

Libraries in Lancaster

By ELIZABETH CLARKE KIEFFER

In 1760, when Lancaster was one of the most thriving inland cities of the colonies, and a point of interest to travellers who wished to understand America, a group of leading citizens met to form the "Lancaster Library Company."¹ This first board, composed in almost equal parts of English, Scotch and Germans, represented very well the cultural leadership of the community, and their names were to appear again and again in Lancaster history as leaders, not only in the activities of the Revolution, but in the more constructive efforts of building a community.

Only four libraries existed at this time in the province: two in Philadelphia, one at Hatboro, one at Darby. The new venture therefore attracted wide attention and comment. In 1763 the company procured a charter from the Proprietor, Thomas Penn, who sent with it a letter of congratulations upon the enterprise which emboldened the directors to ask permission to name the library for his wife — Lady Juliana Penn — in the obvious hope that she would help support it. Beyond sending them a few volumes, there is little evidence that she did so.

The existing minutes of the company are few. From them we gather that the membership was limited to 100 persons who bought shares for 40s which could be willed, or sold if the owner left town. They also paid annual dues of 7s 6d. New members might purchase shares, if approval was given by the majority of the board, at whatever price the directors might deem them worth at the moment. A catalog published in 1766 lists 510 books, which were housed in a room of the librarian's house, together with a rather large collection of scientific instruments. Circulation rules were simple. Folios might be taken out for four weeks, quartos for three, octavos two, duodecimos one.

In 1776 the library was flourishing with 800 books, but all corporations having their charters from the proprietors were dissolved in that year, so that the library's books were boxed and sealed until 1783 when it was re-incorporated under the new government, with John Joseph Henry, (later a President Judge) as librarian, but it never flourished. The books were moved from place to place. Librarians were changed frequently, and few new members were secured. In 1843 the books were finally sold and now appear, from time to time, in private libraries or in auction catalogs.

In 1796 another circulating library was organized and occupied a room in the courthouse. The librarian was John Ross. Little is known of this

¹ Landis, C. I., *The Juliana Library*, L. C. H. S., vol. 33, p. 193, 1929. Landis, C. I., *The Juliana Library Company in Lancaster*. *Penna. Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 43, pp. 24-52, 163-181, 228-250. Diffenderffer, F. R., *The Juliana Library*. Ellis & Evans, pp. 427-33.

and it was no longer in existence in 1811. Several other brief agitations for the establishment of a library met with no response, the most determined one being directed in 1821 by William Augustus Muhlenberg (great-grandson of the famous Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg), who, coming to Lancaster in 1820 as assistant rector of St. James's Episcopal Church, was shocked at the lack of cultural facilities and secured the backing of the local newspapers² in an energetic but quite unsuccessful campaign to found a public library. An editorial in the *Lancaster Journal*, March 16, 1821, has the following interesting statement:

"For ourselves we can say that though having access to a great many books, we almost daily feel the want of a public library, as we, in the course of our reading, (circumscribed as it is) are frequently referred to books which from their scarcity, bulk or cost, are not to be found in private libraries."

Meanwhile, in 1819, Franklin College, had been taking steps with regard to its own library. Professor William Reichenbach had been appointed to prepare a room in the college building for use as a library. Professor Reichenbach, at his death in 1821, bequeathed 88 books to this library,³ 53 of which are still in the possession of the college. These were all in Latin, Greek or German, and were doubtless representative of the private libraries of the local scholars, most of whom were of German birth.

The Misses Jordan Library was conducted by Rebecca and Julianna Jordan, in their home on East King Street, for over a quarter of a century. It was first opened to the public on July 23, 1821, and the hours were from 8 A. M. to 8 P. M. The subscription rate was three dollars per year, or for a shorter period one dollar per quarter. This library was mainly an inheritance, and it continued in active operation during the lifetime of one or both of the proprietors. Following their deaths in the 1860's, the books were disposed of at private and public sales. Volumes, bearing their labels, are found in private collections, but most of the books were secured by the Mechanics Society and the Athenaeum.^{3a}

In 1827 the "Lancaster Reading Room"⁴ was organized, with its headquarters in the college library. The group, again made up of prominent citizens, including the college professors, paid \$10 membership dues yearly, which were used to subscribe to American and foreign reviews and newspapers and to collect a small library of books; it was hoped that the Juliana Library books might eventually be given to the collection, but this was not accomplished. The "Belles Lettres" society donated a collection of 250 volumes.

² Worner, W. F., *Libraries in Lancaster*. L. C. H. S., vol. 34, p. 241, 1930.

³ Ms. list and catalog in possession of Fackenthal Library.

^{3a} Ellis & Evans, p. 432.

⁴ Worner, W. F., *The Lancaster Reading Room*. L. C. H. S., vol. 33,

The room was open to members from 8 to 10 P. M. daily. Clergy were admitted free, college students upon order from their professors. The books and periodicals were to become the eventual property of the college. Undoubtedly some of the long files of early British Reviews now in the College Library originate from this source. No record has been found of the date at which this organization ceased to function.

This completes the early history of libraries in Lancaster. The year 1829 might be taken as the date of the first step toward a more modern development. On January 10 of that year, a meeting was held at the "Bull's Head" tavern, of the mechanics of Lancaster, presided over by General Jeremiah Mosher, a former blacksmith, who had become a colonel in the Siege of Quebec and a general in the War of 1812. Leading men of the city outside of the mechanic trades were present but it was the mechanics' own meeting for the purpose of forming a "Mechanics Society of the City and County of Lancaster."⁵ The society, organized the same year and incorporated in 1831, had, when summarized from the elaborate verbosity of its charter, the very progressive purpose of improving the status of the mechanic arts by educating the apprentices in other fields than those of their trade. With this purpose and supported by responsible men who saw a distinct need for it, the society flourished for nearly a century. For a long time evening courses were given by volunteer teachers — college professors, local scientists and physicians, and educated men among the mechanics themselves. In a community like this it is curious to note that almost the only subject not taught was religion. In 1839 the society built a hall on South Queen Street, but apparently they overestimated their financial capabilities for in 1852 they were forced to sell this building and move back into rented rooms. The evening school gradually languished but the library, from the first, was a flourishing institution. The hours were regularly 5 to 9 on Friday evening— attempts to have it opened oftener always failed. Members of the society and their apprentices were free to draw books. In course of time the provision limiting membership to mechanics was abandoned and anyone could use the library on payment of \$1 yearly. From a collection of 300 books in 1829, the library grew to 3,000 in 1864, and to 6,000 in 1909, when the collection was turned over to the Public Library. On the sale of the Hall in 1852 the very wise provision was adopted of investing the proceeds and keeping the principal intact — the interest to be spent exclusively for books and upkeep. Interest of this principal still goes to the purchase of books for the Public Library. S. S. Rathvon, librarian from 1860 to 1891, was very wise in his choice of books and enriched the collection and improved its usefulness throughout his term of office. The circulation records of his day show from 80 to 100 books charged each Friday. During the whole of the nineteenth

⁵ Haverstick, D. C., *History of the Mechanics Library*. L. C. H. S., vol. 9, p. 334, 1905. Landis, Bertha Cochran, *The Lancaster Union of 1839*. L. C. H. S., vol. 43, p. 165, 1939; *Mechanics Library Association; Constitution and By-laws, 1858; Catalogue, 1884; Amended Constitution, 1888.*

century the Mechanics Library was the only library for the common people of Lancaster.

This does not mean that there were no other sources of literature for the people of the community. Gentlemen's libraries grew to a great extent, some of them becoming quite famous. After a call upon James Buchanan, at Wheatland, in 1852, a local diarist⁶ speaks with surprise of the *poverty* of the library there. Since we know, from other sources, that the president's library was a fairly good one, we may judge that other local collections were unusually good. Preachers, professors, and doctors, whose incomes did not allow of expensive luxuries, nevertheless found money to purchase the current literature in their fields. That there was much uneconomical duplication of expenditure in this system does not seem to have worried them, in spite of the thrift inherited from their Swiss, German, and Scotch ancestors. Individualism inherited from the same source was stronger than thrift. The attitude of many of these private collectors was expressed, even in recent years, when a committee of college professors waited upon the possessor of a notable library with the suggestion that he bequeath his books to the college. He refused, indignantly, on the ground that he wanted his books to go upon the market, so that other bibliophiles might have the fun of reassembling them.

Beside the private libraries, there were the collections of the small learned societies. The Linnaean Society⁷ had an excellent general science library. The Agricultural Society, one on science in agriculture. The Law Library Association,⁸ still in active existence, supplied the professional needs of the local bar. The Medical Society began in 1844 to collect medical books which were too expensive for the budget of the average G. P. (these except the newest have recently been given to the college library). The Lancaster County Historical Society gathered books on local history. The seminary library, since 1871, has supplied local ministers. All the local Sunday Schools, which were large and well-attended, maintained large and active libraries for their members, and almost all of the older people in the community recall that the reading of their childhood was drawn from this source.

The union of Franklin and Marshall Colleges in 1852, brought to Lancaster the really excellent general libraries of the two literary societies—Goethean and Diagnothian.⁹ While these were open only to members of the societies—students, faculty, alumni, and honorary—yet most of the great men of the community were connected with one or the other in one of these capacities, and Henry Harbaugh speaks in his diary of the great pleasure

⁶ Henry Harbaugh.

⁷ Minutes of the Society, in possession of Fackenthal Library.

⁸ Strickler, D. B., The Lancaster Law Library Association.

⁹ Catalogs and circulation records of these libraries in possession of Fackenthal Library.

The College Library, Franklin & Marshall Paper, vol. 1, no. 11, Sept., 1937.

he and others derived from this source. It is to be noted that two student librarians of the Goethean Literary Society later became famous professional librarians: Lewis H. Steiner and Samuel Ranck.

The last quarter of the century saw the development of a number of reading clubs. One of the longest lived of these (died in 1940) bore the picturesque name of "The West End Revolver." Its members were the college and seminary faculty, and cultured persons living near the college. Each member subscribed for one periodical, and purchased a certain number of books a year. Books and periodicals were passed from house to house in carefully planned rotation, and at the end of the year each member might choose the volumes he wished to keep for his personal library. Those not desired by any member went to the college.

This, then, was the library picture at the turn of the century. Community leaders found their literary needs satisfied by private sources, which were best suited to the strongly individualistic spirit of the people. Their social conscience was satisfied by the existence of the Mechanics Library, which was felt to be ample for the education of the poorer classes.

In 1888 Dr. John B. Kieffer, professor of Greek, was appointed librarian of the college.¹⁰ The college library, while more scholarly than those of the societies, was much less active. Composed of 3,000 volumes, many of them gifts from Germany in 1854, it was housed in one room in the college building, and was only opened when professors wished to use it. Dr. Kieffer began his work by campaigning for a reading room, which he secured. He taught himself classification and cataloging, put the collection in shape and made it useful, and then set out to secure funds for a building. Through his efforts and those of an interested alumnus, the attention of Brevet Major-General John Watts de Peyster, eccentric but generous philanthropist of New York, was turned to the college, and in 1898, the Watts de Peyster Library was opened on the college campus. By the depository law, this library, which was made a depository of United States Government Documents in 1894, was required to open its doors to the general public. It has served the community as a whole ever since, except that, with the opening of the Navy V-12 program in 1943, it became necessary to restrict the local use of the library to adults. Re-cataloged in the years 1928-1934; staffed by trained librarians; and, since 1937, housed in a modern building, the gift of B. F. Fackenthal, Jr., this is regarded today as the nearest to a general library the community possesses.

In 1900 Miss Eliza E. Smith presented to the city (in memory of her brother, A. Herr Smith)¹¹ a large house at 125 North Duke Street, to be used for library purposes. In doing so, she offered the Mechanics Library the use of two rooms, rent free, which they accepted, and in which their cus-

¹⁰ Records and reports of college library, F. & M. paper, op. cit.

¹¹ Reports of the A. Herr Smith Library.

tomary library program was carried on until her death in 1904. It had been her expressed intention to endow the library, but, meanwhile, she became interested in other charities and her will contained no provision for the library except a few books, and the appointment of a board of trustees. The Mechanics Library offered to pay rent for the rooms it was using. The Lancaster County Historical Society rented another room for its collections; but these rentals were barely enough to pay taxes and upkeep on the building. A few small gifts from individuals in money and books came in, in the next few years, but not enough to provide a library.

Efforts were then made to transfer the books of the Mechanics Library to the city, but were thwarted by a provision in the charter of the society, forbidding them to unite with any other organization. Legal experts finally figured out a complex system which is still in effect. The Mechanics Library books were "deposited" in the care of the A. Herr Smith Memorial Library, rental is still paid for their storage there, and to this day the officers of the Mechanics Society still meet annually and vote to present the income from their fund of \$4,300 for the purchase of new books for "their own" library collection. Meanwhile, the City Council and the School Board each voted to appropriate \$750 annually, and with this fund, 5,000 books, and one partly trained librarian, the library opened its doors on April 2, 1909, and, in its first year, achieved an average circulation of 1,000 books a week.

The reports of the librarians reveal many things as well as statistics. One finds interesting the psychology of the librarian, who, in the early days, knowing the financial status of the library, kept urging the trustees to give her \$5000 for equipment and to employ a trained children's librarian. One equally approves of her successor who concentrated on single, inexpensive items of equipment, explaining their purpose and value, and invariably got them.

In the summer of 1909 a trained cataloger was employed for two months, and in the fall the library room was enlarged to provide reading space. As early as 1910, the constant demand for books in German had to be met by investing in a collection in this language. In the same year story-hours were begun, with volunteer storytellers. In 1911 the librarian complained that the number of gifts was three times the number of purchases. This was the year when fifteen business men of the city clubbed together to buy the Encyclopaedia Britannica for the library. By 1912 the library was employing two part time assistants and receiving volunteer service from several public-spirited women. The librarian asked for more non-fiction "as there are comparatively few subjects in which we have more than two books." In the same report she complains that parents are forbidding their children to use the library because of the filthy condition of the books.

Even this early, three factors were beginning to show themselves which were to be great drags upon the progress of the library.

One was the prevalent notion that the institution was heavily endowed and should be able to render better service; another was the attitude of the many donors, and volunteer helpers who, while giving generously, did so in a spirit of charity to the poor and not with any apparent feeling that the library could be of service to them or to their section of the community; and the third was that inadequate service and ragged, filthy books were driving borrowers away, rather than attracting them. Miss Helen E. Meyers, just beginning her long term of efficient service, said in her first annual report "If we fail to meet [the citizens] needs, we fail to prove to them our usefulness and the need for our existence."

In 1913 the hours were increased to 9 to 9 daily.

In 1914 a campaign for back files of periodicals improved the reference collection very much, as well as interesting many citizens in the possibilities of this type of gift. In 1914 the Young Men's Business Association undertook to build up the business section. In 1915 the school board asked for class-room libraries — a request which was refused because of lack of books. In 1916 county work was started almost by accident. A teacher in the Ephrata high-school began taking books in her own name and circulating them to her students. The librarian, seeing that a good many circulation statistics were thus being lost, provided charging equipment, thus creating a precedent which brought immediate requests for deposit stations from all over the county.¹²

In 1917 the library was absorbed in war work, distributing government pamphlets on canning; collecting books for the camps, etc. In 1920 the first county branch was opened at Marietta and two class-room libraries established in city schools. By 1922 there were altogether nineteen deposit stations and in 1925 two new branches were opened at Columbia and Elizabethtown.¹³

Returning to the public library reports we find that in 1925 the children's room was opened. In 1930 unemployment produced congestion in the reading room and a demand for foreign-language books. By 1932 there were 42 deposit stations; inventory showed seven copies of the Bible stolen; and two

¹² In addition to, and often in connection with the development of Public Library stations came the development of class-room libraries, and high-school libraries throughout the county. This movement has been greatly inspired by the library course at Millersville State Teacher's College, established in 1921, under the supervision of Miss Helen Ganser.

¹³ It must not be supposed that libraries came entirely unheralded to the county towns. Columbia, indeed, had established a subscription library as early as 1829, and another in 1834. In 1862, the Schock Library was founded, under the control of the school board, with an original endowment of \$500, and served the borough for some time as a public library. (Ellis and Evans, pp. 567-8.) Christiana, too, had a small but active Library Association founded in 1880. (E. & E., p. 1034.) The history of these and other libraries in the county is without the field of this paper, which attempts to cover only the libraries in Lancaster City.

of the assistants took summer courses in library work. In 1933 the hours were cut to 2 to 9 P. M. daily, and two assistants dropped. In 1936 the library was reorganized to comply with the provisions of the state law providing county aid for libraries. The name was changed to the Lancaster Free Public Library. In 1939 the librarian, with a new charging machine and a bookmobile, reported the library as being in better shape than at anytime in its history.

The Garvin Bequest

In 1941, by the will of M. T. Garvin, late president of the board of trustees of the Public Library, a fund of \$92,611 was released to his executors to be expended for library purposes. In accepting it, the executors issued the following statement:

“The award made by the Orphans’ Court this morning to the trustees under the residuary clause of Mr. Garvin’s will, presents an opportunity and also a responsibility, both to the trustees and to the citizens of Lancaster City and County. The will recites the fact that one of the most pressing needs of Lancaster City and County is an adequate public library and records Mr. Garvin’s doubts as to whether any library now in actual operation will certainly develop into the library which he had in mind. The will then provides that the testator’s residuary estate shall be used by the trustees, in the exercise of their absolute discretion, for library purposes.

“They may accumulate the income, adding it to the principal, if they see fit, and they may use both principal and income to create a new library, or to carry on the work and increase the usefulness of any existing library in Lancaster City. To accomplish these purposes, they may use all of the funds in their hands as an endowment, for the erection of a suitable library building, for the purchase of books or in any other connection, which will, in their judgment, accomplish the purposes which Mr. Garvin had in mind. Upon the expenditure of the entire principal and interest comprising the residuary estate, the trustees are to be discharged and the trust is to cease.

MUST DECIDE ON USE OF MONEY

“It now becomes necessary for the trustees to determine how the wishes of Mr. Garvin may best be carried out. The Lancaster Free Public Library, which is substantially a merger of the A. Herr Smith Memorial Library and the Mechanics’ Library Society, has done, and is doing, a praise-worthy and useful work. It has continued to do this work in the face of numerous difficulties. The building which it occupies is inadequate for modern library purposes. It has insufficient funds to purchase the books which ought to be purchased. Finally, the income which it receives from its small endowment fund and from the City of Lancaster, the County of Lancaster and the School District of Lancaster City, is insufficient to do more than barely to meet its relatively small operating expenses.

“At various times in the last five years the library has been on the point of closing because of inability to meet operating expenses, and the trustees

under Mr. Garvin's will are now advised that unless some help is obtained, the library cannot remain open after January 1 of next year.

"The trustees do not feel that they would be carrying out Mr. Garvin's intentions in using the funds in their hands, whether principal or interest, to pay operating deficits of the present library. The funds which will ultimately reach the hands of the trustees would probably be sufficient to erect an adequate and modern library building. In order to erect such a building, a site would have to be obtained. What is even more important, however, is that, even if a site were obtained and a building erected, some provision would have to be made to meet carrying charges and to purchase the books which ought to be purchased from time to time.

"It is obvious that if the income enjoyed by the Lancaster Free Public Library is inadequate for its own modest purposes, it would be utterly inadequate to support the sort of library which Mr. Garvin had in mind.

C. OF C. COMMITTEE AT WORK

"A hopeful circumstance exists in the fact that the Lancaster Chamber of Commerce has appointed a committee of representative citizens to consider the library situation as a whole. The trustees feel sure that this committee commands the confidence of the various municipalities whose contributions have made possible the conduct of the existing library. It is to be hoped that in the near future the committee will be able to make a report which will suggest some plan whereby the deal which Mr. Garvin had in mind may be realized.

"In the meantime the trustees will retain the funds awarded to them pending some determination as to their ultimate use. It is true that these funds may be accumulated indefinitely by the trustees for library purposes. It is to be hoped, however, that an accumulation will not be necessary and that something may be done at once looking to an immediate realization by the community of the fruits of Mr. Garvin's generosity."

As a direct result of this far-sighted policy, a thorough study of the local library situation was made during the following year. Dr. Joseph Wheeler, librarian of the Enoch Pratt Free Library of Baltimore, Maryland, and one of the foremost authorities on public libraries in the country, was employed to draw up a detailed plan for reorganization, his findings were embodied in a thorough survey of 108 pages, which when its substance was made known to the general public inspired some of the liveliest correspondence that the local newspapers have ever carried, proving at least a healthy interest throughout the community. At the same time, the appointment of Mr. Clifford B. Wightman, taken in connection with these other developments, as librarian, seemed to open the way for some satisfactory adjustment of the difficult situation.

The bombs of Pearl Harbor, interrupted these plans, as they interrupted so much else of cultural importance. During 1942 and '43, both the public

and the college library, under-staffed and financially straitened have been forced to cope with the great new demands made upon them, on the one hand by the vastly increasing population, and the new type of technical information needed, and, on the other, by the two Naval programs at the college.

In addition, they have handled two large Victory Book Drives for reading matter for the armed forces. That of 1942, headed by Mr. Herbert B. Anstaett, tripled the original quota set for the county, and that of 1943, headed by Mr. Wightman, stressed quality rather than quantity and was also highly successful.

An extremely important development in the local library situation, begun before the war, but vastly stimulated by the complicated problems of War Production has been the rapid growth of the technical libraries at the large manufacturing plants. Hamilton Watch, Armstrong, and R. C. A. all now employ trained librarians to care for their large collections of technical literature in their own fields, and to act as contact representatives with the local libraries and those of neighboring cities for additional information. This is a factor which will undoubtedly have to play a part in our local post-war planning.

The concluding paragraph of this paper was written in 1941, for the benefit of Dr. Wheeler's study, yet, as it still represents this writer's feelings, I repeat it here, with apologies to this audience if it seems to attempt to explain to them a fact which they know far better than I.

The citizens of Lancaster County are deeply jealous of the personal liberties which it cost them toil and blood to win. They dreaded totalitarianism before they ever heard the term. They are deeply suspicious of anything which looks even faintly like paternalism in government, and they have an inherited memory of the ruinous taxes which drove their fore-fathers away from home 200 years ago. In a predominantly farming community, farmers co-operatives have never taken hold. Public playgrounds are opposed vehemently on the grounds that children should be kept in their own back yards. It took several typhoid epidemics to convince the community that a pure water supply was for the benefit of everyone. Once convinced, we built up as efficient and modern a water-system as any city possesses and are inordinately proud of it.

If Lancaster County ever becomes convinced that a public library can serve all the individuals of the community without in any way infringing upon their rights, it will get behind its library and make a going concern of it.