

Book Reviews

Parnassus on Main Street: A History of the Detroit Public Library. By Frank B. Woodford. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965. 487p. \$9.50. (65-11820).

Relative to their role as custodians of our cultural heritage, librarians, as a group, show remarkably little interest in their own history. This is another way of saying that library histories, particularly histories of individual libraries, are not likely to be widely read. We tend to be progressive, forward-looking, pragmatic, to view the Golden Age as still ahead and only reluctantly cast our eyes backward at our unglamorous beginnings. Except as a source of colorful anecdote or utilitarian explanation of how-it-all-came-to-be, we are not likely to be concerned with library history for its own sake. Add to all this the fact that the historian of a particular library, even a great metropolitan library system, must necessarily deal with more local history than most readers wish to know about. These are indeed formidable barriers to readership.

In what terms then can one recommend a good book such as Frank Woodford has provided us, a centennial testimonial worthy of one of our great and widely influential public library systems? Mr. Woodford's qualifications are noteworthy. For over thirty years he has known Detroit as a newsman and chief editorial writer of the *Free Press*. During the past fifteen years he has produced six other books on Detroit and Michigan history, all but one of which was published by a university press. It is not surprising then that this work is backed by ample research and unobtrusively presents its story in its social, cultural, and political context. Especially striking is the author's skill in keeping his story moving ahead chronologically and, at the same time, dealing in some depth with major developments and issues. But, it may as well be admitted, that, through no fault of Mr. Woodford's, many readers will be better served by commencing to read with the chapter "Branching Out," about two-fifths of the way through, where the DPL clearly begins to emerge as one of our dynamic and prototypical library systems. In the chapters that follow, such as "Blood Money" (Andrew Carnegie's benefaction), "The Children's

Hour," "A Finger on the City's Pulse," "The Library Goes to War," "Days of Despair" (The Depression), and "Plowing New Fields," the clearly evident importance of the story heightens the interest.

This reader was disappointed that the chapter on "Thou Shalt Not Read" was not extended to include a fuller account of book selection policy, with discussion of its negative, as well as positive, aspects. Though by no means ignored, more could have been said about the diverse publics which the library serves. But the book should be judged in terms of what it does, not what it does not do. Mr. Woodford has provided a sound, well written book. The story he tells should increase in interest as, in the coming years, the broad range of services which have made the Detroit public library exceptional become a commonplace experience to all but the smallest communities.—*John C. Abbott, Edwardsville Campus, Southern Illinois University.*

Newspapering in the Old West; A Pictorial History of Journalism and Printing on the Frontier. By Robert F. Karlevitz. Seattle: Superior Publishing Company, 1965. 191p. \$12.95. (65-23450).

Librarians and bibliographers interested in the movement of the printing trades westward will find this volume a useful accession to their collections. The first press to enter the Trans-Mississippi territory was operated in Missouri in 1808, but only five other Western states had presses before mid-century. *El Mejicano* began publication in Nacogdoches in what is now Texas in 1813; *El Crepusculo de la Libertad* was established in Taos, New Mexico, in 1834; the *Cherokee Advocate* appeared in Oklahoma in 1844; both the *Californian* of Monterey and the *Oregon Spectator* of Oregon City began in 1846.

The migration of the printing trades toward the setting sun was difficult. Old presses and battered type were carried on wagons and keelboats, railroad cars and muleback, to assuage the insatiable appetite of early settlers for intelligences and other reading matter from the eastern lands they had forsaken. Newspapers with such colorful names as the *Guthrie Get Up*, the *Unterrified Democrat*, the *Arizona Silver Belt*, and the storied *Tombstone Epitaph*, sprang