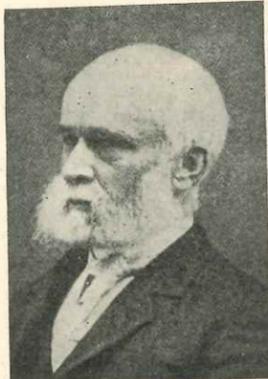


# Beginnings of the Library Movement

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF THE OLD NEW HAVEN COLONY.

An outline of an address delivered before the New Haven Colony Historical society April 18, 1904, by Henry M. Whitney, librarian of the Blackstone Memorial Library, Branford, is now being sent out in pamphlet form by the Connecticut Public Library committee, an auxiliary of the State Board of Education. We print so much of it as refers to the library movement in our immediate vicinity:



H. M. WHITNEY,  
Librarian Blackstone Library.

An historical society naturally cares especially about the beginnings of any great social force or movement, and it is the beginnings that I especially desire first to bring out. I think it likely, even where I have not knowledge, that all over the field there has been a great deal of the kind of work sketched by Smith and Steiner in their "History of the plantation of Menunkatuck" (p. 410): I use this example first not only because it is the most detailed that I have found, but because it goes the farthest back.

It appears that in 1737, a library was formed in and for the towns of Guilford, Killingworth, Saybrook and Lyme—and we must remember that those four town then included Madison, Clinton, Westbrook, Essex, Old Saybrook, Chester, Old Lyme, and part of East Lyme: twelve towns to-day. It seems to me very remarkable that so large a field should have been covered by this organization, as the books for several reasons could not be easily passed from home to home. The number of users may not have been very large, as the books were chiefly on divinity, but every one tried to read divinity then, for it was the time of Edwards and "the Great Awakening." Some of the books were bulky and valuable. There is material for an artist in the idea of one of the clergymen, or of the deacons of that field, in the garb of the time, picking his way by a rough bridle-path, in the lack

of good roads, to the parsonage of a neighboring town, there getting from the minister and strapping behind his saddle some huge tome, with leather cover and brass clasps, riding off in triumph but with judicious care, and yet imperiling the precious volume, in the lack of bridges, by the stumbling of his horse in some ford.

In May, 1787 (fifty years from the foundation), when many of the books had doubtless been lost or burned or worn out, the library consisted of fifty folios, twenty-four quartos, and 307 books of other sizes, the whole being

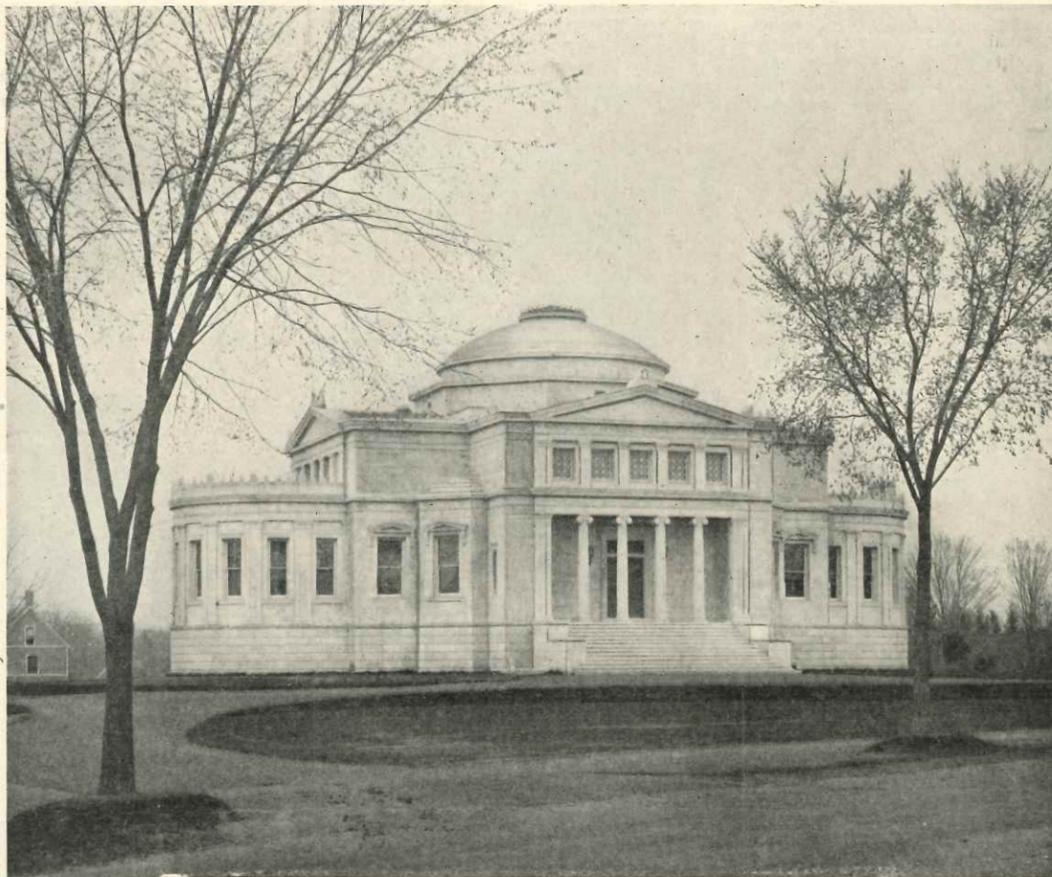
a new company was soon formed in the First Society, and they had in their library some of those earlier books. The young people of Guilford afterward, perhaps craving a different kind of reading, formed an association and made up a library of their own. These two were united in 1817, and thereafter bore the name of the Union Library; in 1838 the stock of books amounted to about 600.

This old library contributed largely to the education of Fitz-Greene Halleck—perhaps the most noted person connected with the history of Guilford: in after life he said that he had read every

In what is now Madison a library was secured in 1793; in 1838 it had about 250 volumes. At that time another in North Madison had a little more than 100 volumes. Such were the infantile beginnings in most of our towns.

\* \* \*

If I were to sketch fully the story of endeavors in the old Guilford—now Guilford and Madison—it would be found typical, really, of the library-history of a multitude of our southern New England towns: an early organization covering a very large field; the library strictly proprietary, if not even jealously limited in its membership; the books dealing chiefly with religion or morals, but with a certain concession to lighter tastes in the field of recognized English standards—the drama, however, being carefully shut out; the binding of the books heavy and substantial, so that a book, once purchased could bear transportation



THE BLACKSTONE MEMORIAL LIBRARY, BRANFORD.

appraised at a value of £167 7 0. All libraries in those days were proprietary, the democratic idea not having got very far. This organization was dissolved after a life of about sixty years. Can any one give any library facts, drawn from the field that we are now reviewing, but belonging to an earlier day?

To go on with Guilford-Madison, which is the eastern edge of our field,

one of the books, and that his father before him had done the same.

A public library was formed in North Guilford about 1760; in 1794 the house in which it was kept was burned, and most of the books were destroyed. There were various renewals of effort; just now the only organization in North Guilford is a club. But the Guilford library is not very far off.

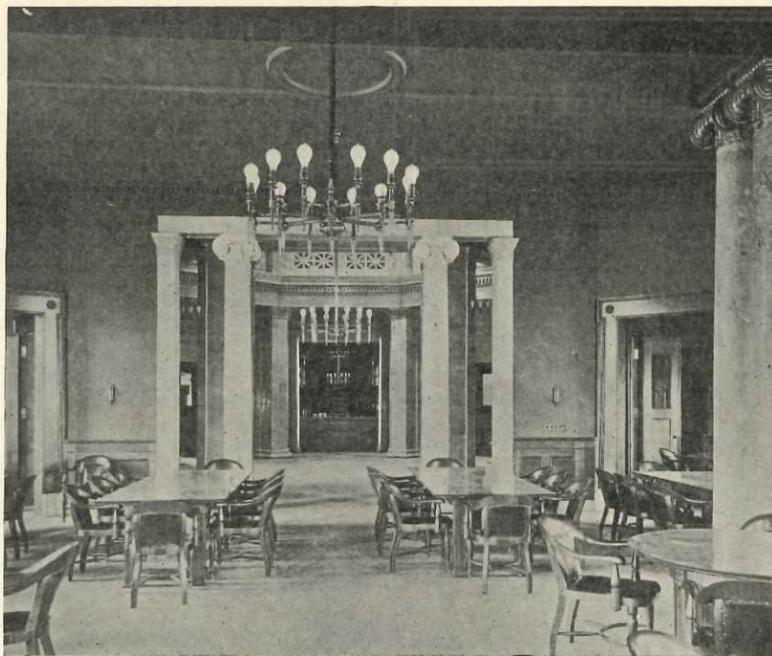
on horseback or in heavy wagons and still endure almost to the end of time; the later books unattractively printed and bound, and furnishing in their material or their typography a key to the history of the American bookmaker's art; interest waning because the books had been read over and over, with little or no freshening, with little or no adaptation to changing taste, by later purchases; no professional skill applied to the care of the books; rotatory housing in many cases, with disastrous results through the communication of infectious diseases by the books—all attributed to the mysterious providence of God; single books gnawed by vermin, or destroyed by fire or rain; occasionally a whole library going up in smoke; money scarce, and purchases and repairs cramped on that account; a few strenuous spirits leading in the work, but the mass of the community apathetic, penurious, or critical; the gradual spread of democratic feeling, weakening and at last breaking down the proprietary idea, and making a library for the whole community seem more and more the inevitable thing: with this the trend toward fiction increasing constantly in power; at last some man or woman offering to erect or help to erect a building, if the community will furnish the land, the books, and the care; then, by permission of the legislature, a small grant in aid coming from the funds of the town; this idea is stoutly resisted, but gaining in popularity and power, till the idea is firmly established that libraries may be not only for the people but by the people; state aid instituted and gradually extended; many libraries keeping alive by state aid, when otherwise they would soon have given up the ghost; some one setting the example of making a bequest to the local library, and the fitness of the act getting recognized on every hand, these bequests becoming larger and more frequent, and sometimes amounting to a substantial endowment—thus giving freedom and breadth to a work that before had been painfully pinched; the librarians having and needing to have a constantly higher professional skill; the or-



STACK-ROOM OF BLACKSTONE MEMORIAL LIBRARY.

ganization of librarians into associations, with its elevating effect upon their work and its strong tonic effect upon their professional self-respect; most of the librarians still paid so little that their service is of a missionary character, not only in spirit but in outward fact; the development of this missionary idea into services is of a missionary character, not the whole life of the library, so that it exists not merely to meet the wishes of the owners, but as a means of doing good; the discovery that the success of a library turns, not upon the extent to which the books can be kept uninjured, but upon the extent to which they can be made useful before they are worn out; the fuller and fuller realization of the fact that there is no nucleus about which the apparatus of civilization and the means of heightening the amenities of life can be more effectively gathered than about a collection of excellent books; the gradual emergence of the idea that the children are an extremely important part of the constituency of the library, and that the moral life of the town, the quality of its citizenship, can be powerfully affected for the better by wise and tactful provision for the youngest and especially for those whose so-called homes are squalid and degrading; the masses, and especially the children, growing steadily in the sense that the public library is almost the best friend that they have—and yet the well-to-do finding at the library a great deal of happiness that would not have come to them in any other way, and taking pleasure in making the library still more rich and beautiful and helpful in all that can exalt the life of a man.

Since I have begun upon the history of libraries in Guilford and Madison, let me carry it now to the end. In what is now Guilford Center the Misses Shepard and Fowler began a subscription-library in 1872; for a long time it met the needs of the town very well, and many are deeply grateful for what that library did for them. About 1888 the Temperance Union opened a free library and reading-room; in 1891, largely through the liberality of E. P. Dickey, a small frame-building was erected on the road to the station; they have about 1,400 volumes now. I have looked in at this building on a Saturday evening, and I have heard much of the zeal and unwearied devotion with which money is raised by fairs and entertainments, and the cheerfulness with which the young women attend, together or in rotation, to the thousand details of administration, including attendance at the library three times a week for the issue of books. I think that these people have fairly earned the right to the help of that coming benefactor who will put them at least where Stamford and Mil-



READING ROOM, BLACKSTONE LIBRARY.

chance to read it. There is something here also for the artist, in the scene of those people wending their way, each with a bit of candle in his pocket, to the schoolroom, of their endeavor to accommodate themselves to the lowness and narrowness of the children's seats, of the excitement at the bringing in of the basketful of books, of the auctioneer holding up some especially coveted book, perhaps the last tale by Sir Walter Scott, of the schoolmaster or the village lawyer calling out from the gloom, "Wished-for: a cent and a half," and perhaps securing the prize at that rate per week because no one offered more. Then perhaps the clergyman gets the first chance at a book of theology for a cent and a quarter.

"The People's circulating library" lasted from 1859 to about 1871. The present "Madison library association" was organized in 1874; in 1895 it was thoroughly burned out and up, but rising superior to disaster, it became in that same May a legally incorporated body. Then Miss Mary E. Scranton erected, at the corner of the two principal streets, in memory of her father, Erastus C. Scranton, the present beautiful library building.

An interesting part of Madison is East River. It has a library association, which opened a library and reading-room in 1874. The association was incorporated in 1883, and now has, near the railroad station, a neat wooden

cation of children: a new edition," published by Henry Ranlet at Exeter, England, in 1794. It reminds me of the ship's carpenter who read Josephus at every spare moment and, on being asked by some of us whether it was interesting, answered: "Oh, yes, it's interesting enouch, but it's verra dhry." The other is a volume of "Silliman's travels," published in Boston in 1812. They are marked "Branford library, No. 124" and "No. 200." Of this, the earliest library in Branford of which I have been able to get any knowledge, the relics are few. It must have been founded in the '30's or before that; and I may say in passing that there seems to have been a general movement for libraries about that time, as may be found in the history of many other towns. In Branford, as is well known, the headquarters of the books were at some house for a period, the members going there to make their changes; after a while the collection would be moved to another house, to be similarly cared for there.

Happily, the present library has secured the record book of a debating society formed at another time of great intellectual movement—the middle '50s. This was named "the Webster society," Daniel Webster being then at the height of his glory. There are still living in Branford about nine of the members; imagination tries to picture them in their fiery debates over slavery, intemperance, and the

upon the shelves of the public school.

There was one later library, of which I have thus far found no trace except a single copy of their label. It is like the elephant, of the early days of Wisconsin, of whose existence my only proof is the tooth that I got one day from the bank of a brook.

But the library idea could not die out in any of our communities, nor could it die in Branford. It was early in 1890 that a fresh effort was made. A meeting was held, subscription papers were arranged for, and certain ones agreed to write to former residents, sons or daughters of the town, to inquire whether any of them would help. One letter brought a startling response; the person addressed replied that he would be glad to do the whole work himself. The tone of the letter was rather that of one asking a favor, and no one was heard objecting to his having liberty to do as he pleased. His fulfillment of his offer is well known to all; even to the sight-seer the Blackstone Memorial Library is an object of pilgrimage on almost every pleasant day.

A good many people of North Branford are able, by owning a bit of land in Branford, to have the privileges of the Blackstone library, but there is no public library in North Branford itself. Perhaps, just as New Haven was slower in getting a public library because so many of its best readers could, more or less directly, get books from the university library, so North Branford may be all the later in getting a library of its own because those who are book hungry have only to buy a bit of woodlot in Branford or a cottage site on the shore, and then they and their households can have their choice of the large collections in the marble building that faces Branford green.

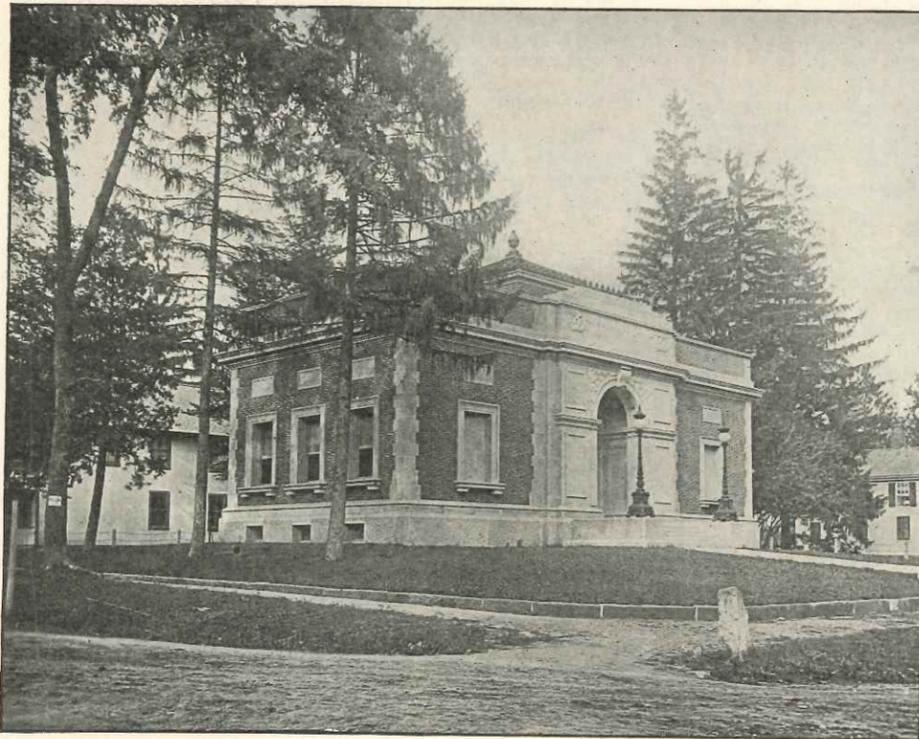
The record of North Haven has in it less of collapse because of a bequest of \$1,000 from Silas L. Bradley and of an equal sum from his widow. The Bradley Library Association was incorporated in 1884. It had a room in a private house for about two years. North Haven set a good example, to towns that have made soldiers' memorials out of cheap and conventional statuary, by putting its memorial fund into the erection of a durable public hall, costing some \$8,000. This building was finished about 1886, and the library has since then had a part of the main floor, there at the center of the town life doing a valuable work. It now has about 3,000 volumes.

New Haven was exceptional in its early library history in two respects: it had books almost from the beginning, and these not forming a proprietary library, but belonging to the town. The story may be found in Henry T. Blake's "Chronicles of New Haven Green," at page 198. Concisely: "The first reference in the records to a town library is under date of March, 1652, when Jerdice Boyce and William Russell were desired to 'make some seats in the schoolhouse and a chest to put the books in.' Possibly the books here referred to were schoolbooks, but if so volumes of a miscellaneous character belonging to the town were soon added. In 1656 Governor Eaton delivered to Mr. Davenport certain books lately belonging to his brother, Samuel Eaton, 'intended for the use of a college and appraised at about twenty pounds.' A catalogue of these" went upon the records of the town.

In the sixth volume of the papers of the New Haven Colony Historical society Professor F. B. Dexter gives a fuller account of the Eaton books, and, with the list, a nearly complete identification of them. Calvin was the principal author, theology the principal subject, and Latin almost exclusively the language—three facts that were peculiarly helpful to the town in carrying out that ancient ideal for a library—that it should never be worn out by use.

A second windfall came in 1658: "Mr. Gibbard acquainted the town that a friend of his in England had sent a parcel of books as a gift to the town and desired to know how the town would have them disposed of." As they were mostly Latin school-books, unloaded on the New Englanders in the spirit that tends to get rid of such books by sending them to the frontier of civilization, it was easy to store them away. Later they were placed upon shelves in the schoolhouse, and the new schoolmaster asked leave to read them; this surprising request, having been duly considered, was granted, "provided a list of them be taken." In 1661 Mr. Davenport said that "there are now many books belonging to the town." Nevertheless, in 1689, by a vote of the "townsmen" (selectmen), afterward ratified by the town, the whole lot was sold to Mr. Pierpont for forty pounds of rye and

(Continued on page 16.)



THE E. C. SCRANTON MEMORIAL LIBRARY, MADISON.

ford and Madison and Shelton now stand. They are rich already in the spirit that makes all things come at last.

Public libraries in Madison date back at least to 1793, and in North Madison to 1824; in 1838 they had respectively 250 and about 110 volumes. Madison had a "Farmers' Library Association" in 1830; they had a curious custom of taking their books at certain intervals to Lee's Academy (the public school), and auctioning off the use of them, the highest bidder for any book having the first

building, erected by the liberality of Mr. and Mrs. Horace B. Washburn. The work here is made more solid and valuable by the fact that the association has an endowment of \$6,500, also given by the Washburns. Patrons who are not members pay five cents a week.

Here are two volumes representing by their labels two strong endeavors made in Branford to found and maintain a library. One of these books is Doddridge's "Sermons on the religious edu-

other burning issues of the times. They had also occasional lectures. In their records we read, under date of September 6, 1858: "During the year a library has been added; \$237.67 were subscribed. Also a donation from the Branford library of 168 volumes, making, including books purchased, 362 volumes. Books drawn during the year, 1,200, by 106 members." The Webster society disbanded about 1870, and its books were either carried home by the disappearing constituent parts of the society or went

## Beginnings of Library Movement.

(Continued from page 7.)

thirty-two bushels of Indian corn. Thus New Haven, after a curiously awkward beginning, went thriftily out of the ownership of books for nearly two hundred years. It is one of the ironies of history that this solitary and extremely early case of a public library, not proprietary, should have been, in its contents, so utterly outside of the horizon of all but a very few of the people of the town.

The place of honor among the existing public or semi-public libraries of New Haven belongs, of course, if age is the test, to the "Young Men's Institute," for, under the name of "The Young Apprentices' Association," it was founded in 1826. The main thought, however, in the earlier years was lectures and class work; it gathered books very slowly. It had arduous times financially, but with its ownership and occupancy of its present building, it began to prosper. It is now strictly a library association, its lectures and its classes having been dropped long ago. It has nearly 20,000 volumes, and seems to maintain a pretty uniform life. It is, however, not only proprietary, but proprietary with a strictly limited membership; as I understand, it finds its quarters crowded when the membership exceeds a certain number, and therefore, when that number is full, candidates are obliged to wait. The expenses are met by fees and rents.

The history of the "Free Public Library" of New Haven is almost too familiar to be told. All admit that its existence was due to a bequest by Philip Marett. New Haven would hardly have let much more time get away without doing something, and perhaps much, to take its proper place in the use of this agency for popular education, but Mr. Marett's bequest furnished the immediate occasion for action. It sometimes happens, as at Milford and in New Haven, that a stranger, coming to live in a town or city, feels its wants and deficiencies more than do those who have grown up in the community life; to him the things that are do not seem to have been so completely ordained from the foundation of the world. So it was with Mr. Marett. About 1851, having accumulated a fortune in the East India trade, he retired from business and came from Boston to New Haven to reside. He felt at once and often said that New Haven ought to have a library that was free to all. But college and university towns are often apathetic and slow in that respect. The Boston public library was doubtless the inspiration of Mr. Marett's zeal; yet in those days Boston specialties were still looked upon as largely crotchety and unsuitable for general adoption; public libraries were not by any means then believed in as a matter of course. They were regarded more nearly as were railroads at first. I have seen a letter written by Robert R. Livingston in which he asserted in regard to a proposed railroad that it would be impossible to prevent the train from spreading and letting the train down upon the earth. Similarly it was argued in New Haven that the taxation for a library would be intolerable, and that such a place would only increase the tendency to idleness by providing a comfortable resort for loafers.

Mr. Marett, in 1867, at the age of 74, drew his own will, leaving his estate of \$650,000 in trust for his wife and his daughter, the whole after their deaths to be distributed to certain charitable objects, chiefly in New Haven. One-tenth of the amount was to go to the city of New Haven in trust, the income to be used "for the purchase of books for the Young Men's Institute, or any public library which may from time to time exist in said city"; this curious phraseology suggests that Mr. Marett felt that the old-time habit of dying was likely to continue indefinitely as a characteristic of the library world.

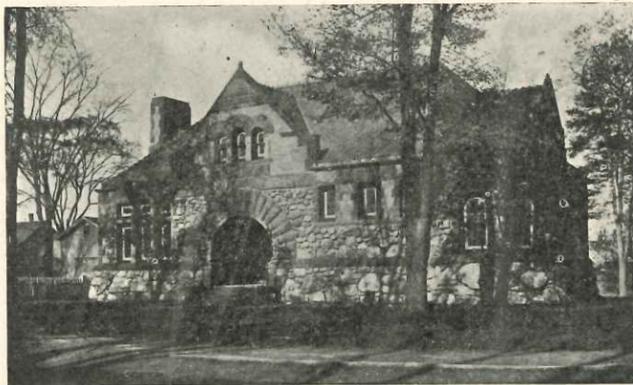
After the death of Mr. Marett in 1869 the city had twenty years in which to get ready for his various bequests. The movement to have a public library to which the income from his library bequests might go began in 1880. As usual under such circumstances, all sorts of abortive movements preceded the real thing; it was not until 1886 that the city made its first appropriation, \$12,000, by which the public library began to be.

After a short stay in the Sheffield building, where the quarters proved entirely too small, the old Third church was purchased and refitted; it was opened to the public January 2, 1891. This building is already much too small for what the library is doing and especially for what it would be doing if it had the room. The provision of a much larger building, somewhat farther from the

business center, is bound to come very soon.

The number of volumes in the library is now over 68,000. The issue of books in 1903 was over 300,000, besides an estimated issue of 10,000 through the public schools. About 18,000 persons hold library cards. As the library is sometimes spoken of as furnishing little but fiction, it is well to note here that the percentage of fiction issued has fallen a little every year; it has gone down from 82.6 per cent to 69.2 per cent—which is not far from the general average after an equal number of years. There is a world of significance in that little statement of decline in the percentage, and it can be paralleled, probably, from the records of almost every library of any strength within the field.

\* \* \*  
The first library organization in Milford, so far as I have learned, was begun in 1858 under the name of "The Milford Lyceum." There was a membership fee of a dollar. The usual story



TAYLOR MEMORIAL LIBRARY, MILFORD.

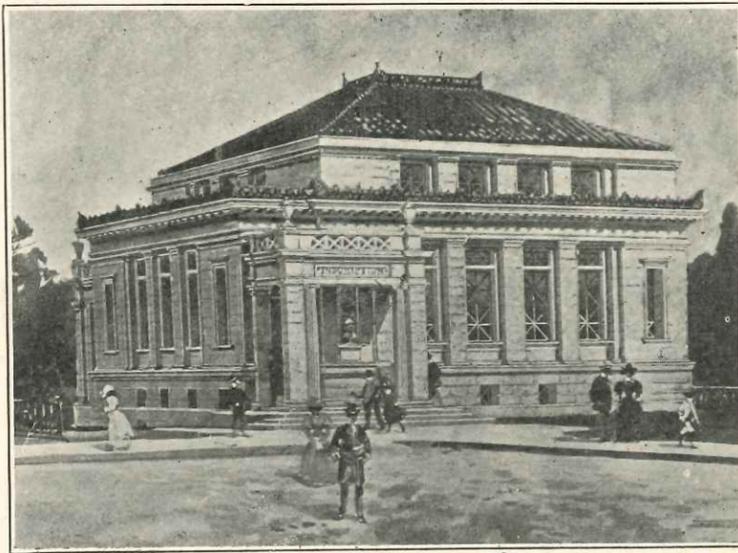
followed; interest waned, books became worn and seemed out of date, the room in the new town hall became unsuitable. George M. Gunn gave it quarters in a building that he owned, and efforts were made by others to give new life to the organization. But a fire, as in Guilford and Madison, swept their 1,800 volumes away. Fresh subscriptions resulted in the purchase of a few new books, and in this condition things dragged along until the erection of the Taylor library as it now exists.

This building was the gift of the late Henry A. Taylor. He had recently purchased a residence in Milford and had become interested in the town and expressed a desire to do something for its advancement. To the suggestion that he erect a library building he cordially consented upon condition that a site be furnished and provision be made for maintenance. These terms were met; the town is bound for fifty years to pay \$1,000 a year to the library trustees. Unfortunately, this sum is all the income. Thus Milford also needs a liberal

an exception to the rule in this state in regard to using the "Booklovers' library" or the "Bodley club" service; with the fewness of the books owned by the Norwalk library, the librarian considers the "Bodley" service "a great boon." Most librarians, I think, consider it too expensive to be a valuable ally. The Norwalk library has recently taken up the method of "traveling libraries," sending books to two precincts, to be changed every two months.

The South Norwalk library makes no special appeal to the eye, but it appeals powerfully to the discerning mind. Like the library in Guilford, it is simply struggling toward the time when a benefactor shall come forward with the large help that it needs and deserves. It issues about 22,000 volumes a year, and it uses all the devices that a narrow income permits for attracting, pleasing and helping both old and young.

It is a very interesting tier of libraries that thus stretches along the Connecticut shore. And yet other tiers or groups of very great interest could easily be found



WALLINGFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY.

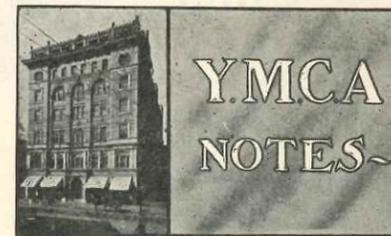
endowment in order to utilize its beautiful plant. For the building, although much too small, is singularly beautiful. They have nearly 10,000 volumes, 1,600 cardholders, and an annual issue of 33,000 books.

In Huntington, with a population of about 5,600, of whom one-half live in the borough of Shelton, there has been a parallel to the library histories that I have given in connection with the other small towns; an early library at Huntington Center; an early reading-room in Shelton; an organization in the winter of 1891-'92, and a subscription of \$2,400; action by the town appropriating

libraries upon which has been expended a wonderful amount of devotion and that are fulfilling their office with the most beneficent results.

The libraries of this group are different according to their location and according to their fortune in finding wise, earnest and powerful friends. They are alike in constantly needing to be protected from the withering touch of the politician; in being of value far beyond what can be done with an equal amount of means in almost any other field of social service; in being able to unite and to serve people of all social ranks, of all party affiliations, of all shades of

religious relief; in their power of adjustment, by simple evolution, to the highest and the lowest of human wants and human needs. It is hard to believe that in meeting the conditions of even a far distant future they will need to undergo any vital or destructive change. Growth, growth, is for them the essential thing.



The educational work of the Association is developing in interest, and plans for new enterprises are being arranged for the near future.

The class in electricity offers a particularly fine program. A series of lectures on wireless telegraphy is being arranged; also on other timely topics pertaining to the whole subject of electricity. Visits to the various electrical plants are being arranged.

Some twenty new students are now coming into the class.

The class in vocal music has made a great change for the better. Mr. George Chadwick Stock has made arrangements to give private lessons, instead of class work to all members of the vocal culture class. It is needless to say that this change is made with great profit to the individual.

Mr. Max Delfant's class in artistic advertising is doing really excellent work. Mr. Delfant is a master of his art, and the class, though small, is really a most satisfactory one.

The class in chemistry is doing good work. Its purpose is to fit unlicensed and junior clerks to pass the state examinations in pharmacy.

The debating club meets on Friday night. Mr. Fred M. Carroll is president; Mr. John W. Wetzel is instructor. The number is limited to 16. New members are coming into this class.

\* \* \*  
"The boys' department never was in such good shape as now," said one of the boys' work secretaries.

The membership is good, and more are coming in. Fifty-five boys came out last Saturday to a noon meeting, and there are sixty boys in Bible classes.

The Success club and Camera club are very popular with the boys.

The Sunday meetings for the older boys are well attended, twenty-five or thirty being the average number.

Different speakers address the boys' meeting every Sunday. The speaker for the coming Sabbath is Rev. Frank Luckey.

\* \* \*  
Quite a striking tribute was paid the physical department last Monday evening at the regular monthly meeting of the board of directors. One of the directors recited the instance of a young man of character and education, who was greatly broken in health. He had gone South for the benefit of his health, and had also taken a great deal of medicine, with little benefit. It was recommended to him to try the Young Men's Christian Association gymnasium. That he did, and after a very short experience he seemed built up into literally "a new man."

\* \* \*  
At the board of directors' meeting on Threshers presented the Association with Monday evening Captain Samuel P. a splendid clock system, which is his own remarkable invention. The main clock is placed in the general office, and this controls thirty-six smaller clocks, which are distributed about the building. Nothing appears on the face of the clock but the number which change from minute to minute. It is prophesied that this system will supercede all former methods. The motive power is electricity.

Mr. Thrasher explained the invention, and short speeches were made by Judge Cleveland, Mr. Edward Swift and Mr. Lotze, expressing appreciation of Captain Thrasher's most generous gift.

\* \* \*  
The Y. M. C. A. restaurant went under a new management on Friday, January 13. Mr. Oscar Schriber, a native of Basle, Switzerland, is now in charge of the restaurant. Mr. Schriber has studied this work in Germany, France, Holland and England. He came to America six years ago. Since being in this country he has been connected with some of the best hotels and restaurants in New York, including the Holland House, Delmonico's, Cafe Martin, etc.

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The speaker for the men's meeting in the Foy Auditorium on Sunday afternoon is Captain Harriet Lamb of the Salvation Army.