

# AMERICAN LAW PUBLISHING 1860-1900

**Historical Readings** 

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## LIBRARIES OF THE WEST By Carrie W. Whitney

The past twenty years have seen a renaissance in library work in the West. To people resident in other parts of the United States, having all the advantages of well selected public libraries, and private libraries handed down from generation to generation of college-bred ancestors, this movement would seem of little importance. When, however, we consider the hundreds of young men and women, who leave their homes every year to come West, the subject should be one very near the heart of every one interested in the social problem.

As early as the later part of the eighteenth century there were good, private libraries, and rumors of public libraries in the Northwestern territory.

The first library organized north of the Ohio river was known as the "Putnam Family Library," and later as the "Belpre Library" and is supposed to have originated from a small collection of books belonging to Gen.

From: Whitney, Carrie W. <u>Libraries of the West</u>, THE AUGUSTA (GEORGIA) CHRONICLE (1895).

The following explanation was printed above the title of the paper: "The Librarian's Congress met in Atlanta yesterday. One of the most brilliant women in attendance was Mrs. Moses Wadley, of Augusta, who was requested by Mrs. Carrie W. Whitney, of Kansas City, to read her paper on 'The Libraries of the West'.

This was a Congress of Women Librarians which was held in Atlanta in connection with the Cotton States and International Exhibition. There are various references to the very fine papers which were given at the meeting, and several references said that the papers were to be printed by the Commissioner of Education for distribution. On Saturday, November 30, 1895, The <a href="Atlanta Constitution">Atlanta Constitution</a> stated that "the papers read. . . will appear in permanent form comprising a valuable supplement to the World's Fair Library Papers to be issued by the commissioner of education in his next report." To date no copy of the papers has been located.

Israel Putnam, brought West by his son, Col. Israel Putnam. The library was owned by a joint stock company, with shares valued at \$10 each. The books were kept at the home of Esquire Issac Pierce, who was librarian. Books seem to have been greatly prized by these pioneers. We read of one who, although six miles distant from the "Belpre Library," was a subscriber and passed the long winter evenings, often until 12 or 1 o'clock reading to his wife, she meanwhile, "patching, carding or spinning." Twenty years later this library ceased to exist, but many of the books are still to be found in the old families of Ohio. In the public library of Dayton, is a yellow, time-stained pamphlet, containing the constitution and rules of the first public library incorporated in the State of Ohio. The affinity existing between libraries and schools, seems to have been unrecognized at that early date.

One rule declares, "If a proprietor loans a book belonging to the library to any one not a proprietor, or suffers a book to be carried into a school, he or she shall pay a fine equal to the value of one-quarter of said book." In the light of recent science, it is rather amusing to read that, "damage done a book while in the hands of a proprietor, shall be assessed by the librarian, at the rate of 3 cents for a drop of tallow."

The library movement was agitated in Cincinnati in 1802, and has resulted in the collection of two hundred thousand volumes now known as the "Cincinnati Public Library," where remnants of many of the pioneer libraries of the Northwestern territory have found a permanent home. The celebrated "western" or "Coonskin Library," was organized in the summer of 1803. The same year, Samuel Brown, when starting on a trip to Boston,

by wagon, was entrusted with a number of furs and skins, collected by the hunters and instructed to bring back their value in books. The skins were sold to the agents of John Jacob Astor, for \$73.50. Among the volumes bought were Harris's "Cyclopedia," "Evelina," "Children of the Abbey," "Don Quixote," and "Goldsmith," this selection, showing, that even at that early day, Western people knew and appreciated the value of good literature.

In this way was implanted in the new settlements the seed of library progress, which has grown in magnitude, until the pollen of civilization and culture has been carried into every State and Territory of the great West. St. Louis was the next resting place of the movement. In December, 1845, eight gentlemen met and organized a library to be known as the "Mercantile Library;" it grew in usefulness and size, and now contains something like one hundred thousand volumes. In 1865 a "Public School Library Society" was incorporated, and with the usual ups and downs of library life has increased as the needs of so great a city demand. By the untiring efforts of the present librarian it has finally been incorporated as a "Free Public Library," bringing pleasures and consolation into many homes and making it possible for every individual of St. Louis to gain an education, that best of all educations, a thorough knowledge of good books.

The "Chicago Public Library" is evidence that "troubles are sometimes blessings in disguise." When the great fire of 1871 almost obliterated the now educational centre of the West, English sympathy for bereaved Chicago, was expressed by gifts of money and books. The author of "Tom Brown at Oxford," Thomas Hughes, took a leading part in collecting works

for that purpose. Many eminent persons, including Queen Victoria, sent autograph copies. The State of Illinois, in answer to a petition from the people of Chicago, granted in 1873, a general public library act. The magnificent building now in course of erection, and the thousands of valuable books, will therefore stand a noble monument to brotherly love and sympathy.

With the usual liberality of the West, Chicago's citizens have provided for the literary needs of every class, the "Public Library," for the people; "The Newberry," with eighty thousand volumes, selected and arranged, by the late Dr. W.F. Poole, a fountain from which every class of students may draw inspiration; the "Armour Mission" reaches a class of people seldom found in either of the other libraries; the "John Crerar" is intended to reach still another class; and with the library of the Chicago University, makes five large people's universities in this modern Athens.

The "Omaha Library Association" was incorporated in 1871. A few months later a room was rented, and the library, having on its shelves a collection of books given by generous citizens and seven hundred additional ones bought by the board, was opened to the public. It has grown in popularity and increased in size, until Omaha's citizen's may be truly proud of their fine building and forty thousand volumes.

The "Kansas City Public Library" is the outgrowth of a patriotic desire on the part of the ladies of the city to see the Gate City represented at the Centennial Exposition. This project abandoned, the disposition of the funds thus collected became a subject of discussion. Finally,

after a bloodless, but not wordless warfare of several weeks, between the two factions, and with some assistance from the legal fraternity, the matter was arbitrated, and the apple of discord placed in the hands of the Board of Education. A library of twenty-five thousand volumes and a fine building in the near future are the result.

In 1860 Bayard Taylor indicated his desire to go to Minneapolis and lecture to any literary society of that city for its exclusive benefit. In this way was organized the "Minneapolis Public Library," containing fifty thousand books, a museum and an art gallery.

It is not, however, the larger libraries of the West that are doing the best work, they have, of course, their mission to perform in feeding the multitude. Almost every small town in the leading Western States has now a public library and reading room; not the old time frowning edifice, with a honeycomb of shelving around the sides, where one must don felt slippers at the door; converse in whispers at the desk; one never talked in those libraries--where a smile was a misdemeanor, a laugh never heard-where the librarian could be reached only by a card of admission, and when found, regretted, unless the visitor was a student of the antique, but a real working library, where one is met at the door, so to speak, his wants anticipated; where valuable treatises on every leading topic of the day are to be found. A library that is a reminder of home to the young man whose mother is far away in the East; a haven for the young school teacher who has come West to help the family; a fountain of knowledge for literary societies; an epitome of genealogies for Sons and Daughters of the Revolution; an art gallery for art classes, and above all a library where children love to go. Western librarians were among the first to

advocate and put into practical use a closer union of schools and libraries; to see the wisdom of placing a refined, cultivated personage in charge of the children's department, to meet them in the delivery room, to be one of them—ready and glad to be there—a lover of children and children's books—who can select for a boy the book which will tell him how to make a canoe or a storage battery; for he who wants adventure, an Indian story interesting and historical.

Personal influence is the keynote to library success; it is this that is creating a growing interest in art, literature and general culture; an increasing demand for good books, and less call for ephemeral literature.

The Western librarian is always in evidence; a Pandora box in which may be found an answer to every question, a solution to every problem. In fact, the Western library is fast becoming a huge reference book, with the librarian as an index.

## SCHOOL LIBRARIES By H. E. Scudder

There is one function of our public schools which ought not to be over-looked by those who desire to see things in the large, to study tendencies, and to mark movements of progress or retrogression in our civilization: that function is to furnish compensation, to redress wrongs, to restore the balance. . . . It has been seen that there is a decay in the habit of strong reading out of school; that the child who does not find the best books in his school work does not find them in his home, and between the two misses great literature altogether. So the school comes in to redress this wrong; it even gives the child fairy tales and nursery legends, because he hears them no longer at home; it goes on step by step and initiates him into the mysteries of literature, because in a vast number of cases the school\_teacher is the only priest of literature.

The incorporation of the best literature into the regular school curriculum is leading inevitably to another great advance in the enrichment of the school. It is the great function of true education to create wants, and the moment books which had inspiration in them found their way into the class-room the want began to be felt for more books, for books which took up the parable and went on expanding and enlarging it. Therefore schemes were framed by which the public library should be made more distinctly an adjunct to the

From: Scudder, H.E. School Libraries, 72 ATLANTIC MONTHLY 678 (1893).

schoolroom, and for several years the reports of the most active superintendents have abounded with lists of books advisable to be read by pubils in school.

Now great as has been the advance of the public library system, we are still more or less under the influence of the old traditionary view of the library as a storehouse of books. We have unchained books, to be sure, and the greatest public libraries in the country are, with a few exceptions lending libraries. But it is chiefly in the libraries based upon commercial considerations, like circulating libraries and those of mercantile associations; that readers are regarded as customers, and books are provided to meet the demand for a great many of the same kind all at once. In such libraries, a new and very popular book is not kept singly, but by the shelfful; and if ten persons want it on the same day, nine do not have to wait for the tenth to read and return it. It is plain that if all the teachers in the city are recommending a particular book to their pupils, and the public library has but one copy, it is the boy with the fastest heels who will get it and the rest may wait until he is done with it.

We have spoken of the public library, but there is another consideration which should not be overlooked. Just as the child is now doing much in the schoolroom which under other conditions would be done at home, so the poverty of the home in the matter of books is likely to force the schools to make compensation. Indeed, the schools have hastened this movement by widespread system of free textbooks. Once the child bought his books, and meagre as with the intellectural diet, yet the reader, the geography, the history were his own, and often constituted the sole library possessed in his home. Now even this little supply has been cut off and the city or town owns the books, and keeps them in use until they are worn out.

Again, therefore, we see the working of this law of compensation as a function of the public school system. The introduction into each schoolhouse of a collection of books to be borrowed and read by children put the pupils on the footing which children once enjoyed when a family collected books as a matter of course; and, rightly used, such school libraries will go far toward repairing the defect of homes without books. It was maintained with some sophistry, not long ago, in the London Spectator, that private collections of books were an anachronism; that it was as absurd for a man to buy a book when he wanted to read, with a public or lending library at hand, as to buy a horse and carriage when he wanted to drive, with a cab stand around the corner. What we believe may result from the widespread introduction of school libraries will be the ambition to one here and another there to own the best books he reads; and since he can borrow easily, he will naturally restrict himself in ownership to books which he wishes to consult, or to read again and again.

It is a fact that the number of school libraries is rapidly increasing, and that the interest in them is widespread. . . There are communities where collections of books are provided for the schools, and where people are making careful and intelligent studies of the growing body of good literature for young people. Publishers are studying the rapidly increasing demand for this kind of literature, and are causing teachers to become more exacting in demands.

It is not to be supposed that this new movement is absolutely a new one. The idea of school libraries is an old one, and was long ago put into practice. It is the concerted movement and the closer relation to new methods of education that render this revival of importance.

Such a movement as this should be followed with the closest attention,

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that it may not, as in earlier instances, be started with enthusiasm, and then gradually lose its impetus. We do not think this will be the history, because, as we have pointed out the movement has a deeper relation than previous ones to the actual conditions of educational methods. But in order to assure its success not only should teachers and superintendents take a lively interest in the libraries; there should be a systematic endeavor to enlist the intelligent interest of pupils. . . . In a word, these libraries may well be made to conduce to the love of good books in a good form, so that out of this movement shall spring individual regard for literature, and that educated interest in books which marks a high degree of civilization.