

# 1%, North Carolina Libraries in the Nineteenth Century

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North Carolina's intellectual pretensions are indeed humble. Nowhere is that more apparent than in the sector of public knowledge. It is observed in the state's overall library development, which continues to be halting in character despite the appearance for the last seventy years of that progressive giant, Louis Round Wilson. That was the case a hundred years ago before Wilson. It is the situation now. Unfortunately the Tar Heel claim to humility seems to erode on a scale discomfitingly equal to that of the sands on the state's Outer Banks.

From the first recorded instance of a library in North Carolina at Bath in 1709, though there were some private libraries in the state during the eighteenth century, nothing of consequence occurred in the area of book collections until the opening of the University of North Carolina in 1795. The library was intended to form an essential part of the University, but it grew slowly and as late as 1886 the two literary societies, the Dialectic and Philanthropic, had larger collections than the University Library. There were abortive attempts at forming a state historical society at the University to collect the historical manuscripts and records of the state's past in 1844 and again in the last decades of the century; however, the North Carolina His-

torical Commission, predecessor to the State Department of Archives and History, was not established until 1903 and the North Carolina Collection at Chapel Hill was created by Wilson in 1917. So the state lagged in academic, private or public agencies to maintain its archives and historical records.

In 1876 there were only two would-be university libraries in the State.<sup>1</sup> The University at Chapel Hill reported 8,394 volumes in its library and 13,813 in the

<sup>1</sup> In 1876, a banner year for the American library movement, the United States Commissioner of Education issued a report on the conditions of libraries and librarianship in the country. *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition & Management* was the cooperative work of those men, the nation's outstanding librarians, who in the same year of the study's release were influential in forming the American Library Association. The report was a remarkable document. It remains an essential record of library history and a basic source for American intellectual and social history of the nineteenth century. Unless otherwise noted the data for this examination of North Carolina libraries before 1901 is extracted from the second reprinting of the narrative and statistical sections issued by Rowman and Littlefield, *The Library Division of Littlefield, Adams & Company, Totowa, N. J., Part I* in 2 volumes, 1971. Part II of the report comprises "Cutter's Rules for a Printed Dictionary Catalog." Part I of the report was first reprinted in 1966 as Number 4 in the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library Science Monograph Series.

Most of the data on North Carolina libraries in the twentieth century is readily available in Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome's splendid single volume history of the state, *North Carolina: The History of a Southern State*, rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963).

collections of the two literary societies. Trinity College (later Duke University in Durham) had 2,400 volumes and the two college societies, Columbian and Hesperian, possessed 8,500 volumes.<sup>2</sup> The legislature was also dilatory in the capital city. In 1831 a State Library was established at Raleigh, but it too was ignored for some time without adequate public funds or interested support. Its collection consisted of law and miscellaneous works, and the bulk of its material was obtained through exchanges with other state libraries. By 1875 its collection had increased to 40,000 volumes, but it was not until 1921 that the annual state appropriation reached \$3,000. The largest of its sister institutions in the nation was that of New York with 95,000 volumes, the smallest was Montana's with 500 volumes. In number of volumes that placed it about midway in size among the forty-seven state and territorial libraries in the United States. By 1873 provisions were made for the first prison library in North Carolina at the State Penitentiary in Raleigh. It had 190 volumes in 1875 used by a reported eleven per cent of the inmates with funds amounting to \$50 provided through visitors' fees.

In 1958 Jane Bahnsen compiled a bibliography of the books contained in the University Library at Chapel Hill before 1830. It made a slender volume.<sup>3</sup> The Report of the United States Commissioner of Education in 1876 listed 1008 printed catalogs as being issued in the United States between 1732 and 1876, some of

which were quite sophisticated productions. Of that number only two were issued in North Carolina, and those were issued by the Dialectic Society of the University. The first was printed in 1821 with twenty-one pages listing 1,673 volumes. The second was released in 1835 with twenty-six pages reporting 3,060 volumes.

Aside from the University of North Carolina Library which traces its history to the charter of 1789, there were no libraries established in the state between 1775 and 1800 which were still extant in 1875, and for the period from 1800 to 1825 only the Salem Female Academy Library remained in operation in 1875 with 3,000 volumes. The number of libraries founded during the years from 1825 to 1850 reflected the general intellectual awakening taking place in that period of the state's history. There was a total of ten libraries established during the period with 61,800 volumes in their collections by 1875. They included: three academy and school libraries with 4,200 volumes in 1875; two college libraries with 7,800 volumes; two society libraries with 8,000 volumes; the one theological library in the state with 600 volumes located in Trinity's Theological Department; one social library with 1,200 volumes belonging to the Freemasons in Fayetteville; and, of course, the State Library in Raleigh with 40,000 volumes. The following twenty-five year span from 1850 to 1875 presented a smaller figure than the preceding one, but because a substantial portion of that period was taken up with the immediate and impassioned crises of war and reconstruction the general picture was not altogether a pessimistic one. There were eighteen libraries formed in that period with a total of 29,600 volumes in 1875.

In the year 1874-1875 the state had

<sup>2</sup> The societies were the centers of intellectual and social life on the nineteenth century campus. Their importance cannot be overestimated. In many respects they were the universities. In 1886 the "Di" and "Phi" endowed the University Library with their rich collections.

<sup>3</sup> Jane Cutler Bahnsen, comp., *Books in the University of North Carolina Library Before 1830*. Chapel Hill, 1958, (Typewritten).

three libraries with over 10,000 volumes. The State Library was the largest having shown a rapid increase from its reported 6,613 volumes for 1857-1858 to the more impressive 40,000 volumes for 1874-1875. The combined libraries of the University had increased at a more sedate pace from a reported 4,000 volumes in the *American Almanac* of 1836 to the figure of 22,207 in 1875. Trinity College had the third major library resource with a combined total of 10,900 volumes.

Another view of these statistics indicates that in 1875 there were thirty-one libraries in the state with a total of 117,007 volumes. At that time there were three states with library facilities surpassing a million volumes each or ten times the holdings of North Carolina's libraries. The Tar Heel total placed the state slightly below the national average of state and territorial library facilities. The state had no law, medical, scientific, historical, public, mercantile, Y.M.C.A., or Garrison libraries. As was noted previously it did have one asylum library in the State Penitentiary with 700 volumes and one theological library of 600 volumes. Both the State Penitentiary and Trinity Theological library collections were well below the national average for volumes per library collection. The State Library with its 40,000 volumes was above the national average in the size of its collection, and so was the total of the combined collections for the State's eight society libraries with 31,113 volumes. The seventeen academy and school libraries with their combined holdings of 21,500 volumes equalled the national average for volumes per library. The six college libraries with 21,094 volumes and the two social libraries with 3,700 volumes were well below the national average. The state had approx-

imately one per cent of the 3,682 libraries in the nation; however, the quotient of their combined holdings per library equalled the national average.

Perhaps more indicative of the state's intellectual condition than these unusually insipid library statistics was the silence about North Carolina by the authors of the federal Education Commissioner's report on libraries. The conclusion is obvious in either case. Nevertheless, a table listing the state's library facilities in 1875 is provided as a starting point for those interested in pursuing the history of libraries in North Carolina.

In addition to the information provided in the table, Professor James A. McRae, librarian of the Cross Creek Lodge Library in Fayetteville, declared a total income of \$35. Of that sum \$20 was spent for books, periodicals, and binding; the remaining \$15 went for incidentals. The State Librarian, Thomas R. Purnell, reported an annual expenditure of \$500 for collection building and binding. J. L. Wooster of the Library Association in Wilmington related an annual circulation of 3,000 volumes and an income of \$900. The Association expended \$150 for books, periodicals, and binding, and used \$750 for salaries and incidentals. These patently inadequate library conditions stabilized throughout the remainder of the century according to Lefler and Newsome who cite Walter Hines Page's mournful statement of 1897 that: "There are no great libraries in the state, nor do the people yet read, nor have the publishing houses yet reckoned them as patrons, except the publishers of school books."

In the same year that Page summarily condemned the populace for ignorance, however, the first tax-supported public library in the state was established at Durham. Other major cities followed suit

in the first decade of the twentieth century: Greensboro in 1902, Charlotte in 1905, and Winston-Salem in 1906. By 1922 there were thirty-five public libraries in the largest towns of the state, but total expenditures for all public libraries amounted to the meager sum of \$83,031 or 3¼ cents per capita. In 1889 the State opened its first land grant college and according to its historian the library had "about three thousand books and periodicals" before the turn of the century.<sup>4</sup>

In 1901, Louis Round Wilson assumed his duties as librarian at the University of North Carolina. One of his initial improvements was the development of a library extension program. He was also one of the first in the South to provide instruction in librarianship. A quarter of a century later, unfortunately in keeping with the condition of the South at that time, southern legislators became impressed by the concept of public education through libraries. Perhaps inspired by Wilson's popular extension program and the relatively mild success of the cities' public libraries, the state began to spend more money on libraries. The North Carolina Library Commission was formed in 1921. Wilson was appointed its chairman. Before the outbreak of World War II the state could begin to take pride in the research facilities

developing in the triangle area between the two great libraries of the State University and privately endowed Duke University. These two library facilities, joined by the essentially specialized scientific and technical library at North Carolina State University, were important factors in the development of the Research Triangle Park and in the formation of a major though informal, information retrieval center in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area. The public and college libraries in the state also underwent a transformation during the century. Initially supplied with Carnegie and other private funds and then state and federal monies, the state's libraries were to thrive during the 1950's and 1960's.

Unfortunately, prospects for the future growth of Tar Heel libraries do not appear promising at the beginning of the new decade. North Carolina libraries are already suffering from the loss of federal funds, higher costs in rising prices and salaries, the blight of tax increase fears among governors and legislators, and a more-often-than-not indifferent public. Perhaps it is an overstatement, but denied money, the first tax-supported public library in the state at Durham may well be on the road to extinction. The most optimistic expectations among head librarians do not extend beyond holding their own and with the current rapid advances in librarianship that constitutes a giant step backward.

<sup>4</sup> David A. Lockmiller, *History of the North Carolina State College of Agriculture and Engineering of the University of North Carolina 1899-1939*. Raleigh: North Carolina State College, 1939, p. 63.

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## NORTH CAROLINA LIBRARIES OF 300 VOLUMES OR MORE, 1875

Location, Name of library	Date Est.	Free/Sub- scription	Class	No. of Volumes	Avg. Annual Increase
Asheville, Asheville Female College	1795		Academy	300	
Chapel Hill, Univ. of North Carolina			College	8,394	
Chapel Hill, Dialectic Society			Society	6,908	
Chapel Hill, Philanthropic Society			Society	6,905	
Charlotte, Biddle Memorial Institute	1867		Academy	1,000	150
Clinton, Clinton Female Institute			Academy	500	
Davidson College, Davidson College	1839		College	6,000	100
Fayetteville, Cross Creek Lodge, No. 4 L.O.O.F.	1846	free	College	1,200	7
Happy Home (Connelly Springs), Rutherford Coll.	1870		Social	3,000	
Hillsboro, Horner & Graves' School	1874		College	700	
Mt. Pleasant, North Carolina College	1859	free	Academy	700	100
Mt. Pleasant, Philalaethian Society	1860		Society	400	50
Mt. Pleasant, Pi Sigma Phi Society	1860		Society	400	50
Murfreesboro, Chowan Baptist Female Institute	1848		Academy	800	
New Garden, New Garden Boarding School	1844		Academy	1,200	3
Newton, Catawba English & Classical High School	1852		Academy	1,500	
Pittsboro, Locust Hill Seminary	1860		Academy	2,000	
Raleigh, Insane Asylum of North Carolina	1868		Asylum	700	
Raleigh, Peace Institute	1872		Academy	300	
Raleigh, Raleigh Female Academy	1871		Academy	1,000	
Raleigh, Raleigh High School	1873		Academy	1,200	
Raleigh, St. Mary's School	1841		Academy	2,200	
Raleigh, Shaw University	1874		Academy	1,300	
Raleigh, State Library	1831		State	40,000	1,140
Ridicksville, Buckhorn Academy	1855		Academy	1,000	25
Salem, Salem Female Academy	1806	sub.	Academy	3,500	
Statesville, Simonon Female College			Academy	300	
Thomasville, Thomasville Female College			Academy	500	
Trinity, Trinity College	1849		College	1,800	50
Trinity, Columbian Society			Society	4,300	
Trinity, Hesperian Society			Society	4,200	
Trinity, Theological Department	1849		Theological	600	
Wake Forest, Wake Forest College, Eugelian Soc.	1835		Society	4,000	50
Wake Forest, Wake Forest College, Philomathesian Soc.	1835		Society	4,000	50
Wilmington, English and Classical School	1859		Academy	2,200	
Wilmington, Library Association	1855	sub.	Social	2,500	150
Wilson, Wilson College	1872		College	1,200	100