THE LIBRARY MOVEMENT IN THE SOUTH SINCE 1899*

By Anne Wallace, Librarian Carnegie Library of Atlanta, Ga.

The history of the library movement in the South, or more precisely, the history of the free public library in the southeastern states since the American Library Association meeting in Atlanta in 1899, conveys to you the scope and the limitations of this record.

To write a comprehensive history of the public library movement in the United States, the logical procedure would be to compile the history of the movement in each section. Up to this period the history of the libraries of the New England and Middle states, which for
many years past and years to come, have been and will continue to be the center of library activity, would be the history of the movement in the United States. But for the last five years the per cent. of increase of new libraries has been greatest in the Middle West and in the South. Both of these sections have equal problems and many similar ones. Vastness of territory, absence of many large cities, together with a large rural population are facts common to both. I shall watch eagerly for the history of the West. It is of the work in the South that this paper deals.

**Area and population**

The section of the United States here covered extends from Virginia to Texas, and from Kentucky to Florida—a territory larger in area than that of the New England and Middle Atlantic states put together, and no one state that is not an empire in extent. In proportion to area the population is smaller and more widely distributed. The absence of large cities which act as centers of culture and means of expediting transportation makes all work of propaganda slower and more expensive.

**Retarding influences**

In addition to the large class of illiterate whites that every section has to carry, the South is burdened with the extra tax of the heaviest negro population of the United States. Climatic conditions that make life out of doors uncomfortable for nine months of the year do not tend to develop indoor recreations which are so necessary in the frozen North. It is well also to remember that a generation is hardly a long enough period for a people to recover that material prosperity which creates the leisure which fosters culture, after having been the battlefield for two encamping armies in civil revolution.

In addition to these retarding influences the South has always preserved an English conservatism in politics, in business, in religion, and in social customs, and an aversion to paternalism in state and federal control which does, we must admit, in its centralizing of power advance the educational, as well as the material advantages, of a state or a corporation. A thorough study of these historical and sociological conditions reveals a deeper insight than the superficial observer gathers from what he regards as an alarming apathy in the development of libraries in the South. On the contrary this conservatism has resulted in a homogeneity of race and interests that makes for a public sentiment that supports liberally any institution for culture and learning, when once established. This is best evidenced in the history of the first free public library supported by the people of a southern city, in the fact that the ten per cent. basis is ignored, and the city appropriation has been more than trebled in five years.

**Conditions**

Prior to the period we are considering there were in existence in the larger cities of the South, state and institutional, subscription and memorial libraries, with and without endowment. Such collections were to be found in Richmond, Va., Louisville, Ky., Charleston, S. C., Savannah and Atlanta, Ga., Montgomery, Ala., New Orleans, La., Nashville, Tenn., Chapel Hill, N. C., and at Austin, Houston and Galveston, Tex.

In antebellum times many private libraries were to be found on plantations. These consisted chiefly of more or less valuable editions of the classics, imported from England, and some rare local histories and biographies, accounts of the Indians, and political pamphlets, but for authentic records of local happenings such as can be found in almost every New England township there were none, partly because the Southern people are given to oral and traditional legend rather than to note taking and record making. What there was of records has fared badly in the fires of revolutionary and civil wars, and to-day the volumes on Southern Americana are scarce. Of what books remained in the South, the enterprising second-hand bookman has bought up the greater portions and sold them to Northern libraries, whose librarians have seen them cataloged and knew them to be valuable at any price. The best collection to-day of Southern Americana is to be found in the British Museum and in English state papers.

**Pioneer work**

The pioneer work, then, was in creating a public sentiment that would demand and support a free public library. The amount of
missionary work that had to be done before one library could be established seems incredible, now that the movement is well started. Unfortunately the public library in the South was not coincident with the public school, which antedated the library movement some twenty-five years. The same kind of advance work in preparing the public mind for the new system had to be done. The press, the women's clubs, and individual effort were employed to this purpose.

To the trustees of the Young Men's Library Association of Atlanta too much credit cannot be given for their policy of preparing the way for the free public library to take the place of the old subscription or club library, and to their prompt and unselfish efforts to promote and consolidate library interests in Atlanta.

In connection with this effort must be mentioned the "congress of women librarians" held at the woman's building of the Cotton States and International Exposition in 1895, which was one of the various congresses employed to advance educational ideas, and which resulted in the organization of the women's club movement in the South, a factor which has always been useful in the development of library work.

The program and arrangement for this Library Congress were placed in the hands of the librarian of the Young Men's Library Association. The success of that program was and is still one of the mysteries. A glance at the program shows subjects that are to-day being used on programs of state meetings in new fields. These subjects were presented by such well-known library workers as the late Hannah P. James, Alice B. Kroeger, Nina E. Browne, and Miss Mary E. Sargent. Mr. R. R. Bowker and Mr. and Mrs. Henry J. Carr attended the meeting as a kind of honorary escort. The audience was not such a credit as the program. It consisted of myself and the librarian of the Young Men's Library Association of Mobile, who was unfortunately deaf, and who had brought her fourteen-year-old nephew to report the meeting to her, and that ever-shifting crowd of sightseers who attend exposition conferences, and who promptly leave the room when the program begins.

Nevertheless the printed report of the "con-

gress" was the initial step in pioneer library work in Atlanta. It brought the needs of the section to the American Library Association, and it brought the American Library Association to Atlanta in 1899—this in itself acting as a great stimulus to the pioneer workers.

The free public library as a municipal property in the South dates from the acceptance of Mr. Carnegie's first gift to the South in 1899. At this time the ten per cent. basis of support had not been formulated. Pittsburgh, Allegheny, and Washington, D. C., had already received Carnegie buildings, but each was on a separate condition. His gift to Atlanta of $100,000 was subsequently raised to $145,000, and only $5000 per annum was required of the city. As up to this time no state library law was in existence, the city charter had to be amended, the only other case on the statute books being the Act to incorporate the Savannah Library Society, Nov. 20, 1841. (This Act has never been repealed, but the society was incorporated with the Georgia Historical Society in 1847, and assumed the latter title.)

It was not until other cities were ready to establish libraries that the Georgia library law was enacted (1901). In this state it was impossible to secure a direct tax for library support without calling a convention to amend the constitution. The code of Georgia to-day states, in concise English, that taxation shall be permitted for the "rudiments of an English education only." This is the reason the present Georgia law was based on the direct grant of the Massachusetts law, rather than on the more satisfactory direct tax in use in many of the Western states.

It has been the history of the movement in the South that after it was demonstrated that Atlanta was operating a free public library other cities followed her example and established libraries with and without city charter amendments. None waited for the passage of a state law. The Alabama and North Carolina laws are now under consideration, and both states are, and have been for some years, enjoying free public libraries.

The force of example was never more keenly employed. While the Atlanta library was in process of erection, the building committee of the Nashville (Tenn.) library trustees visited Atlanta and were so much pleased
that they chose the same architect. The Montgomery, Alabama, library came next, and Charlotte, N. C., and Chattanooga, Tennessee, followed in quick succession, and now the number of free libraries is increasing while you wait. The progress in Texas was at its height about this period, but as that state is too distant to co-operate with the Southeastern Atlantic states we will have to depend entirely upon the report of the state representative. In this connection it might be stated that Texas might be grouped with the Southwestern states, which have already shown a rapid development and should receive the attention of the A. L. A., as even this Asheville meeting is still very distant from Texas.

Agencies

In library progress in the South as elsewhere the same agencies for advancement have been employed. In addition to the individual enthusiast, and the well-organized city library, which always lend aid to its less prosperous neighbors, the work is being advanced by the state library associations, library commissions, and, lastly, a well-equipped technical library school. In this connection might also be mentioned the newly created library department of the Southern Educational Association.

State associations

With the establishment of a free public library on a modern basis in our midst, with the interest of neighboring cities, not all in one state, it was the natural result that cooperation should be desired. The Georgia Library Association had been organized at the old Young Men's Library Association building in Atlanta in May, 1897. Other state associations were organized in quick succession; Texas organized in 1901, Florida in 1901, Tennessee in 1902, Alabama in 1904, North Carolina in 1904, Virginia in 1905, Kentucky will organize in June, 1907. In each of these states the same difficulties presented themselves, and so small was the strictly library following that it was deemed best to call in all allied interests, the most natural allies being the club women and the educational institutions. Trustees of city libraries have proved good friends, often giving the time of the local librarian and personally contributing to the social expenses of the gatherings.

In each Southern state endeavoring to marshall its library interests into co-operation were met the same difficulties. The same conditions prevailed, great area, small cities, poorly paid librarians, lack of assistants to substitute during absence of librarians; the same agencies were employed, the press and the efforts of the individual worker trying to spread himself over too much space.

Interstate meeting

Having to watch these struggles and having noticed an apathy at the second and third meeting of the various state associations, due to the work falling on the same few each year, it was decided to hold an inter-state meeting of Southern librarians in Atlanta in December, 1905, just ten years after the first "congress of women librarians," held in connection with the Cotton States and International Exposition of 1895. The result was gratifying in the extreme, twelve states being represented by active library workers, in fact every Southern state, with the exception of Texas. This meeting did much to unify Southern library interests, and for the first time brought together representatives of all the state associations (except Texas). Although it was deemed best not to organize a Southern association, it was the opinion of each present that inter-state meetings at intervals would be beneficial, in the South as in other sections, the state and national associations being the only organizations necessary.

Library commissions

So far the work of library development in the South has been confined to the cities and towns. This growth with the town as the unit of expansion was rather from the nature of the Carnegie gift than from purpose. It would be preferable to have the county the territory instead of the corporate limits of the town. The annual appropriation for support should come from both the town and the county treasury. This would enable the citizen of the county who comes to the town for supplies to draw library books as well. It would also entitle the man who lives in the country, but whose work is in the town, to the free use of the library. I understand that Mr. Carnegie has no objection to this plan, and
would as soon give to the county as to the town. Whether this change is made or not, the future of library development in the South lies in the establishment of the state commission to dispense state aid.

A central distributing point would tend to cheapen administrative expenses and concentrate the work. As it is now in many states, individual librarians are doing good work and altruistic work in helping the weaker libraries. This gratuitous labor is an additional tax and could be avoided if the state commissions were active. The force of the concentration of power has been felt in our state as the work of the association, the commission, the technical school are all focused in the largest public library of the state, and all act together. The expense of this work has fallen upon a city institution, whereas it should be a work of the state. If the twelve Southern states had each an active state commission, with even a small appropriation from the state, the progress in the section would equal, in one year, the results now obtained in ten by the present system.

Technical training

The building of new libraries, and the organization of the free public library as a department of the city government created a demand for trained librarians and technical experts. As early as 1882 the directors of the Young Men's Library of Atlanta engaged the services of Miss Mary A. Bean, at that time an assistant in the Boston Public Library, to reorganize that library. In defense of the fixed location and printed catalog which Miss Bean employed it must be stated that technical library methods were still unformulated at that early period, and Miss Bean took as her model the Boston Public Library, which is still, I understand, laboring under the disadvantage of an outgrown classification. This system was still in vogue in Atlanta until the consolidation and organization of the Carnegie Library of Atlanta in 1899, which consummation was effected in the presence of the American Library Association. In reorganizing, a graduate of a technical school was put in charge of the catalog department, but still untrained labor had to be employed as assistants. It was then an apprentice class was established, after the plan then being used at the Public Library of Dayton, Ohio, which called for an entrance examination, and offered certain hours of instruction for required hours of service. The details of this plan had been worked out by Miss Doren, who in turn stated her indebtedness to the Los Angeles system, which Miss Kelso had established.

By the time the Carnegie Library was finished a competent staff was trained. But here our troubles began. No sooner had we a model workshop than our neighboring cities began to call on us for trained assistants. Other Carnegie libraries were in process of erection, institutional and private libraries were being reorganized, and a steady demand for better library service was created. Early in this demand were the libraries of Montgomery, Charlotte, and Chattanooga. Their librarians came to study methods and each returned with one of our assistants tucked under her arm. Assistants were lent to the libraries of the Georgia School of Technology, Agnes Scott College, and to the University of Georgia; to the public libraries of Dublin, Newnan, and Albany, Georgia; to Ensley, Seima and Gadsden, Alabama. Assistance was claimed by the state libraries of Mississippi and Georgia, and to the projectors of newly planned buildings not yet erected. It is impossible to see now how we did it so as not to cripple our own library, but finally the demand reached even the limit of intermunicipal courtesy, and Mr. Carnegie was appealed to. Again he came to the aid of the work in the South and established a technical library school, as a part of the work of the Carnegie Library of Atlanta, in May, 1905.

At this school the course of study is similar to that offered by the older schools, with the addition of a special course on library administration, necessitated by the demand for librarians of small libraries in the South rather than for assistants for large libraries. The course of study, hours, instructors, length of term, and other details are now in accordance with the rules prescribed by the special committee of the A. L. A. on library training. Results are already perceptible from the work being done by the ten graduates of the class of 1906. The demand for the members of the class, which will graduate in June, 1907, shows the supply of trained assistants in the South is far short. The good being done by these enthusiastic young women, who have received
technical instruction and practical work in a well organized library as work shop will show in the improved quality of library service in this whole section.

Publications

While the bibliographical output of the Southern library is still inconsiderable, quite an impetus has been given in the last few years. The publications of the Virginia and North Carolina state libraries are valuable contributions. The Department of History and Archives of Alabama has made a fine record, and even Georgia is awakening to the need of printing its records. Public libraries are beginning to see the necessity of collecting local material, and from time to time good working lists are being printed. State associations and commissions are issuing creditable handbooks, and general activity is manifested in the matter of co-operative work.

This report, incomplete though it is, will open the eyes of some to what is being done, and will serve to encourage isolated workers by this showing of cumulative effort, meager as it is. It is impossible in this paper to speak of the indefatigable work of these isolated men and women who have given, and still are giving, the very best of their lives to the work we have under consideration. With no chance of promotion, with little co-operation, and with unselfish zeal they are making records which will become a part of the history of the section.

In conclusion it will not be out of place to acknowledge to the libraries North, East and West, our indebtedness to them for suggestion, information and inspiration. No one appeal to another librarian for help has ever been denied, and it is this beautiful evidence of the library spirit that has enabled us to help and serve the new libraries in our section to the best of our ability. The compiling of this record has served to recall my own service to the cause, and whatever there is of thoroughness and technical integrity in the record I beg to dedicate it to the memory of Hannah P. James, who was the first of the many who came to my aid, and whose life and work have always been to me the source of my best inspiration and initiative in the development of library work in the South.

Sorrento, Italy, April 5, 1907.