

BOOKS IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: NEW YORK LIBRARIES AND THE
CULTURE-BUILDING ENTERPRISE, 1754-1904

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A Dissertation

Submitted to

The Graduate Faculty of

Auburn University

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Auburn, Alabama
August 8, 2005

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Doctor of Philosophy, August 8, 2005
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This dissertation examines the role that libraries played in the development of culture during the colonial period and throughout the nineteenth century. Focusing on a group of libraries in New York City, it seeks to explore the various meanings that publicly accessible collections of books held for different groups in American society and in the city of New York at different times. I define culture in terms of values. Culture is a constellation of mutually reinforcing values that are used to define a society or groups within a society.

Libraries during this period both reflected and served as a means of actively promoting such values. Generally their development points towards a gradual shift from a republican towards a liberal culture. The republicanism of the revolutionary stressed self-denying, socially inclusive virtues such as patriotism, piety, and civic duty. Liberalism by contrast emphasized values tied to individual needs or desires, or that tended to set one group of individuals apart from the rest of society. For example, as republicanism slowly waned in the decades before the Civil War, in some libraries the reading of fine literature was used to confirm the elite status of their members. At the same time, conflicts arose over the purchase of popular fiction, in part because it was considered merely a form of private recreation that served no worthwhile public purpose.

Republicanism and liberalism were never mutually exclusive, and although republicanism was certainly less influential in the later decades of the nineteenth century, New York's libraries expressed both republican and liberal culture throughout the century. For example, in the 1880s the city's free circulating libraries can be seen in part as a republican effort to harmonize a fragmented liberal society. The consolidation of these libraries in the New York Public Library at the beginning of the twentieth century represents a dramatic departure. The founding of the Public Library represents a blending of private and governmental authority and funding. The history of New York's libraries thus sheds light on changing conceptions of the public sphere.

The Chicago Manual of Style, 15th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003)

Microsoft Office Word 2003 (11.5604.5606)

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Introduction

On November 21, 1865, Frederic De Peyster addressed an audience of prominent New Yorkers on “The Moral and Intellectual Influence of Libraries upon Social Progress.” Delivered on the forty-first anniversary of the New-York Historical Society, his remarks indicate the central role that the city’s elite accorded libraries in the spread of enlightenment in the newly unified nation. While his claims for their influence upon society may seem extravagant from the perspective of the twenty-first century, libraries were indeed a critical part of the constellation of cultural institutions that developed in New York over the course of the nineteenth century. Rather than effecting change, it is more accurate to say that they reflected important changes that occurred as the city and the nation evolved into a modern industrial society. The history of libraries can provide a fruitful means of exploring those changes.

This dissertation examines the history of a group of libraries that played an important role in the development of culture in New York throughout the nineteenth century. They are all what might be termed “pre-public libraries.” Established for the most part well before the founding of the New York Public Library in 1895, they were all, to varying degrees, open to the general public, and, most importantly, they all consciously pursued distinctly public purposes. These libraries embraced a wide range of organizations and organizational structures. Some were parts of private associations

maintained ostensibly for the use of their members, while others were philanthropic concerns that sought to educate and uplift less the fortunate segments of the city's population. Their histories provide a revealing perspective on the institutional development of New York City during the nineteenth century. Privately funded, and founded to promote what is largely a private act, the act of reading, they were all animated by a uniquely public impulse. The founders and administrators of these libraries were all concerned with the development of culture.

Cultural historians have defined the word culture in many different ways and not all of these meanings are mutually exclusive. For example, the history of New York's pre-public libraries well might be explored in terms of the definition proposed by Peter Dobkin Hall: "a set of social institutions used by a people in organizing the entire range of their fundamental activities."¹ Hall's functional approach is valuable in that it highlights the active role that people played in developing those institutions and the changes that occurred as their fundamental activities shifted over time. My own definition also emphasizes agency and change. Culture is a constellation of mutually reinforcing values that a group of people promotes and uses to define itself. A culture can be very broadly or very narrowly delineated and can be used as much to exclude as to bind people together. What I emphatically do not mean when I use the word culture is what came to be known later in the nineteenth century as "high culture," an appreciation of and reverence for fine art and belles-lettres. Such a definition implies a relatively static conception of culture that focuses solely upon elite groups.² The history of New York's pre-public libraries shows that the development of culture over the course of the nineteenth century was a fluid, complex process involving many different groups

combining and clashing as the values they promoted shifted and changed. I call this “the culture-building enterprise” to emphasize to active, purposeful, and essentially optimistic nature of the process.

A considerable portion of De Peyster’s lengthy address concerned the values that libraries presumably helped to inculcate in the American people. He placed great emphasis upon the “manifold applications” of “moral and religious ideas” to “the duties of honesty, integrity and benevolence, of loyalty to government and law, and of universal brotherhood.”³ I argue that, particularly early in the century, the elites who founded libraries were vitally concerned with promoting a republican culture, a constellation of mutually reinforcing values that were deemed essential in nurturing an ideal republican citizenry. These values included piety, morality, civic responsibility, and patriotism. Although these qualities were considered integrally related, certain libraries tended to stress some more than others. For example, the New-York Historical Society, of which De Peyster was president, emphasized civic duty and devotion to country. Taken as a whole, New York’s pre-public libraries, during the first decades of the nineteenth century, self-consciously promoted an inclusive culture founded upon republican virtues. They shared the common goal of forging for a new nation a new and distinctive culture defined by a unifying set of values.

By 1865 however, De Peyster’s emphasis upon republicanism was in many ways problematic. Demographically the nation was increasingly diverse as new immigrant groups settled in and changed the character of New York and other cities. Just as important, American’s fundamental activities had changed in ways that made a culture of

shared values less tenable. By 1865 all white males, including the foreign-born, had the vote and the stable politics of deference that had characterized the colonial period had given way to a more divisive style of politics managed by professional political parties. An economy based primarily upon home and craft production and barter was replaced by an industrial system in which workers made things they did not buy and bought things they did not make.⁴ The new system created new classes and unprecedented disparities of wealth. Under these new conditions the idea of a shared republican culture became increasingly untenable. As Americans' fundamental activities changed, libraries in New York City, as culture-building, value-forging institutions, changed as well.

In his speech De Peyster was perhaps more concerned with the relationship between libraries and progress than with the moral influence of libraries. His definition of progress was intimately connected with the creation of wealth and the promotion of commerce. For example, he urged the establishment of libraries as depositories of materials that might facilitate scientific discoveries, in part because science, as the basis for advances in agriculture, commerce, and industrial production, was an "avenue to wealth."⁵ He also maintained that the influence of libraries and other cultural institutions in New York was felt throughout the United States because of the city's importance as center of trade. As the products of the nation "find their way to this metropolis, and from this point, as a radiating centre, are poured forth to every portion of the world," so too the moral and intellectual ideas nurtured in "the great distributive emporium" spread "throughout the whole extent of our country."⁶ At the same time that he celebrated republican virtues, De Peyster also extolled values associated with wealth and commerce.

I argue that the histories of New York's pre-public libraries reflect a shift from a republican to a liberal culture. The shared values De Peyster highlighted in other parts of his address, the obligations of benevolence, loyalty, and "universal brotherhood," are self-denying virtues. Republicanism held that the first duty of a citizen is to safeguard the commonweal. It conceived the ideal polity as a static, homogeneous body of virtuous citizens and posited a unified public good that transcended private, individual interests. Central to republican thought was the fear of factions, selfish combinations of the privileged few that sought to subvert the liberties of the republic. Wealth and commerce were by their very nature corrupting, since they place private gain and individual interests above the interest of society.

Liberalism, by contrast, viewed society as a multitude of conflicting interests. Rather than fearing self-interested minorities, it was founded on the conviction that the public good resulted from the pursuit of private interests. It saw indefinite progress rather than stasis as the hallmark of a healthy polity, and celebrated ambition, opportunity, and the autonomy of the individual. The histories of New York's pre-public libraries therefore reflect a shift from a culture of shared, self-denying civic values to one in which different, potentially conflicting interests pursued a variety of particular values. For example, although the New-York Historical Society originally emphasized civic responsibility and patriotism, in the years following De Peyster's address it increasingly emphasized genealogy as a means of affirming the elite status of its members. The critical question raised by "The Moral and Intellectual Influence of Libraries on Social Progress" is whether, as late as 1865, republicanism was still the guiding force behind these culture-building institutions.

The debate over republicanism and liberalism has been one of the more productive (and passionate) in American historiography and its roots may ultimately be traced to historians early in the twentieth century. Progressive historians such as Charles Beard stressed conflict in American history. Focusing on the economy rather than culture or ideology, they viewed the American past as a series of inevitable clashes between antagonistic economic and regional interests.⁷ Reacting to this paradigm, the consensus historians of the 1950s, most notably Richard Hofstadter and Louis Hartz, did not deny the persistence of conflict, but rather argued that it played out within a consensual, liberal framework. Perhaps the most definitive and influential statement of the consensus thesis is Hartz' *The Liberal Tradition in America: an Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (1955). For Hartz the key figure in American history was an Englishman, John Locke. Hartz held that Americans have consistently adhered to Lockean liberal values that celebrate ambition, entrepreneurship, and individualism. They cherished Lockean values not because they avidly read his *Two Treatises on Government*, but because they were "natural liberals." Having skipped the feudal stage of economic and political development, and the violent revolutions and counter-revolutions to which it gave rise, they naturally developed a modern, stable capitalist culture; having been "born equal," a phrase Hartz borrowed from Tocqueville, they naturally accepted a political and economic system based upon competition between free and equal individuals.⁸

While the Hartzian scholarship held that formal Lockean political theory was largely irrelevant to the American experience, the revisionist republican historiography that challenged it was firmly grounded, at least initially, in intellectual history. The

scholarship on republicanism began in 1967 with Bernard Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, and was elaborated upon by Gordon Wood in *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (1969), and J.G.A. Pocock in *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (1975). These works argued that the revolutionary generation's republican theory was borrowed directly from English opponents to royal authority in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Bailyn's chronology begins with the reign of Charles II, when the powers of the crown expanded as it used an inflated patronage, and a large standing army, both financed by heavy national debt, to menace the liberty of the people. The men who aligned themselves with the monarchy were, to use Bailyn's phrase, the "court party." The "country party" that opposed them stressed the importance of balanced, tripartite government, the independence inherent in freehold property, and a virtuous, civic-minded citizenry in preserving political liberty. The leaders of the American Revolution naturally adopted this body of thought as the most cogent explanation of the political crisis of the 1760s and 1770s and used it to justify the break with Great Britain. Bailyn, Wood, and Pocock all agreed upon the critical influence of the country polemicists and differed only over when republicanism began and ended. For Bailyn, it originated in the seventeenth century and died out with the adoption of the Constitution. Pocock traced republicanism back to Renaissance writers such as Machiavelli and never actually specifies when it ended.⁹

By the 1980s the republican theme had sparked a heated debate among American historians. On one hand, many scholars, most notably Joyce Appleby, maintained that Hartz had essentially been right all along. While they conceded that republicanism

enjoyed a brief ascendancy during and immediately after the revolution, they argued that by the nineteenth century the country was thoroughly liberal.¹⁰ On the other hand, many historians applied the notion of republicanism to a diversity of particular topics within American history and thereby extended its dominance well into the nineteenth and even into the twentieth century. Several important studies in labor history, for example, examined the ways in which it animated the labor movement for most of the nineteenth century. Bruce Laurie and Sean Wilentz, among others, argued that artisanal republicanism was a distinctly American tradition that “associated the emblems, language, and politics of the Republic with the labor system, the social traditions, the very products of the craft.”¹¹

A simplistic dichotomy between republicanism and liberalism distorts the complex process by which culture developed in America during this period. These were not formally articulated philosophies consciously set in opposition to one another. In fact, they shared important points of convergence, such as an emphasis upon Protestant Christianity and a millennial view of the American experiment in government. Similarly, the people who founded and administered the pre-public libraries were not political philosophers. They were educated, civic-minded citizens searching for ways to respond to the enormous changes that occurred during their lifetimes. Although liberalism was certainly more influential by 1865, they drew upon both liberal and republican values throughout the century. The waning influence of republicanism is reflected in the increasing importance of exclusive values that define particular groups or interests rather than inclusive values that define a republican culture.

One way to trace how and when this cultural shift occurred is to examine changes in the “fundamental activities” of culture-building institutions. These libraries were part of a wide range of voluntary associations on both the local and national level through which men and women combined to effect public purposes at a time of limited government and unprecedented social, economic, and political change. It is impossible to understand cultural development in the United States outside of the context of nineteenth century voluntarism. Until comparatively recently, American historians focused on formal political and economic institutions, and tended to overlook other types of voluntary association. In 1944, in a paper entitled “Biography of a Nation of Joiners,” Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. offered a sweeping overview of the “associative principle” in American history. He called it a “spirit which had come to penetrate every aspect of American life,” and argued that voluntary associations formed an “irregular government” that “often possesses greater reality than the constitutional authority.”¹² Since the publication of Schlesinger’s seminal article, and particularly since the 1980s, voluntarism, in all its complexity and variety, has been a central topic in American history. Historians have used a number of thematic and theoretical approaches to help illuminate and historicize the activities of voluntary organizations. The histories of New York’s nineteenth century libraries can be more fully understood when placed within this historiographical context.

Much of the scholarship on voluntarism has focused on reform and charitable organizations. The earliest works tend to portray reformers as selfless idealists embarked upon a crusade to perfect mankind. Alice Felt Tyler’s *Ferment of Reform* (1944), for example, held that antebellum reform was a movement inspired by a common belief in democratic values and an expression of “man’s endeavor to make this world a better

place for himself and his children.”¹³ During the 1960s and the 1970s, historians largely abandoned this heroic model of reform for one that emphasized social control. They maintained that reform organizations were essentially tools with which elites in society sought to dominate an unruly underclass. Different historians offered different accounts of who controlled whom, and for what reasons. For instance, Clifford S. Griffin’s pioneering work on antebellum reform, *Their Brothers’ Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (1960), argued that Protestant evangelical organizations such as the American Tract Society and the American Bible Society were the means by which the heirs of the colonial elite attempted to reassert the moral authority they had lost during the Jacksonian period.¹⁴ Regardless of how it identifies the controlled or the controllers, the historiography of social control portrays an anxiety-ridden, declining group attempting to impose repressive, alien values upon an unresponsive, or even hostile oppressed group in order to advance its own exclusive class interests.

The historiographical argument over the concept of social control was taken up by library historians in the 1970s. In 1973, in an article in *Library Journal*, Michael Harris contended that leaders of the early public library movement such as George Ticknor and Edward Everett were by no means the enlightened idealists portrayed by Alice Felt Tyler and others. Rather they were forthrightly reactionary aristocrats who founded libraries that were “cold, rigidly inflexible, and elitist institutions” designed as an antidote to “irresponsibility, intemperance, and rampant democracy.”¹⁵ Harris further charged that librarians and library historians deluded themselves into accepting a “warm and comforting” narrative of the origins of public libraries, because “it is quite fashionable to be identified with idealistic and humanitarian reform in this country.”¹⁶ Two years later,

in a response in *Library Journal*, Phyllis Dain took up the challenge implied in his argument. She dismissed his emphasis upon social control as “a new set of beliefs . . . postulated without rigorous analysis, solid verification, or appreciation of complexity.”¹⁷ She countered that simply because Ticknor and others were conservative and aristocratic does not mean that their motives for supporting public libraries were repressive and sinister. Rather these early leaders were “imbued with . . . the 18th-century rationalists’ faith that the lower classes could be integrated into society through education.”¹⁸ Drawing in part upon her research into the founding of the New York Public Library, Dain also argued that library readers were often able to use libraries as a means taking control of their own lives. She concluded that a library could offer them “room to maneuver, to experiment, . . . to get from it the means to power.”¹⁹

The concept of social control is useful, to an extent, in explaining when and why these libraries engaged in certain activities. I argue, for example, that the members of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen used their library in part to instill in their employees values, such as industry, sobriety, and punctuality, that served their interests as employers. However, the emphasis in social control theory upon anxiety and coercion obscures the complex relations that evolved between a library’s administrators, its readers, and society as a whole. More recent scholarship has sought to avoid the moralizing simplifications of both the heroic model and the social control model of reform. Paul Boyer, for example, in *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (1978) pointed out that there was often a community of interests shared by the reformers and their clients, and that both groups regarded the future with as much hope as anxiety. This certainly holds true for the General Society’s Apprentices’ Library. The

theory of social control would be hard pressed to explain simply in terms of coercion and repression the success of an institution in which participation was entirely voluntary. Perhaps more important, Boyer also criticized the social control interpretation for focusing exclusively upon the underclass and ignoring the effects that reform movements may have had upon the reformers themselves. He stressed that membership in a reform organization “might reflect less the wish to control others than an impulse toward self-definition, a need to avow publicly one’s own class aspirations.”²⁰

More recent scholarship on voluntary associations has explored the different meanings that voluntarism held for the volunteers themselves. In particular, many historians have examined more closely the role that gender played in the activities in which they engaged. Forty years after Schlesinger’s “Biography of a Nation of Joiners,” Anne Firor Scott wrote an article that discussed the importance of women in reform organizations, charging that the topic presented a “case of historical invisibility.” She argued that current gender biases blinded historians to its historical significance, that voluntary associations were overlooked because they were the primary means by which women participated in public life. Excluded formally or informally from careers in business or politics, they “created amongst themselves organizations through which they formed social values and created social institutions.”²¹ Since the 1980s, Scott and other feminist scholars have broadened the scope of American history with gendered histories of reform and benevolence. Focusing more upon the volunteers than their clients, they have explored the different ways that voluntary associations were used as a means of self-definition, the ways in which they permitted women to create for themselves new roles and new values.²²

During the early decades of the nineteenth century, women were implicitly or explicitly excluded from many libraries. Their presence or absence can reveal a great deal about the values promoted by these culture-building institutions and the complexities and tensions inherent in the culture-building enterprise. For example, the General Society's Apprentices' Library, after much debate, admitted young women in 1846, earlier than many of the other pre-public libraries in New York. Asking why industrial employers would seek to promote reading among their female as well as their male employees can shed light on cultural changes that accompanied the transformation to an industrial economy. Later in the century, women played a critical role in the founding and administration of the free circulating libraries that eventually served as the nucleus of the New York Public Library's system of neighborhood libraries. Yet when these private organizations were absorbed by the public institution, the middle class women who ran them were almost entirely marginalized. We can learn much about the particular interests that the pre-public institutions served by exploring the cultural values that were implied by the exclusion or inclusion of women.²³

Both republican and liberal ideology explicitly reserved separate, largely private roles for women. As Linda Kerber and others have pointed out, the ideal republican female was the "republican mother," a woman nurtured in future citizens the civic virtues that would save the republic from corruption.²⁴ Early in the century the exclusion of women from these libraries was an important part of defining them as exclusively masculine institutions. Similarly, nineteenth century liberalism posited a "woman's sphere," wherein the ideal female would raise virtuous children and provide for her husband a calming refuge from a competitive, amoral marketplace.²⁵ The boundaries of

the women's sphere could be expanded, however, to include for women limited public roles that were now considered an extension of their domestic, motherly role. Thus a respectable, unmarried female might pursue a career as a librarian and retain her respectability. The values associated with women's work in the pre-public libraries thus reflect the shift from a republican to a liberal culture.

Much of the recent scholarship that has examined voluntary associations as tools used by different groups in a process of self-definition has drawn upon Juergen Habermas's notion of a "public sphere." In *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) and other writings, Habermas described this as an area of civic activity that emerged in Europe in the eighteenth century that was situated between the purely private activity of the individual or the family on one hand and the formal public authority of the state and the church on the other. It was "the realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed," and, as such, was the sphere in which an ascendant bourgeoisie debated and influenced the terms of public authority.²⁶ Habermas's work has lent great depth to the historiography of voluntary associations by focusing attention on the meanings of activity that is non-private, but not narrowly political or economic.

In the context of American history in the nineteenth century, however, Habermas can be somewhat problematic. First, because suffrage in the United States was expanded much earlier than in Europe to include all white, adult males, relations within the public sphere between his notion of a bourgeoisie and other groups was radically different.²⁷ Also, because Habermas was concerned primarily with the political consequences of the public sphere, he slights a wide range of activities that are not overtly political but that are

nonetheless publicly significant. For example, the work of women within reform organizations does not conform, strictly speaking, to his definition of a public sphere.²⁸ The most fruitful scholarship on nineteenth century voluntarism has taken Habermas as a starting point, but expanded the dimensions of the public sphere to include a wider range of civic endeavors. In terms of the histories of New York's pre-public libraries, I define the public sphere as the realm of our social life in which something approaching public *values* can be formed. These values may be inclusive or exclusive, so that, in the United States, the public sphere evolved from a relatively unified sphere that instilled republican values to a relatively fragmented one in which different groups fostered particular values that defined themselves apart from, and at times in opposition to, other groups. As the century progressed, Americans increasingly accepted a liberal public sphere in which different interests based upon different values competed with one another.²⁹ While the republican conception of a public sphere never disappeared altogether, references to republican values became more ambiguous and problematic.

At first glance it might seem that De Peyster's remarks on the republican virtues that libraries helped to instill were simply rhetorical. Yet to dismiss the language of republicanism as mere rhetoric is not only condescending, it is a squandered opportunity to explore the complex relationships between words and culture. Some of the richest scholarship in cultural history has focused on the role that language plays in the construction of social reality. The extreme position is taken by postmodernist writers who, arguing that there is no essential connection between the "signifier" (word) and the "signified" (meaning), delight in deconstructing language into meaninglessness. A more constructive approach is taken by historians who, in the words of Joyce Appleby, Lynn

Hunt, and Margaret Jacob “acknowledge the code-making propensities of human groups and the use of those codes to distinguish insiders from outsiders.”³⁰ In this sense, the word “republican” is used in various contexts to expand or contract the boundaries of the cultural world inhabited by the founders and administrators of the pre-public libraries. Such encoding does imply the sinister motives ascribed to them in narratives of social control, but rather a desire to situate themselves in a changing and sometimes unsettling world.³¹

While the managers’ encoded values are a critical component of the history of these libraries, it is equally important not to lose sight of the men and women who actually made use of the collections. Wayne Wiegand and others have recently criticized library historians for “concentrat[ing] too much on the library from the inside out . . . too much on the institution.” They urge instead that scholars consider “the library from the outside in . . . on the people who used . . . the institution” and why they chose to do so.³² It is quite possible, particularly in the case of a philanthropic institution such as the General Society’s library or the New York Free Circulating Library, that readers’ expectations were very different from or even in conflict with those of the elites who directed it. Approaching library history from the perspective of “print culture studies,” however, can be problematic in some respects. It is difficult to infer from circulation records and other documents what library users wanted from libraries, and in many cases those records were simply not kept for most of this period or have not survived. Nonetheless, studies in print culture have immense potential to broaden our understanding of the role of the pre-public libraries in the culture-building enterprise throughout the nineteenth century.

New York City did not start a free, tax-supported public library system until 1895. One reason it lagged behind many other cities is that through the 1880s the pre-public libraries adequately met the needs of many of the various interests that comprised the city's public sphere. Yet this is only a partial explanation. Sidney Ditzion's *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture* (1947) is still the most comprehensive account of the movement in the United States for public libraries that began in New England in the 1850s. Published just four years after Tyler's *Freedom's Ferment*, it follows the heroic model of nineteenth-century reform and places particular emphasis on the influence of republicanism upon the founders of public libraries.³³ I believe this analysis has some merit when applied to the public institutions that were established around the middle of the century. Yet by the end of the century, the public sentiment for tax-supported libraries was more than simply an expression of republican values. I argue that the founding of the New York Public Library reflects a fundamental reconfiguration of the public sphere. Like the earlier shift from a republican to a liberal culture, this reordering resulted from a change in Americans' fundamental activities and was accompanied by what Robert Wiebe termed a "revolution in values."

The "classical" liberal theory that developed during the rise of industrial capitalism held that the public interest was best served by allowing conflicting economic, political, or cultural interests to compete in a public sphere in which formal state authority played no part. By the end of the nineteenth century, this view was rapidly eclipsed by what I call the bureaucratic liberal state. Bureaucratic liberalism, which developed during the rise of corporate capitalism, held that the state should play an active role in serving, regulating, and reconciling competing interests. A new class of expert

bureaucrats, including librarians, acting under formal state authority, performed functions that had previously been the responsibility of private individuals within the public sphere. The public sphere thus contracted as the activities of the state expanded. The shift to bureaucratic liberalism was not complete until at least the 1920s, but it began on the local level in cities like New York as early as the 1890s. The founding of a public library that in large measure overshadowed the pre-public libraries reflects a movement towards a new conception of the public sphere.³⁴

This dissertation examines the histories of several libraries that played a critical role in the culture-building enterprise in the city of New York. Chapter one considers the founding and early years of the first successful pre-public library in the city, the New York Society Library. The Society Library was established in the years before the Revolution to promote knowledge and refinement in a colonial seaport town. Its founders were inspired by a republican enthusiasm for learning and a desire to improve and refine the entire community. As it entered the nineteenth century, however, the Society became increasingly exclusive and elitist. The history of the Society Library raises fundamental questions concerning the different purposes served by making a collection of book available to the public. Chapter two looks at another relatively exclusive library, the library of the New-York Historical Society. The New-York Historical Society was one of the first and most prominent organizations of its kind in the country. Its library sheds light on the meanings of voluntary association, particularly among elites, during the antebellum period, as well as the different uses that elites made of history.

Chapter three is on the library established for apprentices by the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen. In many ways, the Apprentices' Library in the early nineteenth century was intended to serve the same republican purposes as the Society Library in the late eighteenth century. It was founded to educate and refine all the members of a community, only in this case it was a community more narrowly defined, the artisanal republic. At the same time, the General Society's library was representative of that part of the antebellum reform movement that sought to uplift the working class through education. The Biblical Library of the American Bible Society, examined in chapter four, was an important part of a somewhat different strain of antebellum reform. The Bible Society's mission was to bring the Scriptures to the poor throughout the country and across the globe, and its library was founded to further that mission. Like republicanism, evangelical Christianity was animated by an inclusive, leveling sense of community, but it embraced not just the nation, but the entire world. Just as important, the development of Biblical Library sheds light on the emergence of the national corporation. A complex, corporate form of organization evolved within large-scale voluntary associations in the public sphere even before it was adopted by for-profit enterprises in the economic sphere.

In various ways, all the libraries explored in chapters one through four reflect a gradual shift from a republican to a liberal culture. For example, by the 1850s, the leaders of the General Society conceived the Apprentices' Library not only in terms of communal self-improvement, but also as a means of individual advancement, as a way for young men to pursue their own economic self-interest. The free circulating libraries, examined in chapter five, were founded in the 1880s in part to recapture a republican sense of

community. They represent an effort by the city's elite to uplift the masses and bridge the divisions of a fragmented liberal society. At the same time, however, the free libraries themselves reflected the complex ethnic, religious, and class divisions of the city in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. Finally, chapter six explores the long and complex history of the founding of the New York Public Library. The creation of a public library as the term is currently understood reflects a reconfiguration of the public sphere. The city's public library was (and is) an institution funded partly with public monies and partly with private endowments. It was governed both by private individuals and by elected public officials. The library was a blend of public and private. It represents a reconfigured public sphere in which there were no longer rigid divisions between public and private activity.

Although all of the pre-public libraries are still in existence, they have all declined significantly since the founding of the New York Public Library. Nevertheless, during the nineteenth century, they were an essential component of the culture-building enterprise. Yet both cultural historians and historians of American libraries have for the most part failed to incorporate libraries into a larger history of American culture. Cultural historians tend to overlook libraries when examining cultural institutions, and library historians too often celebrate the history of libraries or the lives of prominent librarians rather than placing them in an historical and cultural context.³⁵ By tracing the evolution of several different types of libraries over a long period of time, I hope to shed light on the changing meanings of culture-building for different groups in the city. The history of New York's pre-public libraries can lend greater depth to such historiographical issues as

republicanism and liberalism, voluntary association, and the concept of a public sphere and thereby place the history of American libraries within the context of important debates regarding the development of American culture.

Chapter One
**The New York Society Library: Books, Authority, and Publics in Colonial and
Early Republican New York**

In 1754, a group of earnest young men founded the New York Society Library to advance the cause of learning and refinement in a small seaport town on the fringe of the British Empire. It was the first successful “public library” in the colony and one of the first in North America. As a public institution, its history from the colonial era through the early republican period mirrors changes in the ways that the public, and public and private activity, were conceived during these years. As a public collection, its development and use traces shifts in attitudes towards the kinds of knowledge that were regarded as socially useful and the bases of authority for disseminating such knowledge. The history of the New York Society Library through the 1840’s thus sheds light on issues that were critical to the development of the United States as a modern, liberal society. Generally it reflects a trend towards a broader, more inclusive conception of the public and a more democratic conception of public authority. Just as important, the history of the library shows the ambiguities and tensions that arose as elite New Yorkers struggled to come to grips with these new ideas.

The Society Library’s founding and early years were imbued with the ideals of republicanism. Republicanism was and is a term that defies any precise definition.¹ It is best understood not as a formally articulated political philosophy, but rather as

constellation of mutually reinforcing values.² The republican founders of the library believed in the division of civil and religious authority, in the separation of church and state, and in the power of rationalism to dispel myth and dogma. They sought, to varying degrees, to break the bonds of hierarchy that tied individuals in a monarchical society so that they were judged on personal merit rather than the accident of birth. Above all, the founders sought to promote and safeguard the commonweal. They valued a public good that transcended selfish, private interests, and believed the Society Library served the public good by educating and refining a republican society.

Although they were closely related in certain respects, republicanism and democracy, particularly for the founders of the library, were not the same. Democracy was linked to liberalism, which celebrated equality rather than independence, individualism rather than the commonweal. During the complex process by which the country shifted from a republican to a liberal society, the character of the New York Society Library transformed as well. After the Revolution, as republican enthusiasm cooled, it became progressively more exclusive. Although it had never been quite as inclusive as the founders' republican rhetoric had suggested, in the nineteenth century, the library was increasingly at odds with and less relevant to the liberal, democratic society around it. Its largely patrician membership steadily withdrew from the active role it had played in the cultural and intellectual life of the city.

The idea of a public library as it is currently understood, a tax-supported, circulating collection freely available to everyone in a community, is a relatively recent development. It was not until the 1840's that states began to pass laws that permitted municipalities to

levy taxes to fund libraries, and many towns and cities, including the City of New York, did not establish a public library system until much later in the century.³ In the eighteenth century, a public library was public in the same sense that a public house or public conveyance was public. The term meant not that the collection was free, but simply that it was available ostensibly to any member of the public, as opposed to one belonging to an individual or a closed, private organization such as a school or a learned society.⁴ Moreover, in this monarchical society, as Gordon Wood has made clear, the “modern distinctions between state and society, public and private, were just emerging.” Aside from the military and the courts, government in North America and in the mother country largely acted passively, granting private individuals or organizations the authority to pursue public ends.⁵ This was in fact how all the colonies were settled. In the eighteenth-century sense of the term, the first person to attempt to found a public library in the city of New York was Thomas Bray, a minister and missionary of the Church of England. A brief history of Bray’s library suggests by contrast the degree to which the New York Society Library represented a break from this pre-modern, monarchical world.

Thomas Bray was born in Shropshire in 1656 and graduated from Oxford’s All Souls College in 1678. He was ordained an Anglican minister in 1681 and appointed the Bishop of London’s commissary, or agent, to the colony of Maryland in 1695. Bray’s influence, however, extended to all of the colonies in North America. In 1699, he founded the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and in 1701, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. The aim of these complementary organizations was to foster piety and learning and thereby reassert the authority of the Church of England overseas.⁶ New York in particular was considered rife with ignorance

and dissent. Although the Anglican Church was legally established, it was far outnumbered by the Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed Churches.⁷

At the heart of Bray's mission to bring Christian enlightenment to the overseas plantations was an ambitious plan to establish a system of public libraries in every colony. Each was to be provided with three kinds of collections, organized by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and financed by pious and public-spirited clergy, gentry, and merchants. First, Bray promoted the founding of parochial libraries, comprised mostly of theological works and intended for the private use of the minister in each parish. He considered these an essential means of encouraging poor clergymen to serve in the American wilderness.⁸ Next there were to be "layman's libraries" located in towns throughout the provinces, circulating collections of books designed to promote morality and piety, entrusted to the care of the local minister.⁹ Finally, in its capital each colony was to have a noncirculating "Library of more Universal Learning, for the Service and Encouragement of those who shall launch out farther in the pursuit of Useful Knowledge, as well Natural as Divine."¹⁰ The first consignment of 220 volumes for New York arrived in 1698 and was kept in the vestry of Trinity Church, the first Anglican church in the city.¹¹

Bray's extensive writings to promote his library plan, in particular his enthusiasm for collections of "universal learning," at times seem to mirror the expansive, critical spirit of eighteenth-century thought. In an unpublished manuscript entitled "*Bibliothecae Americanae*, or Catalogues of the Libraries sent into the Severall Provinces," he explained that the purpose of the collections was to "give Requisite Helps to Considerable Attainments in all the parts of necessary and usefull knowledge . . . that

great Perfection of the Rational Nature.” Prefaced to the catalogs is an extensive outline of all knowledge, divine and humane, and brief descriptions of the types of books to be found in each type of library, including the *bibliothecae provincialis*. The collections in New York and the other provincial capitals were to be “more than ordinarily furnished with books” on all of the most useful of the humane sciences.¹² In reality all of the Bray libraries were predominantly theological. In New York, of the 156 titles in the original consignment, 117, or 75 percent, were works of theology. The proportions were similar in the four other provincial libraries.¹³

There are also suggestions in Bray’s writings of a more modern, inclusive notion of the public that his libraries would serve and a more modern, meritocratic conception of authority over books and knowledge. In “*Bibliothecae Americanae*” he explained that the libraries of universal learning in the provincial capitals were intended for “the use and Improvement . . . of the whole Country.” In an essay “Promoting all Necessary and Useful Knowledge,” he held that learning “does more distinguish the Possessors of it, than Titles, Riches, or great Places,” that “the Man of Understanding is . . . [more] inwardly and truly respected” than he who “may command the Cap and the Knee.”¹⁴ In practice, however, Bray’s libraries served an exclusive public and were part of a hierarchy in which authority was legitimated by titles. Bray stated repeatedly in his writings that the books sent to North America were necessary to enable the Church’s ministers to instruct the people and this paternalistic relation is graphically illustrated in the bookplate of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel that was affixed to them. It depicts a larger-than-life missionary on a ship preaching down to a horde of tiny but grateful colonists on the shore of the American wilderness.¹⁵ Moreover, the hierarchy of the Church was

legally and theologically connected with the hierarchy of the crown. In addition to the SPG bookplate, each of the books was also labeled on its cover, in capitals, “*sub auspiciis Wilhelmi III.*”¹⁶ Further, the public that had access to the collections was by no means “the whole country.” In New York, when the titles of the first consignment of books were entered into the vestry minutes of Trinity Church, as prescribed in Bray’s instructions, it was stipulated that they were “for the use Of the Ministers.” There is no evidence that any layperson ever used the collection, and it appears likely that they were kept under lock and key. Most of the other provincial libraries were also used only by the clergy.¹⁷

Bray’s New York library was augmented occasionally by local ministers and crown officials and remained in the vestry of Trinity Church until the Revolution.¹⁸ In September of 1776, it was destroyed by fire when the British occupied the city. It was not a public library in any sense of the term, and the knowledge that it disseminated and the authority to control that knowledge emanated from and were circumscribed by the crown and the church. The early history of the New York Society Library shows ways in which these accepted notions of knowledge, authority, and the public were contested in the city in the decades before the Revolution.

Bernard Bailyn and others have noted that “there was no sharp break between a placid pre-Revolutionary era and the turmoil of the 1760's and 1770's." The conflict between the Tories, who supported the crown, and the Whigs, who sought to place limits on the royal prerogative, increased sharply throughout the first half of the eighteenth century and the arguments employed by each party were honed in innumerable attacks in pamphlets, newspapers, lawsuits, and personal correspondence.¹⁹ The context of this conflict was

distinctly local. Within each colony political divisions arose from a unique and complex combination of personal, familial, religious, and economic motives. The founding of the New York Society Library reflected and was part of pre-Revolutionary colonial politics.

The conflict between Whigs and Tories in New York escalated sharply in the 1730's. John Peter Zenger, a printer and the editor of the *Weekly Journal*, in the midst of the heated municipal elections of 1734, launched a spirited attack on Governor William Cosby, Chief Justice James De Lancey, and other members of the provincial government. Purposefully echoing the arguments and rhetoric used a decade earlier by John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon in the mother country in their savaging of the Walpole administration in the *Independent Whig*, Zenger accused the crown officials of corruption, incompetence, and of "tyrannically flouting the laws of England and New York." Governor Cosby promptly ordered the most offensive issues of the *Journal* burned in public and had Zenger jailed for seditious libel. When the case came to trial, he was ably defended by James Alexander and William Smith, who successfully argued that Zenger was guilty of nothing more than printing the truth.²⁰

In the ensuing decades, political conflict in the colony most often revolved around a bitter contest between the De Lanceys, representing the crown, and the Livingstons, who led the "popular party". To an extent, their rivalry reflected conflicting economic interests. The De Lanceys were backed by wealthy merchants who wanted to shift the tax burden as much as possible to New York's landowners. The Livingstons represented families with landed estates that wanted increased revenue from import and export duties, in part to finance a stronger military that could protect their isolated holdings in the North. The animosity between the two factions was also founded to an extent upon

religious differences. The Church of England, nominally the established church, was the smallest, but also the wealthiest and most powerful denomination in the colony, and De Lancey and most crown officials belonged to it. The Livingstons led the dissenting congregations, including the Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed Churches, the two largest in New York City.²¹

Beginning in the early 1750's, the popular party's most effective polemicists were three young lawyers, William Livingston, John Morin Scott, and William Smith, Jr. All three were Presbyterians, and all three had studied for the bar in the office of William Smith, Sr. Known throughout the colonies as the "New York triumvirate," or to their enemies as the "wicked triumvirate" or the "vile and despicable Triumvirate," they led the attack in the local press on the De Lancey faction and on the royal prerogative generally.²² Even one of their most implacable opponents, the Reverend Samuel Johnson of Trinity Church, grudgingly admitted that it was "indeed fencing against a flail to hold any dispute with them."²³ The triumvirate also promoted a variety of public enterprises designed to refine the cultural and moral climate of their city. In 1748, they organized an informal club called the Society for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge, which, unlike Bray's Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, welcomed members from every Protestant denomination.²⁴ In 1754, the triumvirate founded the New York Society Library.

The founding of the Society Library was a controversy within a controversy. In 1746, the provincial Assembly had authorized a lottery to help establish a publicly supported college.²⁵ In 1754, Trinity Church donated fifty acres of land in New York City on the conditions that the presidents of the school be communicants of the Anglican faith and that Anglican prayers be used in the daily services.²⁶ William Livingston was one of

only three non-Anglicans appointed to the school's ten-member board, and, like any good republican, he detected a conspiracy. He, Scott, and Smith were convinced that King's College (later Columbia University) was an Anglican plot to subvert the city's intellectual as well as its religious liberty. In the words of its founding articles, the Society Library was established in part to be "advantageous to our intended College." For the triumvirate, this meant not simply that the students would have access to the books, but that the collection would help counteract the Anglican influence. The controversy attending the founding of the library was thus a skirmish in the war of words over the founding of King's College.²⁷

In 1752 and 1753, Livingston, Scott, and Smith published a weekly journal to disseminate their views on the college and other local issues. The *Independent Reflector* was consciously modeled on Gordon and Trenchard's *Independent Whig*.²⁸ Each issue was a single essay in which the public-spirited Reflector "dare[d] to attempt the Reforming of the *Abuses of my Country*, and to point out whatever may tend to its Prosperity and Emolument."²⁹ Although the library for the college was mentioned only briefly, the *Independent Reflector* set forth the triumvirate's republican conception of legitimate authority and the proper use of knowledge in an enlightened society, ideals that were central to the founding of the Society Library.³⁰

First and foremost, Livingston, Scott, and Smith were adamantly opposed to the Anglican domination of King's College or any other civil institution. Before they were forced to cease publication, they had planned a separate essay attacking the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel for "the settlement of their missionaries *amongst Christians* in the American plantations."³¹ Remarkably latitudinarian for their time, they

held that “our Faith like our stomachs may be overcharged, especially if we are prohibited to chew what we are commanded to swallow.”³² They considered authority in civil matters to be justly derived only from the public, “for great is the Authority, exalted the Dignity, and powerful the Majesty of the People.” While the triumvirate were certainly no rank democrats, they railed passionately against the “vanity of birth and titles” and the “absurdity of respect without merit.”³³ Unlike Bray’s gentry, who were simply born into their station, a gentleman in their view earned that status through character, virtue, and learning.³⁴ Further, they argued that the “Advantages flowing from the Rise and Improvement of Literature are not to be confined to a Set of Men: They are to extend their chearful Influence thro’ Society in general.” Finally, the triumvirate stressed that the knowledge to be imparted at the new college must be of practical use to the community. Dismissing the “learned lumber of gloomy pendants, which hath so long infested and corrupted the World,” they insisted that “whatever literary Acquirement cannot be reduced to Practice, or exerted to the Benefit of Mankind, . . . is in Reality no more than a specious Kind of ignorance.”³⁵

According to Smith’s *History of the Province of New York*, in March of 1754, as the controversy over King’s College intensified, the triumvirate and “a few private friends” met “to carry about a subscription towards raising a publick library.” Within a month they had collected nearly six hundred pounds and written a constitution, the “Articles of the Subscription Roll of the New York Library.”³⁶ Like most public libraries of the period, the New York Society Library was set up as a private corporation in which members of the public could purchase shares or “rights.”³⁷ Shareholders paid five pounds initially for a share and an annual “subscription” of twelve shillings to maintain their

borrowing privileges. The subscribers or shareholders elected a twelve-member board of trustees annually who were empowered to hire a librarian, buy books, secure a room in which to house them, and draw up regulations for the use of the collection. Members could repeal decisions of the board by a majority vote at the annual meeting.³⁸

In the words of William Smith, Jr., the founders encountered “some obstacles at first from . . . the narrow views and jealousies of sectarian zeal.”³⁹ The election of trustees immediately became embroiled in the controversy over King’s College, as each side sought to gain control of the books intended to serve as its library. In a contribution to the *New-York Mercury* in May of 1755, William Livingston warned that “a Bigot, now heightened into madness by the late frequent controversial Defeats of High-Church on the Subject of the College” had devised a “dirty scheme . . . for excluding as many *English* Presbyterians, as possible from the Trusteeship.” He went on to assure the public, however, that the “Subscribers were so obstinately impartial, as to chuse Persons who, from their Acquaintance with Literature, . . . were able to make a proper Collection of Books.”⁴⁰

These rancorous annual elections continued until 1758, when King’s College established its own library. Thereafter most board members tended to be reelected year after year apparently without opposition. Of the thirty-five trustees who served during the colonial period, about half were Tories and half were Whigs.⁴¹ This does not mean, however, that all of them contributed equally to the administration of the library. William Livingston, for example, was particularly active in selecting books for the collection during its earliest years and designed the library’s first bookplate.⁴² John Morin Scott served as the first librarian, and both Livingston and William Smith served on the board

almost continually until the Revolution. By contrast, James De Lancey, by this time the colony's acting governor, apparently made no effort to secure a royal charter for the Society while he served on its board.⁴³

At the first meeting of the board on May 7, 1754, each subscriber was requested to "prepare ... a catalogue of books as he may judge most proper to be first purchased."⁴⁴ The trustees made selections from these lists, and the initial collection arrived from a London bookseller on October 14. One week later the Society published its first catalog of approximately 250 titles in 650 volumes. The second and the earliest surviving catalog was published four years later and lists 335 titles in 859 volumes.⁴⁵ The library reflected to a great extent the enlightened ideals the triumvirate propounded five years earlier in the *Independent Reflector*. There was a reasonably wide selection of theology, over thirty titles in total. In addition to the usual tracts and sermons, however, the catalog offered such heretical works as the Koran and *Lives of the Popes*. Considering that lawyers were often a majority on the board during this period, the number of legal works was surprisingly small.⁴⁶ There were only six, including *Corpus Juris Civilis*, and *Select Tryals at the Old Baily*. The 1758 catalog proffered useful knowledge to Society members engaged in other vocations as well. A merchant might borrow an atlas, a treatise on insurance, or the *Dictionary of Trade and Commerce*. For gentlemen farmers there were titles such as *The Modern Husbandman*, or *Scotch Improvements in Husbandry*.

While Austin Baxter Keep's official history of the Society somewhat overstated the case when he referred to "the utter absence of light reading," the collection certainly reflected the broadly edifying intentions of its founders.⁴⁷ There was, for example, a wide range of titles in "natural philosophy." Society members inclined to explore the physical

sciences could choose among such seminal authors as Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle, and Benjamin Franklin or browse among the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society in London. Science in 1758 was not yet the exclusive province of the professional scientist, and an enlightened gentleman was expected to be conversant in the scientific advances of an enlightened age.

Beyond the collected works of Shakespeare, there was very little fiction, and the only novel was an English translation of *Don Quixote*.⁴⁸ There was, however, an extensive selection of poetry and other literature, more broadly speaking, of an improving nature. Subscribers could borrow such titles as *Musical Expression*, *The Art of Painting*, *The Art of Speaking in Public*, and *Manners*. This impulse towards refinement should not be interpreted simply as an attempt to affirm one's gentility, nor even as a desire for upward mobility, a striving to join the ranks of the gentry. Rather it reflected what Gordon Wood has called "new republican standards of gentility," new ideals in which one's own refinement was intimately tied up with the moral and material progress of the community.⁴⁹ As the *Independent Reflector* had urged just a few years earlier, many founding members of the New York Society Library believed that New Yorkers, "just emerged from the rude unpolished condition of an infant Colony," should, with "a united Harmony of public Spirit," . . . "make War upon Ignorance and Barbarity of Manners." This new urbanity and fashionable gentility was perhaps best exemplified by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's *The Spectator*, which *The Independent Reflector* praised for having "embellished the gravest Precepts with the Decorations of Gaiety."⁵⁰ The library held a complete run of the journal, as well as issues of its many successors and imitators, including *The Guardian* and *The Rambler*.⁵¹

The Independent Reflector of course also had the highest praise for Trenchard and Gordon's *Independent Whig*, which "sham[ed] Tyranny and Priestcraft" and "struck Terror into a whole Hierarchy."⁵² Although the triumvirate's own journal was obviously too controversial, the 1758 catalog did include *The Independent Whig* and other periodicals in a similar vein, such as Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke's *The Craftsman*. These titles exhibited the same wit and polish as *The Spectator*, but were more overtly political.⁵³ They were critical components of what Bernard Bailyn termed the "sources and traditions" of the "literature of revolution," the war of words carried on in newspapers and pamphlets during the imperial crisis of the 1760's and early 1770's.⁵⁴ In 1758, Society subscribers could borrow a wide range of works that Bailyn identified as part of the intellectual foundation of the American Revolution. The classics, particularly histories of republican Rome, were well represented, including, for example, Thomas Gordon's translation of Tacitus.⁵⁵ There was as well a wide selection of Enlightenment authors, such as John Locke and Voltaire; and polemicists from the period of the English Commonwealth and the early eighteenth century, such as James Harrington and Algernon Sydney.⁵⁶ Just as much as poetry and works on painting and music, all of these writers were considered essential to the instruction of a gentleman. Taken as a whole, the Society Library in 1758 was representative of the ideal of enlightened education in the mid-eighteenth century. It was wide-ranging, eclectic, and intended to refine society as a whole as well as the individual.

Appended to the catalog of 1758 was a list of the 118 original subscribers.⁵⁷ For this early period it is difficult to gauge the degree of exclusivity that prevailed in the Society Library, to measure how broadly inclusive this society of readers was. According

to the Articles of the Subscription Roll, each of the shareholders should have been formally approved by a vote of the trustees. There is no record of this in their minutes, and it appears unlikely that they actually voted in prospective members during these years. The membership list in 1758 certainly included many of the oldest and most prominent families in the city, names such as Alexander, Livingston, Van Cordlandt, and Stuyvesant. Moreover, the price of five pounds for a share in the Society and the annual subscription of ten shillings were beyond the means of many New Yorkers. Nonetheless, the Society Library was less expensive than certain other “public libraries” of the period (the Charleston Library Society, for example, charged an entry fee of fifty pounds) and membership was not confined exclusively to the local patriciate.⁵⁸ When the Society finally received a royal charter in 1772 to “erect within our said city of New York a *public library* [*sic*],” the document included the occupations of all of the current shareholders. Of seventy-one members, only five were listed simply as “gentlemen,” and there were five prosperous artisans or tradesmen.⁵⁹ Within the context of mid-eighteenth-century monarchical society, the New York Society Library was relatively inclusive. While a degree of wealth and a certain social position were undoubtedly expected of the subscribers, in their pursuit of refinement they did reach beyond the boundaries of the traditional gentry to include New Yorkers of more humble origins.

The Society’s original collection did not survive long after it was incorporated by royal charter. British troops looted the library when they occupied Manhattan in September of 1776. The Revolution scattered the membership as well, as subscribers were forced to choose sides in the conflict. Of the founding triumvirate, for example, William Livingston and John Scott Morin both served in the Continental Congress, while

William Smith, Jr., after a period of neutrality and indecision, sided with the crown.⁶⁰ Declaring himself “a Whigg of the old Stamp[,] . . . one of King William’s Whiggs, for Liberty & the Constitution,” he eventually moved to Quebec and became chief justice of the province.⁶¹ [XXX also served as CJ in NY during Rev] The library these three friends founded in the comparatively tranquil years before the imperial crisis reflects the pervasive, yet divisive nature of republican thought in colonial New York. That its founders in the end divided over the issue of independence suggests the complexities and ambiguities of republicanism as the coming of the Revolution forced New Yorkers to choose sides.

The New York Society Library did not reopen until more than five years after the British evacuated the city. In December of 1788, subscribers met to elect a new board of trustees, and the following February the Assembly passed an act validating under state law the royal charter issued in 1772.⁶² The late 1780’s and early 1790’s were years of energy, optimism, and prosperity. In 1789, there were 239 members, and the Society published a catalog of nearly 3,100 volumes. Just four years later, a new catalog of more than 5,000 volumes listed 892 subscribers.⁶³ This interest and activity clearly reflects the city’s post-Revolutionary republican enthusiasm for the diffusion of knowledge. A 1791 article in *The New-York Magazine or Literary Repository* “On the Utility of Public Libraries” lauded the Society Library as an edifying example of “the spring . . . given the human mind, by means of the American revolution.” Urging his fellow citizens to join, the author reminded them that “of all forms of civil government, the republican depends most

on an enlightened state of Society” and enlarged upon the “advantages resulting to a community” from a collection “for universal and critical research.”⁶⁴

This period of prosperity was relatively short-lived. In his official history of the library, Austin Baxter Keep characterized the first three decades of the nineteenth-century as “years of public indifference and private embarrassment.”⁶⁵ The private embarrassment was due in large part to financial difficulties that ensued after the Society constructed its first building on Nassau Street in 1795. It borrowed \$3,750 to pay construction costs and sundry expenses and for more than forty years continued to pay interest annually on this debt. Indeed, throughout this period, although the collection grew steadily, expenditures frequently exceeded income, while at the same time the membership declined. In 1838, for example, there were only 420 subscribers, less than half the number in 1793.⁶⁶ What Keep termed public indifference refers only in part to this decline in subscriptions. More significantly, he was bemoaning the public’s changing attitude towards municipal support for a “public library.”

Before it moved into its first building on Nassau, the library had received limited assistance from the City of New York. From 1754 to 1776 and from 1789 to 1795, the collection was housed for free in a room in City Hall. In May of 1814, an ambitious project was undertaken to secure municipal support on a wider scale. Officers of the New York Society Library, the New-York Historical Society, the Literary and Philosophical Society, and other cultural organizations petitioned the Common Council for the use of Brideswell, the recently vacated almshouse located behind City Hall. In June of the following year, the aldermen readily agreed, praising the City for its “distinguished munificence to private institutions” and expressing confidence that the confederation of

learned societies would become “justly famous as an Institute of the elegant fine & liberal Arts” and “a garden spot in which the young plants of science would be cultivated.”⁶⁷ What became known as the New York Institution eventually comprised ten different organizations, including the Historical Society, a chemical laboratory, and the Academy of Fine Arts. Thomas Bender has described the Institution as a critical development in the cultural history of New York, a sustained effort on the part of the city’s elite and municipal authorities to “consolidate and concentrate the existing elements of the city’s intellectual culture in the interest of invigorating it and giving it more social force.”⁶⁸ The New York Society Library, however, did not participate. In November of 1816, the board of trustees, unable to find a suitable buyer for its own building, voted to reject the offer of free accommodation at Brideswell.⁶⁹ As a result, the Society was relatively marginalized during this critical period.

In the late 1820’s the board petitioned the Council on three separate occasions for real estate or space in a municipal building so that they could sell the property on Nassau Street and pay off their debts.⁷⁰ By this time, however, the public’s attitude towards municipal patronage of elite organizations had changed markedly. After 1827, for example, the Council would grant the New York Institution only short-term leases and in 1831 evicted it from Brideswell altogether.⁷¹ Councilman James Roosevelt certainly spoke for many New Yorkers when he explained that “the great length of time during which so large an amount of public property has been suffered to be applied . . . almost exclusively to private uses, has been a subject of frequent and . . . just animadversion.”⁷² Twenty years earlier it had been widely accepted that the city’s elite should direct its cultural organizations. With the demise of the New York Institution it became clear that

in the aggressively egalitarian public sphere of Jacksonian New York, their leadership was no longer taken for granted. What Keep termed public indifference was in large measure public resentment of municipal support for upper-class cultural institutions.

Public indifference was certainly manifested in a steady decline in the Society's membership. Faced with shrinking revenues from subscriptions and a rising debt, the trustees might have alleviated their financial distress by taking steps to make the library more attractive to the burgeoning reading public. Instead they raised both the cost of the shares and the annual fee in a vain attempt to achieve solvency. During a period without significant, sustained inflation, the price of a "right" increased on five occasions, from \$12.50 in 1788 to \$40.00 in 1824, while the yearly subscription rose from \$1.25 in 1788, to \$2.50 in 1802, to \$4.00 in 1819.⁷³ Alternatively, the trustees might have generated significant income by allowing nonmembers to use the library for a fee. The Mercantile Library Association and the New York Apprentices' Library, two of the most popular public libraries of the period, both employed this strategy with considerable success. Members of the public were permitted to borrow books for a modest annual sum, but were not entitled to hold office or to vote in the annual elections. Money from "pay readers" increased revenues, which enabled these libraries to buy more books, which, in turn, attracted more outside readers.⁷⁴ Essentially they were able to expand by adapting a business model to a nonprofit enterprise.

The steady rise in the price of a share and in the annual subscription was not just a reflection of the Society's increasing elitism. Certainly making the library more expensive also made it less inclusive, but this does not mean the board was purposefully exclusive. In fact, although the Articles of the Subscription Roll, the charter, and the by-laws all

required the trustees to vote on admitting new subscribers, there is no evidence in the minutes or elsewhere that they ever bothered to exclude anyone. In raising the subscription and the cost of a share the board simply adopted the easiest and most obvious solution to their financial problems. The first three decades of the century were years of somnolence and inertia. The Society's patrician leadership was mired in complacency and lacked the energy and imagination to make fundamental changes.⁷⁵ Trustees served long terms, an average of approximately fifteen years during this period, and, as was the practice during the colonial era, they were essentially self-elected; at each annual meeting the board drew up a slate of candidates, which a handful of subscribers then perfunctorily voted in.⁷⁶ The only occasion on which the Society roused briefly from its somnolence was during what Austin Baxter Keep called the "contested" election of 1825.⁷⁷

In April of 1825, instead of the usual ten or twelve voters, sixty subscribers cast ballots in the annual election of trustees. They re-elected only three of the twelve incumbents. One of the non-incumbents elected received only twenty-eight votes, three short of a majority. At a special meeting the following day, a group of shareholders contested the results on the grounds that many of those voting had never been formally approved as members. The board then engaged James Kent, chancellor of the state of New York and a former trustee, to arbitrate the dispute. Three days later Kent ruled the election was void and that the old board should remain in office for another year. He rejected the opposition candidate who had not received a majority of the ballots cast and found that another was ineligible because the board had never approved his membership. Since "the Charter discovers a solicitude to preserve a full constitutional board of

trustees,” the entire election was invalid and “the former Trustees are entitled to hold over.” The old board happily concurred and passed a resolution to that effect the same day.⁷⁸ Perhaps the most significant practical effect of the dispute was that thereafter the trustees always voted on prospective subscribers and were careful to include the names of the newly admitted members in their minutes.⁷⁹

It is not clear what the new members hoped to accomplish by gaining control of the board. Years later some trustees claimed they intended to use the corporate powers conferred in the charter to turn the library into a bank.⁸⁰ However implausible that explanation may seem, it does reveal much about the larger society in which the Society functioned. Particularly after the opening of the Erie Canal in 1824, New York was an intensely commercial city expanding at a feverish pace, and it is perhaps understandable that some members of the board would ascribe sinister economic motives to their opponents. Moreover, banking was an explosive political issue throughout the early nineteenth-century. For many people, any group viewed as manipulative and conspiratorial could easily be connected with a bank. The election dispute of 1825 also mirrored the often tumultuous politics of the period. The state constitutional convention of 1821 significantly expanded the franchise, and New York would soon become notorious for fractious, intensely partisan electioneering.⁸¹ The contested election of 1825 thus sheds light on two seminal forces that by the 1820’s were beginning to transform the United States and New York City in particular, rapid economic expansion and Jacksonian democracy. It also foreshadowed the more intense and protracted conflicts within the Society during the following decade.

The 1820's and 1830's were years of change, experimentation, and adjustment for New York's libraries and other cultural institutions. In 1831, a special report of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen proposed to concentrate the Society's efforts on developing its Apprentices' Library and to devote fewer resources to its traditional role of providing charity to indigent members.⁸² That same year the American Bible Society resolved to refocus its distribution of the Scriptures on Christian missions overseas rather than the United States, and thereafter its library developed into a highly specialized resource for biblical translation.⁸³ Similarly dramatic changes occurred at other libraries about this time, including the New-York Historical Society and the Mercantile Library Association.⁸⁴ This is not to argue that all of these organizations pursued similar aims or evolved in similar directions. Rather, all of them in various ways were striving to remain relevant in a rapidly changing commercial, democratic society.

As a result of these new cultural initiatives, the means for pursuing knowledge and refinement were more widely and readily available. Richard D. Brown has described this as part of "an underlying shift from a society of scarcity, where public information and learning generally flowed from the upper reaches of the social order downward to common people . . . to a society of information abundance . . . a diffusion marketplace animated by multiple preferences and constituencies."⁸⁵ In this new environment, cultural organizations might actually compete for consumers of culture. Since its founding with the Society Library in 1754, Kings College, now Columbia University, had remained steeped in the classics, a bastion of conservatism, elitism, and Anglicanism. In December of 1829, plans were laid for a University of the City of New York, later New York University, which would be nondenominational, would provide free tuition for promising

young men from humble backgrounds, and would stress modern, useful subjects such as English, science, and mathematics.⁸⁶ In response, Columbia circulated a pamphlet assuring New Yorkers that there were “no reasonable data which warrant the conclusion” that a “rivalship between the two institutions will promote the interests of education and science” and promised scholarships and a revised curriculum to include courses in “all the various branches of science and literature.”⁸⁷ About the same time a similar rivalry developed between the New York Society Library and the New York Athenaeum. Founded in 1824, the Athenaeum promised the city a library “in which the curious student can find all the works necessary to the thorough investigation of any branch” of knowledge.⁸⁸ That same year the trustees of the Society Library took the unprecedented step of lowering the price of a share from forty dollars to twenty-five.⁸⁹

Even though it abandoned its ambitious plan to establish a comprehensive research collection, the New York Athenaeum provided the stimulus that in the 1830’s roused the Society from its complacency. Instead of its library, the Athenaeum directed its efforts primarily towards providing New Yorkers with “oral instruction in the form of popular lectures.”⁹⁰ It had a complex organizational structure with different levels of membership, each of which were accorded different privileges and responsibilities. One hundred “patrons,” for example, contributed two hundred dollars to join and were allowed four votes at the annual meetings and substantial control over the treasury. One of the classes of “subscribers” paid a ten dollar annual subscription and had only one vote. Each year the membership elected up to one hundred “associates” who planned and in most cases delivered the lectures. These regular addresses covered a wide and eclectic range of topics. During the first year there were a total of sixteen, ranging from

elementary chemistry to poetry to phrenology.⁹¹ They were designed to appeal not to the scholar, but to the general public, “that immense multitude who are at once invested with the privileges of Freedom and the prerogatives of Power.”⁹²

Many members of the New York Society Library were also ardent supporters of the New York Athenaeum. This became the source of bitter and prolonged conflict within the library during the 1830’s, as pro- and anti-Athenaeum factions fought for control of the board. In all, fourteen Society Library trustees also served as directors of the Athenaeum.⁹³ Perhaps the most active and influential Athenaeum supporter was Gulian Crommelin Verplanck. Verplanck was a founder, and an associate and lecturer for the Athenaeum and also served on the Society’s board nearly continually from 1810 until his death in 1870, longer than any other trustee. Almost forgotten today, he was one of the most prominent and influential New Yorkers of his time. He graduated from Columbia at the age of fourteen, the school’s youngest graduate ever, studied but never practiced law, and served in a number of elective offices, including a term in the U.S. House of Representatives. He wrote prolifically and eclectically on subjects ranging from literature to economics to religion and was also a much sought after public speaker.⁹⁴ Although none of his Athenaeum lectures have survived, several others delivered about the same time were published. One in particular is significant in the way that it reflects changes and continuities in Americans’ views on books, knowledge, and authority since the triumvirate founded the New York Society Library in the years leading up to the Revolution.⁹⁵

In 1831, Verplanck gave a “Lecture Introductory to the several courses delivered before the Mercantile Association of New York.” The Mercantile Library Association, in

addition to its library, had begun an annual series of popular (and profitable) addresses on the arts and sciences that catered to the same broad, self-improving audience for which the Athenaeum competed.⁹⁶ Verplanck explained that his aim was to show “the true advantages of general knowledge to men engaged in active business.” Much of his speech echoed views on the utility of knowledge expounded by the *Independent Reflector* in the years in which the Society Library was founded. He began by lauding the public spirit of the gentlemen who had volunteered to deliver the lectures, “an animating example of . . . unflagging devotion to the common good . . . worthy of republican antiquity.”⁹⁷ He then went on to describe the benefits of a broad, albeit informal education both to the individual and society. On a personal level, “general knowledge makes a man more respectable, more useful, and more happy,” and “fill[s] the soul with kindling and ennobling thoughts.”⁹⁸ More important, Verplanck stressed repeatedly that, “in proportion as knowledge is widely diffused, morals are secured and liberty protected,” that “only in an enlightened republic [do] the people know all their rights, and feel all their duties.”⁹⁹

Verplanck’s conception of the utility of knowledge, however, differed from the New York triumvirate’s in critical respects. He did begin with a classical hero, describing at length Cicero’s selfless efforts “to apply his powerful intellect to such studies only as had a direct bearing on the uses of society.” Yet he went on to assure his audience that they were better able to pursue knowledge than even the Roman republic’s most revered citizen, since they all had access to libraries “far superior in amount, in variety, and . . . in excellence to the treasured volumes of Cicero’s much-loved collection!”¹⁰⁰ Many of Verplanck’s exemplary heroes were Enlightenment figures, men like Joseph Priestley and Benjamin Franklin, part-time scholars whose “studies [were] snatched . . . amidst the

calls of business.”¹⁰¹ He reserved his highest praise, however, for an amateur scholar whose career spanned the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the English author and reformer William Roscoe. Roscoe is perhaps best known as the founder of the Liverpool Athenaeum, after which both the Mercantile Library Association and the New York Athenaeum were modeled, but Verplanck was most impressed by the ways in which he applied his talents to “all the best and most practical uses of society,” in particular to “the machinery of social government, to the statistics of vice, the police of prisons, and the prevention and punishment of crime.” In fact, Verplanck argued that, although “guarding our civil liberties” remained a critical duty, the most “constant and useful” service a patriot could render his country was to become familiar with “the management of the ordinary machinery of society.” In 1831 true patriotism required that every citizen become “well fitted to comprehend and judge” such subjects as banking, taxation, criminal justice, and education.¹⁰²

Verplanck’s references to the “machinery of society” point towards not only the emergence of an entirely new body of knowledge, the social sciences, but also towards an incipient professionalization of scholarship in all fields.¹⁰³ In this address to a popular audience, however, he was more concerned with the benefits of a broad liberal education to the average, self-improving citizen of the early republic. It was not simply that new kinds of knowledge were developing in a new kind of society. The public role of knowledge itself was changing in revolutionary ways. Whereas the founders of the Society Library railed against the threat posed to the community by the machinations of selfish factions, Verplanck, a Jacksonian Democrat, assured his listeners that in an “enlightened republic” the “rage of faction” would always be “mitigated into the fair

contest of parties.”¹⁰⁴ He acknowledged that with the “division of labor” in an industrializing economy there was a “danger that . . . each individual may be narrowed to the limits of his personal occupation,” becoming a mere “cog in a huge and complicated machine.” Yet he contended that such economic specialization, which ensured the nation’s progress and prosperity, “carried with its own corrective, . . . the opportunity of liberal inquiry, and that variety of contemplation which exercises and disciplines the whole intellectual man.”¹⁰⁵ Verplanck thus argued that a liberal education was much more than simply the hallmark of a republican gentleman. It would act as an antidote to the negative effects of industrialization and the tumult of Jacksonian democracy.

In 1828, shortly after the Mercantile Library Association began sponsoring its own program, the New York Athenaeum discontinued its lecture series.¹⁰⁶ Although the Athenaeum had earlier abandoned its plan to develop a comprehensive research library, it still maintained the city’s most extensive collection of foreign and domestic newspapers and periodicals. In 1831, Verplanck and two other Society Library trustees were appointed to a joint committee to confer regarding a union of the two institutions. Although they reported favorably, the Society board rejected the proposal by a slim majority.¹⁰⁷ Thus began a series of protracted and sporadic negotiations over the terms under which the collections might be merged. For seven years the Society Library trustees remained divided over the question, and at each annual election tensions escalated between the Athenaeum supporters and its opponents. The gentlemen of the pro-Athenaeum and the anti-Athenaeum factions attacked each other, often in decidedly ungentlemanly terms, at special meetings, in the local newspapers, and in a series of pamphlets circulated to the subscribers. Ostensibly at issue were such mundane matters as

the value of local real estate and the transfer or purchase of library shares. In fact, in the 1830's the Society Library entered a critical period of self-definition in which it struggled to determine the purpose of its collection and the public it intended to serve.

The trustees who opposed the merger with the Athenaeum made little effort to win over their opponents on the board or to win favor among the shareholders. Rather in defiance of the facts, they declared that by their "untiring industry" and "good management," without assistance from the state or municipal authorities, "the Library [had] attained a state of prosperity that could never have been expected."¹⁰⁸ Their claim to authority, their right to continue in office, was founded upon their long association with the institution and their intimate knowledge of its history. In fact, the first pamphlet they circulated began with a brief history of the Society since its founding. The anti-Athenaeum trustees repeatedly dismissed their opponents as mere "recent members" who knew nothing of the past struggles of the institution they hoped to govern, upstarts whose criticism of the current board's policies, "so authoritatively put," were highly impudent. They referred to the Athenaeum supporters not as "gentlemen," but as "persons," a not so thinly veiled insult that suggests how nasty the dispute had become.¹⁰⁹ The anti-Athenaeum party even went so far as to ascribe pecuniary motives to the movement to combine the two institutions, intimating that it was "a case of [Athenaeum members] wanting to speculate in the shares of another society."¹¹⁰ That is, they charged that the Athenaeum members anticipated an increase in the price of a Society Library share once the merger was accomplished and intended to sell their newly acquired shares at a profit.

The trustees of the pro-Athenaeum party "cheerfully concede[d] that the present list of [anti-Athenaeum] trustees is composed of the names of highly respectable

citizens,” although they added, somewhat defensively, that “on the score of respectability . . . the ticket [we] offer for your support will bear comparison with that of any preceding year’s.” They went on to argue, however, that “a reputable standing is [not] the sole requisite for a trustee,” that their right to office, their authority, should also be based upon “the requisite amount of knowledge in forming a suitable collection.”¹¹¹ They also insisted that the board’s powers be legitimately conferred by the democratically expressed will of the shareholders. Dismissing “the monstrous farce of annual elections,” the Athenaeum supporters compared the management of the library to a “closed borough” in which “the trustees nominated themselves and their friends from year to year.”¹¹² They contrasted the “snug and private manner” in which the Society Library conducted its affairs with “associations of a similar nature,” such as the Mercantile Library Association, that were “organized more in accordance with our free institutions.” The anti-Athenaeum members deserved to be ousted for arrogantly disregarding the views “of the very members to whom they owe their existence.”¹¹³

The pro-Athenaeum faction heatedly denied any personal interest in the negotiations over the merger. They “boldly avow[ed] that [their] only object [was] to increase the usefulness and respectability of the library.” Their sense of public duty demanded that they expand the public’s access to the collection. Disavowing the “churlish or monopolizing spirit” that had made the Society Library “the resort and solace of a few hundred persons,” the pro-Athenaeum trustees promised to “spread its benefits to a constantly increasing circle.”¹¹⁴ At the same time, however, they were careful to distinguish the kinds of books they intended to make available to this expansive public. They roundly criticized the current management for developing a collection that “scarcely

offers more attraction than . . . an ordinary circulating library,” a disparaging reference to the commercial libraries, often parts of bookshops or general stores, that rented out works of popular fiction.¹¹⁵ Members of the Athenaeum and other deserving members of the public were invited “to become citizens of our literary community,” and with their help the Society Library would take its rightful place as “the chief literary establishment of our beloved city.”¹¹⁶ The self-styled reformers argued for a popular readership, but not a popular collection and saw no contradiction between these two goals.

Aside from specific grievances concerning the development of the collection, the exclusivity of the membership, and the negotiations with the Athenaeum, the pro-Athenaeum trustees took issue with the entire tone of the library’s management. They complained that the board was simply behind the times, mired in the past in an era that looked eagerly towards the future. The pamphlets circulated by the opposition were replete with references to “the torpid and monastic state” of the leadership, to “an institution that has been peacefully slumbering for nearly a century.”¹¹⁷ They argued that change would only be effected by “selecting a new set of trustees from among the younger and more active of our members,” forward-looking men who would bring about a “new era of prosperity . . . [and] commence a splendid and progressive march of improvement.”¹¹⁸ This sentiment was frequently echoed in letters to the local newspapers, in which Athenaeum supporters proudly designated themselves the “movement party” and dismissed to their opponents as the “sedentaries.”¹¹⁹ There was a pervasive sense that the library’s management was out of touch with the commercial, democratic city that had long since emerged from its staid colonial past. In fact, the movement party seemed at times to conflate democracy and commerce, as when they discussed the value of the

shares. When the anti-Athenaeum faction accused them of hoping to “speculate in shares,” they responded that the fact that members often sold their memberships for considerably less than the price of twenty-five dollars set by the board showed the true “estimation of the public, who are the proper judges.”¹²⁰ In the new marketplace of culture, cultural consumers comprised an electorate who voted with their pocketbooks.

Throughout most of the 1830’s, the pro-Athenaeum faction steadily gained support. In the hotly contested election of 1833, they fell short of gaining a majority on the board by a only handful of votes.¹²¹ By 1836, the trustees evenly split on the question of the merger and a deadlock ensued.¹²² Finally, in 1838, a pro-Athenaeum ticket, led by Gulian Verplanck, swept the annual election. By the terms of an agreement finalized in July of that year, the New York Athenaeum used its remaining funds to purchase for its members 316 Society Library shares and transferred to the Society all of its books, periodicals, and real estate.¹²³ The movement party was now in a position to effect the changes it had been advocating since the beginning of the controversy.

In the 1840’s and 1850’s, the new trustees instituted a number of the broader reforms that had been promised in the course of the campaigns of the 1830’s. In 1840, for example, the hours of the reading room were extended to ten o’clock in the evening, and in 1856 the Society began printing and circulating for the first time annual reports of the condition of the library.¹²⁴ The complexion of the board itself, however, changed little during this period. For the most part, it remained a “closed borough” in which men from the city’s wealthiest and most prominent families, usually in their forties or fifties, were nominated and elected without opposition.¹²⁵ Terms of service, however, tended to be shorter. In the first three decades of the century, for example, only three of thirty-five

trustees served for five years or less. Between 1840 and 1870, approximately half of the sixty-seven board members served five years or less. With the increased pace of economic activity, it was increasingly common for the city's elite, in the words of Verplanck's address to the Mercantile Library Association in 1831, and echoed in one of the pro-Athenaeum pamphlets a few years later, to pursue their social and cultural interests "in intervals snatched from business."¹²⁶

The trustees after 1838 achieved a measure of success in expanding the Society's membership. Before the election the library had only 420 subscribers. Four years later that number had risen to 1,120, including approximately 165 members of the Athenaeum who joined under the terms of the merger.¹²⁷ In context, however, this increase appears less impressive. For example, in 1794, at the height of the Society's prosperity in the eighteenth century, when the city's population was approximately thirty-two thousand, there had been 965 shareholders. This was only 155 less than the number of subscribers in 1842, by which time the city's population had increased almost ten-fold.¹²⁸ Moreover, other libraries were growing at a much faster rate. That same year, for example, the Apprentices' Library had 1,830 members, and the Mercantile Library Association had 3,372.¹²⁹ One reason the Society Library was less attractive than it might have been is that the trustees consistently refused to lower the cost of a share. In fact, for a brief period in 1841 and 1842 they actually raised the price from twenty-five to forty dollars.¹³⁰ Despite all the rhetoric during the campaigns of the 1830's calling for inclusivity and public spirit, the new leaders were quite as exclusive, as "snug and private," as their predecessors. In 1839, the year after it assumed control, the new board deemed "inexpedient" a request to grant access to the collection to the teachers of the Public School Society.¹³¹

Another of the pro-Athenaeum faction's campaign promises had been to provide adequate cataloging of the library's holdings. The Society published a new catalog in 1838, the first since 1813, and another twelve years later. During that period the collection grew from approximately twenty-five to thirty-five thousand volumes.¹³² By 1850 it was the largest library in the city, although the Astor Library, which opened to the public in 1854, soon surpassed it.¹³³ The catalogs in 1838 and 1850 were the first to provide a subject arrangement of the collection, and the most striking difference between the two, aside from the increase of about ten thousand volumes, was a marked decrease in the titles classed as fiction. In 1838, there were 726 entries under novels, about 8.4 percent of the collection, and in 1850 that number had declined to 389, or 3.3 percent of the collection.¹³⁴ The Society's new leadership purposefully removed fictional works from the shelves in fulfillment of its campaign promise to develop a collection that was more substantial, more improving than a popular circulating library. This was a remarkable policy that was directly contrary to the trend in public libraries during this period. Fiction in public collections continued to be a controversial issue throughout the nineteenth-century, but at the same time that they decried the public's appetite for popular novels, librarians and library managers grudgingly purchased them in increasing numbers. In the Apprentices' Library, for example, the proportion of "novels, tales, and romances" quadrupled during roughly the same period, from just four percent in 1833 to sixteen percent in 1855.¹³⁵

The rate at which the collection grew after 1838 shows the extent to which the new trustees were able to reinvigorate the Society Library. The relatively modest rise in the membership, however, and especially the decrease in works of fiction, suggest the

ambiguity of their success. They sought to develop the library within the context of an increasingly obsolete and discredited model of cultural leadership. By the 1840's, the era had passed in which New Yorkers assumed that elites, by virtue of their superior education and refinement, should lead the city's cultural institutions. The spirit of Jacksonian democracy, as well as competitive pressures within the cultural marketplace, demanded that readers' tastes should help guide the development of a public library.¹³⁶ However distasteful it seemed to the Society Library board, the public wanted fiction, and the decline in fiction was a symptom of their inability to recognize that the library was operating in a radically changed environment. This is not to argue that the rhetoric of the pro-Athenaeum trustees in the campaigns of the 1830's was insincere. Rather they were inspired by the spirit of the times, but were unable to come to terms fully with its realities.

Bray's library and the early history of the New York Society Library reveal critical shifts in the ways that authority, knowledge, and the public were conceived as New York grew from a colonial seaport town to a commercialized city in a democratizing nation. Bray's library was founded in a monarchical, hierarchical world in which authority emanated from the crown and the Church, in which knowledge was constrained by theology, and in which a public sphere was only just emerging. The Society Library in the eighteenth century represented a republican challenge to that world. Its founders sought to loosen the bonds of hierarchy, pursue enlightened knowledge, and broaden the public it served beyond the traditional gentry. By the 1830's, however, the library was overtaken by the logic of that republican impulse. It seemed elitist and anachronistic in a commercial, democratic, liberal society that defined itself in opposition to stasis and hierarchy. New

York's first public library was overshadowed by institutions that increasingly appealed not to readers' public spirit, but to their tastes as consumers.

Chapter Two
The Library of the New-York Historical Society: Elite Voluntarism and the Uses of History

In 1804, a group of prominent New Yorkers founded the New-York Historical Society. The early history of the Society provides a revealing example of the nature and aims of antebellum voluntary associations, a subject that is critical to an understanding of American history before the Civil War. Voluntary associations were an important means by which citizens combined to effect public purposes at a time of limited government and great social, economic, and political change. As one of the city's most prominent and exclusive voluntary associations, the founding and formative years of the Society are an important part of the history of New York's elite. The early history of the Society also lends insight into a particular type of voluntary association, the historical society. In the years before the Civil War, there was established in nearly every state a private organization to preserve and disseminate local history. This movement played a significant role in forging a distinctive national identity and culture. An account of the aims and activities of the New-York Historical Society sheds light on the social purposes of history in antebellum America.

On November 20, 1804, eleven gentlemen of New York City gathered in the City Hall to establish a "Society the principle design of which should be to collect and preserve

whatever may relate to the natural, civil or ecclesiastical History of the United States in general and of this State in particular.” This was the second historical society organized in the new nation, following the Massachusetts Historical Society, founded in 1791. In subsequent meetings they adopted a constitution and a set of by-laws, and elected a slate of officers.¹ The officers included a standing committee of seven members that acted as a board of directors, a corresponding secretary who was responsible for soliciting donations of materials, and a librarian who had charge of the Society’s books and manuscripts. Prospective members were elected by a majority vote; resident members lived in the New York City area and honorary members resided elsewhere. Resident members paid an admission fee of ten dollars, and annual dues of two dollars.² On February 12, 1804 the Society published an appeal to the “liberal, patriotic, and learned” for any documents relating to the history of the nation or the state. It appeared in the city’s newspapers and was mailed to prospective donors throughout the country.³ On September 15, 1807, one of the founders, John Pintard, sold his library to the Society, which became the foundation for its collections.⁴

Although its membership and library grew rapidly after the founding, in its earliest years the Society was plagued by financial troubles. Members were often remiss in paying dues, and the Society consistently spent beyond its means and incurred substantial debts. On two occasions, in early 1824 and from June to December in 1832, the library closed due to lack of funds. On May 4, 1825 the Society actually advertised the sale of its collections in the New York newspapers, and on June 14 voted to sell its property. Only a grant from the State of New York saved it from dissolution.⁵ In addition, it was frequently necessary to relocate for various reasons during these early years. From

1804 to 1857, when it finally erected its own building on Second Avenue, the Society moved six times. During the War of 1812, the library was packed up twice and hidden in anticipation of a British invasion or bombardment. Despite these difficulties the Society was still able to carry out its mission of collecting and preserving historical materials. In 1811, it published the first volume of the *Collections of the New-York Historical Society*. Although subsequent volumes appeared irregularly, they made many of the library's most important holdings more readily available. By 1832, it had grown to 7,000 volumes, mostly by donation and was one of the largest historical collections in the nation.⁶

It was not until the 1840s that the Society achieved some degree of financial stability. In 1841, a popular series of public lectures eliminated the outstanding debts, and a special committee appointed to examine the Society's finances recommended that thereafter the Executive Committee pay no bills without a specific appropriation. By 1845, the latter committee, in its annual report, was able to "congratulate their fellow members on the prosperous condition and healthy prospects of the Society" and declare that "healthy and vigorous action has succeeded to indolent and inglorious repose."⁷ With its finances in order, it was finally possible to secure a permanent home for the collection. On June 1, 1847, a committee was appointed to raise fifty thousand dollars to erect a building to house the library's nearly 16,000 volumes. By June 6, 1854, enough money had been collected to purchase a lot on Second Avenue and Eleventh Street, and the cornerstone was laid on October 17 of the following year. The collection was moved during the fall of 1857, and the dedication ceremony was held on November 3.⁸ In the years that followed, the Historical Society changed considerably and became increasingly more concerned with status and exclusivity than with the preservation and dissemination

of historical sources.⁹ During this early period, however, it established the nucleus of one of the finest history collections in the nation and was a leader among the type of voluntary associations known as historical societies.

Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations. There are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types -- religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute In every case, at the head of any undertaking, where in France you would find the government or in England some territorial magnate, in the United States you are sure to find an association.¹⁰

Although this passage from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* has been widely quoted by scholars in many disciplines, historians have shown little interest of the history of voluntary associations until relatively recently. In 1944, in an article entitled "Biography of a Nation of Joiners," Arthur M. Schlesinger offered a sweeping overview of the "associative principle" in American history from colonial times to the present, calling it a "spirit which had come to penetrate every aspect of American life."¹¹ In the years that followed, however, few historians were inspired to explore the various meanings of American voluntarism. This relative neglect is surprising, considering the central role such organizations have played in American public life. Forty years later, Anne Firor Scott labeled this a "case of historical invisibility." She argued that the importance of voluntary associations was overlooked because they were the primary means by which women in the nineteenth century entered the public sphere. Excluded, formally or informally, from careers in business, politics, or the professions, they "created amongst themselves organizations through which they formed social values and created

social institutions.”¹² Historians later failed to recognize their contributions because they wrote within a culture placed little value upon the role of women in society.¹³

This neglect of voluntary associations has been remedied to a great extent. Since the 1970s, several works have appeared that examine particular types of organizations, for example temperance societies or abolitionist organizations. However, as in Schlesinger’s article, they have tended to concentrate on associations with a national scope. The hundreds of local organizations of various types have received far less attention and were at least as important in antebellum society. Further, although the scholarship on women’s voluntarisms has provided a necessary corrective, it has fostered a somewhat narrow view of the gender and class composition of voluntary associations. Since middle class women played such an important role in this movement, there has been a tendency to focus on them exclusively. Yet as the passage from Tocqueville quoted above indicates, voluntary associations attracted both men and women from all classes of society. A history of the New-York Historical Society provides an example of a voluntary association at the local level with a somewhat atypical class and gender composition. It also helps to highlight interconnections and similarities between antebellum voluntary associations. Although they all had various specific goals, they generally shared and espoused a common, mutually supportive set of values. What Schlesinger called the “application of the associative principle” was an important means by which Americans consciously developed a national and civic culture.

Although its constitution did not explicitly bar women, the Society was an exclusively male organization. There was never a female member throughout the entire antebellum period.¹⁴ Women were apparently permitted to attend the occasional lectures

that began in 1838, but it was not until November of 1846 that they were invited to partake in the refreshments afterwards.¹⁵ During these later years, members seem to have valued women for what they viewed as their ornamental role in the Society's activities. Shortly after the opening of the building on Second Avenue in 1857, a correspondent for *Life Illustrated* described the picture gallery as the place in which "congregate the ladies in all the glory of crinoline, ribbon and lace to feast their eyes on beautiful pictures, while the less impressionable lords of creation are content to burrow among moldy volumes below stairs."¹⁶ Samuel Osgood, the domestic corresponding secretary, in an address at the dedication ceremony, echoed this patronizing tone. In speaking of the gallery, he explained that while "no woman has ever given a masterpiece of the first class to sculpture or painting, or to music, or eloquence, or poetry, the balance is made up, and more too, by the fact that the masterpieces of men have, for the most part been, inspired by women."¹⁷ This attitude is reflect the contemporary conception of the "woman's sphere." However much the "lords of creation" might have admired females in the gallery, women's refined sensibilities presumably rendered them unfit for the manly pursuit of historical knowledge.

The Society was exclusive not simply in terms of gender. Annual dues of five dollars meant that only the well to do could afford to join. In *Riches, Class, and Power before the Civil War*, Edward Pessen estimated that about sixty percent of the Society's approximately 500 members were from New York's wealthiest families, which he defined as the upper one percent of the city's wealthholders.¹⁸ Even more revealing, 48 of them, over ten percent of the membership, were worth more than \$100,000, placing them within the top ten percent of that exclusive one percent.¹⁹ Yet exclusivity cannot be

measured solely in terms of dollars and cents. Although New York's economic elite can be identified more precisely than its social elite, this overlapping, yet vaguely defined latter group is more important in discussing the milieu in which the Society operated. The Historical Society clearly was a pillar of the city's high society. The Stuyvesants, Van Rensselaers, Verplancks, DePeysters, among others, were the Knickerbocker first families and continued to exercise extraordinary influence throughout the antebellum period. Men like Philip Hone, John W. Francis, Washington Irving, and David Hosack, to name a few, were also among the city's acknowledged social leaders, the elite of the elite. All of these names, and those of their close relatives, appear on the Society's membership lists.²⁰ A clause added to the by-laws in 1846 stated that prospective members could be blackballed by only three negative votes. This provision doubtlessly insured that only true gentlemen would be admitted.²¹

As might be expected of such an elitist organization, Society members tended to be staunchly conservative. John Pintard, the secretary of the Mutual Insurance Company, was the driving force behind the founding of the Society. In 1821, he wrote of the state's constitutional convention: "Our convention has risen and given in a constitution, level with the lowest dregs of democracy. . . . So let it pass, and be rued as it will be by the authors who after a short inglorious triumph will be hurled from power to give place to the vilest of the vile."²² From 1804 to 1831, four of the Society's first five presidents were prominent Federalist officeholders.²³ Still, politics seems to have rarely played an overt part in the affairs of the Society. One notable exception occurred in 1845, upon the death of Andrew Jackson. As were all U.S. presidents, Jackson had been elected an honorary member, and it was customary for the Society to pass a resolution mourning the

loss of a departed member. On this occasion, however, a number of prominent local Whigs made impassioned speeches in opposition. Although the resolution passed with only a few dissenting votes, Philip Hone, a former Whig mayor, explained in his diary that it was “one of those things which people do not like to vote against.”²⁴ As representatives of a privileged class in a time of rapid democratization, many Society members evidently resented the changes that undermined their traditional authority.

Although there were a myriad of motives for joining the Historical Society, certainly one of the most important was sociability. The Society functioned in part as a social club in which New York’s elite could gather informally with their own kind and discuss common interests. The Executive Committee’s report for 1848 observed that the monthly meetings were a “useful medium of intercourse among the members, offering opportunity for social converse [and] interchange of friendship.”²⁵ Similarly, joining the Society could be a means of attaining or affirming one’s social standing. Membership in such an exclusive organization meant that the city’s social elite accepted one as an equal. Conversely, certain names on the membership lists lent prestige to the Society itself. Albert Gallatin, the noted statesman and diplomat, joined the Society in 1842 and served as president from 1843 until his death in 1849. He was 82 years old when he assumed office and rarely presided at the meetings, but his connection with Society lent it great distinction.²⁶ The same might be said of many of the honorary members. Election in this case often had more to do with the person’s social prestige than with his contributions to historical scholarship. An honorary membership was as much an honor to the Society as it was to person inducted.

Yet the Society was something more than simply a club for wealthy gentlemen. Those who joined were sincerely interested in the study, preservation, and dissemination of history. The monthly and annual meetings included lectures on historical subjects, and many members were amateur historians. Moreover, at a time when few people attended university, Society members were exceptionally well educated. All of the eleven founders were graduates of either Princeton or Columbia, and several of them later served as presidents, trustees, or instructors at those or other institutions. Those who joined later were also likely to have attended college. Many, perhaps the majority, were lawyers, clergymen, or physicians. More important, members seem to have had a genuine enthusiasm for the pursuit of knowledge. John Pintard, in the years before the founding of the library, lost a considerable fortune and was eventually sent to debtors' prison. Even during this troubled period he found solace in his library. On October 1, 1793, he wrote in his diary: "If I have lost my riches and am, from the peculiar circumstances of my situation, prevented from employing my time for the benefit of my family, let me not lose altogether the advantages which leisure and a few good books afford, of improving my mind."²⁷ The Historical Society thus functioned as both a social club and a learned society.²⁸

Society members were preeminent examples of joiners in a nation of joiners. The most prominent and active among them were often leaders not only in other social clubs and learned organizations, but in local benevolent and reform organizations as well. At least eight of the ten presidents who held office during this period, besides serving in various posts in government, helped to found or were officers in other local voluntary organizations.²⁹ Certainly the best example of a joiner was the Society's founder, John

Pintard. In a letter to his daughter dated January 2, 1817, he listed a total of thirteen voluntary organizations in which he held office. Besides a number of learned societies, there were three benevolent organizations, the Sailors Snug Harbor, the American Bible Society, and the Savings Bank, an institution for encouraging thrift among the poor.³⁰ Pintard and other members of New York's elite were the mainstay of a web of local voluntary organizations that performed a variety of functions which today are normally assumed by government agencies. Although the benevolent and learned societies had varying specific purposes, they often shared a more general goal. They helped to forge a distinctive American culture and to foster what they deemed the ideal republican citizenry. The New-York Historical Society, and other historical societies throughout the nation, besides facilitating the study of history, played an important role in this work.

The New-York Historical Society served as a model for the many historical societies founded during the antebellum period. By 1860, there were sixty-five such organizations in existence throughout the United States. In addition to numerous local societies, there was a state institution established in every state east of Texas except Delaware.³¹ They were often similar in important respects to the one in New York City. Frequently one founder, like John Pintard, provided the organizational talents and enthusiasm necessary to bring together a group of interested individuals. Their constitutions typically included provisions for an executive board to direct the Society's activities, and a recording secretary and librarian to develop a collection of books and manuscripts. Members tended to be affluent and well educated. Clergymen, physicians, and especially lawyers usually predominated.³² Like the New-York Historical Society, their primary purpose was to

encourage the study, preservation, and dissemination of history. According to George H. Callcott, in these state and local historical societies, “more than in the colleges, was the origin of historical association and professionalism.”³³

The establishment of the New-York Historical Society and others like it was prompted, above all, by a well founded fear that the sources with which future historians would write the history of the new republic might be irretrievably lost. Materials documenting the nation’s past were either in the hands of a few private collectors or scattered in the attics and cellars of private homes and government offices. Not only were they inaccessible to scholars, they were in danger of being destroyed or forgotten. During the Revolution, for example, British troops ransacked numerous valuable manuscripts, including Thomas Prince’s priceless collection of New England materials.³⁴ Society members frequently expressed a deep concern that the record of America’s past might be lost forever, unless immediate action was taken. An appeal for funding to the state legislature in 1814 warned that “the destructive hand of time is rapidly sweeping into oblivion many important objects of inquiry; and what might now with facility be rescued from oblivion, the flight of a few years will place beyond the reach of human power.”³⁵ They were convinced that only concerted action by concerned citizens and scholars could secure the nation’s documentary heritage. In the introduction to William Smith’s *History of New-York*, printed by the Society in 1826, the editors advised that action needed to be taken to safeguard the state’s past and that “in the present condition state of affairs, this is best done by institutions like our own; individual attempts are for the most part lost and ineffectual.”³⁶

It is remarkable how little was known of the history of New York State at the time the Society was founded. The “Address to the Public” circulated in 1805 lists 23 specific “Queries as to the points on which the Society requests particular Information.” These included such elementary facts as the date on which the first European settlers arrived in the state; the years in which forts were first erected in Albany and New York; and the periods during which the Dutch colonial governors who preceded Peter Stuyvesant held office. In order to fill these gaps in the historical record, the address also requested fourteen specific types of material that would help shed light on the state’s early history. Among other documents, the Society solicited donations of books; sermons; laws and proceedings of legislative bodies; compilations of statistics; and magazines and newspapers.³⁷ This timely effort to rescue primary sources has been a boon for historians ever since.

The New-York Historical Society was by no means the only organization concerned with documenting the nation’s past. Throughout the antebellum period, in every section of the country, there was a movement to preserve materials for the writing of history. State and local historical societies were the driving force behind what George Callcott has described as a “national obsession--documania.”³⁸ What is most interesting about this mania for collecting is the catholic nature of the materials collected. The societies sought more than just official documents that would serve as the basis for political histories. They placed particular emphasis upon ephemeral sources, such as pamphlets and newspapers, that would, in the words of a member of the New-York Historical Society, “give knowledge of the form and pressure of the times.”³⁹ Much of what the Society collected provides evidence for what today would be termed social

history. At the dedication of the library in the new building in 1857, William Adams remarked that “after all we say of the dignity of history, it is the small, the common, and the humble, which give us a correct idea of existing society.”⁴⁰ Similar comments occur frequently throughout the publications of the Society. Ideally members hoped to document every possible facet of the history of the state and the nation.

In the “Address to the Public” the Society announced that “it will be our business to diffuse the information we may collect in such a manner as will best conduce to general instruction.” To this public spirited end, it began publishing the *Collections of the New-York Historical Society* in 1811. These volumes were intended not simply to disseminate historical materials, but to ensure their survival as well. During this period, when collections were especially vulnerable to fires and physical deterioration, it was generally acknowledged that, the “surest way to preserve a record is to multiply the copies.”⁴¹ Documentary publication was an important activity in all the larger historical societies. Before the Civil War a total of more than five hundred volumes were published by state and local organizations from every section of the country.⁴² The New-York Historical Society produced two separate series during this period, each comprising five volumes. The first was published between 1811 and 1830, and the second from 1841 to 1859. In all, the series included sixty-six separate documents, most of them contemporary accounts of historic events.⁴³ In addition, the Society was instrumental in a significant publishing venture sponsored by the state. In 1838, it petitioned the legislature appoint an agent to identify and copy materials held in archives in England, France, and Holland. An act appropriating funds for the project passed the following year, and in 1841 John Romeyn Brodhead, a member of the Society and later its foreign corresponding secretary,

began transcribing in Europe. The fruits of his efforts were published, beginning in 1856, as *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*.⁴⁴

Historians have devoted comparatively little attention to such cooperative relations between government and voluntary associations. Throughout the antebellum years, state and local governing bodies often helped fund private organizations in order to effect public purposes. This support is most evident in the case of groups promoting scholarship or popular education. In addition to annual appropriations to public school societies, municipal councils frequently aided local learned societies in a variety of ways. In New York, the City provided rooms rent free to the Historical Society for its first three headquarters, in the City Hall, Government House, and the New York Institution.⁴⁵ Besides sponsoring Brodhead's work in European archives, the state also provided much needed financial support. In 1814, the legislature passed a bill granting the Society \$12,000 from the proceeds of a lottery to promote education, and in 1827 appropriated an additional \$5,000, which allowed it to liquidate its outstanding debts.⁴⁶ When it began constructing its new quarters in 1855, the building was exempted from taxation.⁴⁷ Legislators evidently believed that the state had a substantial interest in promoting the objectives of the New-York Historical Society.

A variety of complex and interrelated goals motivated the Society's collecting and publishing activities. These broader purposes are referred to explicitly and repeatedly in the annual discourses and are clearly implied in the types of documents that were deemed important enough to reprint in the *Collections*. On a personal level, members simply considered the pursuit of historical knowledge a pleasurable end in itself. They obviously enjoyed the drama and excitement of stirring historical narrative. For example, in the

annual lecture in 1857, Samuel W. Francis referred to “the extraordinary occurrences of the American Revolution” which were “calculated to awaken a personal interest . . . in every bosom” in “what history would unfold of the marvelous trials through which the people had passed.”⁴⁸ The immediacy of local history further enhanced this emotional appeal. Samuel Miller, in his discourse commemorating the bicentennial of Henry Hudson’s voyage to the New World in 1609, remarked that “when events . . . stand in close connection with persons or places particularly related or endeared to ourselves, they acquire an interest of the highest kind.”⁴⁹ Of the sixty-six documents and lectures reprinted in the *Collections*, over half of them relate to the state or colony of New York.⁵⁰

However, this emphasis upon state history had a more important and more serious purpose. Throughout the antebellum period, different states and regions competed for national leadership in a variety of ways. One of most important means by which a state asserted its preeminence in the present was to chronicle its glory in the past. In particular, local historians used history to portray their state as the cradle of republicanism in the New World.⁵¹ Thus, as New York’s entrepreneurs contended for economic and commercial supremacy within the Union, its historians and antiquarians sought to lay claim to the nation’s republican legacy. In fact, New Yorkers seem to have suffered from a historical inferiority complex. Members of the Historical Society frequently complained that “the most important is the worst or least described part of the union.”⁵² They seem to have especially resented the importance accorded to Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia and often boasted that New York had clearly surpassed her sister states, despite the fact that it was “the principal theatre and greatest sufferer” in every war on the North American continent.⁵³ Of all these wars, of course, the Revolution was the most

important in the history of the republican experiment. Society members were eager to point out the leading role their state had played in it. In his annual discourse in 1828, James Kent assured his audience that “the noble monument erecting on Bunker’s Hill to the memory of her early patriots does honor to the pride and zeal of the sons of New-England; but the records of this state, in the hands of some future historian, are capable of elevating a loftier monument, and one of less perishable materials.”⁵⁴

The Historical Society also took pride in New York’s history as a colony. As in other states, they used the colonial past to glorify their ancestors and to highlight the role they had played in bringing civilization to the wilderness and establishing republican institutions in the New World. However, New York in a sense was at an advantage in that it had been colonized originally by the Dutch rather than the monarchical British. Of the thirty-eight documents or lectures on New York’s colonial past reprinted in the *Collections*, twenty-nine deal with its history as a Dutch colony. Again, however, members of the Society resented the way historians neglected their past. George Folsom, in an introduction to John de Laet’s “Extracts from the New World,” complained that “American historians have written with English prejudices, expiating with ardour upon the heroic enterprise and religious zeal that led to the colonization of Virginia and New England, while they have almost forgotten to record” the history of New Netherland.⁵⁵ The annual lectures published in the *Collections* helped remedy this neglect. In 1812, Gouverneur Morris boasted that New York was settled by a “race of heroes” that had brought to a new continent “their skill, their integrity, their liberty, and their courage.”⁵⁶ Unlike the aristocratic English, these original colonists were said to embody all the republican virtues. In his address at the dedication of the new library in 1857, the

historian George Bancroft proclaimed “the glory of the Dutch republic is peculiarly our inheritance. The republican liberty of the Netherlands is . . . to be found only here.”⁵⁷

Members of the Society were also fascinated by and even proud of the Indians of New York. According to DeWitt Clinton, “no part of America contained a people which will furnish more interesting information and more useful instruction; which will display the energies of the human character in a more conspicuous manner.”⁵⁸ This interest in the “noble savage” may be explained in large part by their romantic appeal. Society members enjoyed both the drama and pathos of their history. Clinton, for example, referred to the Senecas, “who have witnessed the former glory and prosperity of their country, [and] weep like infants, when they speak of the fallen condition of their nation.”⁵⁹ More important, New York’s Indians, like the Dutch, were said to evince the values associated with republicanism. Morris maintained that the colonists “found [in them] patience, fortitude, and a love of liberty like their own.” “The most strongly marked . . . of their moral features was a high sense of personal independence. Is it not likely that this shall be the character of our children’s children?”⁶⁰ The Historical Society used the history of New York during different periods to show that it was the most republican of the states.

Pride in one’s state, however, was intended to complement rather than compete with nationalism. New York’s was simply the most shining example of the development of American republicanism, a past of which the entire nation could be proud. As James Kent explained in a lecture in 1828, he did “not wish to cherish . . . that patriotism that is purely local or exclusive. . . . The glory of each state is the common property of the nation.”⁶¹ Like other American historians and antiquarians, members of the Society saw the United States as the vanguard of a new republican age in which liberty and virtue

would triumph.⁶² This millennial view of American history is expressed repeatedly in the annual discourses. In 1816, Gouverneur Morris referred to the discovery of the Americas as the beginning of a “great epoch” that “tore away the veil which had long concealed the mysteries of government” and “raised a beacon to rouse and alarm a slumbering world.”⁶³ Europeans, by contrast, were portrayed as either struggling manfully to emulate the American example or hopelessly mired in aristocratic decadence and corruption. In an address in 1828, Gulian Verplanck compared the states of Europe, which erected monuments to “princes and nobles who are now remembered only for their vices,” with the United States, whose history had “no equal” in “ethical instruction [and] moral dignity.”⁶⁴

Throughout the antebellum period, there was a deliberately moralizing aspect of historical scholarship that is clearly reflected in the annual lectures.⁶⁵ The Historical Society used the story of America’s past not only to glorify American republicanism, but to instill the values associated with it as well. History was deemed an ideal means of promoting civic responsibility and personal rectitude. For example, Charles King, president of Columbia College, advised at the dedication ceremony in 1857 that “we need at this day, especially, to popularize the study of history, and especially of our own history; for diligently, and honestly pursued, it is the essential study among a people where all are called to take part in public affairs.”⁶⁶ Biography in particular was considered fundamental in inculcating republican morality. According to Verplanck, “the short period of our existence as a people has been fruitful in models of public virtue . . . The history of our illustrious men is a story of liberty, virtue, and glory.”⁶⁷ Such civic instruction was perhaps the most important aspect of the Society’s activities. By

facilitating the research and writing of history, it provided examples that would help to nurture the ideal republican citizenry.

Members of the Society never considered the moralizing version of history they propagated to be in any way contrived. In their view there was no need to manipulate historical truth to serve a larger public purpose. History itself was ultimately a manifestation of the divine will, and the development of republican institutions in the New World was therefore an integral part of the divinely inspired progress of humankind.⁶⁸ As John Francis explained at the dedication ceremony in 1857, “the histories of seemingly detached periods . . . are but parts of the universal system of that Providence which, with infinite intelligence and wisdom, governs the world.”⁶⁹ Thus, an accurately conveyed history of the United States necessarily and rightly promoted national pride and moral rectitude. In the words of Charles King, the library of the New-York Historical Society “shall teach the coming ages that God, and therefore Truth, is in History, and Virtue and Patriotism in public men.”⁷⁰ Members of the Society considered their efforts essential to the Christian Commonwealth. By promoting various interrelated public ends, they believed they ultimately served a divine purpose.

This millennial view of the American republic was typical of antebellum voluntary associations. Such organizations commonly viewed the United States as the beginning of a new epoch in human history. Although they pursued a variety of specific goals, they often promoted the same mutually reinforcing constellation of virtues. They shared a common goal of forging a new American culture founded upon republicanism, morality, civic virtue, and, above all and comprehending these others, religion. The New-York

Historical Society provides a revealing example of the manner in which the associative principle was put into practice before the Civil War.

Chapter Three
**Books for a Reformed Republic: The Apprentices' Library in Antebellum
New York**

In 1785, a group of prosperous master craftsmen founded the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen. The Society began as a fraternal organization whose primary purpose was to aid members who had fallen on hard times. In 1820, it started a library for the use of the city's apprentices. By 1865 the library had become its most important function. The early development of the Apprentices' Library of New York City occurred during a period of unprecedented political, economic, and social change. The franchise was rapidly expanded until all adult white males, including the foreign-born, had the vote. Methods of craft production gradually gave way to a factory system based, in part, on the unskilled labor of women, children and immigrants. The traditional republicanism embodied in the craft system competed with the values associated with modern liberalism. In response to these and other changes, an emerging liberal middle class undertook a myriad of reform efforts aimed at educating and controlling what appeared to be an unreliable, or even dangerous work force and electorate. The development of the Apprentices' Library before 1865 reflects many facets of this reform movement.

The history of the library during this period also illustrates trends and practices in antebellum libraries and librarianship. Its readership expanded rapidly and eventually comprised not only young apprentices, but any member of the public who was able to

afford a small annual subscription fee. The librarian, who was initially little more than a clerk, became more of a professional whose task it was to manage and develop the collection. Access to the books was enhanced by the publication of classed catalogs. The library's holdings grew substantially and gradually included a significant amount of fiction. Moreover, the collection sheds light on the educational aims of antebellum reform movements. The early history of the Apprentices' Library therefore illustrates important aspects of liberal middle class reform in industrializing America and the evolution of libraries and librarianship before the rise of tax-supported public libraries.

The General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen was founded on November 17, 1785 and was incorporated by the state of New York on March 14, 1792.¹ Membership was limited to craftsmen who were at least twenty-one years of age. The by-laws also required that a candidate be proposed by two members who could attest to his "industry, honesty, and sobriety," and be approved by two-thirds of the membership. There was an initiation fee of five dollars, and monthly dues were twelve and a half cents.² The address used at the initiation ceremony urged that new members "let sobriety, industry, integrity, and uprightness of heart continue to be the ornaments of your name."³

The aims and organization of the General Society were typical of the craft benefit societies that flourished during this period. These groups combined the functions of a private charity with the camaraderie of a fraternal lodge. Normally craftsmen in a particular trade would band together and pay dues into a common fund. Members or their dependents would then be entitled to assistance in times of economic distress. Before the days of insurance companies, pensions, and government relief, craft benefit societies were

an important source of aid during the recurring depressions of the early nineteenth century. Although the Society was permitted to loan money to members and non-members, its “leading motive” was to “relieve the distressed of its members that may fall in want by sickness, or other misfortunes.” Four “overseers of the indigent” were elected annually to appropriate aid to destitute members or the widows and orphans of deceased members.⁴ In an apparent reference to these appropriations, the initiation address enjoined members of the Society, “on its private transactions be as silent as the grave.”⁵

The General Society during this early period celebrated the mutuality and centrality of the craft community. Besides its charitable activities, the Society played a prominent part in the festivities that marked patriotic holidays in the city, carrying banners emblazoned with its slogan “by hammer and hand all arts do stand.”⁶ Members considered the craft system of production the bulwark of sturdy republicanism, the embodiment of moderation, simplicity, reciprocity, and civic virtue. The ideal craftsman and citizen conducted his affairs with due regard for the public weal and guarded the republic against the corrupting influences of the greed and luxury associated with unbridled commercialism.⁷ The craftsman’s workshop, in which the master was a fellow worker as well as an employer, and was bound to his employees by reciprocal obligations, was a microcosm of the ideal polity. Members of the Society during these early years so conflated the values of the craft community and the virtues of the republic that, in the words of Sean Wilentz, “as far as they were concerned, republicanism and the system of ‘the Trade’ were so analogous as to be indistinguishable from each other.”⁸ Long after craft production had waned, particularly in times of economic distress, the General Society continued to extol the republican virtues of the artisan. President Ira Hutchinson,

in his inaugural address in 1858, blamed the severe depression in 1857 on “the banker, the merchant, and the speculator,” and lamented that “the simple fact that labor is disreputable” had engendered an aristocratic “system that has destroyed every spark of humanity in the Old World, and . . . is wide-spreading and deep-rooting in this new republic!”⁹

By the time the Apprentices’ Library was founded in 1820, however, changes were occurring that would eventually render this artisanal ideology obsolete. Industrialization was already transforming many of the trades. The workshop in which the master worked side by side with his journeymen and apprentices was being eclipsed by a factory system in which unskilled laborers, often women, children, and immigrants, fashioned goods through a division of labor. Skilled artisans became production workers who performed repetitive tasks for wages and thereby lost their economic independence. Master craftsmen became capitalists who took no part in the production process and concerned themselves solely with the tasks of management and distribution.¹⁰ Instead of celebrating the simplicity and mutuality of the trades, many employers placed a greater emphasis upon wealth and success. An emerging liberal ideology held that competition between conflicting interests ultimately redounded to the public good. It celebrated honest ambition, equality of opportunity, and the autonomy of the individual.¹¹

Although this is a very simplified view of a very complex process, it effected profound changes in American society. The presumed republican harmony of the traditional system of apprenticeship slowly gave way to new economic relationships in which the interests of labor and capital were inherently at odds. During the same period, electoral laws were rapidly liberalized until all white males, including the foreign-born,

were allowed to vote. New York State, for example, had, with minor exceptions, universal white, male suffrage by 1821.¹² The political destiny of the new nation seemed to be in the hands of an uneducated and potentially disaffected laboring class. By 1820, these developments had begun to produce tensions and fears that sharply contradicted the idealized view of the artisanal republic.

In response to these perceived threats, an emerging liberal middle class undertook a variety of reform efforts. Although most reformers were evangelical Protestants, it is difficult to generalize about the reform movement, since it encompassed reactions to so many social, political, and economic conditions.¹³ Many historians, however, have noted two fairly distinct strains within antebellum reform. One element, which was most prevalent before the 1830s, sought to impose external controls upon the behavior of the working class.¹⁴ These reformers hoped to forcibly remake industrializing America into their own vision of a productive, moral, pious, and orderly society. Certainly the most significant example of this coercive aspect of reform is the campaign to abolish the sale and consumption of alcohol. Before the rise of the factory system, social drinking was commonplace in the typical artisan's workshop. The master often imbibed with his journeymen and apprentices, and the practice was normally not frowned upon, provided it was done in moderation. As master craftsmen became industrial employers, they became increasingly concerned about the effects of alcohol in the workplace. The first temperance society was organized in Moreau, New York in 1808, and by 1833 there were approximately 4,000 such organizations with over a half million members. Their aim was not simply to curb the use of alcohol, but to brohibit it altogether.¹⁵

A more dramatic example of coercive reform involves the treatment of criminals and the administration of penitentiaries. Antebellum prison reformers sought to rehabilitate lawbreakers through extraordinarily harsh discipline. In the state prison in Auburn, New York, prisoners were kept in solitary confinement at night and forced to work in complete silence all day. Any infraction of the rules was punishable by flogging. Radical proponents of this system proposed that it be applied to factories, orphanages, schools, and even private homes. Louis Dwight, the founder of the Boston Prison Discipline Society, predicted its adoption would help ensure ““order, seriousness, and purity.””¹⁶ Although this is an extreme example, it aptly illustrates the repressive character of certain antebellum reforms.

There was, however, another side of the reform movement that was less coercive and more progressive. This humanitarian aspect of reform was most prominent in the three decades before the Civil War. Although issues such as temperance continued to enjoy widespread support, other concerns began to occupy middle-class reformers. The two major reform movements of the period, the campaigns to abolish slavery and to extend political and other rights to women, reveal a more optimistic and democratic approach to effecting change. In a sense, the goals of these later reformers were not radically different from those of men such as Louis Dwight. They too yearned for a pious, orderly, and productive society, but the means they employed were less coercive, and they looked to the future with more hope than fear. Whereas the earlier generation of reformers intended to force others to help themselves, those who followed them were more inclined to help them help themselves. The General Society’s Apprentices’ Library was part of this more humanitarian element within antebellum reform.¹⁷

Education was perhaps the most important means of self-help that reformers sought to make available to the less fortunate. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, they organized free school societies in many cities to educate the children of the urban poor. They also lobbied state and local governments to establish tax-supported school systems.¹⁸ Moreover, these efforts were by no means directed solely at the young and the indigent. Throughout the antebellum period there was an unprecedented movement to educate all ages and classes within society. Museums, libraries, and lecture societies were established in villages, towns, and cities throughout the country to provide universally accessible means of self-improvement.¹⁹

Reformers established these educational institutions for a variety of reasons. Perhaps most important, they saw education as a bulwark of democracy. Without it, an illiterate electorate would fall prey to demagogues, and elected officials would be unable to carry out their public duties wisely and effectively. Related to this was a more general focus on cultural improvement. The ideal citizen was not simply literate, but well-informed and well-rounded culturally as well; he was familiar with current events, literature, and the principles of science. Antebellum educational reform was also concerned with moral improvement. Civic and religious education would help combat the crime and vice that reformers came to fear in industrializing urban areas. Education would provide an alternative to drinking, gambling, and other dangerous and immoral pursuits. Finally, on a more practical level, vocational instruction was a means of economic advancement. With an education in business or mechanical principles, a young journeyman or clerk could compete successfully in the marketplace and thus contribute to

the general prosperity. The founders of the Apprentices' Library had all of these educational purposes in mind in 1820.

As the various antebellum reform campaigns began to gain momentum, interest in the more traditional activities of the General Society began to wane. For most of 1819, so few members attended the monthly meetings that there was never a quorum to conduct business. In March of that year, a special committee was appointed to "inquire whether any, and if any, what arrangements can be made for the education of the children of indigent members." Reporting nearly a year later, the committee strongly recommended founding a school, and a second committee then hired a teacher and rented rooms. The original committee also urged another course of action, "from which, if properly conducted, results equally beneficial will doubtlessly follow, to wit, the establishment of a Library for the use of the apprentices of mechanics generally." Its purpose would be to provide for "the gratuitous reading of elementary, moral, religious, and miscellaneous books, and others as may have a tendency to promote them in their several vocations." A Library Committee of nine members was appointed to make the necessary arrangements.²⁰ The founding of the school and library signaled the beginning of a new and more active role for the General Society. It also began a debate within the society over its primary purpose. In the decades before the Civil War, less attention was accorded its original goal of "reliev[ing] the distressed of its members that may fall in want by sickness, or other misfortunes," as the Society concentrated its efforts more upon maintaining and improving the library. By 1865, the General Society was similar in many respects to the myriad of other reform organizations devoted to education.

On March 4, 1820, Thomas Mercein, a master baker and the chairman of the Library Committee, wrote a letter to William Wood requesting advice. Wood was a merchant and philanthropist from Canandaigua, New York, who played a leading role in establishing apprentices' libraries in Boston, New Orleans, and Montreal. He subsequently traveled to New York and helped solicit financial support and donations of books from the city's employers. The library officially opened on November 25, Evacuation Day, an important patriotic holiday that celebrated the British withdrawal from the city during the Revolution. A large audience attended the ceremonies, including the mayor and members of the Common Council and State Legislature. Apprentices later borrowed nearly three hundred books.²¹

Thomas Mercein delivered the keynote address. Parts of his speech reflect the original character of the General Society. He celebrated patriotism, craft pride, and republicanism. Mercein stressed, for example, the "importance and respectability" of the city's artisans, and referred to the library as one of "the securities which we are planting around the fortress of Liberty, erected in the glorious and triumphant struggle of the Revolution." There were also allusions to the traditional paternal role of a master towards his apprentices. The library would be a place where young men could acquire "those sound and commendable habits that will mold the character, and elevate it to a standing, equally congenial to individual and general happiness." Yet he also emphasized other values more closely associated with the liberalism of the emergent middle class. Mercein assured the apprentices in the audience that their "opportunities [were] great and liberal;" that "industry, ardour, sobriety, and perseverance will lead to successful competition . . .

[and] prosperity.”²² The founding of the library suggests the beginning of a subtle shift in the values espoused by the General Society.

The various purposes of the library, as explained by Mercein, closely reflect the aims of antebellum educational reform organizations generally. First, it would strengthen American democracy by enabling young men to fulfill “the representative and official capacities, which they may find it necessary to assume, in a government like ours.” “Ignorance and despotism have shown their kindred qualities.” The library would also be culturally enriching, producing well-rounded, cultured gentlemen, as the readers joined “the march of education, literature, and science.” In addition, the library would provide moral guidance. Mercein urged the apprentices to “avoid the alluring but fatal paths of vice and dissipation” and always to be sober and industrious. Finally, he implied a practical, vocational purpose for the library, calling it a “source of rational and useful information,” and extolling “new combinations and new discoveries . . . constantly developed in the useful arts.”²³ His address thus reflects both the traditional artisanal republican outlook of the General Society and the more modern, liberal values typical of an antebellum reform organization.

Some of the rules and regulations adopted for the Apprentices’ Library in 1820 would seem somewhat onerous to modern library readers. Borrowing privileges were available at no cost to any apprentice who was able to “produce from some responsible person, a certificate that they are worthy of confidence, and guarantying the safe return, in good order of all books.” Loans circulated for two weeks and could be renewed. Two volumes of duodecimos or one volume of folios, quartos, or octavos could be checked out at one time. Overdue fines were assessed at three to twelve and a half cents a week,

depending on the size of the book. The borrower or his guarantor was liable for the entire value of a book not returned within a month. The library was opened from six until nine in the evening, but closed on Sundays. A separate reading room was provided for newspapers and magazines, and the rules for this room were particularly strict. “No conversation [was] allowed . . . under any pretense whatever.” Smoking and spitting on the floor was prohibited, and “all boys admitted . . . must have clean hands, face, and shoes, and sit with their hats off.”²⁴ New regulations published in 1833 required apprentices to check out and return books only one evening a week; each was assigned a day according to the first letter of his last name. They also stated that the “librarian is particularly directed to withhold books from any coming to the library with dirty hands.”²⁵ The General Society was eager to help young apprentices help themselves, but only under the strict supervision of their betters.

The library grew steadily in the 1820s, both in terms of the number of readers and the size of its collection. As it developed, there was clearly a debate within the society over the manner in which it would be funded and the role it would play relative to the society’s original purpose of aiding its destitute members. A special committee was appointed in 1830 to inquire into “extending the usefulness of the Mechanics’ Society . . . so far as it relates to education generally, and the application of the Sciences to the Mechanic Arts.”²⁶ The committee recommended erecting a new building in order to enlarge the school and the library. It also suggested instituting a series of free lectures on science and establishing a vocational school for apprentices to teach mathematics, drawing and design, architecture, and engineering. Its report urged that “every dictate of duty and of patriotism, every impulse of Mechanic pride” required the Society to adopt

the recommendations. The committee estimated that \$20,000 to \$25,000 would be needed, and proposed that it be raised by subscription from the city's craftsmen. It emphasized that "they do not contemplate in any manner to impair the general funds," which were "pledged to the sacred cause of charity."²⁷ The Society adopted most of these changes. In 1832, it purchased a building on Crosby Street and expanded the school and the library.²⁸ In 1833, it began an annual series of free lectures.²⁹

The expansion certainly improved the library's usefulness, but it did not involve substantial alterations in the way the library was administered or the role it played within the General Society. The report of the Library Committee for 1831, which was appended to the special committee's report, urged more fundamental changes. In effect, it recommended that the school and library become the society's primary functions. Without them, the General Society would be nothing "more than a mere common *benefit society* [sic]," . . . "an old, venerable matron, sore beset, to find means to satisfy its widowed dependents, and its host of juvenile starvelings." Its "twin daughters," the school and the library, had "increased in splendour, they yearly renew their age and add to their lustre, until in the brightness and beauty the matron is almost eclipsed."³⁰ The library committee proposed that the Society expand dramatically and focus its efforts on educating the city's apprentices.

In order to "lay a sure foundation for the preservation of the library and its gradual increase," the committee identified three potential sources of income. It recommended that apprentices be charged an initiation fee of twenty-five cents, that journeymen who had been readers when they were apprentices be admitted for a modest annual subscription of one dollar, and that members of the society also pay a dollar annually to

use the library.³¹ Only the last of these proposals was adopted. For a time after 1830, there was a separate fund that consisted of the members' annual fees, the interest on which was included in the library's appropriation.³² The Library Committee's report suggests tensions within the General Society over the future role of the library. Members disagreed over the manner in which it should be funded and whether it should become the Society's primary function.

Over time it seems that a majority came to adopt the committee's view that education should be the General Society's most important purpose. This is clearly indicated in a comparison of the annual appropriations for charitable pensions and the library. In 1847, the year for which figures are first available, \$2,900 was spent on pensions, while the library received only \$1,000. In 1854, \$3,100 was allocated for pensions, and \$2,300 was set aside for the library. Finally, in 1865, the library's appropriation was \$8,000, and \$5,075 was paid out in pensions.³³ Thus, while the Society spent progressively more for both education and fraternal charity during this eighteen-year period, the proportions changed significantly, until far more money was appropriated for the former than for the latter. By the end of the Civil War, the library was clearly the its primary feature.

The Library Committee's report for 1830 is also significant in that it proposed that certain journeymen be allowed the use of the library for an annual fee. This was the first time the society considered charging a subscription and admitting anyone other than members and apprentices. Although this proposal was initially rejected, it was later adopted, apparently for financial reasons. The library was evidently affected by the Panic of 1837, a severe depression that lasted until 1843. The numbers of readers rose from

1,643 in 1837 to 1,844 in 1843, while, at same time, appropriations for new books were limited by the increased demand for charity for the Society's indigent members. Under these conditions, the library, according to the committee report for 1842, "was not and could not be self-sustaining."³⁴ A new source of income was needed to help maintain the collection.

On February 7, 1842, the state legislature passed an act authorizing a change in the General Society's charter. It permitted the Society to admit persons other than members to use the library for an annual subscription.³⁵ Initially subscribers paid only one dollar annually. The regulations in 1855 required that employers pay two dollars, but by 1865 all subscribers paid that amount.³⁶ They did not need to be artisans; any "suitable person" could apply. Although the number of pay readers increased steadily over the years, they were always far outnumbered by the free readers. In 1851, the first year in which such figures were included in the annual reports, there were eighteen subscribers, and by 1854, that number had risen to only 39. In 1860, there were 199 pay readers, and in 1865 there were, 829. At no time during this period, however, were subscribers more than one quarter of the total readership.³⁷ Nonetheless, the admission of men who were not artisans was a significant departure for the General Society. It indicates the Society had lost some of its craft conscious character and that the library itself was no longer solely a charitable institution. It could be a means of self-improvement for members of the middle class who were not craftsmen.

With the additional funds from the annual subscriptions, the Society was able to expand its educational efforts in the 1840s and 1850s. In 1845, it inherited the personal collection of Benjamin Demilt, a member of the special committee in 1830. According to

the terms of Demilt's will, it was to be maintained separately, "to be used and improved as a pay library."³⁸ In 1854, the De Milt collection became a non-circulating reference collection.³⁹ Members and subscribers were allowed to use it at no cost, but free readers had to be at least sixteen years of age and were required to pay an annual subscription of fifty cents.⁴⁰ In his inaugural address in 1857 Thomas Earle advised that the collection be better advertised, since it had "not been as productive as the donors anticipated." The Demilt library seems to have been intended primarily for the cultural improvement of its subscribers. The collection contained, in Earle's words, "little of light literature."⁴¹ Of 895 titles in an 1855 catalog, none were classified as "novels, tales, romances, etc.," but there were fifteen works of "prose fiction" and 76 works of poetry. Approximately thirty-six percent of the collection was classed as "history and geography," and another 29 was "mental and moral science," a very broad class that included philosophy, music, literature, and fine arts.⁴² Earle suggested that it would have been more successful if Demilt had not required in his will that it be maintained by subscriptions.⁴³

In 1850, both libraries moved into new rooms after the construction of an addition to the north wing of the building on Crosby Street. Extensive improvements were financed, in part, by a donation of two thousand dollars from Benjamin Demilt's sister, Sara Demilt, and five thousand dollars from his sister Elizabeth Demilt.⁴⁴ This expansion was perhaps the most important event in the library's early history. The re-opening was marked by a ceremony on September 23, at which the keynote address was delivered by judge and editor Mordecai M. Noah.⁴⁵

In explaining the purposes of the library, Noah touched upon many of the same republican themes in Thomas Mercein's speech at its opening thirty years earlier. He

stressed, for example, the importance and respectability of the craft community and advised parents that "a knowledge of the mechanical arts, steadily and industriously carried out, must in this great and increasing country be forever . . . the true road to independence."⁴⁶ Further, the maintenance of the library was an act of patriotism as well as charity, since it would promote equality and civic responsibility. The unprecedented growth of the republic was due, "above all, [to] that free education which visits all alike, . . . and places mankind on an equality in all that relates to genius and intellect." Young men in particular needed to be educated in order to carry out their duties as citizens in a democracy. Noah argued that "the time has arrived when it has become apparent that the destinies of our country are finally to be placed under the control of the mechanics and laboring men of the Union," and predicted that "well-educated mechanics will fill our legislatures and the halls of Congress; their numerical strength will accumulate until they are able to command the highest stations in the Government." At the same time, however, Noah placed a greater emphasis upon the benefits of competition, for both the individual and society as a whole, that was typical of liberal reformers. He explained that "the great secret of [America's] success" was the fact that "each man is for himself, and the energy of each combined constitutes the wealth and power, the genius, resources, and permanency of the republic."⁴⁷

In some respects, however, Noah's speech was rather less optimistic than Mercein's. It reveals greater anxieties and implies a desire to use the library to control as well as to help the working class. For example, the young factory worker who, "being privileged to take a book home with him, . . . sinks into a calm refreshing slumber and awakens at the dawn of day refreshed and invigorated, with his head clear, his mind calm

and ready for the day's occupation." In 1820, Mercein simply advised young men to "abjure the path of vice." Thirty years later, Noah warned that, without an institution such as the library to direct them to higher things, they would be "scouring the streets, visiting barrooms or theaters, mingling with idle, vicious companions."⁴⁸ An uneducated work force threatened the very foundations of society. The Apprentices' Library would thus protect American democracy from an ignorant, disaffected working class. After referring to the important role that working men must play in elected bodies, Noah asked, "in what will be our guarantee for the safety of the country? I answer, in the education and intelligence of this class of our citizens."⁴⁹ Parts of Noah's address, like Mercein's, expressed confidence in the country's ability to progress indefinitely, but there was perhaps as much fear as hope in his vision of the future. There was a mingling of pessimism and optimism that was typical of antebellum liberal reform.

In the 1850s and 1860s the Society changed how it identified gratuitous readers in a way that reflected important shifts in economic and social relationships. Before this time, free readers were always referred to simply as "apprentices." In a new set of by-laws adopted June 1, 1855, this class of readers was redefined as "Apprentices of Mechanics and Tradesmen, and Youths employed as Apprentices of Mechanics and Tradesmen."⁵⁰ This was apparently a distinction between young men serving formal apprenticeships and those who simply worked in factories. In his inaugural address in 1857, President Thomas Earle proposed another significant change. He recommended granting free access to "a class of operatives for whom no provision of this kind has ever been made, . . . the large number of females engaged in the various employments connected with the mechanic and manufacturing interests."⁵¹ This measure was finally adopted in 1862. The Library

Committee's report for that year states that the "usefulness of the library has been considerably extended" by the new rule and that "little, if any, inconvenience has arisen from admitting the females at the same time with the males."⁵² Young women were by far the fastest growing class of readers during this period. There were 200 in 1862, 606 in 1863, and 1703 in 1864. By 1865, there were 2,599 female readers, compared with 3,663 male readers.⁵³

By the time of the Civil War, the General Society had altered its definition of free readers in a manner that indicates its new role in antebellum reform. These changes acknowledged a deterioration in the traditional relationship between master and apprentice and the rise of more modern forms of economic production. The ideal of the harmonious artisan's workshop had faded as more and more goods were fashioned through mechanization and the division of labor. By the 1860s, members of the society were more likely to be charitable industrialists than benevolent master craftsmen. According to Thomas Earle, "the mission of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen is to all the working-classes."⁵⁴ Although it was still ostensibly a common benefit society, it had been completely transformed from its pre-industrial beginnings, when its primary purpose was to "relieve the distressed of its members that may fall in want by sickness, or other misfortunes." By 1865, it was similar to other liberal middle-class reform organizations that provided the means for educational self-help to the urban poor.

Table 1: Total numbers of volumes, free and pay readers, and annual appropriations for 1820, 1839, 1850, and 1860. (Total volumes include the Demilt Library for 1850 through 1865. Annual appropriations do not include additional sources of income, such as the annual subscription fees.)

	Total Volumes	Total Readers	Annual Appropriation
1820	3-4,000	800	*
1830	7,697	1,576	*
1839	11,161	*	\$1,200
1850	14,940	1,533	\$1,250
1860	22,469	2,359	\$2,899
1865	33,700	7,282	\$8,000

Sources: Annual Reports of the Library Committee for 1839, 1850, 1860, and 1865. Report of the Special Committee, 1830.

* Figures not available.

The early and middle 1860s were very prosperous years for the library. The combined funding for the Demilt and Apprentices' Libraries increased from \$2,898 in 1860 to \$8,000 in 1865. The total number of volumes in both collections grew approximately fifty percent, from 22,469 to 33,700. In 1860 there were 2,359 readers and 47,756 volumes circulated. In 1865 there were 7,282 readers and 135,840 volumes circulated.⁵⁵ The library was one of the most substantial in New York City during this period. In 1859, in his *Manual of Public Libraries, Institutions, and Societies in the United States*, William J. Rhee, the chief clerk of the Smithsonian Institution, listed only nineteen libraries in Manhattan with collections of over ten thousand volumes. The Apprentices' Library ranked sixth with 19,026. The list also included two collections for seminaries, one for a private college, Columbia University, and one for the Free Academy, a publicly supported

high school. By far the largest library in New York was the Astor, established in 1848 with a bequest in the will of John Jacob Astor. Its collection totaled over 80,000 volumes in 1859, but they were for reference only and did not circulate. The second and third largest, the New York Society Library with 35,000 volumes and the Mercantile Library Association with 31,647, were both subscription libraries. The Apprentices' Library was the only significant circulating collection in the city that was free to working class youths.⁵⁶

At this time, most "public libraries," that is, those that were not privately owned or maintained by schools or learned societies, were not free. In 1849, Charles Jewett, the librarian of the Smithsonian Institute, listed twenty-nine libraries supported by state governments in his *Report on Public Libraries in the United States of America*. Of these only thirteen were open to the public, and all of them loaned books only to members of the government or officers of the courts.⁵⁷ Ten years later, Rhees reported 153 "state and city libraries." Most of these were probably public libraries in the modern sense of the term, free, tax-supported, circulating collections.⁵⁸ The majority were in New England, where state legislatures had passed laws in the late 1840s permitting municipalities to levy taxes to support them. The movement for public libraries elsewhere did not gain momentum until after the 1860s.⁵⁹

Libraries that were not supported by schools or learned societies, or state or local governments, were known as "social libraries." Rhees listed a total of 812 in his *Manual of Public Libraries*.⁶⁰ Social libraries were an important part of the popular enthusiasm for universal education during the antebellum period. They were also precursors to modern public libraries, in that they helped developed support for the notion of publicly

accessible, circulating collections.⁶¹ In some cases the municipal public library actually originated as a social library. In New York City, for example, the New York Free Circulating Library was incorporated as part of the original New York Public Library System in 1901.⁶²

The majority of social libraries were financed entirely through annual subscriptions, although a few were proprietary libraries like the New York Society Library, in which members actually owned shares in a public corporation.⁶³ There were several kinds, with different clienteles and different emphases in their collections. Athenaeums were middle and upper class literary and scientific societies. Most maintained a library of scholarly journals and reference books, and offered lectures and debates as well. They tended to be more expensive than other social libraries. The Boston Athenaeum, for example, charged an annual subscription of ten dollars. Lyceums had similar aims but were less expensive and catered to the middle and working classes, especially in villages and towns.⁶⁴ Mercantile libraries were usually founded by and for young clerks and merchants. They circulated popular and refined literature and also served as business reference collections.⁶⁵ The Mercantile Library Association of New York City was the largest of its kind in the country and loaned out more volumes than any other library in the United States in 1859.⁶⁶

There were also libraries which, like the Apprentices' Library, catered to industrial employees and employers. Rhee listed at least thirty-four mechanics' institutes and twenty-three apprentices' libraries.⁶⁷ Mechanics' institutes were founded by prosperous craftsmen and industrialists to educate urban workers. The institutes sponsored lectures, classes, debates, and exhibitions. Probably all of them supported a library. In some only

members or apprentices were allowed to use the collection for free, and in others apprentices paid a lower annual subscription than the general public.⁶⁸ Apprentices' and mechanics' libraries were established under a variety of circumstances. The majority, like the Apprentices' Library of New York, were founded by older craft benefit societies and were free to members and to youths employed in workshops or factories. In 1820, the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanics Association organized the Mechanics' and Apprentices' Library of Boston, probably the first of its kind, but relinquished control to an Association of Apprentices in 1828. Members paid one dollar annually to use the library and elected a board of managers to direct its affairs.⁶⁹ Whether free or pay, the apprentices' and mechanics' libraries were an important part of the social library movement during the antebellum period.

As social libraries grew in size and number, librarianship began to evolve into a profession. Early in the nineteenth century, the job was considered essentially clerical, requiring no special qualifications other than basic literacy. In most colleges and universities, for example, it was usually assigned to a junior member of the faculty.⁷⁰ When the first tax-supported public library was established in Petersborough, Massachusetts in 1833, the town's postmaster was its first librarian.⁷¹ However, as libraries attracted more readers and developed more extensive collections, librarians assumed more complex responsibilities, and began to develop an incipient sense of professionalism. The annual report of the Mercantile Library Association of New York for 1851 stated that "a librarian requires a distinct education upon the prominent parts of his profession - an education that can only be acquired by years of preparation and study."⁷² Two years later, the world's first librarians' convention was held in New York

City to bring together "those believing that the knowledge of Books, and the foundation and management of them for public use, may be promoted by consultation and concert among librarians."⁷³ In 1859, in his *Memoirs of Libraries*, Edward Edwards listed eighteen "routine duties" of librarians in order of their importance, including collection development, cataloging of books, and the preparation of catalogs.⁷⁴ Although the American Library Association was not founded until 1876, by the 1850s there was clearly a growing sense among librarians, if not the general public, that librarianship was a distinct and valuable profession.

This trend towards professionalization is evident in the history of the Apprentices' Library. The special committee that first proposed establishing a library in 1820 recommended that the teacher in the school be given charge of it, in order to "save the expense of a librarian."⁷⁵ A librarian was hired, but his duties appear to have been mainly clerical. According to the by-laws adopted in December of 1823, a six-member library committee, elected annually by members of the society, was directed to "take charge of and generally superintend the concerns of the library [and] to employ and discharge librarians."⁷⁶ By 1855, new regulations stipulated that "the Libraries and Reading Rooms shall be under the care and administration of the Librarian." He was required to submit detailed monthly and annual reports enumerating, among other things, the total number of volumes in both libraries, the number of pay and free readers, and the number of overdue and damaged books. More menial tasks, such as lighting fires and shelving books, were delegated to an assistant librarian.⁷⁷

Perhaps a librarian's most important professional duty during this period was the preparation of catalogs. Because they were expensive to produce, printed catalogs were

relatively rare in the antebellum period and were published only by larger institutions. They were often used by social libraries as a promotional device, to solicit books and recruit subscribers.⁷⁸ With very few exceptions, catalogs in the colonial period were simply alphabetic lists, usually with the author as the main entry. In 1807, the Library Company of Philadelphia produced a catalog with both an alphabetic listing by author and a classified index arranged under thirty broad subject headings.⁷⁹ This method was widely used by other libraries, although some adopted the arrangement employed in the catalog of the Mercantile Library Association of New York in 1844. Instead of broad subjects, its classed index consisted of a long list of specific subject headings arranged alphabetically.⁸⁰ Regardless of the relative merits of the various classification schemes, their development helped to democratize libraries by making their collections more accessible to users. Readers could browse for books by topic, and were no longer required to know the exact title or author of a work in order to find it. Cataloging was also becoming a distinct body of knowledge that was unique to librarians. As such, it was an important element in the professionalization of librarianship.⁸¹

The General Society printed six catalogs between 1820 and 1865. The first and third, published in 1820 and 1839, were arranged by title in roughly alphabetic order. For example, the first section listed all works beginning with the letter “a,” but not alphabetically. The second catalog, produced in 1833, was arranged in the same manner, but was first divided into four parts by size: folio, quarto, octavo, and duodecimo. In all three, the title sometimes included the author’s name. In 1820, for instance, two copies of the same work appear as *Guthrie’s Geography* and *Geography by Guthrie*. Some titles

were listed with a subject word first, as in *Geography (Introduction to)*. An apprentice might have to know the title, the author, or the subject of a book, and even then he would have to browse under the first letter in order to find it.

The catalogs published in 1855, 1860, and 1865 were “classed” catalogs. The first two were divided into five parts. The first and second parts listed all titles in the Apprentices’ Library, except “novels, tales, romances,” and all the titles in the Demilt Library, alphabetically by author. The third and fourth parts were all the fiction in the Apprentices’ Library arranged alphabetically by author and by title. The fifth part was a classed subject index of all the non-fiction works in both libraries. It consisted of nine major classes: theology; mental and moral science; political science; geography and history; mathematics; natural sciences; medical science; technology; and encyclopedias. Each major class was divided into several subclasses. Geography and history, for example, had more than fifty subclasses, including the United States, all the countries of Europe, ethnology, Indians, and female biography. The major classes, the subclasses, and the titles within each subclass were not arranged in alphabetic order. The 1865 catalog added a sixth part that listed the books under the approximately five hundred subclasses found in the fifth part. In this part, the subclasses were arranged alphabetically.

Although these later catalogs, particularly their non-alphabetic, classed indexes, may have been somewhat difficult to use, they were vast improvements over their predecessors. They were designed, in the words of the preface to the 1855 catalog, to “furnish, to some extent, at least, the necessary guidance in selecting books, and also afford greater facility in finding a book, not only on any subject, but on any branch of a subject that one may desire to peruse.”⁸² For the first time, readers could select a book by

topic, and they no longer needed to browse haphazardly through roughly alphabetic lists of titles to find a known item. The catalogs therefore offered greatly improved access at a time when the number of readers and the size of the collection were increasing rapidly. At the same time, they indicate that the General Society's librarians were acquiring skills unique to their profession.

The Apprentices' Library contained between four and five thousand volumes in 1820 and approximately eight thousand in 1833.⁸³ The Apprentices' and Demilt Libraries totaled 17,931 volumes in 1855 and 33,700 in 1865.⁸⁴ It is difficult to compare the proportions of different subjects in the catalogs for these years, since the first two were simply roughly alphabetic lists of titles and the second two included classed indexes. For the 1855 and 1865 catalogs, I simply counted the number of titles under each major class and subclass, and the number of titles under "novels, tales, and romances," and calculated the percentage each represented of the total of both collections. For 1820 and 1833, I first selected a random sample of 100 works from each catalog. I then assigned each title one of the nine major classes from the 1855 and 1865 indexes or classed them as fiction. In a sample of one hundred, the number in each of these ten categories is an estimate of the percentage of that major class within of the whole collection. If an item in the 1820 or 1833 sample was also in the Apprentices' or Demilt Library in 1855 or 1865, I used the major class heading from the later catalog. If it did not, I had only the title from which to infer the subject matter of a work, and some were so generic that the major class assigned was sometimes an educated guess. The sampling method was therefore somewhat subjective. Nonetheless, it suggests some broad generalizations regarding the varying proportions of different subjects in the libraries during the period from 1820 to 1865.

Generally, the percentages of different classes changed relatively little in the four catalogs. By far the two largest major classes in all of them were geography and history; and mental and moral science. Together they comprised at least half of the collection in each year. Theology was a somewhat distant third, and proportionally it actually decreased slightly, from sixteen and ten percent of the 1820 and 1833 samples to ten and nine percent of catalogs of 1855 and 1865. The remaining classes were very small. Political science, natural science, and technology each were never more than six percent of the collection for any year.⁸⁵ Medical science, mathematics, and encyclopedias were two percent or less of the total in all four years.

Table 2: Percentage by class of the total number of titles in the Apprentices' Library for 1820 and 1833, and combined totals of the Apprentices' Library and the Demilt Library for 1855 and 1865.

CLASS	1820	1833	1855	1865
geography and history	30%	40%	36%	32%
mental and moral science	42%	34%	19%	19%
theology	16%	10%	10%	9%
political science	5%	2%	5%	6%
natural science	1%	6%	5%	5%
technology	1%	4%	5%	6%
medical science	--	--	2%	2%
mathematics	1%	--	.59%	.44%
encyclopedias	--	--	.36%	.28%
novels, tales, and romances	4%	4%	16%	20%

On the whole, therefore, political science, natural science, technology, medical science, mathematics, and encyclopedias were relatively unimportant. However, this generalization needs to be qualified in a number of respects. First, the sampling errors for the samples in 1820 and 1833 were slightly less than five percent, so that it is possible

that these major classes were underestimated for those years.⁸⁶ Also, the library in 1820 consisted entirely of donations, so the initial collection of books was determined by what members were willing to donate. More important, there were significant external constraints upon the areas in which the collection might develop. It is not surprising that certain major classes were proportionally smaller, since publishers issued relatively few titles for those subjects during the period under consideration. For example, American publishers between 1819 and 1849 printed 636 works in history, but only 30 in mathematics and geometry.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, it is accurate to generalize, for example, that the collection offered little that, in the words of the 1820 report that recommended establishing a library, would “have a tendency to promote [apprentices] in their several vocations.”

Noah’s address at the re-opening ceremony in 1850 provides an explicit and detailed exposition of the purposes of the collection. In it he suggested a course of reading for “a poor, little ragged apprentice boy” who wanted to take full advantage of the “rich repast spread before him.” It begins with “fiction, wit and humor, always the first to whet the appetite for reading.”⁸⁸ Popular fiction, that is, the titles listed separately under “novels, tales, and romances” in the 1855 and 1865 catalogs, comprised a relatively small proportion of the collections, but increased much more than any of the major classes in the classed indexes. Fiction was only four percent of the samples for 1820 and 1833, but sixteen and twenty percent of the combined libraries in 1855 and 1865. During this period there was also a dramatic increase in the works of fiction available for purchase. American publishers issued 128 such titles between 1820 and 1829, 290 between 1830 and 1839, 765 between 1840 and 1849, and 90 in 1850 alone.⁸⁹

As Noah implied, novels, tales, and romances seem to have been intended to lure young readers into the library, but members of the society never wholly approved of recreational reading, especially earlier in the century. In 1829, for example, the library committee was instructed to “inquire into the expediency of discontinuing hereafter the issuing of Plays, Novels and Romances; and report what proportion of such books compose the present library.”⁹⁰ The librarian in 1857, W. Van Norden, reported that the free readers probably borrowed titles of fiction much more frequently than non-fiction, but hoped that this would “gradually change for the better.” Moreover, he argued that such works did serve some purpose “by withdrawing them from idle and vicious associations, and cultivating a habit of spending their leisure” time in reading.⁹¹

Moreover, the distinction between fiction and “literature” was somewhat ambiguous. Several titles in the 1855 and 1865 catalogs, including *Robinson Crusoe*, *Don Quixote*, and *Ivanhoe*, that were listed under the subclass of prose fiction within the major class of mental and moral science also appear in the lists of novels, tales, and romances. In addition, much popular fiction during this period had an explicitly moralizing aspect. Various reform movements used novels and short stories to dramatize their causes. The 1865 catalog, for example, includes among its titles of novels *Temperance Tales* by Lucius Manley Sargent, one of the leading temperance propagandists of the time.⁹² Many other works, such as *Rising in the World* by Timothy Shay Arthur or *The Mechanic’s Bride* by William G. Cambridge, also appear to have been intended to reform or instruct the reader. Still, despite its popularity and its increase proportionally in the later catalogs, fiction was considered inferior to more serious literature.

The next step in Noah's suggested course of reading was history. The major class of history and geography comprised thirty and forty percent of the 1820 and 1833 samples, and thirty-six and thirty-two percent of the Apprentices' and Demilt Libraries in 1855 and 1865. It was the largest class in every year except 1820. Only seventy-five of a total of 2795 titles within this major class fell under the subclasses of geography or physical geography. There were also small subclasses for ethnography; correspondence; and antiquities, manners, and customs. Most of the others were for particular countries or regions, including Africa, Asia, China, and the Pacific, all of which contained both historical works and travel literature. By far the largest subclass was individual biography, with 371 titles listed. There were also subclasses for collective biography, with 125 titles, and female biography, with forty-eight. Ten separate subclasses dealt with the United States or North America. American history and travels alone had 203 titles. Noah explained that works in history were to be the "foundation" upon which the poor apprentice "builds his superstructure," after he had progressed beyond popular fiction.⁹³

The end of Noah's course of reading was achieved when the apprentice "slides insensibly into a course of *belles-lettres* and polite literature . . . [and] becomes familiar with the fine arts." The major class that most closely approximated these subjects was mental and moral science. It was 42 and 34 percent of the samples of the 1820 and 1833 catalogs, and 19 percent of both libraries in 1855 and 1865. Mental and moral science was the most broad and eclectic of all the major classes. It included such subclasses as temperance; slavery; elocution; anecdotes; and games and sports. Most of them, however, dealt with some aspect of literature or philosophy. Miscellaneous literature was the largest subclass, with 149 titles, and practical ethics or morals was second with 119. Once

he was thoroughly versed in all the mental and moral sciences, Noah's "poor, little ragged apprentice boy" . . . "steps forward as accomplished a gentleman as many who have taken their degrees at Oxford and at Eton."⁹⁴

For Noah and for the members of the General Society, mental and moral science was clearly the most important part of the library. Although it decreased at approximately the same rate that novels, tales, and romances increased, it was the key major class in the collection. Its relative decline in relation to fiction is probably best explained by the necessity of attracting more readers. The General Society felt it needed to lure young boys and girls from less constructive pastimes and also to compete with subscription libraries in attracting subscribers. At the same time, mental and moral science was the most essential major class in achieving the broad purposes of the Apprentices' Library.

The way in which the classed sections of the 1855 and 1865 catalogs were organized reveals a great deal about the worldview of members of the General Society. Mental and moral science brought together a great variety of subclasses that, to a modern reader, would seem rather dissimilar. For Noah and his audience in 1850, however, they were all related, in that they included the books a young apprentice would need to read in order to become "an accomplished gentleman." This was the essential purpose for maintaining the Apprentices' Library. For members of the society, a gentleman was not a mere aristocrat; he was moral, industrious, cultured, and fully capable of carrying out his civic duties in a democracy. Mental and moral science thus comprehended all of the qualities outlined, for example, in Thomas Mercein's address at the opening of the library in 1820, as well Noah's speech thirty years later. In the most general sense, what the society members hoped to accomplish was to mold young workers in their own image, or

at least in the image that they preferred to have of themselves. This goal was a hallmark of reform during the antebellum period.

The history of the Apprentices' Library of New York is significant in several respects. Its founding and development represent major trends within antebellum libraries and librarianship. Its growth in terms of readership and the size of its collections reflects the importance of social libraries as precursors of modern public libraries. The increase in fiction shows a grudging acceptance of recreational literature, if only as an alternative to less constructive pursuits and a stepping stone to more serious reading. The development of classed catalogs was an essential aspect of improving access to libraries, as well as the professionalization of librarianship. At the same time, the transformation of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen from a traditional craft benefit society to a humanitarian reform organization mirrors changes in the American economy and society. It reflects a shift from the craftsman's work shop to factory production and the consequent alteration of the relations of production that was evident in the breakdown of the system of apprenticeship. It also shows a change in outlook from artisanal republicanism to modern liberalism. Finally, the society's educational efforts are clearly representative of antebellum humanitarian reform and the popular enthusiasm for universal education.

Chapter Four
**The Biblical Library of the American Bible Society: Evangelicalism and the
Evangelical Corporation**

The American Bible Society (ABS) was founded in 1816 to publish and distribute Bibles at cost throughout the United States and abroad.¹ Shortly after its founding, its managers established a library as a resource for the Society's editors and translators. In some respects the scope and purpose of this library was rather different from those considered in previous chapters. It was highly specialized, comprised mostly of Bibles in a myriad of languages and editions, and relatively small; by the Civil War it held barely two thousand volumes. Nonetheless, the ABS library was an important part of the culture-building enterprise during this period. The collection reflected the Protestant values that the ABS sought to defend and which were a critical component of republican culture during the antebellum years. At the same time, the development of the library pointed towards fundamental changes in the economic and public spheres, the import of which did not become evident until later in the century, and which reflected values associated with an emerging liberal, corporate culture.

The British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) was organized in 1804. The BFBS quickly became the leader of a worldwide movement to bring the Gospel to the poor in purse and spirit. The first Bible society in the United States was the Philadelphia Bible Society,

founded in 1809. Within just a few years more than one hundred state, county, and town organizations had been established. By 1814, Elias Boudinot, president of the New Jersey Bible Society and former president of the Continental Congress, and others began calling for a national institution that would consolidate and coordinate these local societies. Their efforts came to fruition in the Garden Street Dutch Reformed Church in New York City on May 8, 1816. Sixty delegates representing thirty-four organizations convened to listen to stirring oratory, adopt a constitution, and elect a board of thirty-six managers of the American Bible Society. The founding members included many prominent national figures, including Boudinot, who served as the first president; the novelist James Fenimore Cooper; Jedidiah Morse, geographer and the author of popular children's textbooks; and the Reverend Lyman Beecher, later a leader in the temperance movement and numerous other evangelical causes. Representing a variety of Protestant denominations throughout the nation, the delegates stressed repeatedly that the Society's mission excluded "local feelings [and] sectarian jealousies ... by its very nature" and enshrined in the constitution the principle that "the sole object shall be to encourage a wider circulation of the Holy Scriptures without note or comment."² The constitution further pledged the ABS would "according to its ability, extend its influence to other countries, whether Christian, Mohammedan, or Pagan."

Clifford Griffin and other historians who viewed the antebellum philanthropies that comprised the "benevolent empire" as instruments of social control, emphasized the fear that underlay these efforts at evangelical reform. They portrayed the reformers as angst-ridden elites attempting to bolster their moral authority in the face of a rising tide of immigration, a new, divisive style of party politics, and the specter of infidelity. Griffin,

for example, pointed to Elias Boudinot's *The Age of Revelation or the Age of Reason Shewn to be an Age of Infidelity*, published in 1801, as evidence of the reactionary nature of the benevolent empire. In it the future ABS leader attacked Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* and attempted to counteract the morally degenerating effects of Deism.³ In the case of the American Bible Society, the social control thesis does have a degree of validity. An "Address to the People of the United States" issued at the constituting convention opened with an ominous reference to a "political world [that] has undergone changes stupendous, unexpected, and calculated to inspire thoughtful men with the most boding anticipations." It went on to decry "a period of philosophy, falsely so called, . . . which under the imposing names of reason and liberality, [was] attempting to seduce mankind from" the path of true religion.⁴ There was without doubt an element of anxiety at the founding convention in 1816.

Yet Griffin's account greatly overstated the extent to which reformers like Boudinot were motivated by fear. Certainly their motives were mixed, but there is a clear and persistent strain of optimism that runs throughout the ABS founding documents. After the allusion to a political crisis in the opening of the "Address to the People of the United States," there were repeated and dramatic references to a new spirit that was sweeping the Christian world, "an excitement, as extraordinary as it is powerful [that] has roused the nations." Indeed the "period of philosophy" had passed, succeeded by "the age of Bibles," "auspicious to whatever is exquisite in human enjoyment, or precious to human hope." Granted this is a rhetorical document, intended to rouse the faithful to action (and donation), but there is nonetheless a powerful and genuine optimism that pervades the "Address." Further, these millennial expectations are expressed in the

language of community. Terms and phrases such as “unity,” “cooperation,” “concert,” and “national feeling” appear in nearly every other paragraph.⁵ Again, this was more than stirring rhetoric designed to elicit support. The Society’s founders sincerely sought and expected to achieve a more perfect union based upon the values to be found in the Bible. Their pursuit of an inclusive culture is evidence, in part, of the pervasiveness of the republican notion of the commonweal that remained a compelling ideal throughout the antebellum period.

The Bible Society’s first annual report informed members that “the Managers have commenced a collection of Bibles, especially the earlier editions, in every language.”⁶ The library was established at the Board of Managers meeting in January 1817, at which they resolved that “a Copy of each edition of the Bible printed for the A.B.S.” would “be deposited in this Society’s Biblical Library.” The following month they expanded the collection policy to include “Copies of the early Editions of the Bible” and encouraged members to make donations.⁷ The member who was most responsible for the early development of the library and who served as its *de facto* librarian during its formative years was the Society’s first recording secretary, John Pintard.⁸ Pintard was responsible for the resolution that established the collection and immediately took a keen interest in developing it. He wrote to his close friend and ABS manager Samuel Bayard, “we shall make this an important department- promote it whenever you can. Greek, Latin, Hebrew, any tongue or dialect- ancient or modern- will suit as we want the various Editions of the Scriptures- in one collection.”⁹ Pintard donated Bibles from his own library, solicited donations from others, arranged for temporary quarters at the New-York Historical Society, and prepared the first catalog.¹⁰ In November 1817, he reported to his

daughter Eliza that “the Biblical Library is a child of my own and accumulates beyond my expectations.”¹¹

In many respects John Pintard was representative of the generation of patrician New Yorkers who dominated the city’s voluntary organizations in the early nineteenth century. His family were Huguenots who had fled France and settled in New Jersey in the seventeenth century. Born in 1759, his parents died when he was an infant, and he was raised by his uncle, Lewis Pintard, a New York City merchant. Pintard began his formal schooling at an academy in Hempstead on Long Island, and graduated from the College of New Jersey, later Princeton University, in 1776. He was an ardent bibliophile and an avid reader, particularly of theological works; he devoted part of every Sunday to religious reading and read the entire Bible at least once a year throughout his adult life.¹² Pintard served briefly in the New Jersey militia at the outbreak of the Revolution and for most of the war acted as secretary to his uncle, the American commissioner for prisoners-of-war in New York.¹³ In the 1790s he was elected to the New York City Council and the New York State Assembly. As a young man he failed in a series of business ventures, but in 1809 was appointed secretary of the Mutual Insurance Company, a salaried position that was his primary source of income until his retirement in 1829.¹⁴

Pintard, like many members of New York’s first families, also devoted much of his time to philanthropies like the American Bible Society. Indeed, for Pintard and the patrician founders of the ABS there was no sharp distinction between commerce, government, and benevolence, between the economic, political, and public spheres. In their minds all three were inextricably linked components of civic progress, for which the city’s elite was peculiarly suited, by education and social position, to provide

leadership.¹⁵ Pintard certainly spoke for many of his class and generation when he said that “the motives which activate me . . . arise from a sincere disposition to be useful in my day . . . and to apply the talents with which I am endowed for the benefit of Society.”¹⁶ While his attitude towards public service was quite typical, the range of his public activities was extraordinary. In 1817, the year in which he started the Biblical Library, Pintard held office in eleven additional organizations, including the Chamber of Commerce, the Literary and Philosophical Society, and the St. Esprit Church. He was particularly interested in libraries, and, besides the ABS collection, was instrumental in the founding and development of the New-York Historical Society Library, the New York Society Library, the General Theological Seminar Library, the Mercantile Library Association, the New York Apprentices’ Library, and the libraries of the Society for the Prevention of Pauperism and the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents.¹⁷

John Pintard’s involvement in these various culture-building enterprises reflects many of the salient characteristics of reform and benevolence in the early nineteenth century. First, books and libraries were an important part of the public sphere. While all of these collections served a variety of purposes and readers, they were all intended in some way to promote public morality and the commonweal. Second, leadership in these organizations was shared within a relatively select group of public-spirited patricians, what Thomas Bender has described as “interlocking directorates at the top.”¹⁸ Pintard was without doubt the most hyperactive of New York’s clique, but other elite New Yorkers were nearly as ubiquitous. For example, his friend De Witt Clinton, governor and mayor of New York, was active in, among other organizations, the Literary and Philosophical Society, the New York Society Library, the New-York Historical Society, and the

American Bible Society.¹⁹ Further, extended family connections often reinforced these ties within the benevolent empire. Elias Boudinot, the first president of the ABS, was John Pintard's uncle's brother-in-law, and ABS manager Samuel Bayard was married to his cousin. Finally, benevolence, as well as other kinds of elite association during this period, was primarily local and often a source of intense local pride. Pintard wrote to Boudinot in 1817 that the "Grand Canal, our Colleges, Academies—Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Institutions will proudly elevate the city of New York to that rank which her geographical situation and advantages entitles her to hold."²⁰ Even the American Bible Society, a national organization, was locally oriented to an extent. Its constitution required that the board of managers meet monthly somewhere in New York City and that two-thirds of the managers reside in New York or its environs.²¹ Within the Society, as within certain other prominent associations in the city's public sphere, there was some tension between local and more extended allegiances that never fully resolved during its earliest years.

The countervailing tendency of Bible cause supporters to think in terms beyond their immediate locality, to envision more extensive forms of community, eventually prevailed. One obvious source of this more expansive identity was their ideal of Christian brotherhood. The entire Bible movement was premised upon the evangelical belief that Christianity "teaches us that we are all members of the great family of mankind." An intimately related source was the republican veneration of the commonweal, the conviction that a "nation pouring forth its devotion" would secure "the purest interest of the community."²² A third source was what Thomas L. Haskell has called the "humanitarian sensibility." Haskell argues that the source of antebellum reform was a

new “*perception or cognitive style*” instilled by reformers’ participation in a market economy. The emergence of complex, contractually regulated markets created a heightened sense of moral obligation and a more abstract sense of causality, which, in turn, compelled many elites to feel responsible for the well being of the less fortunate beyond the boundaries of their immediate local communities.²³ This new cognitive style is evident in the “Address to the People” issued in 1816. Supporters were assured that Bible work would “satisfy our conviction of duty” by “minister[ing] to the blessedness of ... tens of thousands, of whom we may never see the faces, nor hear the names.”²⁴ Haskell’s argument is particularly relevant to the ABS, which literally marketed its benevolence in the form of Bibles.²⁵ Indeed the managers noted occasionally in their annual reports that the “extended commerce of the age” would help ensure the success of their cause.²⁶

One key to understanding antebellum reform is to consider how individual organizations defined the geographic scope of their benevolence. The American Bible Society was part of a trend towards the nationalization of voluntary association, but the borders of its benevolent republic were never precisely fixed. From its beginnings it was also part of a global Bible movement. The varying emphasis placed over time upon national and international efforts is evident throughout the annual reports and other ABS documents. It may also be traced in the catalogs of the Biblical Library.²⁷ Since the Library served as the basis for the Society’s scriptural translations, the development of its collection provides evidence of shifting priorities within the organization it served. The earliest surviving catalog, printed in 1837, reflects a relative emphasis upon Bible work within the United States. Although a total of eighty-five languages other than English are

represented, this figure is somewhat misleading, since many of the non-English editions were published by foreign Bible societies. In 1823 the Board had resolved to purchase from societies abroad “a regular series of Bibles and Testaments ... other than in the English language, to be deposited in the Biblical Library.”²⁸ Of far greater evidential value is the relatively small number of titles listed under “lexicons, concordances, and bibliographical works,” the part of the Library that would have enabled the ABS to heed its constitutional injunction to “extend its influence to other countries.” Only twenty-three of a total of 531 titles in the 1837 catalog fell under this heading.²⁹ Clearly Biblical translations for distribution overseas were not a priority for the American Bible Society during its first two decades.

Some of the Bibles in foreign languages in the collection were editions that the Society imported or published for domestic distribution. For example, during its first year alone it purchased from abroad Bibles in German, Gaelic, and Welsh, and printed a French Bible.³⁰ Copies of these were added to the Library. This effort to reach the nation’s non-English speaking population reflected the managers’ firm conviction that Bible reading would inculcate the evangelical values upon which to build an inclusive culture for the new republic. They were confident that distributing the Gospel among the foreign born would “diffus[e] ... the principles of knowledge and virtue so valuable to a republican government.”³¹ Perhaps the most interesting example of this faith and optimism is the Society’s early support of missionary activities among Native American tribes. The 1837 catalog lists editions of the Scriptures in nine Indian languages, including the *Epistles of John* in Delaware published by the ABS in 1818³², and the earliest annual reports stressed that “the Board have not been unmindful of their *brethren*

of the woods.” Even though the tribes were “divided from us by ... everything which distinguishes savage from civilized man,” the introduction of the Bible would effect an “improvement in civilization,” and thus enable them to partake of the blessings of European culture.³³

This zeal for civilizing “the heathen” can only be understood in an international context. Like republicanism, nineteenth century evangelicalism was a trans-Atlantic ideology. Indeed, the two shared critical points of convergence, including most importantly an abiding faith in science and progress. Elias Boudinot’s fulmination against Thomas Paine notwithstanding, the leaders of the American Bible Society saw themselves as the vanguard of the Age of Reason. Like the Bible societies in Europe, the ABS consistently used the imagery of Enlightenment when describing its efforts to spread the Word to the benighted peoples of Africa and Asia. It conflated the light of the Gospel with the advance of commerce and science, which, allied with the missionary impulse, would bring about an “empire of religion and civilization.”³⁴ The annual report in 1838, for example, reminded Bible workers that “the operations of this Society were never designed for our land alone,” and noted the divinely inspired “changes among nations favorable to the introduction of the Scriptures”, including an international “commerce [that] is bringing us into contact with almost every people.”³⁵ The catalog published in 1837 solicited donations from members in the hope that the Library would become “an extensive repository of the most valuable works relating to . . . Biblical science,” which would promote “the spread of the Holy Scriptures among the nations of the earth.”³⁶

Enjoined by its constitution to “extend its influence to other countries,” the Bible Society had always aided missionary work abroad, but during its early years these efforts

were relatively modest. Normally this support was in the form of grants to Protestant missions for foreign translations. Between 1816 and 1831, the Board appropriated less than \$5,300 to overseas organizations.³⁷ Beginning in the 1830s, however, there was a dramatic shift in the Society's priorities. In 1833 alone, the managers granted a total of \$15,000 to support translations of the Bible by missionaries in India, Burma, and the Hawaii.³⁸ At the annual meeting the following year, with the confident optimism typical of nineteenth-century evangelicals, the members resolved to "employ its best endeavors, in concert with similar institutions, toward effecting the distribution of the Bible among all the accessible population of the globe, within the shortest practicable period."³⁹

This dramatic proposition "called the attention of missionaries anew to the work of preparing translations," and effected a change in the scope and character of the Biblical Library.⁴⁰ From 1837 to 1863 the number of foreign languages represented in the collection rose from 85 to 125, many of them non-European languages the translation of which the ABS had underwritten. The managers boasted "that more than three-fourths of the entire race, if able to read, could here find the revealed will of their common Creator."⁴¹ There was also a corresponding increase in linguistic reference works. The 1863 catalog classed ninety-six titles under "grammatical works," and "dictionaries and lexikons," again many of them in non-Western languages.⁴² Finally there was an entirely new kind of book that was listed under "miscellany." During this later period, the annual reports occasionally solicited donations of "sketches of travel, or histories of nations," noting that such titles were valuable, "as the Society is now extensively engaged in preparing and distributing books in foreign countries."⁴³ Over fifty books of history and

travel in exotic lands, and biographies or autobiographies of overseas missionaries were included in the 1863 catalog.⁴⁴

There were a number of motives behind this growing enthusiasm for Bible work abroad from the 1830s onward. Certainly the prospect of converting the heathen in foreign climes was considerably more glamorous and dramatic than distributing Bibles to poor immigrants at home. A more compelling reason may be lie in fundamental changes in the way that ABS members perceived their domestic market. As immigration increased and the country became more ethnically and denominationally heterogeneous, Bible workers were less confident that the Scriptures could serve as the foundation of an inclusive American culture. This diminishing faith in shared values was an important part of the gradual shift towards a modern, liberal culture.

When the American Bible Society was founded in 1816, America was on the brink of momentous social, political, and economic change. The 1820s saw the beginnings of the development of a modern party system, in which professional politicians managed national political organizations fueled by political patronage and cemented by party loyalty rather than adherence to abstract political ideals. Although the country was religiously and ethnically diverse before 1816, that diversity increased markedly in the succeeding decades as immigrants arrived in increasing numbers, and theological divisions arose within the ranks of evangelical Protestantism. Perhaps most significantly, the United States was moving rapidly towards a modern, industrial, nationally integrated economy. All of these dramatic changes were aspects of an emerging liberal culture and

were reflected in the American Bible Society and the library it developed to sustain its efforts in the Bible cause.

A stark distinction between republicanism and liberalism tends to distort the history of this critical transitional period. In the first instance, republican and liberal values are, to an extent, incommensurable. Republicanism developed historically as a political ideology and liberalism was originally associated with economic theory. Although both were identified with a broader cluster of cultural values, each tended to emphasize different, relatively discrete spheres of human activity. Moreover, certain of the defining republican and liberal values were complementary rather than oppositional. The difference between terms such as liberty and rights, or independence and individualism is a matter of nuance that would have meant little to the men and women of the early nineteenth century. To insist upon elaborate distinctions between such keywords imposes our own theories upon real persons and events. The managers of the American Bible Society did not think and act according to paradigms articulated by historians a century and a half after the fact. In their eyes they were simply spreading the word under rapidly evolving circumstances. In doing so, they, in the words of Gordon Wood, “without ... realizing they were defending ‘republicanism’ or advancing ‘liberalism’, . . . cumulatively transformed the culture.”⁴⁵

The complex relationship between republicanism and liberalism is well illustrated by a critical event in the life of that most republican of ABS members and the founder of its library, John Pintard. In October of 1791, Pintard served as an agent for William Duer, a wealthy speculator living in New York City. Together they were implicated in the young republic’s first financial panic and possibly the first instance of what today would

be called insider trading. Duer and a group of associates that included members of such prominent New York families as the Livingstons, the Verplancks, and the Roosevelts, conspired to corner the market in the stock of the Bank of the United States and the Bank of New York, having been assured, according to Duer, by his friend Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton that the two institutions were about to merge. Pintard's role was to help finance the operation through loans from small-time investors, laborers, shopkeepers, and artisans. By March of 1792, he had borrowed nearly \$700,000, an astronomical sum at the time. When the proposed merger fell through, many of these humble investors lost their life savings, the economy went into a brief but disastrous depression, and William Duer went to jail. The mayor wisely reinforced the guard to discourage the lynch mobs that gathered nightly outside his cell. John Pintard fled with his books and his family across the Hudson to New Jersey. He lived in Newark for the next several years, including more than a year spent in debtor's prison, and did not return to New York until 1797, when Congress passed the first national bankruptcy act.⁴⁶ Properly chastened, he wrote years later "he that maketh haste to get rich encompasseth himself in many sorrows. Alas! How sadly I have experienced the truth of this . . . proverb."⁴⁷

Contemporary opinion divided over whether Pintard was a dupe or a knave. The truth probably lies somewhere between these extremes. He was certainly foolish to associate with a swindler like Duer, but he must also have understood the risks to which he was exposing thousands of working class investors. From our perspective it is perhaps more to the point to ask whether he was a hypocrite. The stern republicanism to which he ostensibly adhered posed an irreconcilable opposition between speculation and the

commonweal, between wealth and luxury and republican virtue. Did the John Pintard who during this period signed a letter, “John Pintard, Humble servant is rather a antirepublican phrase,” betray his values in associating with a rank speculator like William Duer?⁴⁸ The Panic of 1792 is an extreme example, but it shows that, in practice, there was no irresolvable tension between republicanism and the market. John Pintard came of age in a time of unbridled optimism and ambition. He and the other civic-minded leaders of the American Bible Society never felt compelled to live up to later historians’ paradigmatic version of republicanism. They celebrated the expansive, exuberant spirit of the age and saw no contradiction between *homo civitas* and *homo economicus*.

A philanthropic association within the public sphere, the ABS was, from its inception, at the forefront of innovations in the economic sphere. Two of the earliest additions to the Biblical Library were copies of *The School Bible* and *The New Testament* published in 1810 and 1814, respectively, by David and George Bruce of New York, purportedly the first Bibles stereotyped in the United States.⁴⁹ Stereotyping is the printing of pages from metal plates produced from molds cast from blocks of moveable type. This revolutionary process significantly reduced labor costs for mass printings and was therefore ideally suited to the purposes of the American Bible Society. In the “Address to the People of the United States” delivered at the organizing convention in 1816, the managers promised to “furnish great districts of the American continent with well executed Stereotype plates, for their cheap and extensive diffusion,” and subsequent annual reports repeatedly emphasized that “their first exertions ought to be directed towards the procurement of well executed stereotype plates.”⁵⁰

When combined with the new, increasingly sophisticated steam presses of the 1830s and 1840s, stereotyping allowed the Society to compete with and in some cases even surpass the capacity of the major commercial printing houses of the era.⁵¹ In 1850, it printed more than 633,000 Bibles and Testaments and by 1863 production had surpassed one million.⁵² In June of 1853, the ABS dedicated a new building, a six-story Bible House that occupied an entire city block at Astor Place. The new headquarters included a spacious, fireproof room for the library and enabled the Society to consolidate all of its operations under one roof for the first time. The production process was “so planned, that from the delivery of the paper in Ninth Street, it proceeds regularly through its various stages of manufacture, until it arrives in books in the Depository, with but very little labour in hoisting from one story to another.”⁵³ The Society’s new home was the culmination of the managers’ dedication to efficiency and productivity, in the words of Peter Wosh, “a monument to industrial technology.”⁵⁴

Just as important as the mechanization of labor during this period was a concomitant revolution in corporate organization. As corporations in both the public and economic spheres grew in size and complexity, they necessarily adopted new and distinctively modern functions and organizational structures. The development of the American Bible Society generally and its library in particular portended changes in the management of bureaucracies that are often associated with large for-profit corporations much later in the century. When John Pintard established the Biblical Library in 1817, its primary goal was to assist the Society’s employees in preparing accurate translations of the Scriptures. Annual reports emphasized that “the object was to have the means at hand for comparing one version with another,” thus enabling the translators to “determin[e] the

true meaning of the Inspired Word.”⁵⁵ Yet the library was part of a complex, evolving organization and, as such, it served multiple functions that changed over time. For example, ABS publications also noted that it could “be visited, and the books there consulted, by any friend of the Society.”⁵⁶ In part, this invitation was simply meant to share the library’s bibliographic treasures with a larger public. Yet it is also likely that the public nature of the collection served more than one purpose. In 1896, Corresponding Secretary Edward Gilman prepared a report for Society in which he outlined the history and condition of the collection and speculated that, apart from its practical uses, “consciously or unconsciously,” the founders intended that it would function as a “museum or place for exhibiting the results of past and current Bible work with a view to the enlisting of new enthusiasm for the future.”⁵⁷ The library thus served a very modern purpose. In part it was a public relations tool, a means of enlisting financial support for the Bible movement. It was part of complex organization and could perform a multiplicity of functions, both internal and external.

From its inception, the library served an internal function that was just as important as its role as a resource for the Society’s translators. In 1816, the ABS was one of the few non-governmental bodies in the United States that was truly national, indeed international, in scope. In order to provide the Scriptures throughout the states and territories, as well as to Protestant missions across the globe, the ABS performed a myriad of complex and interrelated activities, including printing and binding, sales and distribution, and fundraising. Coordinating and documenting all of these functions over vast distances required a record keeping system, what today would be called an archives or a records management center. Shortly after Pintard became recording secretary in

1817, the board of managers instructed him to copy the Society's outgoing communications "into books provided for that purpose, one for foreign and the other for domestic correspondence," and "to note in the said Books the time when, and the mode in which he forwarded each letter." He was further charged to maintain "an Alphabetical Index and such marginal notes as may promote the convenience of reference" for the managers and to make these records available at every meeting of the board.⁵⁸ This archival function was later formalized and expanded in 1845 in the Society's first printed by-laws, which stated that "in [the library] shall be placed ... all manuscripts, and other interesting papers which the Society ... may deem worthy of preservation."⁵⁹ Long before for-profit, national corporations such as the railroads, the ABS began developing in its library a modern system of corporate records management.

Not long after the library's archival function was made explicit in the by-laws, there was a critical change in the nature of the records that it archived. The Society's most important administrative documents were the reports transmitted by its Bible agents, each of whom was responsible for a soliciting donations and distributing the Scriptures in a state or territory or in an overseas agency.⁶⁰ Through the early 1850s, these monthly statements, which were often excerpted in the annual reports, were relatively informal, anecdotal accounts of Bible work throughout the United States and the world. This format allowed agents to "weave the whole into a narrative, which affords an opportunity of introducing anything interesting in the way of incidents, anecdote, remarks or conversation coming under their notice."⁶¹ All of this changed dramatically in February of 1859, when the board mandated a standardized, printed form for the monthly reports. Designed by Archibald Russell, a founder of the American Geographical and Statistical

Society and the author of *Principles of Statistical Inquiry* (1839), the new report required agents to supply weekly figures in twenty-six columns, all culminating in the monthly “total receipts from sales and donations.”⁶² This format enabled accountants and managers in the Bible House in New York to gauge the effectiveness of individual employees and to summarize the progress of the Bible cause generally in a statistically precise fashion. The substitution of numbers for narrative in the records archived in the Biblical Library marks a decisive transition to a modern corporate model of organization and the ascendancy of impersonal corporate values.

At the same time that the Society was consolidating its operations nationally and internationally, its vision of an inclusive culture based upon evangelical Protestant values was slowly fragmenting. To begin with, this projection of cultural harmony was never more than an ideal. From its inception the Bible cause never presented a truly unified front. In 1816, a number of prominent organizations, including, most notably, the Philadelphia Bible Society and the Episcopal Bible and Common Prayer Book Society, declined to send delegates to the constituting convention. In 1823, the same year that John Pintard began to prepare the Biblical Library’s first catalog, the Board of Managers directed that it should “procure all such works as have been published . . . or that may hereafter be published, in relation to the controversy on the subject of Bible Societies.”⁶³ Pintard himself became embroiled in a bitter debate with the leader of his own church, John Hobart, the Episcopal bishop of New York, over his membership in the ABS. The Society’s librarian at first hesitated to join because Hobart “at the origin of this Institution . . . alarmed the Episcopalians by holding out that the American Bible Society swallowed

them up in the gulph of presbyterianism and warned them against the danger of becoming members.” Pintard quickly overcame his misgivings and later complained that “the Episcopalians with our Bishop apprehended that we would be annihilated by associating with other denominations in this great and glorious work.”⁶⁴ Although such divisions within the ranks of Protestantism were rare in the 1810s and 1820s, the dispute was a harbinger of future interdenominational conflicts. As the country became more diverse ethnically and more divided denominationally, the Society’s optimism and its rhetoric of inclusion became increasingly problematic.

The ABS hoped to ensure denominational harmony by focusing solely on the lowest common denominator theologically. It sought to avoid controversy by distributing the Bible “without note or comment.” However, a seemingly technical point of Biblical translation called into question the unity of purpose within the Bible cause and eventually precipitated a schism within the Society. Baptists believed that the baptism of adults into the church required literal and complete immersion in water. Reflecting this belief, they read “immersion versions” of the Bible that rendered the Greek work *baptiso* as “to immerse” rather than “to baptize.” In 1835, Baptist missionaries requested funds from the ABS to publish an immersion translation of the Scriptures for their mission in Calcutta. When the Board of Managers voted to reject their request, on the grounds that they could “encourage only such versions as conform in the principles of their translation to the Common English Version,” the Baptist members of the Board resigned and formed a rival organization, the American and Foreign Bible Society.⁶⁵ As a result of the controversy, the American Bible Society placed renewed emphasis upon its Biblical Library to enhance the authority of its translations. In 1836 it hired George Bush, the

Chairman of the Oriental Languages Department at New York University, as editor of all ABS publications. He was instructed to “have care of the Library” and to “have charge of the integrity of the Text of the English Scriptures printed by the Society rendering them all conformable to the standard copy now in use.”⁶⁶ By the 1830s, the ABS’s original vision of pandenominational unity had faded considerably.

The dispute with the Baptists over immersion translations was relatively minor compared with the Society’s conflicts with the Catholic Church. As the number and influence of Roman Catholics grew in the 1820s and the 1830s, the ABS became increasingly distrustful and intolerant. While its publications still referred occasionally to the “better class” of priests who were allies in the Bible cause, the emphasis shifted decidedly to “the more corrupt of the priesthood [who] are opposed the distribution of the Scriptures in any form” or who circulate only Catholic versions of the Bible, “a cunning device for power.”⁶⁷ All of the annotated catalogs of the Biblical Library published after 1837 carefully noted each title that appeared on the Church’s *Index of Prohibited Books*. This anti-Catholicism probably reached its height in 1849 with the publication of William P. Strickland’s official *History of the American Bible Society*. Strickland devoted an entire chapter to “Bible Prohibition in Roman Catholic Countries” and included lurid references to American priests burning the Scriptures.⁶⁸

This fear and suspicion of the Church was intimately related to the ethnicity of its communicants. Especially after the Potato Famine in the late 1840s, an increasing proportion of American Catholics were immigrants from Ireland, a group many within the ranks of the Bible cause deemed unfit for republican government. Even Pintard, certainly one of the more broad-minded of the ABS leaders, occasionally wrote despairingly of a

country “overwhelmed with Irish emigrants,” poor “Pat and his wife Shelah [who] cannot withstand the temptation” of alcohol, which leads to “thefts, incendiaries, and murders.”⁶⁹ This same unease over the rising tide of immigration is evident in the Society’s publications. At the annual meeting in 1837, a resolution was passed expressing concern over “the rapid influx of foreign emigrants, the great extent to which they are without the Bible, and the consequent danger of their example and influence while in this condition.” A year earlier, the annual report had urged members to redouble their effort to supply newcomers with the Scriptures and added ominously that “in the thorough performance of this duty depends in no small measure the perpetuity of our social institutions.”⁷⁰ Within twenty years of its founding, the Society’s initial optimism had diminished considerably. In the face of rising demographic and denominational diversity, it had, to a great extent, lost faith in its vision of an inclusive culture founded upon a set of unifying values.

The Biblical Library is important in the history of culture-building institutions during the nineteenth century because it reflects this shift from a unified republican culture to a fragmented liberal culture earlier than many other associations within the public sphere. In addition, it highlights the pervasiveness of evangelical values throughout the antebellum years, values that were critical as well to the libraries examined in the two preceding chapters. Finally, the Bible Society and its library are a very early example of the rise of the national corporation in the United States. Corporatization within the economic sphere was to have a profound effect on American culture later in the century.

It was however, large-scale evangelical organizations like the American Bible Society that pioneered this new form of organization.

Chapter Five
New York's Free Circulating Libraries: The Mission of the Library in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era

What Mordecai Noah said at the re-opening of the library of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen in 1850 remained true for more than a quarter of a century.¹ The Apprentices' Library was still the only collection in the city of New York available to the "poor, little ragged apprentice boy . . . disposed to drink deep at the Pierian Spring." While other large cities such as Boston and Chicago established municipal systems that were free to every resident, leaders in the profession both locally and nationally increasingly regarded New York as a backwater of library development. Reference libraries like the Astor and the Lenox welcomed the gentleman scholar, and subscription libraries like the Mercantile Library Association and the Society Library were open to those who could afford to pay an annual fee, but as late as 1878 most New Yorkers lacked, in the words of the *Times*, the "advantage of free and easy access to books as a means of moral and social culture."² The Apprentices' Library was the only substantial free library in the city, and even it was free only to young men and women employed in industry.

Eventually the Society did expand access to the collection, but it did so initially in a limited and revealing way. In 1879, the library was opened to journeymen and to all working women.³ Thus in its first step towards making the Apprentices' Library a public

library, the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen defined its public, somewhat ambiguously, in terms of the craft community. Significantly, this change occurred during a period in which the Society struggled to define what was meant by the term “mechanic.” In February of 1874, a special committee reported that “‘Mechanics and Tradesmen,’ as they were connected by the founders of our Society, simply mean that it was never intended that any one but a mechanic, or one who has learned a trade, should become a member.” No action was taken on the report, and in the coming years the membership was increasingly dominated by engineers, and by wealthy manufacturers like Abram Hewitt and Andrew Carnegie, who had never served formal apprenticeships.⁴ However, despite this shift and the effective disintegration of the traditional craft system that it reflected, the brothers of the General Society continued to cling to the producerist ideal that linked the artisanal community with the republic. Members remained proud that, in “recognizing the relations of skilled handicraft to the prosperity of a nation, our Society, among an industrious and free people, has done its part to assert the dignity of labor.”⁵ By clinging tenaciously to the fiction of an artisanal republic, they could conveniently ignore the realities of class conflict in late nineteenth century.

In August of 1886, the Apprentices’ Library became a free library. Any resident of the city was granted access and borrowing privileges.⁶ This change in policy, however, did not reflect a change in the aims and philosophy of the General Society, but rather was a response to legislation passed in Albany in the previous month. Under the provisions of “An Act to encourage the growth of free public libraries and free circulating libraries in the cities of the State,” any library organization in the city of New York that circulated its collection freely to the public was entitled to apply to the Board of Estimate for up to five

thousand dollars for every one hundred thousand volumes it circulated.⁷ The General Library Law changed entirely the direction of library development in the city. It resulted in the founding of a wide range of free circulating libraries, private associations that were funded largely with public money. These new collections were the first step towards a municipal library system as the term is understood today and were eventually consolidated to form the Circulation Department of the New York Public Library. The free circulating libraries were established by the city's elite as a means of bridging the economic, social, and religious divisions of late nineteenth-century New York. In some respects, however, the libraries were themselves a reflection of those divisions.

Although the first public library in the United States, the Boston Public Library, was established in 1854, contemporaries viewed the founding of the American Library Association (ALA) in 1876 as the true beginning of the "public library idea."⁸ To a limited extent, the Apprentices' Library was a pioneering effort in that it circulated its collection for free for home use. The crux of the public library idea, however, was that libraries should circulate freely to *everyone* in the community and, just as important, that they should be conveniently located. Rather than one imposing central building far from a city's residential neighborhoods, as in Boston, the public library idea favored small branches within walking distance of readers' homes. According to one of the founders of New York's free circulating libraries, "as the people are not likely to come to a central library, we must scatter them among the people."⁹ Beyond this, there was a spirit of service that pervaded the circulating libraries that was lacking in the more established organizations, particularly the non-circulating reference libraries. For example, while the

Lenox and the Astor were closed in the evenings, when working people might use their collections, almost all of the free circulating libraries remained open until nine or ten at night, as well as on Sundays. Similarly, librarians at the “book museums” tended to regard books as sacred artifacts that would be desecrated by contact with the irreverent masses. Librarians at the new free circulating libraries abandoned the idea that their collections needed to be shielded from the public and often reported proudly that their books were “read to pieces.”¹⁰

The first free circulating library in New York City was actually founded before the passage of the General Library Law of 1886. In 1878, a group of benevolent ladies from Grace Episcopal Church taught a free sewing class to young girls in a poor neighborhood in lower Manhattan. One day before class began, a teacher heard overheard one of the students reading to her classmates a hair-raising tale from one of the city’s many cheap, sensationalistic newspapers. Distressed that the children should be enjoying such lurid fare, their teacher offered to lend each of them a book of wholesome literature once a week “on condition that she should never again buy a sensational story paper.”¹¹ This proved to be so effective that the women raised a collection of about 500 donated books and opened a small library on Fourteenth Street and Fourth Avenue. In March of 1880, after soliciting advice and assistance from “gentlemen upon whose judgment and charitable disposition reliance was placed,” they incorporated as the New York Free Circulating Library.¹² The library became the largest and most influential of the city’s circulating libraries. By 1900, it operated eleven branch libraries throughout Manhattan and circulated approximately 1,635,000 books that year from an aggregate collection of nearly 167,000 volumes. The New York Free Circulating Library was instrumental in the

passage of the General Library Law, and when it eventually consolidated with the New York Public Library in 1901, formed the nucleus of the new Circulation Department.¹³

The free circulating libraries were founded during a period of rising class conflict. From the national railroad strikes of 1877, two years before the founding of the New York Free Circulating Library, to the unrest surrounding the Haymarket trials in 1886, to the severe depression of the early 1890s, tensions between rich and poor escalated throughout the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. The republican ideal of a unitary public defined by shared values became increasingly elusive. The free circulating libraries in New York were a sustained attempt to reconstruct a republic fractured by the economic disparities and dislocations of the late nineteenth century. This was the predominant theme, for example, at a meeting held in support of the New York Free Circulating Library in 1882. The Reverend Henry Potter, rector of Grace Church and Bishop of the Episcopalian Church in New York, reminded the audience that “in the Old World, the classes are bound together by ties not existing among us,” that “the relations here of indifferent wealth to the poor may reach out until they become so distant that it may be hard to unite them.” On a more optimistic note, Dr. John Hall, president of New York University, assured them that if “rich men [will] aid in this work by bridging over the chasm between themselves and the less fortunate or wealthy classes, ... they will lay broader and deeper the foundations of society with a regulated liberty.”¹⁴

In the midst of the economic and political unrest of late nineteenth-century New York, the maxim that an informed public is the mainstay of republican government acquired particular urgency. At the American Library Association conference in 1894, Ellen Coe of the New York Free Circulating Library warned that “in these troublous

times popular ignorance is invested with terrors unknown before.”¹⁵ Yet the mission of the free libraries went well beyond merely protecting the working classes from the wiles of socialists and anarchists. The libraries aimed to civilize, to cultivate among the poor an appreciation of beauty and refinement. This was fundamentally different from the aims of libraries such as the Astor and the Lenox in which use of the collections set their readers apart from the masses and served as a means of affirming their status as scholars and gentlemen. It was also rather different from the ethic of mutual, communal improvement that inspired the founders of the New York Society Library. Uplift in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era was animated not by what William Livingston in 1753 termed “a united Harmony of public Spirit,” but rather by elites’ desire to elevate the ignorant masses toward their own level.¹⁶

Although the promoters of the public library idea frequently stressed that the circulating libraries were to serve the entire community, that “the benefits of the institutions were to be shared by all persons, regardless of class and color, race and religion,” in practice they were clearly founded to patronize, to “civilize” the poor.¹⁷ When Catherine Bruce, who provided the funds to construct the George Bruce branch of the Free Circulating Library, saw a carriage standing in the street outside the library, she angrily declared that it was “not for carriage people.”¹⁸ The founders of the free libraries sought to ease class tensions by uplifting the masses, so that those who walked and rode the trolley cars shared the same refined values as the carriage people. Reading the proper books in the proper atmosphere would do more than simply foster good citizenship. It would reconstruct a fractured community. The founders reported optimistically that the libraries were inculcating “habits of quiet, neatness, and decorum,” that “such a place is

civilizing and improving to manners as well as mind.”¹⁹ For New York’s elite in the late nineteenth-century, the key to “a harmony of public spirit” was this effort to remake the masses in their own image.

The free circulating libraries were only one strand in a dense web of middle and upper class voluntary associations working to uplift the urban poor. At the meeting in support of the New York Free Circulating Library in 1882, for example, one of the speakers referred approvingly to the links between the library and the local Charity Organization Society (COS).²⁰ Groups like the COS, which sent “friendly visitors” into the homes of charity recipients to determine whether they were financially and morally entitled to assistance, have been described by some historians as instruments of “social control.”²¹ Rather than philanthropic, humanitarian enterprises, they have been dismissed as tools by which an anxious elite sought to regulate the behavior an unruly working class. Among library historians, Michael Harris was particularly critical of late nineteenth-century free libraries as a means of social control.²² There was certainly an element of control in organizations like the COS and, to a lesser extent, the free circulating libraries. Even though membership in the libraries was entirely voluntary, terms such as “control,” “supervision,” and “regulation” were, in fact, used with some frequency in the annual reports and other documents.²³ The word used much more often, however, was “influence.”²⁴ Psychologically, it is unlikely that the elites who founded the free libraries would have taken comfort in the fact the poor were coerced into adopting their values. They could feel much more secure knowing that they exercised influence, that the poor were willingly guided into the higher realms of elite culture. In any case, wealthy New Yorkers were convinced that their values were self-evidently superior. The

movement to establish free circulating libraries was inspired by the optimistic assumption that the less fortunate would naturally embrace a higher cultural standard if they were exposed to the elevating influence of good books.

However, it was not simply the volumes on the shelves, but the branches themselves, the physical environment of the library, that would exert a wholesome, uplifting influence on the reader. The free libraries were consciously designed to inculcate by example a central value of the Gilded-Age reformers, domesticity. Reference libraries like the Astor and the Lenox were constructed as imposing public monuments to high culture, which often discouraged New Yorkers of more humble means from using their collections. The circulating collections, on the other hand, were often housed in converted houses and storefronts, and their interiors were carefully designed to foster a more intimate, welcoming atmosphere. They were to serve as model homes, as both an example and a refuge for the poor crowded in dark and noisy tenement districts. The New York Free Circulating Library strove to provide “cheerful and homelike library buildings,” “places of rest and comfort” for “those having no quiet homes.”²⁵ In addition to books, supporters of the library also donated works of art, and plants and flowers, so that the poor could read in an uplifting milieu of middle class domesticity.²⁶

This emphasis upon values associated with the domestic sphere sheds light on the critical role that women played in the founding and management of the New York Free Circulating Library. As noted above, the first branch of the library was organized entirely by women, and even later, after “men of standing in the community” ostensibly assumed leadership of the most important committees, they continued to take the most active part in the direction of the branches. As Joseph Choate, who had lost his seat on the board for

failing to attend the monthly meetings, explained at the rally in support of the library in 1882, “those who appear as officers of the institution are only ornamental; the real work is done by the ladies.”²⁷ Further, for most of the library’s history the chief librarian was female, as were practically all of her assistants.²⁸ Both as an educational institution and as a model of domesticity, the free library was deemed a woman’s place. Employment or philanthropic work there were considered an acceptable extension of her nurturing, maternal role from the private into the public sphere.²⁹

With its emphasis upon homelike branches in urban neighborhoods, there was a marked affinity between the public library idea and the settlement house movement. Probably all of the settlement houses in New York City had a library, or at least a reading room, and two of them, University Settlement and the East Side House, had circulating collections substantial enough to receive tax monies under the terms of the General Library Law. The Webster Library of the East Side House in particular became one of the most innovative and influential free libraries in the city. First established in 1892 as a distribution station, a sub-branch, of the New York Free Circulating Library, the Webster opened in a separate building in early 1894, and by the time of its consolidation with the New York Public Library in 1903, it had approximately 12,000 volumes and an annual circulation of over 106,000.³⁰ Its librarian, Edwin Gaillard, was an influential voice in local library circles and later coordinated relations between the public library and the public schools.³¹ Inspired by the lofty ideals of the social gospel, the Webster, like the Free Circulating Library, sought to recreate community, to foster harmony between the rich and the poor. In its first report, the settlement was described as “the home of some men of education, who desire to become acquainted with their neighbors, become their

friends,” to assist them “not as superiors to inferiors, but as brethren, as children of one Father.”³²

For Progressive Era voluntary associations such as the free circulating libraries and the settlements, the locus of uplift and reform was the neighborhood.³³ They hoped to exercise a pervasive influence by creating institutions that were part of the social fabric of the local community, by forging “this bond of neighborhood, . . . one of the most human, yea, of the most Divine, of all bonds.”³⁴ Since the poor neighborhoods of New York were often home to immigrants and their children, this emphasis upon locality meant that reformers were often forced to come to terms with ethnic as well as class differences. Readers of German descent, for example, made extensive use of the Ottendorfer branch of the New York Free Circulating Library, its second branch, established in 1884.³⁵ More troubling for elite New Yorkers, however, were the new waves of immigrants who arrived in the 1890s and later, newcomers from Southern and Eastern Europe who seemed more alien, more threatening than earlier groups. In 1898, for instance, the Webster reported a sharp decrease in the number of Germans using the library and a corresponding increase in Czech readers. To an extent, the free circulating libraries, particularly those in the settlement houses, accorded a degree of respect to the cultures of these new immigrants. The Webster Library, for example, purchased a small collection of books in Czech.³⁶ Yet at the same time, the libraries clearly expected that their influence would contribute to the “Americanization” of the foreign population. The Free Circulating Library reported proudly that its collections helped “make them acquainted with their adopted country, and to fit them to become intelligent American citizens.”³⁷

The Webster and the New York Free Circulating Library were products of mainstream Anglo-Protestantism. There were other free libraries that thrived somewhat apart from the dominant culture. In fact, the public library idea as it developed in New York reflected the diversity and complexity of the city's ethnic and religious composition. There were, for example, two Jewish libraries. Founded by B'nai B'rith in 1850, the Maimonides Library developed a more scholarly, less popular collection, and at the turn of the century chose to close its doors rather than be absorbed by the Circulation Department of the New York Public Library.³⁸ The Aguilar Free Library, established in 1886, was second in size and popularity only to the Free Circulating Library. The first circulating library created as a result of the General Library Law, by the time it consolidated with the public library in 1903, the Aguilar operated four branches and had a collection of approximately 85,000 volumes with an annual circulation of nearly 800,000.³⁹

Founded by a group of men and women "who were then actively interested in Jewish communal affairs," the Aguilar in many ways paralleled the New York Free Circulating Library.⁴⁰ The name of the library itself made reference to the virtues of domesticity. Grace Aguilar was a Jewish-English poet, novelist, and theologian who died in 1847.⁴¹ According to a library newsletter, her writings, and in particular her most popular novel, *Home Influence*, expressed in "a chaste and beautiful moral tone," the "beautiful home influences of ... [the] family circle."⁴² Founded mostly by German-American Jews, the Aguilar sited its "branches in localities where the Jewish population was dense," and served a growing population of Russian and Eastern European Jewish immigrants. The directors stressed in their annual reports that, particularly in the East

Broadway branch in lower Manhattan, the “immigrant population here ... imbibes their patriotic ardor through these books, and the library thus aids the making of good citizens.”⁴³ However, during a period of rising anti-Semitism, Americanization at the Aguilar was rather different from Americanization at the Free Circulating Library, and it certainly never meant a dilution of the newcomers’ identity as Jews. The East Broadway branch, for example, purchased books in Hebrew and subscribed to Jewish periodicals such as *The American Hebrew* and *The American Israelite*.⁴⁴ Culture-building associations such as the library were, in fact, expected to re-invigorate Judaism in the United States. As one supporter explained: “The constant recruits we draw from abroad are acclimated within one generation, are made worthy Americans, and more than make good the vacancies created in our ranks by backsliders.”⁴⁵

The Cathedral Free Circulating Library, the branch system maintained by the Catholic Church, was the third largest in the city. Began in 1888 as a small collection in the Cathedral School of Cathedral Parish, the library grew steadily and eventually opened to the public in 1893, although it did not apply for and receive funds from the City until 1897. By the time it consolidated with the New York Public Library in 1905, the Cathedral Library comprised a Central Library on Amsterdam Avenue, four branches, and five distribution stations, including one in a Catholic settlement. The previous year it circulated over 350,000 volumes from a collection of approximately 50,000.⁴⁶ Although its director, Father Joseph McMahon, stressed that the library welcomed readers of all faiths, it was created and closely supervised by the Catholic Church.⁴⁷ Of all the circulating libraries in the city, terms such as “control” and “regulate” appeared most frequently and emphatically in the publications of the Cathedral Library.⁴⁸ The Cathedral

was also the last to join the New York Public Library and fiercely resisted consolidation for almost four years.

In the midst of the bitter controversy over the takeover, the Cathedral Free Circulating Library declared that it was “established to counter the evil influences of public libraries in general.” In part, this opposition was founded on the fact that their collections included works that reflected the pervasive anti-Catholicism of the period. A “Statement of the Position of the Cathedral Library” issued in 1901 maintained, certainly with some justification, that “on the shelves of these libraries can be found books which are calumnies of Catholic doctrine, faith, and practice.” Just as important, however, Church officials were concerned that the free circulating libraries were not sufficiently selective in developing their collections, they that provided access to “works ... injurious to the morals of the average reader.”⁴⁹ Despite the rather heated rhetoric it employed as it fought to remain independent of the New York Public Library, the Cathedral Library was by no means opposed to public libraries *per se*. Just as much as their counterparts in the Protestant and Jewish free circulating libraries, the supporters of the Cathedral were putting “into practical form their belief in good literature as a civilizing and elevating influence.”⁵⁰ The public library idea, the free lending of books from branch libraries for home use, was generally accepted. What librarians and library leaders differed over was how best to develop collections that would civilize and uplift the masses.

The debate in the 1880s and 1890s over New York’s free circulating libraries centered on the provision of fiction. A consensus within local library circles recognized “a great distinction between matters of opinion and matters of taste,” and held that, in matters of

opinion, in subjects such as philosophy, religion, and politics “it should be the desire of the library boards to have each side fairly and, if possible, evenly represented.”⁵¹ Even the most conservative of the free libraries, the Cathedral Library, held copies of, for example, Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital*, Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty*, and Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species*.⁵² Rather than trying to exercise control or influence, the libraries for the most part promoted critical, wide-ranging reading in matters of opinion. The Free Circulating Library, for example, printed bibliographies on important public issues such as the tariff and the free coinage of silver, as did the Aguilar, including one entitled simply “Questions of the Day.”⁵³

Fiction, however, was a “matter of taste.”⁵⁴ Librarians and trustees of New York’s free circulating libraries argued and agonized over how much and what kinds to collect. The late nineteenth century was a period of change and conflict in this respect. The older prejudice against fiction as intrinsically inferior or even immoral had faded, and there was a greater willingness within local library circles to accommodate to some degree popular tastes in reading. Some library leaders argued that certain kinds of fiction at least were essentially harmless and that the provision of recreational reading was a legitimate function of a free library. One of the speakers at the meeting in 1882 in support of the New York Free Circulating Library, for example, described “the joy and relief it would furnish to the tired working classes.”⁵⁵ Some even argued that fiction could instruct as well as amuse. The newsletter of the Aguilar Library referred to the “librarians[‘] ... especial favorite, the ‘subject reader,’” who read, for example, historical novels to lend “vividness and color to his mental picture” of historical events, and an article by the *New York Post* on the Free Circulating Library held that “no one who realizes how stimulating

ideas and knowledge are most readily absorbed will be disposed either to lament or apologize for” the circulation of fiction.⁵⁶ Yet for most librarians, fiction was neither for amusement nor instruction. Fiction was a matter of taste, and one of the primary aims of the free library was to cultivate good taste among the masses.

The parameters of the debate over fiction in free circulating libraries were tellingly defined at the American Library Association’s annual conference in 1894 by two members of the New York Library Club’s executive committee. In a paper entitled “Common Novels in Public Libraries,” Ellen Coe, the head librarian of the New York Free Circulating Library, urged her audience never to forget that they were “missionaries of literature.” While conceding rather grudgingly that it was sound policy to supply “books [which] are extremely light, entertaining, amusing,” in order to attract the “unlettered, half-educated classes” to the library, she insisted that “a certain unmistakable good literary quality should be maintained,” that it was possible to purchase attractive works “which still unquestionably possess the desirable qualities of literary and moral excellence.” Quoting from the presidential address that year by J. N. Larned, she rallied her colleagues to “defend our shelves.”⁵⁷

At the same session, George Watson Cole presented “Fiction in Libraries: A Plea for the Masses.” Cole reminded the assembled librarians that “what is trash to some, is, if not nutrient, at least stimulus to others.” He chided his audience that “the librarian should not carry his head so high in the clouds so as to forget that the vast majority of people are bowed down by their cares and burdens, and care more for mental relaxation than instruction.”⁵⁸ Most provocatively, Cole argued that libraries that were supported by public money had an obligation to meet the public’s demand for popular fiction. He held

that “the library is in existence by the grace of the public, and it is its duty to cater to” the “wants of the masses who bear the burden of taxation.”⁵⁹

These two papers represented two competing ideals of library development. In practice, the collections of New York’s free circulating libraries reflected a tension between the need to attract the working classes with “trash” and the desire to uplift them with works of “literary and moral excellence.” Few of his colleagues agreed with Cole that they were to cater to the masses. Librarians and trustees viewed library work as a calling, as a noble mission not to provide private amusement, but to promote public refinement. In fact, Cole’s argument that public monies should support collections that satisfied the public’s demand for popular fiction was often turned on its head. At a meeting of the New York Library Club in 1889, for example, one member insisted that free libraries had no “right . . . to spend funds . . . given to us to benefit the public, on books that do not benefit.”⁶⁰ At the same time, however, many librarians would have disagreed with Coe that they should purchase only the most refined and uplifting works. As a practical matter, they realized that free libraries were popular largely because they provided popular fiction. Moreover, since the City’s appropriations were tied to the number of volumes circulated annually, more fiction could mean more generous funding.

Few librarians believed at heart that a collection of what Coe called “pure fiction” was even possible.⁶¹ In practice, they recognized that it was, in the words of one library supporter, “baby-talk” to “suppose that everything can be ticketed with ‘bad’ or ‘good.’” They realized that books were “first-rate, second-rate, and so on,” and that second-rate works were the best means of attracting the masses to free libraries. They purchased

“impure” fiction in the belief, or at least the hope, that reading the second-rate, or possibly even the third-rate, would eventually lead to the first-rate.⁶² This notion that popular fiction could serve as a stepping-stone to more refined, uplifting literature was fundamental to the development of free libraries and was widely held for much of the nineteenth century. When Mordecai Noah spoke at the re-opening of the Apprentices’ Library in 1850 of his “poor, little ragged apprentice boy” beginning with “books of fiction, wit, and humor,” and eventually “slid[ing] insensibly into a course of *bell-lettres* and polite literature,” he was making essentially the same argument voiced at a meeting of the New York Library Club more than a half century later, when one member advised that “the public . . . is attracted first by poor and cheap things, but [its] mind must naturally expand and reach to higher aims in literature.”⁶³

The catalogs of the free circulating libraries make it clear that even the self-styled missionaries of literature failed to practice what they preached. In Ellen Coe’s own library, for example, the New York Free Circulating Library, less than ten percent of the collection in 1895 was classed as literature, while more than twenty-five percent was classed as fiction.⁶⁴ Because of the different ways that they defined and reported statistics, it is difficult to generalize, but in rough terms the city’s free libraries probably held between forty and fifty percent juvenile books and popular fiction.⁶⁵ There was a firm consensus that certain types of works should be excluded. For instance, dime novels and the sensational story papers that so alarmed the ladies of Grace Church in 1878, “blood and thunder” fiction that tended to “speak lightly of virtue and connive at bold or polished villainy,” was considered beyond the pale.⁶⁶ Beyond this, however, there was room for disagreement. Librarians excluded books because they were sensationalistic or overly

sentimental, because they glamorized wrongdoers or gave readers unrealistic expectations of life, or simply because they were poorly written. Yet if the purchase of popular works was predicated on the assumption that reading the second rate would lead eventually to pure fiction, then, in the words of Arthur Bostwick, Coe's successor at the Free Circulating Library, "difference of opinion will always exist" over "where a line must be drawn to separate . . . the desirable from the undesirable."

In 1881, a committee of the American Library Association conducted a national survey of fiction in free libraries. It asked in particular whether libraries circulated the works of twenty-one authors, "all or some of whose works are sometimes excluded from public libraries by reason of sensational or immoral qualities."⁶⁷ The list was somewhat dated by the time the free libraries in New York began to publish their catalogs. For example, by the 1890s, the popular English writer Wilkie Collins, and Edward Bulwer Lytton, who is most remembered for writing that "it was a dark and stormy night", may not have been considered first-rate, but they were no means controversial.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, whether these twenty-one presumably suspect authors appear in the surviving catalogs of the free circulating libraries gives some idea of where they drew the line on the question of popular fiction.⁶⁹ Only the Apprentices' Library, for example, held works by all twenty-one, including even G.W.M. Reynolds, E.D.E.N. Southworth, and the infamous Ouida, one of whose most memorable characters had "a thousand lovers, from handsome marquesses of the Guides to tawny black-brown scoundrels in the Zouaves." Most librarians considered all three little better than dime novelists.⁷⁰ Predictably, the Cathedral Library was the most conservative of the free libraries. Its catalog listed only five of the authors in the ALA survey. The Aguilar and the Bond Street branch of the Free

Circulating Library fell somewhere between these extremes, holding fifteen and sixteen, respectively. There was considerable variation among New York's free libraries regarding the collection of popular fiction, but all of them drew a line that included the second-rate.

The demand for popular novels was much greater than the supply. In all of the libraries, fiction as a proportion of the total circulation was almost always considerably higher than fiction as a proportion of the total collection. For example, in the New York Free Circulating Library in 1895, fiction was approximately twenty-six percent of the volumes on the shelves, but accounted for forty percent of the volumes circulated.⁷¹ Again because of the different ways that they reported statistics, it is difficult to make generalizations about the free libraries' circulation, but overall fiction was at least forty and often more than fifty percent.⁷² Moreover, the proportion of literature circulated was very low, usually six percent or less, and most importantly, these numbers changed very little over time. For example, the Aguilar circulated sixty-three percent novels in 1890 and sixty-three percent again ten years later.⁷³ The free circulating libraries' own statistics belied the claim that the lending of popular fiction would lead to more refined, uplifting reading.

In their annual reports and elsewhere, the librarians and trustees tended to use a stock set of arguments to explain to their supporters, and probably also to themselves, why the character of the circulation failed to improve appreciably over time. Most commonly, they simply explained, often with little or no supporting evidence, that although their readers were perhaps not developing an appreciation of fine literature, they were still reading the very best, most uplifting popular fiction.⁷⁴ The librarian of the

Apprentices' Library, for example, noted in 1879 that even though "works of fiction and juvenile literature are still the most sought after, it is gratifying to report that a perceptible improvement is apparent in the demand for books of a standard character," that is, titles by the "standard," first-rate authors such as Charles Dickens or Sir Walter Scott.⁷⁵ Another argument stressed that, although popular fiction circulated more frequently, readers actually spent more time reading the more improving, uplifting works of literature. In 1889, William Appleton, chairman of the Free Circulating Library, referring to the circulation statistics for that year, cautioned that "a light novel may be read and given out ten times where a serious standard work is circulated only once, and yet the actual time spent by the reader may be the same." Six years later, shortly after taking charge of the library, Arthur Bostwick put this argument to the test by conducting a brief experiment in which the proportional circulation of books in the various classes in the collection was calculated in terms of the number of days each volume was checked out. He discovered that, on average, fiction and literature actually circulated for approximately the same amount of time, about one week, and then cited this as evidence that "the users of the library draw out many of the solid works... which require more time to read."⁷⁶

Despite the confidence that the missionaries of literature expressed in public, by the 1890s the assumption that reading the second rate would lead automatically to the first-rate was becoming rather less tenable. In 1893, Ellen Coe conducted for *Library Journal* a national survey of librarians' opinions on the provision of fiction in public libraries. Asked whether "you believe the reading of light fiction leads to more serious reading," less than twenty-five percent of the respondents said "yes," approximately twenty-five percent believed it was "doubtful," and over half said "no."⁷⁷ This did not

mean, however, that the library community was prepared to abandon its mission of uplift. Rather librarians were simply losing faith in the power of reading to improve the reader naturally, effortlessly. They were much less likely to assume that the users of the free libraries would, in the words of Mordecai Noah, “slide insensibly into a course of *bell-lettres* and polite literature.” Instead, librarians now emphasized the need to take an active role in developing, in refining the literary tastes of the masses.

Again, the key term used was not control, but influence. The librarians of the free libraries recognized that they could never force working class readers to rise above popular fiction, but for the most part they remained hopeful that they might over time guide them to finer, more uplifting reading. For example, in a discussion at the New York Library Club of “How far should reading be controlled in libraries?”, the word “control” was hardly used at all. Instead, the general tenor of opinion was that “we should not dictate, but influence their choices.”⁷⁸ The focus upon nurturing the reading of individual users meant that the success of a free library depended to a large extent upon the personality of the librarian, upon his or her ability to develop personal relationships with the people of the neighborhood in which the branch was located. This was emphasized in the Library Club’s discussion as well as the annual reports of the different libraries. The New York Free Circulating Library, for instance, referred glowingly to a librarian in one of the smaller branches whose “readers” were “personally know to her,” which allowed her “better opportunities for guiding the reading of those applying for books, and thus a great improvement has ... been made in the character of the books read.” Another was singled out for her ability “to make friends ... and help them, without seeming to dictate.”⁷⁹

In the later 1890s, most of the free libraries adopted two very significant changes in policy. Although they would seem, at first glance, to have given readers greater scope and freedom in the selection of books, both were often described as ways to augment the influence of the librarians in the branches. The first of these was the “two-book system.” Until about 1895, users were allowed to borrow only one volume at a time. Under the two-book system, they could check out two, provided that one of them was a work of nonfiction. It was stressed repeatedly in the annual reports and elsewhere that the new policy would provide an opportunity to develop an appreciation of writing of a more substantial, uplifting character, that it would encourage users to “enjoy other kinds of reading when proper guidance is furnished by the librarian.”⁸⁰ The second change, the “open shelf system” was considered even more “radical.” From the beginning, the free circulating libraries were “closed shelves” collections; readers chose a book with the help of a catalog or a librarian, then filled out a request slip and submitted it at a circulation desk.⁸¹ Under the new plan, they were free to browse among the books on “open shelves.” The annual reports occasionally held that simply offering the public direct access to the collection in this way would naturally, automatically result an improvement in reading habits. It would “afford” a direct “familiarity with books of culture” and thus “stimulate a taste for standard works of literature.”⁸² Just as often, however, the reports stressed that it allowed librarians to provide friendly guidance as users selected their books. “Personal aid” was “the natural adjunct of open shelves,” the best way to forge “cordial and sympathetic relations between borrowers and librarians.”⁸³

Open shelves and the two-book system were just part of a wide range of changes in the city’s free libraries in the 1890s. These dramatic innovations did not mean that

librarians and trustees had lost faith in the public library idea as it was originally conceived. In the words Ellen Coe, quoting from First Corinthians at a meeting of the New York Library Club, the missionaries of literature were still prepared to “believe all things, hope all things, endure all things,” firmly convinced that the “reward will seldom fail.”⁸⁴ Nonetheless, there was an underlying sense that the influence of the public library idea could and should be enhanced. There was growing conviction among the supporters of New York’s free libraries of the need to somehow augment the simple idea of providing books for home use in branches in the city’s poorer neighborhoods.

In 1888, there was a sharp exchange in the pages of *Library Journal* between Jacob Schwartz of the Apprentices’ Library and Max Cohen of the Maimonides Library that in many ways paralleled the argument six years later between Ellen Coe and George Watson Cole over the provision of fiction in free libraries. In a contribution entitled “Business Methods in Libraries,” Schwartz challenged librarians to abandon their “Utopian day dreams” and recognize the “practical fact” that “library management . . . is principally and primarily a business, and must be managed on business principles.” He then enumerated a list of “sound business principles” that included, shockingly, “advertise your wares,” and “buy only what your customers want.”⁸⁵ In a heated reply, Cohen was “mortified” that Schwartz gave “public expression to such a low ideal of the librarian’s vocation.” He declared that “the librarian [is] an educator, not a cheap-john,” a peddler of shoddy, worthless goods, and that business principles were “fatal to the principle of the Public Library” and to “the cause of higher culture.”⁸⁶

Schwartz was stating his case in a deliberately provocative fashion, and Cohen was certainly not the only librarian in New York who took offense. Nonetheless, Schwartz' article embodied much of the spirit of what came to be known, in the 1890s and the early twentieth century, as the "modern library idea." In its last annual report in 1901, the New York Free Circulating Library summed up the progress of public libraries in New York since its founding, and in doing so made a distinction between the public library idea and the modern library idea. The modern library idea encompassed all of the defining features of the public library idea, free books circulated from small branches located throughout the city. Yet the modern library idea also included such innovations as open shelves and the two-book system, and a host of other changes, "all in the direction of providing greater facilities for the public."⁸⁷ Nine years later, Arthur Bostwick, now head of the Circulation Department of the New York Public Library, wrote *The American Public Library*, the classic exposition of the modern library idea. Like Schwartz, Bostwick made an explicit analogy between public libraries and commerce. He wrote that "the modern . . . library idea is simply tantamount to a confession that the library, as a distributor, must obey the laws that all distributors must obey, if they are to succeed."⁸⁸ Although Schwartz and Bostwick were careful to point out that they were simply advocating sound principles of management for libraries, not the pursuit of profit, the business analogy they both used was very appropriate.⁸⁹ At the heart of the modern library idea were new kinds of library services, and aggressive efforts to expand the market of library users by promoting those services to new classes of readers.

Librarians such as Ellen Coe and Max Cohen found troubling the mere suggestion that the libraries might share anything in common with the business world. For them, the

high ideals of the free library, the mission of literature, transcended the sordid world of commerce. This view clearly predominated during the years in which the public library idea gained momentum in the city. For example, in their earliest annual reports, both the Aguilar and the Free Circulating Library stressed that they were merely responding to a “natural and great demand for good reading,” that readers flocked to the branches “without resort to advertising or any artificial methods.”⁹⁰ By the time Arthur Bostwick took charge of the Free Circulating Library in 1895, however, those he described as the “old-fashioned librarians” were clearly in the minority and there was a greater willingness to adopt a more commercial attitude towards the promotion of free libraries. By 1898, for instance, his library had developed an extensive advertising campaign using posters, handbills, and other “means of giving the public information about us.”⁹¹ The Webster in particular embraced commercialism to promote good reading and advertised its collection in stores, the elevated railcars, factories, churches, and saloons. It explained in its annual report for 1902 that in order to be successful, it had to make itself known in the neighborhood, that “even shoe stores endeavor to do as much.”⁹²

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of the modern library idea was its focus on serving a new market of library users, children.⁹³ The reference and subscription libraries were only open to adults, but the free circulating libraries not only welcomed younger readers, but, whenever space and funds allowed, established separate children’s libraries or reading rooms.⁹⁴ For example, at the time of its consolidation with the New York Public Library, the Free Circulating Library had separate facilities for children in eight of its eleven branches and over half of its readers were juveniles.⁹⁵ Recognizing the special needs of younger readers, especially those from tenement neighborhoods, the free

libraries took pride in providing “large, light, and airy room[s], wherein dwell cheerfulness and a spirit of content, much to the satisfaction of our little patrons.” They assigned as children’s librarians women who were not only “well read and well educated,” but also “attractive to children in manner and person.”⁹⁶ This special care and effort was considered a wise investment in the future of the library. Librarians at the more established branches noted proudly that many of their most loyal adult readers first developed sound reading habits as juvenile users, “so that this library ... , as it were, ... created its own readers.”⁹⁷ Central to the modern library idea was the conviction that “there is no more important work in the building ... than that with children,” since it “pays so well in immediate and far-off results.”⁹⁸

Librarians also worked with children outside the building. Another distinctive feature of the modern library idea was cooperation between the public library and the public school. From the beginning, supporters of the public library idea had considered the educational mission of the both institutions to be inextricably linked, and they proudly referred to the free library as the People’s University.⁹⁹ At a time when most students left school at around age twelve, the library would provide the means for further self-cultivation, “thus carrying forward the work of civilization which is commenced in the primary school.”¹⁰⁰ However, while the public library idea saw the branch library as simply a “necessary supplement of our common-school system,” the modern library idea envisioned a direct, proactive role for librarians in the education of young children.¹⁰¹ As Ellen Coe explained, “it is not only nor chiefly in the way of this post-graduate education that the library should be considered as an ally of the school; its help . . . is absolutely necessary in the actual class-room work.”¹⁰² Cooperation between schools and libraries

took many forms, but most commonly a branch librarian would select for a class, with the help of the teacher, a small collection of titles dealing with topics the students were currently studying. The books would be sent on loan to the school for a semester, and they would circulate from the classroom rather than the branch. The Webster Library in particular was very active in “school work,” and its librarian, Edwin Gaillard, later supervised relations with the public school system in the Circulation Department of the New York Public Library.¹⁰³

Many of the most innovative services associated with the modern library idea were an outgrowth of these cooperative activities with the primary schools. For example, when the free circulating libraries were first established, it was assumed that reference collections would be the exclusive province of the large reference libraries such as the Astor and the Lenox. Yet once they began collaborating with the schools, it became evident that reference books were not just for scholars, that other library users, particularly children writing essays or doing homework for their classes, had need of them as well. All of the free libraries developed at least a basic reference collection of dictionaries, encyclopedias and yearbooks, but the Aguilar in particular devoted special care and attention to reference service, even listing in its annual reports all the new titles added at each branch. It described its reference collection as “the most valuable feature of a library” and noted with pride “the crowd of children ... who eagerly wait their turn to get a seat at the reference table.”¹⁰⁴

This new interest among librarians in reference service reflected critical shifts in the field of education. For most of the nineteenth century, children learned primarily

through memorization and recitation, from, in the words of John Shaw Billings, the first director of the New York Public Library, “dry manuals in mechanically taught elementary schools.”¹⁰⁵ Beginning in the 1890s, however, there emerged new approaches that valued creativity and individuality, that stressed the active acquisition of knowledge, rather than the passive reception of accepted truths and traditions.¹⁰⁶ Librarians applauded these changes and saw reference service in free circulating libraries as a means of invigorating the learning process. As the Aguilar Free Library explained in its final report, they considered “the habit of looking up information, each one for himself, one of the most desirable habits to cultivate among our rising generation.”¹⁰⁷ The modern library idea valued children as “moral, reasoning being[s], not as automaton[s]” and stressed that they should be “encouraged to investigate,” since “it is ‘digging’ that leaves a permanent impression on the mind.”¹⁰⁸

The free libraries’ work with the public schools was just part of a larger effort to forge stronger links between the branches and the neighborhoods they served. The libraries were eager to cooperate with other local organizations to supply good reading to the people, and to this end, many of them established a “Traveling Library Department.” A traveling library consisted of small collections of carefully selected books, like those sent on loan to the public schools, that circulated outside of the branch from potentially any location in the neighborhood.¹⁰⁹ The Free Circulating Library had a particularly extensive and successful traveling library program which, by 1900, loaned out more books than many of its branch libraries. That year, for example, nearly 140,000 volumes were borrowed from 153 traveling libraries, operating out of locations that included, besides the public schools, three telegraph offices, five public playgrounds, six Sunday

schools, twenty-five firehouses, and a variety of neighborhood clubs.¹¹⁰ In addition, the traveling collections of the free circulating libraries also included “home libraries.” These were boxes of ten to fifteen volumes that actually circulated from apartments in the tenement districts. Typically an older boy or girl in the family would assume responsibility for loaning the books to his or her friends in the neighborhood, and each week a “visitor” from the branch library would replenish the collection and meet with the children to get “acquainted with the little ones [and] lead them to the reading of better books.”¹¹¹ The traveling library departments, and the home libraries in particular, were emblematic of the modern librarian who, in the words of Arthur Bostwick, did “not sit down and wait for customers.”¹¹²

In addition to these efforts to reach out to potential readers in the neighborhoods, the modern library idea also encompassed a variety of services beyond the free circulation of books. From the beginning, photography and artwork were an important part of the refining influence of the branch library. By the late 1890s, however, the free circulating libraries began to envision themselves as “a centre not only for books, but for all the learning which helps to develop a true culture.”¹¹³ Some of them began to lend out prints and photographs so that users could experience the uplifting influence of art as well as literature in their homes. In 1899, for example, the Free Circulating Library loaned out over one thousand reproductions from one of its branches.¹¹⁴ Initially, artwork on the walls of the libraries was also used to inspire and to guide readers to the best books. Next to an engraving of George Washington, for instance, the librarian might place a brief bibliography of titles in the library relating to his life and times.¹¹⁵ Later these became much more elaborate, and incorporated more than just pictures and photographs, so that

the display would in itself serve an educational purpose. This feature of the modern library idea was developed most extensively and creatively in the Webster Library's Department of Practical Illustration. Designed to supplement its work with the public schools, the Webster's displays used a wide range of physical objects to illustrate subjects of interest to its readers. In 1901, for example, its librarians erected a display on North American Indians that included, among other items, a loom, a tepee, and casts of pre-historic tools donated by the Smithsonian Institution.¹¹⁶ While the Webster was "primarily a good Circulating Library," it believed "it could add immensely to its helpfulness were it also a museum of fine and useful arts."¹¹⁷

In many ways, the free circulating libraries combined certain of the defining characteristics of both reference libraries like the Historical Society and the subscription libraries like the Society Library. Like the reference libraries, they engaged in the pursuit of refinement, albeit under the benevolent direction of the city's elite. At the same time, the modern library idea, with its references to "customers" and "business methods," partook of the commercial spirit that to an extent influenced the subscription libraries. Moreover, even the "old-fashioned librarians" had the abiding faith in the indefinite possibilities of the future, in an indefinitely expanding market of refined readers, that was the hallmark of liberalism. Yet like many other voluntary associations in the Progressive Era, the free circulating libraries admired the rationality and efficiency of the business world, at the same time that they deplored its greed and selfishness. They sought to recreate a republic fragmented by economic disparities, and ethnic and religious tensions.

Thus the free circulating libraries combined both republican and liberal impulses. They were, to borrow a stirring phrase from the supporters of the Webster Library, in the “business of humanity” and were thus a robust expression of the culture-building enterprise.¹¹⁸

Chapter Six
**Reconfiguring the Public Sphere in the Progressive Era: The Founding of the
New York Public Library**

In *Triumphant Democracy, or, Fifty Years' March of the Republic* (1886), Andrew Carnegie compared material conditions in the United States near the close of the nineteenth century with conditions a half century earlier. He marveled that “we might almost conclude that we were upon another planet and subject to different primary conditions.” Dedicated to “the beloved Republic under whose equal laws I am made the peer of any man”, his bestseller explained at great length and with an abundance of statistics why America “leads the civilized world.” For Carnegie, republicanism was the critical constant in American history. The essential change in the republic over the course of the century was the increased prosperity of all her citizens.¹

Not all Americans in 1886 shared Carnegie’s optimism. The fifty years’ march of the republic also saw the rise of the corporation, rapid industrialization, massive immigration, divisive party politics and political corruption, and alarming disparities of wealth. By the end of the nineteenth century the cumulative effect of these changes and dislocations challenged the republican ideal of a homogeneous community of virtuous, independent, civic-minded citizens. By around 1910, the various and sometimes contradictory reactions to these changes came to be known as “progressivism.” The New York Public Library was founded, in part with Andrew Carnegie’s money, in the midst of

the tumult of the Progressive Era and its founding sheds light on critical strains of progressive thought. The creation of a public library as we understand the term today necessarily posed the question of what was meant by the word public and how that public was to be served. This question was raised, although not always answered, repeatedly in the long series of negotiations and accommodations that eventually resulted in one of the world's great public libraries. How different parties involved in the founding answered it sheds light on conceptions of liberalism and republicanism in the Progressive Age.

The founding of the New York Public Library took place in two phases over the course of nearly two decades. The first phase created the Reference Department, a noncirculating collection catering primarily to scholars and elites. The second established the Circulation Department, an extensive system of branch libraries that brought books of all kinds into the poorer neighborhoods of the city. During both phases there were extensive and sometimes divisive discussions not only of the kinds of books a public library should provide and the public it should serve, but also regarding who should pay for the library and who should govern it. The institution that developed from this long and complex process served multiple publics, was publicly and privately funded, and was controlled by both public officials and private individuals. The structure, governance, and financing of the New York Public Library were and are unique, but this blending of the public and the private was an important and characteristic feature of the Progressive Era. There was a new permeability and fluidity of the previously rigid public-private boundary that pointed to a significant reconfiguration of the public sphere.

In 1839, for the first time, the City of New York taxed the New York Society Library on the grounds that it was a private institution and therefore not qualified for the exemption granted to public libraries under state law. The Society's board protested and was eventually upheld by Peter A. Crowley, the city's attorney. Crowley based his decision upon the definition of a public library that prevailed when the Society Library was founded nearly a century earlier. He held that in order to be tax-exempt a library had only to demonstrate that it had "something of a public character," that it was "common to many." The Society Library was therefore a public library in the same sense that a railroad was a public conveyance or a tavern was a public house.² Just ten years later the state of New Hampshire passed the first law permitting municipalities to tax their residents to support a library. This inaugurated the movement for public libraries as the term is understood today, tax-supported, circulating collections free to all members of the public.³

The debate over a municipal library system for New York City did not begin in earnest until the latter half of the 1880s. A number of factors account for this comparatively late development. By 1870 New York had nearly one million residents and the task of creating a public library for such a large and heterogeneous population was a formidable and expensive undertaking.⁴ At the same time, subscription libraries such as the Mercantile Library Association and the constellation of voluntary organizations such as the Aguilar and the New York Free Circulating Library already provided adequate library services for many New Yorkers. Probably the most formidable obstacle to the creation of a public library in the city was the profound reluctance of professional librarians and the elites who served on the boards of these privately managed libraries to

share power with the city's politicians. Although they regularly lobbied the city for public monies for their own institutions, they were convinced that the involvement of public officials would render the public library yet another source of Tammany graft and corruption.

By the early 1890s, strong public sentiment gradually overcame these obstacles. It hurt New Yorkers' civic pride that their city still lacked a public library, particularly when rivals such as Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago had already built extensive municipal library systems. Moreover, to progressives preoccupied with system, efficiency and progress New York's uncoordinated patchwork of subscription and free circulating libraries seemed haphazard and anachronistic. The critical factor however, in the creation of both the Reference Department and the Circulation Department, was money. In both cases, it was the generosity of a private citizen that made a public library possible.

The gift that spurred the development of the Reference Department was bequeathed by Samuel J. Tilden. Tilden was a corporate lawyer and an anti-Tammany Democratic who rose to political prominence in the early 1870s in the legal and political fight that ended the rule of "boss" William Tweed in the city.⁵ He was elected governor of the state in 1875 and in 1876 lost the disputed presidential election to Rutherford B. Hayes. In April 1886, he died and left the bulk of his estate, more than five million dollars, to "establish and maintain a free public library and reading room in the city of New York and to promote . . . scientific and educational objects." In March of the following year, his executors, his law partner Andrew Haskell Green, his private secretary George W. Smith, and the writer, journalist and politician John Bigelow, obtained from

the legislature an act incorporating the Tilden Trust. In April, they appointed two additional trustees, Alexander E. Orr and Stephen A. Walker and elected Bigelow president. The powers of the trust were limited to the establishment and maintenance of a public library.⁶

Tilden never married and was survived by a sister, Mary B. Pelton, and the six children of his brother Henry. All of the nieces and nephews received generous trust funds under the terms of the will. The same day it was admitted to probate, one of the nephews, George H. Tilden, filed suit to overturn it, contesting a clause that granted the trustees discretion to devote all or part of the estate to any “charitable, educational or scientific purposes” that would be “widely and substantially useful to the interests of mankind.” His lawyers argued that the will was thus “invalid because of the indefiniteness and uncertainty in its objects and purposes, and because it substitutes for the will of the testator the will of the trustees.” George Tilden and his brothers also lobbied successfully to include a clause in the act incorporating the Tilden Trust that stipulated the incorporation would not affect their claim to the estate, pending the settlement of the lawsuit. In October of 1891, after more than five years of litigation, amidst charges of corruption and malfeasance, the state Court of Appeals decided in favor of the heirs and declared the will invalid.⁷

Before the case was resolved in the courts, the Tilden Trust reached a separate agreement with Laura P. Hazard, the granddaughter Tilden’s sister, who had died shortly after her brother. As Mary Pelton’s heir, Hazard would have been entitled to one half of Tilden’s property when the will was declared invalid. In May 1891, she agreed

instead to sell her interest for \$975,000. As a result, in spite of the court's decision, the trust still had an endowment of one half of the Tilden estate, less the cost of the settlement, slightly more than two million dollars. It could still establish a public library, but with considerably less than half the amount that Samuel J. Tilden had intended.⁸

Predictably, almost everyone except the heirs was disappointed and angry over the outcome of the suit, particularly after it was revealed that the creditors of the spendthrift nephews were lobbying on their behalf in Albany. The local press covered the case extensively. Editorial pages lavished praise upon Tilden's generosity and public spirit. The *Commercial Advertiser* predicted that the new library would be even better than the public libraries in Chicago and Boston, that the bequest would become "the foundation of the greatest public library in the world thus far." The *Daily Tribune* called the Tilden Trust "one of the most far-reaching and beneficent purposes ever conceived by an individual in the interest of society."⁹ When the courts finally decided in favor of the nieces and nephews, the "vultures" were roundly criticized for their greed and selfishness.

The editorials in the *Times* were especially critical, drawing upon the language of republicanism to paint a sharp contrast between Tilden and the heirs. The heirs were "persons whose interests were opposed to those of the public." While "most men . . . would prefer to have less money and more reputation," they forsook reputation in a "greedy eagerness to lay hands on money which they had not earned." The state legislature, which was supposed to act as the "custodian of the interests of the people," had, by adding the clause in the Tilden Trust legislation protecting the heirs' rights, "endanger[ed] the rights of the people." The nieces and nephews had no "natural right" to

be “supported in idleness.” Indeed, it was un-American and typically English to ““found a family,”” that is, to lay the foundation of a hereditary fortune and thus “enable a line of descendants to live without doing any work.” Tilden, by contrast, had earned his money and set a commendable example by devoting it, upon his death, to the public weal. A public library on the monumental scale envisioned in his will was hardly likely in a monarchy, since “no Prince ever has or ever could, from his own property, acquired in his own lifetime by his own energy and skill, make such a gift.”¹⁰

Republicanism was just one language that was used in the late nineteenth century to express discontent and garner support for change. The broad constellation of groups and causes that historians generally label “progressive” drew upon and were influenced by other traditions and languages as well. The gospel of efficiency, for example, played a critical role later in the founding of the New York Public Library.¹¹ Republicanism, however, was one of the most venerable and resonant languages available to would-be reformers, and in the 1880s and 1890s it was more and more appealing. Throughout the century there had always been a degree of tension between republicanism and liberalism, between the pursuit of individual interest and the claims of the larger community.¹² Liberalism lost some of its allure amidst the rampant greed and excessive individualism of the Gilded Age. Republicanism, with its emphasis on moderation and the public weal, enjoyed a renaissance during the Progressive Era.

Neither however eclipsed the other, and very few Americans consciously weighed one against the other. Indeed republican values remained an essential part of the public sphere in age of conspicuously un-republican consumption. As the suit over Tilden’s will

made its way through the courts, this ambiguity was abundantly evident during one of the city's most important civic celebrations of the century, the centennial of Washington's inauguration in Federal Hall in April of 1889. This was, of course, a momentous occasion for the entire nation, but in New York, the first home of the national government, the festivities lasted three days and were accompanied by a tremendous outpouring of patriotism. All of the local newspapers covered every speech and every parade in effusive detail, and few of them lost the opportunity to impart a civics lesson along with the news. The *Daily Tribune* intoned that "the adoption of the Constitution demonstrated the capacity of the people to maintain the liberties they had won," while the *Sun*, in a lengthy history of the founding, concluded that America's "grand political experiment" was to create "a Union that was at once republican and steadfast." The editors of the *Herald* were indignant when President Benjamin Harrison appeared in public wearing a Prince Albert jacket, deeming it a "concession to royalty" and an "offense against the Republic." The *World*, echoing a speech by Episcopal Bishop (and Astor Library trustee) Henry Potter, bemoaned the fact that "'merchantable ideas rule[d] the hour'" and reminded their fellow New Yorkers that "Plutocracy [has] no place in the Republic as founded by the fathers."¹³

Yet at the same time these same newspapers described in tones of awe and admiration one of the most opulent gatherings of plutocrats in the history of the city. The Centennial Ball on April 29, 1889 "pal[ed] all of the assemblies . . . before it, . . . shin[ing] out in the triumphs of society like the Edison light among tallow dips." While a large crowd of the curious and the envious jostled outside, approximately six thousand of the city's and the nation's very wealthiest citizens gathered in the Metropolitan Opera

House to celebrate the centennial and parade their wealth. They enjoyed an eight-course dinner served by three hundred liveried waiters, danced to music by a one hundred-piece orchestra, and consumed 5,000 bottles of champagne. The opera box from which President Harrison observed the spectacle was described as a throne, while Ward McAllister, the reigning prince of New York society, was said to have once again proved himself worthy of his crown. Journalists pictured in extravagant detail the prodigious array of jewels on display. Caroline Astor, the queen of high society and the wife of William Astor, grandson of the founder of the Astor Library, was “literally loaded with diamonds.” Mrs. John Wysung wore diamonds “the size of her thumbs.” The local newspapers also described at length the costumes worn by the most socially prominent women present. A few honored the occasion by wearing dresses from the colonial period, but many more wore styles inspired by the courts of Louis XV and Louis XVI. No one seems to have found it ironic that the city’s elite celebrated the birth of the American republic dressed as French aristocrats.¹⁴

The revelers at the Centennial Ball constructed a new definition of society, society as defined and publicized in the pages of the *Social Register*.¹⁵ By contrast, the Tilden Library was intended for society in the older, republican sense of the term, with its connotations of community and interdependence. It was to be an institution “widely and substantially beneficial to the interests of mankind.” But after the Court of Appeals decided in favor of the heirs, the Tilden Trust was left with an endowment of only \$2,025,000, enough to establish a substantial library, but not one of the depth and breadth that Tilden had envisioned.¹⁶ In May of 1892, at their first meeting after the will was broken, the trustees considered their options. Practically all of the alternatives discussed

involved some degree of cooperation with existing organizations to pool resources and provide more extensive and efficient service. They appointed a plan and scope committee which over the next two years met with representatives of a number of scholarly institutions in the city, including Columbia University, New York University, and the Scientific Alliance, a federation of societies to promote research and popular education in the sciences.¹⁷ During this same period the trustees also prevailed upon the legislature to pass legislation permitting libraries in the city to consolidate.¹⁸

By early 1894 talks with various library and scholarly organizations had stalled. In the spring of that year, “after dinner, while waiting for the ladies to put on their wraps, on the way to the opera,” Tilden trustee Lewis Cass Ledyard mentioned this casually to Astor Library trustee John Cadwalader. This exchange was the beginning of negotiations that eventually led to the creation of the New York Public Library.¹⁹ In November of 1894, the Astor and Tilden boards appointed committees to confer on the question of consolidation. The following January, representatives of the Lenox Library learned of a probable merger and appointed their own committee to join the discussions.²⁰ The three institutions complemented one another in important respects, and merging them offered obvious mutual advantages. The Tilden Trust had a fairly generous endowment, but no books and no building. To buy an initial collection of books and to erect a building would have reduced the trust’s income considerably. The Astor and the Lenox, on the other hand, had very rich collections, but relatively smaller endowments with which to develop them.²¹ The combined income of all three institutions would be sufficient to found a public library on the scale that New Yorkers had hoped for since the announcement of the Tilden bequest more than eight years earlier.

On May 23, 1895, the three corporations formally agreed to merge to create the New York Public Library. The consolidation agreement itself was a fairly simple legal instrument that revealed little about the kind of library the founders intended, apart from the rather vague stipulation that it would “continue and promote the several objects and purposes set forth in the respective acts of incorporation.”²² The full legal title of the new corporation was The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. The conference committees had recognized that the only fitting name would be the New York Public Library, but they also agreed that the original benefactors deserved formal recognition.²³ The new board of trustees would have twenty-one members, with approximately equal representation from the three constituent boards.²⁴ They were broadly empowered to establish regulations regarding “the general custody, care, conduct and management of the affairs” of the new library. However, the agreement added the significant proviso that the trustees should make “appropriate provisions with reference to the limitations . . . under which any of the funds or property of the said several corporations are now held.” This clause referred primarily to certain conditions of the Astor and Lenox bequests and was elaborated in a set of resolutions agreed to by the consolidation committees and passed by the new board at its first meeting on May 27, 1895. The Astor Library would remain a noncirculating reference collection and an amount of money at least equal to the income of the Astor in 1894, approximately \$47,000, would be devoted each year to purchasing reference books. Similarly, the Bibles in the Lenox Library were designated a special, noncirculating collection to be shelved separately from the regular collections of the new library.²⁵

The founding of the New York Public Library was a national event that was covered and commented upon extensively not just in the local press, but in the professional literature and in popular mass circulation magazines as well. *Library Journal* considered it the “one of the most important steps in library matters ever taken in this country,” while *Peterson Magazine* called it “one of the most important steps in educational matters ... in many years.” *Harper’s Weekly* deemed it “one of the most important events in the whole history of the island of Manhattan.”²⁶ Local newspapers boasted that New York was poised to take its rightful place among the cultural capitals of the civilized nations. The *Times* wrote that the library “puts the city, in an important essential of civilization, among the chief cities of the world,” and could surpass the collections in Chicago and Boston, while the *World* brashly predicted that it would rival the British Museum and the *Bibliothèque Nationale*.²⁷ *Harper’s Weekly* aptly summed up the public reaction to the New York Public Library when it wrote that the consolidation was greeted with “the general delight and approval of the great public which is most concerned.”²⁸

Ever since Samuel Tilden’s death almost nine years earlier, New York’s politicians, editors, and civic and cultural leaders had agreed that the public of the great city of New York deserved a great public library. This does not mean, however, that everyone agreed on even the most fundamental matters, including the definition of a public library. Now that the New York Public Library was an accomplished fact, its new board was obliged to address the critical question of what they actually meant by the term. As late as the 1890s, there could still be considerable ambiguity arising from the different ways that the trustees conceived the library’s public and how that public was to

be served by its library. This ambiguity was even reflected in the agreement of consolidation itself. Both in the agreement and in their respective acts of incorporation, the Astor and Lenox Libraries were designated public libraries. This of course no longer meant, as City's Attorney Crowley had written of the Society Library in 1839, that their collections were merely "common to many," that any member of the public could use them for a fee. When the Astor and the Lenox Libraries were established, they were considered public libraries in the sense that any member of the public, under certain conditions, could use them without charge.

Yet by the time the New York Public was founded, a public library implied much more than simply free access. For most laypersons as well as library professionals, it had become synonymous with the ideals represented by a free circulating library or, the term used in Tilden's will and in the consolidation agreement in reference to the Tilden Trust, simply a free library. This meant not only that the public could take books home to read for free, but also that the books were of a popular, albeit an edifying nature, that they were written for the general, self-improving reader rather than for scholars.²⁹ Further, public libraries were widely expected to serve not the privileged few, but the "masses," the self-improving working people that flocked to the free circulating libraries. According to the *Tribune*, "the idea that branch libraries should be established [by the New York Public Library] in the centres of dense population, where the plain, everyday workingman can derive some benefit from them, seems to predominate."³⁰

The agreement of consolidation was intentionally ambiguous regarding this central issue. It simply stated "the new corporation shall establish and maintain a free

public library . . . with such branches as may be deemed advisable.”³¹ This clause left open the possibility that the trustees might deem the establishment of circulating branch libraries inadvisable. Similarly, in their comments to the press in the weeks prior to the merger, some members of the consolidating committees hinted that the new system would or might include small lending libraries, possibly by absorbing the city’s free circulating libraries, but the new board refused to commit to such a policy.³² No doubt there was a certain range of opinion among the twenty-one trustees. However, sixteen of them were from the Astor and Lenox Libraries, both of which were noncirculating collections with decidedly poor reputations for public service. The only board member who actively championed lending libraries was Andrew Haskell Green, a Tilden trustee who was committed to his friend Tilden’s vision of a more popular library. At the board meeting in January of 1896, he introduced a resolution to establish circulating branch libraries that was overwhelmingly rejected. At the meeting the following month, an alternative resolution passed merely committing the library to “the broadest possible policy . . . in reference to the nature and scope of [its] work.”³³

One of the most critical decisions that the new board faced in the months following the consolidation, and one that would shape the character of the new library, was the appointment of its first director. In December of 1895, the trustees hired Dr. John Shaw Billings. Then fifty-eight years of age, Billings was a physician and a leading member of the older generation of self-trained scholar-librarians. After serving as a field surgeon in the Union Army during the Civil War, he was posted to the office of the surgeon-general, where he spent more than thirty years developing the most extensive medical library in the nation. Before joining the New York Public Library, he had

acquired an international reputation as the founder and director of the National Library of Medicine, the designer and organizer of the hospital of John Hopkins University, and the creator of the *Index Medicus*, the first comprehensive bibliography of the literature of the medical profession.³⁴ One of the leaders of the free circulating libraries in New York later accused Billings of having “no sympathy” with circulating branch libraries.³⁵ This was probably an overstatement. As director of the New York Public Library, and during his tenure as president of the American Library Association, Billings does seem to have gained some appreciation of the role that neighborhood lending libraries could play in advancing popular education.³⁶ Nonetheless, he never showed any marked enthusiasm for them. Like his friend John Cadwalader, the trustee who recruited him as director, he regarded the development of a great reference collection for scholars as the “distinctive business” of the New York Public Library.³⁷

Even more fundamental than the appointment of the library’s director was the location of its main building. Where the New York Public Library was located was intimately related to the question of the public it was intended to serve. Everyone, including the former Astor trustees, recognized that the Astor Library was not suitable. The building was not fireproof and was too small for the extensive collections that the board planned to develop. The Lenox Library was in some respects a more eligible location. Its property included an adjacent empty lot, bequeathed by James Lenox’s sister Henrietta, upon which the New York Public Library could expand in the future.³⁸ However, Henrietta Lenox’s will stipulated that the lot could be used only for an extension to the library. This meant that if the trustees built on the property, and then later moved the library to new location, they would be legally prohibited from selling the

property, unless they obtained releases from all of Henrietta Lenox's heirs. In part because of this restriction, the board was divided over the issue of the site for the new library. At its first meeting in May 1895, it passed a compromise resolution selecting the Lenox site, but only on the condition that the heirs agreed to sign releases.³⁹

This restriction in Henrietta Lenox's will was not the only reason some of the trustees considered the Lenox Library an unsuitable location for the New York Public Library. The Lenox was far uptown on Fifth Avenue and Seventieth Street. While it was conveniently near such elite cultural institutions as the Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, it was far from the homes of New York's laboring classes.⁴⁰ The trustees recognized that in establishing a library of reference, its location would be a less critical issue, since most scholars would be willing to travel some distance in order to consult its unique collections. On the other hand, "a library for popular use, intended to reach the people, with a circulating department as an essential feature of it, . . . would present at once as one of the main questions to be considered that of accessibility."⁴¹ Because of this, most of the city's newspapers opposed the Lenox site. The *Herald*, for example, doubted whether "the property of the Lenox Library would be a wise selection," since "the usefulness and practical value of the consolidated library depend so greatly upon its . . . accessibility."⁴²

The location of the Lenox Library raised fundamental issues beyond even the public's ease of access. A decision to locate near the Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art might have meant a less public, more exclusive library. Despite some occasional rhetoric to the contrary, both of these museums were intended

for the use of citizens of wealth and refinement, terms that their founders assumed to be largely synonymous. The Metropolitan, for example, whose board included six New York Public Library trustees, was not opened in the evenings or on Sundays, the only times that New Yorkers of more modest means could enjoy the collection.⁴³ The museum self-consciously sought to create a realm of “high culture” that would define the city’s elite in contradistinction to the masses who were unfit to appreciate true art. Like the nearby Lenox Library, which was frequently described as a museum, the founding of the Metropolitan Museum was part of a larger effort to create a public sphere segregated by class.⁴⁴ As such it was the object of pointed criticism in the popular press. The *Herald* declared that “from the very beginning it has been an exclusive social toy, not a great instrument of education.” The *Times* complained that it was “less available” to the public than “similar institutions in monarchical Europe.”⁴⁵

Just as important within the context of the founding of the New York Public Library was the relationship between both the Metropolitan and the Museum of Natural History and the City of New York. Both institutions were built in the 1870s on public land at the public expense. The City annually appropriated public funds for the maintenance of the buildings. This support was granted despite the forthrightly exclusive nature of both museums, and the fact that city officials were permitted only a nominal role on their governing boards. At first glance, their relationship with the City calls to mind the New York Institution, which, with municipal support in the 1810s and 1820s, sought to consolidate and invigorate the learned societies of the city’s elite.⁴⁶ The critical difference was that the founders of the New York Institution may have been naive and presumptuous, but they were nonetheless sincere in their belief that the arts and sciences

could bring together the rich and the poor in true republican harmony. The trustees of the Metropolitan and the Museum of Natural History, despite an occasional rhetorical flourish in their public statements, never really believed this. For example, it was not until 1891, and only after intense public pressure, that the Metropolitan opened its galleries on Sundays, thus attracting patrons that director Louis P. di Cesnola found “repulsive and unclean.”⁴⁷ Locating the New York Public Library near the Metropolitan and the Museum of Natural History and trying to establish a similar relationship with the City would have implied a model of culture building that by 1895 was no longer tenable. Such a decision, to echo the words of Councilman James Roosevelt when the City finally eliminated support for the New York Institution in 1831, would have “been the subject of frequent and . . . just animadversion.”⁴⁸

Most of the trustees and many of the city’s newspapers seemed to favor the site of the old Croton Water Reservoir. Located on Fifth Avenue between Fortieth and Forty-Second Streets, it was not only closer to the more densely populated districts farther downtown, but was also conveniently accessible by public transportation from all parts of the city.⁴⁹ In January of 1896, when it was finally determined that Henrietta Lenox’s heirs would not sign releases on the Lenox property, John Bigelow, the first president of the library, confided to his diary that it was “the most comforting piece of news” he had “heard for many a day.”⁵⁰ No longer bound by their resolution to use the Lenox Library, the trustees were now free to consider other sites. Perhaps the most attractive feature of the reservoir was that it was public property. Obsolete since the construction of the New Croton Aqueduct in 1893, it would be an ideal location, if the City authorities could be induced to raze the reservoir and donate the land to the New York Public Library.⁵¹

The possibility of financial support from the City of New York and the conditions under which it might be secured was a central issue from the founding of the library. The trustees recognized that, even if they were able to build on the Lenox property, the cost of an addition to the Lenox building would substantially reduce the library's endowment and therefore restrict the development of its collections. If, on the other hand, the City were to erect a building, the library could dedicate all of its financial resources to purchasing books. Thus the resolution passed by the board in February of 1896 that committed the library to the "broadest possible policy" stipulated that "the nature and scope of [its] work" would be limited by "the funds at the disposal of the Corporation, or which can be obtained." The trustees hoped to obtain such funds from the City of New York. At the same meeting they further resolved to make a formal, public application to the City to build and equip a new library on the reservoir site.⁵²

The founders clearly understood that the municipal authorities would be reluctant to appropriate tax monies for a "library of reference purely on the old lines," one that did not include a more popular, circulating collection.⁵³ The ensuing negotiations thus raise the critical question of whether the trustees, in considering the scope of the new library, were motivated more by the need for municipal support than by a sincere desire to create a more inclusive, public institution. Even in their public statements, they frankly acknowledged that without public funds for a building, the reduced endowment would be inadequate to develop an extensive reference collection for scholars.⁵⁴ Yet even in its internal communications the board expressed at least some interest in becoming more useful to a wider public. The committee that originally recommended seeking support from the City was "impressed by the necessity of attempting to do more than merely to

establish a library of reference,” and by “the larger measure of usefulness which would be gained by the adoption of a plan involving a broader scope.”⁵⁵ The formal address to Mayor William Strong in April of 1896 went considerably further. It enthused that libraries “within the reach of every man’s home” were “in a very real sense a part of the educational system” and hinted that the New York Public Library would either cooperate or consolidate with the free circulating libraries.⁵⁶

In the contract between the library and the City of New York, signed on December 8, 1897, the City agreed to raze the reservoir and construct an 87,500 square foot building designed by an architectural firm selected by the library’s board.⁵⁷ The City also committed to maintaining the building and grounds. The library itself cost slightly more than nine million dollars, while the annual maintenance averaged approximately thirty-six thousand during the first five years that it was open.⁵⁸ The City was not granted representation on the board. The New York Public Library agreed not only to make its reference collection freely accessible to the public, but also to operate a circulating library in the new building. Both collections were to be open evenings and on Sundays. Thus even in this first phase of the founding, the creation of what became know as the Reference Department, there was a provision for circulation, even though the demand was clearly for branch libraries, and a centrally located collection could never bring books “within the reach of every man’s home.” In part, the trustees did it for the money. The City of New York would never have agreed to finance their new building without a circulating collection. On the other hand, as the executive committee of the board reported about the time that the City made its first appropriation for construction, the New York Public Library was prepared to “at least sympathize with the general public,”

while “preserving the character of the Library as a library of reference.”⁵⁹ In its earliest years, the library, both geographically and as a culture-building institution, was located somewhere between the Lenox Library uptown and the free circulating libraries in lower Manhattan, but rather closer to the latter.

Throughout the negotiations over the reservoir site, and particularly in their formal address to the mayor in 1896, the library trustees had publicly expressed their strong support for the ideals embodied in popular libraries. Once the City began construction of a magnificent reference library for scholars, there was a general expectation that the New York Public Library would absorb the various free circulating libraries into a comprehensive system embracing both reference and circulation. Yet for nearly two years after the contract for the central building was signed, neither the Public Library board nor the leaders of the smaller library associations took any definite steps towards consolidation. There were a variety of reasons on both sides for this initial hesitation, but to a considerable extent both were torn between two central and, in this case, conflicting preoccupations of progressivism: efficiency and the fear of corruption. Everyone recognized that, despite the impressive statistics marshaled each year by the free circulating libraries, it was inefficient for so many different organizations to pursue the same goals in an uncoordinated fashion. It would be vastly more efficient and economical for all of these libraries to centralize basic functions such as binding, cataloging and book selection.⁶⁰ At the same time, a comprehensive system of circulating collections serving all of the city’s neighborhoods would cost more than the combined resources of all the

circulating libraries. Since the New York Public Library's endowment was barely sufficient to maintain its reference collections, a consolidated library would require ongoing support from the City for circulation. In the late 1890s, such a substantial commitment was highly unlikely unless municipal authorities were granted at least a limited role in the governance of the library. This meant consorting with machine politicians who were presumed to be irredeemably, contagiously corrupt, the introduction of what President John Bigelow called "the Tammany bacillus" into the public library system.⁶¹

It was precisely this fear of corruption that had ended an earlier concerted attempt to create a New York Public Library. Even before the announcement of the Tilden bequest in 1886, some prominent New Yorkers had been dissatisfied with the inefficient patchwork of private institutions and hoped to found a publicly supported public library. In January of that year, Adolph Sanger, the president of the Board of Aldermen, introduced a bill in the state legislature to establish, "as a monument to the homage paid by the people to self-culture," a free public library "on the most liberal and well-considered basis." The City was to erect a central building on the reservoir site and appropriate \$40,000 annually to "furnish free reading to the people of the city." The mayor, the city comptroller, the president of the Board of Alderman, and the president of the Department of Public Parks were to serve *ex officio* on the board of trustees.⁶² When asked why the City could not simply allocate the money to the existing free circulating libraries, Sanger responded that it was inappropriate to give tax monies to "gentlemen to run a private library," that "a public library should be public in every sense of the word."⁶³

Supporters of the free libraries were convinced that any plan allowing elected officials a role in the governance of the proposed library would “encounter the practical certainty of its becoming one more corruptionist engine in the hands of city rulers.”⁶⁴ Representatives of the New York Free Circulating Library appeared before the Senate Committee on Cities to oppose the Sanger bill. They argued that the City should concentrate on establishing branch libraries, rather than a large central building, and that public monies would be more wisely appropriated to a private “society already chartered and actively engaged in this work,” namely the New York Free Circulating Library. As a result of their lobbying effort, the Sanger bill died in committee, and the legislature passed a substitute bill permitting municipalities to fund circulating libraries. Any library association in the state could receive up to five thousand dollars annually for every one hundred thousand volumes circulated. Such appropriations were only discretionary, however, and in New York City the maximum amount that could be appropriated to any one library was forty thousand dollars.⁶⁵ By the mid-1890s, most of the operating expenses of most of the free circulating libraries were paid for by the City.⁶⁶

The state library law of 1886 was a partial victory for the free circulating libraries. On one hand, they received significant public funding, while avoiding the direct involvement of public officials in the management of private library associations. The legislation did not, however, require appropriations for the libraries. The New York Free Circulating Library, for example, received each year only about half of the maximum amount allowed by law.⁶⁷ After 1897, the year in which the City contracted with the New York Public Library to maintain the central building on 42nd Street, city officials were increasingly critical of this private management of public funds. Robert Van Wyck, who

succeeded William Strong as mayor later that year, called it “a system of fostering private control of public institutions . . . a sort of auxiliary government by societies.” In October of the following year, he threatened to take over the free circulating libraries altogether.⁶⁸ By 1899, the libraries were clearly on the defensive. In their annual report for that year, the trustees of the New York Circulating Library conceded that certain efficiencies could be achieved through closer cooperation between the city’s lending libraries. They also recognized that the City had a right to “supervise” the expenditure of public monies appropriated to privately managed institutions. However, they concluded that “today a union of public scrutiny with private management seems to be the best solution.” Such a policy would provide “the individual [with] the opportunity to work for the public good,” while at the same time avoiding “the introduction of politics and . . . routine work.”⁶⁹

In late 1899, the New York Public Library, likewise concerned over the possibility of a City takeover, began tentative steps towards absorbing the circulating libraries. In November, Director Billings wrote a memorandum to the Board of Trustees outlining possible courses of action. He never even considered as an option a system of branch libraries as a department of the municipal government and rejected outright the immediate consolidation of the free libraries under the control of the public library. He advised instead that for the present it would be “best to preserve . . . the interest felt by many persons in each of the . . . volunteer organizations.” Billings stressed that any reorganization should proceed gradually and that the board should “avoid all appearance of grasping for power or of interfering with the work of” the smaller libraries. As an initial step Billings recommended that the City charge the New York Public Library with investigating and reporting on the management of the free circulating libraries.⁷⁰

In June 1900, Comptroller Bird Coler formally requested that the board undertake a comprehensive investigation of lending libraries in the city.⁷¹ Billings surveyed the various library associations during the course of the summer and the Executive Committee presented a report to Coler in September. By this time the trustees had evidently rejected the gradualist policy outlined in Billings' memo. They concluded that although each individual library was managed in an efficient and economical manner, "the great defect in the present method of supplying free circulation of books to the people of New York is the want of a . . . uniform system of expenditure, cataloging, accountability and inspection." The city therefore needed a centralizing agency to coordinate these functions across all of the circulating libraries. Implicitly rejecting the creation of such an office within the municipal government, the trustees advised that "the most effective and economical method for providing such a central authority will be to place this work under the direction of some one of the organizations now in existence."⁷² At the next meeting of the Board of Estimate, the body responsible for the municipal budget, Billings proposed that the New York Public Library act as the coordinating agency for the circulating libraries. About this same time, the New York Free Circulating Library, no doubt recognizing the inevitable, began negotiating the terms of a merger.⁷³

The agreement between the New York Public Library and the New York Free Circulating Library was signed January 11, 1901. In a sense, this consolidation of the reference library and the largest of the lending libraries was a marriage of convenience in which both parties essentially got what they wanted. First and perhaps foremost, both sides wished to prevent presumably corrupt elected officials from meddling in public library affairs. Second, the agreement helped ensure that the reference library and the

circulating libraries would operate as relatively independent entities within a consolidated corporation. All of the income and property that the Free Circulating Library contributed to the new Public Library was to be devoted solely to the operation of branches.⁷⁴ After more than twenty years as the city's leading lending library, the Free Circulating Library's board cherished its independence and was extremely reluctant to relinquish complete control to another organization. For their part, Billings and the old Public Library board had no experience and very little interest in managing lending libraries.⁷⁵ Thus, at its first meeting the new board created a separate Circulation Department. Headed by a Chief of Circulation and a Circulation Committee that formally reported to the Library Director and the board of trustees, in practice the Circulation Department operated as a semi-independent unit within the larger organization. Leaders of the old Free Circulating Library were appointed to all seven seats on the Circulation Committee, giving them a significant degree of autonomy within the new corporation.⁷⁶

What the merger agreement did not provide for and what the Circulation Department badly needed was a reliable source of income. The Free Circulating Library had avoided public governance, but it still had no guarantee of public funding. Aside from its contractual agreement to maintain the central building, the City of New York was not legally required to support the New York Public Library. Its annual appropriation for circulation was still discretionary. Just as money from a private individual, the Tilden bequest, had led to the founding of a great public library devoted to reference, an equally generous benefaction from a private citizen was instrumental in ensuring the success of its new Circulation Department. On March 12, 1901, Andrew Carnegie wrote to John Shaw Billings offering 5.2 million dollars for the construction of "Branches for the

special benefit of the masses of the people.”⁷⁷ It was Carnegie’s gift that finally secured from the City an ongoing commitment to support circulating libraries.

For much of the nineteenth century, charitable institutions in the public sphere were supported by philanthropy on a relatively modest scale. The New York Free Circulating Library for example, before the state library law of 1886, relied mostly upon smaller donations and an annual membership fee of ten dollars.⁷⁸ Carnegie himself, who joined in 1881 and served on the board from 1893 to 1901, gave about ten thousand dollars over the course of twenty years. The latter part of the century was the age of big philanthropy, when wealthy men like John Jacob Astor and James Lenox devoted entire fortunes to creating monuments to their memories and the public good. Andrew Carnegie’s gift giving, however, was of a different magnitude. It was huge philanthropy. Both Carnegie and Samuel Tilden, for example, offered approximately five million dollars for a public library in New York, but for Carnegie this was just one library in one city. His gifts for libraries world-wide totaled approximately \$56,000,000 and by the time of his death in 1919 he had given away more than \$333,000,000.⁷⁹ The charitable trusts founded by Andrew Carnegie and other huge philanthropists such as John D. Rockefeller had a profound impact upon the public sphere. Through them the benevolence of a single individual or family could influence public policy, as in the case of Carnegie’s gift to the New York Public Library, or even, in effect, create policy in the absence of public funding.⁸⁰

Andrew Carnegie’s life spanned and embodied the transition from an economy based upon household and artisanal production to an industrial economy dominated by

national and transnational corporations. His father was a prosperous master weaver in Dunfermline, Scotland who sank into respectable poverty after the introduction of steam-loom weaving. Andrew, born in 1835, was raised in a family he proudly described as “staunch republicans, wild, with Burns, for the “Royalty of Man.””⁸¹ Later in life, of course, he was a symbol of the excesses of industrial capitalism, the coolly calculating robber baron who amassed a fortune from the labor of his fellow man. Carnegie became an enthusiastic disciple of Herbert Spencer, advocating “great inequality . . . ; the concentration of business . . . in the hands of a few; and the law of competition . . . as being not only beneficial, but essential to the future progress of the race.”⁸² At the same time, however, he remained sincerely, emotionally attached to the republicanism of his youth. His book *Triumphant Democracy* is essentially an extended argument designed to remind the citizens of his adopted land and convince the subjects of his native land that “the republican form [of government] and not the government of a class through the monarchical form is the surest foundation of individual growth and national greatness.”⁸³ Carnegie even commissioned his own republican coat of arms, featuring an inverted crown, with a liberty cap above it, and below it the Carnegie motto, “Death to Privilege.”⁸⁴

Carnegie was not a hypocrite, and he was not self-deluded. That he could sincerely embrace both republicanism and liberal capitalism reveals some of the complexities and ambiguities of republican and liberal thought. Republicanism in particular defies definition, but certainly within it there were two dominant, coexisting themes, liberty and independence on one hand, and civic engagement and community on the other. In the simple, relatively homogeneous, agrarian society of the late eighteenth

and early nineteenth centuries, these two strands of republican thought had rarely clashed. By the late nineteenth century, however, sturdy republican independence increasingly became synonymous with the liberal notion of individualism. Unbridled individualism in the economic sphere could, and did, erode community in the public sphere.

Andrew Carnegie's "Gospel of Wealth" sought to resolve this contradiction, to reconcile republicanism and liberalism, community and individualism. Originally published in the *North American Review* in 1889, the Gospel of Wealth wholeheartedly embraced the Spencerian doctrine of the survival of the fittest, the "law [to which] we owe our wonderful material development." At the same time, it frankly acknowledged the corrosive effects of unrestrained individualism, conceding that vast economic disparities meant that "human society loses its homogeneity" and "rigid castes are formed."⁸⁵ Wisely directed, personally administered philanthropy was the one "true antidote for the temporary unequal distribution of wealth," ensuring "the reconciliation of the rich and the poor—a reign of harmony." For Carnegie the Gospel of Wealth differed from conventional philanthropy in two critical respects. First, the true philanthropist was to oversee the redistribution of his surplus income during his own lifetime, not bequeath it posthumously in his will. Mindful of the fate of Samuel Tilden's bequest to the people of New York, Carnegie admonished his fellow millionaires that "he who dies rich, dies disgraced."⁸⁶ Second, true philanthropy was devoted to "uses which give nothing for nothing, which require cooperation, self-help," whereas mere charity, simply distributing alms to the poor, "tend[ed] to sap the spirit of manly independence."⁸⁷ Libraries were therefore one of the best uses of surplus wealth. They helped only those who helped themselves.⁸⁸

In the case of public libraries, the Gospel of Wealth also required that communities help themselves. In return for the gift of a library building, Carnegie insisted that the local government appropriate tax monies annually to maintain the collection. This not only ensured ongoing public support and public interest, but, just as important, it also meant that “all taint of charity is dispelled.”⁸⁹ Even the humblest citizens could enter a Carnegie library with an empowering sense of ownership, knowing that as taxpayers they contributed to its maintenance. Carnegie’s offer of 5.2 million dollars for public libraries in New York was, even for him, an unprecedented sum, but his contracts with the City and with the New York Public Library, signed in the spring of 1902, were typical of the conditions attached to all of the Carnegie libraries. In return for fifty buildings constructed in Manhattan, Staten Island, and the Bronx, the City of New York agreed to provide each year at least ten percent of his total gift to maintain and develop circulating collections. Tax monies were to be appropriated annually to the New York Public Library, which was designated as Carnegie’s agent for library services in those boroughs.⁹⁰ Thus, for the first time, the City committed to ongoing support of branch lending libraries.

For the most part, New Yorkers responded to Carnegie’s benefaction with enthusiasm and gratitude. Mayor Robert Van Wyck called Carnegie “the greatest human product of the nineteenth century,” while Director Billings predicted that his generosity would “result in the greatest free public library system in the world.”⁹¹ The *World* reported that “Tammany officials, reformers, capitalists, philanthropists, workingmen join in . . . a genuine public spirit, something that has not been known here for fully half a century.”⁹² Only the *Sun* actively opposed accepting the gift. It pointed out that since the

City was obliged to support the libraries he built, Carnegie's offer was in fact "a proposition to the people to spend their own money," a "costly change in public policy" that would result in "ruinous prodigality."⁹³ The *Herald* supported the Carnegie agreements, but argued that a public institution such as the library should be governed by public officials, that "since the people are to support these libraries the people's direct representatives should have their management and control."⁹⁴

Carnegie instead chose the New York Public Library to manage the Carnegie libraries, and the City of New York agreed to fund them through its new Circulation Department. Since the City was now understandably unwilling to subsidize collections that might compete with the public library, this in effect meant the end of the independence of the remaining free circulating libraries. In the fall of 1902, Comptroller Edward M. Grout began to pressure these private institutions to dissolve and be absorbed into the Circulation Department. Most of them were extremely reluctant to surrender their independence and to lose their individuality within a larger, presumably more impersonal institution, but the Carnegie agreements furnished Grout with both a carrot and a stick. His stick was the imminent loss of municipal support. In October, he announced that after 1903 the City would fund lending libraries only through the New York Public Library.⁹⁵ His carrot was a new building paid for by Andrew Carnegie. Once a free circulating library agreed to join the Circulation Department, it was understood that Carnegie funds would be used to build a new branch named after the old library, and that members of the old board would be appointed to the Circulation Committee.⁹⁶

Besides the New York Free Circulating Library, which formed the nucleus of the Circulation Department in January 1901, the largest independent system in the city was the Aguilar Free Library. Even before the announcement of the Carnegie gift, the board of the Jewish library had appointed a committee to investigate cooperation with the other lending libraries, and actual consolidation with the New York Public Library was largely a matter of, in the words of Chief of Circulation Arthur Bostwick, “the smoothing down of ruffled plumage.”⁹⁷ While Aguilar President Samuel Greenbaum was willing to acquiesce to a merger, Henry Leipziger, chairman of the library committee, fiercely resisted the loss of the library’s independence. In the annual report for 1901, Greenbaum recognized that the time was “very near at hand when the free circulating libraries will necessarily come under one general control.” Leipziger, in the same document, simply referred to a “closer relationship between the existing libraries.” However, once Grout announced that the City would soon fund only the Circulation Department, Leipziger bowed to the inevitable and agreed to the consolidation. The Aguilar ceded its property to the New York Public Library in March of 1903, and Greenbaum was elected to the library’s board. Leipziger’s plumage was smoothed by an appointment to the Circulation Committee.⁹⁸

Negotiations with the third largest system, the Cathedral Library Association, were considerably more contentious. Since the Catholic library was founded as an antidote to the pernicious influence of public libraries, resistance to joining the New York Public Library involved more than mere pride and sentimentality. Particularly after losing its state support for parochial schools in a new constitution adopted in 1894, the Church in New York City was determined to prevent what it viewed as an intrusion into clerical

affairs. In the spring of 1901, shortly after Carnegie made his offer to the City and long before Grout threatened to cut off City funds, the Cathedral Library Association took the offensive. Anticipating the change in municipal policy, the Association circulated a “Statement of the Position of the Cathedral Library” that outlined its argument for continued independence. It contended that consolidation with the Circulation Department would defeat the very purpose of the library, which “was established in order to counteract the evil influences of public libraries in general,” and “would mean the establishment of so many new instruments for the propagation of opposition to our Church.” It further argued that to compel a merger would be undemocratic. The New York Public Library was essentially a private organization managed by Protestants. As members of the voting, tax-paying public, Catholics, who comprised “the majority of the religious element of the city,” were entitled to libraries that represented their own theological and intellectual interests.⁹⁹

Most of city’s newspapers opposed separate appropriations for the Cathedral Library that would allow it to remain independent of the Public Library. In part, their arguments were founded upon the separation of church and state, “one of the foundation stones of the Republic,”¹⁰⁰ but there was certainly an element of anti-Catholicism in the debate as well. The *Evening Post*, for example, wrote that the Catholics’ plea for public support was an expression of “medievalism.”¹⁰¹ More important, many held that the issue was not democracy, as the “Statement of the Cathedral Library” had argued, but rather the public good that transcended the demands of any particular political constituency. The *Tribune* insisted that “public money should be used for the public and not for any part of it,” while the *Times* assured readers that the Public Library would represent “the general

and not any special public.”¹⁰² Such arguments on behalf of the public weal call to mind the republican fear of factions, but with a critical difference. Here the danger came not from small cabals of grasping individuals, but from large organizations selfishly pursuing interests contrary to those of the people. The public good was eroded by “special interests,” a term that entered the American vocabulary about this time.¹⁰³

For his part Director Billings saw no need to force the issue. In his inaugural address to the American Library Association in 1902, he suggested that “the question will . . . be decided . . . by political party requirements,” and assured his audience that “there is no immediate danger to the free public library system from this particular form of opposition.”¹⁰⁴ His assessment of the controversy proved to be quite clear-sighted. While Father Joseph McMahon, the director of the Cathedral Library, insisted that he would resist consolidation at any cost and warned that it was “now purely a question of politics,” the municipal authorities made a number of critical concessions.¹⁰⁵ Two Catholics were elected trustees of the New York Public Library, thus assuring at least minimal representation on the board, and in late 1903 Comptroller Grout (who was up for re-election) announced that the City would fund the library for one more year.¹⁰⁶ After delicate negotiations for most of the following year, and faced with the certain loss of municipal support in 1905, McMahon and Archbishop John Farley finally relented. The Cathedral Library Association ceded its property to the New York Public Library on December 31, 1904.¹⁰⁷

By this time most of the other lending libraries had already consolidated.¹⁰⁸ Only a very few were able to remain independent. The Society Library and the Mercantile

Library were private subscription libraries, rather than public libraries. They had never received appropriations from the City and were able to rely upon a loyal and extensive clientele for support. Both are still in operation today.¹⁰⁹ A number of the smaller circulating libraries simply refused to join the New York Public Library and were forced to close for lack of funds. B'nai B'rith, for example, after trying to find a "wide-minded philanthropist" who would "rescue" its Maimonides Library, finally sold the collection in early 1906.¹¹⁰ The General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, on the other hand, was rescued by its most famous member. Andrew Carnegie, a brother since 1888, donated over half a million dollars at about this time, a portion of which was used to expand and endow the library. The Apprentices' Library is still a lending library and is still an integral part of the Society's activities.¹¹¹

When Andrew Carnegie wrote to John Shaw Billings offering to finance the construction of branch libraries for the New York Public Library, he observed, with characteristic modesty, that the project "probably breaks the record, but this is the day of big operations."¹¹² Having just sold the Carnegie Steel Company to J.P. Morgan to create U.S. Steel, America's first billion dollar corporation, Carnegie probably knew as much about big operations as anyone in the country. In some ways the consolidation of New York's libraries that his gift accomplished paralleled structural transformations that were occurring about the same time in the business world. It was not simply that previously independent entities were merged into a big operation, but rather they came together in new, complex, and characteristically modern ways. Americans were evolving new ways

of organizing their fundamental activities within the public, as well as the economic sphere.

The various reorganizations that created the New York Public Library were more than just successive consolidations of city's libraries. In one sense, the new library was a reconsolidation of elements that were integrated parts of the city's civic culture earlier in the century. Early nineteenth-century civic culture comprehended both the scholarly and the popular. It was predicated on the republican assumption that all classes would participate in and benefit from the refinement of society. The development of such culture-building institutions as the Astor Library and the Free Circulating Library, each catering to a different public and espousing different values, shows how sharply that original cultural unity was fragmented in the course of the century. The New York Public Library recombined these two cultures within the Reference and Circulation Departments. A somewhat different reconsolidation occurred within the Circulation Department itself. At the close of the century, the various free circulating libraries were moving slowly, grudgingly towards an acceptance of the popular fiction that was circulated commercially by subscription libraries like the Mercantile Library. The new Circulation Department, like other public libraries across the country, increasingly embraced the idea that reading could be recreational as well as educational; that the library could both entertain and uplift.

These different elements, the scholarly and the popular, and popular education as well as popular fiction, were recombined in a public institution, a library supported, at least in part, by public monies. The New York Public Library was part of an expansion of

the role of government in the city of New York and elsewhere. For the Progressive Era librarian, and, ideally, for a library user, a library card meant not simply borrowing books for home reading, but, in the words of Anne Carroll Moore, the library's first Supervisor of Children's Work, "playing a part in the life of a civic institution."¹¹³ The founding of the library represents a desire to recapture a republican sense of community that had been lost amidst the divisiveness and greed of the Gilded Age, but to do so in a government supported institution that was viewed an extension of that community.

At the same time, however, Moore and other leaders of the library movement in New York recognized that they served distinct communities within the larger community, and they tailored their work to meet the needs of different library users. The New York Public Library served multiple publics, scholars and wage-earners; Protestants, Catholics, and Jews; men and women; children and adults; the native born and immigrants from around the world. The consolidation of the city's privately-managed libraries created a public institution in which the interests of these varied constituencies were managed by experts. Librarians were now members of Robert Wiebe's "new middle class," professionals trained to serve and coordinate the needs of the city's publics. They were part of a new liberalism, a bureaucratic liberalism that reworked the nineteenth-century notion of *laissez-faire*.¹¹⁴ The founding of the New York Public Library embodied a new liberalism and a new republicanism, both within the framework of a public institution.

The library, however, was not public in the strictest sense of the term. It was, in fact, funded partly by private endowments and partly by taxes. The City of New York appropriated monies for the Circulation Department, while the Reference Department was

supported by interest on the Astor, Lenox, and Tilden bequests. To a certain extent, the New York Public Library was the kind of institution the founders of the New York Institution had hoped to create in 1816.¹¹⁵ It brought together, if not all, at least significant part of the city's cultural resources, and it was directed for the most part by the city's elite. The library was by no means public in terms of governance. Trustees were self-elected and served for life. Not only at the founding, but for most of the twentieth century, the board comprised mostly older, wealthy, white, Protestant men. The first black man, for example, joined in 1970.¹¹⁶ With each commitment of public funding, however, came a degree, albeit limited, of public representation. In 1899, when the City agreed to construct the central building, the comptroller became an *ex officio* trustee, and in 1902, when the City contracted to fund the Circulation Department, the mayor and the president of the Board of Aldermen were added to the 21-member board as well.¹¹⁷ Thus the New York Public Library was and is a public institution that relies on both public and private support and is governed by both public officials and private citizens.¹¹⁸

The governance of the library, however, was more than simply a mix of public and private representation. Norms and conventions as well as statutes and by-laws guided how the trustees were selected. First, when the library became a public institution, its direction became exclusively masculine. Women had founded and, in large part, led the free circulating libraries, but as a direct result of the consolidations with the New York Public Library, they immediately lost almost all power. Initially they were not even appointed to the Circulation Committee, and a woman was not elected to the board until 1950.¹¹⁹ Jewish and Catholic men, on the other hand, were accorded informal representation. In 1902, before the mergers with the Aguilar and the Cathedral Libraries,

the first Jew and the first Catholic joined the board, and since then it has always included at least one trustee from those faiths. Cardinal John Farley was elected in 1904, and from that time the archbishop of New York has served in essentially an unofficial *ex officio* capacity.¹²⁰ Finally, although the City of New York was formally represented only by the mayor, the comptroller, and the president of the Board of Aldermen, because it held the purse strings, it still wielded considerable power informally. Carnegie's requirement that the City appropriate ten percent of his gift annually to fund circulation proved to be grossly inadequate. Although the Circulation Department was always funded at much higher level, municipal authorities occasionally used the budget to influence the board.¹²¹

In an editorial published around the time that the Circulation Department was organized, the New York *Herald* used what was apparently a new term to describe the New York Public Library. Neither public, nor private, it was "quasi-public."¹²² The library was a new kind of institution for a new century. It was large, complex, multifunctional, and ambiguous. Its founding points towards an expanded sphere of activity for government, and its organization indicates how intertwined public and the private enterprise might become. This quasi-public institution ushered in a new era in which it was no longer possible to delineate precisely the boundaries of the public sphere.

Notes

Introduction

¹. Peter Dobkin Hall, *The Organization of American Culture, 1700-1900: Private Institutions, Elites, and the Origins of American Nationality* (New York: New York University Press, 1982), 2.

². For an extended discussion of how this conception of culture evolved in the United States, see Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

³. Frederic De Peyster, *The Moral and Intellectual Influence of Libraries Upon Social Progress* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1866), 82-83.

⁴. This is a paraphrase of Peter Dobkin Hall: “American culture in the twentieth century is characterized by masses of individuals who produce goods and services that they do not consume and consume goods and services that they do not produce .” Hall, *The Organization of American Culture*, 2.

⁵. De Peyster, *Moral and Intellectual Influence of Libraries*, 79.

⁶. *Ibid.*, 86.

⁷. See especially, Charles Beard, *An Economic Interpretation the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Free Press, 1986 [1913]).

⁸. Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition In America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991 [1955]), 5-6.

⁹. Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967). Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969). J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

¹⁰. Appleby has written extensively on republicanism and liberalism. Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) is a collection of her essays on the subject. See especially “Republicanism in Old and New Contexts,” 320-342.

¹¹. See especially, Bruce Laurie, *Artisans into Workers: Labor in the Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Noonday Press, 1989); and Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). The quote is from *ibid.*, 63.

¹². Arthur M. Schlesinger, "Biography of a Nation of Joiners," *American Historical Review* 50 (October 1944): 2, 21.

¹³. Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History to 1860* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944), v.

¹⁴. Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1960).

¹⁵. Michael Harris, "The Purpose of the American Public Library: A Revisionist Interpretation of History," *Library Journal*, 15 September 1973, 2509, 2514, and *passim*. This is a summary of his conclusions in a document published by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Library and Information Science. Michael H. Harris, *The Purpose of the American Public Library in Historical Perspective: a Revisionist Interpretation* (ERIC Reports, ED 071668; Washington, D.C.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Library and Information Science, 1972).

¹⁶. *Ibid.*, 2509.

¹⁷. Phyllis Dain, "Ambivalence and Paradox: The Social Bonds of the Public Library," *Library Journal*, 1 February 1975, 261.

¹⁸. *Ibid.*, 262.

¹⁹. *Ibid.*, 266.

²⁰. Paul S. Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 57-64. The quote appears on page 61. Actually, Boyer does use the term "social control," but in a more nuanced manner than Griffin and others. It is probably more accurate to say that he is concerned with "social influence" rather than social control.

²¹. Anne Firor Scott, "On Seeing and not Seeing: A Case of Historical Invisibility," *Journal of American History* 71 (June 1984): 9.

²². See, for example, Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991) and Lori D. Ginsberg,

Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

²³. For a preliminary discussion of this important topic as it relates to the library profession, see Anne Firor Scott, "Women and Libraries," *Journal of Library History* 21 (Spring 1986): 400-405. See also Dee Garrison, "The Tender Technicians: the Feminization of Public Librarianship, 1876-1905," *Journal of Social History* 6 (Winter 1972-73): 131-59; idem, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920* (New York: Free Press, 1979; repr., Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 173-242. And the special issue *Journal of Library History* 18 (Fall 1983).

²⁴. Linda K. Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment: An American Perspective," in *Towards an Intellectual History of Women: Essays* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 58-59 and passim.

²⁵. See, for example, Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 171 and passim. Welter argues that women's involvement in voluntary organizations encouraged them to test the bounds of the woman's sphere, 173-4. Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 75 (June 1988): 9-39.

²⁶. Juergen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article," *New German Critique* 1 (Fall 1974): 55 and passim. My "twenty-five words or less" exposition is extremely inadequate considering the complexity of his argument. The "Encyclopedia Article" is a concise and very useful summary of *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989 [1962]). Some excellent examples of how Habermas's ideas have informed historical scholarship may be found in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). The introduction by Calhoun is an especially helpful overview of the notion of a public sphere.

²⁷. This point is made by Mary P. Ryan in "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America," in *ibid.*, 263.

²⁸. See *ibid.*, and Nancy P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth-Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) for insightful applications of Habermas's ideas to American history and women's history.

²⁹. For works that specifically examine libraries in terms of the self-definition of particular groups see: Ronald Story, "Class and Culture in Boston: The Athenaeum,

1807-1860,” *American Quarterly* 27 (May 1975), 178-199; and Howard M. Wach, “Culture and the Middle Classes: Popular Knowledge in Industrial Manchester,” *Journal of British Studies* 27 (October 1988), 375-404.

³⁰. Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1994), 268.

³¹. For a good review of the “linguistic turn” see John E. Toews, “Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience,” *American Historical Review* 92 (October 1987): 879-907.

³². Wayne A. Wiegand, “American Library History Literature, 1947-1997: Critical Perspectives?,” *Libraries & Culture* 35 (Winter 2000): 21; and idem, “In My View: Why Don’t We Have Any ‘Schools of Library and Reading Studies’,” *SHARP News* 8 (Autumn 1999): 1. The Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP) is the foremost scholarly organization for print culture studies. See www.sharpweb.org.

³³. Sidney Ditzion, *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture: A Social History of the American Public Library Movement in New England and the Middle States from 1850 to 1900* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1947), 51 and passim. Another very important early work is Jesse H. Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949; repr., n.p.: Shoestring Press, 1965). See also Abigail A. Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) for an excellent account of the role that Andrew Carnegie played in the founding of later public library systems; and Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*.

³⁴. Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967), 133-164 and passim. Peter Dobkin Hall calls this “welfare state liberalism.” Hall, *The Organization of American Culture*, 2.

³⁵. For an excellent analysis and overview of library historiography, see Wiegand, “American Library History Literature, 1947-1997.”

Chapter One: The New York Society Library

¹. John Adams, for example, claimed that he “never understood” what republicanism meant and that “no other man ever did or will.” Quoted in Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1967), 283 n50.

². There is a vast literature on and in reaction to the “republican synthesis.” The seminal works that laid the foundation for a historiography that stressed the centrality of republicanism in early American history are: Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*; Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969); J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). A good example of the scholarship in reaction to the republican synthesis is Joyce Appleby, *Republicanism and Liberalism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). A somewhat dated but still very useful of overview is Daniel T. Rodgers, “Republicanism: the Career of a Concept,” *Journal of American History* 79 (June 1992): 11-38.

³. On the beginnings of public libraries in the United States, see Jesse H. Shera, *The Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England, 1629-1855* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949). And Sidney H. Ditzion, *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture: A Social History of the American Public Library in New England and the Middle States from 1850 to 1900* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1947). On the founding of the New York Public Library, see Harry Miller Lydenberg, *History of the New York Public Library: Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations* (New York: The Library, 1923). And Phyllis Dain, *The New York Public Library: A History of Its Founding and Early Years* (New York: The Library, 1972).

⁴. Austin Baxter Keep, *History of the New York Society Library, with an Introductory Chapter on Libraries in Colonial New York, 1698-1776* (New York: De Vinne Press, 1908), 150. This is the official history of the Society Library. It is better than most official institutional histories. Keep footnoted some of his sources and was occasionally, albeit mildly, critical of the library’s leadership. The introductory chapter and chapters one, two, and three, which dealt with the history of the library through the Revolution, were his dissertation in political science for Columbia University.

⁵. Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 181-82.

⁶. Charles T. Laughler, *Thomas Bray’s Grand Design: Libraries of the Church of England in North America, 1695-1785* (Chicago: The American Library Association, 1973), 8-16. See also *The Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Bray, Thomas,” by John Henry Overton. To place the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in the context of contemporary organizations, see Meyer Reinhold, “The Quest for ‘Useful Knowledge’ in Eighteenth-Century America,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 119 (April 1975): 108-32.

⁷. In New York the establishment of the church meant only that the colonists were taxed to support it. There are no reliable statistics for the various denominations during this period. One of the founders of the Society Library, William Livingston, estimated

that during the period in which the library was founded, one in ten persons in the colony was Anglican. Livingston, a Presbyterian, may have exaggerated somewhat, but the Anglicans were certainly a small minority. Milton M. Klein, ed., *The Independent Reflector or Weekly Essays on Sundry Important Subjects More Particularly adapted to the Province of New-York By William Livingston and Others* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 183n2.

⁸. Thomas Bray, *Bibliotheca Parochialis: Or, a Scheme of such Theological Heads both General and Particular, as Are More Peculiarly Requisite to be Well Studied by Every Pastor of a Parish, Together with A Catalogue of Books which May be Read upon each of those Points, Part I* (London: E. Holt, 1697), reprinted in *Rev. Thomas Bray: His Life and Selected Works Relating to Maryland*, ed. Bernard C. Steiner (New York: Arno Press, 1972; repr., Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1901), 191-208. The extensive catalog Bray outlined in part one and promised to publish as part two was never compiled. However, many of the catalogs of the actual parochial libraries sent to the North American parishes have survived. A number of these are reproduced in Laughter, *Bray's Grand Design*, 92-101. Laughter claims that in practice books in the parochial libraries often circulated. Laughter, *Bray's Grand Design*, 47.

⁹. Bray's ideas for the lending libraries are explained most fully in Thomas Bray, *Several Circular Letters to the Clergy of Maryland, Subsequent to Their Late Visitation, to Enforce Such Resolutions as Were Taken Therein* (London: William Downing, 1701), reprinted in *Rev. Thomas Bray*, 123-55.

¹⁰. Thomas Bray, *Apostolick Charity, Its Nature and Excellence Considered, in a Discourse ... Preached at St. Paul's, Decemb. 19 1697 ...* (London: W. Downing, 1698), reprinted in *Rev. Thomas Bray*, 76. This includes a summary of the libraries founded in North America up to that time. *Rev. Thomas Bray*, 73-76.

¹¹. For a history of the Bray library in New York see Keep, *Society Library*, 8-42. For an overview of Bray's extensive writings on libraries see Bernard C. Steiner, "Rev. Thomas Bray and His American Libraries," *American Historical Review* 2 (October 1896), 59-75. In all Bray founded five provincial libraries, thirty-eight parochial libraries, and thirty-seven layman's libraries. For a tabular overview see Laughter, *Bray's Grand Design*, 82-86. Bray's most elaborate description of the library plan is the "prefatory epistle" in Thomas Bray, *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (London: E. Holt, 1697), April 13, 2003 <<http://wwwlib.umi.com/eebo/image/65042/5>> *et seq.* This critical passage is omitted in *Rev. Thomas Bray*, but is included in the digital version in Early English Books Online (EEBO).

¹². Thomas Bray, "*Bibliotheca Americanae Quadrpartitae, or, Catalogues of the Libraries Sent into the Several Provinces Belonging to the Crown of England, in Order to Promote All the Parts of Usefull and Necessary Knowledge Both Divine and Humane,*" manuscript at the Library of Sion College, London, pp. [2-14]. The New York Public

Library, Research Division; and the University of California-Berkeley Library have microform copies of a handwritten copy. Quote is from page [14]. This was probably written around 1701 or after. The New York catalog is not one of the catalogs included.

¹³. Trinity Church, Vestry Minutes, 4 April 1698. Word processed transcription courtesy of the Trinity Church Archives. For the other provincial libraries see Laughler, *Bray's Grand Design*, 82-83.

¹⁴Bray, "*Bibliothecae Americanae*," [14]. Thomas Bray, *An Essay Towards Promoting All Necessary and Useful Knowledge, Both Divine and Human, In All the Parts of His Majesty's Dominions, Both at Home and Abroad* (London: E. Holt, 1697), reprinted in *Rev. Thomas Bray*, 53.

¹⁵. On the SPG bookplate, see John Chalmers, "The Cover," *Journal of Library History* 18 (Fall 1983): 473-75.

¹⁶. A facsimile of the bookplate is in Keep, *Society Library*, 100. Instructions for labeling the books are in Bray, "*Bibliotheca Americanae*."

¹⁷. Vestry Minutes, 4 April 1698. Laughler, *Bray's Grand Design*, 34. Bray himself was ambiguous at times on this important point. In "*Bibliotheca Americanae*," under "Directions For the Use . . . of the Library . . . [in] New York" he wrote that "the Chief Design of this Library is for the use of the Church of England Minister belonging to the . . . City." Bray, "*Bibliotheca Americanae*," n.p..

¹⁸. Keep, *Society Library*, 35. For other libraries in the city in the early eighteenth-century see Keep, *Society Library*, 43-117.

¹⁹. Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, xi. For examples see, Bernard Bailyn, ed., *Pamphlets of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1965-).

²⁰. The Zenger case set a landmark precedent for freedom of the press in the United States. See for example, William Lowell Putnam, *John Peter Zenger and the Fundamental Freedom* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1997); David Paul Nord, "The Authority of Truth: Religion and the John Peter Zenger Case," *Journalism Quarterly* 62 (Summer 1985): 227-235; and Cathy Covert, "'Passion is Ye Prevailing Motive': the Feud Behind the Zenger Case," *Journalism Quarterly* 50 (Spring 1973): 3-10. James Alexander's account of the trial has been widely reprinted. For example, James Alexander, *A Brief Narrative of the Case and Trial of John Peter Zenger, Printer of the New York Weekly Journal*, ed. Stanley Nider Katz (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1972).

²¹. Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 179. Richard M. Ketchum, *Divided Loyalties: How the American Revolution Came to New York* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2002), 56-58. My brief description overly simplifies the often byzantine politics of the colony during this period. The key is to think of the De Lancey and Livingston factions not as political parties, but as the loci of shifting alliances. For a more detailed history of the Livingstons in New York politics see Milton M. Klein, *The American Whig: William Livingston of New York*, rev. ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 181-228.

²². Dorothy Rita Dillon, *The New York Triumvirate: A Study of the Legal and Political Careers of William Livingston, John Morin Scott, and William Smith, Jr.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949). The quotes are from the Reverend Samuel Johnson, the president of King's College, quoted in William Smith, Jr., *Historical Memoirs from 16 March 1763 to 9 July 1776 of William Smith*, ed. William H. W. Sabine (New York: New York Times and the Arno Press, 1956), 1: 3; and an anonymous newspaper correspondent quoted in Dillon, *New York Triumvirate*, 47. See also, Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect: A History of Intellectual Life in New York City, from 1750 to the Beginnings of Our Own Times* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 14-18.

²³. Quoted in Klein, *American Whig*, 187.

²⁴. *Independent Reflector*, 18. William Smith, Jr., *History of the Province of New-York*, ed. Michael Kammen (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 1: xxiii. Rheinhold, "Quest for 'Useful Knowledge,'" 114. Among the Society's members were James Alexander and William Smith, Sr.

²⁵. For the early history of Kings College see David C. Humphrey, *From Kings College to Columbia, 1746-1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976); and Horace Coon, *Columbia: Colossus on the Hudson* (New York: E.P. Hutton & Co., 1946), 36-57.

²⁶. Board of King's College to James De Lancey, Lt. Governor, 5 May 1754, in William Smith, "Memoirs, vol. 2, ~1753, Oct. 5- 1760, Dec. ~1777, May 5- July 5." William Smith Papers, ca. 1631-1883, bulk (1770-1780), New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division. Parts of Smith's memoirs, which include copies or transcripts of various public documents, were published in 1956. See note 19 above; and William Smith, Jr., *Historical Memoirs from 26 August 1778 to 12 November 1783 of William Smith*, ed. William H.W. Sabine (New York: New York Times and the Arno Press, 1956).

²⁷. Bender, *New York Intellect*, 17-25. Bender stresses that "much that was said in connection with the controversy over the founding of King's College was said as well in the Society Library elections." Bender *New York Intellect*, 19.

²⁸. Milton M. Klein, the editor of 1963 edition of the *Independent Reflector*, notes in an appendix eleven specific passages that obviously paraphrase the *Independent Whig*. *Independent Reflector*, 450-52. An essay on “The Vanity of Birth and Titles” quotes an extensive passage directly from the *Independent Whig*. *Independent Reflector*, 365.

²⁹. *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁰. The *Independent Reflector* advised, for example, that the incorporating act should include a provision guaranteeing free access to the library for all students. *Independent Reflector*, 203.

³¹. *Ibid.*, 41-42; 442.

³². This issue set forth the *Independent Reflector*’s “creed.” *Independent Reflector*, 393. This particular article of faith was evidently a paraphrase of the *Independent Whig*. *Independent Reflector*, 452.

³³. *Ibid.*, 208, 359.

³⁴. Gordon Wood has described this as a critical shift to “new . . . ideals of gentility.” Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 194-97. See page 11 below.

³⁵. *Independent Reflector*, 193, 175, 172. Klein includes an appendix that attempts to identify the authors of the individual essays, all of which were simply signed with a pseudonymous initial. He concludes that well over half of the total were written by Livingston, the acknowledged leader of the triumvirate; that “the journal was essentially his in design and execution.” A small number of the essays were written by persons other than Livingston, Scott, and Smith. *Independent Reflector*, 446-449.

³⁶. Smith, *History of New York*, 1: 209-10; 2: 150. The private friends included Livingston’s brother Philip, his cousin Robert, and William Alexander, the son of James Alexander.

³⁷. The Society Library, like most libraries of the period was modeled on Franklin’s Library Company of Philadelphia. See Keep, *Society Library*, 149-50 and especially note 2, page 150, which lists “proprietary libraries” founded in the other colonies. For the evolution of public libraries during the colonial period see Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, 30-40, 51-53.

³⁸. The “Articles” are reprinted in Keep, *Society Library*, 535-37. The Articles remained in force into the twentieth century.

³⁹. Smith, *History of New York*, 2: 150.

⁴⁰. [William Livingston], "Watchtower, No. XXV," *New-York Mercury*, May 12, 1755. The Watchtower was a regular column the triumvirate began after the De Lancey faction pressured the printer of the *Independent Reflector* into refusing to print it. *Independent Reflector*, 40-41. This contribution was almost certainly written by Livingston. It is signed with the same initial he used in the *Independent Reflector*, B., and shows his inimitable tact, restraint, and discretion. The dirty schemer was probably Justice John Chambers of the Supreme Court. Dillon, *Triumvirate*, 41. "Defeats of High-Church on the Subject of the College" is rather an exaggeration. *Independent Reflector*, 44-45.

⁴¹. Keep, *Society Library*, 554- 560 lists chronologically all of the trustees who served through 1908. I was able to determine the political affiliations of most of the trustees either in Keep's history or in Appendix B of Smith, *History of New York*, a biographical directory compiled by the editor. It is possible, given the neat balance between the two factions, that some sort of informal agreement had been reached, although there is no surviving evidence for this.

⁴². *Ibid.*, 152, 166. Page 168 is a facsimile of the first bookplate. In all six Livingstons served on the board during the colonial period.

⁴³. De Lancey was only elected twice, in 1754 and 1756. It is possible that he was too distracted by the French and Indian War to seek a charter for the Society. It seems more likely that he was so embittered by the battle over the College that he took little interest in the library once elected.

⁴⁴. "New York Society Library, First Minute Book, 1754-1772," 7 May 1754. Hereafter, Minutes of the Board. The second manuscript volume covers the period from 1788 when the library reopened after the Revolution through 1832. Both are at the New York Society Library. After these initial lists were solicited from all of the subscribers, it seems that only the trustees submitted lists for approval by the board for later acquisitions.

⁴⁵. New York Society Library, *A Catalogue of the Books Belonging to the New-York Society Library* (New York: H. Gaine, 1758). The Society printed a facsimile of this catalog in 1954 to commemorate its two hundredth anniversary. It is organized first by size (folio, quarto, octavo, and duodecimo), then roughly alphabetically by first letter; that is, for example, all of the titles beginning with the letter "A" are grouped together but not alphabetically. The first titles the board ordered in 1754 are listed in Minutes of the Board, 29 May 1754.

⁴⁶. Austin Baxter Keep counts ten merchants and thirteen lawyers serving on the board before 1760. Keep, *Society Library*, 163.

⁴⁷. *Ibid.*, 153.

⁴⁸. Aside from one title in French and a few in Latin, all of the collection was in English.

⁴⁹. Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 193-96. Quote is on page 195. On refinement in the context of colonial New York, see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 172-75.

⁵⁰. *Independent Reflector*, 219-20, 345.

⁵¹. See the Spectator Project at Rutgers University Libraries (<http://tabula.rutgers.edu/spectator/>) for the fulltext of and commentary on eighteenth-century literary periodicals.

⁵². *Independent Reflector*, 345.

⁵³. *Ibid.*, 39, 20-21.

⁵⁴. Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 22-54.

⁵⁵. Gordon's translations included lengthy introductions relating the decline of Rome to the principles of English Whiggery. Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 42. History and biography were the largest genres in the 1758 catalog.

⁵⁶. In all, the catalog includes about one-third of the approximately 100 authors that Bailyn identified as the most important sources of revolutionary thought.

⁵⁷. The same list of subscribers appears in Minutes of the Board, 29 May 1754, along with the list of the first books ordered from London.

⁵⁸. James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748-1811* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 72.

⁵⁹. These five were a surgeon, an apothecary, a printer, and two distillers. The majority of the members were either lawyers (36) or merchants (22). The charter is reprinted in Keep, *Society Library*, 538-47.

⁶⁰. Dillon, *Triumvirate*, 199-203. Livingston became the first governor of the state of New Jersey and signed the Constitution. For divisions in the city during the Revolution see Ketchum, *Divided Loyalties* and Judith L. Van Buskirk, *Generous Enemies: Patriots and Loyalists in Revolutionary New York* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

⁶¹. Smith, *Historical Memoirs from 1763 to 1776*, 2: 278.

⁶². Minutes of the Board, 21 December 1788. The act validating the charter is reprinted in Keep, *Society Library*, 547-48.

⁶³. Keep, *Society Library*, 212, 239. *The Charter, Bye-Laws, and the Names of the Members of the New-York Society Library: With a Catalogue of the Books Belong to the Said Library* (New York: T. & J. Swords, 1793).

⁶⁴. A Subscriber to the New-York Society Library, "On the Utility of Public Libraries," *New-York Magazine; or, Literary Repository*, June 1791, 307-09. For more on post-revolutionary learned societies see Rheinhold, "Quest for 'Useful Knowledge,'" 124-29. For circulation statistics by subject category, 1789-90 see Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, 122.

⁶⁵. Keep, *Society Library*, 289.

⁶⁶. *Ibid.*, 225, 402.

⁶⁷. *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, 1784-1831* (New York: The City, 1917), VII: 738; VIII: 232-36. The quotes, from pages 232, 233 and 235, are part of an ad hoc committee's report on the societies' petition. Mayor DeWitt Clinton and most of the members of the committee were Society members.

⁶⁸. Bender, *New York Intellect*, 62-66. Quote is from page 65. Brideswell became available when the new almshouse at Bellevue opened. Washington Irving quipped that the City's plan was to "give the rich in brains/ The worn-out mansion of the poor in pocket." Quoted in Bender, *New York Intellect*, 64.

⁶⁹ *Minutes of the Common Council*, VIII: 686. Minutes of the Board, 16 November 1816.

⁷⁰. Keep, *Society Library*, 299-300.

⁷¹. By 1827, the writing was clearly on the wall. That year the organizations comprising the New York Institution and others, including the Society Library, campaigned unsuccessfully to have the City grant a 99 year lease on Brideswell. See, for example, "Minutes of the American Academy of Fine Arts from January 1817," 5 May 1827, New-York Historical Society. Also Keep, *Society Library*, 299-300. And Bender, *New York Intellect*, 76.

⁷². *Minutes of the Common Council*, XIX: 78.

⁷³. Keep, *Society Library*, 247, 304. Each increase in the annual subscription required an act of the Assembly and these are reprinted in Keep, *Society Library*, 548-49. Shera estimates that approximately half of the subscription libraries in New England charged an annual subscription of less than a dollar. Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, 77.

⁷⁴. Tom Glynn, "Books for a Reformed Republic: The Apprentices' Library of New York City, 1820-1865," *Libraries & Culture* 34 (Fall 1999): 355-356. The number of pay readers in the Apprentices' Library was comparatively small until after the Civil War. Thomas Augst, "The Business of Reading in Nineteenth-Century America: The New York Mercantile Library," *American Quarterly* 50 (June 1998): 267-305. From 1754 to 1761 the Society Library allowed nonsubscribers to pay one to four shillings to borrow a book for a month, depending upon the size. It was not until 1878 that it allowed "temporary subscriptions," but by the turn of the century these annual subscriptions from nonshareholders generated substantially more revenue than subscriptions from the members holding shares. Keep, *Society Library*, 156, 171, 522.

⁷⁵. According to the by-laws in force between 1789 and 1812, the board was not required vote on new members. Since they never voted anyway, the change in 1812 had no practical effect, but it would seem to indicate greater exclusivity. Although my description of the board may seem unduly harsh, even the Society's official historian referred to "a spirit of exclusiveness [to which] must be attributed to some degree the languor, approaching atrophy, into which at times the institution has sometimes lapsed." Keep, *Society Library*, 404.

⁷⁶. This is the average of the complete terms of service of the thirty-four trustees who served at any time between 1800 to 1830. The average is skewed somewhat by Gulian C. Verplanck, who served a total of fifty-eight years.

⁷⁷. "Contested" is Keep's term for any election in which members actually voted. Aside from the bitter elections around the time of the founding, through 1833 there appears to have been only one other contested election, the one in 1795. Members rejected trustees who served on the building committee, possibly because of cost overruns. Keep, *Society Library*, 226.

⁷⁸. Kent's entire opinion is included in Minutes of the Board, 2 May 1825. His argument is involved, highly legalistic, and based largely on his interpretation of the spirit of the charter, rather than its actual words. See also Keep, *Society Library*, 280-86, who called the election a "lesson in arbitrament by law and the prevention of disorder."

⁷⁹. Nonetheless, one of the recurring complaints in the election disputes of the next decade was that the board was unable or unwilling to furnish a complete list of the current shareholders. There is no record in the minutes of a prospective member being rejected by the board.

⁸⁰. Keep, *Society Library*, 284-85. John I. Morgan and Evert A. Bancker, *Address* (n.p.,1833), 9. This is one of the first pamphlets circulated in the heated election campaigns of the 1830's discussed below. The explanation that the newcomers hoped to turn the library into a bank may not have seemed so farfetched in 1825. New York State did not have a general incorporation law at that time. Each corporation was formed by a special act of the legislature. Getting control of a previously incorporated organization may have been seen as a way to by-pass the legislature, particularly on such a sensitive political issue as the chartering of a bank. On the other hand, the corporate powers conferred in the Society's charter were very limited.

⁸¹. For the constitutional convention, see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 512-15.

⁸². General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Report of the Special Committee . . . to which was Referred the Resolution for Extending the Usefulness of that Institution* (New York: Wm. A. Mercein, 1831). Not all of the report's recommendations were adopted immediately, but from the 1830's the library increased in importance until by the Civil War it was the Society's most important function and one of the most popular libraries in the city.

⁸³. Peter J. Wosh, *Spreading the Word: The Bible Business in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 151-75.

⁸⁴. In the case of these two libraries changes were made in part for financial reasons. The merchants' clerks in the MLA, for example, entered into an agreement with a merchants' organization, the Clinton Hall Association, whereby the latter provided a building for the library in exchange for a measure of control over the content of the collection. The Historical Society experienced a period of financial instability when it lost its rooms in Brideswell with the other organizations of the New York Institution.

⁸⁵. Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 280.

⁸⁶. For the founders' ambitions for the new university, see [Jonathan Mayhew Wainwright], *Considerations Upon the Expediency and Means of Establishing a University in the City of New-York* (New York: Grattan, 1830). And *Journal of the Proceedings of a Convention of Literary and Scientific Gentlemen Held in the Common Council Chamber of the City of New York, October, 1830* (New York: Jonathan Leavitt and G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1831). This meeting was organized by NYU to solicit advice on policies and curricula from scholars and educational leaders across the country. See also, Thomas J. Frusciano and Marilyn H. Pettit, *New York University and the City: An Illustrated History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 1-15.

⁸⁷. *Address to the Citizens of New-York, on the Claims of Columbia College and the New University, to their Patronage* (New York: n.p., 1830). See also Coon, *Columbia*, 69-70. "The promoters [of NYU] echoed what the Livingstons ... had said at the founding of King's College ... [that it] was not democratic..." And Bender, *New York Intellect*, 89-104. By the 1840s, NYU was more like Columbia than a "new university." In 1843, when NYU no longer posed a threat, Columbia abandoned its revised curriculum.

⁸⁸. See for example, "Report of William Gracie and Others Relative to the Expediency of Establishing an Athenaeum," New-York Historical Society, Misc. Mss Box 23, no. 14A.

⁸⁹. Minutes of the Board, 16 May 1824.

⁹⁰. Henry Wheaton, *An Address Pronounced at the Opening of the New York Athenaeum, December 14, 1824*, 2d ed. (New York: J. W. Palmer, 1825), 23. Although its officers vigorously denied it, the disputed election of 1825 may have been connected in some way with the Athenaeum. April 1825 was the first Society Library election after the Athenaeum's founding. James Renwick, one of the old trustees who was re-elected, was a vice-president of the Athenaeum. That the new members wanted to combine with the Athenaeum is at least as plausible as that they were stealth bankers. On lectures as a means of popular education in the nineteenth-century, see Donald M. Scott, "The Popular Lecture and the Creation of a Public in Mid-nineteenth Century America," *Journal of American History* 66 (March 1980): 791-809.

⁹¹. The constitution, by-laws, and list of the lectures for 1825, as well as the aims of the founders were circulated in James Renwick, et al., *To the Public* (New York: J. W. Palmer & Co., 1825). This and the Wheaton address are both at the New York Public Library.

⁹². Wheaton, *New York Athenaeum*, 58.

⁹³. Keep, *Society Library*, 335.

⁹⁴. Robert W. July, *The Essential New Yorker: Gulian Crommelin Verplanck* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1951). Bender, *New York Intellect*, 135-39.

⁹⁵. The most substantial collection of Verplanck's speeches is Gulian C. Verplanck, *Discourses and Addresses on Subjects of American History, Arts, and Literature* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833). An accessible and representative speech is "The Advantages and Dangers of the American Scholar," in *American Philosophic Addresses, 1700-1900*, Joseph L. Blau, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), 115-50. A complete bibliography of Verplanck's writings and published addresses may be found in July, *Verplanck*, 291-94.

⁹⁶. The first series of lectures was delivered in the winter of 1827. Mercantile Library Association, *Seventh Annual Report* (New York: The Association, 1828), 40-41. The MLA “made the charge for the tickets so small that no one need be deterred from attending on the ground of expense” and the board stressed that their aim was to provide informal education for ambitious young men rather than to generate revenue. Nonetheless, by 1838 they reported that “no other single cause has contributed in a greater degree to the unexampled growth and prosperity of our institution than the popularity of the lectures.” Mercantile Library Association, *Eighth Annual Report* (1829), 47; and Mercantile Library Association, *Seventeenth Annual Report* (1838), 14.

⁹⁷. Gulian C. Verplanck, “Lecture Introductory to the several courses delivered before the Mercantile Association of New York,” in Verplanck, *Addresses*, 233-54.

⁹⁸. *Ibid.*, 241, 243.

⁹⁹. *Ibid.*, 243, 246. It is significant that Verplanck said that citizens “feel” their duties. There are distinct overtones of romanticism throughout his oratory. In one address he pictured his listeners’ “future lives ... winding their quiet way through the green pastures and shaded vales of domestic life ... gladdening the land and clothing it with fruitfulness, and beauty, and joy.” Gulian C. Verplanck, *The Right Moral Influence and Use of Liberal Studies. A Discourse Delivered after the Annual Commencement of Geneva College, August 7th, 1833* (New York: Henry Ludwig, 1833), 47.

¹⁰⁰. Verplanck, “Lecture before the MLA,” 237, 241.

¹⁰¹. *Ibid.*, 242, 250-51. Priestley was an English chemist who migrated to the United States after the Revolution.

¹⁰². *Ibid.*, 257; 246-47. On Roscoe, see *The Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Roscoe, William,” by Warwick William Wroth.

¹⁰³. Bender, *New York Intellect*, 121, 124-25. Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 350-51.

¹⁰⁴. Verplanck, “Lecture before the MLA,” 246. The following year Verplanck split with the Democrats over the chartering of the second Bank of the United States. Bender, *New York Intellect*, 136.

¹⁰⁵. Verplanck, “Lecture before the MLA,” 242-43.

¹⁰⁶. Both Keep and Bender argued that the primary reason the Athenaeum failed was its inconvenient location, that it was too far downtown and therefore too distant from the homes of its wealthy supporters. Keep, *Society Library*, 362. Bender, *New York*

Intellect, 74-75. Its complex organizational structure and expense were certainly equally important factors.

¹⁰⁷. Keep, *Society Library*, 334, 336.

¹⁰⁸. Morgan and Bancker, *Address*, 6. My argument here is not that the collection itself was mismanaged. The Society Library was the most extensive in the city at this time. But the Society was continually in debt, while the membership slowly declined.

¹⁰⁹. *Ibid.*, 3, 6-7. Although the pro-Athenaeum faction occasionally stooped to sarcasm, they never went so far as to suggest that their opponents were not gentlemen.

¹¹⁰John J. Morgan, *et al.*, *To the Members of the New-York Society Library* (n.p., [1838]), 2.

¹¹¹*To the Stock Holders of the New-York Society Library* (n.p., 1833), 5.

¹¹². *Ibid.*, 4, 14.

¹¹³. *Ibid.*, 5, 6.

¹¹⁴. *Ibid.*, 16. E[dward] W. Laight *et al.*, *Statement of the Trustees of the New-York Society Library* (n.p., [1838]), 14-15.

¹¹⁵*To the Stockholders of the NYSL* (1833), 6. Circulating libraries originated in Great Britain in the late eighteenth century and competed with other types of libraries in the United States through the first half of the nineteenth. For circulating libraries see David Kaser, *A Book for a Sixpence: The Circulating Library in America* (Pittsburgh: Phi Beta Mu, 1980). And Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, 127-55.

¹¹⁶. Laight, *Statement of the Trustees of the NYSL* (1838), 14. *To the Stockholders of the NYSL* (1833), 16.

¹¹⁷. Laight, *Statement of the Trustees of the NYSL* (1838), 13. *To the Stockholders of the NYSL* (1833), 16.

¹¹⁸. *Ibid.*, 14. Laight, *Statement of the Trustees* (1838), 13.

¹¹⁹. See for example, *New York American*, 18 April 1838. This newspaper and two other large-circulation dailies, the *New York Advertiser* and the *New York Post*, printed numerous letters from both sides, particularly in the two weeks leading up to the 1838 election on April 24.

¹²⁰. *To the Stockholders* (1833), 10. Besides the pamphlets quoted thus far, two others were circulated during this period. Edward W. Laight, et al., *To the Shareholders of the New-York Society Library* (n.p., 1835), a pro-Athenaeum pamphlet. It lists James Kent and Washington Irving as pro-Athenaeum candidates. And Plebeian, *Reply to the Manifesto of the Trustees of the City Library* (n.p., [1833]), a pro-Athenaeum pamphlet by an unknown author. This one is so riddled with sarcasm that it is often difficult to follow. All of the pamphlets are at the New York Public Library.

¹²¹. *New York Post*, 1 May 1833.

¹²². Laight, *Statement of the Trustees* (1838), 4.

¹²³. For a detailed history of the years of negotiations and the election of 1838 see Keep, *Society Library*, 339-58.

¹²⁴. *Ibid.*, 451. For an enumeration of the reforms advocated see *To the Stockholders* (1833), 14-15.

¹²⁵. In 1838, eight of twelve of the candidates on both the anti- and pro-Athenaeum ballots, or members of their families, appeared in [Moses Yale Beach], *Wealth and Biography of the Wealthy Citizens of New York City: Comprising an Alphabetical Arrangement of Persons Estimated to be Worth \$100,000 and Upwards*, 5th ed., (New York: The New York Sun, 1845; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1973). This volume in the Big Business: Economic Power in a Free Society series reprinted Beach's fifth (1845) and twelfth (1855) editions. See also Edward Pessen, *Riches and Class before the Civil War* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1973), 256-61 on New York and 310-19 on Moses Beach. And Edward Pessen, "Philip Hone's Set: The Social World of the New York City Elite in the 'Age of Egalitarianism,'" *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 56 (October 1972): 285-308. There were further "contested elections," to use Keep's term, in 1842 and 1857. Keep, *Society Library*, 428, 453-57.

¹²⁶. Laight *et al.*, *Statement of the Trustees* (1838), 15, and pages 46 and 47 above. Wosh makes a similar point regarding elites' philanthropic work. Wosh, *Spreading the Word*, 50-53.

¹²⁷. Keep, *Society Library*, 402. These statistics are complicated by the fact that individuals sometimes owned multiple shares. Before the election, for example, the 420 members held 480 shares. A member with more than one share had extended borrowing privileges, but still had only one vote at the annual elections.

¹²⁸. *Ibid.*, 307. Barbara Shupe, Janet Steins, and Jyoti Pandit, comps., *New York State Population, 1790-1980, A Compilation of Federal Census Data* (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 1987), 200-02.

¹²⁹. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Annual Report of the Finance Committee* (New York: The Society, 1843), 12. Mercantile Library Association, *Twenty-second Annual Report of the Board of Directors* (New York: The Association, 1843), 6.

¹³⁰. Keep, *Society Library*, 406-07. The increase in the annual subscription was certainly prompted by an increase in the debt. The Society sold the building on Nassau Street in 1836 and was out of debt for the first time since 1795. Then it promptly amassed an even greater debt as a result of its new building and a series of unwise investments. Keep, *Society Library*, 426-431. To put the price of a share in context, twenty-five dollars was perhaps a month's wages for a skilled laborer.

¹³¹. Minutes of the Board, 18 December 1839. The Public School Society was a private organization, partially funded by the City, out of which grew the present public school system.

¹³². New York Society Library, *Alphabetical and Analytical Catalogue of the New-York Society Library with the Charter, By-Laws, etc., of the Institution* (New York: James Van Norden, 1838). New York Society Library, *Alphabetical and Analytical Catalogue of the New-York Society Library with the Charter, By-Laws, etc., of the Institution* (New York: R. Craighead, 1850). The Society published a supplement to the 1813 catalog in 1825. New York Society Library, *Supplement to the Books Belonging to the New-York Society Library* (New York: C. S. Van Winkle, 1825). The collection had approximately 12,500 volumes in 1813 and approximately 17,000 in 1825. In 1838, before the new catalog was printed, the library received at least 1,600 volumes from the Athenaeum, in addition to its newspapers and periodicals. Keep, *Society Library*, 337.

¹³³. Charles C. Jewett, *Notices of Public Libraries in the United States* (Washington: Printed for the House of Representatives, 1851), 84-97. Jewett was the librarian of the Smithsonian Institution. His report was the first real attempt to survey libraries in the United States and was appended to the Smithsonian's annual report for 1850. For nineteenth-century library statistics generally, see Robert V. Williams, "The Making of Statistics of National Scope on American Libraries, 1836-1986: Purposes, Problems, and Issues," *Libraries & Culture* 26 (Spring 1991): 465-67. The Astor Library was founded by John Jacob Astor and later became the nucleus of the Research Division of the New York Public Library. See Lydenberg, *New York Public Library*, 1-95. And Dain, *New York Public Library*, 3-10 and passim.

¹³⁴. For 1838, I counted the titles under each subject and calculated the percentage of novels. For 1850, I relied upon, Ronald J. Zboray, "Appendix 2: Categories in the Analytical Catalogue (1850) of the New York Society Library," in *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 202-10. There were 8,690 total titles in 1838 and 11,737 in 1850. See also Ronald J. Zboray, "Gender and Boundlessness in Reading Patterns,"

chap. in *Fictive People*, 156-79, which analyzes the circulation records of the Society Library for two periods in the 1840's and 1850's.

¹³⁵. Glynn, "Apprentices' Library," 364-66. For fiction in public libraries later in the century see, see Esther Jane Carrier, *Fiction in Public Libraries, 1876-1900* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1965).

¹³⁶. A similar argument is developed in Bender, *New York Intellect*, 121-22; and Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 349-50. See also Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

Chapter Two: The New-York Historical Society

¹. New-York Historical Society, "Minutes of the New-York Historical Society," 20 November 1804; 10 December 1804; 14 January 1805; 9 April 1805. Microfilm copy of a manuscript in the New-York Historical Society Library. The hyphen is not a typographical error; it appears in the original constitution and has been retained ever since. On the Massachusetts Historical Society see, Louis Leonard Tucker, *Clio's Consort: Jeremy Belknap and the Founding of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (Boston: The Society: Distributed by Northeastern University Press, 1990).

². "Constitution, Adopted December 10, 1804," reprinted in R. W. G. Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday: A Sequi-Centennial History of the New-York Historical Society, 1804-1954* (New York: the Society, 1954), 451-52. "By-Laws, As adopted April 9, 1805," reprinted in *ibid.*, 465-67. In a new set of by-laws revised in 1846, the membership fee and the annual dues were changed to five dollars. A new class called "corresponding members" was created in 1843; presumably these were active members who live outside the city, whereas honorary members were elected merely to confer distinction (on both the member and the Society). New-York Historical Society, *The Charter and By-Laws of the New York Historical Society* (New York: The Society, 1846), 14.

³. New-York Historical Society, "To the Public, the Address of the New-York Historical Society," reprinted in Vail, 452-56.

⁴. New-York Historical Society, "Minutes," 22 January 1805; 15 September 1807.

⁵. Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday*, 65-68, 76.

⁶. Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday*, 70.

⁷. New-York Historical Society, *Proceedings of the New-York Historical Society for 1845* (New York: The Society, 1845), 27-28.

⁸. Pamela Spence Richards, *Scholars and Gentlemen: The Library of the New-York Historical Society, 1804-1982* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1984), 22-26. Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday*, 98-99.

⁹. Richards, *Scholars and Gentlemen*, 24-25.

¹⁰. Alexis de Toqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J. P. Mayer (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969), 513.

¹¹. Arthur M. Schlesinger, "Biography of a Nation of Joiners," *American Historical Review* 50 (October, 1944): 2.

¹². Anne Firor Scott, "A Case of Historical Invisibility," *Journal of American History* 71 (June 1984): 9.

¹³. *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴. Although there were certainly some female members after 1857, they were evidently the exception until relatively recently. In a photograph of the Society's sesquicentennial dinner in 1954 all of the diners are distinguished older gentleman. Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday*, 440.

¹⁵. *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁶. *Life Illustrated*, 4 September 1858, 147.

¹⁷. New-York Historical Society, *Proceedings of the New York Historical Society at the Dedication of the Library, Tuesday, November 3, 1857* (New York: The Society, 1857), 26.

¹⁸. Edward Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power before the Civil War* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company), 276.

¹⁹. New-York Historical Society, *Charter and By-Laws* (1846), 23-31. I derived this figure by comparing the membership list for 1846 with a list in *Riches, Class, and Power before the Civil War* that gives the names of New Yorkers in 1845 with wealth assessed at between \$100,000 and \$250,000; and over \$250,000 (Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power*, 323-326). The two lists total 395 persons, so that over ten percent of these very wealthy New Yorkers were Society members. Fourteen members were worth more than \$250,000, making them multi-millionaires in 2004 dollars. My figures, in a way, are underestimated, since they do not include Society members who were immediate family members of the persons on Pessen's list.

²⁰. It is interesting to note that the names of many prominent families continued to appear on the membership lists throughout the Society's history. For example, the

president in 1954, the year in which *Knickerbocker Birthday* was published, was Fenwick Beekman. James W. Beekman joined in 1838 and John H. Beekman joined in 1845. Both of these men appear on Pessen's list of the wealthiest New Yorkers in 1845. James served as a trustee from 1872 to 1877. Throughout its history, the Society has been a bastion of the city's elite.

²¹. New-York Historical Society, *Charter and By-Laws* (1846), 15. See also, Edward Pessen, "Philip Hone's Set: The Social World of the New York City Elite in the 'Age of Egalitarianism,'" *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 55 (October 1972): 285-308. This is an excellent overview of the city's elite society during the antebellum period.

²². John Pintard, *Letters from John Pintard to his Daughter, Eliza Noel Pintard Davidson, 1816-1833*, ed. Dorothy C. Barck (New York: The Society, 1940-1941), 2:107 (16 November 1821).

²³. The interesting exception is the third president, De Witt Clinton, Republican mayor of the city and governor of the state. Clinton appears to have gotten along well with his Federalist opponents in the Society and was a close friend of Pintard's. However, his plan to build the Erie Canal probably won him the admiration of the city's conservative mercantile elite.

²⁴. Quoted in Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday*, 384.

²⁵. New-York Historical Society, *Proceedings*, 19.

²⁶. Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday*, 89-90. Gallatin served as Secretary of the Treasury under Jefferson and Madison, and later held a number of important diplomatic posts. Vail called him "the most distinguished of our presidents and his name lent great prestige to our Society."

²⁷. John Pintard, *Diary Transcripts*, John Pintard Papers, Box 2A, New-York Historical Society Library. For more on Pintard, a central figure in the founding of New York's libraries during this period, see pp. 111-13 below.

²⁸. For a discussion of learned societies in the city during this period, see Brook Hindle, "The Underside of the Learned Society in New York, 1754-1854," in Alexandra Oleson and Sanborn C. Brown, eds., *The Pursuit of Knowledge in the Early Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 84-117. And Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect: A History of Intellectual Life in New York City from 1750 to the Beginnings of our own Time* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 7-116.

²⁹. Vail includes a brief biography of each of the presidents at the beginning of each chapter of *Knickerbocker Birthday*.

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- ³⁰. Pintard, *Letters from John Pintard to his Daughter*, 1:47.
- ³¹. Leslie W. Dunlap, *American Historical Societies, 1790-1860* (Madison, WI: Cantell, 1944), vii.
- ³². *Ibid.*, 22-24, 27-28, 41-42.
- ³³. George H. Callcott, *History in the United States, 1800-1860: Its Practice and Purpose* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1970), 35.
- ³⁴. Tucker, *Clio's Consort*, 64-65.
- ³⁵. New-York Historical Society, *Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1814*, series I, (New York: The Society, 1814), 2:vii. Hereafter, New-York Historical Society, *Collections* (1814).
- ³⁶. New-York Historical Society, *Collections*, 1:vi.
- ³⁷. The "Address to the Public" is reprinted in Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday*, 452-456.
- ³⁸. Callcott, *History in the United States*, 103.
- ³⁹. John W. Francis, "New York During the Last Half Century: A Discourse in Commemoration of the Fifty-third Anniversary of the New York Historical Society, and of the Dedication of their new Edifice," reprinted in New-York Historical Society, *Proceedings of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1857* (New York: The Society, 1857), 50.
- ⁴⁰. *Ibid.*, 20.
- ⁴¹. New-York Historical Society, *Collections* (1809 [1811]), iv. *Collections for 1809* were published in 1811.
- ⁴². Dunlap, *American Historical Societies*, 95.
- ⁴³. The major titles published by the society through 1954 are included in Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday*, 498-504.
- ⁴⁴. John Bromeyn Brodhead, *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York* (New York: Weed, Parsons, 1856). Seven volumes of documents were eventually printed. A detailed history of the project is found in Brodhead's introduction, 1:v-xlv.

⁴⁵. On the New York Institution, which the New York Society Library declined to join, see pp.37-38 above.

⁴⁶. A petition to the legislature and an excerpt from the bill appropriating the money in 1814 is reprinted in New-York Historical Society, *Collections* (1814), v-xii. As was typical in these early years, the Society spent the money before it actually received it, and eventually sold its interest in the lottery for \$8,000 to Union College to pay off debts. Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday*, 67-8.

⁴⁷. *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴⁸. New-York Historical Society, *Proceedings* (1857), 69.

⁴⁹. New-York Historical Society, *Collections* (1809 [1811]), 1:9.

⁵⁰. See “The Personal Uses of History,” chap. in Calcott, *History in the United States*, 193-204.

⁵¹. David D. Van Tassel, *Recording America's Past: An Interpretation of the Development of Historical Studies in America, 1607-1884* (University of Chicago Press, 1960), 54-59, 115.

⁵². New-York Historical Society, *Collections* (1814), x.

⁵³. *Ibid.*, 119, 141-147. New-York Historical Society, *Collections* (1841), 11-13, 17.

⁵⁴. *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵⁵. *Ibid.*, 283.

⁵⁶. New-York Historical Society, *Collections* (1814), 124-125.

⁵⁷. New-York Historical Society, *Proceedings* (1857), 17.

⁵⁸. New-York Historical Society, *Collections* (1814), 40.

⁵⁹. *Ibid.*, 84.

⁶⁰. *Ibid.*, 125, 134.

⁶¹. *Collections*, series 2, vol. I, 35.

⁶². Callcott, *History in the United States*, 172.

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- ⁶³. New-York Historical Society, *Collections* (1821), 35.
- ⁶⁴. *Ibid.*, 98-99.
- ⁶⁵. Callcott, *History in the United States*, 177-89.
- ⁶⁶. New-York Historical Society, *Proceedings* (1857), 19.
- ⁶⁷. New-York Historical Society, *Collections* (1821), 44.
- ⁶⁸. Callcott, *History in the United States*, 160-62, 177.
- ⁶⁹. New-York Historical Society, *Proceedings* (1857), 6 (“Dedication” is paginated separately).
- ⁷⁰. *Ibid.*, 19-20.

Chapter Three: The Apprentices’ Library

- ¹. Lawrence Martin, *The General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of the City of New York* (New York: The Society, 1960), 3. General Society of Mechanics’ and Tradesmen, *Charter and Bye-Laws of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen* (New York: The Society, 1798), 1.
- ². *Ibid.*, 10-11.
- ³. Thomas Earle and Charles T. Congdon, *Annals of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of the City of New York, from 1785 to 1880* (New York: The Society, 1882), 242. This is a history commissioned by the society that consists mostly of primary documents. Earle was the Society’s president in 1857.
- ⁴. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Charter and Bye-Laws* (1798), 12.
- ⁵. Earle and Congdon, *Annals of the General Society*, 243.
- ⁶. Sean Wilentz. “Artisan Republican Festivals and the Rise of Class Consciousness in New York City, 1788-1837,” in Michael H. Frisch and Daniel J. Walkowitz, eds., *Working-Class America: Essays on Labor, Community, and American Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 45.

⁷. The seminal works on republicanism in early American history are: Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969); and J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). For an excellent discussion of the historiographical debate surrounding their work see Daniel T. Rodgers. "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept," *Journal of American History* 79 (June 1992): 11-38.

⁸. Wilentz, "Artisan Republican Festivals," 50.

⁹. Earle and Congdon, *Annals of the General Society*, 326.

¹⁰. There is a substantial literature on various aspects of the industrial revolution. Some important works include: George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York: Rinehart, 1951); Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Bruce Laurie, *Artisans into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1989); Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); and Paul G. Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers in the Early Industrial Revolution: Lynn, Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981).

¹¹. The seminal study of liberal thought in the United States is Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1955). For a later work that responds, in part, to Bailyn, Wood, and Pocock, cited above, see Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

¹². Marchette Chute, *The First Liberty: A History of the Right to Vote in America* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1969), 298.

¹³. There is an extensive literature on various facets of the antebellum reform movement. Some important monographs are: Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History to 1860* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1944); Clifford S. Griffin, *The Ferment of Reform, 1830-1860* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1967); Thomas Bender, *Toward an Urban Vision: Ideas and Institutions in Nineteenth-Century America* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1975); Paul S. Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978); Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860*

(New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); and Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1991).

¹⁴. W. David Lewis, "The Reformer as Conservative: Protestant Counter-Subversion in the Early Republic," in Stanley Coben and Lorman Ratner, eds., *The Development of an American Culture* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 67.

¹⁵. *Ibid.*, 79-82.

¹⁶. Quoted in *ibid.*, 82-83.

¹⁷. The concept of social control has been a central theme in the scholarship on reform and charity in the nineteenth century. Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971) is a seminal work. For a well-rounded discussion of its strengths and weaknesses, see the essays in Walter I. Trattner, ed., *Social Welfare or Social Control?: Some Historical Reflections on Regulating the Poor* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1983).

¹⁸. Richard D. Brown, *The Strength of a People: The Idea of an Informed Citizenry in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 133-51.

¹⁹. *Ibid.*, 126-132.

²⁰. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Some Memorials of the Late William Wood, Esq., the Eminent Philanthropist, with Resolutions of Respect for his Memory* (New York: The Society, 1858), 16-19. This is a special report by the Apprentices' Library Committee investigating Wood's role in establishing the library. The society's school closed in 1858.

²¹. *Ibid.*, 19-20. Earle and Congdon, *Annals of the General Society*, 60-61.

²². Thomas Mercein, "An Address upon the Opening of the Apprentices' Library," reprinted in Paul A. Gilge and Howard B. Rock, eds., *Keepers of the Revolution: New Yorkers at Work in the Early Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 52-54.

²³. *Ibid.*, 52-53.

²⁴. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Catalogue of the Apprentices' Library* (New York: The Society, 1820), [following title page]. Hereafter cited as General Society, *Catalogue* (1820).

²⁵ *Catalogue* (1855), 168.

²⁶ General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Report of the Special Committee to Whom was Referred the Resolution for Extending the Usefulness of that Institution* (New York: The Society, 1830), 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4-7.

²⁸ Earle and Congdon, *Annals of the General Society*, 277.

²⁹ Martin, *General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen*, 7.

³⁰ General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, "Report of the Library Committee, 1830," reprinted in General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Report of the Special Committee* (1830), 21-22.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 16-18.

³² *Ibid.*, 9. The regulations published in 1855 stated that members could use the library for free. *Catalog* (1855), ix.

³³ General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen. *Report of the Finance Committee*, (New York: The Society, 1847), 4. Hereafter cited as General Society, *Annual Report*, (1847). General Society, *Annual Report*, (1854), 5. General Society, *Annual Report*, (1865), 7.

³⁴ Earle and Congdon, *Annals of the General Society*, 95, 105.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 272.

³⁶ General Society, *Catalog* (1855), ix. General Society, *Catalog* (1865), 9.

³⁷ General Society, *Annual Report* (1851), 12. General Society, *Annual Report* (1854), 8. General Society, *Annual Report* (1860), 12. General Society, *Annual Report* (1865), 13.

³⁸ Earle and Congdon, *Annals of the General Society*, 107.

³⁹ General Society, *Annual Report* (1854), 8.

⁴⁰ General Society, *Catalog* (1855), viii-ix.

⁴¹ Earle and Congdon, *Annals of the General Society*, 320.

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- ⁴². General Society, *Catalog* (1855).
- ⁴³. Earle and Congdon, *Annals of the General Society*, 320.
- ⁴⁴. General Society, *Annual Report* (1850), 7. In 1849, Elizabeth Demilt also donated three thousand dollars to the Mercantile Library Association and five thousand dollars to the New York Historical Society Library. Charles C. Jewett, *Notices of Public Libraries in the United States* (Washington: Printed for the House of Representatives, 1850), 86, 93. This was printed as an appendix to: Congress, *Fourth Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., 1850, S. Doc. 120, Serial Set 564. William Rhees drew upon Jewett's work extensively for his report ten years later. See note 56 below.
- ⁴⁵. Martin, *General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen*, 8.
- ⁴⁶. Earle and Congdon, *Annals of the General Society*, 278.
- ⁴⁷. *Ibid.*, 273-74.
- ⁴⁸. *Ibid.*, 278-79.
- ⁴⁹. *Ibid.*, 274-75.
- ⁵⁰. General Society, *Catalog* (1855), viii.
- ⁵¹. Earle and Congdon, *Annals of the General Society*, 319.
- ⁵². General Society, *Annual Report* (1862), 13.
- ⁵³. *Ibid.*, 12. General Society, *Annual Report* (1863), 11. General Society, *Annual Report* (1864), 11. General Society, *Annual Report* (1865), 13.
- ⁵⁴. Earle and Congdon, *Annals of the General Society*, 322.
- ⁵⁵. General Society, *Annual Report* (1860), 10-12. General Society, *Annual Report* (1865), 10-13.
- ⁵⁶. William J. Rhees, *Manual of Public Libraries, Institutions, and Societies in the United States and the British Provinces of North America*, University of Illinois Graduate School Monograph Series, no. 7 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967 [1859]), 255-97.
- ⁵⁷. Jewett, *Notices of Public Libraries*, 190-91, *passim*.

⁵⁸. Rhee, *Manual of Public Libraries*, xxvi-xxvii.

⁵⁹. Nicholas Truebner, *Bibliographical Guide to American Literature: A Classed List of Books Published in the United States During the Last Forty Years* (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1969 [1858]), cxix-cxxi. Elmer D. Johnson, *Communication: An Introduction to the History of Writing, Printing, Books, and Libraries* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1973), 157.

⁶⁰. Rhee, *Manual of Public Libraries*, xxi-xxii. Jewett reported that “in some states, almost every town has, under some name, a social library.” Jewett, *Notices of Public Libraries*, 39.

⁶¹. Michael H. Harris, *History of Libraries in the Western World*, compact textbook edition (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984), 174.

⁶². Sidney H. Ditzion, *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture: A Social History of the American Public Library Movement in New England and the Middle States from 1850 to 1900* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1947), 149. Phyllis Dain, *The New York Public Library: A History of Its Founding and Early Years* (New York: The Library, 1972), 201.

⁶³. Harris, *History of Libraries*, 172.

⁶⁴. D.W. Davies, *Public Libraries as Culture and Social Centers: The Origin of the Concept* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1974), 15. Rhee, *Manual of Public Libraries*, 93.

⁶⁵. Sidney Ditzion, “Mechanics’ and Mercantile Libraries,” *Library Quarterly* 10 (April 1940): 192-219.

⁶⁶. Rhee, *Manual of Public Libraries*, xxi, passim.

⁶⁷. *Ibid.*, 585-650, passim. These numbers are probably underestimated. Rhee included a list of libraries by state at the end of the *Manual*, not all of which are described in the text. I simply counted all the libraries with “mechanic” or “apprentice” in their names and others that Rhee described and that were clearly for workers. However, there are others, such as the ubiquitous “Franklin Libraries,” that are not described, but may well have served working class readers.

⁶⁸. Davies, *Public Libraries as Culture and Social Centers*, 18-19. Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 272-274. Rhee, *Manual of Public Libraries*, 35, 60, 277, 315, 409, 467, 489, passim.

⁶⁹. Ibid., 108-10.

⁷⁰. Harris, *History of Libraries*, 168. Johnson, *Communication*, 150.

⁷¹. Ibid., 157.

⁷². Mercantile Library Association, *Thirty-First Annual Report of the Board of Direction of the Mercantile Library Association of the City of New-York* (New York: The Association), 17.

⁷³. George Burwell Utley, ed., *The Librarians' Conference of 1853: A Chapter in American History* (Chicago, American Library Association, 1951) reprints of the proceedings from *Norton's Literary and Educational Register*.

⁷⁴. Quoted in full in Rhees, *Manual of Public Libraries*, xi-xvii.

⁷⁵. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Some Memorials of the Late William Wood*, 18.

⁷⁶. Earle and Congdon, *Annals of the General Society*, 257.

⁷⁷. General Society, *Catalog* (1855), vii-viii. It is interesting to note that the librarian was paid considerably less than his counterparts at other institutions. Rhees estimated in 1859 that the average annual salary of a library was \$450 and the General Society's librarian was paid \$350. Rhees, *Manual of Public Libraries*, xxiii, 259.

⁷⁸. James Ranz, *The Printed Book Catalog in American Libraries: 1723-1900*, Association of College and Research Libraries Monograph Series no. 26 (Chicago: The American Library Association, 1964), 3, 7.

⁷⁹. Ibid., 24, 26.

⁸⁰. Ibid., 29.

⁸¹. As early as 1850, Charles C. Jewett had started work on a union catalog of the largest libraries in the United States. A union catalog brings together all the holdings of several libraries. Jewett also proposed using stereotyped cards for producing catalogs, so that the preparation of a new catalog would require only inserting the cards for new acquisitions and rearranging the old ones. Both of these ideas were abandoned when Jewett left the Smithsonian, but were adopted later in the century.

⁸². General Society, *Catalog* (1855), v.

⁸³. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen. *Report of the Special Committee* (1830), 12.

⁸⁴. General Society, *Annual Report* (1855), 9. General Society, *Annual Report* (1865), 12.

⁸⁵. Political science comprehended several subclasses that would be classified elsewhere in modern catalogs, including bookkeeping, statistics, and various areas of the law.

⁸⁶. For a concise, practical discussion of sampling error, see Donald P. Warwick and Charles A. Lininger, *The Sample Survey: Theory and Practice* (New York: Mcraw-Hill, 1975), 92-94.

⁸⁷. Truebner, *Bibliographical Guide to American Literature*, 198-202, 261-98.

⁸⁸. Earle and Congdon, *Annals of the General Society*, 276.

⁸⁹. Lyle H. Wright, "A Statistical Survey of American Fiction, 1774-1850," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 2 (April 1939): 309.

⁹⁰. Earle and Congdon, *Annals of the General Society*, 74-75. The committee reported that it would be "inexpedient" to discontinue the circulation of fiction, but suggested that any member could instruct the librarian not to allow his employees to borrow it. See also, C. Seymour Thompson, *Evolution of the American Public Library*, 91.

⁹¹. Rhees, *Manual of Public Libraries*, 260.

⁹². Lyle H. Wright, "Propaganda in Early American Fiction," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 33 (1939): 104-5.

⁹³. Earle and Congdon, *Annals of the General Society*, 276.

⁹⁴. Earle and Congdon, *Annals of the General Society*, 276.

Chapter Four: The Biblical Library

¹. The most comprehensive critical history of the American Bible Society to date is Peter J. Wosh, *Spreading the Word: The Bible Business in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994). Other secondary works include Creighton Lacy, *The Word-Carrying Giant: The Growth of the American Bible Society (1816-1966)* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1977), and two official histories, William P. Strickland, *History of the American Bible Society from its Organization to the Present*

Time (New York: Harper Bros., 1856); and Henry Otis Dwight, *The Centennial History of the American Bible Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1916).

². American Bible Society, *Constitution of the American Bible Society . . . together with their Address to the People of the United States* (New York: G. F. Hopkins, 1816), 9, 16.

³. Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keeper: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1960), xx.

⁴. American Bible Society, *Constitution and Address* (1816), 13-14. "Stupendous political changes" is, at least in part, a reference to the moribund state of the Federalist Party. The year following the founding of the American Bible Society, the Federalists declined to run a gubernatorial candidate in New York State, overwhelmed by "the Irish and that class who were brought in by the Democrats to break down Federalism." John Pintard, *Letters From John Pintard to his Daughter Eliza Noel Pintard Davidson, 1816-1833*, ed. Dorothy C. Barck (New York: The New York Historical Society, 1940-41), 1:63.

⁵. American Bible Society, *Constitution and Address* (1816), 13-20.

⁶. American Bible Society, *First Annual Report* (New York: The Society, 1817), 30. Hereafter, American Bible Society, *Annual Report* (1817).

⁷. American Bible Society, Minutes of the Board of Managers, 15 January 1817 and 5 February 1817, American Bible Society Archives.

⁸. The Society did not employ a librarian until 1836. The office of recording secretary was its first paid position, although Pintard later claimed he donated the annual salary of four hundred dollars to charity. Pintard, *Letters to his Daughter*, 4:24. He served as recording secretary until 1836, when he was elected a vice-president. He held that office until his death in 1844.

⁹. John Pintard to Samuel Bayard, 22 March 1817, John Pintard Papers, New-York Historical Society. Quoted in Peter J. Wosh and Lorraine A. Coons, "A 'Special Collection' in Nineteenth-Century New York: The American Bible Society and its Library," *Libraries & Culture* 32 (Summer 1997): 326.

¹⁰. "Status of Bibles Donated to ABS 1817/1818," typewritten manuscript dated January 31, 1941, American Bible Society Archives. American Bible Society, Minutes of the Board of Managers, 15 January 1817 and 6 February 1823.

¹¹. Pintard, *Letters to his Daughter*, 1:89.

¹². For Pintard's reading habits, see Larry E. Sullivan, "Books, Power, and the Development of Libraries in the New Republic: The Prison and Other Journals of John Pintard of New York," *Journal of Library History* 21 (Spring 1986): 407-24. This is a useful article that, despite his rejection of the term, views voluntary organizations as instruments of social control.

¹³. John Pintard, "Reflections of John Pintard, L.L.D., Transcribed by his daughter, Louis Hall Pintard Servoss," John Pintard Papers, Box 16, New-York Historical Society. This autobiographical fragment is a fascinating, charming document. It describes Pintard as a youth of seventeen, "imbued with the principles of liberty," quitting college and rushing to the defense of New York City.

¹⁴. The most detailed biography of Pintard available is David L. Sterling, "New York Patriarch: A Life of John Pintard, 1759-1844," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1958). See also, James Grant Wilson, *John Pintard, Founder of the New-York Historical Society* (New York: The Society, 1902); and Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Scribner's, 1934), s.v. "John Pintard," by Robert Greenhalgh Albion.

¹⁵. Wosh makes a similar point in *Spreading the Word*, 13. He also stresses, as I do below, the importance of localism in elite civic involvement during this early period.

¹⁶. Pintard, *Letters to his Daughter*, 1:94. Pintard's wife teased him that he had "an insatiable itch to be always occupied with everyone's business but [his] own."

¹⁷. *Ibid.*, 1: 47-48, 197. See also, Sullivan, "Books, Power, and the Development of Libraries," 409.

¹⁸. Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect: A History of Intellectual Life in New York City, from 1750 to the Beginnings of Our Own Time* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 66.

¹⁹. A good recent biography of Clinton is Evan Cornog, *The Birth of Empire: De Witt Clinton and the American Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Clinton was a founder of the Society and served on the board of managers and as a vice-president.

²⁰. John Pintard to Elias Boudinot, 20 May 1817, American Bible Society Archives, Recording Secretary's Papers. The Grand Canal was, of course, the Erie Canal, the building of which was De Witt Clinton's most lasting achievement in public office.

²¹. American Bible Society, *Constitution and Address* (1816), 11-12. There were obviously practical reasons for these constitutional requirements as well. Requiring that a majority of the managers live in New York made it easier for the board to conduct its

business in a regular and timely fashion. But at the same time, New Yorkers took pride in the fact that the Society was headquartered in their city. In a speech at the constituting convention, manager George Griffin called New York “the London of America” that would “electrify the Western continent.” American Bible Society, *Proceedings of a Meeting . . . of the American Bible Society . . . with the Speeches . . .* (New York: J. Seymour, 1816), 8.

²². American Bible Society, *Proceedings of a Meeting* (1816), 10-11, 14-15.

²³. Thomas L. Haskell, “Capitalism and the Origins of Humanitarian Sensibility, Part I,” *American Historical Review* 90 (April 1985): 339-61 and “Capitalism and the Origins of Humanitarian Sensibility, Part II,” *American Historical Review* 90 (June 1985): 547-66. The quote is from page 342, and the emphasis is Haskell’s.

²⁴. American Bible Society, *Constitution . . . Address to the People* (1816), 20.

²⁵. Assuming that free Bibles would not be read, the local societies normally sold Bibles at cost. The Society produced Bibles very cheaply and sold them to its constituent societies at cost and to societies that were not affiliated at five percent above cost. American Bible Society, Minutes of the Board of Managers, 15 January 1817.

²⁶. See for example, American Bible Society, *Annual Report* (1841), 118.

²⁷. Between 1816 and 1863, the Society published four catalogs, in 1823, 1837, 1855, and 1863. There are no surviving copies of the catalog prepared by John Pintard in 1823. American Bible Society, Minutes of the Committee on Versions, 26 March 1896, American Bible Society Archives.

²⁸. American Bible Society, Minutes of the Board of Managers, 6 February 1823.

²⁹. American Bible Society, *Catalogue of the Editions of the Holy Scriptures in Various Languages, and Other Biblical Works, in the Library of the American Bible Society* (New York: Daniel Fanshaw, 1837), 26-27. These titles included reference works for modern European languages as well as Hindi, Persian, Burmese, Chinese, Arabic, and Ethiopic.

³⁰. American Bible Society, *Annual Report* (1817), 29; and *Annual Report* (1818), 53-54. The French Bibles were distributed in the newly acquired Louisiana Territory. John Pintard in particular was very interested in Louisiana. See Sterling, “John Pintard,” 216-41.

³¹. American Bible Society, *Annual Report* (1818), 53. The quote is part of an account of a joint lobbying effort undertaken by the American Bible Society and the

Philadelphia Bible Society. The societies petitioned Congress without success to lift the import duty on Bibles in foreign languages.

³². American Bible Society, *Catalog* (1837), 5-6.

³³. American Bible Society, *Annual Report* (1818), 48-51. The emphasis is in the report.

³⁴. American Bible Society, *Proceedings of a Meeting* (1816), 8.

³⁵. American Bible Society, *Annual Report* (1838), 980-81.

³⁶. ABS, *Catalogue of the Library* (1837), end leaf.

³⁷. Wosh, *Spreading the Word*, 152.

³⁸. American Bible Society, *Annual Report* (1833), 681.

³⁹. American Bible Society, *Annual Report* (1834), 708. The resolution as originally proposed aimed at supplying the entire world within the space of twenty years. The managers prevailed upon the members to be somewhat less ambitious. American Bible Society, *Annual Report* (1840), 54-55.

⁴⁰. *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴¹. American Bible Society, *Annual Report* (1856), 41.

⁴². American Bible Society, *Catalogue of Books Contained in the Library of the American Bible Society, Embracing Editions of the Holy Scriptures in Various Languages, and Other Biblical and Miscellaneous Works* (New York: The Society, 1863), 127-133. There were a total of 1339 editions of the Bible in the 1863 catalog.

⁴³. American Bible Society, *Annual Report* (1862), 26.

⁴⁴. American Bible Society, *Catalogue* (1863), 135-60.

⁴⁵. Gordon S. Wood, "Republicanism and the Political History of Colonial America: Afterword," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 102 (April 1992): 213. This is the concluding essay in a special issue entitled "The Republican Synthesis Revisited."

⁴⁶. David L. Sterling, "William Duer, John Pintard, and the Panic of 1792," in Joseph R. Frese and Jacob Judd, eds., *Business Enterprise in Early New York*, (Tarrytown, NY: Sleepy Hollow Press, 1979), 99-132. This article is based largely on his

dissertation, “John Pintard,” 134-70. Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press), 309-310. Burrows and Wallace contend that Duer’s plan was to hype the stock by circulating rumors of the merger and then sell at a handsome profit.

⁴⁷. John Pintard to Lewis Marsden Davidson, 6 May 1833, Pintard Papers, New-York Historical Society. Quoted in Sterling, “John Pintard,” 143.

⁴⁸. John Pintard to Jeremy Belknap, August 26, 1798 in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections Massachusetts Historical Society*, 6th series, (Boston: The Society, 1891), 4:446-48. Pintard would have been expected, of course, to close the letter with “Your humble servant, John Pintard.”

⁴⁹. “Biblical Library of the American Bible Society,” *Christian Herald*, 12 July 1817, 256.

⁵⁰. American Bible Society, *Constitution and Address* (1816), 17. American Bible Society, *Annual Report* (1817), 23.

⁵¹. Wosh, *Spreading the Word*, 18-24. David Paul Nord, “The Evangelical Origins of Mass Media in America,” *Journalism Monographs* 88 (May 1984): 7-11, 17.

⁵². Dwight, *Centennial History of the American Bible Society*, 577.

⁵³. American Society Library, *Annual Report* (1853), 774-776.

⁵⁴. Wosh, *Spreading the Word*, 17.

⁵⁵. American Bible Society, *Thirty-Eighth Annual Report* (1854), 34-35.

⁵⁶. American Bible Society, *Annual Report* (1855), 36.

⁵⁷. American Society Library, Minutes of the Committee on Versions, 26 March 1896, 258-59, American Bible Society. Gilman also noted a third purpose, “the opening for Bible students of a library for reference and consultation.”

⁵⁸. American Society Library, Minutes of the Board of Managers, 15 May 1818. Pintard wrote to his daughter that indexing the correspondence “made [my] head snap.” Pintard, *Letters to his Daughter*, 1:316.

⁵⁹. American Bible Society, By-Laws, 1845, Article XII, American Bible Society Archives.

⁶⁰. In 1853 the Society employed thirty-seven agents. For the development of the agency system, see Wosh, *Spreading the Word*, 175-199.

⁶¹. American Bible Society, Minutes of the Committee on Agencies, 2 February 1859, American Bible Society Archives.

⁶². Instructions for agents were set forth in: American Bible Society, *Bible Agents Guide* (New York: The Society, 1860). The form is reprinted in Peter J. Wosh, "Bibles, Benevolence, and Bureaucracy: The Changing Nature of Nineteenth Century Religious Records," *American Archivist* 52 (Spring 1989): 174. The change to the new format was not effected without opposition. William Forrest, the chairman of the Agency committee complained that it was "an attempt to bring within the computation of a business transaction the worth of truth or the gain of godliness." *Ibid.*, 175. This mania for tabulation apparently effected even the descriptions of the library in the annual reports. From 1858 to 1861 the library section simply lists the books added for that year with no accompanying text.

⁶³. American Bible Society, Minutes Board of Managers, 6 February 1823.

⁶⁴. Pintard, *Letters to his Daughter*, 1:44, 91. Pintard's relations with his bishop became increasingly strained over the years, especially after Hobart opposed the establishment of the General Theological Seminary. When he died in 1830, Pintard wrote to his daughter: "I hope he is better off than I trust our Diocese will be." *Ibid.*, 3:175.

⁶⁵. American Bible Society, Minutes of the Board of Managers, 19 November 1835.

⁶⁶. American Bible Society, Minutes of the Board of Managers, 7 April 1836.

⁶⁷. American Bible Society, *Annual Report* (1839), 39. *Idem*, *Annual Report* (1840), 53.

⁶⁸. Strickland, *History of the American Bible Society*, 75, 201.

⁶⁹. Pintard, *Letters to his Daughter*, 3: 52, 152.

⁷⁰. American Bible Society, *Annual Report* (1837), 888. American Bible Society, *Annual Report* (1836), 840.

Chapter Five: The Free Circulating Libraries

¹. On the re-opening of the Apprentices' Library, see chapter three, p. 91 above.

². "Shall we Have a Public Library?", *New York Times*, 26 February 1871, p. 4.

³. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Annual Reports of the Treasurer, Secretary, and Standing Committees of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen* (New York: The Society, 1879), 12. Title varies. Hereafter, General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Annual Report* (1879). In 1893, the name was changed to The Free Library of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen. *Library Journal* 18 (February 1893): 55.

⁴. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Annual Report* (1886), 41-57 lists the full membership by “trade” and date of induction. The list includes a dentist and a hairdresser along with the names of the city’s wealthiest manufacturers. On Hewitt and Carnegie, see Robert Rutter, “Mr. Carnegie and the Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen,” *New York Times*, 22 March 1902, p. BR10.

⁵. “Inaugural Address of President Wm. Otis Munroe, Delivered February 3d, 1875,” reprinted in Thomas Earle and Charles T. Congdon, *Annals of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of the City of New-York, From 1785 to 1880* (New York: The Society, 1882), 362.

⁶. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Annual Report* (1886), 24.

⁷. The law is reprinted in Harry Miller Lydenberg, *History of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations* (New York: The Library, 1923), 216-17. At a meeting of the New York Library Club the following year, Robert Rutter, a member of both the General Society and the club, claimed there was no connection between the change in policy and the new law, that he was surprised to learn the Apprentices’ Library fell under its provisions. Considering the timing of the change, this seems highly unlikely. “New York Library Club,” *Library Journal* 12 (April 1887): 165.

⁸. The seminal works on the development of public libraries in the United States are: Sidney Herbert Ditzion, *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture: A Social History of the American Public Library Movement in New England and the Middle States from 1850 to 1900* (Chicago: The American Library Association, 1947); Jesse H. Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England, 1629-1855* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949); and Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920* (New York: The Free Press, 1979; repr., Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003). For a succinct description of the public library idea, see The New York Free Circulating Library, *Twenty-First and Final Report of the New York Circulating Library, with a Sketch of Its History* (New York: The Society, 1900), 23-24. Hereafter, New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1901)]. This report is dated 1900, but was published in early 1901, immediately before the Free Circulating Library was absorbed by the New York Public Library.

⁹. Henry Leipziger one of the founders of the Aguilar Free Library, at a discussion of the New York Library Club, *Library Journal* 17 (April 1892): 132. In 1867 and 1868, the General Society discussed establishing reading rooms (as opposed to circulating collections) in lower Manhattan, but decided that sufficient funds were not available. Earle and Congdon, *Annals of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen*, 161-62.

¹⁰. See for example, East Side House [The Webster Free Circulating Library], *Eleventh Annual Report for the Year Ending January 31, 1902* (New York: East Side House, 1903), 12-13. Hereafter, East Side House, *Annual Report* (1903). New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1886), 11. Aguilar Free Library Society, *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Aguilar Free Library Society of the City of New York* (New York: The Society, 1903), 10. Hereafter, Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1903).

¹¹. Stanford University has a very interesting online collection of “Dime Novels and Penny Dreadfuls.” <http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/dp/pennies/collection.html>.

¹². New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1901), 20-21. “The Free Circulating Library,” *New York Evening Post*, 18 March 1889, reprinted in Lydenberg, *New York Public Library*, 203-5. The act of incorporation is reprinted in George Lockhart Rives and Charles Howland Russell, comps., *The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, Book of Charters, Wills, Deeds and Other Official Documents* (New York: The Library, 1905), 163-64. This includes all of the significant legal documents associated with the founding of the New York Public Library, including the acts of incorporation of each of its constituent parts.

¹³. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1901), 20-25, 29, 37, and passim. Lydenberg, *New York Public Library*, 199-240, is a concise history of the library.

¹⁴. New York Free Circulating Library, *Library Meeting at the Union League Club, Jan. 20, 1882*, 4, 6-7. This was appended to: New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1882).

¹⁵. *Library Journal*, 19 (Conference Proceedings 1894): 23. Coe was quoting the presidential address of that year by Josephus N. Larned of the Buffalo Public Library.

¹⁶. On this quote from the *Independent Reflector*, see the prologue, p. 33 above.

¹⁷. New York Free Circulating Library, *Library Meeting, 1882*, 3.

¹⁸. Arthur E. Bostwick, *A Life with Men and Books* (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1939), 169.

¹⁹. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1889), 10-11.

²⁰. New York Free Circulating Library, *Library Meeting, 1882*, 4. The president of the Free Circulating Library at this time, Henry Pellew, was also one of the founders of the COS. There were other important connections. Otto Ottendorfer, for example, was active in the COS and also donated money for the second branch of the Free Circulating Library, the Ottendorfer Branch. During the severe depression of the early 1890s, the Free Circulating Library employed assistants through the local COS Relief Committee. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1894), 14-15.

²¹. Historians of social control have been especially critical of the COS. For a discussion of social control historiography as it relates to the COS and for a more nuanced account of the history of the COS in New York, see Joan Waugh, "'Give this Man Work!': Josephine Shaw Lowell, the Charity Organization Society of New York, and the Depression of 1893," *Social Science History* 25 (Summer 2001): 219-21, and *passim*.

²². See for example, Michael H. Harris, "The Purpose of the American Public Library: A Revisionist Interpretation of History," *Library Journal* 98 (17 September 1973): 2509-2514.

²³. See for example, a discussion at the New York Library Club on "How far should reading be controlled in libraries?," *Library Journal* 14 (March 1889), 93-94.

²⁴. See Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Avon Books, 1977), 51-55 and *passim* on "the doctrine of feminine influence."

²⁵. Bostwick, *Life with Men and Books*, 2. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1894), 12. See also, for example, New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1900), 16; and Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1901), 18. The settlement libraries, discussed below, were literally in settlement houses.

²⁶. See for example, New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1885), 24; (1890), 27; (1900), 56. And Aguilar Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1895), 36; (1900), 58.

²⁷. New York Free Circulating Library, *Library Meeting, 1882*, 5.

²⁸. The historical sketch in the final report took special note of the role played by both the female trustees and librarians. Of the fifty-one trustees throughout the library's history, nineteen were women. Ellen Coe served as chief librarian from 1881 until her marriage in 1895. As will be seen below, she was active in professional circles both locally and nationally.

²⁹. In the libraries founded by non-Protestants women played a less prominent role. They were employed as librarians and even chief librarians, but generally did not

serve as trustees. Once the Free Circulating Library was consolidated with the New York Public Library, the new Circulation Department was managed exclusively by men.

³⁰. Lydenberg, *New York Public Library*, 263-68, 534. The East Side House, *The East Side House, New York City* (New York: East Side House, 1892), 7-8. Title varies; hereafter *Annual Report* (1892). *Annual Report of the East Side House* (1893), 5; (1894), 6. On the University Settlement Library, see Lydenberg, *New York Public Library*, 255-62, 534. On settlement libraries in New York City generally, see "New York Library Club," *Library Journal* 21 (January 1896): 24-25.

³¹. Phyllis Dain, *The New York Public Library: A History of its Founding and Early Years* (New York: The Library, 1972), 298-99.

³². East Side House, *Annual Report* (1891), 1.

³³. For an analysis of the neighborhood as a "workable unit for social reform," see Don S. Kirschner, "Ambiguous Legacy: Social Justice and Social Control in the Progressive Era," *Historical Reflections* 2 (Summer 1975): 81-86.

³⁴. East Side House, *Annual Report* (1896), title page. This is a quote from the English clergyman and writer Charles Kingsley.

³⁵. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1885), 11.

³⁶. East Side House, *Annual Report* (1897), 14; (1898), 16-17.

³⁷. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1886), 12. See also, Plummer Alston Jones, Jr., *Libraries, Immigrants, and the American Experience* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999).

³⁸. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 18, 264-66. Ada Sterling, "To Rescue and Old Library," *New York Times*, 19 February 1906, p. 8. Allegra Eggleston, "Plea for the Maimonides Library," *New York Times*, 19 February 1906, p. 8.

³⁹. Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1902), 30, 36. This is the last annual report and pp. 8-12 is a brief history of the library.

⁴⁰. Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1902), 8.

⁴¹. See Michael Galchinsky, *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer: Romance and Reform in Victorian England* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 135-190.

⁴². “Grace Aguilar,” *Voice of the Aguilar Free Library* 1 (November 1891), 2. For Victorian readers and library organizers, the fact that Aguilar died young and “was a delicate child from birth” no doubt enhanced her appeal. She was also English and therefore more “Americanized” than any American.

⁴³. Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1903), 9; (1890), 9.

⁴⁴. Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1895), 29; (1903), 36. I do not argue that the founders of the Free Circulating Library, for example, were anti-Semitic, but they certainly tended to conflate Protestantism and Americanism. On anti-Semitism in late nineteenth century New York, see Moses Rischin, *The Promised Land: New York’s Jews, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 265-67. On anti-Semitism among New York elites, see Sven Beckert, *Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 265-66. Henry Leipziger, one of the founders of the Aguilar, was instrumental in forcing Melvil Dewey from his position as New York State Librarian. Dewey, the creator of the Dewey Decimal System and a leader in New York City library circles for a time, was clearly anti-Semitic. Wayne A. Wiegand, “‘Jew Attack’: The Story behind Melvil Dewey’s Resignation as New York State Librarian in 1905,” *American Jewish History* 83 (September 1995): 359-79.

⁴⁵. “Judaism in New-York,” *New York Times*, 23 January 1887, p. 4. This is a quote from the president of the Young Men’s Hebrew Association, who referred to the Aguilar as one of the institutions promoting the Americanization of the immigrant.

⁴⁶. Joseph H. McMahon, *Final Report of the Director of the Cathedral Free Circulating Library* (New York: Cathedral Library Association, 1905), 5-19.

⁴⁷. *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁸. See for example, *ibid.*, 9. Cathedral Library Association, “Statement of the Position of the Cathedral Library with Reference to the Proposed Action of the City of New York in the Matter of the Carnegie Library Proposition,” [4], Record Group 4, Free Circulating Libraries, Cathedral Library Association, New York Public Library Archives and Manuscripts Division. This was a pamphlet published by the library in 1901, when it was fighting consolidation by the New York Public Library.

⁴⁹. *Ibid.*, [3-4]. As an example of “calumnies” against Catholicism, in 1904 the *New York Daily News* printed a petition to remove John Hay’s *Castilian Days* from the New York Public Library, and quoted passages that very clearly denigrated the Church. “Petition,” *New York Daily News*, 9 November 1904.

⁵⁰. McMahon, *Final Report of the Director*, 10.

⁵¹. *Library Journal* 14 (March 1889): 93. The quote is from William Eaton Foster of the Providence Public Library, who apparently participated as a visitor in a New York Library Club discussion of “How far reading should be controlled in libraries?”. Significantly, no one challenged this statement and the discussion thereafter focused on fiction. Arthur Bostwick, the librarian of the Free Circulating Library, held that “the exclusion of nonfiction is generally on the score of incorrect statement or bad treatment of the subject.” Arthur E. Bostwick, *The American Public Library* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1910), 131. However, Bostwick apparently did consider public opinion a factor in book selection. He advised that a book might be held “objectionable” to “a class of readers” because of “political or religious aspersions.” A. E. Bostwick, W. A. Bardwell, and Wilberforce Eames, “What Should Librarians Read?”, *Library Journal* 25 (February 1900): 58.

⁵². Cathedral Library Association, *Author and Title Catalog of the Cathedral Library Association of New York* (New York: The Association, 1899).

⁵³. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1895), 27. Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1896), 28. Since none of the “bulletins” have survived, it is impossible to judge how well the different sides of any given issue were represented, but all the available evidence indicates the libraries avoided taking sides. At the same time, however, many of the bulletins were clearly intended to promote patriotic reading. Both the Free Circulating Library and the Aguilar printed bulletins on Washington and Lincoln practically every year.

⁵⁴. On the reception of fiction in public libraries during this period, see Evelyn Geller, *Forbidden Books in Public Libraries, 1876-1939: A Study in Cultural Change* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984). Esther Jane Carrier, *Fiction in Public Libraries, 1876-1900* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1965). Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*, 67-104. Patrick Williams, *The American Public Library and the Problem of Purpose* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 9-24. This was also a period of great change in the novel itself, with the emergence of naturalism and what one New York librarian called “novels presenting studies of modern social conditions.” *Library Journal* 25 (March 1900): 128. See also, “Priest Denounces Realistic Novels,” *New York Times*, 27 January 1903, 5. The priest was Joseph McMahon, director of the Cathedral Library.

⁵⁵. New York Free Circulating Library, *Library Meeting, 1882*, 3-4. Another speaker explained that “the imagination is a fact of human nature; it has its cravings and has to be dealt with wisely.”

⁵⁶. *Voice of the Aguilar Free Library* 1 (November 1891): 4. The *Post* article, “A Study of the New York Circulating Library,” was reprinted in *Library Journal* 11 (May 1886): 142-43. It is a study of the library’s most popular titles by subject, including fiction.

⁵⁷. Ellen M. Coe, "Common Novels in Public Libraries," *Library Journal* 19 (Conference Proceedings 1894): 23-24.

⁵⁸. George Watson Cole, "Fiction in Libraries: A Plea for the Masses," *Library Journal* 19 (Conference Proceedings 1894): 20. "What is trash to some . . ." is a quote from Frederick Beecher Perkins, the former librarian of the Boston Public Library and the San Francisco Public Library. Cole was the director of the Jersey City Free Public Library, but lived in Manhattan and was an active member of the club. New York Library Club, *Libraries of Greater New York, Manual and Historical Sketch of the New York Library Club* (New York: The Club, 1902), 109, 173.

⁵⁹. Cole, "Fiction in Libraries," 18-19. "Masses who bear the burden of taxation" is a quote from former ALA president William Frederick Poole, the librarian of the Boston Public Library, the Boston Atheneum, and other institutions. It is significant that Cole quotes at great length from three older library leaders, all from New England, Poole, Frederick Beecher Perkins, and Samuel Swett Green, of the Worcester Free Public Library. This was an attempt, I think, to lend weight and respectability to what many considered a radical argument.

⁶⁰. "New York Library Club, Fifteenth Regular Meeting," *Library Journal* 14 (March 1889): 93.

⁶¹. Coe, "Common Novels," 23.

⁶². New York Free Circulating Library, *Library Meeting, 1882*, 4.

⁶³. "New York Library Club," *Library Journal* 26 (April 1901): 219.

⁶⁴. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1895), 25. Juvenile literature was reported as approximately fourteen percent. When the library was absorbed into the New York Public Library in 1901, juvenile literature was seventeen percent, fiction was twenty-nine percent, and literature was nine percent. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1901), 38.

⁶⁵. The Apprentices' Library reported approximately forty-six percent fiction and juvenile literature. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Annual Report* (1879), 11. The Aguilar reported forty-three percent, which probably includes juvenile fiction, but probably not, for example, history written for children. Aguilar Free Library Society, *Annual Report* (1895), 41. The Webster and the Cathedral never published collection statistics. A national survey conducted by Ellen Coe for *Library Journal* reported an average of twenty-four percent fiction, which apparently did not include juvenile works. Ellen Coe, "Fiction," *Library Journal* 18 (July 1893): 250-51.

⁶⁶. R. B. Poole, "Fiction in Libraries," *Library Journal* 16 (January 1891): 9. Poole, librarian of the YMCA Library, was one of the city's more conservative librarians, but even the most progressive librarians would never have considered purchasing works of the "blood and thunder" variety.

⁶⁷. *Library Journal* 6 (December 1881): 314. "The A.L.A. Co-operation Committee's Report on Exclusion," *Library Journal* 7 (February 1882): 28-29. Actually the list comprises twenty-eight authors, but I have excluded seven writers of juvenile fiction, since fiction for children and adults involved somewhat different issues. Interestingly, Horatio Alger was considered objectionable in 1881, probably on the grounds that he gave young boys unrealistic expectations of life. In all of the surviving catalogs, however, Alger is well represented, and in 1889 he was the most popular juvenile author in all of the branches of the New York Free Circulating Library. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1889), 20.

⁶⁸. In fact, even in 1881 Collins and Bulwer were probably not considered especially controversial and it interesting that their names appear on the list. All of the thirty libraries that responded to the survey collected them. In the catalog of the Aguilar Free Library both were starred as recommended authors.

⁶⁹. The catalogs are: Cathedral Library Association, *Author and Title Catalog* (1899); General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of the City of New York, *Finding List of the Apprentices' Library Established and Maintained by the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of the City of New York* (New York: J. J. Little & Co., 1888); New York Free Circulating Library, *Catalogue of the New York Free Circulating Library, Bond Street Branch, English Books* (New York: The Society, 1892); and Aguilar Free Library Society, *Fiction List of the Aguilar Free Library* (New York: The Society, 1895). There is also a surviving catalog of the Bruce branch of the Free Circulating Library, but I chose the Bond Street catalog, since was the first branch founded and therefore more likely to hold the authors in the 1881 survey. The Bruce branch held thirteen of the twenty-one. Comparing these catalogs from the 1890s with the survey in 1881 is somewhat problematic, since some of the authors had declined in popularity and a few were probably not in print when the free circulating libraries were founded. However, the most suspect authors tended also to be the most popular and were available in the 1890s and even later. E.D.E.N. Southworth, for example, who was considered rather trashy, was still in print in the 1940s. Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*, 81. Also, all of the libraries solicited donations and might have accepted older works that were out of print.

⁷⁰. The authors in the ALA survey are discussed in Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*, 75-87; and Williams, *The American Public Library*, 13-14.

⁷¹. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1895), 23-24. These numbers sometimes varied widely by branch. For example, in the Ottendorfer branch, fiction was only seventeen percent of the collection, but accounted for fifty-four percent

of the circulation. Due to the way the statistics were reported, here and elsewhere I calculated the percentage of fiction circulated as an average of the percentages for each individual branch. This is different from calculating the fiction circulation system-wide as a percentage of the total circulation system-wide.

⁷². Coe's national survey in 1893 reported an average annual circulation of fiction of fifty-six percent. Coe, "Fiction," 251. According to Arthur Bostwick, by 1910, "a library that circulates less than sixty percent considers that is doing fairly well." Bostwick, *American Public Library*, 126.

⁷³. Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1890), 13; (1900), 37-38. Literature was three percent in 1890 and six percent in 1900. In the Free Circulating Library, fiction was forty-two percent in 1890 and thirty-nine percent in 1900. Juvenile books were twenty-nine and twenty-eight respectively. Literature was approximately six percent both years. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1890), 18; (1901), 39. The Apprentices' Library reported seventy-nine percent fiction and juvenile books in 1890 and sixty-four percent fiction in 1900. I think this drop means that non-fiction juvenile books, history for example, were assigned to other classes. Literature was two percent in 1890 and six percent in 1900. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Annual Report* (1890), 22; (1900), 16. The Webster only reported circulation statistics in 1903, twenty-eight percent adult fiction and forty-six percent juvenile fiction. Poetry and literature was five percent. East Side House, *Annual Report* (1903), 21. The Cathedral never reported circulation statistics.

⁷⁴. Since detailed circulation records have not survived, it is difficult to assess these arguments. There is, however, limited evidence that at least some readers were reading the "standard" works. The Free Circulating Library reported occasionally on its most popular books and authors in fiction and other classes and Charles Dickens was consistently the most popular author and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was always the most popular title. However, that certain standard authors or titles circulated frequently does not mean that overall the "first-rate" circulated more frequently than the "second-rate." New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1886), 27-32; (1889): 19-26. "Study of the New York Free Circulating Library," 142-43 [reprinted from the *New York Post*]. *Library Journal* 17 (December 1892): 499-500. Jules Verne's *Mysterious Island*, and Alexandre Dumas' *Count of Monte Criscoe* were usually the second and third most popular titles in fiction. Both Wilkie Collins and Edward Bulwer Lytton were lower on the lists, but still very popular. The Aguilar also reported on "some of the titles most frequently circulated," with similar results. Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1895), 26-28.

⁷⁵. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Annual Report* (1879), 23. Variants on this argument appear with great frequency in the annual reports. See for example, Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1896), 8. "The novels circulated are of the kind which merit wide circulation and tend to instruct, and to improve the literary tastes

of the readers.” The term standard works, meaning not quite literature, but the very finest fiction, also appears quite often. In an interview with the *Harlem Reporter* in 1892, Ellen Coe stressed that “each year there is a greater demand for the standard works of fiction,” that authors like Mary J. Holmes, who was in the ALA survey in 1881, “are giving way to Dickens, Scott, and Dumas.” *Library Journal* 17 (December 1892): 500.

⁷⁶. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1895), 28-32. The “Experiment on a New Method of Stating Circulation” is also described in Arthur E. Bostwick, *Library Journal* 21 (March 1896): 96-98. And Bostwick, *American Public Library*, 127-28. Overall, works of fiction circulated 6.8 days, while titles classed as literature circulated 7.4 days. In another experiment (Progressive Era librarians, and Bostwick in particular, loved the word “experimentation”), however, he reached a different conclusion. In 1901, in a study of the circulation of large, multi-volume works, he found that readers would often borrow only the first or the second volume, but that “circulation decreases steadily from volume to volume.” From this he concluded that readers in his library did not actually read what they borrowed, since “what is true of books in more than one volume is presumably also true, although perhaps in a less degree, of one-volume works.” “Do Readers Read?”, *Library Journal* 26 (November 1901): 803-4. Significantly, Bostwick did not report on his study in *Library Journal*, but in a literary journal, *The Critic*. *Library Journal* reprinted excerpts from the article.

⁷⁷. Coe, “Fiction,” 230-31.

⁷⁸. “New York Library Club, Fifteenth Regular Meeting,” 93-94.

⁷⁹. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1893), 12-13; (1899), 27.

⁸⁰. The Free Circulating Library adopted the two-book system in 1895 and reported that it had “materially improved the character of reading.” New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1895), 15. *Library Journal* credited the policy with a fifty percent increase in the circulation of nonfiction. E.A. Birge, “The Effect of the ‘Two-Book System’ on Circulation,” *Library Journal* 23 (March 1898): 99. “When proper guidance is furnished” is from Birge’s report, page 100. The Aguilar also adopted the policy in 1895 and reported that “the result is gratifying.” Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1895), 11. The Webster waited until 1897 (East Side House, *Annual Report* (1898), 16), and the Cathedral Library and the Apprentices’ Library apparently never adopted it. Interestingly, Jacob Schwartz, librarian of the Apprentices’ Library, denounced it as “in a nature of a fraud and expressly devised to get a larger grip on the public pap.” Birge, “Effect of the Two-Book System,” 101. That is, Schwartz felt it was used to inflate circulation in order to get a larger appropriation from the City, which appropriated money based on volumes circulated. As will be seen the below, Schwartz was one of the most “liberal” of the free circulating librarians in terms of the circulation of fiction.

⁸¹. Bostwick, *American Public Library*, 292, has a great photograph of the “old closed shelf system” in which the librarians are actually behind a cage.

⁸². New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1899), 31.

⁸³. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1898), 25; (1899), 31. See also, Arthur E. Bostwick, “The Duties and Qualifications of Assistants in Open-Shelf Libraries,” *Library Journal* 25 (Conference Proceedings 1900): 40-41. Since open shelves supposedly encouraged book theft, he argued that assistants had to have “first, greater readiness and ability to aid the public in selection, and, second, greater watchfulness in guarding against abuse.” The Webster adopted open shelves in 1897, the Free Circulating Library in 1898, and the Aguilar in 1899. Initially this was considered a truly radical innovation. In 1894, Henry Leipziger said it would be impossible in the Aguilar. “New York Library Club,” *Library Journal* 19 (April 1894), 133. The Cathedral Library never had open shelves.

⁸⁴. “New York [State] Library Association and New York [City] Library Club,” *Library Journal* 20 (January 1895): 23. Coe used the same quote in Ellen M. Coe, “What Can be Done to Help a Boy to Like Good Books after He has Fallen into the ‘Dime Novel Habit’,” *Library Journal* 20 (April 1895): 119.

⁸⁵. Jacob Schwartz, “Business Methods in Libraries,” *Library Journal* 13 (November 1888): 334.

⁸⁶Max Cohen, “The Librarian an Educator, and not a Cheap-John,” *Library Journal* 13 (December 1888): 366-67.

⁸⁷New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1901), 23-24.

⁸⁸. Bostwick, *The American Library*, 1-4. Quote is on page 3. Bostwick also called the modern library idea the “American library idea” because British librarians were apt to dismiss it as “American tomfoolery” (page 3).

⁸⁹. Bostwick, for example, stressed that “the comparison of library work with trade holds, of course, only in so far that both are systems of distribution,” and that libraries should distribute only wholesome literature. *Ibid.*, 4. Schwartz responded to Cohen in a later issue of *Library Journal*, arguing that libraries could not properly serve an educational purpose unless they were properly managed. John [*sic*] Schwartz, “The Librarian as Educator, Mr. John Schwartz Replies to Mr. Cohen,” *Library Journal* 15 (January-February 1889): 5-6.

⁹⁰. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1885), 11. Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1903), 10. The second quote is from the historical sketch in the Aguilar’s final report. See also, New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report*

(1880), 19; and Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1889), 6. This was the first report issued by the Aguilar.

⁹¹. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1898), 18-19. In *The American Public Library*, Bostwick frequently described the opponents of the modern library idea as “the old-fashioned librarians.” He referred to “library advertising” as one of the “distinctively ‘modern’ features of American public libraries.” Bostwick, *American Public Library*, 9.

⁹². East Side House, *Annual Report* (1903), 18.

⁹³. Most of the free libraries required borrowers to be at least twelve years of age, although in 1895 the Free Circulating Library lowered the limit to ten. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1895), 13. The New York Public Library did not remove the age limit until 1906, and even then it was considered a fairly radical change in policy. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 301. As late as 1927, approximately half of the large public library systems in the United States had an age restriction. American Library Association, *A Survey of Libraries in the United States* (Chicago, The Association, 1927), 3:5. Typically, the Webster was ahead of its time in having no restriction except for basic literacy. East Side House, *Bulletin of the New Books of the Webster Free Library* 1 (December 1899). Surprisingly, there is no evidence that the Cathedral Library had an age limit. All of the libraries, including the Webster, required borrowers of any age to have a “responsible person” sign the reader’s application as a guarantor.

⁹⁴. For a good discussion of the issues involved in service to children in free libraries, see a paper read before the New York Library Club: Mary Wright Plummer, “The Work for Children in Free Libraries,” *Library Journal* 22 (November 1897): 679-86. See also, Bostwick, *American Public Library*, 11-13; 76-94. Bostwick held that by the late 1890s “a separate children’s room became a component part of every properly constructed and operated public library” (page 13). From the beginning, the Circulation Department of the New York Public Library had a “Supervisor of Children’s Rooms” and the library was nationally renowned for its services to children. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 299-306.

⁹⁵. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1901), 15-17, 40. In two of the branches, Bond Street and Jackson Square, the library could only afford or make room for a “children’s table.” My rough estimate of the total number of children is based upon the number of new readers who were children, since the total number of readers is not broken down by age. What is perhaps more revealing is the trend in new readers who were children: in 1890 it was thirty-nine percent (*Annual Report*, 20); in 1895 it was fifty percent (*Annual Report*, 26); and in 1900 it was fifty-eight percent (*Annual Report*, 40).

⁹⁶. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1899), 28. Plummer, “Work for Children in Free Libraries,” 681.

⁹⁷. Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1898), 16; (1901), 14. Librarians often very used the metaphor of cultivation when referring to young readers. In 1884, the chairman of the library committee of the General Society wrote: “The husbandman must patiently await the operation of those silent forces in nature which first cause growth, then fruitage; so with those who seek the best interest of the young in endeavoring to train their thoughts to higher and nobler aims and objects in life.” General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Annual Report* (1884), 14. The metaphor was a staple among educators throughout the century. See Robert Wiebe, “The Social Functions of Public Education,” *American Quarterly* 21 (Summer 1969): 149-50.

⁹⁸. Plummer, “Work with Children in Free Libraries,” 681.

⁹⁹. There is a significant parallel between the development of public libraries and public schools in the United States. The public library was preceded by the free library society and the public school was preceded by the free school society. Both the free library societies and the free school societies were privately managed, eventually received public funds, and were then taken over by local governments. Moreover, the General Society also ran a free school before the establishment of the public school system in New York, and the Aguilar Library was for several years connected with the Hebrew Free School Association. Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1903), 20-21. It is interesting that the New York Public Library has resurrected the evocative phrase “The People’s University” for use in the electronic age: “The New York Public Library offers a continuing education, to each of us, at every level of learning.” See www.nypl.org [6 August 2004].

¹⁰⁰. Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1892), 14.

¹⁰¹. New York Free Circulating Library, *Library Meeting, 1882*, 8. This was one of three resolutions passed by the meeting. For background on the new approach to working with schools, see Josephine A. Rathbone, “Cooperation Between Libraries and Schools: An Historical Sketch,” *Library Journal* 26 (April 1901): 187-91.

¹⁰². Ellen M. Coe, “The Relation of Libraries to Public Schools,” *Library Journal* 17 (June 1892): 193. Although Bostwick would probably have described Coe as an “old-fashioned librarian,” the “missionaries of literature” and the “modern librarians” agreed on many points, especially work with schools and the traveling libraries discussed below.

¹⁰³. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 298. The Webster went even further than the other circulating libraries to accommodate public school teachers. See, for example, a circular the Webster sent to teachers, explaining special privileges available to them. Edwin White Gaillard, “To the Teachers, From The Library,” Record Group 4, Free Circulating Libraries, Webster Library, New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Division. School work was always highlighted in all of the libraries’ annual

reports and a frequent topic of discussion and papers presented at the New York Library Club. See, for example, Henry L. Elmendorf, "Public Library Books in Public Schools," *Library Journal* 25 (April 1900): 163-65. And New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1895), 19-20. This was Bostwick's first year as chief librarian, and his report includes a good description of the kinds of activities undertaken in the schools.

¹⁰⁴. Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1895), 10; and, for example, (1900), 43-46, during which year alone well over one hundred reference titles were added to the reference collections.

¹⁰⁵. John S. Billings, "Some Library Problems of To-Morrow: Address of the President," *Library Journal* 27 (Conference Proceedings 1902): 3. Billings was quoting from James Bryce, *Studies in History and Jurisprudence* (1901).

¹⁰⁶. This is a rather overly simplified description of the changes in education during the progressive era. See, for example, Wiebe, "Social Functions of Public Education," 154-56 and passim. And Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988): 153-322.

¹⁰⁷. Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1903), 14.

¹⁰⁸. Rathbone, "Cooperation between Libraries and Schools," 187. Plummer, "Work with Children in Free Libraries," 685. Rathbone was actually quoting Charles Francis Adams, one of the earliest proponents of cooperation between public schools and public libraries." See Charles F. Adams, Jr., *The Public Library and the Common Schools: Three Papers on Educational Topics* (Boston: Estes & Lauriet, 1879).

¹⁰⁹. Many states also ran traveling library systems to serve rural areas where it was not economically feasible to establish permanent collections. Bostwick, *American Public Library*, 108-16. See also, "Traveling Libraries, a Symposium," *Public Libraries* 2 (February 1897): 47-51; 54-55.

¹¹⁰. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1901), 38, 43-46. The librarians report for the department is quoted in full, including many interesting examples in, New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1899), 34-340. My favorite example is the libraries on the St. John's Guild "Floating Hospitals." These were charity hospitals that plied New York's rivers and harbor, offering medical care and fresh air to the city's poor. Bostwick expanded the program in the New York Public Library, and by 1908 it had 717 traveling collections and circulated nearly a million volumes. Bostwick, *American Public Library*, 109.

¹¹¹. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1898), 27-28. By 1900, there were eighteen home libraries in the Free Circulating Library alone. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1901), 45. "N.Y.L.A. and N.Y.L.C.," *Library*

Journal 21 (January 1896): 24-25. This is a report of a paper read at the New York Library Club on home libraries. Its interesting that they used the same term as the Charity Organization Society, “visitor.” The author of the paper called the home libraries part of “the movement known as the new philanthropy,” which combined “scientific study” and “a spirit of friendliness.” See also, “N.Y.F.C.L.,” *Library Journal* 24 (January 1899): 34. Bostwick, *American Public Library*, 112-14.

¹¹². Bostwick, *American Public Library*, 3.

¹¹³. East Side House, *Annual Report* (1900), 12.

¹¹⁴. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1898), 19; (1899), 32. In this “experiment,” the reproductions were circulated with brief bibliographies on the artist and his or her work.

¹¹⁵. New York Free Circulating Library, *Annual Report* (1889), 13. See also, for example, Pauline Leipziger, “Picture Bulletins and their Use in the Aguilar Free Library,” *Library Journal* 24 (June 1899), 257-58.

¹¹⁶. Edwin White Gaillard, “An Extension of the Picture Bulletin,” *Library Journal* 26 (December 1901): 874-75. See also, Edwin White Gaillard, “The Outcome of the Picture Bulletin,” *Library Journal* 26 (April 1901): 192-93. Gaillard described the displays as “a greater development in what we call the ‘modern library movement.’”

¹¹⁷. East Side House, *Annual Report* (1900), 12. From its Department of Practical Illustration the Webster loaned to public schools, among other things, bark, birds’ eggs, coral, and anatomical models. East Side House, *Annual Report* (1903), 19. On the relationship between public libraries and museums generally, see Bostwick, *American Public Library*, 303-15.

¹¹⁸. East Side House, *Annual Report* (1902), 11.

Chapter Six: The New York Public Library

¹. Andrew Carnegie, *Triumphant Democracy or Fifty Years’ March of the Republic* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1886), 92.

². Quoted in Austin Baxter Keep, *History of the New York Society Library* (New York: The De Vinne Press, 1908), 422-23.

³. Sidney Ditzion, *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture: A Social History of the Public Library Movement in New England and the Middle States from 1850 to 1900* (Chicago: The American Library Association, 1947), 30. The New Hampshire law is quoted in full in Jesse H. Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the*

Public Library Movement in New England, 1629-1855 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949; repr., New York: Shoe String Press, 1965), opposite 192.

⁴. Barbara Shupe, comp., *New York State Population, 1790-1980* (New York: Neal-Shuman, 1987), 200.

⁵. Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of the City of New York to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1008-11. On the rise and fall of Boss Tweed, see Seymour J. Mandelbaum, *Boss Tweed's New York* (San Diego: Blackbirch Press, 2002).

⁶. Harry Miller Lydenberg, *History of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations* (New York: The Library, 1923), 129-33. This is the official history of the founding and is comprised of chapters that originally appeared in the *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*. It includes the full text of many of the key documents and an extensive appendix of statistics. Lydenberg was the first head of the Reference Department. Phyllis Dain, *The New York Public Library: A History of its Founding and Early Years* (New York: The Library, 1972), 36-39. Dain's is a more scholarly, critical work, although she relies heavily on Lydenberg on certain key points, including her assessment of John Shaw Billings, the first director, and of various elected officials involved in the founding. George Lockhart Rives and Charles Howland Russell, comps., *The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, Book of Charters, Wills, Deeds and Other Official Documents* (New York: The Library, 1905), 71-73. This is an excerpt of the clauses in Tilden's will relating to the library. *Book of Charters* is a compilation of all the legal documents pertaining to the founding, including those relating to the various free circulation libraries that were absorbed after 1900. For biographies of Tilden, see John Bigelow, *The Life of Samuel J. Tilden* (New York: Harper & Bros. Co., 1895) and Alexander Clarence Flick, *Samuel Jones Tilden: A Study in Political Sagacity* (Dodd, Mead & Co., 1939; repr., Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973). Green was one of the founders of Central Park and one of the architects of the plan to consolidate the boroughs into Greater New York in 1898. See John Foord, *The Life and Public Services of Andrew Haskell Green* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1913).

⁷. Lydenberg, *New York Public Library*, 132-40. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 38-42. The text of the final ruling is in *Book of Charters*, 86-88. Bigelow, *Tilden*, 2: 359-66. Flick, *Tilden*, 508-19. Flick provides a good summary of the provisions of the will in plain English, pages 511-13. He claims Governor D.B. Hill, who was seeking an appointment as U.S. senator, assigned judges to hear the case on appeal who were likely to decide in favor of the heirs, page 515.

⁸. *Book of Charters*, 89-94. For contemporary summaries of the Tilden case, see for example, "Tilden Heirs to Get Fund Left to Charity," *New York Herald*, 28 October 1891, p. 7; "The Tilden Will Contest," *New York Times*, 28 October 1891, p. 9; and

“Tilden’s Will Broken,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 28 October 1891, pp. 1-2. The trust also received Tilden’s personal library of approximately 20,000 volumes. For a description see, *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 3 (December 1898): 4-8.

⁹. *New York Commercial Advertiser* quoted in Charles Amni Cutter, *Library Journal* 13 (December 1888): 378. “Tilden Will Decision,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 28 October 1891, p. 6. “Trying to Thwart a Beneficent Purpose,” *New York Times*, 16 March 1887, p. 4.

¹⁰. *New York Times*, 24 October 1886, p. 8; 16 January 1887, p. 6; 16 March 1887, p. 4; 29 March 1887, p. 4; 6 March 1888, p. 4; 29 October 1891, p. 4.

¹¹. Historians of progressivism disagree over what these “languages” were and how to define them, but this is still a fruitful means of exploring the complexities of the progressive era. See Daniel T. Rodgers, “In Search of Progressivism,” *Reviews in American History* 10 (December 1982): 121-27. For a different formulation and one that is particularly relevant to the founding of the New York Public Library, see Susan Tenenbaum, “The Progressive Legacy and the Public Corporation: Entrepreneurship and Public Virtue,” *Journal of Policy History* 3 (November 1991): 309-30. John Patrick Diggins argues that republicanism was peripheral in the discourse of public intellectuals during the progressive era. John Patrick Diggins, “Republicanism and Progressivism,” *American Quarterly* 37 (Autumn 1985): 572-98. I would respond this that does not mean it was irrelevant in the broader universe of public discourse.

¹². A similar point is made in Daniel T. Rodgers, *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics since Independence* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 8-11.

¹³. *New York Daily Tribune*, 28 April 1889, p. 6. *New York Sun*, 28 April 1889, p. 18. *New York World*, 1 May 1889, p. 8. *New York Herald*, 30 April 1889, p. 8. The *Herald*, with characteristic modesty, claimed that “the future historian of this great event will not be equipped for his task until he consults our files.”

¹⁴. *New York Daily Tribune*, 30 April 1889, p. 7. *New York Sun*, 30 April 1889, p. 7. *New York World*, 30 April 1889, p. 3. The prose used by the society reporters was often a curious mix of staunchly republican and rather unrepublican language. The *World* wrote that Mrs. Edward Cooper “looks like a Roman matron,” but added that “an Englishmen would say she looked like a duchess.” For an excellent exploration of New York’s elite during this period see, Sven Beckert, *Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896*.

¹⁵. *The Social Register* began publication in 1887, the same year the Tilden Trust was incorporated. Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 1072-73.

¹⁶. Bigelow, *Tilden*, 2: 367.

¹⁷. Lydenberg, *New York Public Library*, 143-50, 301-04. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 42-58. Andrew Green outlined the trust's options in a letter he read to the board at the May 1892 meeting. Lydenberg quotes the relevant passages on pages 141-43. See also John Bigelow, "The Tilden Trust Library: What Shall it Be?," *Scribner's Magazine* 12 (September 1892): 287-300. It outlines options similar to those in Green's letter.

¹⁸. The act passed May 13, 1892. Reprinted in *Book of Charters*, 113-17.

¹⁹. Lydenberg, *New York Public Library*, 305-06. Lydenberg based his account of the genesis of the negotiations "largely on talks with the men who effected the consolidation."

²⁰. The reports of the Tilden, Astor, and Lenox consolidation committees are reprinted in Lydenberg, *New York Public Library*, pages 313-16, 316-28, and 331-35, respectively. A brief discussion of the issues involved in the merger is included in the "Introductory Statement" of the trustees in the first issue of the *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 1 (January 1897): 10-11.

²¹. The endowments of the Astor and the Lenox in 1895 stood at \$941,000 and \$500,000 respectively. By this time the Tilden endowment had grown to between \$2,225,000 and \$2,500,000. Lydenberg, *New York Public Library*, 313, 317, and 322. These figures come from the reports of the Tilden Trust and Astor Library committees on consolidation. Negotiating with two libraries also probably placed the Tilden trustees in a rather more favorable bargaining position. Confident that they would consolidate with the Astor, they were in a position to moderate certain demands of the Lenox trustees, especially in regards to the future location of the library.

²². The text of the agreement is in *Book of Charters*, 118-22.

²³. Apparently there was no wrangling over the order of the names. It was convenient that the alphabetic order of Astor, Lenox, and Tilden was also the chronological order of the incorporation of the two libraries and the Tilden Trust.

²⁴. The original board comprised eight trustees from the Astor Library, eight from the Lenox, and all five trustees of the Tilden foundation. The Astor and Lenox boards each elected seven of their members. The Tilden trustees then elected an additional NYPL trustee from among the remaining Astor trustees and the remaining Lenox trustees. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 67.

²⁵. Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the New York Public Library, 27 May 1895, vol. 1, 32-40, Record Group 5, New York Public Library Board of Trustees, New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Division. Hereafter, Minutes of the NYPL

Board. The negotiations over these resolutions are detailed in the reports of the consolidation committees. See note 20 above.

²⁶. *Library Journal* 20 (March 1895): 84. S. Turner Willis, "The Proposed Public Library of New York," *Peterson's Magazine* 5 (June 1895): 638. Laurence Hutton, "The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations," *Harper's Weekly* 34 (23 March 1895): 274.

²⁷. *New York Times*, 3 March 1895, p. 4. *New York World*, 14 March 1895, p. 9.
²⁸. *Harper's Weekly* 34 (16 March 1895): 259. News of the impending consolidation leaked out a few weeks before the formal agreement was signed.

²⁹. For an example in the contemporary literature, see R. R. Bowker, "Libraries and the Library Problem in 'Greater New York'," *Library Journal* 21 (March 1886): 99. Bowker was the publisher of *Library Journal*. Reprinted from a talk he gave to the New York Library Club, his article argues that a "free public library in a great city" must have both scholarly, reference collections and popular, circulating collections. See also, George Putnam, "The Great Libraries of the United States," *Forum* 19 (June 1895): 485. Putnam was at this time Director of the Boston Public Library and later Librarian of Congress. Putnam adds that a public library, as well as being popular and circulating, should also be publicly funded and publicly governed.

³⁰. "Many suggestions as to Carrying out the Consolidation Scheme," *New York Daily Tribune*, 8 March 1895, p. 9. *The World*, 21 March 1895, p. 4, offered similar advice: "Now give us more libraries for the plain people where the plain people can easily get at them." Of the local newspapers that specifically addressed the issue, only the *Times* seems to have been noncommittal. Regarding circulating collections like those of the New York Free Circulating Library and libraries of reference like the Astor, it simply wrote that "there is much to be said on each side of the question." *New York Times*, 3 March 1895, p. 4.

³¹. *Book of Charters*, 120. Similarly, the state law authorizing the consolidation stated that "the new Corporation . . . shall be permitted to . . . carry on any form of library." *Ibid.*, 117.

³². For example, John Cadwalader, one of the prime movers behind the consolidation, and the second president of the library, spoke favorably of absorbing the free circulating libraries and other organizations at some time in the future. *New York Daily Tribune*, 14 March 1895, p. 1. *New York World*, 14 March 1895, p. 9. One member of the consolidation committee claimed the library definitely planned on branch libraries. This was probably Andrew Haskell Green. *New York Daily Tribune*, 4 March 1895, p. 8.

³³. Minutes of the NYPL Board, 1:98, 119-120. Green's support of popular lending libraries was rather oddly coupled with his plan to have the library set up

laboratories for the city's scientific societies. See, for example, *New York Daily Tribune*, 4 March 1895, p. 8. In his comments to the press, he claimed that the consolidation committees had agreed that this was "one of the most important features" of the consolidation. This had no basis in fact. Public statements such as this and his aggressive advocacy of branch libraries alienated him from his colleagues on the board. Library President John Bigelow, for example, derided his support of circulating libraries as his "lending library fad." John Bigelow Diary, 27 January 1896, John Bigelow Papers, New York Public Library Archives and Manuscripts Division.

³⁴. Fielding H. Garrison, *John Shaw Billings: A Memoir* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915). Harry Miller Lydenberg, *John Shaw Billings, Creator of the National Medical Library and Its Catalogue, First Director of the New York Public Library* (Chicago: The American Library Association, 1924). Carleton B. Chapman, *Order out of Chaos: John Shaw Billings and America's Coming of Age* (Boston: Boston Medical Library, 1994). The National Library of Medicine is still the nation's leading medical library and *Index Medicus*, now online as Medline, is still the standard bibliography of medical literature. On the founding of the National Library of Medicine, see "Who Founded the National Medical Library?", in *Selected Papers of John Shaw Billings*, Frank Bradway Rogers, comp. (n.p.: Medical Library Association, 1965), 115.

³⁵. Arthur E. Bostwick, *A Life with Men and Books* (New York: H.W. Wilson Co.), 182.

³⁶. See for example, John Shaw Billings, "Some Library Problems of To-Morrow," *Library Journal* 27 (Conference Proceedings 1902): 1-7. And John Shaw Billings, "The Public Library: Its Uses to the Municipality," *Library Journal* 28 (June 1903): 203-4.

³⁷. "Memorandum" 28 December 1911, presumably by Cadwalader. Quoted in Dain, *New York Public Library*, 360.

³⁸. "Introductory Statement," 16-18. Report of the Site Committee, 5 February 1896, 3-4, Record Group 3, Tilden Trust, box 2, New York Public Library Archives and Manuscripts Division.

³⁹. The relevant clause from Henrietta Lenox's will is reprinted in *Book of Charters*, 58-59. The provisional acceptance of the Lenox site was worked out by the respective committees of consolidation before the merger. See note 20 above and Minutes of the NYPL Board, 27 May 1895, 1:38-40.

⁴⁰. The Museum of Natural History was and is on Seventy-Ninth Street and Central Park West. The Metropolitan is across Central Park at Fifth Avenue and Eighty-Second Street.

⁴¹. Report of the Site Committee, 5-6.

⁴². *New York Herald*, 25 May 1895, p. 8.

⁴³. For the connections between the Metropolitan and the New York Public Library, see Dain, *New York Public Library*, 82. For histories of the Metropolitan, see Winifred Howe, *A History of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Gilliss Press, 1913-46). And Calvin Tompkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces: The Story of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, rev. and updated ed. (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1989).

⁴⁴. Beckert, *Monied Metropolis*, 267-69. On the interesting connections between both the Metropolitan and the Museum of Natural History and Central Park, see Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 349-66. On the creation of “high culture” generally, see Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

⁴⁵. *Herald* quoted in Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 1082. See also *ibid.*, 963-65. *New York Times*, 10 July 1881, p. 6.

⁴⁶. See the epilogue, p. 46 above and Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect: A History of Intellectual Life in New York City, from 1750 to the Beginnings of Our Own Time* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 62-66.

⁴⁷. Quoted in Tomkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces*, 78. According to Tomkins, the leadership of the Metropolitan was divided over the question of Sunday hours, and Cesnola and some of the younger trustees supported it from the beginning. *Ibid.*, 75-79.

⁴⁸. New York City, *Minutes of the Common Council*, XIX, 78. See above, chapter one, page 38.

⁴⁹. The only paper actively to campaign against the reservoir site was the *Tribune*, which feared that the library would encroach upon Bryant Park adjacent to it. See, for example, “Keep off the Grass,” *New York Tribune*, 24 March 1895, p. 6. Green, one of the founders of Central Park, opposed the reservoir for the same reason. As it happened, the library was built adjacent to Bryant Park, and today it is one of the most popular public places in mid-town Manhattan. On the question of public transportation in relation to the site, see, for example, Bowker, “The Library Problem,” 99-100.

⁵⁰. John Bigelow Diary, 16 January 1896. Minutes of the NYPL Board, 8 January 1896, 1:96-97. Report of the Site Committee, 5 February 1896, 4-5.

⁵¹. Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 1229.

⁵². Minutes of the NYPL Board, 14 February 1896, 1:119-23.

⁵³. “Report of the Executive Committee,” *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 3 (March 1899): 108. This is a brief review of the development of the library from its founding until the first appropriation of City money.

⁵⁴. “Introductory Statement,” 108. This first issue of the *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* appeared in January 1897, in the midst of the negotiations with the City. It was at least in part an effort to make the library appear more open and welcoming to the public when the trustees needed public money.

⁵⁵. “Report of the Site Committee,” 6.

⁵⁶. The “Address to the Mayor, Aldermen and Commonalty of the City of New York,” delivered on March 26, 1896, is reprinted in *Book of Charters*, 125-33. The quote is on page 129 and references to the free circulating libraries are on pages 129 and 130.

⁵⁷. The agreement is reprinted in *Book of Charters*, pages 147-52. The construction of the central building was a complex process legally, requiring a series of nine separate laws or contracts between the library, the State of New York, and various municipal agencies. All of these documents are reprinted in *Book of Charters*, pages 134-55.

⁵⁸. Lydenberg, *New York Public Library*, 546. This is a table summarizing all the contracts for the central building. The original estimate was 2.5 million dollars. When complete the building cost two million more than the Library of Congress, completed about the same time. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 324. The average annual appropriation from the City was calculated from: “Director’s Report,” *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 17 (February 1913): 98; 18 (March 1914): 213; 19 (March 1915): 207; 20 (February 1916): 208; and 21 (March 1917): 159.

⁵⁹. “Report of the Executive Committee,” *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 3 (March 1899): 108.

⁶⁰. See for example, G.L. Rives to Bird S. Coler, 24 September 1900, reprinted in *New York Public Library, Correspondence Relating to the Question of a Consolidation of Free Circulating Libraries with the New York Public Library* (New York: The Library, 1900). Rives’ letter is a report to the city comptroller of the results of the public library’s survey of the free circulating libraries referred to below. The discussion of efficiency is on pages 22-24.

⁶¹. John Bigelow Diary, 2 December 1898.

⁶². The bills to incorporate the library and authorize city support are reprinted in Lydenberg, *New York Public Library*, 292-96.

⁶³. From an interview with Sanger published in the *Commercial Advertiser*, 3 February 1886, reprinted in *Library Journal* 10 (February 1886): 46-47. It is not clear in the bill itself if Sanger intended to include branch libraries and even his public statements at the time were somewhat vague on this important point. In this particular interview, he claimed that the free circulating libraries could become branches of his proposed library.

⁶⁴. Frederic Beecher Perkins, "Public Libraries and the Public," in *Library and Society*, Arthur Bostwick, ed. (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1921; reprint, Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries, 1968), 233. This is an address that was read in 1885 at the American Library Association annual conference.

⁶⁵. The statement presented to the committee is reprinted in Lydenberg, *New York Public Library*, 298-300. The law authorizing grants to free circulating libraries is reprinted in Lydenberg, *New York Public Library*, 216-17. About the time of the Astor, Lenox, Tilden merger, a new law was passed that changed the formula for discretionary appropriations to ten cents per volume circulated. Lydenberg, *New York Public Library*, 218.

⁶⁶. See for example, New York Free Circulating Library, *Twenty-First and Final Report of the New York Free Circulating Library, with a Sketch of Its History* (New York: The Library, 1900), 23. By 1899, City money accounted for four-fifths of its operating expenses. New York Free Circulating Library, *Twentieth Annual Report of the New York Free Circulating Library* (New York: The Library, 1899), 12.

⁶⁷. Lydenberg, *New York Public Library*, 528 and 530, gives the annual expense accounts and circulation statistics, respectively, for the New York Free Circulating Library. Based on these figures, from 1887 to 1900, it received \$417,250 from the City. The maximum legal amount it could have received was \$801,815.

⁶⁸. *New York World*, 12 July 1898, quoted in Dain, *New York Public Library*, 175. Van Wyck held up City appropriations for the central building and was continually at odds with the circulating libraries. Van Wyck was a Tammany mayor who defeated Strong, a reform mayor. There was no love lost on either side. Several leaders of the libraries were active in the Citizens Union that opposed his administration and worked for nonpartisan elections. See for example, "Mayor on Libraries," *New York Times*, 15 October 1898, p. 12.

⁶⁹. New York Free Circulating Library, *Twentieth Annual Report of the Free Circulating Library* (New York: The Library, 1899), 12-13.

⁷⁰. [John Shaw Billings], "Memorandum on the Library Consolidation Question," Record Group 5, New York Public Library Board of Trustees, Committees, Consolidation Committee, New York Public Library Archives and Manuscripts Division.

⁷¹. New York Public Library, *Correspondence Relating to a Consolidation of Free Libraries*, 5-6. This pamphlet includes many of the important documents connected with the consolidation, including the cover letter Billings used in his survey of the libraries, a table summarizing his findings, and his report to the board, which was the basis of the board's report to Coler.

⁷². New York Public Library, *Correspondence Relating to a Consolidation of Free Libraries*, 21-26. Quotes are from pages 22-23 and 24. Unofficially, influential members of the NYPL board had decided as early as July that the best course of action was to take over the circulating libraries. Billings and Cadwalader wrote a "confidential minute" to that effect for the Executive Committee and sent copies to certain representatives of the lending libraries. The minute stresses the danger of political control of the libraries, and that fear probably accounts for this rather abrupt change in policy. Billings' memo the previous fall had sought to avoid responsibility for the circulating libraries. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 195-98.

⁷³. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 201.

⁷⁴. The agreement is reprinted in *Book of Charters*, 219-24.

⁷⁵. Arthur Bostwick, *A Life with Men and Books* (New York: H.W. Wilson Co.), 185. Bostwick, the first head of the Circulation Department, quotes Billings as saying: "The trustees and I are running a reference library for scholars. We know nothing about circulating libraries and branches, and we want those to be operated by the same persons who have been doing so in the past with such success."

⁷⁶. John Shaw Billings, "Report of the Director," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 5 (October 1901): 396-398. John Shaw Billings, "The Organization of the New York Public Library," *Library Journal* 26 (Conference Proceedings 1902): 215-17. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 201-04. The current designations are the Research Libraries and the Branch Libraries. They remain largely independent parts of the NYPL with separate budgets and managements.

⁷⁷. *Book of Charters*, 231.

⁷⁸. Documentation of the bequests to the Free Circulating Library is reprinted in *Book of Charters*, 165-218. A summary of donations is in *New York Free Circulating Library, Twenty-First and Final Report* (1900), 57-64.

⁷⁹. Robert M. Lester, *Forty Years of Carnegie Giving: A Summary of the Benefactions of Andrew Carnegie and of the Philanthropic Trusts which He Created* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), 6, 93. In 1941, the total value of the various Carnegie benevolent trusts was \$319,000,000.

⁸⁰. For a good overview of American philanthropy, see Robert H. Bremmer, *American Philanthropy*, 2d ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). On library philanthropy generally, see Ditzion, *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture*, 129-64. On Carnegie's library philanthropy in particular, see Abigail Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1-43 and passim.

⁸¹. Andrew Carnegie, *The Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986; repr., New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1920), 1-13. Andrew Carnegie, "A Confession of Religious Faith," in *Miscellaneous Writings of Andrew Carnegie*, ed. Burton J. Hendrick (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press; repr., New York: Doubleday & Co., 1933), II: 296.

⁸². Andrew Carnegie, "The Gospel of Wealth," in *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays*, ed. Edward C. Kirkland (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962), 16-17.

⁸³. Carnegie, *Triumphant Democracy*, vi.

⁸⁴. "Andrew Carnegie at Home," *Current Literature*, 23 (March 1898): 221.

⁸⁵. Carnegie, "Gospel of Wealth," 16.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 19-24, 49.

⁸⁷. Andrew Carnegie, "The Best Use of Wealth," in *Miscellaneous Writings*, II: 210. This was a speech delivered at the opening of the Carnegie Library in Pittsburgh in 1895.

⁸⁸. Carnegie, "Best Use of Wealth," II: 210-11. Carnegie, "Gospel of Wealth," 36-40. Here and elsewhere Carnegie recalled fondly Colonel James Anderson, who opened his small personal library to the working boys of Pittsburgh on Saturday afternoons. Carnegie devoted an entire chapter in his autobiography to Anderson and his library. Carnegie, *Autobiography*, 43-51.

⁸⁹. Carnegie, "Best Uses of Wealth," 211.

⁹⁰. John Shaw Billings, "Report of the Director," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 5 (October 1901): 395-96. All of the documents related to the Carnegie gift are

reprinted in *Book of Charters*, 231-58. These include a contract between the City and the NYPL, pages 238 to 248, and between the NYPL and Carnegie, pages 254 to 258. This rather complicated series of legal instruments was further complicated by the fact that, in 1898, Manhattan had consolidated with the four outlying boroughs to create Greater New York. Carnegie entered into separate agreements with the Queens Borough Public Library and the Brooklyn Public Library, each founded about the time of the consolidation, so that there were and are three separate public library systems in what is now New York City. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 223-28.

⁹¹. “City will Accept Mr. Carnegie’s Gift,” *New York Times*, 17 March 1901, p. 2. “Five Millions for the New York Public Library from Andrew Carnegie,” *Library Journal* 26 (March 1901): 134.

⁹². *New York World*, 18 March 1901, quoted in Dain, *New York Public Library*, 218.

⁹³. *New York Sun*, 22 March 1901, p. 6; 19 March 1901, p. 6. The latter editorial in particular is a good summary of the various arguments used against accepting Carnegie’s offer. The *Sun* argued, for example, the City would be wiser to spend its money on public schools and tenements, rather than public libraries, which simply encouraged the reading of trashy fiction. It also argued, rather self-servingly, that the daily newspaper provided the average citizen with all the good reading she needed. The other argument that was frequently advanced against accepting the gift was that Carnegie’s money was tainted, earned at the expense of the working classes. See, for example, A.M. Baugh, “Workingmen’s Viewpoint,” *New York Times*, 24 March 1901, p. 23. A number of cities did in fact reject Carnegie grants under pressure from organized labor. For a good summary of the arguments against Carnegie, see Van Slyck, “Free to All,” 19-22 and Dain, *New York Public Library*, 219-21. For a good laugh, see [Finley Peter Dunne,] “The Carnegie Libraries,” in *Dissertations by Mr. Dooley* (New York: Harper & Co., 1906), 177-81. “If ye write him f’r an autygraft he sins ye a libry.”

⁹⁴. *New York Herald*, 22 March 1901, p. 8.

⁹⁵. *New York Times*, 30 October 1902, p. 16.

⁹⁶. Bostwick, *Life with Men and Books*, 184. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 203-04, 232. Shortly after the consolidation of the New York Free Circulating Library and the New York Public Library, the legislature passed a law allowing the remaining free circulating libraries simply to convey their property to the Public Library. This simplified the rest of the consolidations. It meant the Public Library would not have to enter into separate agreements with each of the remaining library corporations. *Book of Charters*, 227-30.

⁹⁷. Aguilar Free Library, *Fourteenth and Final Report of the Aguilar Free Library Society of the City of New York* (New York: The Society, 1903), 22. Hereafter, Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report 1903*). Bostwick, *Life with Men and Books*, 186.

⁹⁸. Aguilar Free Library, *Eleventh and Twelfth Annual Report* (1901), 8-10; 14. Aguilar Free Library, *Annual Report* (1903), 22. The deeds transferring the Aguilar's property to the NYPL are in *Book of Charters*, 300-106. Along with Greenbaum, Oscar Strauss was elected to the NYPL board and Mark Ash was also appointed to the Circulation Committee. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 255-58. Bostwick described Director Billings and Leipziger as "two autocrats [who] disliked each other at sight." He claimed that ex-Major Billings nearly sabotaged his delicate negotiations with the Aguilar by "throwing the monkey wrench of militarism into the machinery of peaceful adjustment." Bostwick, *Life with Men and Books*, 186-87.

⁹⁹. Cathedral Library Association, *Statement of the Position of the Cathedral Library with Reference to the Proposed Action of the City of New York in the Matter of the Carnegie Library Proposition* (n.p., n.d.), Record Group 4, Free Circulating Libraries, Cathedral Library Association, New York Public Library Archives and Manuscripts Division. This sums up the arguments used by the CLA over the course of the next two years. Public remarks by Archbishop Corrigan in April 1901 on the Carnegie offer were taken verbatim from this pamphlet and the Church's stand was covered extensively in the press. See for example, "The New York Public Library and the Cathedral Library," *Library Journal* 26 (May 1901): 276-77. "Roman Catholics and the Public Library," *New York Times*, 18 April 1901, p. 8. "Sectarianism and Public Aid," *New York Daily Tribune*, 24 February 1903, p. 14. After the CLA was absorbed, there seem to have been few complaints about anti-Catholicism in the NYPL, but in 1904, the *Daily News* circulated a petition to remove a book "assailing the Catholic Church." "Petition," *New York Daily News*, 9 November 1904.

¹⁰⁰. H. Clay Peters, "Catholic Libraries," *New York Times*, 12 May 1901, p. 20. Clay was a Catholic who argued the issue with his archbishop in a series of letters published in the *Times*. For other uses of the church-state argument, see for example, *New York Times*, 21 May 1901, p.22, and *New York Tribune*, 19 February 1903, p. 8. These and other editorials also compared the library merger with the controversy over public support for parochial schools.

¹⁰¹. The *Post* also argued that if the collections did not reflect the needs of Catholic readers, it was simply because "other demands are more urgent." *New York Evening Post*, 14 April 1901, p. 6.

¹⁰². *New York Times*, 12 February 1903, p. 8 *New York Tribune*, 19 February 1903, p. 8.

¹⁰³. For use of the term interests, see the Peters editorial, note 103 above. Special interests was a keyword in the progressives' vocabulary and came into use around 1905. *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*, updated, new rev. ed. (1996), s.v. "special interests." In the progressive era, special interests often referred to economic interests. Daniel T. Rodgers, *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics since Independence* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 178-87.

¹⁰⁴. Billings was ostensibly referring to Catholic opposition to public libraries generally, but he obviously had in mind the controversy in New York. John Shaw Billings, "Some Library Problems To-morrow," 6. Particularly in light of his "militarism" in regards to the Aguilar (see note 100 above), Billings was rather conciliatory in his dealings with the Church generally. See for example, Billings to Fr. Joseph McMahan, Director of the Cathedral Library, 14 February 1901, Record Group 6, NYPL Central Administration, Director's Office, John Shaw Billings, Subseries 1.4, Letterbooks, Circulation Department, vol. I, New York Public Library Archives and Manuscripts Division. "I don't object to the autonomy you indicate." Generally the NYPL policy during this period seems to have been to not get involved in the fights between the City and the circulating libraries over consolidation.

¹⁰⁵. McMahan pointedly reminded the City that "we represent 1,200,000 people in" New York. *New York Sun*, 18 February 1903, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 252.

¹⁰⁷. *Ibid.*, 280-64. *Book of Charters*, 351-54. Joseph H. McMahan, *Final Report of the Director of the Cathedral Library* (New York: Cathedral Library Association, 1905), 3.

¹⁰⁸. *I. Book of Charters*, 259-288; 307-48. Most of the smaller free circulating libraries held out to the last possible day and transferred their property to the New York Public Library on December 31, 1903.

¹⁰⁹. Given the elite character of the Society Library, a merger with a truly public library was out of the question. Even before the creation of the Circulation Department, it had declined offers to negotiate with the fledgling New York Public Library, "preferring to die a natural death to strangulation." Keep, *History of the New York Society Library*, 502-05.

¹¹⁰. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 264-66. Ada Sterling, "To Rescue an Old Library," *New York Times*, 19 February 1906, p. 8.

¹¹¹. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 267-68.

¹¹². *Book of Charters*, 231.

¹¹³. Annie Carroll Moore, "Library Membership as a Civic Force," *Library Journal* 33 (July 1908): 272.

¹¹⁴. Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 111-63, especially 159-63.

¹¹⁵. Bender, *New York Intellect*, 82-66 and epilogue, p. 46 above.

¹¹⁶. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 78-86. Phyllis Dain, "Public Library Governance in a Changing New York City," *Libraries & Culture* 26 (Spring 1991): 219-50.

¹¹⁷. Dain, *New York Public Library, 177-79. Book of Charters*, 363.

¹¹⁸. The best work on the government of public libraries is still, Carleton Bruns Joeckel, *The Government of the American Public Library* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), 77-110 and passim. In 1935, one-sixth of large public library systems in the United States were what Joeckel called "corporation libraries," libraries with private or semi-private boards.

¹¹⁹. Dain, *New York Public Library*, 79, 203.

¹²⁰. *Ibid.*, 230, 263.

¹²¹. *Ibid.*, 310-15. The average annual appropriation for the first five years after the completion of the original Carnegie branches was approximately \$765,000. "Director's Report," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 19 (March 1915): 209; 20 (February 1916): 210; 21 (March 1917): 161; 22 (March 1918): 161; 23 (April 1919): 183.

¹²². *New York Herald*, 22 March 1901, p. 8. On "quasi-public" institutions in the Progressive Era see, Tenenbaum, "The Progressive Legacy and the Public Corporation: Entrepreneurship and Public Virtue," 309-330. For a more general treatment, Albert S. Abel, "The Public Corporation in the United States," chap. in *Government Enterprise: A Comparative Study*, W.G. Friedman and J.F. Garner eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 181-200.

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