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## THE BUFFALO PUBLIC LIBRARY IN 1983.

BY C. A. CUTTER, LIBRARIAN OF THE BOSTON ATHENÆUM.

I N the year 1983 I had come to Buffalo from Niagara, where I had been admiring the magnificent canal works by which the enormous power of the Falls was collected to be transmitted by wire, not merely to the great manufacturing city that had grown up upon each bank of the river, but also to Buffalo, where every machine, from a hundred-ton trip-hammer to an egg-beater, was driven by the water that had formerly only furnished a livelihood to hack-drivers and toll-takers. The Falls were as beautiful as ever, though their volume was slightly diminished. Along the bank ran the park; for all the factories, which were generally owned and managed in Buffalo, were kept at a distance from the water and hidden by trees. These great industrial towns, which furnished Buffalo its wealth, both directly and by nourishing its commerce, contained several well-used collections of books of moderate size, but no great library such as I was told I should see at Buffalo.

That city was not then one of the largest of the United States, having about two millions of inhabitants; but it yielded to none in the attention it gave to popular education, part of the remarkable commercial energy which distinguished the first century of its existence, having naturally, with the acquisition of wealth, been turned into the channels of literature, art, and science. The library, therefore, as being the very culmination of the educational system, had a high reputation both for its excellent management, for the extent to which it was used, and for the pride and affection with which it was regarded by the citizens. The library building was near the centre of the city. A whole block some 200 feet square had been secured for it. Part was already built upon, and part, reserved for the inevitable extension of a growing collection, was occupied by stores and houses, whose rents were allowed to accumulate for a building fund. Wide avenues gave it air and light, and pro-

tected it against fire on three sides; on the fourth there was space enough between the library and the shops. The situation, as I have said, was central, and yet it was a little retired from the noisiest streets. All the neighboring paving was of a kind to minimize the clatter of passing vehicles, and particular attention was paid to keeping the ways scrupulously clean, to prevent, as far as might be, the evil of dust.

The building, when complete, was to consist of two parts, the first a central store, 150 feet square, a compact mass of shelves and passages, lighted from the ends, but neither from sides nor top; the second an outer rim of rooms 20 feet wide, lighted from the four streets. In front and rear the rim was to contain special libraries, reading-rooms, and work-rooms; on the sides, the art-galleries. The central portion was a gridiron of stacks, running from front to rear, each stack 2 feet wide, and separated from its neighbor by a passage of 3 feet. Horizontally, the stack was divided by floors into 8 stories, each 8 feet high, giving a little over 7 feet of shelf-room, the highest shelf being so low that no book was beyond the reach of the hand. Each reading-room, 16 feet high, corresponded to two stories of the stack, from which it was separated in winter by glass doors. When I first entered a reading-room, which was in summer, when the doors were off, I was much amused by the appearance of the two tiers of passages running off from one side like so many bird holes in a sandy river-bank, sixty of them leading off into darkness. They were, in fact, sixty short tunnels, with floors for top and bottom and books for sides, 8 feet high, 3 feet wide, and now 75 feet long. When the library should occupy the whole lot, they were to be 150 feet long. "Their length might equally well," said my guide, "be 300 feet, for they do not depend upon the sun for light. In the night, or in a dark day the runner, on going in, touches a

knob, which lights an electric glow-lamp in the middle; that shows him his way. There are other lamps in the tunnel at suitable distances. If his central lamp does not give him light enough to read the titles or the books themselves at the shelf where he is, he has only to touch the button of the nearest lamp to get all the light he wants. In the first experiments in stack-building, which were made a century ago, if the light came from the sides, either the stack could not exceed 20 feet in width, or the middle was dark; if one wanted to use a wide lot of ground, it was necessary to have light-wells about as wide as the stack, which sacrificed valuable space and neutralized the sole advantage of a stack, which is compact storage of the books. If an attempt was made to let the light from the top filter down through perforated, or through glass floors, the lower passages were still dark, and in summer the upper floors under a glass roof were intolerably hot. With electric illumination we are both light and cool. We can store the greatest number of books in the closest proximity to the reading-room, and extend our storage-room indefinitely. There is no way in which books can be packed in closer nearness to the place where they are used. We have now room for over 500,000 volumes in connection with each of the four reading-rooms, or 4,000,000 for the whole building when completed. In the present reading-room there are 9,000 square feet on the front of the building, without counting the special rooms under the art-galleries on the side. We have, of course, book-lifts, noiseless and swift, to take the books from floor to floor. For horizontal transmission we tried various little railroads, but came to the conclusion that a smart boy was the best and the quickest railroad in a library. For carrying many books at a time, of course, we use trucks; and, as the attendants in each room have two stories of shelves to go to, to save the fatigue of climbing even the small height of 8 feet, each room has several little lifts just large enough for one person, driven, like everything else in the library, by Falls-power."

"The books," he told me, "are arranged in groups of subjects on the different stories, those most called for lowest. On the ground-

floor is a selection from all classes of books that are in most active circulation, many of them duplicated in their proper places on higher floors. On the same floor is the class literature, because it is, on the whole, the most sought for. We have not yet escaped the preponderant use of fiction though we have diminished it since your day. It used to be 75 per cent. Thanks to our training the school children in good ways it has fallen to forty. I doubt if it goes much lower. The next two stories are given to the historical, geographical, and social sciences; the fourth to the natural sciences, the industrial arts, the fine arts and sports, and finally to philosophy and theology. When several classes correspond to a single reading-room, one of them is put on one side of the stack opposite one end of the reading-room, another opposite the middle, and a third, if there are three, opposite the other end. This arrangement greatly facilitates procuring books. Every one goes to that reading-room, and to that part of the room whose adjacent shelves contain the subject he is going to work on,—if art, to the fourth story, middle; if European history, to the second story, west end. If he happens to need books from another class, of course he can have them sent up or down to him.

"But the main advantage of this system of separate reading-rooms is that it compels the appointment of just as many competent librarians. There must be one for each floor, and in fact there is one for each great subject,—a scientific man for the science, an art lover for the art, an antiquarian for the history, and a traveller for the geography; and even in their attendants the specialization of function has led to a special development of ability. In selecting them we take into account aptitude, so far as it can be discovered, but we find that a librarian who is himself interested will train even his runners into a very considerable degree of capacity to assist readers. This we think an extremely important matter. It is a more glorious thing to organize and administer a great library, but full as good results may be got even in very small collections of books by a sort of spade husbandry. We boast of both here. Our chief librarian is not more success-

ful in the conduct of the whole than his subordinates are in the thorough cultivation each of his own little plot. On the one hand their knowledge of the shelves, volume by volume, on the other, their personal intercourse with the students enable them to give every book to that reader to whom it will do most good, — as a skilful bookseller suits the tastes of his patrons, — and to answer every inquiry with the best work the library has on that matter, as the doctor prescribes the right medicines for his patient. No one man could do this for our half million volumes; and our chief librarian's ability, for all his enormous acquaintance with literature, is best shown in his selection of the men who do it for him."

The first room that I entered was the delivery on the ground floor. It was divided into three parts, all having access to a central curved counter, the middle one for children, the right side for women, the left for men. There was nothing remarkable about it save the purity of the air. I remarked this to the friend who accompanied me, and he said that it was so in all parts of the building; ventilation was their hobby; nothing made the librarian come nearer scolding than any impurity in the air.

"We do not have drafts," he said, "because we introduce and draw off our air at so many points; but we do have a constant renewal of the air, and the more borrowers or readers there are the faster we renew it. Formerly we had a young man, whose sole duty it was to attend to heat and ventilation; and to ensure his attention there were several registering thermometers and hygrometers and atmosphere-meters in every room. If he let the heat get above 70 in the reading-room or above 60 in the stack, or if the dryness or the impurity went beyond a certain point, there was the tell-tale record to accuse him, and that record was examined every day by the chief librarian. After a time one of these ventilators invented an arrangement by which the rooms regulated their own dryness and heat. The air is nearly as good as out-of-doors. Every one must be admitted into the delivery-room, but from the reading-rooms the great unwashed are shut out altogether or put in rooms by themselves.

Luckily public opinion sustains us thoroughly in their exclusion or seclusion.

"And our care is as useful to our dead as to our living wards. The bindings do not dry up as they would if the air were not filled with moisture to its proper capacity. The books we sometimes get at auction, bound in powder, shows what carelessness in this regard leads to."

From the delivery-room my guide led me down into a basement running under the whole building, — the newspaper-room. I found there an apparently full collection of the Buffalo press and the journals of the neighboring towns, but no other American papers. I expressed my surprise. My guide said that half a century before the preservation of newspapers had become one of the most perplexing problems of library economy. "For local history they are invaluable, but if kept with any completeness they occupy an enormous amount of room; they soon fill up the largest building. The American libraries, therefore, made a league among themselves. Each large library agreed to provide a fire-proof depository, and to each was assigned a certain territory, — its own city and the country around, — on its promise to keep every paper published within those bounds that it could buy or beg. If it received any daily published outside of the limit, it was to send it to the proper depository for that paper. A few exceptions were made of newspapers which were to the United States what the 'Times' is to England; these any library that chooses is allowed to keep for the use of its patrons." "For others," said he, "the plan works in this way: if I want a Cincinnati paper I telephone to the public library there to set a searcher at work to hunt up the matter in question. When she has found it she may either copy it or read it off to me through the telephone, or, better still, read it to a fonograf and transmit on the foil. She sends the charge for her time, which is moderate, to the librarian here, and I pay him. This exchange is going on all the time between the different libraries. Of course it is not exactly the same thing as having the newspapers at hand, but in some respects it is better. The searchers become very acute in their scent, and

will find things which the untrained inquirer would be sure to miss. The great advantage, however, is that it leads to a more thorough keeping of newspapers than would otherwise be possible."

From the newspaper basement a lift took us to one of the reading-rooms. These rooms were narrow, to ensure perfect light at every desk. The windows ran to the very top of the room and occupied more than half the wall space. The desks had every convenience that could facilitate study; but what most caught my eye was a little key-board at each, connected by a wire with the librarian's desk. The reader had only to find the mark of his book in the catalog, touch a few lettered or numbered keys, and on the instant a runner at the central desk started for the volume, and, appearing after an astonishingly short interval at the door nearest his desk, brought him his book and took his acknowledgment without disturbing any of the neighboring readers.

"In the National Library," said my friend, "which has the treasury of a whole continent to draw from, and can afford any luxury, they have an arrangement that brings your book from the shelf to your desk. You have only to touch the keys that correspond to the letters of the book-mark, adding the number of your desk, and the book is taken off the shelf by a pair of nippers and laid in a little car, which immediately finds its way to you. The whole thing is automatic and very ingenious; but the machinery is complicated and too costly for us, and for my part I much prefer our pages with their smart uniforms and noiseless steps. They wear slippers, the passages are all covered with a noiseless and dustless covering, they go the length of the hall in a passage-way screened off from the desk-room so that they are seen only when they leave the stack to cross the hall towards any desk. As that is only 20 feet wide, the interruption to study is nothing."

I complained that the room was low for its length. "Why should it not be?" he replied. "There is nothing gained in collecting a quantity of bad air, and storing it in the upper part of a lofty room; what is wanted is to remove the used and contaminated air altogether, and this we do. As to appearance, the outside

of the building is very effective; inside everything is sacrificed to utility. The great stack, with its rows of shelves, each two feet wide, separated by alleys of three feet width and cut apart horizontally by seven floors, is entirely without beauty; indeed it cannot be seen as a whole. But it stores a vast number of books in a very small space, and close to where they are wanted. The reading-halls, 150 feet long, 20 feet wide, only 16 feet high and cut up by desks, offer as little chance to the architect as any room you can imagine. But each of the four floors accommodates 100 readers with comfort."

We now went up to the fifth floor. "This," said my guide, "is our cataloging and machine room. The books are classed and prepared for cataloging, each in its own department, under the eye of the librarian of that class. Difficult cases may be referred to the chief librarian, who will decide them or turn them over to the council, an advisory body composed of the several librarians, who meet every week, presided over by their chief, and deliberate on doubtful points of administration. But in the department the book is only prepared, the heading is settled, notes are written, and the like; the actual cataloging is done here by *fotografy*, instantaneous of course, as all *fotografy* now is. Here, you see, the new books are arranged, open at the title, against this upright board. These are *duodecimos* and *octavos*, the *quartos* are put on that stand farther off, and the *folios* farther off still, so that all the plates may be of about the same size. The standard catalogue card now is ten centimeters wide and fifteen high. Underneath each title you notice a slip, on which the cataloger has written those facts which the title does not show; the number of volumes, various bibliographical particulars, and sometimes short criticisms. These are reproduced on the plate. Longer notes, which are sometimes needed, must have a separate card. When a sufficient number of boards are ready one is put upon this travelling-car which is moved forward by clock-work; as each title comes in focus the slide of the instrument is drawn, and the title and its note are *fotografat*. The whole operation is very short, and, since the

late improvements, much cheaper than writing. The printing from the negative is done in this way. We want, of course, different numbers of the different titles according to the number of times which they will enter into the catalog. A few, for instance, will only appear in the author catalog; others must be put under half a dozen different subjects. Multiplying the number of our catalogs by the number of appearances, and doubling this (for we always reserve the same number that we use) gives the required number. You see these round stands some with 6, some with 7, some with 8 sides, and so on. The cards to be printed are put into these and revolved in focus before the instrument. Different combinations give us the number of cards we want. If it is 25, two tens and a five are revolved; if it is 16, a ten and six are put on." But doesn't the mounting take a long time? "Oh, no; nobody mounts nowadays, we fotograf directly upon the card." The cards, by the way, were not kept in drawers, but ingeniously fastened together to make little books so contrived as to allow insertions without rebinding. "Experience has shown that they can be consulted more readily in this way than when kept in drawers."

I asked my guide what precautions he took against fire. "What is there to burn? The walls, floors, shelving, are all of incombustible materials. Books burn slowly, and it would be almost impossible for the fire to spread. There was an idea twenty-five years ago of dipping the books in the solution which they use for actresses' dresses and scenery on the stage; but it never took root. Librarians saw that they might as well spoil their books by fire as by water. It was a case of *propter vitam vivendi perdere causas*. We are not likely to burn. Our electric lights are absolutely safe; our elevator and other machinery are run by power from the Falls, brought in by wire, and all our heat is supplied from the outside by the City Heat Company. In the building there is nothing to start a fire and next to nothing to feed it."

"Have you any branches?" I asked. "Yes, several; in the outlying parts of the city are branch libraries, each containing a small store of books and a study-room, and connected by

telephone to the central library, so that books can be ordered for delivery or use there, which is a considerable relief for the central reading-rooms, to say nothing of the accommodation to the distant suburbs."

"But what," he continued, "will be a novelty to you, is the listening-room, where works, of which we have fonographic editions prepared by the best readers, are read by machines, often to crowded audiences. The rooms are distributed all over the city, fifty or more, and we are intending to increase the number. People go to them with their whole families, except to those where smoking is allowed, which are frequented for the most part by men alone. There they listen to the reading of a story or an entertaining history or biography, or book of travels, or a work of popular science. Sometimes one work occupies the whole evening, sometimes selections are read. The program for the whole city is advertised in the papers each day. The reading-machines have reached such a pitch of perfection that it is as if one were listening to an agreeable elocutionist. I prefer to do my own reading, but there are many whose eyes are weak, or who do not read with ease, or have not comfortable homes, or do not own the book that is to be read, or prefer to listen in company. We are very particular about the ventilation. We do not want any one to go to sleep." I asked him whether he thought these readings gave any real instruction, or only amusement. He admitted that an exciting novel would draw better than anything else, but said that they did not allow the selection to run too much to fiction. "In the circulation of books we have to follow the public taste, but in these listening-rooms we have the matter more in our control. Of course we must select bright books which the people will come to hear. Dull books must be rigidly excluded; but that is not difficult, because no dull book is published in reading-machine editions. Yes, I think a great deal of information is spread that way, and at any rate they are a valuable rival to the dram-shops, and keep many a young man out of bad places. The readings are usually in the evening. Where a school-room is used for the purpose it must be so; but, for our own branches, we have a

rule that if ten people ask for a reading in the day-time it shall be granted, with any book they choose. When trade is dull there are readings going on all day."

I omit many details in which their ways did not differ much from ours, — the book-trucks, the fall-power lifts just large enough for one person, the means of communication between all parts of the building by telephone or pneumatic tubes, or in any other way that the situation required. Their intention was to make the work easy and quick, and to reduce time and space as nearly as possible to zero. I cannot stop to describe the arrangements for allowing the public access to the shelves. But I may mention that the library was open every day in the year, without any exception; that one study-room was kept open as late at night as anybody wanted it, and on several occasions, when there was a special need, it had been kept open all night.

"One other practical point: The fonograf," I was told, "plays a great part in our library work. If Boston or Philadelphia has a rare book from which we wish extracts, instead of having it sent on with the risk of loss, we have a fonografic foil made of the desired passages, which are read off to us, or, if we pay a little more, are sent on. In the latter case, a duplicate, made by a new process, is kept at the library, so that librarians gradually accumulate fonografic reproductions of all their rarest books, and when they are called for have only to put the foil in the machine and have it read off through the wires to the end of the Union. All the libraries in the country, you see, are practically one library."

As I was leaving the library by the side door a troop of children came flocking in in such numbers that one would have thought it to be a public school. "I thought your delivery-room for boys and girls was on the front of the building," said I to my friend. "It is," said he. "These children are not going to borrow books but to learn how to use them. Public libraries are maintained here not more for the adult public than as a branch of the public schools. We have a reading-room devoted solely to the use of scholars, and a librarian who gives all his time to the assistance of

school-children. It was thought, when he was first appointed, that at many times in the day he would have nothing to do; but it was soon found that this was a mistake. What with assisting scholars when they come, keeping their accounts of special loans, preparing reference-lists on subjects given out for compositions, meeting classes who come on every day from some one of the schools to receive what might be called an object lesson in bibliokresis, — the use of books, — not only is his time fully occupied, but he has to have assistants.

"You must not be misled by my speaking of his preparing reference-lists for compositions. He does not lay these lists before the scholars. That would keep them too much in leading-strings. A main object of the system is to teach them to help themselves. So, although when, in their school course, they reach the time at which they first visit the library, he gives them such lists, he does it not so much to assist them in that particular case as to show them by an example what can be done. And he tries to lead them afterwards to do the same thing for themselves, only giving them hints from time to time, and by a Socratic questioning leading them to discover for themselves.

"There are great differences, of course, among the children. Some take to the exercise as ducks to water, some manifest the most perfect indifference. There is the same variety throughout education. But, on the whole, no part of our library work is more effective. I do not hesitate to say that the *useful* reading is quadrupled in any city where such a course is pursued, for the children with whom the method takes grow up as real inquirers instead of being desultory amusement-seekers. The ordinary novel-reader is not done away with, though his tribe may be diminished. But novel-readers come from a different class, and read for a different object. We never can convert them, and often cannot intercept the taste in youth. Our chief work is to bring into the fold those who otherwise would not read books at all. It is not the novel but the newspaper reader that we aim to catch.

"But there is more than this. You will think I am using great words, but I know our school librarian. In his best moments, and with his

best pupils, it is not the mere love and habit of reading, nor the wise selection of books and their judicious use, nor even the desire of knowledge alone that he would like most to impart, but some culture of heart and soul. This, however, is a matter that does not consist with rules and methods, and does not appear in reports. It comes from a word, a look, a tone, an influence. I cannot show you this.

"But I have shown you enough for you to see that our library is not a mere cemetery of dead books, but a living power, which supplies amusement for dull times, recreation for the tired, information for the curious, inspires the love of research in youth, and furnishes the materials for it in mature age, enables and in-

duces the scholar not to let his study end with his school days. When he leaves the grammar school, it receives him into the people's university, taking also those who graduate from the university and giving them too more work to do. Its mottoes are always '*plus ultra*' and '*excelsior*.' There is not an institution in the country more democratic, not one which distributes its benefits more impartially to rich and poor, and not one, I believe, in which there is less taint of corruption and less self-seeking in those who administer it."

With these words he left me, and I must leave you, thanking you for the kindness with which you have accompanied me in this little excursion in the land of dreams.

## REPORT ON THE READING OF THE YOUNG.

BY MISS MARY A. BEAN, LIBRARIAN OF THE BROOKLINE PUBLIC LIBRARY.

IN preparing what may be termed the Second Annual Report upon the "Reading of the Young," it seemed to me very desirable to preserve some sort of uniformity in the method of treatment, and I have therefore followed the admirable plan initiated by my predecessor in last year's report, and have gathered my information through postal inquiries, for the most part, not only sending to all the librarians quoted by Miss Hewins, on the supposition that they would have progress to report, but also pushing my inquiries beyond the pale of so-called leading libraries into twenty-five institutions of lesser celebrity but of undoubted standing and usefulness, on the premise that we might find the leaven working in hidden places in a way which might profit us to know.

The liberal harvest which the larger libraries yielded last season has failed to come to my garner, on the same principle as the "off years" in all standard fruit-bearing trees, I presume; yet I am happy to report the possession of some choice fruits, of which I shall give you specimens, simply pausing long enough to return cordial thanks to each and all of my kind correspondents, as well as to those who have invol-

untarily contributed material through the medium of their annual reports.

The question of juvenile reading is so closely allied to that of the coöperation of school and library that I must be pardoned if I trench somewhat upon that ground, since nearly all the work reported is, more or less, in that field, as the following extracts will show.

The Report of the Chicago Public Library, June, 1883, gives an extended and interesting account of the movement in that city, quite too long to be quoted entire, but the cream of which is thus put by Mr. Poole:—

"The plan in brief is this: An appointment is made with a teacher to bring his class to the library on a Saturday morning at 10 o'clock. A subject for the day is selected, usually one which the class had been studying from textbooks. The standard books and illustrated works in the library on that subject are laid out on the table in the directors' room, the teacher supervising the selection, and preparing himself to speak upon it, and especially with reference to the books before him, indicating such as are of the best authority, and describing the best method of using them. A preliminary talk is