

The Washington Historical Quarterly

LIBRARIES OF THE NORTHWEST

Everyone who is interested in the history of the Pacific Northwest is aware of the unselfish work and the indispensable cooperation of the librarians. In these swift years of our complex civilization, the people in general have learned to lean with child-like confidence upon the public libraries and their trained staffs. Even a more intensive form of dependence has evolved among students and writers of history, especially in the American area known as the Pacific Northwest.

This condition as a whole has been quickened and, perhaps, completely developed within the half-century of life of the American Library Association. There were great public libraries, of course, before that Association was called into being at the American Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, 1876, and there were also many significant private libraries. Some of the most important changes wrought since the organization of the Association are rather easily discerned. In the first place, the librarians themselves awakened to the fact that their work was worthy of being classed as a profession. Training schools were established and, although they probably do not yet realize it, they became one of the first American groups to lend a glory to the slogan of "service" now so dominant in business and professional circles. Many improvements were also devised for the better classification, shelving and cataloguing of books, pamphlets and manuscripts. Precious time was saved for helper and user. People who could benefit by books and reading, it was thought, should not be handicapped by reasons of residence. Smaller communities were aided in organizing libraries and finally rural districts were served. The wholesomeness of the growth has been admirable from whatever angle it be viewed. Who would dare to complain about the consistent modesty of the profession! What group can match its alertness to help or its watchfulness to eliminate waste in time, money or materials! It ought not to surprise us to observe the streams of public

funds and the millions of surplus wealth attracted to this constructive element of American life.

While the Pacific Northwest was one of the latest portions of North America to be populated and developed, it passed through the same experiences of log-cabin, rude trail and savage conflict. The greatest difference from experiences on the Atlantic shores is the rapidity with which obstacles were overcome. A great momentum of progress had been acquired. That momentum was revealed by the far-western pioneer in his every act, in the implements he brought or soon acquired, in his quick efforts for ships, wagon roads and railroads, in his immediate ambition for towns, newspapers, schools, churches and libraries.

The pioneer efforts to secure libraries and reading rooms comprise one of the fascinating chapters of Pacific Northwestern history. Its compilation has remained for the professional librarians. Following the fine spirit of their colleagues in other regions of North America, they have been maintaining the Pacific Northwest Library Association. This organization held its Seventeenth Annual Conference at Big Four, near Everett, Washington, on June 14-17, 1926. At that meeting three historical papers were read as follows: "Early Library Development in Washington," by Charles W. Smith, Associate Librarian of the University of Washington; "Some Early Libraries of Oregon," by Mirpah G. Blair, of the Oregon State Library, Salem, Oregon; "The Library Movement in British Columbia," by J. Forsyth, Librarian and Archivist of the Provincial Library, Victoria, British Columbia. It is a privilege to publish in full these three papers in the *Washington Historical Quarterly* as a symposium on an important phase of Pacific Northwestern history.

Readers of these papers will be pleased with the aggregate of public spirit shown by the pioneers in their struggling villages and towns.

This brief tribute to the librarians of the Pacific Northwest should be prolonged sufficiently to justify a statement in the opening paragraph. In the early days, before the arrival of the professional librarians, students and writers of local history had to depend upon the memories of surviving pioneers and upon the private libraries of books, newspapers, manuscripts and diaries. Many of the pioneers have passed away and the private libraries have likewise almost entirely ceased to exist. These numerous collections have been merged, by gift or purchase, into the public or in-

stitutional libraries where they are scrupulously cared for and scientifically managed by the professional librarians. The change from the older condition was pointedly manifested by the publication of a remarkable working-tool for the Northwestern historian. Reference is here made to a check-list called *Pacific Northwest Americana*, published (as a second and enlarged edition) in New York by The H. W. Wilson Company in 1921. The work was sponsored by the Pacific Northwest Library Association. Fifteen of the most important libraries participated and three others also furnished some of the items. Four thousand, five hundred and one items are listed with full bibliographical information and giving the location of each item. In this undertaking the Pacific Northwest is interpreted as all of that area north of California and between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. These libraries cooperate with each other. In this way the students and historians of the Pacific Northwest are served with books and documents more adequately than is probably the case in any other portion of North America. One of the historians desires here to lift his voice in praise of the devoted service of those unselfish librarians.

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