

OREGON State Library

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State Library Dedication

THE highlight of a state-wide conference of librarians and library trustees held in Salem on April three and four, was the dedication of the new State Library building.

The ceremony was held in the main lobby of the building on the evening of April third. Speakers were seated beneath the beautiful bas-relief portraying the pioneer mother reading to her son, so that throughout the ceremony the audience was conscious of the cultural heritage of the past. The impressive ceremonies were presided over by Governor Charles A. Sprague.

"The Beginnings of State Library Service in Oregon" were recounted in the paper written by Mrs. Cornelia Marvin Pierce, and read by her associate, Miss Mirpah Blair:

What a pleasure and satisfaction it is for me here at the other side of the continent to be heard by Oregon friends and Oregon library workers and users on the day of dedication to library service of the fine building in which the State Library is now housed.

I do recall most vividly indeed those beginnings in August, 1905, when I arrived in Salem as Secretary of the Oregon Library Commission, which had neither books, quarters, tradition, nor financial support beyond the State appropriation of \$1200 a year for all expenses. The field was clear before me. It was the great privilege of my life to have had placed in my hands the beginning and shaping of the new library venture in Oregon and the winning of converts to the cause. Formulating policies, securing financial support from the Legislature, planning legislation for extension of library service through public and county libraries, gathering up nearly a quarter of a million books and many thousands of users of books, and finally acquiring the name of Oregon State Library for the institution filled nearly twenty-four years of my life.

Oregon afforded opportunity for library pioneering in a State still dominated by the pioneer spirit. The response was stimulating. People wanted books. The three free public libraries in Portland, Salem, and Eugene became a hundred or more during my time. Excellent subscription libraries in Ashland, Astoria, and elsewhere were, after much persuasion, made free libraries. Books began to flow into the little schoolhouses, too remote to be reached by public libraries. Visiting librarians from other states were always curious to see the sets of encyclopaedias and reference books which had been clipped for lending in sections in order that the benefits of books

collected in Salem might reach beyond the walls which housed them, and be put into hands stretched out from the far corners of the State.

We initiated the first mail order library service known to this country, sending books by express to all who asked for them until the parcel post was started. It is interesting to recall that this post came about largely through the influence of our Oregon Senator, Jonathan Bourne, and that it later became the library book post through the effort of another Oregon Senator, Frederick Steiwer.

It is fitting on this dedication day for me to recall the names and contributions of those who fought by my side. The members of the first Board of Trustees were a notable group. I, alone, survive to speak for them and to participate in this ceremonial on an occasion which would have given them great satisfaction because housing workers and books was always our most serious difficulty. First must be spoken the name of Mary Frances Isom, gifted librarian of the Portland library, an associate whose generous nature urged her to serve beyond the borders of her own library territory, and to whose eager advocacy of the library cause Oregon is most greatly indebted. Mr. Winslow B. Ayer was for years the tower of strength for library efforts in Oregon, and the financial benefactor of the early Library Commission days. State School Superintendent J. H. Ackerman was a real leader in educational development, through whose foresight the school library law was written into our statutes. President Prince L. Campbell of the State University was always an ardent advocate of democracy in education. Governor George E. Chamberlain was followed by other Governors, always appreciative and helpful as members of the Board of Trustees.

Free traveling libraries were started on their beneficent rounds through encouragement and money gifts of Mrs. Julia Hoffman of Portland and the cooperation of several little towns hungry for books, Woodburn being the first to contribute a unit. The women's clubs of the State played a conspicuous part in establishing public libraries. Mrs. Sarah Evans of Portland, President of the State Federation, was chiefly responsible for the enactment of the first public library law in Oregon. Salem people should gratefully recall on this day the name of Mrs. Carolyn Kelliher, who tramped the alternately dusty or muddy streets of Salem to gather up each month contributions of money and books which kept going, one of the two free public libraries in Oregon, outside of Portland.

I trust the names of these founders and early supporters of the library cause in Oregon are carved in marble in the beautiful new building. In my tours of the State during those early library days I discovered book lovers everywhere. I wish I might mention the names of the many eager workers for the library cause.

At the risk of becoming tiresome with reminiscence I desire to point out the contrast between Oregon of 1905 and Oregon of 1939 in library and educational matters. When I came in 1905, I found very few high schools; no school libraries; (how I enjoyed starting the "little libraries" out to rural schools in

later years); no tax-supported free public libraries outside of Portland; no county libraries; no traveling libraries; no mail-order library service (that was our great contribution to library progress); few debating societies; no inter-school debates because informed public discussion awaited our package libraries; no organized or catalogued library in the whole State outside of Portland, even in universities, college, or normal schools; not a room full of children's books outside of Portland, and no radio competition for attention!

Stage trips were frequently necessary as I visited teachers' institutes to talk about books and libraries. Wallowa, Tillamook, Klamath, and other counties were accessible only by horse-drawn stages. There were short school terms and few trained teachers. Our only normal schools were closed. What a different scene in 1939!

The coming of trained librarians and the training of the little group then serving, through a summer school at Eugene, marked real progress. Then came the library building period when Carnegie funds were made available. A State Library Association was formed, and people grew to think of free public libraries as essential to the educational system.

How fortunate is the worker in a cause who lives to see and enjoy the fruits of labors. As I think of my associates of many years in the State Library, and among the librarians of the public and school libraries of the State which multiplied so rapidly, and those elsewhere who have molded the educational life of the State, I am moved to paraphrase Theodore Roosevelt's ejaculation, "Aggressive fighting for a great cause is the noblest sport this world affords."

The past has been glorious in progress, accomplishment, and change. The vision of the future is not without inspiration. The task is not complete. My own early plans for state-wide library service included county and regional libraries, making stores of books everywhere accessible. The revolution wrought in transportation and communication has transformed this into the idea, and ideal goal, of *regional librarians* with the state book storehouse which this building affords. Books are now so cheaply and quickly transported, the carrying of their magic message, and news of the possibility of pleasure and self-education through books becomes the administrative problem for the State Library Trustees and Librarian.

Libraries may become and remain significant and highly serviceable only as they convey the personal touch and inspiration of gifted leaders and teachers to those whose destinies they may so greatly affect.

From this building, the store-house and symbol, must pour forth the books which will become, through the skill and direction of devoted and qualified librarians, the means of ennobling character, opening vision and widening horizons. That is my hope for the future.

The dedication address delivered by Dr. Evelyn Steel Little, librarian of Mills College, was a masterly presentation of the "Power of Books in a Democracy."

Dr. Little termed the State Library "the people's university." "We should be thankful not only to have books; we should be thankful that we have freedom to read them," counseled Dr. Little. "Books are the enduring record, our cultural heritage. Democracy in the use of books implies that every citizen must have access to all sides of every question, not that everything that is printed is true, but without freedom to investigate we cannot have democracy."