

[Review] *Louis Shores: Defining Educational Librarianship* by Lee Shiflett

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LOUIS SHORES: DEFINING EDUCATIONAL LIBRARIANSHIP. By Lee Shiflett. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996. xii, 304 p. \$36.00. ISBN 0-8108-3114-7.

Although Louis Shores died as recently as 1981, he is already almost totally forgotten. Even among his living associates, what often comes to mind is the vulgarity of his supposedly self-promoting schemes, and most notably, his self-appointed role as a sort of one-note-Charlie for the library college idea. Pushy to get his own way (too much so for the taste of ALA's Committee on Accreditation), a benign dictator ("consensus" was only a figure of speech among the faculty at FSU's library school) of the good old southern boy-gentleman variety (although he was born in Buffalo, and conveniently forgot his Jewishness for most of the latter two-thirds of his life), and clearly nutty at times (he wrote personal letters to Sister Ruthlife), and clearly nutty at times (he wrote personal letters to Sister Ruth Norman of Unarius fame, apparently had enthusiasm for saucer cults, and cherished the idea that reference work was largely an extrasensory phenomenon), Shores was a controversial, and even during his lifetime, largely discounted figure of librarianship. Yet his legacy, which Lee Shiflett has finally unfurled after nearly two decades of painstaking research, probably ranks with that of Melvil Dewey (innovation), Pierce Butler (philosophical foundations), Jesse Shera (intellectual underpinnings), or Anne Carroll Moore (the public service imperative). Shiflett summarizes these contradictions deftly in his final sentence: "Whatever monuments he may have desired are small in comparison to the effect his writing, his thought, and his personality have had on the development of American librarianship as an educational enterprise" (p. 276).

This is conceivably one of the finest, and certainly most lucid, library biographies to date. Like other practitioners of "modem" biography, the author doesn't stint on character flaws. Ironically, it may be Shore's amazing accomplishments that will surprise most readers. For example, during his lifetime, he was the most prolific writer in the field, and even accounting for recycled material and lack of scholarly rigor, his output was prodigious, not to mention internationally renowned. He founded the Reference and Adult Services Division of ALA. He headed several huge Crowell- Collier publication projects—notably Collier's Encyclopedia—while "running" FSU library school (although clearly his faculty did most of the work) and at one time could boast of the longest tenure of any living library school dean. In the 1930s, before becoming head of Peabody Library School, he headed Fisk University's library and turned the staid southern library establishment on its ear by planning a Negro Library Conference without consultation with either ALA officials or their southern representative, Tommie Dora Barker. His efforts built the most comprehensive and well-integrated library education program in the nation and eventually led to the establishment of FSU's Ph.D. program. He was fearless with respect to the niceties of accreditation protocol and never abandoned his championing of junior college programs for paraprofessional training. One of his most endearing and vulnerable qualities, which Shiflett details magnificently, was his lifelong ambition to be a writer; Shores was neither the first nor the last librarian whose literary output exceeded his talent—he was, in fact a poet and novelist manqué—but fiction's loss was the profession's gain. As Shiflett so clearly demonstrates, his articles and speeches, even when

repetitive, overly rhetorical, and obscure, were among the most inspirational library literature ever published, perhaps matched by only Butler's or Shera's contribution in impact, if not longevity. He was a man with a consistent vision of the library as an integral part of education, and one can only regret that he did not live to see how cyberspace has transformed learning.

Shiflett is at his finest in describing Shores's physical and emotional decline, which began about the time of the student revolutions in 1968. Here was the classic liberal, defending Nixon past Watergate, and the author explains beautifully Shores's sense that his political ideals had been betrayed by the new generation of radicals. While there are many people still alive who knew Shores, it is doubtful that many writers could have recaptured the pathos of his latter career with such immediacy. Indeed, it is unusual to have such a balanced and richly textured portrait of a venerable worthy (although Shores was always more of a celebrity than an icon) so recently deceased.

The text of the book is relatively typo-free (I counted three sentences with missing text, plus several midline hyphenations), which is much better than average these days, and is accompanied by several appropriate photographs of the maturing Shores, one with his wife Geraldine. Historians may be less than happy with endnotes rather than chapter notes, not to mention the lack of a bibliography, but the index is more than adequate for reference purposes, and the lack of pedantry, plus Shiflett's straightforward style, make it highly recommended reading for any librarian curious about the profession, for clearly Shores played a central role in its current state of development.