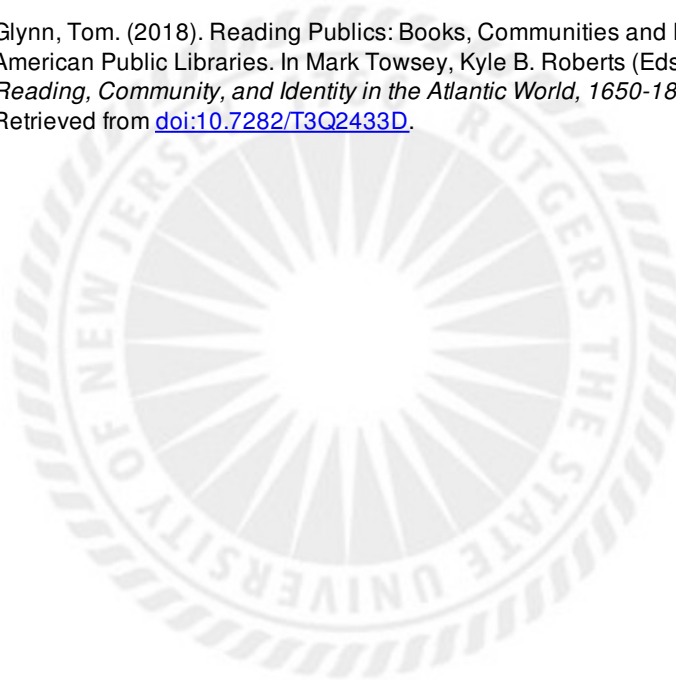


Reading Publics: Books, Communities and Readers in the Early History of American Public Libraries

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Reading Publics: Books, Communities and Readers in the
Early History of American Public Libraries

In 1851, Charles Coffin Jewett, then the librarian of the Smithsonian Institution and later superintendent of the Boston Public Library, compiled his *Notices of Public Libraries in the United States of America*. In the introduction he explained that “I mean by it libraries which are accessible— either without restriction, or upon conditions with which all can easily comply—to every person who wishes to use them ... In this sense I believe it may be said that all libraries in this country, which are not private property ... are public libraries.”¹ In 1876, the United States Bureau of Education published its exhaustive *Public Libraries in the United States of America, their History, Condition, and Management*. In a chapter on the organization and management of public libraries, William Frederick Poole, head librarian of the Chicago Public Library, offered the following definition: “The ‘public library’ which we are to consider is established by state laws, is supported by local taxation and voluntary gifts, is managed as a public trust, and every citizen of the city or town has an equal share in its privileges.”² It would therefore seem at first glance that in just a quarter of a century there was a dramatic change, a sharp break in the way Americans defined public libraries. In fact, the public library as described by Poole evolved over time from the collections Jewett described in *Notices of Public Libraries*. That evolution sheds light on the communities of readers served by public libraries, on the public and private values associated with reading, and on fundamental changes in how public institutions in the United States were conceived, governed and supported.

Public and Private in America's Social Libraries

Many of the libraries in Jewett's *Notices of Public Libraries* were not truly public, even given his very broad definition of the term. The seven categories in his statistical summary include, for example, the libraries maintained by college literary societies. Developed for recreational reading and to prepare for debates, for most of the nineteenth century these collections were more heavily used than the college library itself, but it is highly unlikely that members of the general public were ever granted access.³ The only collections that were accessible without restriction were the school-district libraries. By 1851 most states had passed laws permitting local school districts to levy taxes to purchase books not just for pupils in the common schools, but for any resident of the district. Intended to circulate good books to the home every citizen, most of the libraries in Jewett's statistical summary were school-district libraries. They were essentially a noble but failed experiment in the history of American public libraries. Poorly funded and maintained, by 1876 they had been, according to a report in *Public Libraries in the United States*, "allow[ed] ... to sink into neglect and contempt."⁴ Nonetheless, a number of public library systems today, including St. Louis, Cleveland, Detroit, Cincinnati, and Indianapolis trace their origin to a school-district library. Moreover, the school-district libraries, according to an early history of the public library movement published by the American Library Association, helped to establish the principle of public support for publicly accessible collections.⁵

More important for the future development of public libraries in the United States were the ubiquitous social libraries.⁶ According to Jewett, "in some states, almost every town has, under some name, a social library." These were shared collections of books established and maintained by voluntary associations of readers. There were several different types. Proprietary

libraries were joint-stock corporations. Members owned stock, a share in the library, that could be sold, transferred as a gift, or bequeathed in a will. Shares were expensive, sometimes costing hundreds of dollars, so these libraries were, by their nature, elitist, exclusive. Some, the Boston Athenaeum for instance, even placed limits on the numbers of shares in order to preserve that exclusivity.⁷ Members of the more numerous and more popular subscription libraries simply paid an annual fee to borrow books. Many were open to any member of the reading public, while others catered to a particular reading community. There were, for instance, social libraries for physicians and attorneys, women's libraries, young men's libraries, and mechanics' libraries for artisans. By far the most successful type was the mercantile library. Founded and managed by young clerks, many of them would allow members of the general public to join for a slightly higher annual subscription. According to a report in *Public Libraries in the United States*, in 1876 "the majority of our mercantile libraries are ... the only important public circulating libraries in their respective towns."⁸ Most subscription libraries were relatively inexpensive, and therefore relatively accessible, democratic institutions. The Albion Ladies' Library Association in Michigan, for example, boasted in 1876 that its membership fee of just fifty cents was "almost nominal ... thus extending its privileges to all."⁹

Social libraries were considered public libraries, public institutions, not simply because they were accessible to the reading public, but, more importantly, because that accessibility presumably served a public purpose. This was explicit in the various enabling laws that permitted the establishment of public libraries, as well as the constitutions of individual social libraries. The first state statute respecting public libraries in the United States, enacted by New York State in 1796, held that "it is of the utmost importance to the public that sources of information should be multiplied and institutions for that purpose encouraged."¹⁰ The preamble

to the constitution of the Mercantile Library Association of the City of New York stated that it was founded to “extend our information upon mercantile and other subjects of general utility.”¹¹ Reading good books -- science, history, the classics -- would promote the public good by nurturing an enlightened, productive, informed citizenry. More important, however, was the presumption of an intimate connection between mental and moral improvement. An address published in the *Connecticut Courant* in 1774, for example, soliciting readers for a proposed subscription library, held that “the utility of public libraries, consisting of well chosen books ... and their smiling aspect on the interests of Society, Virtue, and Religion are too manifest to be denied.”¹² This conviction that good books engendered good morals was fundamental to the growth of social libraries in the United States. Social libraries, private voluntary associations of readers, were synonymous with public libraries for much of the nineteenth century because they were presumed to promote the public good.

In a lecture delivered in Boston in 1838 on “The Elevation of the Laboring Portion of the Community,” Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing urged that “every man, if possible, gather some good books under his roof, and obtain access for himself and his family to some social library.” Although many social libraries charged a quite reasonable annual subscription, and books themselves were becoming more affordable in the 1830s and 1840s, even a small private library or access to a public library was often beyond the means of the working class.¹³ Most readers, however, could afford to patronize the more numerous and more popular circulating libraries. The main competitor to the social library, these were for-profit concerns, often part of a stationary or bookstore, but also available in a wide variety of commercial establishments, including dry-goods stores and millinery shops.¹⁴ For a small fee, they rented out books and periodicals, usually on a weekly basis, and were, according to a pamphlet published

by the New York Lyceum in 1840, “the only collections open to all classes of people.” During the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, their proprietors often stressed that they were not merely for profit, that, like social libraries, they served the public weal. In 1791, John Dabney of Salem, Massachusetts assured his customers that he provided “materials capable of forming the minds of individuals to solid virtue, true politeness, the noblest of actions, and the purest benevolence.” Yet by the time of Channing’s address, they mostly circulated popular novels. According to the New York Lyceum, “twenty-five to one is the proportion of fictitious to solid reading given by most of them,” thus allowing their customers to indulge in the “captivating, but dangerous and often disgusting and immoral works of fiction, which pour like torrents from the press.”¹⁵

The Lyceum’s pamphlet solicited support from public-spirited citizens to build a collection that would provide wholesome reading at a nominal fee to readers of every class. It would include only those books “that will have the effect of ... imparting knowledge and elevating the social and moral disposition” and exclude “all immoral and irreligious literature and works of fiction (except those of a religious or moral character).” One part of the opposition to the provision of novels in public libraries throughout the nineteenth century was simply that they were merely recreational, designed solely for the reader’s private amusement and therefore served no public purpose. More fundamentally, reading cheap fiction was viewed by many as not just frivolous, but mentally and morally dangerous. Works of the imagination appealed to the passions rather than the intellect, so that, according the Lyceum’s pamphlet, “the mind surrenders itself to the interest and excitement of the story” and becomes “diseased and infatuated.” Citing “reports of some of the French hospitals for lunatics,” the Lyceum concluded that “the *reading of romances* is set down as one of the standing causes of insanity.”¹⁶ Even

much later in the century, many supporters of the public library movement believed there was a direct correlation between popular novels and mental illness. In 1875, the annual report of the trustees of the Boston Public Library claimed that “a vast range of ephemeral literature, exciting and fascinating” was “responsible for an immense amount of mental disease and moral irregularities.”¹⁷

Female readers were presumed to be especially susceptible to the dangerous allure of popular fiction. As late as 1877, the *Detroit Free Press* reported the sad case of a young woman “of fine education, who gratified a vitiated taste for novel reading till her reason was overthrown, and she has, in consequence, been for several years an inmate of an insane asylum.” Even those women who were not driven mad, were considered to be mentally enfeebled and morally compromised by a rapacious desire for thrilling romances.¹⁸ This presumed nexus between gender and debasing fiction is one key to understanding how reading was idealized in public libraries throughout the nineteenth century. Reading “solid” books was rational and therefore masculine. Reading popular novels was frivolous and feminine. Non-fiction was self-improving and therefore promoted the public good. Fiction was private, self-indulgent, demoralizing. The idealized reader thus reflected gendered values that distinguished the public from the private in American culture. Women were, of course, assumed to be the mainstay of the circulating libraries. A proprietor of the Boston Athenaeum for example wrote that they “contented themselves with the more insidious forms of corruption ... to be had at circulating ... libraries connected with stationers’ and bakers’ stores.”¹⁹

Ideally the collection of a social library was a source of “rational amusement.” It would provide subscribers or proprietors with reading that was both amusing and self-improving, that would entertain as well as instruct. These early public libraries, however, were subject to the

same market pressures as the commercial circulating libraries. Fiction was popular. In order to survive, to retain their membership, they were, in the words of the New York Lyceum's highly critical pamphlet from 1840, "obliged to comply with the general requirements of their frequenters." Moreover, the social libraries were democratic institutions. Members elected a board of directors or trustees, which was accountable to a dues-paying constituency. All of this meant that, although they never collected the same proportion of popular fiction as the circulating libraries, social libraries increasingly provided and circulated, along with more substantial works, books that were, again according to the New York Lyceum, a "light and trifling kind of reading." This was often at odds with a library's identity and self-image as public institution. This conflict between private pleasure and the public good, between meeting the demands of the market and promoting the common weal is well illustrated in the annual report of the New York Society Library in 1858. On one page the trustees assured their constituents that "it is absolutely necessary that several copies of every popular work be purchased on its first appearance." On the very next page, they went on to claim that the "shareholders naturally expect their Library to be kept up to the standard maintained by Institutions of a similar character." This tension between public purpose and popular demand, between the public and private functions of shared reading, was fundamental to the character of American social libraries in the nineteenth century.²⁰

The Public Library Movement: Missionaries of Literature in the Gilded Age

In March 1848, the State of Massachusetts enacted the first legislation permitting the creation of a public library as defined by William Frederick Poole. It empowered the City of Boston to levy taxes to support a library in which "every citizen" had "an equal share in its privileges." Such an

“enabling law” was a prerequisite to a library movement in any state and, according to William Fletcher in *Public Libraries in America* (1894), “the genius and significance of this modern movement are well illustrated in the establishment of the Boston Public Library.”²¹ In 1852, in the first *Report of the Trustees of the Public Library*, George Ticknor explained “the objects to be attained ... and the best mode of effecting them.” He held that any type of social library “falls far short of the aid and encouragement which [should] be afforded to the reading community.” The city’s new library would instead be modelled upon its public schools. It would expand and supplement public education by allowing every citizen to gratify the taste for salutary reading nurtured in the primary schools. In doing so, it would, like the public schools, serve a public purpose and promote the public good. The Library’s trustees intended, “as a matter of public policy and duty,” to provide Bostonians with “the means of self culture through books” and thereby “raise personal character and condition.”²²

Although Ticknor and other founders of public libraries in the later nineteenth century often emphasized, like the leaders of the public school movement, that these new, publicly funded institutions would benefit every citizen, they were clearly intended, at least in large cities like Boston, for working-class readers.²³ William Fletcher, in *Public Libraries in America*, devoted an entire chapter to “The Public Library and the Community.” He stresses the ostensible value of the library in “providing all classes ... with the means of culture,” its presumed influence on “not only the intellectual but the moral and spiritual life” of every reader. But he then refers specifically to the “meagre and stunted intellects of the masses.”²⁴ Librarians proudly referred to themselves as “missionaries of literature,” and their mission, the aim of the public library movement in the latter part of the nineteenth century, was to civilize, to uplift the working class.²⁵ Public librarians sought to enculturate the masses with good books and thereby instill

good morals and ensure an orderly, virtuous republic. Amidst the rising class tensions of the Gilded Age, the mission of the public library seemed particularly urgent. At a meeting in 1882 in support of the New York Free Circulating Library, one of the speakers called upon “rich men [to] aid in this work by bridging over the chasm between themselves and the less fortunate or wealthy classes [and] lay broader and deeper the foundations of society with a regulated liberty.”²⁶

Like missionaries of the Gospel, the missionaries of literature were often women. At that same meeting in New York in 1882, another supporter of the Free Circulating Library remarked that “the men who hover about the wings here ... are only ornamental; the real work is done by the ladies.”²⁷ G. B. Utley, the executive secretary of the American Library Association, estimated in 1914 that half of the public libraries in the United States were founded by women. Middle- and upper class ladies, usually in women’s clubs and other voluntary associations, also played a leading role in raising funds for collections and lobbying for library legislation.²⁸ And, as in the public schools, female librarians soon came to predominate in the workforce. In part this was simply a matter of economy. Because there were so few professional opportunities open to them, women were often willing to do the work for less than men.²⁹ More important, middle- and upper-class women were considered innately well suited to the uplifting, enculturating mission of the public library. Public librarianship was regarded as a natural extension of a woman’s nurturing, maternal role from the domestic to the public sphere. The stereotypical image of the refined lady librarian thus co-existed with the older, yet still prevalent stereotype of women as frivolous devourers of cheap novels.³⁰

Public libraries’ policies regarding the provision of popular fiction varied widely. William Kite, the librarian in Germantown, Pennsylvania, gained national attention by his refusal

to purchase any fictional works whatever. He held that the “blighting influence of the sensational literature of the day” was “enfeebling the very flower of our nation” and that providing only wholesome reading instead would “help form a character for good that might otherwise be led to evil.” By contrast, the Boston Public Library furnished, in multiple copies, what George Ticknor’s report in 1852 referred to as “the more respectable of the popular books, ... the pleasant and popular literature of the day.”³¹ But Ticknor and most leaders of the early public library movement believed that circulating common novels was the first step in the “process of elevating the taste of the uncultivated masses.”³² As William Poole of the Chicago Public Library explained in an early issue of *Library Journal*, since “the masses of a community have very little literary and scholarly culture,” it was necessary to lure them into the library with “such books as they can read with pleasure.” Librarians disagreed over the proper quantity and quality of popular novels for a public library, over the extent to which their collections should cater to popular demand. Most however agreed with Poole (despite statistical evidence in their annual reports to the contrary) that collecting at least some recreational fiction would nurture “the habit of reading,” and “once acquired, the reader’s taste, and hence the quality of his reading, progressively improves.”³³

By the time of the founding of the American Library Association in 1876, small neighborhood libraries, in close proximity to the homes of working-class readers, had become a defining feature of the public library movement.³⁴ They would serve, in the words of ALA President J. N. Larned, as “beneficent snares,” enticing the uncultivated masses to the branch library with amusing fiction and thereby fostering an appreciation of more substantial, uplifting reading. Refining, directing the taste of the reader was the mission of the refined lady librarian, a “cultivated woman [with] a vein of philanthropy in her composition.”³⁵ According to Justin

Winsor, superintendent of the Boston Public Library, she would “allure ... imperceptibly guide ... , as unwittingly as possible, from the poor to ... the good, and so on to the best.”³⁶ The public library gospel held that the missionary of literature was to cultivate personal relationships in the neighborhood so that the branch library became an integral part of the community. The New York Free Circulating Library, for example, praised in particular those librarians who were able to “make friends ... and help ...without seeming to dictate,” which created “opportunities for guiding the reading of those applying for books.”³⁷

However, articles and reports written by leaders of the public library movement do not fully reflect the experiences of readers in public libraries during the later nineteenth century. As late as 1910, a majority of Americans still lived on farms or in rural communities.³⁸ Small towns were more homogenous ethnically than urban areas and less divided economically. Librarians there were members of the community rather than philanthropic outsiders and seem to have been little influenced by the missionaries of literature in the public libraries in large towns and cities. Usually young, single women, often the daughters of prominent local families, they were less concerned with moral uplift than with giving their middle-class friends and neighbors what they wanted to read.³⁹ In Osage, Iowa, for example, the local librarian purchased books under the direction of the library committee of the City Council. Fiction comprised roughly forty-five percent of the public library’s collection, compared with just fifteen percent in the model *Catalog of “A.L.A.” Library* published in 1893. The public library circulated works by popular novelists, such as Horatio Alger, Berth Clay, and *The Duchess* (Margaret Hungerford), that professional librarians in the American Library Association would have deemed too “weak and flabby and silly” to properly enculturate the reader. In contrast to the missionaries of literature, the library committee made “special efforts to select such books as will please the taste of all.”⁴⁰

The library in Osage, Iowa was typical, in important respects, of public libraries founded in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Public libraries were usually established and supported, at least in part, with private resources. Rather than making a large, initial purchase of books, as in Boston and Chicago, towns frequently took possession the local proprietary or subscription library.⁴¹ In 1876, the proprietors of the Osage Library Association donated their collection, making it free to any resident over ten years of age. The building itself, like many public library buildings during this period, was made possible by a private benefaction from a public-spirited philanthropist. Orrin Sage, one of the original developers of the town in the 1850s, donated approximately half of the funds to construct the Sage Public Library.⁴² The City Council appropriated \$250 annually to the library committee to develop the collection, but this was not uniformly the case. According to statistics published by the Department of Education, thirty percent of public libraries in 1891 received no public funding.⁴³ In some towns a wealthy benefactor provided an endowment to support the library as well a fund as to construct a library building, and in others the proprietors of the local library association provided free access to the collection to their fellow citizens.⁴⁴

William Frederick Poole's definition of a public library in 1876, a collection that was "supported by local taxation and voluntary gifts," was in a sense aspirational, an implicit argument for public support of public libraries. The common understanding of the term was in flux in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Certainly Charles Coffin Jewett's definition in 1851, any library that was "not private property," was no longer valid even a quarter of a century later. Through the 1890s there were still more subscription and proprietary libraries than libraries supported by local taxation,⁴⁵ but by that time the social libraries were no longer considered public institutions. By the end of the century, most readers, if they gave the matter any thought,

would probably have agreed with the simple criterion in William Fletcher's *Public Libraries in America*: any collection that was free to the public. A critical aim of the public library movement was to firmly establish the principle of public funding. Fletcher, for example, argued that "any community, once tasting its advantages, is ready to [it] support by taxation, paying the necessary expenses ... as cheerfully as it does those of the public schools."⁴⁶

Ultimately, it was the "voluntary gifts" of one individual that did the most to ensure that public libraries were "supported by local taxation." When Andrew Carnegie agreed in 1903 to erect a new building for the Sage Public Library in Osage, Iowa, he required that the City Council appropriate to the library each year at least one thousand dollars for operating expenses.⁴⁷ The significance of Carnegie's philanthropy for public libraries lies not simply in the number of buildings he funded (1,689 in the United States alone), but rather that his contract with each municipality guaranteed that the public library receive annually an amount equal to at least ten percent of the Carnegie grant.⁴⁸ In contrast to most other public institutions, such as the public schools, the development of public libraries has most often been a result of what today would be termed a public-private partnership. In the words of William Scudder, in a history of early libraries in *Public Libraries in the United States*, "the growth of the system has been in the conjunction of private beneficence with public aid."⁴⁹

The Modern Library Idea: Public and Private in Progressive Era Public Libraries

Due in part to the Carnegie building program, there was a dramatic increase in the number of public libraries founded in the Progressive Era. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, there were 910 new libraries in the United States; from 1900 to 1919 there were 1,854.⁵⁰ There was still a significant proportion of readers without free access to books, especially in rural areas and in the South, where African Americans in particular were often denied service.⁵¹ But by this

time most states had established a library commission to promote and support public libraries.⁵² One of the most important functions of the commissions was, according to Henry Legler, president of the American Library Association, in 1905, to “educate public sentiment so that a genuine desire for ... library privileges will manifest itself in the practical form of local taxation.” By the 1920s, a public library was generally understood to mean a collection that was tax supported; a “free library” without public funding was an exception to the rule.⁵³ After the turn of the century there was also a corresponding decline in the number of social libraries. Generally only the more exclusive proprietary libraries, especially those with generous endowments, survived the ascendancy of the public library. In a paper read before the American Library Association in 1906, William Fletcher held that “one thing that has kept [them] behind in the race has been the slowness with which they have waked up to the modern library spirit.”⁵⁴

In January 1901, when the New York Free Circulating Library transferred its property to the New York Public Library, creating the nucleus of the Library’s Circulation Department, the trustees explained that “the idea that this system of circulating libraries is only for the use of the very poor has been superseded by the belief that it is an important adjunct of the city’s educational system, and as such entitled to municipal support.” They also highlighted, in their final annual report, the part the library had played in advancing the “modern library idea.”⁵⁵ The modern library idea embraced the basic principle of the public library movement, the free circulation of good books from small libraries near readers’ homes, but sought to broaden its influence and appeal by offering a host of new and innovative services. Public librarians, for example, collaborated closely with public school teachers, bringing books into the classroom and helping students with their homework after school.⁵⁶ Inspired by the modern library spirit, they created “travelling libraries” that circulated from churches, playgrounds, telegraph offices,

firehouses, and even private homes.⁵⁷ The library building itself often served as a community center, providing an auditorium and meeting space for neighborhood clubs.⁵⁸ In the words of Arthur Bostwick, director of the St. Louis Public Library and the leading proponent of the modern library idea, there were a “thousand and one activities that distinguish the modern library from its more passive predecessor.”⁵⁹

One reason for the expanded scope of the public library during the Progressive Era may have been that many of the missionaries of literature were simply losing faith in the power of good books to improve the reader naturally, effortlessly. As early as 1894, in a survey conducted by the American Library Association, approximately seventy-five percent of the respondents believed it was not true or “doubtful” that “the reading of fiction leads to more serious reading.”⁶⁰ With “school work,” “readers’ advisory,” and other innovations, the modern librarian played a more direct, active role in elevating the taste of the reader. More important, the modern library spirit was attuned to spirit of the times. Like other activists and reformers during the Progressive Era, progressive librarians were eager to experiment, to innovate, and to marshal their professional expertise for the improvement of society.⁶¹ They also believed in an expansive, interventionist state, in “the state itself [as] a stimulative rather than a purely administrative power.” According to Asa Wynkoop, inspector of public libraries for the New York State Library, “the leaders of the modern library movement have taken their stand with those who believe that human betterment is to be promoted by the enlargement of the function of government.”⁶² The rise of the modern public library reflected rising expectations of government service at all levels.

In his classic exposition of the modern library idea, *The American Public Library* (1910), Arthur Bostwick claimed that “the American public has come to consider the library as an

essential part of its system of education.” However, unlike the public schools, the use of public libraries was not mandatory. In order to reach its full potential, it was, according to Bostwick, the “business of the library to deal with that part of the community that does not voluntarily come to it.” There was therefore a dynamic, entrepreneurial spirit evident in public librarianship in the Progressive Era that contrasted sharply with the staid, sometimes condescending manner of the missionaries of literature. *The American Public Library* held that “the modern ... library idea is simply tantamount to a confession that the library, as a distributor, must obey the laws that all distributors must obey, if they are to succeed,” and that the modern librarian, “like the successful distributor through trade is precisely he who does not sit down and wait for customers.”⁶³ Similarly, because the modern library was now understood to be a tax-supported institution, and the librarian therefore a public servant rather than a missionary to the working class, there was a radically different relationship to the reader. The local taxpayer was now, as Bostwick explained in an address in 1915, a “stockholder” in the library and the “boss” of the librarian.⁶⁴

Like the proprietary library that was accountable to its shareholders, the modern public library had a fairly generous policy regarding the provision of popular novels. In part, this was simply a reflection of American society’s more liberal, less censorious attitude towards recreational reading, a fading of the prejudice typified by those Bostwick dismissed as the “old-fashioned librarians.”⁶⁵ At the ceremony in 1902 marking the laying of the cornerstone of the New York Public Library’s “marble palace for booklovers” on Fifth Avenue, Mayor Seth Low observed that “indeed ... many will read only that which amuses instead of that which deepens and instructs, but [this] is not to be despised, for there is a place in life for amusement as well as work.”⁶⁶ Librarians still vigilantly excluded those books they deemed unrefined or immoral, but most now viewed recreational reading as a harmless pastime, rather than a stepping stone to

more substantial works. At the American Library Association's conference in 1906, Lindsay Swift of the Boston Public Library told his colleagues that, since "most people read for pleasure ... with a modicum of serious purpose, that library which is the best purveyor is the library for me."⁶⁷

The modern library's more generous provision of popular fiction was also an important part of the effort to popularize the library, to attract "that part of the community that does not voluntarily come to it." Echoing the entrepreneurial spirit that Bostwick promoted in *The American Public Library*, the American Library Association's manual for book selection, published in 1915, advised the modern librarian to "study his community as thoroughly as the successful merchant who buys clothing to serve its varied tastes."⁶⁸ The purveyance of fiction in the progressive era public library was also clearly influenced by the way its reading public was constructed. The modern library continued to serve the poor and the working class, especially in its efforts to "Americanize" new immigrants, but, like school children, they were now considered a special class of reader.⁶⁹ No longer on a mission to enculturate the unlettered masses, the library was expected to satisfy, to cater to the "customer," the middle-class, tax-paying, fiction-loving public. In an address before the American Library Association in 1903 on "The Purchase of Current Fiction," Bostwick defined "the great reading public" as "just you and I and some other fellows."⁷⁰

Yet Bostwick's claim that the reader was now the boss was only part of the story. Like its funding, the administration and governance of the public library was, in practical terms, a mix of public and private elements. Whereas school boards were almost always elected bodies, the trustees of public libraries, especially in the larger cities, were often private citizens appointed annually by public officials. Moreover, since many of the libraries were founded in the

nineteenth century as social libraries, some of them remained legally independent entities.⁷¹ The New York Public Library, for example, is a private corporation, governed by a board of trustees that elects its own members and contracts with the City to provide library service for the public.⁷² In general, because of reformers' largely unwarranted fear that the library would "encounter the practical certainty of its becoming one more corruptionist engine in the hands of city rulers," boards were designed to be largely independent of the municipal government.⁷³ However, since the city council or other municipal body appropriated public monies, a substantial portion of the library's funding, the city rulers always had significant influence over the board.

Finally, in regards to the provision of fiction, the modern public library had not one boss, but many; not a generic reading public, but its community's multiple reading publics. The library had to decide, given a limited budget, what to purchase and, just as important, what to reject. According to John Cotton Dana, director of the Newark Public Library, the modern public librarian should be, ideally, not a "missionary to his community, [but] instead ... a hospitable Keeper of the Inn of All Comers." Yet as a practical matter he or she was constrained in book selection by local public opinion. Without some degree of "benign" censorship, there would "come to his shelves volumes which will arouse such antagonisms, such criticisms ... as will make his library a mere center of controversy." And since "no librarian can always practice it to perfection," controversy did inevitably arise; readers served by the library disagreed at times over what titles were either included or excluded.⁷⁴ A new function of the modern librarian was to arbitrate such disputes. The public library became a contested space that helped to forge local consensus regarding a community's cultural and literary values.⁷⁵

In order to understand the history of the modern public library in the United States, we have to start with the history of the community libraries of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The public libraries we know today evolved from these early public libraries. And that evolution sheds light on and is an important part of the history of the book. The history of public libraries helps us understand race, class, and gender in the construction of the reader; the reception of fiction and the role the market played in what readers read; and the public and private goods that reading was expected to serve. Public libraries were also, from their inception, protean public institutions. Their history allows us to explore the shifting definitions of a public institution and the public good; and how, why and to what extent government was expected to promote that public good. The history of American public libraries is a critical component of the social, cultural, and political history of the United States.

1. Charles C. Jewett, *Notices of Public Libraries in the United States* (Washington: Printed for the House of Representatives, 1851), 4. This was printed as an appendix to: Congress, *Fourth Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., 1850, S. Doc. 120, Serial Set 564. Jewett's report is by no means comprehensive, but it was the first attempt to describe all of the "public libraries" in the United States. Most of the work comprises descriptions of individual libraries, arranged by state and municipality.

2. William F. Poole, "The Organization and Management of Public Libraries," in United States Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition and Management*, Special Report, Pt 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876), 477. This monumental work was published around the same time as the founding convention of the American Library Association and the first issue of *Library Journal*, the official organ of the ALA. In addition to descriptions of libraries in the major cities and statistical summaries of public libraries nationwide, it includes essays on all types of libraries and various aspects of library science, such as reference, management, and cataloging.

3. Jewett, *Notices of Public Libraries*, 189-91. The seven categories in Jewett's statistical summary are: state libraries; social libraries; college libraries; student literary society libraries; libraries of professional schools, academies, etc.; libraries of learned societies; and school-district libraries. He did not include the many Sunday school libraries, "which have a vast influence in forming the intellectual as well as the moral character of the people." The literary societies were the heart of student social life for most of the nineteenth century and their libraries were generally well maintained and heavily used. Thomas Spencer Harding, "College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to the Development of Academic Libraries, 1815-1876 I. The Golden Age of College Society Libraries, 1815-40," *Library Quarterly* 29 (Jan. 1959): 1-26. Thomas Spencer Harding, "College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to the Development of Academic Libraries, 1815-1876 II. The Decline of College Society Libraries, 1841-76," *Library Quarterly* 29 (April 1959): 94-112.

4. In the statistical summary, 9,505 of 10,199 libraries are school-district libraries. Jewett, *Notices of Public Libraries*, 191. Some of the states have entries that summarize the school-district libraries. "School and Asylum Libraries," in Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the U.S.*, 38-59. Most of this chapter describes the movement for school-district libraries in each state. Carleton B. Joeckel, *The Government of the American Public Library* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), 8-13; 111-50.

5. Phyllis Dain, "American Public Libraries and the Third Sector: Historical Reflections and Implications," *Libraries & Culture* 31 (Winter 1996): 60. Charles Knowles Bolton, *American Library History* (Chicago: American Library Association Publishing Board, 1911), 10. This is a "chapter" in *Manual of Library Economy*. Apparently the manual was never published as a single volume; each chapter was issued as a separate pamphlet. Sidney Ditzion, "The School-District Library, 1835-55," *Library Quarterly* 10 (Oct. 1940): 545-77.

6. Patrick M. Valentine, "America's Antebellum Social Libraries: A Reappraisal in Institutional Development." *Library & Information History* 27 (March 2011): 32-51.

7. A share in the Boston Athenaeum was \$300 in 1851. Jewett, *Notices of Public Libraries*, 19, 189-91. Jesse Shera, "The Social Library. I: Origins, Form, and Economic Backgrounds, in *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England, 1629-1855* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949; repr., n.p.: Shoestring Press, 1965), 54-85. Katherine Wolff, *Culture Club: The Curious History of the Boston Athenaeum* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts press, 2000), 143.

8. Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the U.S.*, 380. Mercantile libraries "are in fact open to anybody who pays the moderate fee." There are also reports, separate chapters, for YMCA libraries and law and medical libraries. Sidney Ditzion, "Mechanics' and Mercantile Libraries," *Library Quarterly* 10 (April 1940): 192-19. The first and most famous circulating library in America was Benjamin Franklin's Library Company of Philadelphia.

9. A. F. Bixby and A. Howell, comps., *Historical Sketches of the Ladies' Library Associations of the State of Michigan* (Adrian: Times and Expositor Steam Press, 1876). William I. Fletcher, *Public Libraries in America*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1894), 11. A subscription of just fifty cents was exceptional. The Mercantile Library Association of the City of New York, for example, charged five dollars in 1851 for readers who were not employed in mercantile establishments. Jewett, *Notices of Public Libraries*, 84.

10. An Act to Incorporate Such Persons as May Associate for the Purpose of Procuring and Erecting Public Libraries in this State, The Revised Statutes of the State of New York, as Altered by Subsequent Legislation, ch. 18, tit. 9 (Gould, Banks 1852) (passed April 1, 1796). On enabling acts, see Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, 61-64.

11. The original constitution is reprinted in "At a Meeting of the Subscribers to the Mercantile Library Association," *National Advocate for the Country*, November 27, 1820. There are fewer references to public utility in official documents relating to libraries later in the century. For example, when the Mercantile Library wrote a new constitution in 1870 there was no preamble.

12. Quoted in "Proprietary Libraries: Round Table Meeting," in *Papers and Proceedings of the Twenty-Eighth General Meeting of the American Library Association* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1906), 270. This association of good books and good morals is commonly referred to founding documents. See for example, the articles of association of a social library in Maine in 1801: "to promote the diffusion of useful knowledge, piety and virtue." Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the U.S.*, 446.

13. William Ellery Channing, *Lectures on the Laboring Portion of the Community* (Boston: Crosby and Nichols, 1863), 55. Channing's address in 1838 was immediately before the first "paperback revolution," from 1839 to 1845. Especially later in the nineteenth century, paperback publishers were competitors of the public library. Late in the century, even "good books" could be purchased in cheap editions. On the first "paperback revolution," see John Tebbel, *A History*

of *Book Publishing in the United States* (New York: R.R Bowker, 1972), 1: 242-45 and Frank L. Schick, *The Paperbound Book in America: The History of Paperbacks and Their European Background* (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1958), 48-50. All types of libraries also faced competition from periodicals and especially newspapers, the “penny-press,” both of which published fiction. See for example, Ronald J. Zboray, *Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford, 1993), 126-29 and George H. Douglas, *The Golden Age of the Newspaper* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999), 1-10.

14. Preface to a catalog quoted in: David Kaser, *Books for a Sixpence: The Circulating Library in America* (Pittsburgh: Beta Phi Mui, 1980), 119. On the variety of establishments that offered a circulating library, see page 50. Kaser’s examples include a tavern and a brokerage firm. In roughly the first half of the twentieth century, they were very common in drugstores. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, many circulating libraries charged a subscription, rather than a rental fee, or offered both options. Kaser argues (page 120) that services provided by circulating libraries influenced services provided by public libraries later in the century.

15. New-York Lyceum, *New-York Lyceum* (New York: n.p., 1840), [1-2]. Available online in Readex’s American BroadSides and Ephemera, Series I, 1760-1900. The Lyceum pamphlet was also highly critical of the public libraries in the city, including the Mercantile Library Association and the New York Society Library, a proprietary library. On the proportion of fiction in the circulating libraries, see Kaser, *Books for a Sixpence*, 66-67, 102 and Appendix II, 173-76; and Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, 149-54. On advertisements and that catalogs that promised an abundant selection of novels, see for example, Tom Glynn, *Reading Publics: New York City’s Public Libraries, 1754-1911* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 120.

16. New-York Lyceum, *New-York Lyceum*, [1-2]. The references to mental illness and popular novels are an extended excerpt from Horace Mann’s annual report in 1840 for the Massachusetts Board of Education.

17. Quoted in J. P. Quincy, “Free Libraries,” in Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the U.S.*, 395; see also page 393, which refers to “the enervating influence of the prevalent romantic literature” and page 396, which relates the doleful tale of Jesse Pomeroy, “the boy murderer,” who confessed to being a “great reader ... of dime novels.”

18. Quoted in Kaser, *Books for a Sixpence*, 119, 126, n. 6. The most frequently cited example is “Novel Reading, A Cause of Female Depravity,” *Monthly Mirror* 4 (November 1797): 277-79. The *Monthly Mirror* was a London periodical, but this article was widely reprinted in the United States. Mott, *History of American Magazines, 1741-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 174.

19. Bolton, “American Library History,” 7. Book historians have tended to perpetuate uncritically the assumption that the customers of the circulating libraries were primarily women. To my knowledge, the only study to compare the circulation of fiction for men and women is Ronald Zboray, “Reading Patterns in Antebellum America: Evidence in the Charge Records of the New York Society Library,” *Libraries & Culture* 26 (Spring 1991): 301-333. Zboray found little difference in male and female reading for 1847 to 1849 and 1854 to 1856. The same may

well have been true of the patronage of the circulating libraries. Most of the contemporary evidence comes from proprietors of circulating libraries, who had a vested interest in encouraging female readers to rent their books, and male editors and others who may have simply assumed that, since circulating libraries provided trashy fiction, their customers must have been mostly women.

20. New-York Lyceum, *New-York Lyceum*, [1]. New York Society Library, *Annual Report of the Trustees of the New York Society Library* (New York: John F. Trow, 188), 4-5.

21. Poole, "Organization and Management of Public Libraries," 477. Fletcher, *Public Libraries in America*, 16. The brief enabling act for the Boston Public Library is quoted in full in Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, 175. On library legislation, see especially, United States Bureau of Education, *Statistics of Libraries and Library Legislation in the United States* (Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1897). "The act of 1848 for Boston is really the germ out of which has grown the much of the library legislation in this as well as other countries (page 524)."

22. George Ticknor, *Report of the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston, July, 1852* (Boston: J. H. Eastburn, 1852). Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, 276-90, includes a facsimile of the report. The quotes are from pages: 268, 273, 281, 287, and 286. See especially pages 272-73; Ticknor compared the public library with the public schools, explained that the public library will be a "provision for carrying on the great work" of the public schools. The comparison of public libraries with the public schools is ubiquitous in the popular press and the professional literature during this early period. Ticknor was the driving force behind the establishment of the Boston Public Library. See also, George Ticknor, *Life, Letters and Journals of George Ticknor* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909): II: 300-303. This is a letter, written in 1851 to Edward Everett, in which he makes many of the same arguments found in the first report of the trustees.

23. "Above all, while the claims of no class ... should be overlooked, the first regard should be shown, as in the case of our Free Schools, to those, who can in no other way supply themselves with ... interesting and healthy reading." Ticknor, *Report of the Trustees*, 282. On the public schools and the urban masses, see, for example, Horace Mann, *The Massachusetts System of Common Schools; Being an Enlarged and Revised Edition of the Tenth Annual Report of the First Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1849). Mann placed particular emphasis on the moral and cultural qualifications of public school teachers and observed that in a city "it often happens that the surface disease of coarse and untamed manners is aggravated and made virulent by moral distempers within" (pages 70-71; 80-85; the quote is from pages 84-85). Mann was the leading reformer and proponent of public education in the antebellum period, the "father of the common school movement."

24. Fletcher, *Public Libraries in America*, 37-38. The mission of the public library to refine and uplift working-class readers is a commonplace in the professional literature and public documents of the period.

25. "Missionaries of literature" was used, for example, by J. N. Larned, Superintendent of the Buffalo Public Library, in his presidential address before the American Library Association in 1894. J. N. Larned, "Address of the President," *Library Journal* 19 (Conference Proceedings 1894): 23-24. For a good summary of the "public library idea" in the second half of the nineteenth century, see New York Free Circulating Library, *Twenty-First and Final Report of the New York Free Circulating Library, With a Sketch of Its History* (New York: The Library, 1900), 23-24. The New York Free Circulating Library was the largest of a number of free libraries in the city that, between 1886 and 1901, were privately managed but publicly funded.

26. New York Free Circulating Library, *Library Meeting at the Union League Club, Jan. 20, 1882* (New York: The Library, 1882), 4. I am not arguing here that public libraries during this period were instruments of "social control." Rather they were a means of *influencing* the working class, a term used much more frequently by proponents of the public library movement. On the social control theory and library historiography, see Glynn, *Reading Publics*, 203-204.

27. New York Free Circulating Library, *Library Meeting*, 5.

28. *Official Report of the Biennial Convention of the General Federation of Women's Clubs* (Portland, ME: Lakeside Printing, 1914), 561. Quoted in Paula D. Watson, "Founding Mothers: The Contribution of Women's Organizations to Public Library Development in the United States," *Library Quarterly* 64 (July 1994): 235. See also, Paula D. Watson, "Carnegie Ladies, Lady Carnegies: Women and the Building of Libraries," *Libraries & Culture* 31 (Winter 1996): 159-196.

29. On salaries for women in public libraries, see, for example, Melvil Dewey, *Librarianship as a Profession for College-Bred Women: An Address Delivered Before the Association of College Alumnae* (Boston: Library Bureau, 1886), 19-21. In some respects, Dewey's views on the employment of women were fairly progressive for the time, but he claimed that they earned less than men in libraries in part because they were usually in poor health and because of "lack of permanence in the plans of women"; they will just get married and leave the profession, so why pay them decently. This speech was delivered shortly before Dewey founded, at Columbia College, the world's first School of Library Economy. Most of the students were women. See also, F. B. Perkins, "How to Make Town Libraries Successful," in Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the U.S.*, 430. Perkins, the Librarian of the Boston Public Library, wrote that "the least satisfactory feature of our present library system is the excessive proportion [of] ... the cost of administration" and that "women should be employed ... as far as possible."

30. See especially, Dee Garrison, "The Tender Technicians: The Feminization of Public Librarianship," *Journal of Social History* 6 (Winter 1972): 131-59. Among the "natural qualities" that Melvil Dewey considered essential to public librarianship were earnestness, enthusiasm, and "the housekeeping instinct." Dewey, "Librarianship as a Profession for College-Bred Women," 21.

31. William Kite, *Fiction in Public Libraries* (n.p.: Philadelphia: 1880), 2, 7. Kite's was librarian of the Friends' Free Library. Founded by the Quakers, it was open to all residents of

Germantown and made special efforts to attract working-class and young readers. It received no public funds at the time. Ticknor, *Report of the Trustees*, 283.

32. William I. Fletcher, "Public Libraries in Manufacturing Communities," in Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the United States*, 410. On fiction in public libraries during this period, see Esther Jane Carrier, *Fiction in Public Libraries, 1976-1900* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1965).

33. William F. Poole, "Some Popular Objections to Public Libraries," *American Library Journal* 1 (November 1876): 49. This is a paper that was read at the founding convention of the American Library Association. See also the discussion of his paper in the Proceedings section of this issue. One attendee remarked, for example, that "we shall all agree as to the duty of excluding immoral works, but will differ as to the dividing lines, in the use of fiction generally." "Novel-Reading," *American Library Journal* 1 (November 1876): 98.

I have found no evidence of "improvement" from libraries' circulation statistics from the period. For example, fiction comprised seventy percent of the circulation of the Boston Public Library in 1876 and seventy percent ten years later. Boston Public Library, *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report* (Boston: The Library, 1876). City of Boston, *Thirty-Six Annual Report of the Trustees of the Public Library* (Boston: The Library), 31.

34. For example, in its final annual report, the New York Free Circulating Libraries explained that "small libraries at no great distances apart" were one of the "fundamental features" of the "Public Library idea." New York Free Circulating Library, *Final Report*, 23-24. The Boston Public Library was the first to establish branches, in 1870. See "Branch Libraries," *American Library Journal* 1 (April 1877): 288-89.

35. Larned, "Address of the President," 4. Samuel S. Green, "Personal Relations between Librarians and Readers," *American Library Journal* 1 (November 1876): 79.

36. Justin Winsor, "Free Libraries and Readers," *American Library Journal* 1 (November 1876): 64. Earlier in the nineteenth century, librarians assumed that exposure to good books would "naturally" improve readers' tastes. By 1876, terms such *influence* and *guidance* were regularly used.

37. New York Free Circulating Library, *Fourteenth Annual Report of the New York Free Circulating Library* (New York: The Library: 1893), 12-13. 37. New York Free Circulating Library, *Twentieth Annual Report of the New York Free Circulating Library* (New York: The Library: 1899), 27.

38. Gavin Wright, *Historical Statistics of the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), "Table Aa716-775 - Population, by Race, Sex, and Urban-Rural Residence: 1880-1990." <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/ISBN-9780511132971.Aa684-1895>

39. It is difficult to generalize about public libraries in rural areas during this period, but they do seem to have often been different from public libraries in cities, especially if they were not

managed by professional librarians, librarians trained in the library schools that were founded beginning in the 1880s. See for example, Wayne Wiegand, *A Part of Our Lives: A History of the American Public Library* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 78-79, 149.

40. Christine Pawley, *Reading on the Middle Border: The Culture of Print in Late-Nineteenth-Century Osage, Iowa* (Amherst: University of Amherst Press), 61-116. “Weak and flabby and silly” is from a report of the librarian of the Young Men’s Association of Buffalo, printed in *Library Journal* in 1882 (p. 93). The quote regarding the effort “to please the taste of all” is from a local newspaper account (p. 68). Pawley compares two catalogs from the Osage public library to the *Catalog of A.L.A. Library*, one from 1876 and another from 1893. Both had three times as much fiction as the model collection from the American Library Association.

41. One of the reports in *Public Libraries in the United States*, for example, explained that public libraries “are, generally speaking, the outgrowth of social libraries.” Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the U.S.*, 445. Fletcher wrote that “most of them have grown up from ... an association.” Fletcher, *Public Libraries in America*, 28-29. For brief histories of the founding of the Boston Public Library and the Chicago Public Library, see U.S. Department of Education, *Public Libraries in the United States*, 863-66 and 894-95. Both cities received generous donations of books as well as money to create the original public library collection.

42. Pawley, *Reading on the Middle Border*, 61-65. Wayne A. Wiegand, *Main Street Public Library: Community Spaces and Reading Spaces in the Rural Heartland, 1876-1856* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011), 47-52. On gifts to public libraries up to 1894, see Fletcher, *Public Libraries in America*, “List of Some of the Principal Gifts and Bequests to Public Libraries in the United States,” 144-46.

43. Fletcher, *Public Libraries in America*, 152-54. The table on page 154 shows a total of 566 public libraries in twenty states, only 399 of which were supported by local taxes. Fletcher does not include the twenty-four other states that had fewer than three public libraries. His numbers are derived from Weston Flint, *Statistics of Public Libraries in the United States and Canada* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893). Flint included only libraries of more than one thousand volumes and acknowledges that his statistics are incomplete, since many libraries did not report on every category in his survey (pp. 9, 21).

44. See Flint, *Statistics of Public Libraries*, 22-203. Some of the libraries in this main table show both “corporation” rather than “taxation” as the type of support and “free” rather than “subscription” as the type of access. However, using the table to determine the proportion of public libraries that were free to all, but received no public monies is complicated by the fact that Flint’s definition of a public library is very broad and includes, for example, school and college libraries. His definition is essentially the same as Jewett’s in 1851, any library that is not strictly private. On endowments, see M. Emogene Hazeltine, “Maintaining the Public Library by Endowment,” *Library Journal* 21 (March 1896): 93-95.

45. Haynes McMullen, “The Very Slow Decline of the American Social Library,” *Library Quarterly* 55 (April 1985): 207-225.

46. Fletcher, *Public Libraries in America*, 17, 152. Fletcher's definition of a "free public library" is one that provides both free circulation of books and free reference.

47. Wiegand, Main Street Public Library, 59-66.

48. See for example, Abigail A. Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) and Theodore Jones, *Carnegie Libraries Across America: A Public Legacy* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997).

49. Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the United States of America*, 35.

50. "Table 14- Number of public libraries, distributed by date of founding, 1944-45," in Willard O. Mishoff, *Public Library Statistics, 1944-45* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1947), 28-29.

51. As late as 1920, forty-three percent of the population in the United States did not have access to a public library. This number varied considerably by region; for example, seventy-two percent of readers in ten southeastern states did not have access. "Appendix: People without Public Library Service," in Committee on Library Extension of the American Library Association, *Library Extension: A Study of Public Library Conditions and Needs* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1926). See also, Cheryl Knott, *Not Free, Not for All: Public Libraries in the Age of Jim Crow* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015).

52. See for example, Gratia Countryman, "Lines of Work which a State Library Commission Can Profitably Undertake," *Library Journal* 25 (Montreal Conference, August 1900): 51-54; and League of Library Commissions, *League of Library Commissions Hand-Book 1922* (n.p.: League of Library Commissions, 1922). In 1922, 40 of the forty-eight states had library commissions (pages 4-6).

53. Henry E. Legler, "State Library Commissions," *Library Journal* 30 (Portland Conference, September 1905): 40-45. Legler was the secretary of the Wisconsin Free Library Commission and the president of ALA in 1913-14. In 1923, of 2,788 libraries free to the public, 2,754 received public funding. Bureau of Education, *Statistics of Public, Society, and School Libraries, 1923* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1926), 2. Again, statistics here are incomplete, in part because only about two thirds of the libraries surveyed responded (page 1). Between 1902 and 1912, in cities with populations over 100,000, local funding for public libraries increased two and a half times. Dain, "American Public Libraries and the Third Sector," 67.

54. The Office of Education's statistical compilation for 1929 notes that the "falling off in the numbers of association or society libraries shows the trend towards publicly supported institutions." Office of Education, *Statistics of Public, Society, and School Libraries, 1929* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1931), 2, 6. Haynes McMullen claimed that after 1923 social libraries were just one percent of non-school libraries in the United States. Haynes McMullen, "The Distribution of Libraries throughout the United States," *Library Trends* 25 (July 1976): 33. "Proprietary Libraries: Round Table Meeting, 271. On the surviving social libraries,

see William Wendorf, ed. *America's Membership Libraries* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2007).

55. New York Free Circulating Library, *Final Report*, 23-24.

56. Work with children was one of the hallmarks of the modern library idea. See, for example, *Library Work with Children*, Alice I. Hazeltine, ed. (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1917) and *The Relationship between the Library and the Public Schools*, Arthur E. Bostwick, ed. (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1914). Both are part of a series edited by Bostwick, *Classics of American Librarianship*.

57. See for example, the classic exposition of the modern library idea, Arthur E. Bostwick, *The American Public Library* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1910), 108-16 and also that section of Bostwick's bibliography, 378 (the bibliography is more extensive in the later editions). Traveling libraries also served rural areas without regular public library service, often with support from a state library commission. The Traveling Library Department of the New York Free Circulating Library was especially extensive and loaned out more books than many of its branches. New York Free Circulating Library, *Final Report*, 43-46.

58. For three discussions of the public library's role as a social center, see another title from *Classics in American Librarianship*, *The Library and Society*, Arthur E. Bostwick, ed. (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1920), 431-58. In an introduction to this section, Bostwick reported that "community center service is ... the newest phase of library work and the most convincing evidence of its socialization." Socialization in modern library jargon meant a focus on people as well as books.

59. Bostwick, *American Public Library*, 2. This passage provides an excellent, concise summary of "the great multiplication of facilities in the modern public library." Before moving to St. Louis, Bostwick was the last chief librarian of the New York Free Circulating Library and the first chief of circulation of the New York Public Library.

60. Ellen Coe, "Fiction," *Library Journal* 18 (July 1893): 250-51.

61. On librarianship during the Progressive Era, see Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920* (New York: Free Press, 1979; repr., Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 206-25. Garrison focused in particular on work with children and the "Americanization" of immigrants. Progressivism was a complex, multifaceted, and sometimes contradictory movement, but the modern library spirit certainly reflected many of its most salient aspects. For a good, recent overview, see Walter T. K. Nugent, *Progressivism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). Librarians' preoccupation with efficiency was also a very progressive characteristic.

62. Isabel Ely Lord, *The Free Public Library* (Chicago: American Library Association Publishing Board, 1914), 1. This is "chapter" six in the *Manual of Library Economy*. Asa Wynkoop, *Commissions, State Aid, and State Agencies* (Chicago: American Library Association Publishing Board, 1911), 1. This is "chapter" twenty-seven.

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63. Bostwick, *American Public Library*, 3, 26. This was a highly influential book in the profession. It went through four editions between 1910 and 1929, was formally endorsed by the American Library Association, and was widely adopted in library schools. However, Bostwick noted, even in fourth edition, that “the broadening of the library idea ... has not taken place without opposition, nor is it accepted to-day, even by all librarians (page 2).”
64. Arthur E. Bostwick, “People’s Share in the Library,” in *A Librarian’s Open Shelf: Essays on Various Subjects* (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1920), 198-201. This was an address delivered to the Chicago Woman’s Club. On business as a metaphor for public libraries, see Robert F. Nardini, “A Search for Meaning: American Library Metaphors, 1876-1926,” *Library Quarterly* 71 (April 2001): 121-23. Modern librarians stressed that the modern library was efficient and cost-effective, as well as entrepreneurial. The dominant metaphor in the nineteenth century was, of course, the public school.
65. Bostwick held that “a large part of the circulation of a public library will ... be fiction, and so long as this is of good quality there is no reason for being ashamed of it.” Bostwick, *American Public Library*, 2, 152.
66. The New York Public Library, *Ceremonies on the Laying of Its Cornerstone* (New York: R. W. Crothers, 1902), 27.
67. Arthur E. Bostwick, “The Librarian as a Censor,” in *Library Essays: Papers Related to the Work of Public Libraries* (H. W. Wilson Co., 1920), 211-139. The quote from Swift is found in “Proprietary Libraries: Round Table Meeting,” 272. See also, Esther Jane Carrier, *Fiction in Public Libraries, 1900-1950* (Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1985).
68. Elva E. Bascom, *Book Selection* (Chicago: American Library Association Publishing Board, 1915), 10. This is “chapter” twenty-six in the *Manual of Library Economy*.
69. For primary sources on Americanization in public libraries during this period, see that section in the bibliography in Arthur E. Bostwick, *The American Public Library*, 4th ed. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1929), 429-30.
70. Arthur E. Bostwick, “The Purchase of Current Fiction,” in American Library Association, *Twenty-fifth Annual Conference, Niagara Falls, June 22-27, 1903* (Philadelphia: The Association, 1903), 32. Nonetheless, what works of fiction should be excluded from the public library continued to point of contention for much of the twentieth century. See for example, Nora Rawlinson, “Give ‘Em What They Want!,” *Library Journal* 106 (15 November 1983). Providing whatever readers wanted to read was still considered controversial as late as 1983.
71. Joeckel, *Government of the American Public Library*, 24, 170-96. This is the classic study of public library governance in the early twentieth century and much of it is still relevant today. Joeckel demonstrated that in the history of American social libraries “the pattern for the future was thus clearly outlined: independent libraries [and] strong management by boards of prominent citizens” (page 8). In 1935, approximately seventeen percent of the public libraries in cities of

30,000 or more residents were private corporations or associations governed by private boards (pages 80, 344).

72. The founding and early development of the New York Public Library was unique and complex. It was originally the consolidation in 1895 of the Astor Library, the Lenox Library, and the Tilden Trust. See Harry Miller Lydenberg, *The History of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations* (New York: The Library, 1923), 301-48. On the creation and membership of the NYPL board, see Glynn, *Reading Publics*, 229, 250-51 and Phyllis Dain, *The New York Public Library: A History of Its Founding and Early Years* (New York: The Library, 1972), 78-86.

73. “In this respect [corruption by political machines in the later nineteenth century], the record of the public library appears to be almost entirely clean.” Joeckel, *Government of the American Public Library*, 23. Joeckel qualified this however by observing that “perhaps the libraries were financially too poor and their salaries too low to attract the interest of the spoilsman.” The quote regarding “city rulers” is from Frederic Beecher Perkins, “Public Libraries and the Public,” in *Library and Society*, ed. Arthur Bostwick (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1921; reprint, Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries, 1968), 233. This is an address delivered at the American Library Association annual conference in 1885.

74. John Cotton Dana, “Public Libraries as Censors,” *Bookman* 49 (March-August 1919): 147-52; the quotes are from pages 147, 150, and 152. Dana emphasized that, as a practical matter, censorship was part of a librarian’s job, because his or her budget allowed the purchase of only a fraction of the books published. For the most part, he resisted the anti-German hysteria during the First World War and the removal of “pro-German” books from his library’s collection: “in this particular incident it was clearly shown that a librarian’s censorship, exercised with discretion, is approved by his trustees, his community, and his local press” (page 152). Dana also refers to the practice of placing controversial works in a restricted collection that required special permission for access. He referred to this as “censorship of seclusion” (page 148). Librarians called it, among themselves, “purgatory.” Wiegand, *Part of Our Lives*, 117-18.

75. Wayne Wiegand has shown that this is a defining and recurring theme in public library history. Wiegand, *Part of Our Lives*, 5, 39, 168, 266. Arbitrating community consensus is a complex and “sometimes messy” (page 269) process that involves “common readers,” powerful, local elites, professional librarians and distant arbiters of culture. The profession did not take a stand against censorship until after World War II. Local library boards generally left the day-to-day operation of the library to professional librarians (Dain, “Third-Sector,” 65), but this was not always the case when complaints over book selection were raised. Oddly, in an extensive and detailed discussion of the principles that should guide the librarian in censoring books, Bostwick acknowledged the importance of local community standards, but only briefly and without elaboration: “every [librarian] must struggle with it for himself, having in mind the force and direction of his own local sentiment.” Bostwick, “Librarian as a Censor,” 133. This was Bostwick’s presidential address before the American Library Association in 1908.
