

**PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN THE UNITED STATES**

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"Americans spend more than two and a half times as much on salty snacks as they do on public libraries."<sup>i</sup>

*History*

At the time of writing, public libraries have been in existence in the United States for fewer than 175 years. The story of the way in which they have developed into one of the central features of American life and most important pillars of a democratic society is both fascinating and instructive. The first public library in the United States was established in Peterborough in the north-eastern state of New Hampshire in 1833.<sup>ii</sup> Though there had been a number of libraries, some open to some members of the public, in the previous two hundred years, the Peterborough library was the first to be founded by a community with the

deliberate purpose of creating a free library that would be open to all members of the community—without charge.<sup>iii</sup> It should be noted that the population of Peterborough at the time was fewer than 2,000; of New Hampshire, 268,977; and of the United States, 5,542,000. The crucial points about this library were that it was open to all and that it was supported by taxes. There were social libraries before the first public libraries, but they were open only to the members of the society—usually subscribers or contributors. Also, there were parish and provincial libraries organized primarily for the use and convenience of clergymen and church members and paid for by religious societies and churches. Thus, in Peterborough was born the idea of a library that would be open to all, regardless of money or the lack of it and supported by communal funds. When we use the term “open to all,” we must remember that many inhabitants of the United States were excluded from the goods of society in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century because of their ethnic origins, gender, or age. It was a time when

women could not vote, children were to be seen and not heard, and African –Americans were regarded as less than full human beings, not to mention the tragedy visited on Native Americans by European settlement. Nevertheless, the germ of a great democratic idea was there—an idea that took almost 150 years to reach fulfillment, an idea that has made the American public library a central element in American democracy.

The first public library in a major city was opened in March 1854 in Boston, Massachusetts. This library prospered under the guidance of civic minded city leaders and gifted librarians to the point that it was, 14 years after it was founded, second only to the Library of Congress in terms of size (the Library of Congress owned 175,000 volumes and 70,000 pamphlets in 1868; Boston Public Library 144,000 volumes and 50,000 pamphlets). By the late 1860s there were only two other public libraries in the whole country that had sizeable collections—those in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and Cincinnati, Ohio.

The number and size of US public libraries grew exponentially in the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, aided in great part by philanthropic gifts for people of great wealth. John Jacob Astor and his heirs funded the Astor Library in New York from 1839. That quasi public library eventually was merged with the libraries set up by two other millionaire philanthropists—Lenox and Tilden—to form, in 1896, the New York Public Library. In 1882, Enoch Pratt, a successful merchant endowed Baltimore’s public library, which bears his name to this day—the Enoch Pratt Free Library. The greatest benefactor of US public libraries was Andrew Carnegie, who was born to a penniless family that emigrated from Scotland to the United States in 1846, when he was a child, and built a great fortune by creating a steel company in Pennsylvania and eventually selling it in 1901 for the then almost unbelievable sum of \$500 million. Despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that he built his fortune in great part by exploiting and oppressing the workers in his steel enterprise, Carnegie devoted the rest of his life to

philanthropy in line with the philosophy he set out in his book *The gospel of wealth*.<sup>iv</sup> Whatever his motives, Carnegie's philanthropy was on a staggering scale. Among other things, he gave more than \$56 million (more than \$1.2 billion in today's money) to construct more than 2500 library buildings in the English-speaking world, of these more than 1600 were in the United states.<sup>v</sup> Most of these buildings were funded and built in the period between 1898 and 1919, and each one was funded only after the municipality in which it was built guaranteed continuing support of library services in the building.

The period from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the end of World War I (1850-1919) was characterized by civic action on public libraries by wealthy members of communities supported by philanthropic contributions from the ultra-wealthy. What motivated these people? For many years the received opinion was that they were motivated by a disinterested desire to bring library materials and services to the poor—in the phrase of the time, the “common man.”

Later historians, notably Michael Harris,<sup>vi</sup> have argued that those civic leaders and philanthropists were motivated by a desire to preserve the social order by educating the new inhabitants of American cities—those who had moved from rural areas of the US and those who were immigrants from other countries—and making them willing participants in the social order. Carnegie himself wrote that he was motivated by the idea of public libraries making “men not violent revolutionists, but cautious evolutionists; not destroyers but cautious improvers.”<sup>vii</sup> These opposing views have never been reconciled and are still relevant to consideration of public libraries in the US today. Is the public library a means of improving opportunities for individuals and individual growth or is it a social mechanism among many such mechanisms creating and supporting acquiescence to the social order and preventing desire for revolutionary change?

In 1890, only seven of the sixteen largest cities in the US had public libraries.<sup>viii</sup> The great increase in building

libraries instigated by Carnegie changed the picture and, by the end of World War I, there were public libraries in all major communities and in many of the minor. The Depression of the 1930s and the concentration of national resources on World War II (entered by the US in December 1941) meant that the progress made in the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century slowed considerably. From 1945 (the end of WWII) onward, America witnessed another great leap forward in public library construction and the provision of community library services. This period was characterized not only by growth but also by three important trends—the first of which was standardization.

In 1956, the Public Libraries Division of the American Library Association published *Public library service: a guide to evaluation with minimum standards*. This work, which built on work aimed at formulating public library standards that began during WWII, set out the principles and standards covering such matters as subjects and types of literature to be covered, books and other materials to be

collected, provision of librarians and other personnel, the organization and control of materials, and library buildings and facilities. A later publication gave statistical measures for libraries of various sizes. In 1966, a revision was published under the name of *Minimum standards for public library systems*.<sup>ix</sup> This was followed in 1969 by *Your public library: standards for service*,<sup>x</sup> and, in 1975, by *Interim standards for small public libraries; guidelines toward achieving the goals of public library service*.<sup>xi</sup> The postscript of this 1975 standard states: "The great diversity in libraries, therefore, dictates that these guidelines be used with caution and that careful consideration be given to the study of local needs, the formulation of local goals, and the development of local programs." This signaled an end to the drive to set standards for all public libraries and a new concentration on service results. Therefore, in the 30 years since, the movement has been away from such numerical standards and toward the assessment of outcomes. This change in emphasis was, perhaps, inevitable in such a vast,

diverse, and rapidly growing country as the United States. It is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of standards that would apply, in any useful manner, to an urban central library in a city in New York State, to a public library branch in an affluent retirement community in Florida, to a public library in an Asian community in Oakland, California or Chicago, Illinois, to a suburban library in Ohio, and to a public library in a sparsely populated rural county in North Dakota. All those libraries should be appropriately funded and staffed, should have collections and services that meet the needs of their communities, and should adhere to the altruistic principles of librarianship, but assigning global statistical measures to those aims is not useful.

The approach that replaced the setting of standards concentrates on planning that is geared to the mission and goals of the public library and on the results—both of programs and services—that planning is intended to achieve. The last decade of the twentieth century and the first of the twenty first century have produced a number of publications

embodying the service results approach. These include *Planning for results: a public library transformation process*<sup>xii</sup> and *Staffing for results: a guide to working smarter*.<sup>xiii</sup>

The standardizing (later planning for results) movement in public librarianship was accompanied by two other major trends—co-operation and the involvement of the national and of state governments in local public libraries.

### *Co-operation*

Early public libraries in the US served their local communities with little or no contact with other libraries. They were, as they are now, funded locally and set up to serve local needs. For more than a century, though, it has been apparent that those local needs are best served when libraries act in concert with other libraries and use and/or contribute to centralized and co-operative systems. The Library of Congress' catalogue service (which has existed since the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) is a good example of a centralized system from which libraries of all kinds—including public libraries—have profited. Other kinds

of co-operation have been in existence for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The case for it was put in the 1956 *Standards*, mentioned above:

*Libraries working together [my emphasis], sharing their services and materials, can meet the full needs of their users. The co-operative approach on the part of libraries is the most important single recommendation of this document. Without joint action, American libraries will probably never be able to come up to the standard necessary to meet the needs of their constituencies.*<sup>xiv</sup>

The main vehicle for public library cooperation is the regional grouping of libraries known as a library system. These had their origins in county (each of the 50 states of the US—roughly equivalent to your *do*—is divided into a number of counties libraries) libraries—particularly the county libraries of California.<sup>xv</sup> The earliest public libraries in the US were established, as we have seen, services offered by large and small towns and cities—the smallest units of local government. Later, in rural areas and particularly in the rural areas of the West, the next largest unit of local government—the county—was seen as the only way in which

library services could be supplied to people in or near small communities. This tradition of county-wide library services for all residents—urban and rural—with a central library in the largest or most politically important town, branch libraries in the smaller communities, and, often, mobile library services for rural areas was the earliest kind of library system. A variation of this is the amalgamation of a previously independent city library with the library system of the county in which it is located. For example, the library system of Allen County, Indiana, well-known for its extensive genealogical collections, is a result of the amalgamation of the Fort Wayne Public Library and the Allen County Library (Fort Wayne is the largest city in the county), and the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library serves both the city of Atlanta, Georgia, and the surrounding Fulton county. Other co-operative arrangements include multi-county systems, city libraries contracting to serve surrounding rural areas, state-wide cooperative systems, and multi-type library systems. The latter, which consists of formal co-operative

arrangements between public, academic, school, and special libraries in a given county or region, became quite common in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in Midwestern states such as Illinois, being based on resource-sharing (inter-library loan) based on system-wide union catalogues made possible by the spread of computer technology and implementation of the MARC record.<sup>xvi</sup> As far as modern library systems are concerned, the optimal situation consists of the Illinois model—that is a state-wide organization of regional multi-type library systems, coordinated and funded by the state library.

#### *National government funding*

Federal (that is, national) government involvement in public libraries began fifty years ago with the passage of the *Library Service Act, 1956*. This Act authorized the expenditure of \$7.5 million annually (\$50 million in today's money), essentially for library services in rural areas and small towns with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. The Act followed a report by the US Office of Education showing that

there were 26 million rural inhabitants who had no library service and 50 million had inadequate library service—so 76 million people out of a total US population of more than 168 million (45%) had little or no library service as recently as fifty years ago. The 1956 Act was succeeded by the *Library Services and Construction Act, 1961 (LSCA)*, which authorized the expenditure of \$25 million annually for library services and \$20 million annually for library construction (a total of more than \$275 million in today's money). The 1961 Act has been amended over the years to include specific expenditures for library services for the physically handicapped, for interlibrary cooperation, and for the provision of library technology. The latest manifestation of the Act is the *Library Services and Technology Act, 1998 (LSTA)*, which is not limited to public libraries and has the broad aim of providing "library service to those who have difficulty using a library." That difficulty can be the absence of local library services, lack of appropriate technology, physical and mental handicaps, lack of transportation, and

any of the other barriers to library use that exist in the modern world. The overall aims of the LSTA are summed up in its long-range plan as:

- Improving student learning through libraries;
- Service to diverse populations through libraries;
- Service through public libraries;
- Access to electronic library services and library cooperation;
- Recruitment, retention and training of librarians.

This is an ambitious agenda covering almost all aspects of library services. The funds appropriated (more than \$210 million in 2005-2006) are administered by the Institute for Museum and Library Services, a federal agency, in large part (\$163.746 million in 2005-2006) through the State Library Agencies (often the state libraries) of the states and territories.<sup>xvii</sup> Funds in the grants to states are allotted in proportion to the population, so that the largest state—California (population more than 36 million)—received \$16.5 million in 2005-2006, and the territory of American

Samoa (population almost 59,000) received \$65,700. The remaining funds go to a variety of programs related to library services for Native Americans, leadership grants, and the education of librarians.<sup>xviii</sup>

The involvement of federal government agencies and federal funds has been beneficial to US public libraries in the last fifty years. That involvement has meant that library services have been extended to inhabitants of rural America, many library buildings have been constructed, cooperation and resource sharing have become common, library technology has been developed and made available, and services to special populations have been increased.

### *Staff*

There were no professional librarians in the early days of US public libraries. The first library school was opened by Melvil Dewey in 1887 and that school produced the first generation of trained librarians. It is now widely understood that trained and educated librarians (with a master's degree from one of the 50+ library and information science

programs accredited by the American Library Association) are necessary if public libraries and their services and programs are to reach their goals. This aspiration often encounters the problems of financial reality in dealing with complex libraries with a number of branches. The usual pattern of staffing today is to have a director who is, in most cases, a head librarian (one with an ALA-accredited master's degree) with librarian colleagues heading the major services and units of the library working with a larger number of technical assistants and clerical staff.

A picture of the overall staffing patterns can be seen in the statistics issued by the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES), a division of the US Department of Education. In 2003, their survey shows:<sup>xix</sup>

- There were 136,171 people employed in 9,211 libraries
- Of those, 45,114 (33%) were described as "librarians," but only 30,479 (22%) held ALA-accredited MLSs

- The remainder of public library employees (91,057—67%) were described as “others”—i.e., library workers who are not librarians.

The general ratios are clear. In US public libraries as a whole, 1 out of 3 employees holds a “professional” position; 1 out of 5 employees has an accredited master’s degree; and 2 out of 3 are “non-professionals.” The latter is a controversial category and should not be taken as implying any lack of education or competence—simply that they are library workers without qualifications as a librarian.

### *Governance*

The early public libraries, as we have seen, were established locally with funding from local taxes and/or private philanthropy. It is not surprising, therefore that the earliest public libraries were locally governed. This pattern continues to this day. Most public libraries report, directly or indirectly, to the governing body of the town or county (the City Council, County Board of Supervisors, etc.). One feature of US public libraries is that they almost always also

have local bodies—boards of governors, commonly called “trustees,” who are lay people appointed by local elected officials (mayors, etc.) or, less commonly, directly elected. Some library boards have taxing and budgetary authority but most are advisory. The staff of public libraries report either to a head librarian or to a person responsible for a number of local services including the city, town, or county library.

To take some examples:

- The Chicago Public Library (one of the largest urban libraries in the world) is headed by a “Commissioner,” appointed by the mayor of Chicago, who works with a Board of Directors, also appointed by the mayor with the concurrence of the Chicago City Council.
  - The Burlington, Iowa, Public Library is headed by an “Administrative Director,” who works “to implement the policies of the Burlington Library Board of Trustees.”<sup>xx</sup>
- Under Iowa law, the authority for public libraries is derived from the county or city elected officials who

- appoint an independent board of trustees that sets budgets and establishes library policies in consultation with the library staff.
- The City of Los Angeles, California, Public Library is governed by a board. "The Board of Library Commissioners is, by City Charter authority, the legal head of the Library Department. The five-members of the Board are appointed by the Mayor for five-year staggered terms and confirmed by the City Council. In common with other city commissions, the Library Board has the power to make and enforce all necessary and desirable rules and regulations. The Charter gives the Library control of its own funds. It is also the duty of the Board to provide quarters and equipment, to design, construct, and maintain library buildings, to create necessary positions, and to authorize personnel and fix their duties."<sup>xxi</sup>
  - The Brooks Memorial Library in Brattleboro, Vermont, is funded by the Board of Selectmen (elected),

administered by a Director who works with the Board of Trustees.

- The Atlanta-Fulton Public Library in Georgia is headed by a director, appointed by the county Board of Commissioners, who works with a Board of Trustees, the members of which are appointed, variously, by the Atlanta City Council and individual members of the Fulton County Board of Commissioners.
- The Fresno, California, Public Library is a department of county government. The County Librarian is appointed by the county Board of Supervisors.

You can see, from these brief descriptions of public libraries of different sizes from different parts of the United States that there are variations in the details of governance but there are similarities and common features of the governance of almost all public libraries in the US:

- The ultimate authority rests with the elected officials of the unit of local government (county, city, town, township, etc.) served by the public library. That

authority is, in some cases, delegated to a board appointed by the elected officials.

- The day to day administration of the library is the responsibility of a director, chief librarian, etc., appointed by the elected officials and reporting to the elected body (city council, county board, etc.) or to a library board
- Those days to day responsibilities include the hiring, direction, work assignments, and evaluation of the library's staff of librarians and others
- Most public libraries that are departments of a unit of local government have a separate board of appointed or elected officials to advise the director, chief librarian, etc., on library policies, budgets, etc.

This general structure can, on occasion, lead to ambiguities over the respective responsibilities of the elected officials (or library board), board of trustees, and professional staff.

There can be, on occasion, conflicts that arise when dealing with budgets and policies, particularly when sensitive issues

such as censorship are concerned. The democratic imperative can, sometimes, conflict with professional expertise and ethics and having at least three parties (elected officials, boards, and staff) involved does to make such situations any easier.

### *Financing*

The early public libraries were funded by local taxes, sometimes supplemented by local subscriptions. As we have seen, co-operative schemes of various kinds, state funding, and money from the federal government have complicated that picture. Though the basic funding of public libraries still comes from local sources (principally property, sales, and income taxes), there is an increasing dependence on other funding sources. In most cases, a library is funded by some percentage of the taxes gathered by the governmental unit (county, city, etc.) as determined by the elected officials. In fewer but an increasing number of cases, the library constitutes its own tax district, raising taxes specifically to fund library services and programs. For example, following



- Interest, user fees, and others

\$ 2,229,140 (9.98%)

You can see that more than 80% of their operational funding comes from local property and income taxes. This budget does not include funding for a major library expansion project funded by local and state revenues from bonds, state support for participation in the state-wide cooperative system (Indiana Cooperative Library Services Agency) and OCLC, or any monies from the state's share of LSTA (see above) funds..

**EXPENDITURES**

The expenditures from this \$23 million plus budget fall into the following broad categories:

- Salaries and benefits \$11,652,416  
(52.17%)

- Books and other library materials  
\$ 3,066,740  
(13.73%)

- Other operating expenses                      \$ 6,315,368  
(28.27%)
- Reserves    \$ 1,301,408  
(5.83%)

Note that the “other operating expenses” includes not only the high and increasing costs of the library’s information technology infrastructure (hardware and software) but also funds for the purchase of digital materials (subscriptions to online services and databases, etc.) that would logically belong in the “books and other library materials” budget to give a truer picture of expenditures. The fact that more than half the budget is spent on staff is partly because a county library system is naturally labor-intensive (with many branches) and partly in conformity with the general rule for libraries of all kinds.

The revenues and expenditures in 2005 of a much larger library, with a budget in excess of \$110 million—the City of Los Angeles, California, Public Library—were as follows:

**REVENUES**

- City taxes, etc. \$98,669,422 (89.5%)
- Federal funds \$ 463,325 (0.42%)
- State funds \$ 1,727,560  
(1.56%)
- Other revenues \$ 6,727,893  
(6.11%)
- Trust fund \$ 2,372, 732  
(2.15%)
- Donations \$ 331,805  
(0.30%)

Note that almost 90% of the revenues come from city taxes (property, sales, etc.).

**EXPENDITURES**

- Personnel \$51,788,960  
(47.04%)
- Library materials \$11,119,981  
(10.10%)
- Other expenses \$ 8,612,145  
(7.82%)

- Related costs \$38,570,651  
(35.03%)

Again, we can see the pattern of more or less half the budget being spent on staff costs (salaries, benefits, etc.) and considerable expenses on electronic library resources being subsumed under another budget item—in this case “related costs.”

*Services of the modern US public library*

Public libraries, as do all libraries, carry out all the tasks that enable maximum interaction with the human record. To that end, they select, give access to, organize, and preserve documents in all formats (including electronic resources) and provide assistance and instruction in their use as well as related services of many kinds.

As a result, modern public libraries offer a wide range of collections and services to both adults and children and, in many instances to subsets of those two categories (senior citizens, adults who speak languages other than English, people with learning and reading difficulties, young adults,

etc.). The greatest change in those collections and services in the last hundred years has been caused by the intensive use of, and demand for, computer technology in addition to many of the “traditional” roles of the public library. This change has shaped everything about the modern American public library—including its staffing, services offered, budget priorities, and even design of public library buildings. The provision of computer access to people who would otherwise lack such access is the latest example of the indispensable role of the public library in bringing essential services to the poor and the otherwise disadvantaged. In this case, the US public library is doing more than any other institution in American life to bridge the “digital divide” between the technological haves and have-nots. Given the unprecedented demand for, and impact of, information technology on America’s public libraries it is unfortunate that the added expense of technology has not been matched by increases in funding commensurate with that expense.

One way of looking at public library services is set out in the Public Library Association 1998 publication, *Planning for results*.<sup>xxiii</sup> This book moves away from planning based on the traditional roles of the public library (reference services, children's services, etc.) and bases the planning process on what it calls "service responses," thirteen areas of service provided by a good public library. These are:

- **Basic literacy**

The library should be an essential part of community literacy programs—places for children to be encouraged in their love of reading and for adults with literacy problems to find adult literacy programs.

- **Business and career information**

The public library should be a place of first resort for up-to-date and accurate information relating to employment, training and retraining opportunities, career information, and personal finances.

- **"Commons"**

This ambiguous term is, among other things, used to refer to the function of the public library as a community center—a place in which people come together to interact and meet on a variety of social, political, literary, artistic, and cultural issues.

- **Community referral**

The library should be a source of up-to-date and accurate information on community organizations and institutions.

- **Consumer information**

The library should provide up-to-date and accurate information that helps community members to make informed consumer decisions.

- **Cultural awareness**

In a multi-cultural society such as the United States, it is essential that the library should have materials and programs that help people to understand their cultural heritage and the cultural heritage of others.

- **Current topics and titles**

The library should have materials, programs, and up-to-date and accurate information that satisfy the need for knowledge of popular cultural and social trends and for recreational reading and other experiences.

- **Formal learning support**

The library should have materials, programs, and up-to-date and accurate information that will help students of all ages who are involved in formal educational programs.

- **General information**

The library must be able to supply up-to-date and accurate information on a wide range of topics.

- **Government information**

The library must be able to supply up-to-date and accurate information on government officials and agencies (at all levels) and collections and programs that enable people to participate fully in the democratic process.

- **“Information literacy”**

The library must have skilled staff and programs that address the ability of the library's users to locate, evaluate, and use relevant information.

- **Lifelong learning**

The library should have materials, programs, and up-to-date and accurate information that will help people in self-directed and informal intellectual growth.

- **Local history and genealogy**

Each public library should have collections and programs that are tailored to the need for local historical and family information.

The idea behind these "service responses" is that, once clearly understood and agreed, they provide a basis for services. In other words, once you have decided that, for example, "Formal learning support" is a desirable service outcome, you can devise services that enable that support in an effective manner—in this case, collections and databases that are tailored to the needs of students; reference services and library instruction programs that help students, and

specific services, such as term paper assistance, that help in the learning process.

To illustrate this tailoring of services to desired outcomes, I have taken the services and programs offered by the Allen County, Indiana, Public Library (ACPL) and its branch libraries in 2006 and will relate them to the outcomes listed above. The ACPL is a progressive, innovative library system that goes well beyond the traditional roles of the public library while providing all traditional library services. The central library lists the following major services:

*Services for adults*

- Readers' services—this area houses fiction books, periodicals, and a reference service for the humanities and social sciences (*Cultural awareness; Current topics and titles; Formal learning support; General information*)
- Business and technology—in addition to providing business and technological reference services and

- materials, this area provides information and assistance on cooking, car and small engine repair, job searching and company information, health and drug information, plant identification and gardening, and government information and legal references (*Business and career information; Community referral; Consumer information; Current topics and titles; Formal learning support; General information; Government information*)
- Art, music, and audiovisual—provides printed and audiovisual materials and services for art, architecture, crafts, music, theater, dance, movies, photography, antiques and related subjects; and organizes concerts, art events, and exhibits. (*"Commons;" Cultural awareness; Current topics and titles; Formal learning support; Lifelong learning*)
  - Genealogy—the library's renowned genealogy service includes more than 332,000 printed volumes, 362,000 microform items and access to major online databases. (*Local history and genealogy*)

- Access Fort Wayne—offers three community access television channels and a community computer center housed in the Main Library (*Information literacy and Lifelong learning*)

#### *Services for children and young adults*

- Children’s services—offers collections and programs that are designed for children (from birth to age 11) and the adults who work with them. Services include a reference desk, book and audiovisual collections, and computer access., (*“Commons” Current topics and titles; Formal learning support; General information*)
- Young adult services— offers collections and programs that are designed for young adults (aged 12 to 18) (*“Commons,” Current topics and titles; Formal learning support; General information*)

In addition to the main library, the ACPL has a number of branches, each of which offers services such as reference assistance, children’s and young adult services, and meeting rooms.

The ACPL offers a very wide variety of programs, of which the following are some current examples:

*Programs for adults*

- Adult summer reading program (*Basic literacy*)
- Online book club (*Lifelong learning*)
- Book discussion groups (*Lifelong learning*)
- Classics book club (*Lifelong learning*)
- Artists' blog—a forum for artists and art lovers (*Lifelong learning; Current topics*)
- Resources for home-schooling (*Formal learning support*)
- Computer classes (*Information literacy*)
- Writers' forum (*Lifelong learning*)
- Crafters' circle—for all who create portable craft works (*Current topics*)
- Non-profit resource centers orientation (*Community referral*)
- Local history displays (*Local history*)

*Programs for children and young adults*

- Parent and child computer class (*Information literacy*)
- Story readings for young children (*Basic literacy; Current topics*)
- Online children's book awards discussion group—for adults and children ("*Commons; Lifelong learning*")
- Online book group for teenagers ("*Commons; Lifelong learning*")
- Movie programs for teenagers (*Current topics*)
- Manga/Anime art group for teenagers (*Current topics*)

### *Social dimension*

As can be seen from the description of the service responses sought by the modern US public library and the range of services and programs offered by one such library, the public library occupies a central social and cultural position in communities in the US. It is, for many people, an institution that is the source for most authoritative information that affects their lives; for access to the recorded knowledge and recreational reading, listening, and viewing materials; for research into local and family history;

and for assistance with literacy and learning. More even than those, it is a vital part of the cultural infrastructure of communities large and small—the one secular, non-political gathering place in which ideas can be discovered and debated; a safe haven for young people and old; and both a symbol and a manifestation of the democratic ideals of their country and community. In many ways, these words written more than half a century ago hold true today: *The library, among other purposes, was created as a source of knowledge for an informed citizenry, upon whose collective judgment the success or failure of responsible democracy rests.*<sup>xxiv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> . As of 2002 - American Library Association, Public Information Office [www.ala.org/ala/issues/quotable06FINAL.pdf](http://www.ala.org/ala/issues/quotable06FINAL.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> . I am indebted for this and subsequent historical facts to the article on public libraries in America in vol. 24 of the *Encyclopedia of library and information science*. Marcel Dekker, 1978. pp.273-339

<sup>iii</sup> . Childers, Thomas. *The information-poor in America*. Scarecrow Press, 1975. p. 11. As quoted in the *Encyclopedia of library and information science*. *Op.cit.*

<sup>iv</sup> . Carnegie, Andrew. *The gospel of wealth*. London: Hagen, 1889.

<sup>v</sup> . Bobinski, George S. Article on Carnegie in the *ALA World encyclopedia of library and information services*. Chicago: ALA, 1980, pp. 117-119.

<sup>vi</sup> . Harris, Michael. Purpose of the American public library: a revisionist interpretation. *Library journal*. v. 98 (September 15, 1973) pp. 2510-2514. As quoted in the *Encyclopedia of library and information science*. *Op.cit.*

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- xvi . See [http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/library/what\\_we\\_do/systemsmap.html](http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/library/what_we_do/systemsmap.html) for a map showing the organization of multi-county, multi-type libraries in Illinois.
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- xviii . [www.ims.gov/pdf/budgethistory.pdf](http://www.ims.gov/pdf/budgethistory.pdf)
- xix . <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005363.pdf>
- xx . <http://www.burlington.lib.ia.us/Contact.htm>
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