

## The Snows of Yesteryear

*Based on information found in institutional histories, this paper calls attention to rules, regulations, and general conditions prevailing in American academic libraries of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and attempts to examine these rules, regulations, and general conditions in terms of how they affected students, faculty, and librarians. The article also touches upon library collections of that period.*

TODAY WHILE some libraries are rushing headlong into the twentieth century, and others are trying to bypass it in order to reach the year 2000 in 1969, it can be somewhat tantalizing, if not amusing, to look back on the years 1783-1912 for an appreciation of the great or little distance we have traveled since.

A library's rules and regulations and occasional statement of philosophy may mirror a period, an age, or they may merely be a reflection of the manner in which a particular library is being managed. At any rate, as found in various institutional histories, they may make one understand why evolution is not necessarily the answer to all problems.

At Brown University in 1783 freshmen were not permitted the use of the library. The other classes could use it; freshmen, however, could not. What determined the loan period of that time? Not demand but size of the book. Folios circulated for four weeks; quartos, three weeks; octavos, two weeks; and duodecimos, one week.<sup>1</sup> Students came to

the library four at a time when sent for by the librarian, and they could not enter the library beyond the librarian's table on the penalty of three pence for every offense.<sup>2</sup> The fine evidently failed to place the library in a high income bracket for in 1788 the college found it necessary to raise the charge to students for the use of the library from six to twelve shillings a year.<sup>3</sup> Still the appropriation to the library several years later for the purchase, repair, and binding of books decreased from \$200 to \$100 per annum.<sup>4</sup>

In 1797 the library committee at Brown issued a report with a rather familiar complaint. Some books had been kept out for several years although the persons keeping them had been notified. The chief offenders? A professor and a fellow. Another report issued at about the same time discussed the problem of book injury by worms.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps if those professors had not kept those folios out for years, the worms would have had to look elsewhere for their repast.

<sup>1</sup> Reuben Aldridge Guild, *Early History of Brown University, Including the Life, Times, and Correspondence of President Manning, 1756-1791* (Providence: Snow & Farnham, 1897), p. 358.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 412.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Cochrane Bronson, *The History of Brown University, 1764-1914* (Providence: The University, 1914), p. 111.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

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If at Brown books served as nourishment to worms, at the University of North Carolina around 1820 there were so few works which undergraduates cared to read that it was a matter of pride for the students to borrow them and then use them as deadfalls for the swarming mice. The tall tomes of St. Augustine apparently were as efficacious in slaughtering the troublesome rodents as was their great author in crushing the religious heresies of his day.<sup>6</sup>

Farther north, at the University of Virginia, according to regulations drafted in 1825, a student who defaced a volume only moderately was required to pay its full value; when he damaged it seriously, double its value; and when he lost it, three times its value.<sup>7</sup> The librarian at Virginia, W. H. Brockenbrough, was compelled to resign in 1835 not because he promoted the use of the library in the above manner but because, among other things, he admitted students into the library without ticket and winked at their taking down freely any volume that appealed to their curiosity.<sup>8</sup> The usual procedure had been for students to drop their petitions for books into a box placed outside of the library door and then, when the library opened, to wait for them to be handed out like loaves of charity through the iron bars of a monastery. If a student ever did succeed in getting through the door, he was not permitted to take down a book without the written consent of the librarian.<sup>9</sup> This procedure was simple, however, compared with the one in force at the College of the City of New York where as late as 1853 students desiring books had to fill out a detailed form and

get it countersigned by at least three members of the faculty! Even then the student could borrow only one book at a time.<sup>10</sup>

In 1871 at the University of Wisconsin the library was open for half-an-hour beginning at two o'clock on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. But gentlemen only could use the library on two of these days and ladies only on the other two.<sup>11</sup> Students rebelled at the regulation forbidding a reader to examine any book unless it was handed to him by the attendant in charge. The *University Press* noted that the same rule prevailed at the Milwaukee House of Correction.<sup>12</sup>

The faculty of the University of Pittsburgh, at its weekly meeting on March 23, 1877, decided to clamp down on the hippies of the day by decreeing that in the library there should be

- I No loud talking
- II No unnecessary whispering
- III No leaning back in chairs
- IV No spitting of tobacco juice
- V No studying except by librarians

The strange fifth rule meant that only the students who were acting as librarians were permitted to study in the room where the books were arranged on shelves; other students had to take their books elsewhere.<sup>13</sup>

Under the system that prevailed at the College of the City of New York in 1884 few students read in the library itself. There were only three long tables available for readers. Places at these tables were usually occupied by "shivering or insouciant" delinquents who had been sent for some act of disorder or

<sup>6</sup> Kemp P. Battle, *History of the University of North Carolina from Its Beginning to the Death of President Swain, 1789-1868* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1907), p. 406.

<sup>7</sup> Philip Alexander Bruce, *History of the University of Virginia, 1819-1919* (New York: Macmillan, 1920-1922), II, 201.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>10</sup> S. Willis Rudy, *The College of the City of New York, a History 1847-1947* (New York: City College Press, 1949), p. 49.

<sup>11</sup> Merle Curti, *The University of Wisconsin, 1848-1925* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1949), p. 349.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.

<sup>13</sup> Agnes Lynch Starrett, *Through One Hundred and Fifty Years, the University of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1937), p. 155.

insubordination, and who, on presenting the written charges against themselves at the Office, had been ordered to "go right out there and sit in the Library."<sup>14</sup>

At the same institution the librarian's fervor to protect the students' morals provoked a sharp protest from the college newspaper. Certain standard works of supposedly questionable content, such as Fielding, Smollett, and Boccaccio, were removed from the shelves "on account of their pretended immorality." *The Collegian* conceded in its editorial column that it might be proper for the faculty to supervise carefully the reading of members of the freshman class, but it objected strenuously to any attempt to censor the reading of juniors and seniors.<sup>15</sup> Where did that leave the sophomores, we may wonder?

*The Daily Cardinal* of the University of Wisconsin testified that on the morning of September 20, 1892, between nine and ten, every available seat in the reading room was taken and a good many students were standing up to read. Patrons of the library also grumbled about the disturbing noises from the adjoining hall, used for military drill. The executive committee of the Board of Regents, having "carefully investigated" the complaint, declared that they could not believe readers were seriously inconvenienced by the noise and that, in any case, military instruction was too important an affair to be "crippled."<sup>16</sup>

Georgetown University was no exception to the then prevailing general rule of turning the library into a major obstacle course for the student. According to Durkin, in the middle 1890s it was almost as difficult for a student to borrow a book as for him to borrow the Saint Jerome Bible.<sup>17</sup> "Philosophers"

were allowed in the library on Wednesday and Saturday only. Students of the other classes were not allowed to enter the library at all. They had to obtain their books through their teachers.<sup>18</sup>

At the University of Arkansas, as late as 1912, a student was allowed to take out but one book at a time.<sup>19</sup>

It is not surprising therefore that Durkin would declare that:

Logically, the practical exclusion of the . . . student from a free and close contact with books other than the assigned ones should have made the results of his training incomplete and inefficient. By a narrow regimentation of his reading, he was deprived of one of the most valuable experiences of a scholar—the formation of an intimate acquaintance with as much as possible of the written records of the best minds. He was never given an opportunity . . . to form his independent taste in reading. Not only was he not taught the right methods of using a library, most of the time the library was, for him, out of bounds.<sup>20</sup>

If the concept of the library as an intellectual workshop had not yet won its way into the academic world of the nineteenth century, how did the librarian and his collection fare?

A 1783 Brown University regulation required the librarian to "enter down" in the receipt the title and size of the book taken out and the time when it was taken and returned. Furthermore, he was expected to keep the room neat and clean.<sup>21</sup>

The trustees of the University of Georgia, realizing that one of the best ways of promoting knowledge was through a library, appropriated \$1,000 for books and scientific apparatus in 1800 and sent a professor of mathemat-

<sup>14</sup> Rudy, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>16</sup> Curti, *op. cit.*, p. 654.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph T. Durkin, *Georgetown University: the Middle Years, 1840-1900* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1963), p. 153.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>19</sup> Harrison Hale, *University of Arkansas, 1871-1948* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Alumni Association, 1948), p. 207.

<sup>20</sup> Durkin, *op. cit.*, p. 155-156.

<sup>21</sup> Gould, *op. cit.*, p. 358.



ics on a purchasing trip to London. The professor, however, bought more apparatus than books, so that the library was forced in 1806 to resort to a lottery to raise \$3,000 for books.<sup>22</sup>

Professor of moral philosophy and metaphysics, Calvin Park of Brown, as early as 1815 had a very progressive view of the function and needs of a college library. "A Library, not to be retrograde, must keep pace with the progress of science and of other similar institutions. The college Library ought therefore to have an annual appropriation for its regular increase."<sup>23</sup> Nineteen years later the library committee at Brown urged that it was of great importance that books be selected in conformity with some approved plan, so that the "Library may present a view of the progress and attainment of the human mind."<sup>24</sup>

The librarian's salary at the University of Virginia in 1815 amounted to fifty dollars; but the position had distinct fringe benefits. The incumbent was entitled to dormitory space free of rent. Furthermore, he was at liberty to use the volumes in his custody without being liable for the regular charge.<sup>25</sup> He was expected to be on hand in the library once a week, and to remain at least one hour to receive all those books returned, and to give out all those that were requested.<sup>26</sup> Wertebaker, the man who had the position in 1835, in addition to being librarian was also postmaster, secretary of the faculty, and local agent of the firm of Street & Sanxey, the Richmond stationers.<sup>27</sup>

At Amherst, the trustees in 1826 instructed the librarian, Professor Worcester, who was receiving the sum of forty

dollars a year for his services, to prepare a catalog which disclosed some lamentable weaknesses in the collection. Help arrived in 1829 from an unexpected quarter. John Trappen of Boston, a fanatical foe of tobacco and alcohol, offered the undergraduates \$500 if they would form an association pledged against the use of ardent spirits, wine, opium, and tobacco. The students formed the association but rejected the money, asserting with noble vehemence that they were not to be bribed into virtuous habits. Mr. Trappen, however, not to be outdone in magnanimity, sent the \$500 anyway.<sup>28</sup>

At Minnesota, President Falwell had the library collection moved to a room near his office and for fifteen years doubled as president and librarian.<sup>29</sup> This was quite an improvement over the first president of the University of North Carolina who kept the University Library in an upstairs bedroom of his house for twenty years, or the librarian of Columbia who resolutely fought every effort of the faculty to add a book in order to turn back half his appropriation unused.<sup>30</sup>

At the University of Mississippi in 1877, as part of an economy drive, the Board decided to require the duties of librarian to be performed by the janitor! Exactly a year later it formalized the decision through the election of the janitor-librarian. This combination remained in effect until 1882, when standards were lowered once more and the offices were again separated!<sup>31</sup>

Academic libraries of that period were

<sup>22</sup> Claude Moore Fues, *Amherst, the Story of a New England College* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1935), p. 104.

<sup>23</sup> James Gray, *The University of Minnesota, 1851-1951* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1951), p. 528.

<sup>24</sup> Morris Bishop, *A History of Cornell* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 108.

<sup>25</sup> James Allen Cabaniss, *A History of the University of Mississippi* (University: University of Mississippi Press, 1949), p. 95.

<sup>26</sup> E. Merton Coulter, *College Life in the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1951), p. 39-40.

<sup>27</sup> Bronson, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>29</sup> Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

often richer in museum pieces than in books that were actually usable. Georgetown in 1847 failed to have so much as one single novel on the shelves.<sup>32</sup> The University of Arkansas, when it opened its doors in 1872, did not even have a library.<sup>33</sup> It was sixteen months after Ohio State opened before any specific appropriation was made for its library.<sup>34</sup> Dr. Gregory, the librarian at the University of Illinois complained that nothing "was more vexatious than the Trustees' failure to keep the collection abreast of the times."<sup>35</sup> His library at Urbana toward the end of the century contained only about 20,000 volumes.<sup>36</sup>

There were men, however, who did appreciate the importance of the library. President Malcom of Bucknell, for instance, stated that "it is of great consequence that our University at Lewisburg should possess a noble library. . . . Without a respectable library, there can be no respectable College."<sup>37</sup> Beloit of the 1870s even anticipated libraries of the 1950s and 1960s with its encouragement of individual initiative in study which transformed the library—winter months excepted—into an increasingly vital element in college work.<sup>38</sup>

At the University of Kansas the inconvenience to the members of the faculty from the lack of library facilities is vividly represented in Chancellor Fraser's report dated 1873. He says:

The books needed by the students are at present furnished out of my private library. Other professors in the institution likewise give to their students the use of

books which are not to be found in the very limited and defective library belonging to the University. Without an adequate supply of good books, bearing on the subjects of textbooks, the student cannot be trained to habits and methods of critical literary and philosophical research. Narrowness, superficiality and dogmatism are almost sure to be results of the method of instruction that limits the student's knowledge of a subject to the contents of a single book.<sup>39</sup>

At Cornell the librarian reported that in 1877 the library had added only 448 volumes, of which 376 were gifts and 56 continuations, leaving 16 as the number of new books purchased within the year. In 1878 and 1879 the same story repeated itself with but slight variations in the numbers.<sup>40</sup> Still, by 1891, Cornell had what was regarded as one of the finest college library buildings in the country. It cost \$227,000 and had a stack capacity of 400,000 books but no serious toilet facilities for male readers.<sup>41</sup>

At the University of Arizona, by 1900, books and magazines could be reached only by way of sixteen-inch aisles which presented a problem to some. The reading room was a space about twenty feet square.<sup>42</sup> Four years later, fortunately, President Babcock could report that the new library had been accepted. At the dedication the dirt floors in a work room, one level of stacks, and three classrooms were politely ignored by the local press covering the event.<sup>43</sup>

The old libraries of the nineteenth century with their seemingly ludicrous rules and regulations and not so ludicrous budget problems have all but dis-

<sup>32</sup> Durkin, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>33</sup> Hale, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

<sup>34</sup> James E. Pollard, *History of Ohio State; the Story of Its First Seventy-Five Years, 1873-1948* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1952), p. 65.

<sup>35</sup> Allan Nevins, *Illinois* (New York: Oxford, 1917), p. 73.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>37</sup> J. Orin Oliphant, *The Rise of Bucknell University* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1965), p. 61.

<sup>38</sup> Edward Dwight Eaton, *Historical Sketches of Beloit College* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1928), p. 153.

<sup>39</sup> Wilson Sterling, *Quarter-Centennial History of the University of Kansas, 1866-1891* (Topeka: George W. Crane, 1891), p. 108.

<sup>40</sup> Waterman Thomas Hewett, *Cornell University, a History* (New York: University Publishing Society, 1905), p. 364.

<sup>41</sup> Bishop, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

<sup>42</sup> Douglas D. Martin, *The Lamp in the Desert; the Story of the University of Arizona* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1960), p. 72.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

appeared. Our conscious link to the past, if not entirely submerged, seems at least to be very, very weak. Librarians are acutely aware of the needs of the present, and less acutely aware perhaps of the needs of the future. They may be rightly proud of how far they have come

in so little time. Yet, somehow the question must occur whether or not in their present glory they may be as blind to the ludicrous aspects of some of their policies and procedures, rules and regulations as colleagues of the last century were to theirs. ■■

