

Advancing the Community:  
Women, Schools, and Popular Culture in the Public Library  
Movement

Jolie Valentine Matedne

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California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

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Advisor: Zuoyue Wang

In the 2000 California primary election, voters were asked to decide whether to approve additional funding for public libraries in Proposition 14, or the California Reading and Literacy Improvement and Public Library Construction and Renovation Bond Act of 2000. During the debate on the measure, opponents argued that the emergence of new technologies has made tax-supported libraries obsolete, and that the functions of the public library should be decentralized and distributed among the private sector. In the March 2000 Voter Information Guide, California state senator Ray Haynes, along with Lewis K. Uhler and Carl McGill, discouraged the expansion of public libraries:

With the Internet, expanded-hour private bookstores, and virtual schools, many opportunities for research and training already exist. And they don't require intensive, large-scale construction of government buildings with borrowed money. These government buildings may be obsolete in 10 years, but we will be paying them off for 30 years. Is that a good use of taxpayer dollars?<sup>1</sup>

They went on to explain their resistance to tax-supported public libraries:

...With new computer technology and the growth of the Internet, the library improvements funded by this bond may be obsolete in five years. It does not make sense to spend our grandchildren's money on the "horse and buggy" technology that this bond would fund. We will still be paying for these bonds decades from now, even if the improvements are obsolete. Information can be retrieved and exchanged much more conveniently--and at a much lower cost--through the Internet. This bond is actually more expensive than offering FREE Internet service to every

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Haynes, Lewis K. Uhler, and Carl McGill, "Rebuttal to argument in favor of Proposition 14," in *California Voter Information Guide: March 7, 2000 Primary Election* by the Office of the Secretary of State of California, (Sacramento: Office of the Secretary of State, 2000), 18. Available on the web at URL: <http://primary2000.ss.ca.gov/VoterGuide/Propositions/14yesrbt.htm>, as accessed on 11/18/2001.

school child in California! Is this a wise use of our tax dollars?<sup>2</sup>

Viewing the public library as merely another information resource, the above authors have proposed the institution be replaced with the World Wide Web. Superficially, their arguments seem persuasive. For a sizeable initial investment in hardware and a modest (by upper-middle class standards) monthly service fee, anyone can theoretically access any and all information from everywhere in the world. No need to support building maintenance, librarian's salaries, or swiftly outdated print resources; the overhead expenses of the public library can now be circumvented. In many respects, commercial bookstores and Web search engines offer convenience that the public library cannot match. In addition, the Web's promise of unrestricted access to limitless amounts of information leads many to believe that the technology is better suited to a democratic, egalitarian society than are libraries, which, we are vaguely aware, share a history with royal and ecclesiastical elites.

Yet voters must have had a sense that public libraries are something more than just databases of print, for the California library initiative eventually passed. The debate itself, however, is instructive; it shows that we are still grappling with the same issues that bedeviled the nineteenth century participants of the public library movement. Though the current debate masquerades as a question over the merits of different media (print vs. electronic), the call to replace the public library system with private-sector Internet resources is in fact a challenge about the size of government, the need to support

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<sup>2</sup> Ray Haynes, Lewis K. Uhler, and Carl McGill, "Argument Against Proposition 14," in *California Voter Information Guide: March 7, 2000 Primary Election* by the Office of the Secretary of State of California, (Sacramento: Office of the Secretary of State, 2000), 19. Available on the web at URL: <http://primary2000.ss.ca.gov/VoterGuide/Propositions/14noarg.htm>, as accessed on 11/18/2001.

public education, and the validity of popular culture. Some of these issues, like whether those who can afford to pay for education have a responsibility to provide for those who cannot, are in common with both the development of public schools and public libraries; others, like the challenge over the appropriate role of government, are familiar to all institutions. Public libraries, as repositories of both the most enduring of human creations and the most ephemeral, are perhaps uniquely situated as a battleground between high and popular culture; the nineteenth century Fiction Problem is revisited today in the reluctance to subsidize public consumption of best-selling novels and feature films. The debate over whose interests are served by the library is as old as the library itself; indeed, this issue alone spawned a new school of library history.

In a period of about fifty years during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the number of libraries open to the public – without charge or for a nominal fee only – increased from 342 in 1875 to 5,954 in 1926.<sup>3</sup> During this time, local associations, philanthropists, and, in some cases, library professionals, worked together to found institutions of public education and culture. In many respects, the current debate on the utility of public libraries represents a distorted view of the origins and dynamics of this public library movement.

### Historiography

Unfortunately the current historical literature, valuable as it is, has not helped the public understand the real history of the public library movement. Historical focus on

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<sup>3</sup> Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition and Management; Special Report, Part I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1876; reprint, Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1966), 797, 799; Louis R. Wilson, *The Geography of Reading: A Study of the Distribution and Status of Libraries in the United States*, (Chicago: American Library Association and The University of Chicago Press, 1938), 12.

eastern library leaders and large eastern cities has resulted in a general ignorance of the immense popular contributions to the movement, especially in the West. Partly because the greater availability of official sources creates a bias toward an elitist view of the movement, library historians have tended to discuss the founders of the public library institution as if they formed a discrete, cohesive group. While recent historians are attempting to broaden the academic debate, the public perception that libraries are the creation of the idle rich remains as yet unchanged.

The first comprehensive and analytical histories of the public library movement appeared in the 1930s. Jesse Shera and Sidney Ditzion's works are considered the standards in the field of public library history. Both authors list similar causal factors for the development of the public library movement, though they differ in the importance granted to each factor. Among the contributing forces, both Shera and Ditzion draw attention to the necessity of having concentrated urban populations, prosperous enough to support library taxes, as well as to the general enthusiasm for public education and humanitarian causes during the nineteenth century. Civic pride, historical preservation, and vocational training also figure into both authors' analyses of the movement, as does the leadership of prominent male community leaders.

Revisionist historians, beginning in the 1970s, began to re-interpret the history of the public library movement as it relates to theories of social control. Dee Garrison and Michael Harris are among the most influential historians of the revisionist school. These writers tend to focus on the underlying motivations of library founders, examining especially the professed humanitarian claims made for the creation of public libraries. Public libraries in these analyses became ways for an eastern library elite to impose

Victorian standards of morality on the burgeoning and potentially dangerous lower classes, including the waves of new immigrants. Fearful of changes brought by the growth of cities, industry, and the laboring class, the institution builders looked for ways to organize society and maintain the status quo. Public libraries become places to homogenize the unruly and unwilling, and to advertise socially acceptable thoughts. Dee Garrison argues that the proliferation of women into the library profession was not a rejection of Victorian womanhood, but an embrace of it; she describes how female library students and their male professors developed the role of library hostess, which became an extension of women's domestic roles rather than a true profession.

More recent library history scholarship tends to avoid the proclamations of the revisionist historians, veering away from speculation over library founders' motivations in favor of new attention toward the multi-cultural heritage of public libraries. Though both Shera and Ditzion dismissed the role of women's associations in the movement, and Garrison mentions their influence only in passing, current historians are re-examining the substantial contributions made by women's associations across the country in support of their local public libraries. Especially in the West and Midwest, women's associations labored to raise money, stir public opinion, and even solicit philanthropy for public libraries when other groups showed no interest in doing so.<sup>4</sup> Other recent historical writing has looked at the importance of segregated Southern public libraries in the Civil

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<sup>4</sup> See Margaret Gribskov, "The Women Behind Washington's Libraries," *Columbia* 11, no. 2 (1997): 37-42; Marilyn Martin, "From Altruism to Activism: The Contributions of Literary Clubs to Arkansas Public Libraries, 1885-1935," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (1996): 64-94; and Paula D. Watson, "Founding Mothers: The Contribution of Women's Organizations to Public Library Development in the United States," *The Library Quarterly* 64, no.3 (July 1994): 235-236.

Rights Movement, and at the relation of public libraries to political battles over downsizing government.<sup>5</sup>

Yet aside from a few recent journal articles, the bulk of historical literature on the library movement has been dominated by a handful of New England personalities: William Poole, Charles Cutter, and Justin Winsor, to name a few. This literature has largely ignored the role of the public, especially women, and the vital connection between the public education mission of the schools and that of libraries. Most public libraries are not the creations of famous librarians; indeed, the professionalization of library science followed the growth of public libraries, rising to fill the need created by the incredible expansion of the libraries themselves. Recognizing the popular roots of the public library movement underscores the public library's significance to the community, and will help to clarify the current debate over the future of public libraries.

## Overview of the Public Library Movement

The original purpose of the library in its ancient, medieval, and early modern expressions was as a museum, to preserve and protect precious pieces of art and culture: manuscripts and books. Yet over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially from the end of the Civil War through the beginning of World War I, the idea of what a library was and what purpose it served changed dramatically. Technological developments in printing lowered the cost of books, making the object itself less valuable than the ideas it

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<sup>5</sup> See Stephen Cresswell, "The Last Days of Jim Crow in Southern Libraries," *Libraries and Culture* 31, no.3-4 (1996):557-572; and Phyllis Dain, "American Public Libraries and the Third Sector: Historical Reflections and Implications," *Libraries and Culture* 31, no. 1 (1996): 56-84. For a review of current historical literature in this vein, see Cheryl Knott Malone, "Toward a Multicultural American Public Library History," *Libraries and Culture* 35, no. 1 (2000): 77-87.

contained. Still, citizens could not hope to purchase all of the books they may wish to read.

Social libraries and circulating libraries were set up by private clubs to provide light reading for subscribing members, while Sunday school libraries and Young Men's Christian Association libraries strove to inculcate values and provide alternatives to unwholesome entertainments.<sup>6</sup> The first library tax laws, passed in the 1830s, were for school district libraries, which generally consisted of material that was neither accessible to students nor interesting to the public<sup>7</sup>. Yet these school district libraries helped to pave the way by linking libraries with public schools as a responsibility of a civilized community. Gradually, as the functions of these various private libraries began to merge into the concept of the free town library, libraries were transformed into centers of public service and free education.

The report by the U.S. Bureau of Education in 1876 is the most extensive and readily available primary resource on early American public libraries. With contributions from leaders in the library field such as Poole, Cutter, Winsor and Dewey, along with statistics and historical data on the libraries in the principal cities of the nation, the report provides a thorough overview of public libraries at time of the founding of the American Library Association. In 1876, the public library movement was still in its infancy. Most

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<sup>6</sup> On Sunday school libraries, see Donald G. Davis, Jr., "Bread Upon the Waters: The Printed Word in Sunday Schools in 19<sup>th</sup> Century England and the United States," in *Reading for Moral Progress, 19<sup>th</sup> Century Institutions Promoting Social Change: Papers from the Conference on Faith and History, Messiah College, Grantham, Pennsylvania, October 7-8, 1994*, by the Board of Trustees of The University of Illinois, (Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 5-18.

<sup>7</sup> Elmer D. Johnson, *A History of Libraries in the Western World* (New York: The Scarecrow Press, 1965), 324-325; George S. Bobinski, "Andrew Carnegie's Role in American Public Library Development," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1966), 3. The same material is also available in Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969), 5.



libraries were clustered on the East Coast, especially in Massachusetts (164 public libraries in 1875, or nearly half of all public libraries in the country)<sup>8</sup>. There were no standard professional requirements for librarians, in either academics or experience. Neither was there any standard scheme of classification; each library had its own method of shelving, sorting, and indexing books. While the better libraries sorted by subject to some extent, smaller libraries were apt to order books by the accession number, which referred to the date the book entered the collection – or even by a volume's color or size. Dewey was just introducing his decimal classification system in 1876; over the next decades it would compete for acceptance against dictionary or alphabetical catalog systems and other systematic classification schemes.<sup>9</sup> In the public libraries of 1876, borrowers were not permitted to wander amid the stacks; children (as well as women, in some places) were not allowed inside libraries at all.

Although the Midwest was not far behind the East Coast in numbers of public libraries – Indiana, at 58, had more public libraries than the rest of New England combined – the eastern library professional elite still considered the newer states a hinterland.<sup>10</sup> William I. Fletcher, librarian of Amherst College and early president of the ALA, stated that the American public library "is essentially a New England institution, having thus far flourished outside of New England only in the states in which New

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<sup>8</sup> Department of the Interior, 797-799. The figure refers to "all libraries open to the public without charge or for a nominal fee only."

<sup>9</sup> In an alphabetical catalog system, books on elephants would be shelved right after books on electricity; in the Dewey system, as with similar systematic schemes, books on elephants are located in the section on animals, while books on electricity would be grouped with the science books. Dozens of different systems were vying for acceptance at the time Dewey introduced his invention; see Department of the Interior, 526-662; for a first-hand account of the professional controversy and a humorous take on the ensuing confusion, see Samuel Swett Green, *The Public Library Movement in the United States 1853-1893: From 1876, Reminiscences of the Writer* (Boston: The Boston Book Company, 1913), 132-139.

<sup>10</sup> Department of the Interior, 797-799. The figure refers to "all libraries open to the public without charge or for a nominal fee only."

England influences have been powerful."<sup>11</sup> Ohio had 11 public libraries in 1875, ranking it as eighth in the nation and ahead of Connecticut, Vermont and Pennsylvania, yet when Cincinnati hosted the annual conference for the American Library Association in 1882, only 46 people attended (the conference of 1881, held in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. was considered small with seventy attendees)<sup>12</sup>. Samuel Swett Green, public librarian from Worcester, Massachusetts and president of the ALA in 1891, stated that the sharp drop in attendance during the 1882 conference was attributed to the distance of Cincinnati from "the section of the East which was then the library center."<sup>13</sup>

Thus, over the next fifty years of the movement, the growth in public libraries would be most noticeable in the West. In 1875, Iowa was the only state west of the Mississippi to have more than one public library (it had six).<sup>14</sup> By 1926, California ranked fifth in the nation in library service, with 98% of its population being served by local public libraries.<sup>15</sup> The settled communities of East Coast states also expanded their library services during the movement, maintaining their early edge in numbers of libraries, librarians, and volumes. But the explosive growth of public libraries in small towns across the frontier makes the story of the public library movement a story properly set in the West.

Much of the historical debate on the public library movement presupposes a grimy, industrial city – an unlikely environment in nineteenth century America west of the Mississippi. In the dangerous cities, public libraries appealed to the same nineteenth

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<sup>11</sup> W.I. Fletcher, "The Public Library Movement," *The Cosmopolitan* 18 (1894): 103.

<sup>12</sup> Green, 94, 103.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>14</sup> Department of the Interior, 797-799. The figure refers to "all libraries open to the public without charge or for a nominal fee only."

<sup>15</sup> Wilson, 13.

century reformers who campaigned for such causes as prison reform, public asylums, settlement houses, and other institutions designed to combat the negative affects of the Industrial Revolution.<sup>16</sup> Like asylums, public libraries were a balm to the dislocated elements of society; like settlement houses, they were a civilized solution to poverty. Libraries were even promoted as the ideal form of criminal rehabilitation. The report of the chaplain for Kansas State Penitentiary in 1874 declares, "No instrumentality is more important in securing the ends for which prisons are established than a well-selected and regulated (prison) library."<sup>17</sup> City officials argued that libraries could prevent crime, thus saving taxpayers money. As Ditzion has remarked, public libraries were a fairy wand of social reform to urban humanitarians.<sup>18</sup>

All of the social reform institutions were designed to mold a gentler, more enlightened and industrious society; they were responses by metropolitan idealists to the viciousness of city (or prison) life. The traditional historical interpretation of the public library movement, and the revisionist interpretation on which it is based, makes sense only in an urban context. Tying the public library movement to the social reform movement is less helpful as a framework to understand how and why public libraries were founded in the new, overwhelmingly middle-class farm towns of the West.

## Local Associations Lead the Way: Women's Clubs and Boosterism

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<sup>16</sup> Alistair Black, "Libraries for the Many: the Philosophical Roots of the Early Public Library Movement," *Library History* 9, no. 1-2 (1991): 28.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Department of the Interior, 226.

<sup>18</sup> Sidney Ditzion, *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture: A Social History of the American Public Library Movement in New England and the Middle States from 1850 to 1900* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1947), 24.

The American Library Association estimated in 1933 that 75% of the public libraries in the nation were founded by women's associations.<sup>19</sup> Especially in the Midwest and West, where one historian has speculated that many if not most public libraries were founded by women, women's organizations ventured to found libraries when community leaders refused to take the initiative.<sup>20</sup> Women also founded the first public library in New York City, but the small-town women's organizations differed from the urban reformer's organizations in the East.<sup>21</sup> Rather than campaigning for libraries for the poor and the downtrodden, western women's associations often started libraries for themselves.

In the rural areas of the West, public libraries provided vital reading material not only to students, but also to their often well-educated mothers. Girls outnumbered boys in public and private high schools in every western state in 1894-95; in the early 1900s women outnumbered men in several western and Midwestern state universities in California, Texas, Washington and Nebraska.<sup>22</sup> Many of the library associations began as literary clubs, initially taking up the cause of libraries in order to furnish reading materials for their members. The clubs soon realized that by campaigning for a public library, free to the entire community, they would be providing books for their children as well, and spreading the financial burden over a wider scope.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Sophonisba P. Breckinridge, *Women in the Twentieth Century: A Study of Their Political, Social and Economic Activities* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1933; New York: Arno, 1972), 93; quoted in Marilyn Martin, 65. See also Watson, 235-236.

<sup>20</sup> Gribskov, 38.

<sup>21</sup> In 1879, 12 prominent New York women founded a free circulating library of 11,000 volumes. See Green, 92.

<sup>22</sup> Gribskov, 39.

<sup>23</sup> Marilyn Martin, 72-73.

After the club libraries acquired a collection and a steady clientele, and local governments felt more confident about raising tax support, the libraries were turned over to the community.<sup>24</sup> The Pomona Public Library was founded in 1887 by a women's floral association; after funding the library with flower festivals for three years, the women finally convinced the city to assume responsibility for the library in 1890.<sup>25</sup> In Washington state, the Women's Reading Club of Walla Walla petitioned the legislature to pass a previously defeated bill enabling cities to establish tax-supported free public libraries. After seeing the bill enacted in 1895, the club raised money to open a library, helping to secure both municipal funding and a Carnegie building grant.<sup>26</sup> Between 1880 and 1935, literary clubs in Arkansas were responsible for the creation of 28 libraries and numerous city, county, and state measures to provide them with tax support.<sup>27</sup>

When the library became a municipal responsibility, the female enterprise surrendered to male control. Though the professional librarians they hired were often female, library boards of trustees were overwhelmingly composed of wealthy white men.<sup>28</sup> The San Diego Public Library's first elected board of library trustees, consisting of five men, was typical: a banker, a physician, two attorneys and an owner of a dry-

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<sup>24</sup> Dain, 58.

<sup>25</sup> Minutes of Pomona Public Library and Floral Association, recorded by Mrs. L. G. Mullen, Secretary, Special Collections, Pomona Public Library, Pomona, California; Margaret Hogarth, "A Social History of the Pomona Public Library, 1887-1930," (1996), Special Collections, Pomona Public Library, Pomona, California.

<sup>26</sup> Gribskov, 37.

<sup>27</sup> Marilyn Martin, 67,84. The active period for southern women's clubs, extending into the Depression years, was somewhat later than those in the Midwest and Far West.

<sup>28</sup> Gribskov, 41; Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), xii.

goods store.<sup>29</sup> (Interestingly, however, Seattle's 1890 city charter included a provision specifying that the city's governing library commission contain at least two women.)<sup>30</sup>

Occasionally, club women who had founded the library were appointed by the new library boards to stay on in an official capacity; such was the case in Pomona, where the president of the library floral association served as the librarian until her death.<sup>31</sup> The typical pattern in California, though, was to hire a scholarly gentleman as the first librarian, following the tradition of the older social libraries.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, despite their tireless activity in support of libraries, women were accepted only grudgingly into the role of librarian – until the expansion of public libraries placed suitable candidates at a premium.

Samuel Swett Green records the formation and early history of the American Library Association in 1876, describing the annual conferences and the development of professional networks among national and international librarians. The most interesting feature of his work is the window it provides on the ambivalent attitudes of male librarians toward the emergence of women into their profession. Throughout the book, Green makes a point to note the increasing numbers of women at each annual conference. At the first national library conference in 1853, all 82 persons present were men, and at the founding of the ALA in 1876 there were 13 women present; but at the second annual ALA conference, in 1879, 36 out of 145 attendees were female, and by the 1890

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<sup>29</sup> Clara E. Breed, "'Two Reading Rooms – One for Each Sex': Public Library Beginnings 1880-1890," *Journal of San Diego History* 28, no.3 (1982):162-163.

<sup>30</sup> Gribskov, 38.

<sup>31</sup> Annual Report of the Pomona Public Library, 1902, Special Collections, Pomona Public Library, Pomona, California.

<sup>32</sup> Ray E. Held, *The Rise of the Public Library in California* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1973), 13.

conference, the numbers were roughly equal, at 127 men to 115 women.<sup>33</sup> Describing a special ceremony at the international conference of librarians in 1877 in London, Green records:

It was understood that no ladies were invited and provision was made elsewhere for the entertainment during the evening of the ladies of the visiting library party.<sup>34</sup> Rev. Moncure D. Conway, formerly a clergyman in Cincinnati, Ohio, American born but at that time a resident of London, a preacher and member of the School Board, appeared, however, at the dinner with Miss Taylor, the daughter of Mrs. John Stuart Mill, also a member of the Board, on his arm. It was regarded as very unusual, if not unprecedented, occurrence, it was said, for a lady to be present at such a function in the Mansion House. The host, however, accepted the situation gracefully, and, inviting the Lady Mayoress to attend, the dinner passed smoothly and the only change perceptible to the initiated was the use by the Master of Ceremonies, in prefacing his announcements, of the address, "My lord, *ladies* and gentlemen," instead of one applying to men only.<sup>35</sup>

Male librarians recognized that the large pool of educated, eager but idle women in nineteenth century America could be put to productive, and inexpensive, use in the expanding field of public libraries. Frederick Beecher Perkins, in an article entitled, "How to Make Town Libraries Successful," argued that a good way to keep administration costs down was to hire women as librarians and assistants as far as possible. Yet old habits of paternalism died hard; Perkins warned in the next breath that special precautions would have to be taken to prevent the "curious troubles" that arise when women work together.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Green, 84, 202.

<sup>34</sup> The visiting library party contained only four women: Green, 84.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

<sup>36</sup> Department of the Interior, 430.

Over the period of the public library movement, the gender ratio in the library profession would reverse dramatically, due in no small part to the efforts of Melvil Dewey, an earnest young man at the time of the ALA founding. Dewey was the first to provide academic instruction to women in librarianship; indeed, his library school at Columbia College was the first in the world when it opened in 1887. His first class consisted of 20 students, 17 of whom were women; the class was held in a storeroom off campus due to tension with the college trustees over the admission of female students.<sup>37</sup> The graduates from Dewey's school and those that followed discovered that their new ideas and credentials were most sought after in the West, which did not have an established library elite hierarchy.

Without formal library education or professional networks to support them, the dignified, erudite men who led the early western public libraries could scarcely compete with the onslaught of earnest female candidates. While the first two librarians of the Los Angeles Public Library, serving from 1872-1880, were male, for the next 25 years the library was run by a succession of activist, increasingly well-educated women librarians.<sup>38</sup> Pomona Public Library was headed by three capable women from its inception in 1887 through the 1940s.<sup>39</sup> The first librarian of the San Diego Public Library was male, and earned \$10 a month. He was replaced after three years with a female graduate from the State University of Iowa who was hired at \$70 a month; her immediate

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<sup>37</sup> Sarah Prescott, "If You Knew Dewey...", *School Library Journal* (August 2001): 52; Garrison, 130, 134.

<sup>38</sup> Jerry Finley Cao, "The Los Angeles Public Library: Origins and Development, 1872-1910," (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1977), 329.

<sup>39</sup> Margaret Hogarth, "A Social History of the Pomona Public Library, 1887-1930," (1996), Special Collections, Pomona Public Library, Pomona, California.



accomplishments included classifying the collection according to the Dewey Decimal System and compiling the first printed catalog.<sup>40</sup>

Influential as they were, the library graduates only improved upon what the local citizens had already begun. If a western library was not founded by a women's organization, it was probably the result of civic-minded business leaders. Men's associations often viewed libraries as a hook to draw in business investment and tourism. In a letter to Andrew Carnegie, a New Mexico attorney argued that a library "would be a splendid advertisement for our City."<sup>41</sup> As tax-supported institutions, libraries indicated a town's stability and prosperity to business investors, while at the same time demonstrating the town's progressive values and public spirit to prospective residents.<sup>42</sup> Battles over where libraries would be built in a community were often intense, and demonstrate that libraries were sought after for very different reasons. Women often wanted libraries located near residential areas or schools, while men were more likely to champion a prominent location downtown.<sup>43</sup>

Libraries displayed America's cultural sophistication at a time when the country was eager to cast off its frontier reputation.<sup>44</sup> America might have lagged behind Europe in architectural grandeur and artistic innovation, but America was at the forefront of the public library movement.<sup>45</sup> In the same manner, western communities eagerly embraced

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<sup>40</sup> Breed, 167.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Abigail A. Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 136.

<sup>42</sup> Ray Held notes that the appeal of libraries as draws for tourism and new residents was particularly strong in southern California. See Held, 26.

<sup>43</sup> Van Slyck, 137-139.

<sup>44</sup> Jesse H. Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England 1629-1855* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1949; reprint, Hamden, Conn.: Shoe String Press, 1965), 216.

<sup>45</sup> Urging his fellow Britons to join the public library movement, S.W. Jevons notes, "What we are too stupid and antiquated to do, the Colonies and the United States are doing." Later he also cites the influence

the movement; public libraries provided the trappings of high civilization to raw western towns, and their educational utility made them more marketable to local taxpayers than art museums or opera houses. The patrons of the Los Angeles Public Library were primarily concerned about how the library represented their town to visitors from the East. Letters to the Los Angeles Times from the 1880s requested that the library be kept open on holidays, when tourists were likely to be about, and that the collection be replenished regularly with a good class of modern literature and reference works, such as a visitor from an Eastern city with a well-stocked library might expect.<sup>46</sup>

Many founders considered civic pride the best reason to establish a public library and were keen to acquire for their town any amenities that a neighboring town possessed. Historians like Bobinski have also speculated that large-scale philanthropy (like that of Andrew Carnegie) inspired library enthusiasm in otherwise disinterested communities; the prospect of getting something for free is a powerful enticement, whether or not that thing is desirable in its own right. This reasoning helps to explain why many endowed libraries failed so soon after opening – to flourish, a library needs community support. Trophy libraries, built to be showpieces with extravagant architecture and little else, had a much more insecure future than frugal libraries backed by aggressive associations.

Alexis de Tocqueville stated that Americans do not change their society by governmental regulation or the whims of individuals but by associations. “Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions, constantly form associations... Wherever, at

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of the American Library Association in inspiring the Library Association of the United Kingdom. See S. W. Jevons, "The Rationale of Free Public Libraries," *The Contemporary Review* 39 (1881): 395, 402. See also comments from Mr. I. Tanaka, librarian of the Imperial Library in Tokyo, Japan, in Green, 225.

<sup>46</sup> Ralph E. Shaffer, "Public Library," *Letters From the People: The Los Angeles Times Letters Column, 1881-1889* (Pomona, Calif.: History Department, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, 1999) [computer file on-line]; available from <http://www.intranet.csupomona.edu/~reshaffer/libex.htm>.

the head of some new undertaking, you see the government in France, or a man of rank in England, in the United States you will be sure to find an association."<sup>47</sup> Whether they sprang from women's literary clubs or the chamber of commerce, public libraries in the West differed from other institutions in that they were primarily founded at the grass roots level by highly motivated local associations – often with little support or impetus from either government or outside advocates. These associations of middle-class women, businessmen, and professionals deserve credit for the movement – credit that historians have granted too generously to eastern librarians and philanthropists. As Jesse Shera noted, "Community leadership was necessary to give the library movement the impetus and direction it required, but it was essentially a small-town leadership – a leadership that was largely unknown outside its native environs."<sup>48</sup> It is time to tell the story of the public library movement from the perspective of the people who gave it life.

### Schools and Libraries in the Mission of Public Education

From the very beginning, library leaders recognized the importance of linking the public library movement with the rationale for free public schools. Intellectuals George Ticknor and Edward Everett, writing the first report of the trustees of the Boston Public Library in 1852, noted that the public school system "awakens a taste for reading, but...furnishes to the public nothing to read," and concluded that "a large public library is of the utmost importance as the means of completing our system of public education."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, edited and abridged by Richard D. Heffner (New York: Mentor, 1965), 198.

<sup>48</sup> Shera, 244.

<sup>49</sup> Boston Public Library, *Report of the Trustees...July 1852* (City Document No. 37 [Boston: J.H. Eastburn, 1852]), 6, 9; reproduced in Shera, 267-290.

By 1876, the connection was so ingrained that the first sentence of the Bureau of Education report on public libraries called the institutions "auxiliaries to public education."<sup>50</sup> As a recognized partner in public education, libraries had access to the same tax revenues as public schools; the first library tax laws to be passed, after all, were for the school district libraries.

As further evidence of their shared history, public libraries were criticized with the same logic which had been used to battle the public school system – the same logic that is being used today in funding disputes over public libraries. This reasoning, which Paul Peterson describes in his history of the school reform movement, is based on the hostility to be taxed to educate other people's children, or in the case of the library, to pay for other people's books.<sup>51</sup> Opponents of the public library quoted from Benjamin Franklin's idea that young men would profit more from books that they had to make sacrifices to get.<sup>52</sup> Legislators who today extol the virtues of private bookstores as replacements for the public library are basing their arguments on the same principle: that of avoiding interference with the individual.

As might be expected, those arguments raised in defense of public schooling were applied with similar success to public libraries.<sup>53</sup> The crux of these arguments was that public education was the only way to ensure good government in a democracy. "A key justification for both public schools and public libraries was the need to create a citizenry intellectually equipped for self-government in a republic, especially after suffrage was

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<sup>50</sup> Department of the Interior, xi.

<sup>51</sup> Paul E. Peterson, *The Politics of School Reform, 1870-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 27.

<sup>52</sup> Ditzion, 21. See also Boston Public Library, 8; reproduced in Shera, 267-290.

<sup>53</sup> Ditzion, 66.

extended to all white males."<sup>54</sup> Protagonists of the public library reasoned that giving the masses the right to vote without providing access to education was irresponsible, and that it is the duty of the state, if for no other reason than its own continued vigor, to provide free universal education.<sup>55</sup> Public schools are only part of the solution; as Horace Mann indicated: "After the rising generation have acquired habits of intelligent reading in our schools, *what shall they read?*" He continued, "...with no books to read, the power of reading will be useless."<sup>56</sup>

Public libraries were touted as the most appropriate form of adult education. The formal structure of the school may be suitable for a child, but the self-directed adult learner required a different sort of educational environment. Libraries were more suited to educating the motivated worker than were schools, and they were certainly less expensive than schooling the adult population. In addition, the possibilities of adult vocational education that public libraries provided were used to tantalize city and state governments with promises of economic benefits, as educated individuals necessarily accomplished more and better work.<sup>57</sup> Libraries and schools were viewed as perfect compliments to one another, with schools providing a base level of instruction and libraries filling in the gaps left by the schools.

The progressive education movement, however, made the connection between libraries and schools more than just rhetoric. During the same period in which the public

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<sup>54</sup> Dain, 58.

<sup>55</sup> See address of ALA president Herbert Putnam before the convention in 1904; quoted in R. Kathleen Molz, "Libraries and the Development and Future of Tax Support," in *Libraries and the Life of the Mind in America: Addresses Delivered at the Centennial Celebration of the American Library Association* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1977), 48. For the full text of his speech, see "Address of the President," *Library Journal* 29 (December 1904): C26.

<sup>56</sup> Horace Mann, *Life and Works* (Boston: Lee & Shepherd, 1891), III, 8-9; quoted in Shera, 222.

<sup>57</sup> Shera, 237.

library movement was blossoming, public schools were undergoing a movement of their own. Educators realized that public schools would never be successful as long as they were viewed as charity, unfit for educating middle-class children.<sup>58</sup> The progressive education movement, by redesigning the school environment, transformed public schools into the leading educational force and public school teachers into respected professionals. Progressive education also made libraries a necessity. Whereas traditional schools had relied solely on textbooks, education reformers stressed the importance of providing a variety of books to complement lessons.<sup>59</sup> Though school district libraries in the 1830s had preceded the birth of public libraries by several decades, the experiment had failed and school libraries would not be useful supplements to the schools until after the turn of the twentieth century. If progressive educators were going to have supplementary materials for their students, those materials would have to come from public libraries. In the West, where small town schools may not have even had textbooks, the need for public libraries to support the schools was even greater.<sup>60</sup>

Though it is difficult to find discussion of the partnerships between public schools and public libraries in the historical literature, investigation of source material offers some indications of the importance of each institution to the other. Samuel Swett Green, recording the events at the ALA conference of 1882, notes that the superintendent of schools in Cincinnati requested the last session of the conference be set aside to consider

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<sup>58</sup> Peterson, 11.

<sup>59</sup> Judy Drury and Anne Masters, "School Libraries and the Progressive Movement: A Study of the Role of the Librarian in Implementing Progressive Education," in *The Emerging School Library Media Center: Historical Issues and Perspectives*, ed. Kathy Howard Latrobe, (Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1998), 21.

<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, while eastern librarians argued about the appropriate age for admission into their institutions, William F. Poole declared that in western libraries there was no age restriction whatsoever. See Sidney L. Jackson, *Libraries and Librarianship in the West: A Brief History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), 364.

how to establish better co-operation between the public schools and public libraries.

Green himself was fervent advocate of the use of library books in schools; large numbers of teachers attended the meeting, and were "favorably impressed" with the suggestions he made.<sup>61</sup>

In a letter to Green two years before, the principal of the Worcester high school had written, "As an ally of the high school, the public library is not merely useful – it is absolutely indispensable."<sup>62</sup> Green disseminated his ideas in educational and library journals, as well as at his frequent convention appearances; his plans for library and school co-operation were adopted by public libraries in many parts of the country. The trustees of the Pomona Public Library noted that their library provided a "valuable and helpful supplement to the schools," and that students and teachers, along with clubwomen, made up most of the patronage of the library.<sup>63</sup> Libraries provided the tools for a progressive educator's instruction, and schools provided libraries with steady circulation numbers and a justification for tax revenue. Unfortunately, historians have inadequately explored the crucial bonds of mutual support between public libraries and public schools, and disregarded their parallel battles for public acceptance.

It is interesting that in the current funding debates over libraries, library advocates do not voice the educational mission more often. Some historians have speculated that libraries sense the shift in community perception of schools; as schools are increasingly seen as failures, librarians, wary of losing already slim appropriations, distance their establishments from the public schools. Yet if libraries are not educational institutions,

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<sup>61</sup> Green, 105-106.

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Green, 308.

<sup>63</sup> Annual Report of the Pomona Public Library, 1904.

what are they? It is possible that libraries divorce themselves from the public schools only at their own peril. No other function of the public library is as concrete and easily marketable to voters as that which places it at the center of public education.

### Class Tensions and Cultural Disputes: the Fiction Problem

Even outside of the framework of a social control theory, the founding of public libraries offered plenty of fodder for class disputes. Conservative bibliophiles, older gentlemen librarians, and wealthy trustees all fought against innovations that aimed at making the library accessible to the lower classes. These innovations included open stacks, branch locations in the suburbs, foreign language collections, Sunday hours, the inclusion of fiction in the collection, and universal borrowing privileges (those which allowed books circulate without fees, deposits, or guarantees from property holders).

Few public libraries were able to withstand the tide of change for long; as institutions dependent on democratic financial support, they soon realized that it was in their best interests to make libraries as welcoming as possible. Most public libraries adopted open stacks before the turn of the century, despite the fact that librarians continued to debate the procedure's merits for years.<sup>64</sup> Fees for borrowing privileges tended to disappear when a library acquired tax support, though many libraries shifted the restrictions to the library card itself, demanding a guarantor or a reference to a responsible party on card applications.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ernestine Rose, *The Public Library in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), 217. See also Arthur E. Bostwick, *The American Public Library* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1917), 9-10.

<sup>65</sup> Jackson, 362.



Sunday hours and foreign language departments were also added as demanded by the individual communities; philosophical arguments about the Sabbath or the evils of foreign books generally meant less to librarians than did their circulation numbers and their image with public taxpayers.<sup>66</sup> The suburbs would eventually be served by what became a standard compromise in most large cities: a large showpiece central library downtown for the upper classes, with smaller satellite branch locations for the rest of the citizens.<sup>67</sup> Once part of the civic bureaucracy, libraries were keen to show their egalitarian and hospitable side. "Before the present era there were regulations in all institutions that seemed to be framed merely to exasperate – to put the public in its place and chasten its spirit. There are now no such rules in good libraries."<sup>68</sup>

The Fiction Problem would be the most tenacious; the issue became more complicated as educational arguments were raised on both sides. Social conservatives viewed novels as a hindrance to education; the presence of novels in the library would distract the masses from the beneficial influence of nonfiction classics. An organization soliciting book donations for soldiers during the Civil War had stated, "[a] library is a valuable hygienic appliance," and many early librarians agreed.<sup>69</sup> They felt that the

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<sup>66</sup> For Sunday hours, see Department of the Interior, xx. For foreign language resources in early public libraries, see Plummer Alston Jones, Jr., *Libraries, Immigrants, and the American Experience*, Contributions in Librarianship and Information Science, no. 92 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999). See also Jenna Weissman Joselit, "Reading, Writing, and a Library Card: New York Jews and the New York Public Library," *Bibliion* 5, no. 1 (1996): 97-117.

<sup>67</sup> See Theodore Jones, *Carnegie Libraries Across America: A Public Legacy* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 25-32.

<sup>68</sup> Arthur E. Bostwick, *A Librarian's Open Shelf: Essays on Various Subjects* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1920), 206.

<sup>69</sup> United States Christian Commission, *Facts, Principles, and Progress* (Philadelphia: C. Sherman, Son, 1863), quoted in David M. Hovde, "The Library is a Valuable Hygienic Appliance," in *Reading for Moral Progress, 19<sup>th</sup> Century Institutions Promoting Social Change: Papers from the Conference on Faith and History, Messiah College, Grantham, Pennsylvania, October 7-8, 1994*, by the Board of Trustees of The University of Illinois, (Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 38.

purpose of the library was to counteract the influence of the increasingly prevalent dime-literature, not to supply it.<sup>70</sup>

On the other hand, progressive librarians realized that supplying fiction encouraged library use among the general population. These librarians argued that novels served as training wheels for more educationally desirable literature.<sup>71</sup> Most libraries bowed to public pressure and began to carry fiction, although some, like Pomona Public Library, placed restrictions on how it could be borrowed. The two-book rule, a common response to the overwhelming demand for novels, stated that borrowers could check out two books, provided that the second was not fiction. Nevertheless, fiction accounted for more than half of the volumes circulated in Pomona.<sup>72</sup> Libraries, conscious of the need to please taxpayers, gradually began augmenting fiction collections with duplicate copies, easing loan restrictions, or initiating hold policies for popular books. In time, offering copies of popular works for a small fee for those who did not wish to wait became an additional source of revenue for libraries.

The evolution of public library policies reveals that the institution has been remarkably responsive to democratic pressure. Despite the best intentions of the eastern library elite, public libraries, rather than shaping popular demand, were molded by it, developing into reflections of the local community. If today's public libraries devote more of their budgets and shelf space to Danielle Steele novels and Jackie Chan films than to theological treatises, it only proves that it is the average citizens of the

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<sup>70</sup> Ditzion, 103. Though generally the case, opposition to fiction was not strictly the province of the upper class; mining communities that established social libraries in early California also had much to say about the evil influence of fiction. See Hugh S. Baker, "Rational Amusement in Our Midst: Public Libraries in California, 1849-1859," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1959): 295-319.

<sup>71</sup> For a variety of contemporary views on this question, see Department of the Interior, 393-399, 410-422, 431-433.

<sup>72</sup> Annual Report of the Pomona Public Library, 1902.

community, and not the scholars, who make the most use of the library. Hardly an indication that the library's cultural mission has failed, the prevalence of popular art forms in public library instead shows how successful the library institution has been at ensuring the nation's culture belongs to everyone, not only to those who can pay for it.

Reviewing the arguments raised in the current funding disputes over public libraries, it is striking that those who wish to scrap the public library base their private sector proposals on the assumption that the library's main function is as a reference tool, much like the World Wide Web. These commentators seem oblivious to the fact that most of the library's circulation consists of fiction, films, and other popular art. It is not difficult to imagine that this silence stems from a belief that popular culture is merely entertainment, and should not be subsidized by the state. The examining committee of the Boston Public Library, writing in 1875 about the manifold dangers of novels, stated,

...This is the kind of reading to which multitudes naturally take, which it is not the business of a town library to supply...it is no part of the duty of a municipality to raise taxes for the amusement of the people, unless the amusement is tolerably sure to be conducive to the higher ends of good citizenship...The sole relation of a town library to the general interest is as a supplement to the school system...<sup>73</sup>

Library service may have outgrown its elitist roots, but the opponents of the public library continue to look to the past for inspiration.

The debasement of popular culture is just one way in which the public has been excluded from the history of the public library movement. Revisionist interpretations of the public library movement, while seeming to discourage traditional theories of elite library leadership, have actually invigorated the perception of public libraries as

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<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Department of the Interior, 395.

institutions that have been inflicted on the rest of the population. This misunderstanding of the public library's origins has served only to strengthen the hand of those who wish to replace the library with private enterprises.

The social control theory rests on the premise that the public library movement was directly guided into particular paths by a group of elite intellectuals.<sup>74</sup> Yet the actual founding of most libraries in the Midwest and West, as we have seen, was accomplished not by librarians or even politicians, but by local women's associations in response to local needs. The social control theory thus creates an artificial distance between the public and their library – a distance that has been exploited, unfortunately, by antigovernment conservatives, such as the opponents of Proposition 14. Any history of the public library movement that purports to reinstate the public's role must therefore repair the damage rendered by the social control theory.

If the public library was primarily an institution of social control, then the proposal to replace it with purely online information databases becomes more appealing. The concept of a physical structure, run by the government and holding all of a community's information resources, seems sinister, even oppressive, when viewed from the lens of a social control theory. Yet this chilling image only reveals how far the social control theory strays from the historical reality. In small communities across the Midwest and West, libraries were designed, not as information museums, but as community centers. Carnegie's secretary, James Bertram, went to considerable lengths to prevent the 1,679 American libraries built by Carnegie funds from being corrupted into public meeting halls, since most city governments were more interested in the building

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<sup>74</sup> Dee Garrison terms this group the "gentry elite." See Garrison, 9-15.

than in the books.<sup>75</sup> Most public libraries provided rooms for use by local associations, although which groups, which rooms, and how often they could be utilized were hotly debated by librarians.<sup>76</sup>

Labor resistance to public libraries, the revisionist historian's smoking gun, was rarely the most important factor in communities that rejected library proposals. Even in cases of Carnegie grants, where labor resistance would presumably be fiercer, the more typical reason for a library plan's failure was a pragmatic refusal to approve additional taxes.<sup>77</sup> The development of the public schools shows that, contrary to the common idea of progressive reforms being forced upon the laboring class, those in the working class were eager to partake of the same benefits being offered to the middle class.<sup>78</sup> The image of libraries as a ladder out of the factory and a haven from the slums was not only present in the minds of idealistic reformers – it was an image embraced by the factory workers and slum residents themselves.<sup>79</sup>

If libraries were created to control social undesirables, why then were so many libraries situated in exclusive neighborhoods, intentionally built as far as possible from the slums where the masses lived? Why did the undesirables, like African-Americans, have to fight for access to the libraries? Indeed, how could public libraries, which one can simply choose not to visit, function as an effective social control at all? Public schools had compulsory regulations to compel attendance, while asylums and prisons

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<sup>75</sup> Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, 63-70, 148-149, 166-169.

<sup>76</sup> See Bostwick, "The Public Library, the Public School, and the Social Center Movement," in *A Librarian's Open Shelf*, 145-156.

<sup>77</sup> Robert Sidney Martin, ed. *Carnegie Denied: Communities Rejecting Carnegie Library Construction Grants, 1898-1925*, Beta Phi Mu Monograph, no. 3 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993), 176-177.

<sup>78</sup> Peterson, 10, 50, 70.

<sup>79</sup> For librarians' comments on their immigrant and working class patrons' attitudes, see Plummer Alston Jones, Jr., 27-29. For Jewish immigrant views on the New York public libraries, see Joselit, 97-117.

received a steady stream of inmates whose choices mattered little, but public libraries could hardly influence anyone against their will. The social control argument, far from restoring marginalized groups to the history of public libraries, has served only to increase the public's alienation from the history of the institutions they helped create. The future of public libraries depends upon the public's ability to reclaim that history.

## Conclusion

Arthur Bostwick stated that every citizen should make it his or her business to discover what the local public library is doing, and what it is leaving undone due to lack of funds, to determine if the appropriations for the library are adequate. He felt strongly that every citizen has a responsibility to aid in the formation of sound public opinion, to set standards for the public library and see that the library budget is such that it "shall not make an attempt to live up to such standards a mere farce."<sup>80</sup>

The public library, unlike private enterprise, is a democratic institution, funded by taxes and answerable to the public. Dissatisfied citizens have only to make their voices heard in order to effect change, provided they remember to tax themselves accordingly for the improvements. Indeed, as Bostwick affirms, it is the librarians themselves who are usually the most distressed about the limitations of public library service. An inquiry into what the public library "is leaving undone due to lack of funds" would probably stun

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<sup>80</sup> Bostwick, *A Librarian's Open Shelf*, 202, 204.

most lay persons; librarians combine into one personality the idealism of an teacher with that of a journalist, and they have the munificent dreams to match.

Andrew Carnegie explained his own motivations for library philanthropy:

I think it fruitful in the extreme, because the library gives nothing for nothing, because it helps only those who help themselves, because it does not sap the foundation of manly independence, because it does not pauperize, because it stretches a hand to the aspiring and places a ladder upon which they can only ascend by doing the climbing themselves. This is not charity, this is not philanthropy, it is the people themselves helping themselves by taxing themselves<sup>81</sup>.

It is no coincidence that Andrew Carnegie, one of the cherished symbols of the American dream, is indissolubly linked to public libraries. His rise from a poor weaver's son to a man who could not give away his wealth fast enough represented everything that idealists hoped libraries could accomplish. A passionate believer in public schools, practical education, and simple cultural pleasures, Carnegie also championed community activism. His "free" library buildings, awarded only to those cities that pledged to maintain the libraries at the rate of ten percent of the grant, were designed to coerce municipalities into giving themselves a library. The program encouraged the growth of local library associations across the country, which campaigned at town meetings in order to pass the required tax maintenance laws. Whatever his personal motivations for philanthropy, Carnegie recognized that public libraries could not succeed without the support of the community.

As the voting public ponders the future of tax-supported libraries, the need for an account of the public library movement from the people's perspective becomes

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<sup>81</sup> Quoted in Kevin Kiddoo, "Andrew Carnegie and the Library Movement," *AB Bookman's Weekly* 76 (1 July 1985): 68.

particularly acute. American public libraries are not antiques from a genteel past, but hard-won testimonies to the community spirit and idealism of middle-class citizens. Along with the public schools, they represent the American mission to provide free education to all citizens, regardless of status. But most significantly, perhaps, public libraries represent the American democratic culture itself, in which not only the intellectual and conventionally beautiful ideas, but also the fashionable, the controversial, and even the mediocre are accessible and free to all. Public libraries are more than merely storerooms of facts; they are a window on the culture and the thoughts of an entire community. Rather than seeking to replace the public library, we should allow them the resources they need to evolve alongside the society they serve.



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