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LOCAL HISTORY AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

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All librarians find satisfaction in reporting a large circulation, and so they should. Equally as important as the handing of books over the desk, the majority being fiction, is the ability of the librarian to satisfy those library patrons who come seeking information of all types. This, of course, chiefly concerns the reference department, of which the local history collection is an invaluable part.

Mr. James I. Wyer, in his book, *Reference Work*, published by the American Library Association, has this to say: "Few though its books may be, there is yet one important subject of which every small library should have, and may have, whether other libraries do or not, the largest existing collection: the history of its town and region. Unless there is a live historical society in the town, it would seem to be a public library obligation to maintain with all possible zeal a local history collection. It can be built up at slight expense; the material is already in the community. The chief task is to bring it together, to arrange it attractively, and to get and to keep interested in its growth those people, found in every town, who care greatly for such a project. A collection as complete as it can be made, well kept and vigilantly enlarged, is a solid satisfaction and a proper pride for both library and community."

All the local occurrences in any given community, large or small, are of continuing interest to its citizens. Time enhances the value of both community and personal happenings. Collections of local history give careful writers the material from which they weave their worth-while stories. The life of another day can be reconstructed only from day by day occurrences of those times. Recorded history of the community fifty and a hundred years ago is indeed a treasure to those historians who cannot find material in published books. One should always remember that the happenings of today constitute the history of the future.

It is necessary that the libraries of each community collect every item of local history available in order to complete its own part in the picture. Local books, pamphlets, pictures, photographs, church and school histories, programs, bulletins, reports of public officials, handbills, and banquet menus all grow in value as time goes on. Newspapers, local, county and state, should be carefully read and articles of value clipped, sources and dates noted, and mounted on stiff paper. State magazines often have articles of great value. A biographical file is probably the most important part of a local collection. All possible material on the lives of those men and women who have made from the beginning and are now making your community what it is, should be carefully collected and filed under their names. Probably you have an outstanding writer, artist, musician or scientist in your city. In Greensboro a complete file on O. Henry is kept in a special niche

in the library. Here men and women come from all parts of the country to make use of the material when writing about the famous short-story writer.

More and more interest is being shown in family history. For this reason it is most important to keep rosters of military companies, including the present war records, marriage and death records, city directories, tombstone records and all family Bible records that you can collect. Early newspapers are priceless sources of this material. Call upon the older people of your community for historical material of all kinds, while you still have the opportunity.

For handling local history material, other than books, we have found a vertical file most practical. The newspaper articles, small pamphlets, typed material, etc., are placed in manila folders on which have been written the proper subject headings in alphabetical order. *Subject Headings for the Information File by the Newark, N. J. Public Library (Modern American Library Economy Series)*, 5th rev. ed., H. W. Wilson, 1943, has proven a valuable guide. In the Greensboro library there is one file for Greensboro and Guilford county and another for North Carolina. Four drawers contain biographical material and there is a drawer for North Carolina counties and there are two drawers for North Carolina towns.

When a librarian is able to find material for a newspaper man or woman for a feature article, together with pictures to illustrate the article, you have won a friend for the library. When you are able to furnish a city official the names and dates of office of your mayors from the town's beginning you have won another friend. When your postmaster sends you an inquiry for information about some long-ago resident your assistance in tracing that person will be much appreciated. Club women and students use the local his-

tory for preparing papers. Many strangers make inquiries at the library for information about historical places in and around the community, while numbers of service men from far-away states have used the genealogical material to trace their ancestors who were natives of North Carolina.

Just now a prominent citizen is writing a history of one of the leading churches of the city. He spends hours in the library using the newspaper articles, pamphlets, early church rosters and manuscripts which have been carefully preserved through the years. Another talented writer is preparing a history of Greensboro College, and he, too, has spent much time using our local history collection in the preparation of his book. These instances are given as examples to show the value of collecting the historical material for your city, county and state. Start now before any more of the priceless records are lost forever.