



FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY
OF THE CITY OF
NEW BRUNSWICK
NEW JERSEY

THE UNION LIBRARY COMPANY

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The evening of Monday, January 15, 1796 was an important one in the history of New Brunswick. On that evening a number of gentlemen met at the "New Coffee House," probably on the corner of Albany and Peace Streets, the site of the White Hall Hotel for the purpose of founding a Public Library. A committee consisting of John Baker, Thomas Hill, and Moses Guest, was appointed to draft a constitution. After some discussion, it was decided that shares in the intended Library should cost \$5.00, subject to an annual tax of \$1.50. The name chosen was the "Union Library Company".

The committee was ready with the draft of the constitution by the next Monday evening and it was produced "neatly executed" and was signed by John Baker, Thomas Hill, Timothy Brush, Moses Guest, John J. Voorhees, David Abeel, Joseph Warren Scott, Abraham Blauvelt, William Leupp, Robert Eastburn, Aeron Hassert, Charles Smith, and John Vredenbergh. After the signing of the constitution the following books were proposed by the gentlemen whose names are prefixed to them:

Mr. Baker	Chesterfield's Modern Europe
Mr. Hill	Critical Review
Mr. Brush	Fool of Quality
Mr. Voorhees	Winterbotham's America
Mr. Guest	Ramsay's American Revolution
Mr. Abeel	Guthrie's Geography
Mr. Scott	Montesquieu's Spirit of Laws
Mr. Cholwell	Bruce's Travels
Mr. Van Norden	Priestley's Early Opinions
Dr. Smith	Hume's Essays
Mr. Baker	Smith's Wealth of Nations
Mr. Hill	Goldsmith's Animated Nature
Mr. Brush	Cook's Voyages
Mr. Voorhees	Buffon's Natural History
Mr. Guest	Moore's Travels
Mr. Abeel	Peter Pindar
Mr. Scott	(The) Tattler
Mr. Cholwell	Paine's Political Works
Mr. Van Norden	Rights of Women
Mr. Baker	Spectator
Mr. Hill	Rollin's Ancient History
Mr. Brush	Works of Josephus
Mr. Guest	Burnet's Theory of the Earth



FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY
OF THE CITY OF
NEW BRUNSWICK
NEW JERSEY

-2-

Mr. Abeel	(The) Humourist
Mr. Scott	Locke on the Human Understanding
Mr. Cholwell	Universal Gazetteer of 1794
Mr. Van Norden	Freneau's Works

Nothing was decided on until the next meeting, February 9, 1796, when the following were selected:

Chesterfield's Modern Europe
Critical Review
Ramsay's American Revolution
Montesquieu's Spirit of Laws
Hume's Essays
Smith's Wealth of Nations
Cook's Voyages
Moore's Travels
Peter Pindar
Paine's Works
Rights of Women
Spectator
Works of Josephus
Burnet's Theory of the Earth
Fool of Quality
Freneau's Works

A committee consisting of two, Abraham Blauvelt, and Dr. Charles Smith was authorized to purchase them. These books, sixteen volumes, formed the foundation of the Library system in New Brunswick and have been in each Public Library from that day to this.

Meetings were held each Monday evening in February and at each meeting new members signed the constitution and additional books were suggested. until by March 9th, thirty-two volumes had been bought and Messrs Leupp and Blauvelt were authorized to "cause a book-case to be provided". On March 16, Joseph Warren Scott was chosen Librarian, and on that evening the first books were taken from the Library. The first book drawn was Montesquieu's Spirit of Laws. and the borrower was Abraham Blauvelt. The second was Rights of Women taken by Jacob Cholwell. Following these Moore's Travels was borrowed by Dr. Smith, The Spectator by Mr. Van Norden, Fool of Quality by Mr. Vredenbergh, Man of the World by Mr. Brush, Wilson's Pelew Islands by Mr. Moses Guest, Political Justice by Mr. Hassert. The first work of fiction in the Library was "Fool of Quality" and it was always taken out as soon as returned in quick succession by John Vredenbergh, Abraham Blauvelt, Timothy Brush, David Abeel,



FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY
OF THE CITY OF
NEW BRUNSWICK
NEW JERSEY

-3-

James Neilson, James Swift, Aaron Hassert, Andrew Ryder and others.

At this meeting the minor details of library work were discussed; the length of time books might be retained; the system of fines; duties of the Librarian, etc., etc. The members appear to have been deeply interested, as they remained in session until 11:30 P.M. If a Board of Trustees of a Public Library of today were to become so deeply interested that they should remain in session until 3:00 o'clock in the morning, they would show no more interest than did these gentlemen, at that date when every honest citizen was expected to be in bed at 9:00 o'clock. They adjourned to meet at Mr. Brush's tavern on the first Tuesday of October. At this meeting John Hill was appointed Librarian, which office he retained until his death many years later.

At a meeting January 4, 1797, after the Library had been in operation one year, a committee was appointed to inspect the state of the Library, and at the following meeting they reported that they found it in general good order, but a few of the volumes had been abused, whereupon it was unanimously resolved to again instruct the book committee that only books of the most substantial bindings be bought. The Librarian of the present day of slight bindings and the endless round of repairing dilapidated books which it entails, sighs for the good old days when only substantially bound volumes found a place upon the shelves.

At a meeting held April 1797, it was resolved that the quarterly meetings be abolished, as the members found it "injurious and inconvenient to leave their necessary avocations so often". This was evidently before the days of early closing. It was resolved that a committee of five, called the Grand Council, "be empowered to transact all business during the recess of the Society". They were authorized to buy books to the extent of \$30.00 and instructed that their whole expenditure must not exceed \$50.00

Financial difficulties seem to arise during the summer of 1797 and the Librarian reports that "although the forfeitures arising from the too long detention of books is considerable, he cannot collect the money". A committee was appointed to call upon delinquent members of whom there seems a goodly number, to pay their dues on their original subscriptions. At the next meeting this committee reported that they had called on delinquents,



FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY
OF THE CITY OF
NEW BRUNSWICK
NEW JERSEY

-4-

but could not collect the amounts due from them. The book committee reported that "owing to the detention of money by the subscribers, they have been necessitated to postpone the purchase of books until some future period."

By January 1798 affairs reached a crisis, and a committee was authorized to inform the delinquents that if they should not discharge their debts before the next meeting, "it is probable that the Company will cause their names to be inserted in the public papers". That this heroic measure was successful we infer from the fact that at the following meeting the book committee was instructed to purchase books to the amount of \$25.00. At this meeting it was also resolved "that the Librarian shall be in future remitted his quarterly dues in consideration of duties attending his office".

May 4, 1802, Rev. John Croes purchased a share, and from this date he took a very prominent part in the work, being made President May 5, 1807. As Bishop Croes was, while living, held in high regard by all classes of citizens throughout the State of New Jersey, and his memory is still green, it may be of interest to follow out the course of his reading in connection with this Library. As will be seen he was one who read for relaxation as well as instruction. He drew his first book, Moore's Travels, October 18, 1802. Following this he read in their order, Tom Jones, Fool of Quality, Zelucco, Brydone's tour, Winterbotham's America, Rollins Ancient History, Camilla, Don Quixote, Roland's Appeal, Peregrine Pickle, Desmond, Rousseau's Confessions, Vicar of Wakefield, Marmontel's Tales, Gil Blas, Thompson's Seasons, Plutarch's Lives, North American Register, Hume's England, Spectator, Russell's Modern Europe, Forsyth on Trees, Cowper's Poems, Kotzebue's Plays, Pope's Works, Montesquieu's Letters, Gibbon's Roman Empire, Gillie's Greece, Wilson's Pelew Islands, Milton's Works, Vindication of Divine Providence, Franklin's Life, Robertson's Charles 5th, History of Kentucky, Mackenzie's Voyages, Snollett's England, Evenings at Home, Cook's Voyages, Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, Rumford's Essays, Ramsay's American Revolution, Devil on Sticks, Guardian, Man of the World, Porteus' Lectures, Blair's Sermons, Bloomfield's Poems, Jefferson's Notes, Espriella's Letters, Life of Sir William Jones, Panorama, Laws of New Jersey, Humphrey Clinker.

The bard of New Brunswick, Moses Guest, strengthened his mental powers during the intervals of poetic frenzy by Political Justice, Spirit of Laws, Winterbotham's America,



FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY
OF THE CITY OF
NEW BRUNSWICK
NEW JERSEY

-5-

Roland's Appeal, Adam's Defence. There is no record of his ever taking a volume of fiction or poetry.

The first assignment of a share in the Library Company reads as follows:

January 1st, 1797 This certifies to the Secretary of
New Brunswick the Union Library Company of New
 Brunswick, that the undersigned has
 sold his share right in the said,
to Mr. Samuel Barker, Church Street, New Brunswick. The
Secretary is requested to enter the transfer on the books,
to admit the said Samuel Barker to the said share agreeably
to the laws enjoined by the constitution.

(signed) William Wilton Barker

Registered in the Secretary's office according to law on the first day of March in the year of our Lord one thousand, seven hundred and ninety-seven.

J. Warren Scott, Secretary.

Original preserved in the files of the Company.

The Library now (May 1807) contained 372 volumes and evidence of increasing prosperity is found in the fact that a committee was authorized to "purchase a new and enlarged book case".

During the summer of 1811 financial difficulties again arise, and the Treasurer reports that "\$86.00 is due, and likely to remain so". This time the trouble was serious, and resulted in the closing of the Library for five years, May 7, 1816 being the date of the next meeting. During this time Mr. John Hill who had served as Librarian 15 years, died. On the re-opening of the Library, Miss Hannah Scott took his place. "For her convenience", the books were removed to her residence on the corner of Albany and Neilson Streets in the house now occupied by Mr. John C. Elmendorf.

When the Company held its first meeting after the war of 1812, its affairs were found to be badly disorganized. A committee was appointed to ascertain who were members, and a resolution taken to collect arrearages for one year only, and not for the whole time of suspension. In spite of the earnest



FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY
OF THE CITY OF
NEW BRUNSWICK
NEW JERSEY

-6-

efforts of a few of the original members, the prosperity of the Library steadily declined from this date; meetings were held at intervals of two or three years, and financial difficulties seem to be the only topic of discussion. Finally a proposition from the New Brunswick Library Company which, had been started about 1820, to unite the two Libraries was accepted, after much discussion, and March 12, 1821 a committee consisting of Dr. Croes, James Crommelin, and Cornelius Hardenbergh was appointed to announce to the New Brunswick Library Company the acceptance by the Trustees, of the proposition. Six persons, three from each Library were selected to draft a constitution, and a catalog printed in 1847 shows that at that date, the Library was in operation under the title of the New Brunswick Library Company.

In May, 1868, the books, which had finally been deposited in the Rutgers College Library, and consigned to the care of the Trustees, were, by them, transferred to the Young Men's Christian Association, as the foundation of their Library. In April, 1888, they were presented by the Association to the Free Public Library, and thus after nearly a century of use, returned almost to their original starting point. The poet tells us that,

"Little of all we value here,
Walks on the morn of its hundreth year,
Without both feeling and looking queer"

and books are no exception, but, thanks to the careful purchases of "substantially bound books only" their general condition is excellent; that is of those that are left. Many have been lost, and valuable sets are broken. Those remaining, 656 in number, have been classified by the Dewey System, which is used by the Librarians of the Free Library, and by this classification thus are made easily accessible to any one desiring to use them.

The Librarians book of this ancient Library establishes a point that has been much discussed. The idea is very widely spread that, in the good old days, solid reading was always preferred to any other kind. This record, made nearly a hundred years ago, disproves all that, for New Brunswick at least and as the grade of reading done at the Free Library during the last five years is somewhat above the average of Public Libraries in many other places it is fair to suppose it was so a hundred years ago.

During the first two months of the existence of the



FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY
OF THE CITY OF
NEW BRUNSWICK
NEW JERSEY

-7-

Union Library Company 76 books were given out. Of that number "The Fool of Quality" went out 18 times, and "Desmond" 8, making 26 charges for fiction out of a total of 76. The most insatiable devourers of Roe, and "The Duchess" would leave no worse record. At the end of the first year, "The Vicar of Wakefield" and "Camilla" were purchased, and they immediately became fully as popular. But what encourages those interested in Public Libraries today, as well as a century ago, is that while light reading goes on, instructive and elevating reading is also being done, and that most Librarians will testify to the fact, that after persons have read fiction alone, for a time, they tire of it, and here comes in the Librarian's opportunity, when the reader may be kindly and wisely guided to the story of the deeds of noble men; sent with the traveller into strange places; interested in the latest discoveries of the scientist; told in simple language; elevated by the thoughts of great minds, until he realizes that what Cicero said centuries ago, is true today "books are the food of youth; the delight of old age; the ornament of prosperity, and the refuge and comfort of adversity."