

The American College Society Library and the College Library

Mrs. Storie has abbreviated for the readers of College and Research Libraries a master's essay which she presented at the School of Library Service, Columbia University, in 1938.

THIS ARTICLE reports a study of college society libraries in the nineteenth century and was undertaken to provide a supplementary chapter in the history of the American college library. The closing lines of Shores's history of colonial college libraries discussed the situation as it was in 1800 and stated that "the inadequacy of most of the college libraries was felt so keenly by the students that the literary societies which began to appear for the first time undertook to establish libraries as one of their major purposes."¹

Except for a few individual colleges and for statistics covering one decade, there seem to be no contemporary accounts of the early college society libraries. There are scattered later references in histories of higher education, in histories of particular colleges, and in periodical articles written after 1875. Also D. H. Sheldon's *Student Life and Customs*, published in 1901, gives in three chapters a fairly extensive treatment of student societies. But none of these sources has anything to say in detail about the contribution of the society library to the college library, and only indirectly

does any one of them discuss the value of the society libraries.

At first it was the purpose to show merely the value of the society library to the college library. Before the value of the libraries could be discovered, however, the printed or manuscript catalogs of these libraries had to be located; and before the catalogs could be located, the colleges which had had societies had to be determined. Examination of the society library collections at all the colleges was impossible. This part of the work was confined, therefore, to a cursory study of the value of these libraries in general and to a specific examination of the collections at one college, *i.e.*, those of the Peithologian and the Philo-xian societies at Columbia University.

Sources for Locating the Libraries

Reports and Handbooks. To help in locating colleges which had society libraries there fortunately are various government documents. The Smithsonian Institution issued in 1851 the earliest report on libraries in the United States. William J. Rhee published more extensive information in 1859, and the Commissioner of Education has included notices on public (including college) libraries in his reports at intervals since 1876. A handbook on college societies was put out in 1871. These publications, as has been indicated, cover the period after 1850 only.

Periodical Literature. Few articles re-

¹ Shores, Louis. *Origins of the American College Library, 1638-1800.* New York City, Barnes and Noble, 1934. 290p.

lating even indirectly to the subject were found in indexes to periodicals. In these accounts the society library was mentioned only in passing. With such scant information and with no references to articles written before 1850, the next approach was to go directly to educational periodicals published during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Statistics: 1828-39. In spite of the fact that no descriptions of society libraries could be located in the early journals, very interesting statistics exist in certain tables in the *American Annals of Education and Instruction* for 1834, 1835, and 1836. The 1834 volume points to an earlier source by mentioning that the editor of the *American Quarterly Register of Education* had estimated the number of students in 1830. In this journal are statistics for the years 1828, 1829, 1830, 1831, and 1833. The table in the *American Annals of Education and Instruction* for 1834 also leads to a more complete source, stating that it was "copied with some additions and variations from the *American Almanac* for 1835." The *American Almanac* was found to contain statistics on students' libraries for every year from 1830 through 1840, and its table for 1830 referred back to the *American Quarterly Register and Journal of the American Education Society*, which was the same periodical under a variant title as the *American Quarterly Register of Education* mentioned above.

Sources for Locating Catalogs

Library Card and Book Catalogs and Bibliographies. Although it is evident that the societies in general were dying out in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the number of libraries referred to in the *Report of the Commissioner of Education for 1884-85* was much greater than in earlier issues. In that report 127 colleges were listed as having societies. It mentions

thirty-one other colleges as having been established before 1825, some of which presumably had societies. Material referring to these two groups totaling 158 colleges was sought in the card catalogs of Columbia University Library, the Library of Congress Depository Catalog at Columbia University, the catalogs of Teachers College Library and the New York Public Library, twenty-five printed or book catalogs of college libraries and the Boston Athenaeum, the shelflist of the Library of Congress, and, after a revision, the catalog of the library of the American Antiquarian Society.

Questionnaire. To supplement the checking of library card catalogs, a questionnaire was sent to the librarians of the colleges founded before 1850. Limitation to this period was decided upon because library catalogs had not been located for any of those founded at a later date.

Procedures and Findings

From the foregoing it can be seen that three main types of sources were located: the statistical tables (in the government reports and in the journals for 1828-40), the catalogs of society libraries, and the responses to the questionnaire. Results, therefore, depended upon interpretation of the statistics and of the responses to the questionnaire and upon evaluation of the catalogs and of a few miscellaneous sources.

Interpretation of the Statistics. The statistics brought to light some interesting facts. It was discovered that of all the colleges flourishing in 1830, 80 per cent had society libraries, and of these, nearly half had collections larger than those of their college libraries. In 1837 these libraries varied from a few hundred to 15,000 volumes, while the college libraries varied from a few hundred to 10,000 volumes, with the one exception of Harvard, which had 43,000 volumes. By 1851 only 55 per cent of the colleges reported society libraries,

with slightly over a third of these having collections larger than their college libraries. These society libraries were found in the colleges of the United States from Maine to Georgia and as far west as Missouri.

Information tabulated from the statistics in the journals from 1828-40 showed that throughout this period the society libraries at Dartmouth, Middlebury, Amherst, Yale after 1830, Washington² after 1833, Williams after 1835, Jefferson and Washington,³ Western,⁴ Union, Geneva,⁵ Dickinson, Washington,⁶ University of North Carolina, University of Georgia in 1831 and 1832, Nashville from 1835 to 1839, Miami, and Franklin from 1836 to 1839, had larger collections than their college libraries. Also, one-third of the colleges in the New England states had more books in the libraries of their societies than in their college libraries during the decade 1830-40.

Beside the facts relating to the size of the libraries which the reports generally yielded, the report of the Smithsonian Institution for 1851 presented other information which added considerably to the picture. The descriptions for 126 college libraries vary from a paragraph to several pages and include 142 student libraries at sixty-five of these colleges. One of the items requested from the libraries was the number of hours that each was open. Forty-six of the colleges which had student libraries responded to this question, indicating that their *college* libraries were open for periods ranging from one hour every two weeks or a half hour once a week to "several hours" daily. At the most this probably resulted in eighteen or twenty hours a week for six of the colleges, while half of them could claim only the minimum.

² Now Trinity.

³ Now Washington and Jefferson.

⁴ Now University of Pittsburgh.

⁵ Now Hobart.

⁶ Now Washington and Lee.

Yale reported the most complete schedule: every day in the year (except Sundays and three or four public days) in term time from 10 A.M. to 1 P.M. and from 3 to 5 P.M., and in the summer commonly an hour or two more: in vacation every day from 3 to 5 hours. Added to the inconvenience of short hours, at Amherst College, was that of paying for the privilege of borrowing books at the library. These conditions show clearly why any supplementary libraries which might be developed at a college would be of great use to the students.

Interpretation of Responses to the Questionnaire. Because of the painstaking responses to the questionnaire, many additional catalogs were located, although no catalogs of society libraries were known to exist at the universities of Georgia or Virginia or at the colleges of William and Mary, Hampden-Sydney, Washington, Charleston, or at any institution in Alabama, Louisiana, Tennessee, or Kentucky. Yet the Library of Congress has a catalog for one of the society libraries at Franklin College (now the University of Georgia) and, according to the statistics quoted in the original study, nine of the sixteen institutions listed from the South had society libraries of over a thousand volumes at some time during the decade 1830-40. The libraries at the College of William and Mary were largely destroyed by fire before the Civil War, in 1859. Moreover, other colleges in all sections of the country suffered from disastrous fires throughout the whole nineteenth century. It seems probable, therefore, that many catalogs were published for libraries of which all the records are lost, except bare statistics.

Only two colleges reported the distribution of their society library collection other than to the college library. At one of these one of the libraries was sold to an individual, and at the other the books of

one society were sent to "Southern colleges."

Evaluation of Miscellaneous Sources and of the Printed Catalogs of Society Libraries. That the society libraries were of value not only to the students, but an intrinsic ally, appears in certain passages taken from histories relating to colleges for which printed society library catalogs could not be found or were not available for interlibrary loan. All of these colleges were located in or west of the Appalachian Mountains or in the far South. Whatever the reason for the lack of printed catalogs for their society libraries, the quotations show that these libraries were important. The following concerns Marietta College, founded at Marietta, Ohio, in 1835:

They began at once also to collect libraries, the members donating books and assessing themselves at different times from five to fifty dollars apiece for this purpose. The high quality of the books bought may be inferred from an entry in the record book of Psi Gamma in 1847: "It was voted to expend one half of all moneys paid into the treasury for initiation fees and fines in the purchase of well authenticated histories of the early settlements of the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys."⁷

One of the most interesting facts discovered about a society library came from another miscellaneous source. It was found that one of the student libraries at Yale furnished the material for the beginning of that famous and invaluable reference tool, *Poole's Index*. Contrary to Shores's statement in *Basic Reference Books* that this work was undertaken in and for the college library, Poole tells in the opening paragraph of the preface to the 1882 edition of his index how the need for a key to periodical literature grew in the library at one of the literary societies; also, how by 1848 the

manuscript which he had compiled for the use of his fellow students was rapidly wearing out and was finally printed as the *Index to Subjects Treated in the Reviews and Other Periodicals*.⁸ An issue of five hundred copies was made, the society sponsorship being alluded to and the immediate distribution being described, together with the purpose of the book, in a note following the introduction to the first edition:

It is yet uncertain whether a second edition of the *Index*, containing the improvements and additions suggested above, will be printed. Book-making is a profession that is not contemplated in the purposes and objects of our Society. This work was prepared expressly for our own accommodation, and if in securing this, we have extended it to other kindred Societies and Public Libraries, we are doubly gratified. The need of such a work is evident from the fact, that no sooner was the preparation of the work announced, than orders from abroad exceeded the whole edition. If the Society concludes to issue a second edition, it will be announced through our publishers.⁹

In the search for the printed catalogs of the society libraries, finally 273 different catalogs, 220 of which were printed, were discovered. Since eighteen of these 220 were not located in any library but were listed in bibliographies only and since one unique edition at the Library of Congress was missing, a maximum of 201 could have been examined. Sixty-seven per cent of these were examined at the five libraries visited or were obtained through interlibrary loans.

The American Antiquarian Society had the greatest number of unique editions outside of the colleges themselves (an edition was considered "unique" if it were available in only one of the five libraries visited and if it were not available for interlibrary

⁷ Beach, A. G. *A Pioneer College, the Story of Marietta*, p. 110.

⁸ *Poole's Index . . . Index to Subjects Treated in the Reviews and Other Periodicals*. c1882. 1938. p. iii.

⁹ *Poole's Index . . .* 1848, p. iv.

loan). The editions available on interlibrary loan from the colleges ranked second among the sources for examining the catalogs.

It seems probable that many other catalogs existed for the libraries of the Middle States (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland) and some others for those in the South; the libraries in the Middle Western colleges, however, did not develop until a later date. The preponderance of catalogs for the society libraries of the New England colleges is probably attributable to more fortunate circumstances of preservation than existed in other sections. The disappearance of catalogs in the colleges of the South is probably due at least partially to the general disruption of education, and consequently of educational libraries, after the Civil War.

From the forewords and introductions in the catalogs it was noted that the college usually gave the society a room in which to hold its meetings and to house its library. The introductions also often contained rules and regulations. Although many of the rules of the society libraries indicated that little or no reading was done on the premises, it seems altogether probable that the society libraries were to some extent the browsing rooms of the early nineteenth century. The rooms were furnished by the societies, and in some cases separate buildings were constructed by them, as at Emory and Henry and at Princeton. Financial support was supplied to the society libraries by their members, and later when these libraries were given to the colleges their book funds often were also turned over to the colleges.

Several other attributes of the society libraries can be discovered from the book catalogs which they published. From the mere number of catalogs published a chart can be produced showing definitely the trends in the growth of the society libraries,

which reached their peak by 1840, continued near this peak until 1860, and died out rapidly thereafter.

One of the most unexpected attributes of the society libraries was the range of subjects included in the collections. A preconceived idea led the author of this paper to imagine the society library as one mainly of fiction and general literature, with some drama and poetry and perhaps a few travel books, and to suppose that if any nonfiction were included, it would be in the field of religion or the Latin and Greek classics. Actually, of ninety-seven catalogs examined, none was found devoted solely to literature. Sixty-seven of these ninety-seven were classified, having from four to twenty-seven subject divisions.

To ascertain the quality of books included within the varied classifications, the author compared twenty-five catalogs from sixteen colleges with a list of books recommended by Robert M. Hutchins in 1936 as books which every educated person should read. This list was chosen from an indefinite number of "best books" lists, because fifty-three of the fifty-seven books included were first published before 1860, because practically all classifications of subject matter were included, and because it was comparatively short. It was found that all but eight of the fifty-three books were represented in one or more of the society libraries checked, that the library of the United Fraternity at Dartmouth College contained thirty-one of the titles in 1824, and that the two societies at Middlebury College contained thirty-one between them twenty years later.

Without an extensive study of the catalogs of the society libraries it would be impossible in most cases to determine their value. Two catalogs from societies at Dartmouth and at Middlebury, which give date and place of publication as well as author and title, indicated collections of significance in two different fields. A count

of the entries according to date of publication showed the following:

	Before 1500	1500-99	1600-99	1700-99 (in U.S.)
Dartmouth		5	18	157
Middlebury	2	22	114	1

The collection at Dartmouth is obviously strong in Americana, even after discounting the fact that there were two entries for some volumes. The earlier collection belonging to the Philological Society at Middlebury College was, on the other hand, strong in foreign books, including two incunabula, one from the press of Aldus.

Society Libraries at Columbia

To have discovered that the society libraries contained rare books is something quite apart from discovering that the college libraries ever received these books or now have them. Several college librarians, in responding to the questionnaire, indicated that they hoped to check up on the old collections that had come to them.

As bearing on this, an attempt was made to evaluate the collections at Columbia University as a sample, using the resources available in the Columbia University Library. The entries in other society catalogs, such as those of the societies at Dartmouth, Middlebury, and Yale, would have been easier to identify since the bibliographic information included in them is more complete than in most.

At Columbia only one catalog of the collection of the Philolexian Society is known. This one, for 1825, is, however, a

typical example in that the only clue it furnishes to the identification of a book, other than incomplete author and short title, is the size! There were 415 individual titles listed. No printed catalog is known for the collection of the Peithologian Society library, but one volume of this society was listed in the accession book of the university library with the gifts of the Philolexian Society. Looking at random through other volumes of the accession books, 642 gifts of the Peithologian Society were found in the volume immediately preceding the one which contained 530 gifts of the other society.

Comparing the titles of the gifts of the two societies, it is interesting to note that one society contributed several outstanding American editions of nineteenth-century fiction, that together they gave forty-two volumes of Americana published in the United States before 1800, and that none of these duplicated each other. Moreover, four of the Americana from the Peithologian Society could not be found in Evans' *American Bibliography*. All of those from the Philolexian Society were found in Evans, although none is listed as being at Columbia University.

Since the society libraries at Columbia were found to be significant in spite of being smaller than those at twenty-five other colleges in 1830 and smaller than those at seven others in 1839, it may be inferred that the ones existing elsewhere than at the Columbia libraries were of material value.

Dates of founding of societies and of publication of society library catalogs considered in this study. (The first date given after each society is the date of founding; the others are dates of catalogs.)

Allegheny College, Meadville, Pa.
Allegheny Literary Society, 1835
Philo-Franklin Society, 1834

1867*, 1866-73*, 1886
1855-56*

Amherst College, Amherst, Mass.
Athenian (Athenae) Society, 1821
Alexandrian Society, 1821
Eclectic Society

1836, 1855, n.d., n.d.
1853, n.d.
n.d.*

* Manuscript copy.

Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Me. Athenaeon Society, 1802 Peucinian Society, 1805	1830, 1834, 1838, 1861 1823, 1829, 1859
Brown University, Providence, R.I. Franklin Society, 1824-34 Philermenian Society, 1794 Society of Federal Adelpi, 1799 United Brothers Society	1826 1810, 1814, 1817, 1821, 1824, 1828, 1833, 1835, 1838, 1841, 1844, 1849 1799-1800* 1821, 1824, 1829, 1835, 1837, 1839, 1841, 1848, 1853
Colby College, Waterville, Me. Literary Fraternity Society, 1824	1852
Columbia University, New York City Peithologian Society Philolexian Society, 1802	1820-63* 1825
Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H. Philotechnic Society United Fraternity, 1786	1856, 1858, 1862, 1872 1812, 1820, 1824, 1830*, 1835, 1835*, 1852-54, 1859, 1877*, n.d.*, Supplements . . . presented by the classes of 1852-54, etc.
Delaware, University of, Newark Athenaeon, 1834	1836*
Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pa. Belles Lettres Society, 1786	1825, 1839
Emory and Henry College, Emory, Va. Calliopean Society Hermesian Society, 1839	1872 1872
Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, Pa. Diagnothian Society, 1835 (Marshall College)	1841, 1843
Georgia, University of, Athens, Ga. Demosthenian Society, 1801 (Franklin College)	1855
Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pa. Philomathean Society, 1832	1846
Hamilton College, Clinton, N.Y. Phoenix Society, 1814 Union Society, 1824	1827*, 1832*, 1839, 1839-55, 1847* 1834*, 1835-58 (?), 1838, 1842, 1842*, 1847, 1847*
Harvard College, Cambridge, Mass. Hasty Pudding Society, 1795 Institute of 1770, 1770 Porcellian Club, 1791(?) ΔΕΛΙΙΝΟΦΑΤΟΙ Club	1838, 1841, 1852, 1857*, n.d.* 1832, 1823-36*, 1837*, 1841*, 1854-55* 1816, 1827, 1831, 1834, 1839, 1846, 1850, 1854, 1857, 1865, 1867, 1877, 1887, 1891 1816
Haverford College, Haverford, Pa. Loganian Society, 1848	1854, 1862
Kalamazoo College, Kalamazoo, Mich.* Philolexian Society, 1851 Sherwood Rhetorical Society, 1855	1868 1868, 1871, 1873, 1876
Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio Philomathesian Society, 1827	1834, 1840, 1843*, 1853, n.d.*
Knox College, Galesburg, Ill. Adelpi Society and Gnothautii Society, 1845, 1849	1887
* Manuscript copy.	

Lafayette College, Easton, Pa.	
Franklin Society, 1831	1890
Washington Society, 1832	1877, 1888
Marietta College, Marietta, Ohio	
Society of Inquiry	1850
Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vt.	
Philological Society	1824
Philomathesian Society	1819, 1832, 1837, 1844
North Carolina, University of, Chapel Hill	
Dialectic Society, 1795	1817, 1821, 1835, 1843*, 1860*, n.d.* (4)
Philanthropic Society, 1795	1822, 1829, 1840*, 1882*, 1889*, n.d.* (2)
Pennsylvania, University of, Philadelphia	
Zelosophic Society	1850
Philomathean Society	1840, 1870
Princeton University, Princeton, N.J.	
American Whig Society, 1769	1845, 1853, 1857, 1862, 1865, 1870
Cliosophic Society, 1765	1840, 1850, 1855, 1873, 1878, 1882, n.d.
Philological Society	1828
Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J.	
Peithessophian Literary Society, 1825	1864*, n.d.
Philoclean Literary Society, 1825	1827-34*, 1836*, 1875
South Carolina College, Columbia	
Clariosophic Society	1842*, 1848*, 1868*, n.d.* (2)
Euphradian Society	1883*
Trinity College, Hartford, Conn.	
Athenaeum Society, 1824	1838, 1840, 1844, 1853, 1853*
Parthenon Society, 1827	1836*
Union University, Schenectady, N.Y.	
Adelphic Society, 1796	1827, 1836, 1847, 1852, 1856, 1868
Philomathean Society, 1795	1812, 1820, 1828, 1833, 1840, 1841, 1848, 1863
Vermont, University of, Burlington	
Phi Sigma Nu, 1803	1846
Wabash College, Crawfordsville, Ind.	
Calliopean Society, 1847	1855
Lyceum Society, 1847	1854
Washington & Jefferson College, Washington, Pa.	
Franklin Society (Jefferson College), 1791	1857
Philo Society (Jefferson College), 1805	1840, 1854
Wesleyan University, Middletown, Conn.	
Peithologian Society, 1831	1831-41*, 1846, 1853
Philorhetorian Society, 1831	1837, 1st, 1840, 2nd, 1846, 1853, 3rd
Western Reserve University, Cleveland (formerly Western Reserve College, Hudson, Ohio) Adelbert College	
Adelphic Society	1837*
William & Mary, College of, Williamsburg, Va.	
Flat Hat Club	n.d.
Williams College, Williamstown, Mass.	
Adelphic Union	1812, 1832
Philologian, 1795	1843, 1847, 1850, 1853, 1856, 1862
Philotechnian Society, 1795	1844, 1850, 1853, 1856, 1861, 1867

* Manuscript copy.

Wittenberg College, Springfield, Ohio
Excelsior Society, 1845
Philosophian Society, 1847

Yale University, New Haven, Conn.
Brothers' & Linonian Society

Brothers in Unity, 1768
Calliopean Society

Linonian Society, 1753

Moral Society
Phoenix Society

* Manuscript copy.

1850, 1877
1876 (?)

1808, 1811, 1814, 1818, 1822, 1825, 1873, 1880,
suppl. to 1873
1781*, 1829, 1832, 1835, 1838, 1841, 1846, 1851
1819, 1824, 1826, 1828, 1829, suppl., 1831, 1837,
1841, 1846
1770*, 1780*, 1790*, 1800*, 1829, 1831, 1834,
1836, 1837, 1840, 1841, 1846, 1860
1814, 1818, 1822, 1825
1806(?)

Sources of Reports and Statistics

American Almanac and Repository of Useful Knowledge for 1830-40. Boston, 1829-39. v. 1-11.
American Annals of Education and Instruction, 1834, 1835, 1836. Boston, 1834-36. v. 4-6.
American Quarterly Register and Journal of the American Education Society, 1828-31. Andover, etc., Mass., 1829-31. v. 1-3.
Cutter, Charles A. "List of Printed Catalogues of Public Libraries in the United States." (In U.S. Office of Education. *Public Libraries in the United States of America.* Washington, Government Printing Office, 1876, p. 577-622.)
Jewett, Charles Coffin. *Notices of Public Libraries in the United States of America.* Printed by order of Congress, as an appendix to the fourth annual report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution. Washington, Printed for the House of Representatives, 1851. 207p.
Rhees, William Jones. *Manual of Public Libraries, Institutions, and Societies, in the United States, and*

British Provinces of North America. Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1859. 28, 687p.
Seeley, I. C. *Manual of College Literary Societies with Statistical Tables.* Kalamazoo, 1871. 145p.
U.S. Office of Education. *Public Libraries in the United States of America; Their History, Condition and Management.* Special report. Department of Interior, Bureau of Education. . . . Washington, Government Printing Office, 1876. 2v. in 1.
U.S. Office of Education. "Public, Society, and School Libraries in the United States; with Library Statistics and Legislation of the Various States." 1896, 1900, etc. (In *Report of the Commissioner of Education,* 1895-96, 1899-1900, etc. Washington, Government Printing Office, 1897, 1901, etc.)
U.S. Office of Education. . . . "Statistics of Public Libraries in the United States Numbering 300 Volumes and Upwards for 1884-85." (In *Report of the Commissioner of Education,* 1884-85. Washington, Government Printing Office, 1886. ccxxx-ccxxx, 691-782p.)

Personnel in Cataloging Departments

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alertness, self-confidence, perception, flexibility, and balance."⁶ According to Mrs. Nyholm, who listed the qualities above, these people could withstand aggressive and demanding pressures and make decisions based on "soundness" and "survival value."

Finally, a good deal more attention

should be given by administrators to catalogers as people. This seems so obvious that one hesitates to repeat it, yet the epidemic of criticism suggests that administrators, in their great desire to emerge from a bad situation, have not always used the proper approach.

⁶ *Op. cit.*