



History of Urban Main Library Service

JACOB S. EPSTEIN

THE MOST IMPORTANT early date for urban public libraries would certainly be 1854, the year the Boston Public Library opened its doors. But as Jesse Shera has noted: "The opening, on March 20, 1854, of the reading room of the Boston Public Library . . . was not a signal that a new agency had suddenly been born into American urban life. Behind the act were more than two centuries of experimentation, uncertainty, and change."¹

Before the advent of public libraries there were numerous social libraries, mercantile libraries and other efforts to have a community store of books which could be borrowed or consulted. A common principle evident in each of them was the belief that the printed word was important and should be made available to the ordinary citizen who could not own all the literature which was of value.

Although it was a subscription library, rather than a public library as we think of it today, Benjamin Franklin's Library Company of Philadelphia, organized in 1731, was the first library in America to circulate books and the first to pay a librarian for his services. In his *Autobiography*, Franklin declared, "These libraries have improved the general conversation of the Americans, made the common tradesmen and farmers as intelligent as most gentlemen from other countries, and perhaps have contributed in some degree to the stand so generally made throughout the colonies in defense of their privileges."² Here is that recurrent theme of self-improvement that runs throughout the American public library movement.

The formation of the first tax-supported library, one that was publicly supported, publicly controlled and open to all, preceded the Boston Public Library by some twenty years. Peterborough, New Hampshire, Shera reports, deserves to be known as the first library to be supported by public funds.³ Located in an attractive building with a col-

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unned portico, the present library contains about 37,000 volumes and has been supported by public taxation ever since April 1833. Although its MacDowell Colony and its many summer visitors give it a cosmopolitan air, Peterborough, with its population of 3,732, can scarcely be considered an urban area. Librarians identify the community as the locale of the American Winston Churchill's novel, *Mr. Crewe's Career*, and the birthplace of the modern concept of the public library.

It would be gratifying if the Peterborough example had given impetus to public library development in the United States, but there were few free circulating libraries until after 1850. Their history is also a history of American culture. Northeastern states found it convenient to establish school district libraries composed mostly of adult books housed in schoolhouses. New York legalized such libraries in 1835, but neglected to provide for their tax support. Similar legislation was enacted in a number of other states, but by 1870 most of these collections had deteriorated for lack of use and efficient administration. School district libraries are still a common form of organization in parts of the Midwest.

Today, the free public library in the United States has become an accepted and expected feature in community life. What were the forces behind this peculiarly American institution? In eighteenth-century Europe there was no great demand for public service. Even today there is a decided difference in Europe between libraries "for the people" and those for academics. In England the public library idea was actually opposed by such personages as Herbert Spencer who argued that it would be as reasonable to supply the public with free food and clothing as with free books.

In the Smithsonian Institution's "A Report on the Public Libraries of the United States of America,"⁴ we may look in vain for a library which fits the present definition of "public library." Peterborough somehow was missed. The compiler, Charles C. Jewett, regretted that he had not been able to visit each institution himself but had had to depend on his questionnaire, and defined "public" as any institution that could be gotten into easily; that is, it might be a private library, but the rules or restrictions could be complied with so easily that almost anyone could use it.

In the final paragraph of the report concerning the libraries of Massachusetts and quite likely to be missed since it is under the general heading "Public School Libraries in Massachusetts," there is a notice that:

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By chapter 52, statutes of 1848, the State legislature authorizes the *city of Boston to establish a public library*, and to expend \$5,000 a year for its support. Mr. Bigelow, the present mayor of the city, has presented \$1,000. Hon. Edward Everett has given a valuable collection of public documents, comprising more than 1,000 volumes. Many books have also been received from Mr. Vattemare. Mr. Winthrop, present Senator from this State, has also presented the documents of the general government for about ten years.⁴

What the report does not say is that it was largely through the pioneer work of Josiah Quincy that this legislative authorization for the establishment and maintenance of public libraries by municipalities was brought about. Boston wasn't the largest city in the United States. In 1840 it had 93,383 people, making it fourth in size in the country. Twenty years later, at the time of the 1860 census, it was in fifth place with a population of 177,840. There were, at this period, only nine cities with populations in excess of 100,000. Size itself, however, was not a factor in the establishment of public libraries, as reference to Table 1 will reveal.

TABLE I
19 LARGEST CITIES OF THE U. S. IN 1890 AND THE DATES WHEN THEY
ESTABLISHED PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE

City	Population	Date ^a
New York	1,515,301	1895
Chicago	1,099,850	1872
Philadelphia	1,046,964	1891
Brooklyn	806,343	1892
St. Louis	451,770	1865
Boston	448,477	1854
Baltimore	434,439	1882
San Francisco	298,997	1879
Cincinnati	296,908	1856
Cleveland	261,353	1869
Buffalo	255,664	1897
New Orleans	242,039	1896
Pittsburgh	238,617	1881
Washington, D. C.	230,392	1898
Detroit	205,876	1865
Milwaukee	204,468	1875
Newark, N. J.	181,830	1889
Minneapolis	164,738	1889
Jersey City, N. J.	163,003	1889

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At the time of the opening of its public library, Boston had probably the greatest book resources in the country, with the Boston Athenaeum alone having holdings of close to 70,000 volumes. Other resources included the collections maintained by such organizations as the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Boston Library Society, the Boston Society of Natural History, the Bowditch Library, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Massachusetts State Library and the Mercantile Library Association. Just across the Charles River was the even-then notable collection of Harvard College—as large as that of the Athenaeum.⁶ It is a small wonder that Bostonians felt they held a special place in the world!

If size and availability of library facilities did not influence the establishing of a public library in Boston, it must have been a part of what Van Wyck Brooks characterized as *The Flowering of New England*. He considered 1857, the date of the founding of the *Atlantic Monthly* periodical, as the high tide of the American mind. Ever since coming to Harvard in 1848, the lively and magnetic Louis Agassiz had been telling Bostonians that they could easily become a “center” if they would stop worrying about what Europeans thought of them. Already Bostonians liked to immerse themselves in big projects with literary overtones. Agassiz’s advice made them more sure of themselves and more eager to perpetuate their own culture. With the rise of democratic ideas and the growing interest in public affairs, they asked what better way to enhance their prestige than with the establishment of a great public library?

Each Bostonian seemed to have taken the oath of the Athenian youth, and even the imposing George Ticknor of Harvard wanted to show that he was a useful citizen. He was also worried about the rival Astor Library in New York which had opened to the public in 1854 as a reference library. Something similar had to be done for Boston, for New England culture. So, armed with lists of “best books” compiled by various citizens, Ticknor set off on a buying trip—establishing agents in Florence and Leipzig—and himself bringing home books from London, Paris, and Rome. Along with Prescott and Bancroft, he succeeded in making Boston a center for historical research. Charles C. Jewett was brought from the Smithsonian Institution to be librarian. For his part in developing the Boston Public Library and prodding the Massachusetts legislature in 1851 to extend the privilege of maintaining free public libraries to all towns in the state, he earned the title Father of the American Library Movement. New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont, and

Ohio soon followed this example of having state legislation authorizing free public library service, maintained by the proceeds of taxation.

This concept developed rapidly after the formation of the American Library Association, and—quite often—in response to demands from public organizations, such as women’s clubs. (Perhaps this is one reason why both Poole and Dana always had kind words for women.) William Poole, replying to some critics, said that the Cincinnati Public Library would continue to buy the works of Southworth, for even if they did not improve taste, they performed a “beneficent mission, as they are read by females in the intervals of their daily toil in the workshop and the family, and thus relieve the tedium of a hard lot.” John Cotton Dana remarked on “a certain almost apostolic devotion to reading” by women and children in this country and extended a special welcome to women to use the Newark Business Library.⁸

So quickly did public libraries catch on, that in 1875 it was deemed necessary to have a “conference of librarians” to discuss their mutual problems. At the conference in Philadelphia in October 1876, Poole was able to report to the participants the following:

By the latest statistics of the Bureau of Education, it appears that there are 188 public libraries in eleven of the United States. . . . Eight of these States have passed public-library statutes within the past ten years. In the number of libraries the States rank as follows: Massachusetts, 127; Illinois, 14; New Hampshire, 13; Ohio, 9; Maine, 8; Vermont, Connecticut, and Wisconsin, 4 each; Indiana, 3; Iowa and Texas, 1 each. . . . The aggregate number of volumes in these libraries is 1,300,000, and their annual aggregate circulation is 4,735,000 volumes.⁹

This “conference of librarians” was to become the organizational meeting of the American Library Association, basically conceived by three men only indirectly part of the growing field of librarianship, but men who were to have far-reaching influence—two were publishers, Frederick Leypoldt and Richard Roger Bowker, and one was a young man just recently out of college, Melvil Dewey. The creation of a national association would have seemed enough of an achievement, “But even beyond that, for library progress, 1876 was *annus mirabilis*. Not only did the *Library Journal* reach the Philadelphia conference with its first issue containing Mr. Dewey’s remarkable forecast for the profession, but there was then issued the first Government Report on Libraries from the Bureau of Education, an event of far reaching importance; the first trial presentation of the Decimal System of Dewey’s was ready.”¹⁰

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By 1887 this self-same *Journal* was able to report in its January-February issue that there were 2,139 public libraries in the country with collections of more than 1,000 volumes; forty-seven of these had collections of more than 50,000 volumes and together had a total book stock of 5,026,742 volumes.

The rapidity of the movement during its formative period would hardly have been feasible had it not been for some outstanding men who quickly moved to the fore in the foundation and early growth of what, nearly 100 years later, are recognized as great urban libraries. A paper of this length does not permit detailed biographies of these nineteenth-century giants, but brief sketches of a few of the men and their achievements would seem pertinent to the overall picture of library development.

JUSTIN WINSOR, 1831-1897¹¹

In the opinion of Samuel Swett Green, himself a librarian of note and one closely associated with the early years of the American Library Association, Justin Winsor, then superintendent of the Boston Public Library, was "the most conspicuous of the group of leaders" at the 1876 conference, although the one least heard of today. Characterized by his colleagues as an outstanding scholar and able library administrator, Winsor was born in Boston in 1831 and educated at Harvard and the University of Heidelberg. Today he would be considered a dropout, as he left Harvard in his senior year without a degree; it was granted to him fifteen years later with the class of 1853. He had wanted to be a poet. He liked history, read widely, and diligently studied the subjects he liked. He wrote steadily for periodicals and could undoubtedly have supported himself in this manner had he chosen to do so. He was appointed a trustee to the Boston Public Library in 1866 and was then asked to take charge, temporarily, when Jewett died and the assistant was dying—he stayed for nine years.

Winsor disliked municipal politics, and his numerous conflicts with city authorities made him more than willing to resign to become librarian at Harvard College in 1877. He was elected the first president of the newly formed American Library Association in 1876 and served in that capacity for ten years. Green, in his sketch of Justin Winsor, commented that Winsor had once told him that he sometimes found it a failing in his staff members that he could not persuade them to omit or postpone details of work, since with limited time and resources he felt they should use more perspective in doing their work. Although he was

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most scholarly in his tastes, he had a well-defined appreciation of the mission of the library to the population as a whole and so was able to develop a collection pleasing both to scholars and to general readers. Early issues of the *Library Journal* frequently included articles by Winsor, and he did much to formulate early principles of sound and efficient library administration. He was elected president of ALA again in 1897, especially to represent the Association at the International Meeting of Librarians in England. Shortly after his death in October 1897, it was written of him:

He respected rules but did not fear them. He was conservative in the sense that he would not fritter away time and opportunity in seeking after new devices, but he was eager to devise a remedy for a patent evil, and the remedy would probably be simple, efficacious, and individual. It was in fact always easier for him to solve a problem in his own way than to examine what solution had been attained elsewhere. For agreement in methods among libraries he did not greatly care, and the argument that in this or that library a difficulty was treated in this or that way had no great weight with him. He believed that everyone worked to the greatest advantage through methods that best expressed his own individuality.¹²

WILLIAM FREDERICK POOLE, 1821-1894¹³

Of all librarians, Poole's career most nearly parallels the rise of the public library movement in the United States. Green stated that he was the Nestor of the leaders at the Philadelphia conference. Born in Salem, Massachusetts in 1821, he attended the common schools of his area but left school when he was twelve, having decided that a student's life was not to his liking—another dropout. However, some five years later, he yielded to his mother's wishes, entered Leicester Academy, and then went on to Yale College in 1842.

As a student Poole became assistant to John Edmands, student-librarian of the Brothers in Unity, one of Yale's famous literary societies. He continued Edmands's practice of maintaining an index on slips of paper to material in books and magazines useful for current student exercises and debate. Seeing its value, he expanded this index to cover all periodicals in the Brothers' Library. This index was then published in July 1848 by G. P. Putnam under the title *An Alphabetical Index to Subjects, Treated in the Reviews and Other Periodicals, to Which No Indexes Have Been Published*. This made Poole well-known and was the forerunner to Poole's *Index to Periodical Literature*.

Following graduation Poole became assistant librarian of the Boston Athenaeum, but soon left that position to become librarian of the Boston

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Mercantile Library, where he remained for four years. In 1856 he returned to the Atheneum as librarian, a position he held for nearly thirteen years. In 1869 he accepted the position of librarian of the Cincinnati Public Library. The Cincinnati Public Library's *Annual Report of 1870-71* shows that the number of books in the collection of November 5, 1869, was 22,537 and circulation for the preceding year was 50,058. It also notes the election of "William F. Poole, late librarian of the Boston Atheneum, and well known for his bibliographical attainments."¹⁴ Three years later, in 1873, Poole felt he could not turn down the challenge of becoming the first librarian of the newly formed Chicago Public Library. During the time that he was in Cincinnati, 40,000 volumes were acquired and the third floor of the library building was opened to the public. More than a decade later, when the Chicago Public Library was ranked second only to the Boston Public Library, Poole moved on to a different sphere of librarianship, that of librarian of the Newberry Library of Reference. Nine years older than Justin Winsor, he predeceased him by three years, dying suddenly March 1, 1894, in Evanston, Illinois.

These two men, Justin Winsor and William Frederick Poole, had much in common, yet, according to Green, brought totally different concepts to librarianship. Both were bookmen and scholars; both were outstanding in building library collections and were practical, capable administrators. Here, however, the similarities cease. Poole took seventeen years of experience in librarianship to Cincinnati and was reluctant to part with traditional methods; Winsor, however, was willing to discard the traditional and seek innovative methods of dealing with library tasks. One illustration must suffice. Poole believed a printed catalog to be essential, expostulating vigorously with Winsor when it was proposed to discontinue printed catalogs in Boston. And, indeed, one of his major Cincinnati achievements was the publication in 1871 of a book catalog. However, when he left for Chicago, he was proud that all the acquisitions since 1871 were entered in the brand new *card* catalog. He was a skilled book buyer and made new foreign contracts for Cincinnati during his stay there. Cincinnati was the first large library to be open on Sunday.

In addition to being instrumental in building the collections of two major urban libraries and inaugurating the *Index to Periodical Literature*, Poole's contributions were many. He was an advocate of appropriate architecture for library buildings, constantly speaking against and

writing about the then-prevalent use of a dome-like structure for housing books. His suggestions concerning what he considered sound library architectural practice were recognized as having merit, and his influence on library planning should not be underestimated.

As the second president of the American Library Association, succeeding Justin Winsor, Poole continued the process of building that organization. Perhaps less well-known than his contributions to librarianship is the fact that, in his "spare" time, he also proved himself to be an eminent historian. With special interests ranging from the New England witchcraft trials to studies dealing with slavery, Poole published many articles and was elected president of the American Historical Association in 1887. He was a fluent speaker and writer, enjoying his association with ALA and the Cincinnati and Chicago Literary Clubs. Also among his historical interests was the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. Green ended his remembrances of Poole with these words penned by J. N. Larned: "More than any other man, he popularized the idea of librarianship as a profession. There are others, like Dr. Jewett, who had made it a profession in the understanding of the community, but it was Dr. Poole who brought librarianship as a profession distinctly before the public."¹⁶

JOHN COTTON DANA, 1856-1929¹⁶

John Cotton Dana was not at the founding meeting of the American Library Association for he was still a student at Dartmouth in 1876, but he has so much influenced library thinking that he should be mentioned. Between practicing law and civil engineering he was appointed librarian of the Denver Public Library in 1889. First of all, he delighted the children by giving them a room of their own where they could go right to the shelves and choose their books. Adults and some librarians seemed to find this freedom upsetting. In 1894 at a national gathering of librarians, Dana was one of four to vote for the open-shelf method, while 125, including Dewey, voted against it. Dana did museum work in Springfield, Massachusetts and then, in 1902, went to the Public Library in Newark, where, as the saying goes "the rest is history." Although he had trained as a lawyer and engineer, Dana was proud of being a librarian. Who else has sung such paeans to library stacks? What other librarian has ever suggested that someone should write a poem entitled "Our Pleasure in the Books We Cannot Read" or the "Ballad of Him Who Joyed to Know that Others Knew."¹⁷

In July 1909, he helped found the Special Libraries Association. A

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new criterion, which one could probably call Dana's rule, was put into effect. Regarding ephemeral material the watchwords were "select, examine, use and discard," and on more than one occasion he and Brett of Cleveland clashed publicly over the care and preservation of such materials.

The John Cotton Dana Award for library publicity was established and named for Dana because of his knack of making the city aware of the library. He was an exuberant man and people liked to be around him. He was one of the few who could poke fun at himself, not as a librarian, but as a man. Also, he appears to be one of the few who ever had doubts (or at least one of the few to ever set these doubts down on paper) about education and wisdom being able to prevent wars. In a talk given to the New York Library Association in 1915, he emphasized the growing importance of libraries as practical institutions, even while he deplored that mankind remained fundamentally uncivilized in spite of many generations of access to books, and that librarians had no power to change the situation.¹⁸ He foresaw the decline of the public library, along with other tax-supported institutions, and he suggested that libraries again start charging for books taken out and for special services. Dana pointed out that "what the book does, it does quietly," and that the "silence of the book and the invisibility of its handiwork . . . are two of our great handicaps." He contended that people would spend money on something which showed them immediate, tangible results but would spend little, and that begrudgingly, on books to stimulate thinking.¹⁹ This statement was true in 1915, and is even more true today when the demand is for instant results and satisfaction or our money back.

On rereading Poole and Dana one is struck by the timeliness or timelessness of their remarks. Many of them sound as if they had been uttered just yesterday. This shows either how farseeing these men were, how little library problems have changed, or how new it all really is.

Many public libraries had their beginnings as private book collections—at first only for the privileged class then gradually opened to the public—first in metropolitan areas, then in small towns or rural areas. This is the general pattern in Europe where libraries are older, but not nearly so organized. In the United States a favorite form of philanthropy has been private bequests for the establishment of public libraries. The Astor Library, established by John Jacob Astor, was opened in 1880, and the Tilden Trust, founded in 1887, joined with it in 1895 to form the New York Public Library, which in 1900 began to

absorb most of the free circulating libraries operating independently in the city of New York. The Enoch Pratt Free Library (1882) of Baltimore and the Providence (Rhode Island) Public Library (1878) are also typical of the numerous public libraries originally endowed, but having so expanded as to depend largely upon public funds for their support. State laws now usually specify how much and what kind of a tax is to be levied to maintain a free public library and what kind of a governing body it is to have.

Because Boston was the very first public library, many laws and rules were modeled after the ones governing it. Boston, in turn, was modeled after the Atheneum, because many of its proprietors were members or trustees of the Atheneum. The power and prestige of library board members like Ticknor and Everett headed the library toward autonomy, just as it headed the librarian toward a career of custodianship. Jewett and Winsor would have none of that, and both, being vigorous people, assigned the trustees broad policy-making powers and reserved to themselves the authority over administration. Library literature on boards ranges from the legendary board of thirty ladies who met three times a week, to the California and Pacific Northwest recommendations that boards be abolished. On his departure from Cincinnati, Poole said that he would like a library law which would avoid control by an outside body, something which had plagued libraries in Ohio and Indiana. In regard to the Ohio and Cincinnati plan he said: "The obvious objection to this system is that the real control of the library is with a board of many members who were appointed for other duties, and have not the time or inclination to make themselves familiar with the details of library management. They are required to vote upon subjects on which they have little or no practical knowledge."²⁰

Public funds for library support are complicated and differ within given states. A brief history of a few representative urban libraries will probably give the clearest picture of modern library trends. Each represents the formation of a distinct type of library.

Mentioned earlier as an example of a public library originally endowed but now publicly supported is the Enoch Pratt Free Library of Baltimore. Baltimore, like Boston, had long had a number of good reference libraries, but no general lending library. Enoch Pratt, a Massachusetts native who made his fortune in Baltimore dealing in nails, iron and steel, gave the city of Baltimore \$833,333.33 in addition to the land and built and paid for the original central building on condition that

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the city would guarantee the library an annual income of \$50,000. This offer was speedily accepted by the city fathers in 1882.

The present central building opened in 1933. In the meantime, 1926 to be exact, Joseph Wheeler arrived on the Baltimore library scene. The rise of the Pratt Library can be credited to his genius. It was the third largest U.S. library building to be subject departmentalized. Wheeler promoted interest in booklists, home reading projects and what he liked to call "purposeful books." These he arranged around a central hall on the main floor. Always outspoken, Wheeler said:

The librarian must enjoy helping the reader, or patron or student find what he wants. With all our talk of goals, priorities and relating it might be well to investigate whether or not librarians can answer a question or exercise good judgment or ask a serious question. I think public libraries have lost some of the cultured, the scholarly readers, because of their accent on silliness. . . . May I suggest that we need more knowledgeable librarians rather than more impractical theories—a librarian who will last thirty years and improve rather than a machine which will have to be replaced in two years.²¹

Pratt was a pioneer in having all staff members participate, through committee and group meetings, in formulating present policies.

One of their earliest poverty programs was a converted vegetable wagon holding 125 books, operated by Margaret Edwards during the summers of 1942-44 in Baltimore. "Operated" meant driving the horse, Berry, checking books in and out, singing with the children and holding babies during emergencies. Edwards is convinced this attracted more attention and established better rapport than a well-stocked van or bus.

From a rented room with 2,000 books in 1869, the Cleveland Public Library has grown into a collection of more than 3 million books and some 500,000 borrowers. The original 2,000 volumes were from a high school library which had been organized under the Ohio School District Law of 1853. The first two librarians were originally newspapermen. It was William H. Brett and Linda Eastman who established the Cleveland Public Library as a leading city library. It was Brett who was responsible for Cleveland's being the first large library with free access to open shelves. Columbus, Ohio, had practiced this in a small way and Philadelphia took it up next in 1895, whereafter it became commonplace. Carl Vitz, librarian emeritus of the Cincinnati Public Library, says that "The Cleveland Public Library of the early '80s has been described by a Clevelander . . . as the 'worst library in the world.'" ²² Vitz says there were many competitors for that position, that

libraries then were on the whole dreary and mediocre and Cleveland was no different. Brett recognized the importance of indexing periodical literature and his *Cumulative Index* grew into the H. W. Wilson *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*. Children were made to feel welcome with their own room, and story hours were inaugurated in 1903. The present building which marks the south boundary of the mall of the Public Square was completed in 1925. It has been estimated that the five-story gray marble building contains forty-seven miles of shelving. The book collection changed location six times between 1869 and 1925. A large business and science annex was added in 1959. Like many other large city libraries, Cleveland has attempted to overcome the lack of interest of the poor in what the library has to offer. It has established what were called "reading centers" which tried to familiarize the limited adult reader with all types of written material and began other innovative programs.

The Free Library of Philadelphia was incorporated in 1891, upon the initiative of William Pepper, stimulated by a bequest of over a quarter of a million dollars from George S. Pepper, an uncle. The board of directors is self-perpetuating and the members, except those ex-officio, serve for three years. The corporation owns real estate, many special collections of books and manuscripts and certain endowment funds.

In order to enable the library system to procure appropriation from the city of Philadelphia, a board of trustees was created by ordinance of the city council in 1894 for maintaining a free library. A management contract is in effect whereby the operating affairs of the corporation are managed by the board of trustees.

While the library had an architecturally attractive exterior, much of its equipment, lighting, etc., had been deteriorating since the depression. The role of the individual philanthropist had always been significant in the library's history, but during the 1950s the city's appropriation to the library doubled. Philadelphia embarked on a huge urban renewal program. In 1951 Emerson Greenaway came to Philadelphia to undertake a thorough reorganization of the Free Library. Until 1953 the bulk of the collection had been held in a central unit, reference or circulating. In 1954 a major shift was made, grouping books according to subject. Since the main building is in a park-like setting at Logan Square, a special business library was established at a downtown location. Opened in 1953, it was largely financed by private funds, and is under the jurisdiction of the Civil Service Commission of Philadelphia.

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Only applicants who pass qualifying examinations are eligible for employment.

The evolution of library service in Cincinnati followed much the same pattern as that observed in other Midwest communities.²³ First came the subscription library, then came the apprentices' library and the Young Men's Mercantile Library Association. Then, in 1853, the Ohio school law was rewritten and a tax of one-tenth of a mill on the dollar was imposed, the proceeds to be used to establish school district libraries. When eighteen identical collections were sent to Cincinnati for its eighteen school districts, the board of education decided that there should be but one library, and the state commissioner proved willing to give the school board the money value of the eighteen collections. Quarters were leased eventually in the Mechanic's Institute and service to the public was begun.

Progress of the young library fluctuated as the state tax was suspended in 1856 and 1857, reinstated in 1858 and repealed in 1860. Private contributions did aid the institution to a degree, but the library was in a sad state during the Civil War. Fortunately, in 1867 the state legislature enacted a law allowing a city to tax for the maintenance of a public library. With this assurance of funds, the library began rapid growth and property originally planned for an opera house was purchased in 1868.

The coming of William Frederick Poole to Cincinnati as librarian insured the progress of the organization. Under his direction a printed catalog was produced; the front part of the new building was readied, and service to the public was resumed in the new quarters in December 1870. Although Poole remained in Cincinnati only three years, they were significant ones for the library. During his tenure as librarian the book collection grew from 30,799 volumes to some 70,000 volumes; borrowers and circulation increased proportionately.

By 1875 the entire building was open for use and was to continue to serve the community, under ever-increasing stress as the collection grew larger and space became lacking, until 1955 when the library moved into new and larger quarters a block and a half from the original location.

In 1898, a new library law was enacted by the state which led to a reorganization of the library as a county library and complete separation from the jurisdiction of the board of education. This early change (Cincinnati was one of the earliest county libraries) meant that the

organization has not experienced the type of "growing pains" affecting other libraries in recent decades as they have moved toward larger service areas through consolidation of small units.

Cincinnati may have housed its books in what was intended to be an opera house, but only Chicago has had a "Book Tank." Until other quarters could be found after the great fire, books for the new public library were housed in an unused water tower. On the top, known as "The Rookery," a partial third floor was built to provide a reading room and office space for the library. By June 1873 this strange library had almost 7,000 volumes, and visitors were welcome. To such an arrangement came William Frederick Poole from Cincinnati on January 2, 1874.

Even before the fire in October 1871, community leaders had been working toward a free public library. Afterwards the city was more determined than ever to have this new cultural institution. A sympathy gift of 8,000 books from the British people helped hasten its establishment and prompted other countries and citizens to do likewise.

An Illinois library law was drafted in 1872. The directors were to be named by the mayor and confirmed by the city council; they were to be free from interference by that body, not more than one of whose members could serve on the library board at any given time. All money received for library purposes was to be placed in a special fund which, though deposited in the city treasury was to be drawn upon only by vouchers of the board.

On May 1, 1874, the library opened in rented quarters at the corner of Wabash and Madison Streets. Borrowers increased and in a single day in 1874 2,452 volumes were issued. Financial difficulties arose in 1875-76; cuts in funds and service were made, and it was not until 1885-86 that the library was on the road to recovery. When Poole left in 1887 the library had 129,000 volumes and a circulation of 600,000 annually.

The present central building opened in 1897. It was not until 1916 that the open shelves were established. The presence of two great reference libraries, Newberry and John Crerar, limited the Chicago Public Library's subject coverage. The removal of Crerar from its downtown location was the occasion for broadening the collection. In his 1969 survey of the Chicago Public Library, Lowell Martin (who, among other things was a page boy there at age sixteen) stated the belief that the library should have a stronger reference collection for a city like Chi-

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cago.²⁴ He says that what happened to the Chicago Public Library happened other places—it was severely hit by the depression when it was most needed, then came the other priorities of World War II, and before it could recover from that it was hit by an onslaught of new students. He goes on to say that a central library should be an “advanced capstone” of a city-wide system. It should have (what the Chicago Library lacked at the time of the survey) “a strong collection of broad scope and depth for advanced students, specialists, and ‘citizen scholars’ unaffiliated with universities.”²⁵

The collection passed the 4 million mark in 1969 and, while Martin blames the rigid building with its extremes of heat and cold for some of the poor morale, he thinks the institution has suffered from lack of subject specialization.

In 1969 Chicago reported a slight upturn in circulation. It has also been experimenting with a full-time social worker and lawyer on the library staff and venturing to stock jury waiting rooms with paperbacks. An addition is being planned to the main building since the library won new state legislation which will allow it a much higher income.

During the past fifty or sixty years public libraries have attempted to provide for individuals whose requirements were not met by the traditional type of book collection. Some libraries established collections of non-English language books for the foreign born; raised-type books for the blind; and music (including records and tapes), pictures, maps, films and slides.

Apparently no one had ever thought of children as being a group with special library needs until one summer day in 1885 when Emily S. Hanaway, principal of the primary department of Grammar School No. 28 in New York City, said a thought came to her suddenly as if someone had leaned over her shoulder and asked, “Why not give the children reading rooms?” A separate library was started on its peripatetic career that fall at 243 Ninth Avenue; closed for the summer of 1886; reopened in February 1887 at 436 West Twenty-fifth Street; removed temporarily to Columbia College; and, in April 1888, found a home on the third floor of the George Bruce Library, a part of the New York Free Circulating System whose children’s room it became. In December of the same year the children were deemed a disturbance because they went through the first and second floors of the library, so they were asked to move to 1554 Broadway.²⁶ Meanwhile, in the autumn of 1886, a separate children’s room had been opened in the Tompkins

Square Branch of the New York Public Library. The Public Library of Brookline (Massachusetts) claims that it was the first to separate the children from the adults with a room of their own in 1890; yet the room on the third floor of the Bruce Library antedates this by several years. By 1896 separate children's rooms had become common in almost all large libraries.

Departmentalization in libraries came about as the result of special interests within a community. An early example is that of Cincinnati where there was an unusually active community interest in art, while the library had the nucleus of an excellent collection in this field. Thus it was as early as 1871 that Poole recommended to his board of trustees that a special room be set aside in the new library building as a "room for illustrated books," perhaps the first subject department in an American public library. The board agreed to this proposal and, by June 1873, Poole was able to report that "the room specially fitted up for the safe preservation of valuable illustrated books, and with proper appliances for their exhibition, was opened to the public in November last. . . . The room has been visited by a large number of citizens, and of visitors from abroad, who have uniformly expressed their surprise, as well as satisfaction, in finding in our city so fine and valuable a collection of illustrated books."²⁷ The fact that city libraries have large collections of books, pamphlets, and other services for businessmen and industrial and technical workers can be credited to John Cotton Dana. He noticed that men of affairs did not use the library except for an occasional travel book or biography. In order to promote what he called the "community's utilitarian literature," a separate business or special library was opened in the heart of Newark, New Jersey, in 1909. No form of print is foreign to the library today, but up until Dana's time it had been restricted almost entirely to the book. He demonstrated how clippings, brochures, pictures, government reports, timetables and directories of all kinds could be used in gathering data and in making calculations. Practical people found that a visit to their library could save them time, money and effort.²⁸

Particularly in North America, public libraries undertook positive social activities for general adult education. From around 1910 to about 1925 this meant helping the European immigrant adjust to American life. Immigration reached its peak in 1907 when 1,285,000 immigrants entered this country. By 1910, there were 13,345,000 persons of foreign birth living in the United States. Many of these immigrants had great respect for books and learning. They were eager to make use of what

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the library had to offer. This is the era pictured so graphically by Jacob Riis in *The Making of an American* and by Lillian Wald in *The House on Henry Street*. Workers were needed to fill jobs so there was great zeal for universal education. Was not Andrew Carnegie a prime example of self-education? If one worked hard and had just a little bit of talent, it was comparatively easy to rise in this new country. (This nineteenth- and early twentieth-century passion for self-improvement is evident in publications like *The Lincoln Library of Essential Information*. Ever since the first edition in 1924 the title page has borne this legend: "An up-to-date manual for daily reference for self-instruction and for general culture named in honor of Abraham Lincoln, the foremost American exemplar of self-education.") Libraries in the large immigrant centers became closely associated with the life around them. Not only did they offer books in foreign languages, but meeting rooms, special staff members, Americanization classes, and readable books in English for adults just learning the language. Forums, theater groups and lectures came to be regularly scheduled. Essentially this is the same policy that has been followed in trying to reach the racially segregated and low-income groups in today's innercity.

The Cincinnati Readers' Bureau (Readers' Advisory Service) under the guidance of Pauline Fihe, Margaret Egan, and Viola Wallace pioneered with their graded list of *Books for Adult Beginners*. Fihe was always quick to point out that the public library was the one educational institution to which people were exposed all through their lives, therefore the library's prestige and hope for the future rested greatly on its adult activities. Previous to 1933 there was a predominance of requests for cultural reading courses. With the rise of unemployment came an increase in calls for reading courses on vocational subjects. Staff members helped form and participated in training institutes for literacy teachers. Fifteen classes for the unemployed were established. In 1935 the Readers' Bureau became the clearinghouse for all adult education activities in Hamilton County. One of its most challenging assignments was preparing reading courses for more than thirty Civilian Conservation Camps in Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee. Adult education was no longer a vague term but a reality.²⁹

Another pioneer who helped shape this reality was Mary Rothrock. While supervisor of Library and Visual Education for the Tennessee Valley Authority in Knoxville, Tennessee, she sponsored a lively adult education movement which spread from the workers out into the larger community. A great believer in the film as an educational device, Roth-

rock did not hesitate to scold other librarians for not taking it more seriously. She pointed out that before 1914 there was little organized recreation in the United States. Few newspapers had a sports section or comic pages. Since then state and national park programs have developed, and popular magazines and books are cheaper and more easily available. She felt there was less need for libraries to supply recreational reading and greater need for them to cater to educational and informational needs. When she went back into public library work she carried this same philosophy with her.³⁰

Some say that this period was the public library's finest era, when its public purpose (diffusion of knowledge) and the purpose of its users (acquiring this knowledge for gainful occupation) were so much the same. Others, like Alvin Johnson, say that it came later during the Great Depression when the big city public library truly became "a People's University."³¹ In 1933 the American Library Association estimated that between 3 and 4 million new borrowers had been added since 1929, while the total circulation of books had increased nearly 40 percent. In Frank Woodford's history of the Detroit Public Library, he recalls how unemployed factory workers flocked into the library: "The Library felt the brunt of the depression sooner than most other municipal agencies with the possible exception of the Department of Public Welfare."³² The highest circulation before or since was in 1930-31 while 1932-33 was the low point financially. The library took responsibility, serving as a safety valve for the distressed, giving them an opportunity to make constructive use of their time. At first fiction was the great gainer, then a tendency toward books on intellectual and technical subjects along with books on self-help (such as operating roadside stands) was noted.

In St. Louis in 1932-34, valuation of properties was reduced and resulted in reduction of income of the library, and then cuts in salaries and staff. The library school was discontinued in 1932, while county residents (those not paying St. Louis taxes) began to have to pay a membership fee. The year 1933 saw their largest circulation, and was accompanied with an increase in use of reference and reading rooms.³³

In a ten-year report of the Enoch Pratt Free Library (1926-1935), it was noted that "When unemployment was at its darkest . . . American library book use rose thirty to forty percent in a two year period, so that the public libraries of the country were lending four hundred and fifty million books a year. . . . Reading proved itself a social good."³⁴

Unfortunately at this time of greatest opportunity, libraries were

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poverty-stricken. "In sixty large cities book-buying funds dwindled from an annual two and a third million dollars in 1931 to less than a million by 1933."⁸⁵ During the 1932 Century of Progress Exhibition, when Chicago was trying to keep up its courage, the public library faced its third season with no book buying funds at all. It was a deliberate policy to retain staff rather than acquire books. There was little change in the number of registered borrowers, although circulation was at an all-time high in 1932-33. There was general tiredness and discouragement among personnel. Joeckel and Carnovsky think this may be one of the reasons for the decline in circulation in later years as it took a long time to restore standards.⁸⁶

The story of the Louisville Free Public Library was much the same as that encountered by libraries throughout the country:

A problem of maintaining facilities on a drastically reduced budget in the face of increased demands for service. . . . Not only the unemployed, who were entirely without financial resources, but also those who still had jobs though at reduced incomes, turned to free diversions. One of the foremost of these was reading; and this was reflected in the Louisville Library chiefly by a sharply increased use of the library reading rooms: circulation was at its all-time peak in an early year of the depression, 1930-31.⁸⁷

The source of the last quote is an example of one of the more striking ways that the federal government entered the library scene during the depression. From 1935 to 1939 the Work Projects Administration's (WPA) Federal Writers Project completed and published 378 books and pamphlets, many of them guidebooks to states and cities. The WPA's Historical Records Survey assigned pairs of workers to various institutions to take inventories of local public records. From library lofts, old courthouse cellars, churchyards and old newspaper files, the workers listed printed records, volumes, unbound records, papers, maps, photographs, paintings, statues and manuscripts. The interest aroused by the survey got local movements under way to better care for and house the records. Sixteen relief workers were assigned to the survey in Ohio's Hamilton County. Two worked on local newspaper indexes in the library while one WPA assistant was assigned to the reference department.

To the burden of public libraries which were scarcely beginning to recover from the depression, was suddenly added the impact of war. World War I had slowed the development of library services, but this was not so in World War II. Another Johnson—Elmer D.—in his book on libraries in the western world, thinks that "without exaggeration it can

be said that America's public libraries more than proved their worth to the nation during the trying days of World War II."³⁸ Personnel diminished in most large libraries, but the remaining staff greatly extended their services. Johnson goes on to say, "In maintaining public morale, in serving business and industry, and in the broad fields of adult education and public information, the wartime services of libraries can hardly be overestimated."³⁸

Proof of the services were the book drives, the hasty designation of large public libraries as Defense Information Clearinghouses with information on rationing, draft boards, classes in defense training, blackouts, victory gardens, air raid shelters, aircraft engines, blueprint reading, USO centers and the location of army posts and hospitals. Special libraries pooled their resources through large metropolitan libraries in an effort to unify information facilities. Self-teaching books and records in foreign languages were in great demand, but the greatest of all was in the technical book field. Many people had left their regular line of work and taken war jobs as temporary measures. They needed practical, well-illustrated, up-to-date guides on machine tools, aeronautics, and methods and procedures in construction and inspection.

There are gaps in certain publications for the war years; and the books printed on poor paper are still on the shelves. Few American publications printed during the war reached other countries. However, the close of the war saw many American librarians traveling as technical advisors on various library matters to other countries.

At the request of the National Resources Planning Board, the American Library Association prepared its *Post-War Standards for Public Libraries*. As the most democratic of institutions, public library buildings were considered as fitting reconstruction projects, as living war memorials. The sign over the door of the main library of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County reads Memorial Library. This was the first large library to be built after the war and the first of modern architecture. New buildings followed in Dallas, Buffalo and Seattle; then there was Dayton (Ohio), Minneapolis, New Orleans, Queens Borough (New York), and Detroit. An architectural competition was recently announced for the addition to the Chicago Public Library, and Washington, D.C. has a new library building just completed. A \$20 million addition is presently under way to the Boston Public Library on Copley Square.

What of the future of the large urban library? The library does not exist in a vacuum. It is subject to the same social forces as the rest of

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society. These forces are discussed in *The Public Library and the City*, a collection of writings from a symposium on library functions in the changing metropolis, which was edited by Ralph W. Conant. Some of the changes in use of the central library can be traced to migration of middle class families from core cities to suburbs, greater numbers of students and readers between the ages of five to nineteen and over sixty-five, an increase in the number of specialty publications available, the increasing complexity of public affairs and an increase in the power of public opinion over public policy, the easy availability of books through other than libraries (i.e., paperbacks, book clubs, department stores), instant and constant impact of television, rising expectations of the "have nots" through exposure via television as to how the "other half" lives, changes in teaching techniques, and a huge increase in the photocopying of periodicals and reference materials.³⁹ Does the library's future lie in becoming a reference and research center? in direct access and delivery? in trying to reach and motivate the culturally deprived in today's inner-city? or all of the above? Unfortunately, expenditures for all public libraries are declining in relation to the nation's total expenditures for social agencies. The annual expenditure for public library service in the United States, about \$743,227,127 bulks large beside the figure for 1876, \$518,548, but small beside the annual cost of welfare programs (\$126,802,000,000 in 1969).⁴⁰

There are now about 7,190 public libraries of all types in the United States; thirty-eight of these serve population groups of 500,000 or more. Since 1959 the greatest progress in public libraries has been in rural areas. The Library Services Act of 1956 authorized grants to states for extension and improvement of rural public library services.

The whole subject of mechanized information retrieval is a report in itself, but one is always asked about the computer. Will libraries of the future really be like the one described on the jacket of a recent book which stated that there would be "few books, but lots of punch cards, magnetic tapes, microfilms and videotapes. The only books will be for recreational reading—the Dewey Decimal System will be unknown to the librarian, but he will be a whiz at running a computer."⁴¹ It is only reasonable to expect the big library of the future to be an extension of present-day procedures. Despite accusations to the contrary, libraries have always assimilated the newer media for mass communication, whatever its form—magnetic tape, film, wax disc, printed page, papyrus scroll or clay tablet. Someone has said that if we tried to drive an automobile by the same methods we used in organizing our civilization we

would have the steering wheel facing out the back window to see where we had been. We are used to studying history to try to interpret the future, but we can make the future what we want it to be—what we really set our hearts on.

Let's not make it one with clay tablets!

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