

**PAPERS AND PROCEEDINGS OF
THE EIGHTH GENERAL MEETING
OF THE AMERICAN LIBRARY
ASSOCIATION, HELD AT
MILWAUKEE, JULY 7 TO 10, 1886**

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~~University of Toronto,
Library Services~~

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OF THE

EIGHTH GENERAL MEETING

1277

OF THE

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION,

HELD AT

MILWAUKEE, JULY 7 TO 10,

1886.



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CONFERENCE OF LIBRARIANS.

MILWAUKEE MEETING, JULY 7, 1886.

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT,

WILLIAM F. POOLE, LL.D., LIBRARIAN OF CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Association:—

IT is a noteworthy incident in the history of the American Library Association that we meet for our eighth annual conference in the great North-west, more than a thousand miles from the fringe of cities on the Atlantic coast, where it had its origin and its earlier conferences were held. I know something of the North-western States, and venture the statement that no city in the East has received us with a more intelligent and generous welcome than we experience to-day in Milwaukee. Nowhere are the benefits of libraries better understood, and the purposes of our organization better appreciated than here. We are not on pioneer and missionary ground, so far as a proper valuation of books and libraries is concerned. If you ask me: "Where in the West is that pioneer and missionary ground?" I must say I do not know. I have here an official invitation from a Board of Trade which has lately established a free public library in a city a thousand miles west of Milwaukee, inviting this Association to hold its next annual conference in Denver, Colorado, and promising a cordial welcome and every kind of hospitality. The idea which suggests to a Board of Trade to establish a public library, and the idea which the masses accept as an axiom, that the maintenance of such an institution is as legitimate an object for general taxation as the maintenance of a public school, seems to be indigenous in Western soil. If you insist on my localizing that pioneer and missionary

ground to which I have alluded, I should say to our Eastern friends that you left the region when you came into the North-western States.

The present year marks the close of the first decennial period in the history of our Association. In reviewing briefly its record a mention of its precursor, — a convention of eighty librarians and others interested in bibliography, which was held in New York City, in September, 1853, — must not be overlooked. Prof. Charles C. Jewett, of the Smithsonian Institution, Dr. Samuel F. Haven, of the American Antiquarian Society, and Mr. Charles Folsom, of the Boston Athenæum, all of whom have passed away, were among its prominent members. Prof. Jewett was the leading spirit in the call and management of the convention, and its President. Indeed, he may justly be ranked as the ablest and most zealous of the early American reformers in the methods of library management. He was the first to collect the statistics of the libraries of the United States, which he published in 1851. One week ago three of the librarians who signed the call for that Convention, and were present, were members of this Association. Two of them were our esteemed associates, — Mr. Smith, of the Philadelphia Library Company, who died on Friday last, and of whom further mention will be made, and Dr. Gould, of Brown University. The third was myself, then in charge of the Boston Mercantile Library. If I did not fear to encroach upon the theme of Mr. Barton, who will read at this conference a paper on

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"The Convention of 1853," I could give some reminiscences of its sessions. I may say, however, that the Convention of 1853 made a lasting impression on the minds of all the librarians who were present, and that it must be regarded as an era in American bibliography. Prof. Jewett said in his opening address: "This is the first convention of the kind, not only in this country, but, so far as I know, in the world." That conference aroused a spirit of inquiry and search after better methods. The card catalogue, about that time, had been adopted in several American libraries, and Prof. Jewett had prepared a system of rules for cataloguing, based on those of the British Museum, which he simplified and improved. Prof. Jewett had on his mind, and pressed it on the convention, a scheme of making the Smithsonian Institution a great national library. He had met with opposition from the scientists, who had no sympathy with his project, and wished the funds of the Smithsonian to be used for the printing of scientific papers. His scheme was later defeated by the action of Congress, and with sadness he retired from the Smithsonian Institution. Another project he was much interested in at the time; and it was highly creditable to his enterprise and ingenuity. It was an honest attempt to lessen the cost of printing elaborate catalogues, which were then, and are now, absorbing funds which ought to be expended in books. The development of his scheme was one of the chief topics considered at the Convention of 1853. In brief, the scheme was to stereotype in separate blocks the titles of books, using a material cheaper than metal; keeping these blocks in stock, and printing from them all the library catalogues of the country. The material he used was a sort of clay from Indiana. Congress made an appropriation for executing the plan. I recollect that the librarians of the country generally favored it, and that I did not. I remember that I spoke of it at the time as "Prof. Jewett's *mud* catalogue." My views concerning it were based on some practical knowledge of legitimate typography, and from specimens of the work which Prof. Jewett exhibited. I doubt whether the scheme of stereotype blocks could have been a success under any circumstances;

but it failed in this instance from mechanical defects in the process, — the shrinking and warping of the blocks in baking, and the intractable nature of the material when baked, which made the exact adjustment of the blocks on the press impossible. In presenting the scheme, Prof. Jewett stated that "practical stereotypers had said that it could not be done."

It is not necessary, to be a successful man, that one should be successful in everything he undertakes. Errors, mistakes, and blunders even, mark the path of all the great inventors, and the benefactors of the race. One who was so full of resources and expedients in library economy as Prof. Jewett could afford to make an erroneous judgment on the process of using baked clay in typography. Those who in future years shall read the *Library Journal* will find, with much which is of the highest importance, schemes which are of no practical value in the form in which they were presented; but even these may afford suggestions which, in other relations, will lead the reader to excellent and practical results.

In 1855 Prof. Jewett was elected superintendent of the Boston Public Library, where, with such trustees as George Ticknor and Edward Everett, he had a part in developing the sagacious policy of that great institution, the pioneer of all the free public libraries of the country. If he were living to-day, with what zeal and charming urbanity would he have taken part in the exercises of this conference! He would have completed his seventieth year on the 16th day of August next. Our profession is a debtor to Prof. Jewett for his early and scholarly services in bibliography and in library economy; and a memorial paper concerning him from Mr. Winsor, who was his successor in the Boston Public Library, would be a fitting recognition of this obligation. In the wide range of topics treated at the meetings of the Association, I do not recall a biographical memorial of any eminent American bibliographer who has passed away. The services of Ezra Abbot, George Ticknor, Samuel F. Haven, Joseph G. Cogswell, and some others, entitle them to such a recognition.

At the close of the sessions in 1853, it was unanimously

"Resolved, That this convention be regarded as preliminary to the formation of a permanent Librarians' Association."

A committee, of which Prof. Jewett was chairman, was appointed to draft a constitution and by-laws, and to present them at the next meeting of the convention, to be held at Washington City. Perhaps the retirement of Prof. Jewett from the Smithsonian Institution accounts for there being no subsequent meeting of the convention.

If I understand the matter correctly, to our accomplished Secretary is due the credit of suggesting the revival of the excellent scheme of forming a Librarians' Association which had slumbered undisturbed for twenty-three years. A telegram from Mr. Leybold to me at Chicago, in the summer of 1876, asking if I would sign a call for a Librarians' Convention, was the first intimation I had on the subject; and I replied by asking who were behind the scheme. On receiving a satisfactory answer I gladly signed the call. The conference met at Philadelphia, October 4, 1876, and was in session for three days. The American Library Association was there organized, a constitution adopted, and officers appointed. One hundred and three members were enrolled, eleven papers were read, and a variety of interesting topics were discussed. The proceedings filled one hundred and one pages of the *Library journal*, the first number of which was issued in September of that year. About the same time the elaborate "Report on the Public Libraries of the United States" appeared from the Bureau of Education, the principal contributors to which were the librarians who formed the Association.

The printed report of the Philadelphia Conference attracted immediate attention in England. Mr. E. B. Nicholson, now Librarian of the Bodleian Library at Oxford, urged in the *Academy* of January 27, 1877, that a similar conference be called in London. The suggestion was approved by the principal librarians in the kingdom, and the result was the International Conference of Librarians at London in October, 1877, and the founding of the

"Library Association of the United Kingdom," which has since made a brilliant record. Mr. Henry R. Tedder, in his introduction to the printed Proceedings of the London Conference of 1877, assigns its origin to the example and good results of the Philadelphia Conference. In speaking of the latter, he says: "This date, 1876, may almost be said to mark a new period in the history of bibliothecal science; for at the same time was issued the exhaustive Report of the Bureau of Education on the Public Libraries of the United States, and in the previous month had appeared the first number of the *Library journal*, founded by some of the promoters of the conference. Perhaps the most important result has been the foundation of an American Library Association, which has since undertaken much work of real practical use." Mr. John Winter Jones, Librarian of the British Museum, and President of the Conference, said in his inaugural address: "The idea of holding a Conference of Librarians originated in America, — in that country of energy and activity which has set the world so many good examples, and of which a conference of Librarians is not the least valuable."

The second meeting of our Association was held in New York City, September 4-6, 1877. At its close sixteen of our members sailed for Europe to attend the International Conference at London, where we were received with every mark of attention and hospitality, and the Proceedings of the Conference show that the American librarians had a large share in its deliberations. The third meeting was held at Boston, June 30-July 2, 1879; the fourth at Washington, February 9-12, 1881; the fifth at Cincinnati, May 11-13, 1882; the sixth at Buffalo, August 14-17, 1883, and the seventh at Lake George, September 22-25, 1885. At these seven meetings ninety-seven papers on topics relating to library economy were read, and the papers and discussions, as printed in the *Library journal*, fill 639 pages. In literary merit, and in the treatment of historical, antiquarian, and biographical topics relating to our profession, these papers are not equal to those which have appeared in the proceedings of the British Association. They are, however, emi-

nently practical and suggestive, and, by confession of English librarians, more useful than those of their own Association. What the American librarian, in his treatment of professional topics, lacks in scholastic style, he makes up in suggestive helpful devices. He refuses to be trammelled by conventional ideas, and the solemn frown of precedent has no terror to him. He takes delight in cutting red tape; in schemes for enlarging the usefulness of his library; in contributing to the accommodation of readers; in devising shorter paths to the sources of information, and better methods in the arrangement of his books, catalogues, and indexes. All his methods and contrivances do not survive the test of experience; but some of them do. His associates have no more respect for a plan because it is *new* than because it is *old*. If it be useful it will be generally adopted. If it be not useful its ingenuity will not save it. The meetings of our Association, and the visiting of libraries, which is one of the most useful features in these annual gatherings, furnish opportunities for the exchange of ideas in library economy and the discussion of their merits. The result has been a practical agreement in this country as to the essential principles on which libraries should be conducted. There is, nevertheless, a great diversity in the methods by which these principles are applied. Every librarian who has ability and originality has methods of his own, which, if they have no other merit, meet the conditions of his own personal equation. Some librarians surround themselves with short-hand writers and much routine. Every emergency is provided for by a rule or contrivance, and every sort of business transaction, by an armory of hand-stamps. Other librarians take delight in doing work in the simplest way; in meeting emergencies as they arise; in reducing each business operation to its lowest terms, and in turning over to subordinates work which they can do well. Such librarians are not swamped in an ocean of detail; they write their own letters, are delightful correspondents, and have time to attend to the higher and bibliographical wants of their libraries. Methods which are adapted for one library are not necessarily adapted for another where the conditions are different.

The past record of the association may be seen not only in the *Library journal*, but in the practical working of the new libraries throughout the land which have sprung up under its influence. The old libraries have been reorganized, and, now that they are more intelligently conducted, meet with a more liberal support.

The promptness with which our members engaged in the coöperative work on the *Index to Periodical Literature*, and, performing all they promised, are now carrying on the *Coöperative Index*, is a pledge that other work of a similar character may be accomplished. Mr. Fletcher, the chairman of the coöperative committee, will lay before you a scheme of work which his committee has elaborated, to which I ask your respectful attention. I have not made myself familiar with its details, but I have the highest confidence in Mr. Fletcher and his executive ability; and whatever he undertakes will be a success.

What this association has done in bringing the public libraries and the public schools into closer relations — the work of one supplementing the work of the other in the general system of education — is in itself an object of sufficient importance to justify its existence.

The old controversy, as to whether it is proper to lay a public tax for the support of a public library, is happily ended, except in the Middle States; and New Jersey, if I am correctly informed, has at last come into line with the Eastern and Western States on this point. New York City is still wrestling with the problem of establishing and maintaining a public library without using public funds, or giving the municipal government any control of the institution. It is a problem which, in my judgment, can never be solved, unless there are citizens in New York who are ready to endow the library with four or five millions. The one million which Enoch Pratt gave to Baltimore will not give New York such a library as it needs. What would become of the public schools of New York City if their support was left to charitable contributions, and to passing round the hat periodically? Is the municipal government of New York City so much worse than that of other large cities —

Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, and Milwaukee — that it cannot be trusted with the interests of a public library? No speculation or scandal has ever occurred in connection with the management of a public library. If every department of the corporation affairs in the cities which have been named were managed as well as their public libraries they would be model municipalities. There is every reason to believe that a public library in New York City, organized under such library statutes as exist in the Western States, would be equally well managed. New York has no disturbing element which does not exist in Chicago, Cincinnati, or Milwaukee, unless it be the reluctance of wealthy men to be taxed for such an object. What are alleged to be disturbing elements — a large foreign population, socialism, communism, anarchism — are not so in fact. These people desire their children to be educated, and make no opposition to the public schools. They desire to read books, that their children should read, and that this reading should be furnished at the public expense. The most zealous friends of public libraries in large cities are the middle and poorer classes who carry votes, and it is public policy to educate these classes.

The large legacies and gifts which have recently been made for the founding of libraries in this country are among the most cheering signs of the times. The Newberry legacy to Chicago, the Pratt and Peabody gifts to Baltimore, the Scofield gift to Oak Park, Ill., the Fuller gift to Belvidere, Ill., the Hoyt fund for East Saginaw, Mich., the Seymour fund for Auburn, N.Y., the Ames fund for Easton, Mass., the Nevins fund for Methuen, Mass., and the Board of Trade gift for Denver, Colorado, are a few among the many which might be mentioned. The erection of library buildings by private individuals for institutions already existing has become in New England a favorite and appropriate mode of expressing their donors' interest in libraries.

The work for which this association was organized is not yet completed. We need to carry on the reform in the construction of library buildings which has already begun; that they shall be planned for the specific purpose for which they are to be used, and not simply

as exercises in architectural display. It is a misfortune that the absurd plans of a building for the Library of Congress, which were presented to this association at its meeting at Washington, in February, 1881, and condemned by the unanimous voice of the members present, and also at the meeting of the association at Cincinnati the next year, have been adopted by Congress.

To say that we need more discussion of the subject of classification would be superfluous. We need, however, that the discussion should be divested of some of the asperities and personalities into which earnest men and honest men are liable to fall. We need, also, that the discussion should be cleared, as far as possible, of technicalities and abstruseness, so that an incipient librarian, who has not the wisdom of Solomon and the ingenuity of a magician, may understand it. We need some practical method of lessening the expense of printed catalogues, which absorb the resources of libraries, and, in rapidly increasing collections, soon grow out of date. We have many other needs at present, and the future will furnish its own quota when these are supplied.

In the midst of this cordial welcome and these happy greetings a dark shadow falls upon us in the death of our esteemed associate, Mr. Lloyd P. Smith, of the Philadelphia Library Company, which occurred on Friday, July 2. To many of us who read the announcement in the telegraphic dispatches of Saturday last it was a dreadful shock. We had not heard of his illness, and he was expected here with his wife and daughter. His name is on our programme to read a paper on "The Great Enemy of Books." I have a letter from him, dated May 10, announcing his intention to be present, and giving the subject of his paper. It is in his usual sportive vein, and a perfect type of his mind and temperament when in health. To me the death of our friend comes as a deep personal affliction. I made his acquaintance at the Librarians' Convention in 1853, and since that time we have been frequent correspondents. I never passed through Philadelphia without visiting him at his Library, or at his home in Germantown. He was the host of the members of the associa-