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# Looking Back at Kentucky Libraries in the 1850s

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## **Looking Back at Kentucky Libraries in the 1850s**

### **By Jonathan Jeffrey**

In the early-1850s, William J. Rhees, the chief clerk of the Smithsonian Institution, sent out surveys to libraries throughout North America in order to compile a comprehensive statistical manual and guidebook for librarians. The result was the *Manual of Public Libraries, Institutions, and Societies in the United States, and British Provinces of North America* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1859). In it he compiled library statistics by state and advised on a variety of matters related to library work from erecting buildings, to classification systems, to daily regimens for librarians. For your perusal I've extrapolated some of the statistical information related to Kentucky libraries and have included Mr. Rhees's suggestions on constructing and furnishing libraries. Rhees interpreted "public libraries" as any library that circulated books to the public even if a subscription or membership was necessary.

Rhees received statistical information from 87 Kentucky libraries. Of these repositories, only 49 actually knew the size of their collections. The Smithsonian clerk calculated that on an average Kentucky libraries added 231 volumes each year and circulated 4,680 volumes annually amongst an average of 491 patrons. Kentucky librarians reported that they spent an average of \$255 per year on books. Below is the breakdown of libraries by size:

<u>Collection Size</u>	<u># of Libraries</u>	<u>Total Volumes Reported</u>
Under 1,000 volumes	11	5,821
1,000 - 2,000 volumes	11	15,472
2,000 - 3,000 volumes	3	6,000
3,000 - 4,000 volumes	4	12,500
4,000 - 5,000 volumes	2	8,500
6,000 - 7,000 volumes	1	6,000
7,000 - 8,000 volumes	1	7,000
8,000 - 9,000 volumes	1	8,000
9,000 - 10,000 volumes	0	0
10,000 - 15,000 volumes	3	33,000

Rhees's *Manual* also included brief library histories which had been submitted by individual librarians. I've edited these to include information about the library, rather than the history of the umbrella institutions. Material in quotation marks comes directly from the *Manual*.

**Augusta College** in Bracken County was founded in 1822 and its librarian reported in 1855 that the library housed 3000 volumes.

The library at **St. Joseph's College** reported 5000 volumes in its facility in 1857. This school, located in Bardstown, commenced operations in 1824. "Before August, 1848, the library contained about 6000 volumes. At that time, the Board of Trustees divided the library between this and several other institutions which they directed, leaving to St. Joseph's College about 5000 volumes of theological, historical, and literary works, with a set of Congressional documents.

The principal reliance for the increase of the collection is upon donations. The library occupies a room, 24 feet by 15, and 13 feet high, in the College building. The books are arranged according to subjects, each subject having one or

more panels. There is no printed catalogue. The library is opened every day twice, to allow the professors opportunity for consultation, three-quarters of an hour in the morning, and one hour in the afternoon. Books are freely lent to persons connected with the College, and, by permission of the superintendent, to others residing in the immediate vicinity.

During 1854, \$800 were expended for books, and \$150 for periodicals. During 1856, \$350 were spent for books, and \$80 for periodicals. Of the volumes in the library, 2500 are in English, 1040 French, 60 German, 25 Spanish, 100 other modern languages, 1005 Latin, 200 Greek, 7 Hebrew.

The **Centre College** library in Danville reported a collection of 2000 volumes in 1857. "The faculty, students, and public, have the use of the library. The students pay \$2 annually. It is open two hours once a week. During 1854, 6,000 volumes were lent to 300 persons. 4800 volumes are in English, 25 French, 150 Latin, 15 Greek, 6 Hebrew.

During the last five years, about \$400 were expended for books.

There are three literary societies connected with the college. They occupy halls, large, commodious, and fitted up with taste and elegance. The societies hold public exercises on the 22nd of February, and on the Tuesday preceding commencement each year. Each of them possesses a well-selected library of about 1700 volumes. The College library contains about 2000 volumes, among which are a number of rare and valuable works.

The **Kentucky State Library** in Frankfort reported a collection of 10,000 volumes in 1856. Founded in 1834. The library consists almost exclusively of law books. There are about 400 volumes of miscellaneous works. In 1840, the legislature appropriated \$3000 for law books for the courts and the legislature. The library is kept in a room, 50 feet by 20, in the State House. A catalogue was published in January, 1856. The library is open daily during the sessions of the courts and legislature. Officers of the State government, members of the legislature, and lawyers attending the courts in Frankfort, are allowed the use of the books. The books are not lent out to others. During the last five years \$2500 were expended for books. The annual cost of supporting the library is \$1500.

The **Georgetown College** library reported 6000 volumes in its collection in 1855. The library was founded in 1837, and contains many costly works in philology and theology, but chiefly scientific and historical books, a few manuscript journals of early settlers of Kentucky, and many maps and charts. It has also 64 medals and 676 coins, comprising those of Burmah, Siam, Hindostan, the East Indian Company, South America, Dutch East Indies, etc. The average annual increase is about 500 volumes. The library is in a room of the main building of the College, 45 feet by 32, with lofty ceiling. The coins, medals, pictures, etc., are kept in a room devoted to the purpose, on the same floor as the library. The books are arranged on the shelves, according to subjects, under twenty divisions. A catalogue raisonne was been printed, containing 76 pages, 12mo. The library is open twice a week, half an hour each time. All person connected with the

College are allowed the use of the books; under-graduates are taxed \$1 per annum for the privilege. By permission of the president, books may be taken out by citizens.

The philosophical and chemical apparatus is of the first quality.

The cabinet of minerals, fossils, and shells, embraces over six thousand specimens, besides charts, maps, etc.

The museum contains over sever hundred articles of different countries, many of them Oriental.

The **Urania College** library in Glasgow, Kentucky, reported a collection of public documents, comprising the Acts of congress and State papers as far back as 1774; also a small library of miscellaneous works, but no extensive apparatus.

The **Lexington Library** reported a collection of 11,000 volumes in 1857."Shareholders pay \$2 per annum. Receipts during 1856, \$373. Expended for books \$162. Binding, \$35. Periodicals, \$20. Salaries, \$259. Incidentals, \$50. About 400 volumes are added every year. During the last five years \$1280 were expended for books.

The books are arranged according to their size. The library is open on Wednesday and Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. During 1856, 8000 volumes were lent to 175 persons; the books principally read were novels, biographies, and travels. A catalogue was printed in 1852; 200 copies cost \$100.

The library building was destroyed by fire in 1854, and a number of books lost. The American editions of the English Reviews are taken, but no other periodicals.

The **Transylvania University** library reported the largest library in the Commonwealth with 12,000 in 1857. The College library founded in 1798, is kept in three library-rooms in the three department of the University, under the control of the Faculties of arts, law, and medicine. Several catalogues have been published, but none of recent date.

The students' libraries contain 2000 volumes.

In September, 1857, it is stated that 'the libraries, having been mainly burnt when the old College edifice was consumed many years ago, are not extensive.'

The Medical Department library at Transylvania reported a collection of 8000 volumes in 1857. The books are principally medical and scientific; they are arranged by subjects. More than half are in English; about 200 in French.

The **Law Library** in Louisville reported a collection of 1350 volumes in 1852. This library is only for reference. Terms, \$5 per annum, to law students. Open from 9 to 12 a.m., and 2 to 5 p.m. A catalogue was printed in 1852, and 145 volumes added during the same year.

The **Mechanics' Institution** of Louisville reported a 7000 volume library in 1857. Organized March 25th, 1853. Incorporated July 18, 1854. From the 1st May, to the end of the year 1856, 1065 persons drew books; of this number, 523 were members, 807 ladies, 235 minors. In the same time, 10,523 volumes were

circulated, averaging 1403 per month; an increase of nearly 300 volumes per month over the previous year. The annual exhibitions are very successful. The receipts for 1856 were \$7309.42; and expenditures, \$5706.92, leaving a balance of \$1602.50 in the treasury.

Average annual amount expended for books, about \$315, since 1854 (including 1854). Average annual number of volumes added to the library, about 313, since 1854 (including 1854). Average annual number of volumes lent to readers, about 13,500.

The **Shelby College** library in Shelbyville reported 2427 volumes in its facility in 1855. Founded in 1841. The library is open to the free use of students and professors. The books are classified by subjects. There are 1922 in English, 50 French, 12 German, 1 Polish, 240 Latin, 123 Greek, 60 Hebrew, 15 Oriental. *Silliman's Journal* is the only periodical taken.

Besides providing statistical information for librarians, Rhees also presented the latest data related to best practices for libraries. In the passage below (which is quoted verbatim), he discusses the erection and furnishing of library buildings.

### **The Construction and Furnishing of Library Buildings**

1. The site must be dry and airy, and capable of affording light on several, and (when possible) on all sides. The building should, therefore, be



- isolated, and if it be necessary to place it near to any great thoroughfare, as much open space as possible should intervene.
2. The building should be fire-proof; walls, floors, and roof should be exclusively formed of brick, stone, iron, and slate. If the reading-room, or any other special apartment have a wooden floor, it should be embedded in stucco upon a stone flagging, or upon brick arches.
  3. The ground floor should be vaulted, and in the external walls of the entire structure there should be ample passages and channels for ventilation. If the building be extensive, large water pipes ('fire mains') should be carried along the roof.
  4. In general, the building should not exceed two stories in height, and the upper floor should be lighted by sky-lights, lantern lights, or cupolas.
  5. The principal room, or rooms, for the reception of books should be of such proportions, and be so constructed, as to admit of the greater part of the contents of the library, if of moderate extent, being seen at one view.
  6. The entire collection of books should be accessible without steps or ladders. This condition may be attained in the loftiest rooms by the use of light galleries of perforated iron, with railings breast high, and with small spiral staircases at each angle. These galleries should be placed in tiers at intervals of about every seven feet, of the height of the inner walls; so that if these be thirty-five feet high in the clear, there would be four such tiers on all sides of the room.

7. The reading-rooms should invariably be distinct from the rooms appropriated to the main collection of books. If the library be a large one, two reading-rooms at least should be provided. Such rooms should be shelved for the reception of books of common reference, and of a selection of such as form the bibliographical apparatus of a library. A smaller and contiguous room should be assigned for the use of such readers as need special facilities for collation, copying, and other like pursuits. The reading-rooms should be provided with a series of shelved closets, which might be distinguished by the letters of the alphabet, for the reception of books which are in continuous use by readers from day to day.
8. There should be an ample provision of smaller rooms for the general business and internal working of the library. In any considerable library, the following rooms will be indispensable: 1) A receiving and unpacking room, with access, if possible, distinct from that of the public. 2) A stamping and registering room. 3) A cataloguing and account-keeping room for clerks and transcribers. 4) A book-binding room. If the binding be done within the library premises, this room should communicate with the workshop; but if otherwise, advantage will result from the assigning a separate small room to the business connected with binding. 5) Committee or board room, with ante-room thereto. 6) Librarian's room or study. In a large library, this room also should have its vestibule or waiting-room. 7) Rooms for the assistant librarians and attendants, according to the extent

and character of the library. 8) Cloak-rooms, lavatories, and other conveniences. 9) A room, the extent and situation of which must depend on the other arrangements of the library, into which the books can be readily wheeled on proper trucks or barrows, for the dusting and cleansing, which is periodically needful.

### **Lighting and Heating**

It may now be taken to be a settled point, that a library can be so constructed as to be warmed either by open fire-places (which in most cases would have descending flues), or by hot water pipes carried throughout the building with equal and absolute security against the danger by fire. In the former case, the fire-places should be grated and the grates locked; in the latter, the apparatus should be heated by furnaces and boilers placed either in fire-proof vaulted chambers beneath the library, or in an isolated building; the pipes should be carried through all the apartments in channels provided in the fire-proof floors, at a distance of at least three feet from the nearest books; other pipes should be carried round, or near to, all extensive glazed surfaces, and the circulation of the heated water should be unintermittent.

It may also be taken to be an established maxim, that gas may with perfect safety be introduced into a properly constructed building; but the gas-fittings should invariably include tubes for the carrying off of the vapors produced by its combustion. Such tubes may be either pendent from the ceilings or attached to

the walls; the inner tube may be of copper, and the outer one of opaque glass: or, on the other hand, the lights may be placed entirely on the outside of the building, of which method very successful applications may be seen at University College, London, and elsewhere.

### **Fittings and Furniture**

Oak, or well-seasoned deal, without veneering, staining, or other deceptive process, should be employed for cases. If it be determined that the book-cases shall be wholly unflammable, the shelves may be made of enameled slate, and the other portions of galvanized and perforated rolled iron. Whatever the material, the shelves should be movable. The cases should everywhere be perfectly flush, and without any sort of protruding ornament near the shelves, or of cavity at the sides. There should always be a space between the back of the cases and the inside of the external walls against which they are to stand, and a plinth of at least six inches between the lowest shelf and the level of the floor. It will also be found both advantageous and economical to make the framework of the various presses of equal dimensions, as much as may be, so that the shelves should be mutually transferable, and even the presses themselves, should occasion arise for their removal.

In estimating the extent of shelving which may be necessary to provide, we may fairly calculate that in an ordinary library, such as would now be formed, a space two feet high and two feet wide will, on the average, contain

about thirty-five volumes; or, in other words, it may be estimated roughly that every thousand volumes in the library require about one hundred and ten square feet of shelving.

All shelves intended for choice and richly bound books should be covered with leather, and especially such as are intended for books of large sizes.

For the bulk of a great collection of books, I see little or no advantage in the use of closed cases, whether wired or glazed. Under proper regulations, and with the precaution of a railing carried around all rooms to which the public have access, at about four feet from the front of the book-presses, there is as much safety without them as with them. They sometimes induce carelessness as to the proper condition and fit binding of the books; and if the latter are well bound and well kept, they undeniably detract from the external effect and beauty of appearance: and, in fine, their great cost would go far towards an important increase in the valuable contents of the library--a consideration to be especially borne in mind where the funds for enlargement are of small amount. But in all cases, the rarities and choice contents of a library should be protected by glass; and all open presses, without exception, should be furnished with curtains, of linen, or other fit material, on spring rollers, for which provision should be made under the cornice or entablature of the presses. Every shelf should have its "*fall*" of leather, morocco cloth, or other good material, from two to three and a half or four inches in depth, according to the size of the volumes for which the shelves are intended.

Some fixed shelves will be needed for the select books, and the usual height may be specified:---

For folios,	18 to 21 inches.
“ quartos,	12 to 15 “
“ octavos,	10 inches.
“ duodecimos,	7 “

These spaces will allow ample room for the *average* sizes. As to the depth, it should never be less than 20 inches for folios, 15 inches for quartos, 8 inches for octavos and duodecimos, which dimensions will allow of the free circulation of air behind the books. The ‘Atlas folios’, ‘elephant folios’, and the like, are best accommodated in single shelves, on which they may lie flat, or on ‘trays’ in table-cases. Some of the library tables should also be fitted up for the reception of maps and charts, if the extent of the collection be not considerable enough to induce the setting apart of a particular room or gallery for them. Others should be provided with drawers, or ‘trays,’ in tiers, for the preservation and arrangement of the catalogue titles or slips.

Book barrows or trucks are serviceable. The tops and end rails are covered with padded leather, and on such barrows books may be wheeled from one end of the library to the other, speedily, and without risk of injury. Leather-covered trays are also necessary.

In no library in the world can better examples of nearly all the varied mechanical arrangements and appliances be seen than those of the British Museum.