

# Melvil Dewey: The Professional Educator and His Heirs

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## The Assessment of Dewey's Educational Work

MELVIL DEWEY IS, without question, the person most responsible for establishing formal education for librarianship in the United States. On 5 January 1887, after more than three years of planning, he opened the doors of the first library school in this country, the School of Library Economy at Columbia College in New York City. His work in the school was extensive. He developed its curriculum through a trial-and-error method and arranged for a number of outside lecturers. By his own accounting he presented more than 60 percent of the formal class sessions conducted by its resident staff during the lecture terms in its first two years.<sup>1</sup> He also nearly singlehandedly wrote and published a journal, *Library Notes*, that served as a serial textbook for the school.<sup>2</sup> And, between late 1888 and early 1889 when Columbia College withdrew its support for the school, Dewey reestablished it at the New York State Library in Albany, New York. Dewey's personal involvement in the school began to diminish as early as 1889, but his influence was such that the school continued for years afterward in the course he had originally set for it.<sup>3</sup>

Dewey's contribution to early library education also went well beyond his own school. He was untiring in his efforts to explain, extol, defend, and promote library education throughout the larger library community. His own school also became an effective educational model by virtue of its graduates becoming staff members of the burgeoning

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new library education programs. Between 1887 and 1920, graduates of Dewey's school went to no less than eleven of the other fourteen library schools that would eventually survive the early period, supplying at different times no less than fifty-three faculty members. Of those, eleven also served as directors or associate directors in seven of the schools. Graduates also became teachers at different times in no less than thirty-five less substantial educational programs including summer schools, library training classes, and library association training programs.<sup>4</sup>

Although there can be no question about Dewey's role in establishing and shaping formal education for librarianship, assessing the character of his contribution is quite another matter. Critical studies, beginning especially with Charles C. Williamson's *Training for Library Service* in 1923, have tended to indict the early period in library education and Dewey himself for not bequeathing the right kind of education to the library profession.

Two points in the indictment are typical. First, early library education has been faulted for not being integrally connected to the collegiate academic community—for not absolutely requiring college graduation as an entrance requirement and for not requiring a collegiate academic environment for its conduct. Second, the education that Dewey and others passed along has been heavily criticized for being centrally concerned with technical matters rather than with abstract knowledge; for functioning merely as systematic programs of apprenticeship in which chiefly clerical skills were taught. In many respects these two basic criticisms of early library education are redundant. Education that is noncollegiate in its bearing and education that is merely "technical" are simply two different ways of saying the same thing—that such education is in some way anti-intellectual (or at least a-intellectual) rather than professional.<sup>5</sup>

A third criticism that arose after the beginning of the University of Chicago Graduate Library School and especially after the 1951 ALA accreditation standards is that the same early educational programs were not research-oriented. This is a moot point, however, since widespread research has been a more recent development in almost all social service professional fields. One may just as well criticize Charles C. Williamson as Dewey for a lack of emphasis on research.

The foregoing indictment has not been restricted to library education. The same investigations have attempted to show that the library profession itself must shoulder much of the blame for the way library education developed. Williamson stated the logic of this conclusion as early as 1923.<sup>6</sup> Subsequent investigations, especially those of Vann and White, have attempted not only to document library education's early

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vocationalism but also to show how and when library education eventually got off its original sidetrack and onto the main line of preparing for professional-level work. Vann emphasized the interactions that took place between the wider library community and library educators. White portrayed the struggles of the early period in light of the rise of formal technical education. He concluded that early library education was a form of the "apprenticeship school" where the basic elements or skills of an occupation were taught through class instruction. Teaching was based on breaking down the work to be done into a series of normative precepts or activities. Its goal was to produce "master craftsmen" who were versed in the "ABCs" of a set of practices.

All such interpretations of the early period of library education, while useful—particularly in their review of details—are essentially marred and troubling as historical works. They have tended to adopt a prescriptive, hindsight point of view in which present-day views of library education have become the basis for examining past library education. The result has been to examine early library education for what it was not or to portray early library education in light of categories imposed on it.

The overall effect has been to represent the early period as a matter of embarrassment. Vann guarded somewhat against a negative tone by summarizing the entire process as one of "*positive* progress" [emphasis added]. But that does not entirely erase the effect of many other statements in her work that emphasize blame-taking. White too stops at one point to suggest that there was some redeeming value in the educational efforts of the early period. But his three paragraphs of only faint praise do little to ameliorate what otherwise is highly methodical and categorical finger pointing. When extended to its limit, it results in statements like Rayward's where he concluded that when Dewey began formal education for librarianship he also "set it back fifty years."<sup>7</sup>

The principal loser in this approach to the early period has been Melvil Dewey. Critical portrayals of Dewey as an educator have taken so much away from the man as to make him out to be a misguided and even devious founder who pursued narrow and limited ends. Perhaps this portrayal was to be expected—a reaction especially of the 1960s and 1970s to earlier laudatory accounts of his work. The result is that Dewey's role in the development of library education has continued to be clouded. A corrective approach could be undertaken, but it must emphasize that complex of goals and vision of the library movement out of which his educational work arose.

### Dewey and Library Education through 1885

If one of the marks of an educator is the way he or she integrates an educational objective with broader cultural issues, then one of the most distinctive features of Dewey's approach to library education through 1885 is the lack of such a perspective in his work. His attempts during this period to characterize such issues as the social role of the library and the nature of professional work, professional training, and professionals are plainly few in number, and for all practical purposes insubstantial. For example, in the very first issue of the *Library Journal* in September 1876, Dewey addressed a series of such issues, but only briefly and in some respects as little more than echoes of the opinions of other library leaders who expressed the same ideas in much greater detail and depth. Thereafter until 1886 he barely returned directly to these topics at all.<sup>8</sup>

Dewey directly broached the idea of formal library training in his 1879 article on the "Apprenticeship of Librarians." Here too one finds little more than an enthusiastic suggestion. For example, he advanced the idea that a professional librarian consisted of what a person brought into the field combined with what was added to that person through special training. But his attempt to enumerate what each side of this equation consisted of was at best only skeletal. On the first side were certain naturally endowed qualities as well as a general education. Other synonyms for the same things were being a *scholar*, being *very learned*, and having *mental and cultural training*. He then described the other side of the equation with such terms as *practical business qualities*, *administration*, *enterprise*, and *business capacities*, all of which he summed up in the phrase *the practical details of library economy and administration*.<sup>9</sup>

Two other key statements during this same period were his spoken words to the 1883 Buffalo ALA conference in which he formally proposed a school of training and the school's first "Circular of Information" issued in 1884. These key statements do not indulge in anything resembling an overview that justifies library education. Neither do they add anything substantive to what Dewey had already said in 1879 regarding the first side of the equation denoting a professional. He did expand his ideas on the second, or training, side but even those were not firmly fixed. For example, in 1883 Dewey gave a fourfold list of topical areas to be covered in the school—i.e., practical bibliography, books, reading, literary methods. By 1884 these topics were relegated chiefly to library instruction courses for college students and replaced by a long,

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undifferentiated, and admittedly incomplete list of specific library activities and problems.<sup>10</sup>

Given that by 1883 Dewey was the chief proponent of formal library education, one may reasonably ask, why was he also so vague about matters of such obvious educational import? Issues of that kind are ordinarily thought of as being at the heart of an educational endeavor and essential to professional education. Some insight into how Dewey viewed such matters is provided by considering how Dewey had approached librarianship up to this point in his life.

Although in 1876 Dewey had joined with other mostly older and more experienced librarians to found the American Library Association and promote library development and the library "profession," Dewey plainly did not approach librarianship in the same way that they did. His older contemporaries, already entrenched as librarians, tended to see librarianship as what went on in individual libraries and the library movement as the cumulation of all of those individual situations. The resulting social role of the library movement was also viewed primarily as a local matter and stressed the mental cultivation of the citizens of the town.

Dewey appears not to have had any arguments with such views and in fact from time to time echoed them in his own opinions. What captivated his interest more, however, was a much grander conception that focused not on the individual library and its social role but on all libraries together as a single, interrelated entity of national scope. Together they made an inherently dynamic and developing system of libraries. Together, in fact, this system constituted the library movement. Of course, in 1876, the conception was still only a potentiality because the system had yet to be organized. Dewey considered organization to be possible, and further, he saw himself as the chief organizer. Even his idea of organization had grand features. For example, he did not consider organization simply to mean any single agency such as the ALA. Rather it referred to overall organization where particular libraries, agencies (including the ALA), and individuals came together in one corporate structure for the purpose of engaging in decisive action toward a common goal. The source of Dewey's vision of the library movement and of his idea of overall organization is not hard to discern. He patterned it after the business developments of his own day and conceived of the entire library system in much the same way a contemporary entrepreneur saw the organization of a system of manufactures and markets related to a particular product.<sup>11</sup>

That Dewey should base his view of libraries on his understanding of business organization is understandable. His own experience in an individual library—a total of about three years at the small Amherst College that were taken up especially with technical innovations related to efficiency—was relatively limited. Furthermore, when Dewey moved to Boston in 1876, he did not go as a librarian. He went specifically to promote his library organization ideal and to pursue the business of selling library and other educational supplies. In fact, he viewed library supplies as simply one element within the overall system. Within that context, he gave particular attention to the standardization of library work aids and operations. In his view, no overall organization of the library movement could take place without such standardization because standardization was the basis of efficiency and only efficiency could provide the kind of organizational power needed. It was this aspect of the library movement that truly excited him and gave him considerable promise of a good living and notable influence. And it was this vision of the library system and library organization that Dewey pursued with unparalleled enthusiasm during the period to 1883.

Dewey's initial approach to library education bears the same hallmarks. Formal library training was only another way of being systematic and efficient in supplying a needed element in the overall system. In this respect, providing trained librarians differed only slightly from the efforts of, say, a railroad company in calculating the need for and ensuring the supply of an adequate number of trained locomotive engineers, or in fact, from Dewey's efforts to supply standardized library forms. The existing means for supplying trained librarians was dependent on informal methods of apprenticeship and was inadequate. Between 1879 and 1883 Dewey had attempted a partial solution to the problem of supplying library personnel when he operated an employment bureau for librarians and something akin to a consulting service in which he supplied temporary personnel to local libraries for special tasks such as the cataloging and classification of their collections. But those efforts did not overcome the lack of organized training.

When Dewey accepted the Columbia College librarian-in-chief post in 1883, there is every reason to suppose that he saw the position and the library itself as a vital means to further his corporate conception of the library movement. That same motivation also helps to explain why he promoted a training school there from the start. If, indeed, training had traditionally taken place informally in libraries in the form of apprenticeship, what better opportunity could present itself than to have a library of respectable means in which to supply librarians to the movement. What would be original was to make the training a

systematic school of apprenticeship rather than an informal affair—so much the better for efficiency.

Moreover, what would the course of study involve except those technical matters that Dewey had been immersed in for the previous seven years—“all the special training needed to select, buy, arrange, catalogue, index, and administer in the most economical way any collection of books, pamphlets or serials.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, this is precisely the view of libraries that Dewey had had during the previous period. A library was, for all practical purposes, little more than a collection of objects and a system of operations. One need only peruse Dewey’s writings from this era to see how deeply preoccupied he was with such matters. Further, his experience as a librarian seems not to have gone beyond such mechanical concerns. For example, before 1883 he seems never to have experienced fully the moment-by-moment administrative responsibility of a library of any complexity or size. Nor had he been exposed personally to the kind of work with readers that prodded the typical active librarian to mull over and rationalize the social importance of library work.

With this background it is quite understandable that Dewey did not at first devote much effort to broader educational issues—e.g., to ponder the qualities of the ideal librarian, or to delineate the appropriate qualifications of applicants for a school or, in fact, to work out an overall justification for such an educational venture. Such questions were those of thoughtful and long-experienced librarians and educators. When Dewey went to Columbia College in May 1883, he was clearly neither of these. Rather, his outlook had been limited to that of a shaker and a mover for a more or less impersonal and very businesslike approach to a vast and growing system of libraries and their needs.

### **The Impact of Columbia**

There can be little doubt that Columbia changed Dewey with respect to these matters. Here for the first time he had administrative responsibility for a library of respectable size in an institution of some importance. And here too for the first time his businesslike expression of the corporately structured library movement came face to face with educators who struggled with issues to which Dewey had previously paid little attention.

The first thing that Dewey had to face with respect to his proposal for a library school was the lack of immediate action. Dewey was used to making quick, firm decisions, but in this matter the college board took a full year to consider and finally approve the program. In the interim

Dewey busied himself with the Columbia College library itself, in many respects gaining experience that he had not previously had.

The Board of Trustees of Columbia approved the library school in May 1884. However, with their approval and with Dewey's almost immediate publication of a circular of information concerning the school, it is clear that a meeting and blending of the businessman's and the educator's points of view had already begun to take place. For instance, Dewey's systematic organizational emphasis was reflected in his remarks in the "Circulation of Information" on the new program insofar as they defined library administration as "the modern improved system of library management," one that had, in fact, been "reduced to a system." But the educator's views were also present. The proposal for the school referred not simply to learning a mere mechanical-like system of library management, but also to the more substantive idea of "a thorough education in the principles of library administration." And the educators emphasized the social context of the educational venture when they spoke not only of graduates qualified "to take charge of the very numerous public libraries of the country," but also of the result of being "be instrumental of great public good."<sup>13</sup>

Dewey's own words in his circular likewise gave evidence of greater sensitivity to educational issues, particularly his effort to list the teaching methods to be used in the school and to indicate the educational tone of the school. The list of methods is impressive, emphasizing as it does the discussion and exploration of ideas and applications related not only to the library as an operating system of objects and processes, but also to the library as a public agency within its social environment.<sup>14</sup>

Although Dewey had issued a circular of information almost immediately, he could not immediately open his school. The board had set the opening of the school for October 1886, almost two-and-one-half years away. Dewey put this new period of waiting to good use by working through the educational issues involved. From 1884 to 1886 he tested his educational plan on the Columbia library staff by conducting special library training classes for it. He also brought his ideas and plans once again to the ALA, this time in the form of his circular and at least a portion of Columbia President Barnard's report. The association's committee on the school reported the results of their discussions of these documents at the 1885 annual conference at Lake George. Their concerns focused on two educational issues: the relationship of the school's work to a college course, and the possibility that the thoroughness of its technical content might mislead the graduates as to their abilities. In the end the committee concluded that the proposed school was likely to be more serviceable than any other existing method in providing trained

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personnel for libraries. But they did not wholly endorse it because even with the greater wealth of details that the new documents provided, what they pinpointed and simply raised as fundamental educational issues had not yet been addressed. Thus they closed their report by calling for a still more definite plan.<sup>15</sup>

### **Dewey the Educator**

Dewey's subsequent statements regarding the school and its relationship to librarianship as a profession signal a definitive change in his educational work. These statements begin with his notable address to the Association of Collegiate Alumnae in March 1886 entitled "Librarianship as a Profession for College-Bred Women" and continue in his "Circular of Information" for 1886-1887 (summer 1886) and his *Library Notes* (June 1886-June 1888). In the actual program of studies in his school, especially during its first two years (January 1887-June 1888), Dewey dealt with the more fundamental issues that he had not addressed previously. In fact, so obvious was his attempt to meet these issues, one may say with confidence that the period from 1886 through 1888 was the point at which Dewey the educator emerged.

Dewey's enhanced educational views may be conveniently viewed as an attempt to formulate a more complete rationalization of the social role and importance of libraries and library work, and as an attempt to delineate the qualifications necessary in a professional librarian. The latter may be further divided conveniently into personal qualities, the relationship of personal qualities to college work, and qualifications that would be gained from special training.

### *Rationalization for Library Work*

The initial and perhaps fundamental area in which Dewey's enhanced educational views are evident pertains to his efforts to provide an extended rationalization for the nature of library work. In his March 1886 address, Dewey summarized the social role of the library and library work by portraying it, as he had in 1876, as "an essential part of our system of education."<sup>16</sup> The difference between his earlier statement and his 1886 views was that here he attempted to support his assertion by an appeal to the ideas upon which it was founded. At the base was "the book," that vehicle of recorded knowledge that was important not simply for its capacity to transmit information but for its power to put readers in touch with the very best minds of the past. Books—that is, the best books—were powerless, however, until read with purpose. When read with purpose, books became instruments of education. That meant

that they would foster the acquisition of "systematic knowledge and consistent powers of thought."<sup>17</sup> The result would be to elevate the character of the reader and to make his or her life "better worth living."<sup>18</sup> In terms of the mental-discipline philosophy of education that this view reflected, purposeful readers would be in the process of having their mental and moral faculties or powers sharpened. And in so doing they would become cultivated and educated.

Viewed this way the reading of good books was not simply a useful tool in education. It was the chief tool of education, one imbued with enormous power. In Dewey's words: "Reading is a mighty engine, beside which steam and electricity sink into insignificance."<sup>19</sup> Moreover, given this view, the nature of the educational system was itself more strictly defined. The very core of that system was reading, its goal being not simply the elevation of individuals through reading, but even more so the inculcation of reading as a personal activity so that what might have begun as school exercises would eventually develop into lifelong self-education.

The practical difficulty of this was that the public schools often had their students for too little time to accomplish education's goal. But that is where the library stepped in. The library served as the complement to the public schools, efficiently supplying the best books and advising on their use in those instances in which people no longer attended school. "The school STARTS the education in childhood; we [i.e., librarians] have come to a point where we MUST carry it on."<sup>20</sup> The library was, in effect, an equal partner with formal educational institutions. And this pertained not simply in the general realm among popular libraries, but in the realm of higher education as well. "With the reference librarian to counsel and guide readers, with the greatly improved catalogues and indexes, cross-references, notes and printed guides, it is quite possible to make a great university of a great library without professors."<sup>21</sup>

### *The Qualifications of a Librarian*

The second area in which Dewey expanded his thinking on educational issues during the 1886-1888 period was his statements on the qualifications of a librarian. That this should have occurred is not surprising. Dewey could hardly have created a grand rationalization of library work without also reflecting on the qualifications necessary for the persons who were to accomplish the work. In this respect one may assume that librarians involved in the work had to be at least equal to the task at hand. Furthermore, if the tasks were of a high rather than menial character (and one cannot fail to see this in Dewey's statement of

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ideals), then so also must the librarians' qualifications match that loftiness.

At the same time, any close examination of the character of library work as Dewey described it will reveal that it involved a wide range of activities, not all of which were lofty. And with each activity, the potential existed that different levels and types of qualifications were required. That Dewey and some of his contemporaries recognized these contradictions is apparent in overtones from their written statements. For example, the ALA committee on the library school in 1885 divided library work into clerical, bibliographical, and administrative aspects. Ultimately, however, although Dewey hinted at how specific qualities were appropriate to the various kinds of library work, he did not during this period make any hard and fast correlations between kinds of work and qualities. Instead, he focused principally on the overall characteristics of the ideal librarian and related them to the total range of library work.

Following the division he first made in 1879, Dewey also divided the qualifications of the ideal librarian into two general groups—i.e., those acquired by the person apart from library work and brought to it; and those acquired in the form of special training for library work. The first are essentially personal, having to do with general aspects of a person's character and mind; the second are essentially technical, having to do with specific skills and ideas related to the library work at hand. Although during 1886 one will find differences in the renditions Dewey made of what belonged on each side of this equation, by 1887 and early 1888, Dewey had more or less developed in class lectures a standard way of referring to the matter. The librarian could be referred to (1) as a man, (2) as a scholar, (3) as a bibliographer, and (4) as a library economist.<sup>22</sup>

The first two of these made up the first, or personal, side of the basic equation. Qualities related to "the man"—that is, to a person's character—included heredity (the "stock" one came from is important), health (if not good, a person "cannot work as many hours nor with as much vigor"), one's social manners (such things as tact, personal magnetism, and personal activities above reproach), and one's mental abilities ("an accurate habit of mind, order, method, system, housekeeping instinct, executive ability"). Qualities related to being a "scholar" or having general education (of which Dewey concluded, "the more the better"), included first of all languages (German first, then French, Latin, Italian, Spanish, and Greek); second, history or general literature; and finally, something of political economy, political science, fine

arts, and popular science. Although the entire list of subjects appears cut and dried, it would be erroneous to suppose Dewey viewed it that way. He may well have been this specific in response to the 1885 ALA committee's enumeration of a similar list. When Dewey discussed education more directly with his students, he was careful to dispel any grocery-list impression of what he meant. For example, in April 1887 he referred to education by commending to the students an idea that Ernest C. Richardson had presented twice during the term—that learning referred to encyclopedic knowledge, a systematic approach and structure of the entire universe of knowledge. The following January, Dewey stressed the same idea even more fervently, suggesting that to have encyclopedic knowledge meant to have a wide knowledge of books, that is, of their subject contents.<sup>23</sup>

In the end, the most striking feature of his list of qualifications is the general kind of person the elements signified when taken together. That kind of person may be summarized in the phrase, “cultivated and educated,” an apt description not simply of an ideal prospective librarian, but of any person who, in the words of the educational philosophy already referred to, had (or were in the process of having) their mental and moral faculties disciplined and cultivated and who had become uplifted in character. In fact, enumerating such qualities represented Dewey's effort to depict this kind of a person. More important, Dewey's emphasis on the cultivation of personal qualities in his overall rationalization of library work closely matches the ideals of the mental-discipline model of education. In short, one could not expect librarians to work effectively in the library as an educational uplift movement unless they themselves were educated and cultivated.

#### *Personal Qualifications and a College Education*

Dewey's view of personal qualities is also important in that it better helps one to understand his attitude to the relationship between library education and college. It is obvious that Dewey saw a college course as a principle means by which an individual might gain the character and education central to this side of the equation. This attitude is basic to his encouragement of “college-bred” women to enter librarianship. He could say of their college training that it “has given them a wider culture and broader view with a considerable fund of information...as almost nowhere else.” Or again, “a four years' course successfully completed is the strongest voucher for persistent purpose and mental and physical capacity for protracted intellectual work.”<sup>24</sup> This valuation of college is also reflected in his 1886 “Circular of Information” on the school. In portraying an idealized preparation for library work, he noted that the

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foundation should be a regular college course.<sup>25</sup> Still Dewey resisted making a college graduation an absolute requirement for admission to the school. Instead, he simply noted that applicants would need to present evidence—through diplomas, certificates, or examinations—that the qualifications on this side of the general equation were present.<sup>26</sup>

Recent interpretations of Dewey's refusal to make college graduation an absolute admission requirement have implied that his resistance arose from his viewing library work as principally a clerical occupation that did not require the intellectual milieu of a college education. Evidence for this attitude is often centered on the 1885 ALA committee statement that "by far the greater part of the librarians in actual service have not enjoyed, and will not in the future enjoy the benefits of a college training, and yet they prove most admirable librarians."<sup>27</sup> It is erroneous to assume that the committee and Dewey as well meant that what is ordinarily thought to be the result of a college education—learning and the formation of good character—was thereby not also required for library work. Dewey's enumeration of what characteristics a person brought to library work as well as virtually all contemporary library opinion viewed general learning and good character—the cultivation of the mental and moral powers—as absolutely basic requirements for the profession. Librarians who had no college degree were not viewed as successful because librarianship required no more than clerical and technical skills gained from other than a college course. They were viewed as successful apart from a college course precisely because they had gained the education and culture otherwise. In other words, college was not the only or even chief source of persons with those qualities.

The foregoing conclusion accords with the status of college as a social institution in the late nineteenth century. College attendance and graduation had not yet become the national social phenomena that they became afterward or today. During the two decades from 1870 to 1890 the approximate number of new college graduates annually rose at about the same rate as the general population—from about 10,000 annually to about 15,000, an increase of 50 percent; the general population increased from some 40 to 63 million, or about 58 percent. But the real figures are very small. Each year for this period, new graduates represented only about 1 in 4000 persons. When the ALA committee suggested that a college education was enjoyed by very few persons, they were simply stating a reality.<sup>28</sup>

A college education also did not enjoy the public esteem that it has gained since. College programs were going through a period of great

change. The older classical curriculum and philosophy of mental discipline had many adherents. But they were both being severely challenged by new philosophies related to social utility, research, and newer definitions of liberal culture. As a result, public estimates of the value of a college education—particularly in an age when the image of the self-made man was so prevalent—were often disparaging.<sup>29</sup> Even Dewey suggested as much when he stated in his 1887 advice to applicants: “Obviously one might pass a rigorous examination for scholarship, and yet be totally unfitted to take charge of a library; while some of our best candidates have long since forgotten how to demonstrate most of Euclid’s theorems or to conjugate the irregular Greek verbs.”<sup>30</sup> This was, of course, an offhanded reference to the classical college curriculum. Given these realities, it is understandable that Dewey and other practicing librarians questioned whether formal college graduation should be required of librarians or that library education should need to function within a college as the only or even best educational environment.

#### *Technical Qualifications and the School Program*

The final area in which Dewey’s educational views show considerable enhancement had to do with the second group of qualifications of the ideal librarian—i.e., those coming from special training. Following the pattern that Dewey developed during 1887 and 1888, he divided these qualifications into two subgroups—those related to bibliography and those related to library economy. They may also be spoken of in terms of the actual curriculum of Dewey’s school since he viewed the qualifications as the direct result of a formal training program.

When Dewey first seriously proposed the ideal of a school in 1879 and referred to the librarian’s qualifications in terms of “enterprise and business capacity,” and “the practical details of library economy and administration,” there can be little doubt that what he had in mind was learning a variety of technical details related to the standardization of routine work. The tasks to be mastered were, in fact, “all the work doing from day to day in all its details.” And the best way to learn such work was to “have practice in doing each part of it under careful supervision.”<sup>31</sup> The best name for this was, indeed, a school of systematic apprenticeship.

That focus on detail expresses very well Dewey’s 1879 view of the library movement and library work. It also expresses very well his personal curricular focus eight years later when his school opened. In fact, Dewey’s interest in such matters continued throughout his career in library education. A summary of his lecture subjects during the 1887-1888 lecture semesters of the school show that with few exceptions,

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he kept almost exclusively to such matters. Notable among the topics he personally covered was the systematic and orderly plotting of procedures for the acquisition, organization, and preparation of books for the shelves. Lecturing on such operations called for extensive—even minute—attention to detail, a fact affirmed in his lectures on bookplates and book embossing and on the ins and outs of the accession record. He was also very concerned with the planning and equipping of library buildings. Accordingly, his lectures dealt extensively with such matters as heating; lighting; ventilation; book hoists; book carts; shelving (including how to place shelves around windows and the calculation of depth, height, and width of furniture); reading tables; chairs; lamps; measures to insure safety against fire; and the overall planning for and use of floor space. He was also very interested in catalogs and classification. But when lecturing on those topics he almost invariably approached them in terms of their physical aspects and processes.<sup>32</sup>

Although Dewey's personal interest began and continued in such matters, one can see that between 1884 and 1886 Dewey's sense of the overall qualifications of a librarian gained from special schooling and, therefore, the curriculum of his school had begun to extend beyond just those issues. This awareness is suggested by the appearance—in both the 1884 and 1886 circulars of the school—of such topics as the goals and purposes of libraries and issues related to obtaining legislative and general public support for libraries.<sup>33</sup> What appears to have most expanded his awareness, however, was the experience of conducting the school itself, especially its first session from January to April 1887.

The school officially opened on 5 January 1887. Originally planned as a twelve-week session to be completed by the end of March, it was eventually extended to the end of April. The basic curriculum consisted of lectures, visits to libraries and library-related agencies, and supervised individual work sessions—the latter for practice in the most important library economy routines. In addition, the school required written assignments on special projects and discussion sessions related to the lectures and visits.

The regular staff of the school consisted of Dewey, Walter S. Biscoe, and George H. Baker. Biscoe was from the cataloging department and Baker from the reference department of the Columbia College library. Dewey and Biscoe gave lectures, led discussions and visits, and evaluated the major written assignments while Baker apparently limited his work to giving lectures. In addition, Mary Salome Cutler from the library staff (and possibly with other female library staff members as well) conducted the practice sessions. In addition to the regular staff, Dewey obtained the services of a large number of guest lecturers including notable and

experienced librarians, others whose specialties were of value to librarianship (e.g., G.E. Stechert, an importer of foreign books who lectured on that topic; Charles E. Sprague of the Union Dime Savings Bank in New York City who discussed accounting), and Columbia College faculty members.<sup>34</sup>

The chief difficulty of this initial session appeared almost immediately and remained a persistent problem for the entire four months. Dewey, whose forte had always been efficiency and systematization, failed miserably in organizing the curriculum into a systematic, rational sequence of learning experiences. A sequential reading of the lecture headings of the staff reveals almost no logic in their relationship except within very limited groups. Further, the original schedule—which was to have practice sessions from 9:30 to 10:30 A.M., lectures from 10:30 until noon, and extra lectures and meetings in the afternoons—appears to have suffered some disruption by library visits and special lectures. Apparently not all the guest speakers who had originally said they would appear were able to or chose to appear. Dewey appears to have taken whomever he could get whenever he could get them. Far more important, Dewey appears never to have worked out the logic of the guest speakers' topics and kinds of presentations with respect to the overall curriculum. He exercised little control over the content of guest lectures and did not attempt to weld them into a sequential whole. The overall impression is, in fact, of a curriculum as a hotchpotch. It may well have been inspiring and useful to the students, but it had all the marks of something put together day by day as the school progressed.<sup>35</sup>

Before the session was over, however, Dewey apparently had been prodded to consider more seriously the idea of the curriculum for special training and with it the related topic of the qualifications of a librarian that arose from such a course. While doubtless there were several sources of his thinking, one certain source that appears is Ernest C. Richardson and particularly a lecture he gave on 14 April 1887 on what constituted "library science." In his outline on the matter, Richardson subsumed all issues related to a librarian's educational accomplishments under four topics: linguistic (i.e., the learning of languages), cyclopedic (i.e., a broad survey of knowledge in general), bibliographic (i.e., learning about books both internally and externally), and economic (i.e., library economy, or learning how libraries operate). Economic was subdivided into the topics acquisition, preservation, and utilization which in turn were subdivided into various topics related to purchasing books, organizing them, circulating them, etc.<sup>36</sup>

Richardson's thinking on the matter might well be criticized in its own right. But its importance was not so much in what he included as in the systematic way he proceeded. A week later Dewey enumerated for the first time in a systematic way the fourfold list of qualifications of a librarian mentioned earlier (and referring to Richardson's ideas at least at one point), which in turn were partly reminiscent of Richardson's words. Later, when the March issue of *Library Notes* was issued (probably in May), Dewey noted that changes for the following year were specifically directed at the content of the program including planning in advance for specialist lectures on languages and literature and enhancing the position of bibliography in the total program. His suggestion that library economy and bibliography together were simply subdivisions of a larger area called library science, while not following Richardson's ideas precisely, certainly shows a growing awareness on Dewey's part of a broader outlook on the curriculum than he had had previously.<sup>37</sup>

It also appears evident that Dewey in a very real sense "discovered" the area of bibliography during the first session and as a result became enthusiastic about developing it further as an element of a more systematically drawn curriculum. His own statement that the bibliographical lectures were "one of the mark successes of the last year" simply testifies to what were in fact the best organized and most substantive lectures of the session. That his own interest in the topic continued is evidenced by his attempt the following year to submit even that area to more rigorous analysis and enumeration, dividing the topic into the subtopics of physical bibliography and intellectual bibliography and attempting to characterize each in turn.<sup>38</sup>

In summary, by the end of the first session Dewey's sense of the content of the curriculum and what he meant by the technical qualifications of the ideal librarian had expanded enormously. The curriculum of the second year more than showed that he was willing to put his new ideas to the test. The lecture contents were much better ordered.

A final issue to be broached in attempting to understand Dewey's approach to the qualifications of a librarian and, more specifically, to those that comprised the technical qualifications, is to what degree the program devised represented what later critics have called a clearly technical or clerical orientation that was taught and, in the words of White, that was especially concerned with imparting the ABCs of practice. There can be little doubt that the school, in part representing Dewey's original approach to the library field, incorporated much that was centered on clerical routine. This was particularly true of the

practice-session work. Furthermore, Dewey himself constantly made note of the fact that the school's program was practical and technical.

At the same time there was a very sizable representation of topical matter and educational method that can only be termed idea-oriented, intellectual, and even theory-based, although not recognized as such or so named. Evidence of this comes especially from the content of many of the lectures given in the school. Of these, the most consistently notable are the lectures of Biscoe and Baker and of some of the guest lecturers on what might loosely be called bibliography. These lecturers did not simply list books but also presented the nature of the works themselves or the nature of a field of knowledge.<sup>39</sup>

Other areas of notable "intellectual" content included a number of the lectures on cataloging by Biscoe and several outside lecturers who discussed cataloging issues instead of simply setting standards of practice (including one by Biscoe that strikingly begins by discussing the objects of a catalog), the large number of lectures by guest speakers (including S.S. Green, C.M. Hewins, W.E. Foster, and A.R. Spofford) that broached the issue of the educational role of libraries and the issue of fiction, and lectures on language and literature.<sup>40</sup>

Lectures on library economy issues also were not solely restricted to "routines." For example, W.A. Bordon, in an extensive presentation on charging (i.e., circulation) systems, began by systematically listing twenty-five purposes for which circulation records were kept. He followed this with an enumeration of the equipment available for making circulation systems and an extensive classification of users by sex and occupation. The latter was for keeping records that would correlate the social characteristics of users with book use. Finally he discussed fifteen different strategies of circulation record keeping, showing what equipment was needed and what combinations of purposes were met. Even Dewey, when going beyond obvious issues or routine to those of overall administration of building specifications, went about his lectures with an obvious air of exploring issues rather than simply pronouncing on so-called accepted methods. Notable in this respect was his response at the end of a lecture by C.E. Sprague on the philosophy of double-entry bookkeeping of how the specific values of books, including their depreciation, could be recorded in a double-entry system.<sup>41</sup>

All of this suggests that at least for its first two years, Dewey's school was conducted on a plane somewhat different than has been otherwise imagined. To this, however, one also may add the fact that categorically assigning this new venture to that class of apprenticeship schools that created master craftsmen by teaching them the ABCs of practice was in many respects logically impossible. The one thing that is everywhere

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evident in the school is that there were few if any ABCs of practice to be had. In fact, one of its most striking contributions was to forge what might be called the ABCs of practice where previously there had been none, and this by a process of trial and error, discussion, examination, and reflection. This is at least the case for bibliography where the notion of "reference" had not yet evolved into anything resembling standard lists of reference books. And it was true for cataloging, where many of the issues related to appropriate bibliographic data and name form that one might have thought were settled by this period clearly were not.

It should be noted that besides creating such areas, Dewey's school played a significant role in the creation of a literature for librarianship. Dewey's use of his *Library Notes* is in fact portentous in this regard. Not only did Dewey use it as a vehicle for his own writing, but also as a vehicle for publishing some of the lectures given at the school and as a compendium where several sides of some issues might be expressed. One may reasonably assume that it was at least partly involved in establishing the phenomenon important to any field that the knowledge content of an area to be taught must ultimately become a literature to be read and digested.<sup>42</sup>

### Dewey's Heirs

Given the foregoing discussion of Dewey's own development as an educator and, within that context, the establishment of the Columbia School of Library Economy, it remains only to draw some generalizations regarding those who followed him, both immediately and at some distance in time. It seems obvious that Dewey's most immediate heirs—including especially those most responsible for his school after 1889 when he himself began to lessen his own direct involvement in it and those students who took the example of his school into other library education programs—continued to refine and develop what he had begun. It is also true, however, that Dewey's immediate heirs had to contend with significant changes that brought into question the work that he had begun.

First, the "library movement" itself went through a distinct period of institutional differentiation. Institutional differentiation refers to the way the library as a social institution is conceptualized by both those within it and those outside it. In this period, change included differentiation with respect to types of libraries. Commonly spoken of in the late 1880s as popular and scholarly (both were "public" in contrast to others that were private), libraries were reconceptualized in terms of the more familiar nomenclature (established by the 1920s) of college, public,

school, and special libraries. This change also included the differentiation of kinds of library work. By the 1920s the most important differentiation was that of distinguishing clerical from professional work.

The second change of significance during this same era was the rising importance of the college in American society. In contrast to what was said earlier about the college of the 1880s, by the mid-1890s and unabated thereafter, the social acceptance of a college education skyrocketed. Whereas between 1870 and 1890 there was about one new baccalaureate graduate each year for every 4000 in general population, between 1890 and 1910 that ratio had already increased to one for about every 2500; by 1920 to one for about every 2000; and by 1930 to one for about every 1000 persons. In addition, the content of a college education changed significantly, taking on ideas related to social utility and research, and adopting new, higher standards.<sup>43</sup>

The third important change that took place in this era was the rise of the "specialist" in American life. The most immediate effect of this change on the library movement was (in conjunction with the institutional differentiation of the library) the creation of a drastically altered conception of what the social role of the library was. Notable in this respect was an increasing emphasis on service as delivery of information to an increasingly more complex array of users. When one adds to this picture the rise of the importance of a college education in American life, it should not then seem surprising that Charles C. Williamson could find in the 1920s not only that the person most appropriate to the profession of librarianship "is most likely to be found in those who have completed a college course," but that the truly professional work of such a person is not to be found in the mere act of organizing objects and processes (which Williamson caricatured as clerical routines) but rather lies in service to patrons based on extensive subject knowledge and the administration of the library in terms of its service goals.<sup>44</sup>

In sum, by the 1920s, the phenomenon of the library within American society had changed sufficiently to bring into question almost the entire complex of factors which provided the basis of Dewey's first library education program. When one adds to those changes others that have occurred since the 1920s—notably, the rise of research, the rise of electronic technology, and the rise of an information revolution—one might reasonably conclude that Dewey's relationship to his heirs of the present day is a moot point.

In at least one issue, however, the struggle between learning and advancing the idea content behind a service profession and learning and advancing the skills needed to render those ideas effective, Dewey

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remains ever-present. The lesson of "Library Hand" courses is archetypical. Dewey's inclusion of library hand in his library school curriculum has long been the object of amusement. It has been spoken of in hindsight as an indication of the clerical practice and therefore the nonintellectual orientation of early library education. Dewey, however, was not as ignorant as this kind of judgment implies. *The chief technology for bibliographic control during the 1880s was handwriting.* And if that technology was to be effective it had to be efficient and well done. This meant that some effort to control handwriting was not only useful but absolutely essential if the broader goals of the library were to be met.

In a similar manner, one may imagine a day well in advance of the present when the computerized technologies and ideas of the present and the skills they involve—e.g., programming, word processing, keyboard operation, online searching and algorithms, database construction—will have long been superseded by still more advanced technologies. Will the present-day inclusion of these curricular matters be at that future time an object of derision and an occasion for pointing out how obviously "nonintellectual" library and information science education was in the 1980s? The fact is that any professional education outside of one that perhaps exists only in the realm of pure intellect will necessarily struggle with balancing the needs of learning and advancing what is known at present with the skills needed to render that knowledge operable. Certainly there can be no shame either in attempting to achieve this balance or in accepting the fact that past educators also attempted to do the same. If Dewey bequeathed anything to the present-day library realm, it was surely this educational struggle.

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### Abbreviations

GWC—Shorthand notes taken by George W. Cole of lectures delivered at the School of Library Economy, Columbia College, 1887-1888. American Antiquarian Society, George Watson Cole Papers, Red boxes 11 and 12.

MD—Shorthand notes taken by Melvil Dewey of lectures delivered at the School of Library Economy, Columbia College, 1887-1888. Columbia University Library, Melvil Dewey Papers, Box 14.

*SLECC—School of Library Economy of Columbia College, 1887-1889: Documents for a History.* New York: Columbia University, School of Library Service, 1937. Citations to the facsimiles within this volume are limited to author (if any), title, and original date followed by "In *SLECC*, p. \_\_\_\_."

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18. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
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25. "Circular of Information, 1886-7." In *SLECC*, p. 104.
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43. Statistics based on figures available in United States. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States*, pp. 8, 386; Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University*, pp. 264-444.

44. Williamson, *Training for Library Service*, pp. 3-11.

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