

## SOME EARLY LIBRARIES OF OREGON

The Oregon State Library has in its possession the original schedules of the federal census for 1850, 1860 and 1870 which give most valuable and interesting information concerning early libraries in Oregon. In 1850, Clackamas County reported two libraries, the Territorial Library with 1,500 volumes, and the Multnomah (Multnomah Circulating Library) number of volumes not given; Clatsop County reported one Presbyterian Sunday School library of 200 volumes, and Clark and Lewis Counties reported that there were no libraries within their boundaries. In 1860, Clackamas County had none to report; Clatsop had two church libraries, a Presbyterian and a Methodist; Jackson had one of 100 volumes belonging to a Methodist Sunday School and a Masonic library of 100 volumes; Linn reported three private libraries, of 200, 350 and 1,000 volumes; Multnomah had three Sunday school libraries, the Episcopal and Congregational with 300 volumes each, the Methodist with 1,200 volumes, and also had 250 volumes belonging to a Female Seminary; Washington County reported one college library (Pacific University) with 1,500 volumes. The enumerator for Columbia County wrote "There are no public or private libraries in this county".

By 1870, libraries of all kinds had increased very materially. Nearly all counties had Sunday School and Church or Pastor's libraries. Grant and Marion counties reported Odd Fellows libraries, the former having 178 volumes, the latter, 800. Clatsop had a Masonic library with 118 volumes. There were College libraries in Benton County (Corvallis College) with 300 volumes; Clackamas County (probably Oregon City University), 100 volumes; Linn County (Albany College) with 1,000 volumes; and Washington County (Pacific University), 3,000. There were circulating libraries in Benton County, which had two subscription libraries with a total of 550 books; Clackamas, one subscription, with 50 books; Clatsop, one city library, with 1,161; Coos, 1 subscription, with 50; Multnomah, two subscription, with a total of 6,000 volumes, and Yam Hill with a subscription library of 40 volumes.

When the United States Bureau of Education published its *Public Libraries in the United States of America* in 1876, it gave the following for Oregon:

"Albany, Albany Collegiate Institute, 1,250 volumes and Young Ladies' and Gentlemen's Society, 300 volumes; Astoria, Pioneer and Historical Society of Oregon, founded 1871, 600 volumes; Corvallis, Library Association, founded 1873, 350 volumes; Forest Grove, Pacific University and Tualatin Academy, founded 1853, 5,500 volumes; Portland, Bishop Scott Grammar and Divinity School, founded 1870, 3,500 volumes, Library Association, founded 1864, 7,785 volumes, St. Helen's Hall, founded 1869, 400 volumes; Salem, Oregon Natural History and Library Association, founded 1874, 400 volumes, State Library, founded 1850, 5,257 volumes, State Prison, 600 volumes, Willamette University, founded 1844, 2,000 volumes, and Willamette University Society libraries, 500 volumes."

There were many private libraries and the size of these was surprisingly large; Benton had 400, with a total of 50,000 volumes; Douglas, 12 and 3,000 volumes; Linn 60 and 8,000 volumes; Marion 60 and 10,000 volumes; Multnomah 1200 and 150,000 volumes; Polk, 19 and 10,000 Umatilla 12 and 4,000 volumes; Wasco, 8 and 2,505 volumes; Washington 16 and 7,400 volumes; Yam Hill, 300 and 15,000 volumes.

But there were libraries in Oregon before the census of 1850 and they were circulating libraries too, for the use of the community.

#### *Hudson's Bay Company Library*

The first circulating library on the Pacific coast was that of the Hudson's Bay Company officers at Vancouver. Dr. Tolmie, in a letter published in *Oregon Pioneer Association Transactions* for 1884, says: "By 1836, a circulating library of papers, magazines, and some books, set on foot by the officers, was in 'full blast'." He also says that books were bought from the Boston merchant captains who were buying furs on the coast.

Mention of this library is also made by T. C. Elliott in his "Peter Skene Ogden, Fur Trader" which appeared in the *Oregon Historical Society Quarterly*, September, 1910:

"One further item regarding the three and one-half years on the coast is worth mentioning. It was then that the first circulating library of the Pacific coast was started. The record is that the Gentlemen of the coasting trade contributed to a fund and had brought from England the later books and magazines and circulated them from one post to another. In his journal Dr. Tolmie

speaks of receiving from Mr. Ogden the *Life of Edmund Burke* and *Franklin's First Journey to the North*."

*Multnomah Circulating Library*

The organization, about 1840, of the Multnomah Circulating Library at Willamette Falls (Oregon City) was an important event. Gray, in his *History of Oregon*, says of this:

"A consultation was held at the house of Gray to consider the expediency of organizing a provisional government. In it the whole condition of the settlement, the missions, and Hudson's Bay Company, were carefully looked at, and all the influences combined against the organization of a settler's government were fully canvassed. The conclusion was that no direct effort could succeed, as it had already been tried and failed . . . Two plans were suggested . . . The first was to get up a circulating library, and by that means draw attention and discussion to subjects of interest to the settlement and secure the influence of the Methodist Mission, as education was a subject they had commenced. We found no difficulty in the library movement from them, only they seemed anxious to keep from the library a certain class of light reading, which they appeared tenacious about. This was not the vital point with the original movers, so they yielded it. The library prospered finely; one hundred shares were taken at five dollars a share; three hundred volumes of old books collected and placed in this institution which was called the Multnomah Circulating Library; one hundred dollars were sent to New York for new books which arrived the following year."

The Multnomah Circulating Library, "a very good circulating library" as J. W. Nesmith called it in one of his letters, was incorporated by Act of the House of Representatives of the Provisional government, August 19, 1845, being the second corporation authorized in Oregon.

Senator Nesmith in an address before the Oregon Pioneer Association in 1875 gives the following interesting anecdote:

"In the small collection of books at the Falls known as the Multnomah Library, I found what I had never heard of before, a copy of *Jefferson's Manual*, and after giving it an evening's perusal by the light of an armful of pitch knots, I found that there was such a thing in parliamentary usage as 'the previous question.'

"I had a bill then pending to cut off the southern end of Yamhill, and to establish the county of Polk, which measure had vio-

lent opposition in the body. One morning while most of the opponents of my bill were amusing themselves at 'horse billiards' in Lee's ten-pin alley, I called up my bill, and, after making the best argument I could, I concluded with: 'And now, Mr. Speaker, upon this bill I move the previous question.' Newell looked confused, and I was satisfied that he had no conception of what I meant; but he rallied, and, looking wise and severe (I have since seen presiding officers in Washington do the same thing) said: 'Sit down, sir! Resume your seat! Do you intend to trifle with the Chair! When you know that we passed the previous question two weeks ago? It was the first thing we done!' I got a vote, however, before the return of the 'horse billiard' players, and Polk County has a legal existence today, notwithstanding the adverse ruling upon a question of parliamentary usage."

This probably was the library mentioned by Thornton in *Oregon and California in 1848* when he gave as one of the attractions of Oregon City "a public library containing three hundred well-selected volumes."

The Pioneer Lyceum and Literary Club formed in the winter of 1842-3 at Willamette Falls gave opportunity for its members to meet for discussion of topics of general interest.

### *Sunday School Libraries*

The early missionaries soon developed a system of Sunday School libraries which helped in a way to meet the constant demand for books. Walling's *Illustrated History of Lane County* says of the First Baptist Church of Eugene:

"On April 16, 1864, we have the first mention of a Sabbath School when a committee was appointed to solicit subscriptions for the purpose of forming a library."

The "Letters of the Reverend William M. Roberts, Third Superintendent of the Oregon Missions" frequently mention this subject. March 18, 1848, he wrote from Oregon City to the Rev. D. P. Kidder, Corresponding Secretary of the Sunday School Union of the Methodist Episcopal Church, as follows:

"At this time there are but two Sabbath schools really organised in this country under the care of our Church. One at this city with one Sup. 8 Teach. 48 Scholars & 150 volumes in the Library . . . There were a few vol. of Books in the Library when we arrived in the country but those reported above are the set furnished by the kindness of the board in the autumn of 1846. The



other school is at Salem and is held in the Oregon Institute. It has 2 Superintendents, 10 Teach., 40 Scholars, and upwards of 159 volumes in the Library . . . The donation of Books which we brought to this country were I think judiciously selected and will be of great advantage . . . The 10 sets of Library Books placed in my hands I have disposed of as follows, Sabbath School at San Francisco uper [sic] California, 1 Set of 150 vols. another at this place in the School and another at the school at Salem. It is possible that we may break one or two of the sets for the sake of getting Books to place in the hands of Children in various parts of the country where as yet we can have no school. The rest will be reserved for new schools as they may be formed in various parts of the country."

A year later, February 14, 1849, he again wrote to the Corresponding Secretary:

"Many persons enquire of us for books. They hear of the libraries of the A. T. Soc. [American Tract Society] and of the Harper & C and they wish to send money by us to buy some of these Libraries. Now we tell them we have libraries and books of the very best kind, and cheap too and moreover that we will have some brought out to this country as soon as possible."

#### *Library Association of Portland*

The Library Association of Portland was organized, in 1864, largely through the efforts of L. H. Wakefield. Seeing the need of such an organization, Mr. Wakefield began a canvass for subscriptions, and having secured \$2,500.00 in a few days, a call was issued for a meeting of the subscribers. This meeting was held in the U. S. District Courtroom January 12, 1864, and Honorable Matthew P. Deady was made president of the temporary organization. It was decided to call the organization the Mercantile Library Association; but this was later changed to the Library Association of Portland. On February 20, another meeting was held, and directors chosen, who at a meeting on March 3 elected W. S. Ladd, president, and William Strong vice-president. Dues were placed at \$3.00 a quarter and there was an initiation fee of \$5.00 which was reduced to \$2.00 in 1867 and abolished in 1869.

Having secured rooms on the second floor of the Stark building and having money available for equipment, the officers ordered a long list of periodicals and forwarded \$2,000.00 to Judge Nelson and J. A. Hatt of New York City for the purchase of books.

They selected 1400 volumes and forwarded them by way of the Isthmus. They arrived in November and were placed on the shelves by Harvey W. Scott, the first librarian, who served until the following May when he resigned to begin his connection of many years with the *Oregonian*.

In 1869, through the generosity of Mr. Ladd and Mr. Tilton the association was able to occupy rooms over the bank at the Southwest corner of First and Stark streets, and through renewals of the offer continued to occupy the same quarters, free of rent, until June 1893, a gift of great importance to a struggling institution.

Judge Deady early suggested a plan for the sale of forty or more perpetual memberships to be sold at \$250.00 apiece and succeeded in procuring signatures of 101 subscribers and in raising a fund of \$25,250.00.

The early history of the Association was filled with financial difficulties. At the end of the first year, it owed for current expenses \$684.25, but through special effort most of this was raised between the end of the year and the first of March. The membership increased gradually but it was not unusual for members to give their names but never pay any money.

By 1867, the Association owned about 2,000 volumes, many of them public documents, the gifts of Oregon's representatives in Congress. An inventory taken February 22, 1867, showed sixty or seventy volumes missing, probably stolen.

The report for 1869 stated that through an arrangement with the Council, the librarian was about to assume the duties of meteorological observer for the city, for which he was to receive \$15.00 a month. The reports of the librarian for 1870 and 1874 also contain his report as meteorological observer and give the readings of the barometer, and the records of snow, rain and temperature for the year. Judge Deady thought it extremely important to keep and publish an authentic weather record of our "wholesome, temperate, and agreeable climate".

#### *Pacific University, Forest Grove*

One of the most interesting of the early libraries is that of Pacific University at Forest Grove. In 1852, when Sidney Harper Marsh was offered the presidency of the new institution, he was given a year in which to make special preparation for his work and gather books for the library. The library had been

started before his arrival in Oregon, and when the charter was granted giving full collegiate privileges to "Tualatin Academy and Pacific University", one thousand volumes were in the library, the result of the efforts of Dr. Atkinson, who had been sent out by the Home Missionary Society of the Congregational Church. The first book, a *History of Harvard College*, was given in 1859 by Rev. C. S. Damon, seaman's chaplain at Hawaii.

The *Souvenir Bulletin, Articles Exhibited by Pacific University at the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, 1909* has this to say of their valuable collection:

"Many authors gave of their works, Longfellow, Rufus Choate, Edward Everett Hale. The most interesting collection came from the family of Rev. Jedidiah Morse, for thirty years a leader in geographical knowledge, who gave his extensive collection of works of geography and travels. From this family came Ptolemy's *Universal Geography* printed in 1542, and for the physical laboratory the sounder, receiver and key used by S. F. B. Morse in developing the electric telegraph."

This library also contained important works from the printing press of the Oregon Mission, and some of the choice works of the early printers—Aldus, Elzevir, and Plantin.

#### *Albany College*

The Library of Albany College was founded at the annual meeting held on January 24, 1868. Books belonging to the Albany Library and Literary Institute were donated, and a room in the College building chosen as a library, which was to be free to all the donors, members of the Institute. By the time the decennial census was taken in 1870, Albany was able to report 1,000 volumes in its college library.

#### *Corvallis*

Articles of incorporation for the Corvallis Library Association were filed in the office of the County Clerk, December 24, 1872. The articles state the Association "shall endure fifty years" and that its purpose and object "is to purchase and possess a library of a miscellaneous character for general reading on all subjects of a literary, scientific and entertaining description, to have and possess a room suitable for the same." The capital stock was five thousand dollars gold coin and the shares were "fifty dollars gold coin." How long this Association lasted is not known—the

Articles of Incorporation gave fifty years as the duration of the corporation but some time before 1880, probably in the late 1870's the books were given to the Adelpian Literary Society of Corvallis College, which in 1885 became the Oregon Agricultural College.

The present Corvallis Public Library is an outgrowth of the work of the "Coffee-Club" which was started some years later.

### *University of Oregon*

When the University of Oregon opened in 1876, it was entirely without library facilities, but during the second year students of the institution through their two literary societies purchased a collection of about 500 volumes from the Eugene Library Association, and arranged to care for them. The Eugene Library Association had been formed on February 7, 1874, and opened its doors to the public April 23 of the same year. While it had an auspicious start, it lasted only a short time.

The University collection increased very slowly and was inadequate to meet the needs of the school. Finally Henry Villard came to the rescue and his offer of help is given in a letter to the Board of Regents, dated October 25, 1881, and printed in Walling's *Illustrated History of Lane County* in which Mr. Villard states:

"2nd. That I will give one thousand dollars for the foundation of a Library for the University. I will personally undertake to have the most suitable works of references selected by competent experts."

In 1883, Mr. Villard gave property valued at \$50,000 to constitute a perpetual endowment fund for the University and stipulated that from the annual income not less than four hundred dollars was to be expended regularly for building up the library. For eighteen years this four hundred dollars was the main source of funds as the State made no appropriation.

### *Territorial Library*

Oregonians early realized the importance of a collection of books for official use. The minutes of the public meeting of the inhabitants of Oregon Territory held on July 5th, 1843, printed in the *Oregon Archives*, contains the following, "Moved and carried, to purchase several law books, of Jas. O'Neill, to be the property of this community" but the amount paid and the titles of the books are not given.



In the enabling act of August 14, 1848, Congress appropriated \$5,000 for a library to be maintained at the seat of government. J. Quinn Thornton in his memorial to Congress, writes:

"Your memorialist prays that the sum of ten thousand dollars may be appropriated, to be expended in the purchase of a library, to be kept at the seat of government for the use of the governor, secretary, legislature, judges, marshal, district attorney, and such other persons, and under such regulations as may be prescribed by law. The fact that the inhabitable part of the Territory is so remote from the seat of the national government, and that access cannot be had to any books or libraries, is a circumstance rendering it expedient to make this appropriation much larger than might, under other circumstances, be necessary. The necessary books of reports in the departments of law alone would cost a large sum, to say nothing of books upon the science of government, general politics, history, education, agriculture, horticulture, &c."

Samuel Royal Thurston, first delegate to Congress from Oregon Territory, was much interested in the library and in the diary kept while in Washington frequently mentions the documents which he has secured for the Territorial Library—charts of the battlefields in Mexico, patent reports, publications of the Wilkes Exploring Expedition, narrative and scientific works of the Coast Survey being among the publications. His diary for June 24, 1850, has the following item: "Also wrote a letter to J. McBride suggesting to him the idea of circulating libraries in Oregon. Wrote to Linn City on the same subject."

F. G. Young in his "Financial History of Oregon" which appeared in the *Oregon Historical Society Quarterly*, 1907, gives the following account of the money appropriated:

"The five-thousand dollar appropriation for a territorial library incorporated in the act organizing the Territory was quite naturally placed at the command of the newly appointed governors as soon as they qualified, and while yet in the East, so that they could more conveniently make suitable purchases of books. The record of the disbursement of this library fund is found in communications by Governors Lane and Gaines, respectively, in response to resolutions by the Territorial House of Representatives enquiring as to what disposition had been made of this money.

"On July 26, 1849, Governor Lane, in reply to the request made on the fifth day of the first session of the first House, said, 'that books to the amount of two thousand dollars have been purchased in New York, and shipped for Oregon last winter, and

that the balance of the appropriation will be applied, as provided by law of Congress.' On December 8, 1852, Governor Gaines had a similar inquiry made of him to which he responded as follows:

"I received from the treasury of the United States \$3,000.00, which was [in]vested in books and maps, and placed in a room fitted up for the purpose in Oregon City, and delivered nearly two years since to Mr. J. Turner, the librarian elected by the Legislative Assembly, together with a catalogue of the entire purchase, since which time, I have exercised no control whatever over the library.' A voucher from the comptroller of the Treasury accompanied this statement.

"In the quarrel between Gov. Gaines and the territorial legislature over the validity of the act of the latter locating the seat of government, the penitentiary, and the territorial university, the retention of the library at Oregon City—the original seat of government—it made a subject of complaint by the legislature in its memorial to Congress in December 1851. In this memorial the legislature asked for permission for themselves to elect their Governor, Secretary and judges."

The *Biennial Report of the Oregon State Library for 1880* contains a brief history of the library and its librarians, who usually were students using this means of paying their expenses while studying law. Several of these later became prominent in the State. The first Librarian was Aaron E. Wait, afterwards Chief Justice of Oregon, who served two years. Others who held the position for terms, usually brief, were James D. Turner, Ludlow Rector, Chester N. Terry, Milton Shannon, F. S. Hoyt and B. F. Bonham during territorial times, and J. C. Peebles, Geo. J. Ryan, and S. C. Simpson, brother of Sam Simpson, during the early days of statehood.

The Territorial Library originally was located at Oregon City, then the seat of government, but the Legislative Assembly of 1851-52 ordered the librarian to move the library from Oregon City to Salem, on or before January 1, 1852. That this was not done before this date is shown in the report of the librarian for 1852, which contains a letter from Adams & Co., dated September 27, 1852, stating that they had been holding in their office for two months a shipment of books for the Territorial Library which had been delivered to the librarian at Oregon City who refused to pay the freight charges amounting to \$39.00.

The *Report of the Librarian for 1854* shows "1,735 volumes of miscellaneous and law books in the library." In 1855, between

Christmas and New Year, the capitol building was burned and most of the library destroyed, the only books saved being the few in circulation. The Legislature which convened in the fall of 1856 passed a joint memorial asking Congress for an appropriation of \$20,000 but Congress granted only \$500.

After the first the small collection of books which grew very slowly was moved from one place to another, occupying in turn the Old Court House, the Rector House, the Opera House and the Grover Building, until in 1878 it was removed to the new capital building.

During Territorial days Congress had complete control of the library. A salary of \$250.00 a year was paid until 1855, when it was raised to \$500.00 but when Oregon had been admitted to statehood and the State Legislature assumed control, the salary was fixed at \$150.00 a year. From the fire in 1855 until 1880, only \$4,100 had been appropriated for the purchase of books, but the librarian in 1880 reported 9,283 volumes in the library, mostly law books and public documents, with the *American Encyclopedia*, *Zells Encyclopedia* and the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. By 1878 it had assumed such importance that there were twenty-two applicants for the position of librarian.

The "Report of the Librarian and a Catalogue of the Territorial Library" are published as appendices to the *Journals of the Legislature* in 1852-54. It is interesting to note the character of the books, and to see that from the beginning it was thought necessary to have in the State a good collection of books of various subjects. Some of the titles contained in the catalogue for 1852 in addition to the law texts and reports, are Goldsmith's *Works*, *U.S. Dispensatory*, *Vicar of Wakefield*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Schiller's Thirty Year's War*, Darwin's *Voyages*, *American Ornithology*, *Geography of the Heavens* and *American Architect*. The catalogue for 1854 contains several books on medicine, several astronomies, the *American Rifle*, by Chapman, *Manual of Practical Assaying*, *Angler's Guide*, *Angler Complete*, by Walton, *Bible and Gipsies in Spain*, by Barrow [Borrow], *Birds of America* (105 pamphlets), *Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture*, many books of poems, the works of Scott and Cooper, and some other fiction—on the whole a well selected general library.

During the early days of Statehood, the librarians usually emphasized the need of larger and more regular appropriations to fill the many gaps in the collection. In 1872, the Librarian S. C. Simpson, in closing his report says:

"In conclusion, permit me to suggest that the State Library is deserving of more attention at the hands of the Legislature than it has yet received. The foundation of a good Library ought to be one of the first concerns of a young state. . . . But Oregon hasn't even the nucleus of such a Library. This is, in fact, one of the most constantly and consistently neglected institutions of the State. . . . It is inferior to the library of many a respectable village in the Eastern States. . . . There is no reason in the world why Oregon should occupy the bad eminence of having the poorest Library of any State in the Union. The Library has no value at all except as a Law Library. Yet even that department is scantily furnished. . . . There are only three full sets of Reports in it—those of New York, Mass. & Ky." Mr. Simpson then suggested that regular biennial appropriations be made and after the Law Library had been adequately equipped that "the appropriation might then be continued and applied to the purchase of books for a miscellaneous department."

In reviewing this history of the early State and Territorial Libraries, it is most interesting to note the emphasis that, from the start, has been placed on the desirability of a circulating library for the people of the State: in 1843, through the purchase of books from Jas. O'Neill; in 1848, by Thornton in his memorial to Congress; in 1850, by Thurston in his letter to J. McBride; by those who selected the books for the Territorial Library, and by the librarians who heard the call from the people and did their best to bring it to the attention of the Legislature.

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