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The Philadelphia Free Library.

Free libraries usually rise as outgrowths of other libraries or are founded by some public spirited citizens, but sometimes they are started by direct legislative action. The Philadelphia Free Library was established as a direct result of the Will of George J. Pepper, by which $15,000 and a share in his estate were given to the trustees of such free library as should be founded in the city of Philadelphia, south of Market St. and east of the Schuylkill river. By a charter of February 1871 certain Directors were enabled to establish and maintain the Free Library of Philadelphia. This Will was disputed for several years by libraries already existing. Meanwhile $15,000 were appropriated.
to be expended by the Board of Education in starting a system of free libraries, for the purpose of ascertaining if there was a demand for them. The Wagner Institute at 17th and Montgomery Ave. gave part of their building, and the actuary of the Institute gratuitously undertook the position of librarian. The success of the library was beyond all expectation—the circulation for the first year being over 137,000 volumes.

For 1893 $25,000 was appropriated to continue and develop the work. In April of this year a second branch was opened in the Y.M.C.A. rooms at Broad and Federal sts. This branch also was a great success, having a circulation of 40,000 volumes the first six months.

From this time there was a general demand
for free libraries by people in all parts of the city. The litigation as to the Pepper fund having been decided, in March 1894, the Free Library of Philadelphia was established in the City Hall. Council appropriated to this work $5,000, and to the system under the Board of Education $25,000. Four more branches were opened by the Board of Education.

Now there were two systems growing up in the city at once. Appropriations were made for the year 1895 for both systems, making a total of $75,000, but it was decided to unify the systems. This was done by a series of legal manoeuvres without interfering with the operation of either system. The union was completed about the beginning of 1896.

In February 1895 the Free Library opened its present quarters on Chestnut St. Two more
branches were meanwhile opened by the Trustees of the Free Library, one at the College Settlement in St. Mary St., the other at the Evening Home Association near 21st and Chestnut Sts. So that now there are eight branches and the Central.

Each branch is a complete library in itself, so far as the public has any connection with it. At the Central all cataloguing and binding are done, but each branch has its own catalogue, its own sets of reader's cards, its own files of magazines. Readers are referred to the Central only for those books which on account of expense or small use would not profitably be owned at each branch. The branches do not obtain books from the Central but send the readers themselves to the Central.
In all the libraries the public are allowed free access to the shelves of all but the rare and expensive books. Strange as it may seem this privilege is but little abused. For example at the Wagner Institute Branch which contains 20,000 volumes and which is visited by an average of 1500 people a day the loss is just 100 volumes a year. At the Central, with 40,000 volumes and 2500 visitors daily, the loss is about 200 volumes a year. The manifest advantages of this system are great; and to an effective carrying out of it, the rapid growth of the circulation of the Philadelphia Free Library is attributed. For only by free handling of books do the users come to understand the true value of books from an educational point of view.
A slight comparison will show the rapidity of this growth. In 1892 the first branch was opened; the circulation for the year ending Sept. 30. 1896 was 1,293,004 volumes, from a total of 100,000; that is on the average each volume was taken out 13 times last year. The Boston Public Library with 700,000 volume had a circulation of less than 850,000; the Chicago Free Library a circulation of 617,3508. We see that the Philadelphia Library outranks them all, though the youngest by many years. These figures include only the home use of books; the use of books of reference, periodicals, and other works not taken out is very large, but of course no statistics can be given.

The object of this Library is to give the greatest good to the greatest number. In
endeavoring to carry out this object many expedients are used. For example, books little used yet needed as the reports of cities, are stored in the loft. These are not catalogued but are simply ranged in alphabetical order.

In another corner of the loft is the bindery - another attempt to serve the public, by preventing delays. Here 500 volumes a week are rebound by a force of six. The work-rooms are wretched. Every available wall of the loft is lined with books waiting to be rebound - about 4000 in number.

On a lower floor, in a better room, yet much too small is the cataloguing department. Here the books for all the branches are catalogued, numbered, etc. This department is also behind in its work although
about fifteen young women are steadily employed. The books are catalogued according to the Dewey system.

In further trying to give the greatest good to the greatest number with the limited funds available, a department of "Travelling Libraries" has been established. To meet the cases where it is unwise to go to the expense of opening a branch library, an experiment has been tried of providing boxes of books containing 100, 50 or 25 volumes which are given to the care of some person who takes charge of the loaning of the volumes to persons in the immediate neighborhood of the custodian. A great demand for these boxes has arisen in many places. The boxes are left in each locality for three months and then
are exchanged for another set. Thus small communities can have the advantages of a circulating library without the disadvantages accompanying small libraries which are soon read through and then discarded for want of new material. This system has been of the greatest advantage to the men who are employed at fire-engine stations. Through the efforts of the Civic Club similar advantages have been given to employees in telegraph offices.

An unexpected demand has risen from students, reporters and others for standard works of all kinds which shall be kept at the library for reference. The nucleus of such a collection has been formed and occupies a large case in the women's reading room. This reserved shelf contains the works
of the standard novelists, poets, dramatists, and such other writers as are often alluded to or quoted from. These works are all duplicates of volumes on the open shelves.

On the reserved shelves in the women's reading room are also many rare works, such as old editions of Shakespeare, and sets such as the Delphin classics. Some persons have said that a free library should not strive after rare editions. This is largely true, but it must be remembered that those who are studying literature or are working out an education at home, as Elihu Burritt did, and have not the means to purchase the needed authorities, must be given the opportunity to work; for the free library is intended to give the poor an equal chance with the rich. Among these rare works are necessarily placed
books that cannot bear rough handling, or whose pages must not be soiled. So among these reserved books we find illustrated books on art.

In endeavoring to fulfill the library's purpose as a supplement to all educational work, cooperation with the University Extension courses is attempted. In the passage between the men's and women's reading rooms are books reserved for the University Extension students. A table is furnished for those who wish to work there, but the accommodations are necessarily very cramped. The librarian offers to give similar privileges to other educational movements if rooms will be provided.

The men's reading room contains the current periodicals in temporary binders. Back volumes are on reserved shelves in this room.
and cannot be taken out. Reference books are also kept in this room. Each Branch has a complete set of the periodicals taken (136 in number) some branches have two copies of a few magazines, but of most magazines only one copy is taken at each reading room.

Around the walls of the main room are ranged shelves on which are the circulating books. One side of the room is devoted to fiction, the remainder to other subjects.

At the extreme back of the room is the general administration department of the whole system. The partition is used for reserved shelves for government publications. Such is the general arrangement of the library floor.

The method of charging books is that
used in most libraries. Any person can obtain a card on which he can take out books by signing a proper application and having it endorsed by some one whose name is in the city directory. When a book is taken out the number of the book and the date before which it must be returned are entered on this card. Each book has a pocket which contains a card. When the book is taken out, the book card is kept at the library, on this card is the reader's number and the date the book is due. The reader's number is also stamped on the outside of the pocket. If a book is overdue a postal card notice of the fact is sent to the reader. If the book is still kept a messenger is sent after it; the messenger collects 2 cents a day for the time the book is overdue and a fee of 20 cents for
Persons wishing to take out or consult books are encouraged to ask advice from the assistants. At the Central there are three assistants who do nothing but answer questions and direct readers. Readers are not discouraged to read fiction, but the attempt is made to make fiction (if the reader is interested only in that) a starting point for systematic reading in biography, travels, science, history etc.

The number coming into the library who do not take out books is about one fourth the daily number of those taking out books. Thus at the Central the average daily number of visitors is at present about 2500 of whom 2000 take out books. The quarters for readers are very crowded. The reading rooms have
overflowed both at the Central and the branches into the main room. The Central which has accommodations for about 50 readers usually has over 100 present, at all times of the day beside those who are at the shelves. The Wagner Institute Branch is in still worse condition. At the latter place there was such a crowd selecting books from the shelves and reading that I had difficulty in moving about each time I was there.

The character of people using the library varies with the locality. At the Central are found "all sorts and conditions of men." To the Wagner Institute come the typical dwellers around north Broad St. - well to do people. At Kensington, the library is principally used by mill hands. The Wagner Institute Branch is probably more used by students than any
other branch on account of its close connection with the work of the Institute; instead of having reference books for readers, the reference library of the Institute is used. This reference library uses the open shelf system, although no books are allowed to be taken out. The librarian says that this system is the only one that should be used in any library.

The character of the books read is much the same in all the branches, about 77% of the whole is fiction, 5.2% is literature, 3.1% is travel, 2.7% is history, biography and sociology also have about the same proportion; other divisions have less circulation. These figures are very misleading, for fiction is easy reading and is rarely kept out the whole time allowed, while in other subjects the books are
often kept the full period of two weeks. All classes of people seem to take out about the same character of books, even the poorest class that come take out and seem to study understandingly philosophical, scientific and sociological works. Now in considering the circulation of this library all the above mentioned facts must be taken into account, together with the fact that in this as in all free libraries the percentage of fiction in the circulation is constantly though slowly falling. This shows that a library is a factor and a very important factor in education, for the library turns the mind of the adult toward study. If we further remember that from two to five volumes of fiction are read in the time that is usually spent on one volume of "heavier" subjects, we will rather
wonder that the average person reads so little fiction when such facilities for obtaining it are offered.

The selection of books and, consequently, the number under each subject rests with the librarian. He buys wherever prices are lowest, purchasing largely at auctions. In all things he tries to follow the motto, the greatest good to the greatest number with the funds available.

Within the past week a report has been published by Librarian Thomson in which he states that the circulation for the year ending Dec. 31, 1896 was 1,349,070 volumes. "This is the largest circulation of any library in the world." I think I have shown that this great success has been won under very adverse circumstances. The needs are such
as only a librarian can fully appreciate, but anyone will see that a new Central Library building is needed. This should be large, fire-proof and have ample room for the various departments; it need not be so fine as the Boston Public Library—perhaps had better be less ornamental and more homelike, for the magnificence of the Boston building is almost awe-inspiring.

The Trustees of the Philadelphia Free Library announce that they are prepared to open ten more branches as soon as the necessary funds are furnished $2,000 a piece. Surely after such a brilliant success at the start, means to carry on the work should be given.