











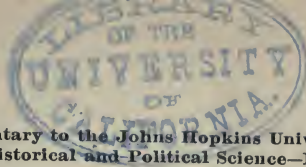




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[Notes supplementary to the Johns Hopkins University  
Studies in Historical and Political Science—No. 5.]

# A SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN BALTIMORE.

ABSTRACT OF A LECTURE BY PHILIP R. UHLER, OF THE PEABODY INSTITUTE, TO THE STUDENTS OF HISTORY AND POLITICS IN THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY.

The history of libraries and of reading in the State of Maryland remains as yet an unwritten chapter in the progress of literary effort. The materials for a complete sketch of the subject seem at the present time beyond the reach of the investigator. Likewise that portion of the material which relates to Baltimore and its early connections is only in part attainable, and leaves much to be desired. Apart from all this, however, many interesting items relative to the libraries of our city are accessible, and we propose in this sketch to bring together such as seem most worthy of connected record.

Almost at the beginning of Lord Baltimore's colony in the counties of Anne Arundel and Baltimore, laws were passed for the benefit and preservation of parish libraries. Annapolis having been settled earlier than her sister on the Patapsco, it is to the annals of Saint Anne's parish, distant some twenty-five miles southeast of Baltimore, that we must look for the agencies which influenced this city in the use of books. Situated directly on the navigable highway leading to Baltimore, Annapolis had the advantage of being a port more quickly accessible to vessels coming from the mother country. As few books were yet printed in the colony, it became necessary to import them from abroad. Among the early colonists there were those who had been accustomed to reading books and newspapers. So, but a short time had elapsed after the establishment of the people in their new home that importations of books became one of the settled functions of merchants, who acted as agents for them. All of the better class of inhabitants were possessors of small libraries, consisting of a family bible and prayer books, a few religious books, several volumes of tales, extracts, and romances, to which were added some loose numbers of the *Tatler*, *Spectator*, &c. The rector, of course, had his more ample library of theological literature, the lawyer had one or more shelves of law books in his office, and the doctor of medicine owned some volumes of medical books of reference.

The only substitute for a public library at this time was the one at the rectory, which was known as the library of the parish, for the support of which a small tax was laid upon the landholders, and for the preservation and control of which laws were enacted. Such a library existed at Annapolis, in the parish of Saint Anne, and from it the good people of Baltimore

town, as early as 1732, were privileged to draw books to be used at their homes. Somewhat later, the parish of Saint Paul, in Baltimore, enjoyed its own library, but how many books it contained or how extensively it was used we cannot now ascertain.

As the community increased in size and importance wealth accumulated in the hands of leading citizens creating opportunities for wider and more frequent contact with the culture and luxury of other lands. New needs were continually growing out of the changing conditions of life, demanding more knowledge and a wider education. Schools were established in numerous places, and a general desire for public instruction was taking hold of the popular mind. With the desire for education came the desire for more books. The home library was no longer adequate to the wants of the growing members of the household. Nevertheless, our ancestors certainly as far back as a hundred and fifty years ago, were fond of reading; but while each good family had its own little cabinet of much prized books, the thoughts of few were directed to the wider requirements of the increasing population.

Through the persistent efforts of the book importers, who established themselves in the young city before the outbreak of the Revolution, the community was kept informed as to many of the new books which were being issued from the presses of England and France.

As early as 1773 a certain Mr. Joseph Rathel sent forth a circular soliciting subscribers to a circulating library which he proposed to establish in Baltimore town. We are left in ignorance as to the success of this enterprise, and there is no record remaining now to tell whether the library was continued here by this enterprising bookseller. Nevertheless, shortly after this time, Mr. William Murphy, a bookseller whose store was on Baltimore street adjoining Calvert, succeeded in establishing a circulating library at his place of business, which was afterward purchased and continued until 1784 by Hugh Barkley.

In the year 1796, when the population of the town scarcely exceeded 13,000 inhabitants, the people were supplied with all the books they desired by enterprising importers and dealers who kept large stocks of books in store for sale, either by the wholesale or retail. During the year just noticed five such establishments existed in the town, besides the offices where books were printed and published. The wants of numerous private schools, and the growing desire of educated persons for certain popular books which had first been issued in England, created a demand which must have given occupation to the several printing firms existing here at that time.

About this time, some of the more public-spirited citizens of Baltimore, chief of whom were the Right Rev. John Carroll, and Rev. Dr. Patrick Allison, became interested in the project of founding a comprehensive public library suited to the needs of all classes of the community. Accordingly, in December, 1796, several of the most prominent professional and business men met at Bryden's Inn, adopted a constitution, and organized a stockholder's library. The collection of books was at first lodged in a private

dwelling, but, in 1798, it was moved to commodious apartments in Grant's Assembly Rooms, on German street. This was the well known *Library Company of Baltimore*, which supplied a large part of the best literary material to the more wealthy and prominent inhabitants both of the city and country. The privileges of membership were liberal and so wide-reaching that, respectable residents of the Eastern Shore were allowed to take double the number of books supplied to other members, and during the cold part of the year to keep them from December 10 until March 20. Persons not stockholders, were permitted to take books to their homes on condition of depositing double the value of the books withdrawn, and upon payment of four cents per day for each single volume. During the earlier years of its activity, the library was open to members every weekday from ten o'clock in the morning until two o'clock in the afternoon, being closed on Sundays and holidays.

Before the end of the year 1799 the library, developed by gifts and purchases, contained three thousand and three hundred volumes of books, and so ample was the fund for increasing the collection that in this year three hundred pounds sterling were forwarded to London to pay for the new books.

In 1800 the library included four thousand volumes of books, most of which were of the more solid character, and with no preponderance of fiction. By the advent of the year 1809 the library had grown to a collection of about 7,000 volumes. Likewise the membership had increased from eighty-eight persons in 1799 to four hundred and twenty-one persons in 1809. During this last-named year a catalogue of the books was published in which the titles were arranged chiefly in alphabetical order, under subjects, with a further division by the size of the folded sheet, such as folio, quarto, octavo, &c. The catalogue presents a goodly assemblage of excellent books, multitudes of which are useful sources of reference at the present day. As a few examples of these we may cite the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, the publications of the *Royal Irish Academy*, those of the *American Philosophical Society*, of the *Asiatic Society of Bengal*, *Abridgments of the Physical Memoirs of the Academy of Sciences at Paris*, *Journals of the Royal Institution of Great Britain*, &c. In *Philosophy and Ethics* the works of Aristotle, Seneca, Epictetus, Plutarch, Cicero, Dugald Stewart, Reid, Kant, Helvetius, Cudworth, Enfield, Drummond, Monboddo and others stood up in the midst of a large group of lesser lights. Four pages were devoted to a list of the chief Greek and Latin classics, among which we find rare old editions of Dion Cassius, Diodorus Siculus, Apollonius Rhodius, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus. History was represented by sixteen pages of the standard authors of that day, and included some expensive and precious works which have a value for reference even now. Some of these, such as Rushworth's historical collections, Wilkins' *Concilia Magnae Britanniae*, Rapin's *History of England*, Clarendon's *State Papers*, Thurloe's *State Papers*, and Smith's *History of Virginia*, are among the good things which



students delight to honor at this late hour of the nineteenth century. The heading *Novels* has its place near the end of the list, and spreads out thinly over eight pages of heavily leaded matter, which looks lean and meagre in contrast with the historical, scientific, and literary material which packs the preceding pages. A few samples will suffice to show the flavor of this class of reading which found some favor with the light hearted people of this region three-quarters of a century or more ago. Forth from the less known favorites of the period shone such works as Brooke's *Fool of Quality*, Miss Burney's *Camilla*, *Cecilia*, and *Evelina*, Saint Pierre's *Paul and Virginia*, Miss Edgeworth's *Belinda*, *Castle Rack Rent*, *Modern Griselda*, Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*, Richardson's *Clarissa Harlowe*, Sir Charles Grandison, *Pamela*, Charlotte Smith's *Banished Man*, etc., Le Sage's *Gil Blas*, De Foe's *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, Smollet's *Peregrine Pickle*, Roderick Random and his other novels. Besides which, perhaps two dozen other works of fiction aided in filling out the mental requirements of our grandmothers and grand aunts of that day. Apparently the years rolled heavily along, for we do not find that any great impulse stirred new desires for numerous fresh books. In 1816, seven years later, only 1,214 volumes had been added to the collection. Books of history seem to have been most desired at this time, for we observe that five pages of the new supplementary catalogues were devoted to that subject (including biography) while but one or two pages were given to any other subject. In 1823, at the end of another seven years, a second supplement was printed, in which was recorded upwards of 1,300 volumes of works possessing the same solid qualities of those noticed before. Eight years later, or in 1831, the last supplementary catalogue of the new accessions was printed, and therein we find a continuation of the same good quality of books, distributed through a wide range of subjects. The new additions were fewer than before, but they contributed many important works to the collection. The library had then accumulated 10,424 volumes, and had nearly reached the full limit of its growth. From this time until 1848 the library seems to have lost its hold upon the interest of the community. Only a few more books were bought, and the total number derived from all sources amounted to about 11,000 volumes. In the meantime, several prominent gentlemen of Baltimore were engaged in soliciting funds to pay for the erection of a large building to accommodate the then rising Maryland Historical Society. For this purpose \$40,000 were secured, and the present Athenaeum building was erected, at the northwest corner of St. Paul and Saratoga streets. To this society, the stockholders of the Baltimore Library Company transferred their trust, and thus, by uniting the libraries of the two corporations, the books are to be held in perpetuity for the benefit of the people of this community. The combined libraries at that time formed a collection of somewhat beyond 14,000 volumes, and these with the acquisitions of later years, form the large collection now occupying the shelves of the Athenaeum building on St. Paul street.

As it was observed before, Baltimore has always been the home of circu-

lating libraries connected with book stores. Probably the most widely known and useful, while certainly the largest, private circulating library which has ever existed in Baltimore, was that kept by Joseph Robinson in his store on Baltimore near Holliday street, then known as number 110. This gentleman conducted a printing and book-selling establishment prior to the year 1818, to which was shortly afterward added the business of a circulating library. By large additions of books suited to the public taste, he gained favor with a wide circle of readers. His efforts were crowned with such success that at the beginning of the year 1839 he had accumulated a collection of more than 17,000 volumes of standard books in nearly every branch of knowledge. During this year he issued a printed catalogue, arranged under broad heads, such as History, Voyages and Travels, Novels, Tales and Romances, and Miscellaneous, with short titles following the author's name, or first descriptive noun or adjective. A second volume was published later, which included the works belonging to Poetry, the Drama, Magazines and Reviews, and others printed in the French and Italian languages. These catalogues were sold at the price of fifty cents per copy, and were certainly of great value to the public who desired to know the titles of good books. We have no information relative to the existence of this library after the year 1842; but such a collection of books, complementing the others in the Baltimore Library Company and in the newly established Mercantile Library, must have furnished the intelligent people of this community with all the varieties of reading matter that they could have found the time to use and enjoy.

By the approach of the year 1825 the city had shown a marked development in the various mechanical branches of industry. The rapidly growing population of mechanics and artizans now formed an important and prominent element in the growth of the community. Intelligent men perceived that this class of citizens could be made more useful by skilful training in the industrial arts. Accordingly, in 1826, the Maryland Institute for the Promotion of the Mechanic Arts was founded and incorporated, with Messrs. John H. B. Latrobe, Fielding Lucas, Jr., Hezekiah Niles, Thomas Kelso, and a few others as trustees and managers. The purpose of its foundation included lectures on the mechanic arts, exhibitions of artistic and industrial manufactures, a school of drawing, and a library of books on science and the mechanic arts. This institution had held several public exhibitions of articles of American manufacture, and had made good progress in collecting a library when, by grievous misfortune in 1835, the entire property of the Institute was consumed by the fire that destroyed the old Athenaeum building in which it was lodged. After this, no united effort was made to resuscitate the organization until November, 1847, when a call for the formation of a Mechanic's Institute was issued, which, at a later meeting, held January 12, 1848, resulted in the organization of the present Maryland Institute for the promotion of the Mechanic Arts. Much success has resulted from the unflinching interest of the directors of this highly useful institution. Exhi-

bitions of Art and Industry have been held in its large hall; schools of drawing, designing, modelling, and painting have been conducted by instructors of its own appointment; courses of lectures have been given in many branches of learning by eminent professors; and last, but not least in the estimation of its directors, a library has been steadily collected which at the present time numbers more than 20,000 volumes. The library has been of incalculable benefit to the families of the mechanics and middle classes of the community, and especially to that part of the population whose homes were in the eastern part of the city. The low price for admission to all the privileges of the Institute, five dollars per year for adults, and one half of that sum for junior members, placed these facilities within the reach of all but the very poor, and consequently large numbers eagerly joined the association. As early as 1851, the Institute included a membership of more than eight hundred persons, most of whom drew books from the library for reading at home, while another group was actively at work in the school of design. In 1865 a classified catalogue of the books in the library was issued, which materially aided the readers in their search for desired books. It constitutes a closely printed work of 176 pages, with the subjects arranged in thirty classes, and includes a varied collection of good books, in nearly every branch of knowledge. As might be expected, the library is fullest in works which are more or less connected with the industrial arts, but it is also well supplied with encyclopaedias and works of ready reference. At the present time, its growth is somewhat impeded by the establishment of branches of the Enoch Pratt Free Library, yet there are numerous persons who still feel an interest in the books of this widely useful institution.

Founded at a later date than one or two of the foregoing libraries, but not necessarily growing out of anyone of them, the Mercantile Library Association followed and fulfilled its important functions for many years. The first aim of its originators was to benefit the young men of the city who were engaged in mercantile pursuits. At the time of its organization in 1839, the Association occupied rooms at the corner of Baltimore and Holliday streets, but in 1848 its library was removed to the basement of the Athenaeum building, on the corner of St. Paul and Saratoga streets, where the most active period of its existence was passed. Mr. J. Morrison Harris was its first president. During the earlier years of its vigor, this collection of books was of inestimable benefit to the young men for whom it was founded; and they also profited by the courses of lectures which were given under its direction. Later on, however, it became a library in which the families of citizens took the most interest, and the young men found that other kinds of enjoyment had greater attractions for them. The beneficent influence of this institution upon the families of Baltimore can, I think, hardly be estimated. In its days of greatest prosperity, it furnished the best accessible reading to thousands of our people, who would not otherwise have acquired equal knowledge, or had so much pure and satisfactory enjoyment at so



little cost. The collection of books embraced most that was good or best in the departments of fiction, literature, history, biography, and travels, and it was amply supplied with the choicest and most attractive of the magazines and current periodicals. In a period of rather less than forty years it had accumulated a collection of more than 36,000 volumes in the English language, and had procured many books worthy of notice in the other languages of modern Europe.

Other libraries have at different times taken a part in contributing to the culture and improvement of various classes of the people of Baltimore. It is, however, not possible for us at this time to do more than merely mention the names, and indicate the character of books belonging to some of them. Chief among these we notice the library of St. Mary's College, composed of about 16,000 volumes, mostly of theological and ecclesiastical literature, and now devoted to the use of seminarians of the order of St. Sulpice. Another important library in the department of ecclesiastical literature is that bequeathed to the Protestant Episcopal diocese of Maryland by the late Bishop Whittingham. There is also a legal library of the Baltimore Bar, placed in the court house, and maintained at the expense of the lawyers of this city; the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland have their library of medical and surgical works, and this is well provided with the current journals and periodicals of the profession. The Odd Fellows Association have also long maintained a library for the benefit of their members, which now numbers about 22,000 volumes. The Methodist Historical Society, likewise, owns a large and valuable collection of books, papers and manuscripts illustrating the work of that church in the United States. This library has recently been placed in the new building provided for the Woman's College of Baltimore. Various other libraries of smaller size have been begun at different times, but these have either been absorbed by the larger organizations, or they have failed for want of proper support.

Hitherto we have been recording the work of institutions founded by the energies of devoted men, who urged forward those enterprises by their combined efforts. But now a royal mind of the widest comprehension determines that Baltimore shall share in his bounty, to produce a library equal to the best in the world. Mr. Peabody visits this city, and in 1857 he places with some of his friends, who are willing to be his trustees, a sum of money with which to buy the ground, construct a monumental building, and found a library. Baltimore had now grown to be a city of more than 200,000 inhabitants. Horse-cars traversed the streets on smooth tramways, where the slow cab and omnibus had before been the chief means of public conveyance. A nation was stirred in its profoundest depths in a quarrel between the people of the North and the South. Already the harsh echoes of battle had been heard on our borders, when in the spring of 1862 Mr. Peabody's first building for the Institute and library was finished. In a quiet room in the back part of this new edifice, still odorous with the exhalations of freshly laid paint, one of Baltimore's popular divines, the

Rev. Dr. John G. Morris, is preparing to record the books which have just been brought to the hall. The first to be entered is a set of volumes, the *Annals of Congress*, presented by the United States Interior Department, through the Hon. John P. Kennedy; the next is a copy of the *Madison Papers*, from the same source. Other gifts come pouring in from individuals and from learned societies. The Smithsonian Institution, by its secretary, Professor Henry, expresses a willingness to help the young Institute in various branches of scientific pursuit.

An assistant, Mr. P. R. Uhler, was now employed to aid the librarian, and lists of books were speedily sent to publishers and booksellers in New York, Boston and Philadelphia, to direct the buying of works for a first foundation. The librarian also visited these cities and selected large numbers of books to be sent to the Institute for examination and approval. More than a year had been previously spent by the librarian in taking from catalogues and bibliographies the titles of 50,000 volumes, which were to bear the first fruits of learning to the waiting multitudes of an eager population. Hearts were deeply stirred as they heard of the royal feast that was being prepared for their enjoyment. Ardent terms were employed as men expressed to one another their expectations of the abundance of splendid literature now about to be placed before them with little effort and without cost. Almost the entire community seemed to be seized by the impression that Mr. Peabody meant nothing less by his generous gift than that every individual in this large city should have the privilege of taking home as many beautiful books as he desired for his amusement or gratification. A little later, days of gloom spread over the nation, and the infant library shared in the despondency of the period. At one interval, on the verge of a great battle beyond the western border of our state, the Secretary of War proposed to turn the beautiful new building into a hospital for disabled soldiers. Happily, through the urgent efforts of Mr. John P. Kennedy, the building was saved by substituting others of less value, and the librarian was allowed to pursue his work unhindered by the presence of army officials. Foreign exchange was now rapidly advancing in cost, and the prices of imported books were becoming correspondingly high. Opportunities to secure good books in this country at moderate prices were eagerly sought, and the infant library grew by small accretions. Four years had now passed, and Mr. Peabody had come to visit his Institution. Pleased with what he saw and anxious to have his plans more rapidly developed, he left larger endowments of money to the Trustees for the completion of his purposes. At this time, on the twelfth of October, 1866, the library, embracing 16,000 volumes, was opened to the public. In the month of September, 1867, the present Provost of the Peabody Institute entered upon his duties as chief executive officer of the institution. He has shown a dominant interest in the development of the library, "is responsible for all books added to the collection, and has personally selected most of them. He also planned its catalogue and has superintended the printing of the



same." Since 1867, Mr. Uhler has acted as librarian in charge of the library, and during most of that time he has arranged and conducted the daily routine of work therein, and with the aid of several assistants he has prepared the manuscript of the catalogue and examined the sheets as they were printed.

The library has now reached a position of great importance to all classes of the community, but especially to the Johns Hopkins University, and to members of the learned professions, residents of this city. At the present time it numbers nearly 100,000 volumes, distributed throughout almost every branch of knowledge. Free to all, and as accessible as it can be readily made, it is meant to be the study of the student and the resort of the investigator. The treasures that it contains are limited to no country, language or time. It seeks to get the best that exists, in all topics of human investigation. The material with which it is most fully endowed is that of history, represented by more than 12,000 volumes. Science in all its branches embraces at least 11,000 volumes. English literature, including the drama, essays and criticism, comprehends more than 5,500 volumes. Biography is still richer in the number of volumes; while more than 5,000 volumes of English and foreign periodicals decorate the shelves at the north end of the library. The fine arts, archæology and music, occupy a large place in the collection, as likewise do the works relating to oriental literature, the Greek and Latin classics, philology in all branches, and the best of all the voyages and travels of ancient and modern times. Nearly all the books referred to in Professor C. K. Adams' *Manual of Historical Literature* may be found there, as likewise those in Tylor's *History of Primitive Culture*, in Lecky's *History of European Morals*, in Lea's *History of the Inquisition*, in Darwin's *Origin of Species*, etc. Works which have been jealously guarded as unique treasures in one or another of the public libraries of England or France have been reprinted by subscription, and now substantial copies of these rareties grace the collections of the Peabody Library. Printing clubs have also sprung up in England and Scotland, such as the Spenser Society, the Chaucer Society, the Early English Text Society, the Fuller Worthies Library, etc., and have published choice literary gems from private libraries, and these likewise have been secured for this library. Time fails for the enumeration of many of the good things that are now being enjoyed by students in the library of the Peabody Institute.

The Johns Hopkins University, opened to students in 1876, also possesses numerous libraries. Each seminary has a library of the subject to which it is devoted. Thus, there is a library of Greek and Latin classics, another of physics, a third of chemistry, a fourth of biology, etc.; but besides these there is a general collection of reference books in a hall expressly prepared for their accommodation, and the extremely valuable historical library formed upon that secured from the estate of Professor Bluntschli, and named, accordingly, the Bluntschli Library. All the collections of books

united form an aggregate of more than 40,000 volumes, and furnish the student with most that he needs for his immediate studies; but when comprehensive original research with books is to be made, his wants are supplied by the larger collections in the Peabody Institute and elsewhere.

Baltimore now possesses almost boundless opportunities for learning and culture in the many libraries within her borders. To the great reference library of the Peabody Institute, where the books must be used within the building, the munificence of Mr. Pratt has added the crowning pinnacle of that literary edifice, which completes the circle of institutions of learning in the Monumental City. The now widely known Enoch Pratt Free Library, for which a beautiful marble building has been constructed near the centre of the city, was formally opened to the public on the fifth of January, 1886. In this convenient and appropriate edifice, provision is made for a library of 250,000 volumes, and, by the sagacious foresight of its founder, an endowment of \$50,000 per year is guaranteed to the institution forever. Thus, there is secured to the citizens of Baltimore a never-ending opportunity to enjoy at home the latest and best literature of every land, and this, too, is made readily accessible to all by five capacious branch libraries, which are located in various sections of the city.

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No. 5, May, 1889.











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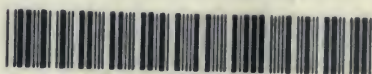
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