

Books for a Reformed Republic: The Apprentices' Library of New York City, 1820–1865

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The General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of New York City opened a library for young apprentices in 1820. By the Civil War the library had become the society's most significant function. The development of the library mirrors a shift in the character of the General Society from a traditional craft benefit society to a reform organization focusing on education. The history of the library therefore illuminates important aspects of the antebellum reform movement. The ultimate aim was to mold young workers into industrious employees, responsible citizens, and cultured gentlemen. In addition, the history of the library reflects important developments within the library profession before the rise of public libraries.

In 1785 a group of prosperous master craftsmen founded the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen. The society began as a fraternal organization whose primary purpose was to aid members who had fallen on hard times. In 1820 it started a library for the use of the city's apprentices. By 1865 the library had become its most important function. The early development of the Apprentices' Library of New York City occurred during a period of unprecedented political, economic, and social change. The franchise was rapidly expanded until all adult White males, including the foreign-born, had the vote. Methods of craft production gradually gave way to a factory system based, in part, on the unskilled labor of women, children, and immigrants. The traditional republicanism embodied in the craft system competed with the values associated with modern liberalism. In response to these and other changes, an emerging liberal middle class undertook a myriad of reform efforts aimed at educating and controlling what appeared to be an unreliable or even dangerous work force and electorate. The development of the Apprentices' Library before 1865 reflects many facets of this reform movement.

The history of the library during this period also illustrates trends and practices in antebellum libraries and librarianship. Its readership expanded rapidly and eventually comprised not only young apprentices

but any member of the public who was able to afford a small annual subscription fee. The librarian, who was initially little more than a clerk, became more of a professional whose task it was to manage and develop the collection. Access to the books was enhanced by the publication of classed catalogues. The library's holdings grew substantially and gradually included a significant amount of fiction. Moreover, the collection sheds light on the aims of the antebellum educational reform movement. The early history of the Apprentices' Library therefore illustrates important aspects of liberal middle-class reform in industrializing America and the evolution of libraries and librarianship before the rise of public libraries.

The General Society and Antebellum Reform

The General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen was founded on 17 November 1785 and was incorporated by the state of New York on 14 March 1792.¹ Membership was limited to craftsmen who were at least twenty-one years of age. The by-laws also required that a candidate be proposed by two members who could attest to his "industry, honesty, and sobriety" and be approved by two-thirds of the membership. There was an initiation fee of five dollars, and monthly dues were twelve and a half cents.² The address used at the initiation ceremony urged that new members "let sobriety, industry, integrity, and uprightness of heart continue to be the ornaments of your name."³

The aims and organization of the General Society were typical of the craft benefit societies that flourished during this period. These groups combined the functions of a private charity with the camaraderie of a fraternal lodge. Normally craftsmen in a particular trade would band together and pay dues into a common fund. Members or their dependents would then be entitled to assistance in times of economic distress. Before the days of insurance companies, pensions, and government relief, craft benefit societies were an important source of aid during the recurring depressions of the early nineteenth century. Although the society was permitted to loan money to members and nonmembers, its "leading motive" was to "relieve the distressed of its members that may fall in want by sickness, or other misfortunes." Four "overseers of the indigent" were elected annually to appropriate aid to destitute members or the widows and orphans of deceased members.⁴ In an apparent reference to these appropriations, the initiation address required that new members of the society "on its private transactions be as silent as the grave."⁵

The General Society during this early period celebrated the mutuality and centrality of the craft community. Besides its charitable activities, the society played a prominent part in the festivities that marked patriotic

holidays, carrying banners emblazoned with its slogan “by hammer and hand all arts do stand.”⁶ Members considered the craft system of production to be the embodiment of republicanism. Although republicanism is inherently difficult to define outside of a specific historical context, its central tenets were moderation, simplicity, reciprocity, and civic virtue. The ideal citizen conducted his affairs with due regard for the public weal and guarded the republic against the corrupting influences of the greed and luxury associated with commercialism.⁷ The craftsman’s workshop, in which the master was a fellow worker as well as an employer and was bound to his workers by reciprocal obligations, was a microcosm of the ideal polity. Members of the society during these early years so conflated the values of the craft community and the virtues of the republic that, in the words of Sean Wilentz, “as far as they were concerned, republicanism and the system of ‘the Trade’ were so analogous as to be indistinguishable from each other.”⁸ Long after craft production had waned, particularly in times of economic distress, the General Society continued to extol the republican virtues of the artisan. President Ira Hutchinson, in his inaugural address in 1858, blamed the severe depression in 1857 on “the banker, the merchant, and the speculator,” and lamented “the simple fact that labor is disreputable” had engendered an aristocratic “system that has destroyed every spark of humanity in the Old World, and . . . is wide-spreading and deep-rooting in this new republic!”⁹

By the time the Apprentices’ Library was founded in 1820, however, changes were occurring that would eventually render this ideology obsolete. Industrialization was already transforming many of the trades. The artisanal system in which the master worked side-by-side with his journeymen and apprentices was being eclipsed by a factory system in which unskilled laborers, often women, children, and immigrants, fashioned goods through a division of labor. Skilled artisans became production workers who performed repetitive tasks for wages and essentially lost their economic independence. Master craftsmen became capitalists who took no part in the production process and concerned themselves solely with the tasks of management and distribution.¹⁰ Instead of celebrating the simplicity and mutuality of the trades, many employers placed a greater emphasis upon wealth and success. An emerging liberal ideology held that competition between conflicting interests ultimately redounded to the public good. It celebrated honest ambition, equality of opportunity, and the autonomy of the individual.¹¹

Although this is a very simplified view of a very complex process, it effected profound changes in American society. The presumed republican harmony of the traditional system of apprenticeship slowly gave way to new economic relationships in which the interests of labor and capital

were inherently at odds. At the same time, electoral laws were rapidly liberalized until all White males, including the foreign-born, were allowed to vote. New York State, for example, had universal White, male suffrage by 1825.¹² The political destiny of the new nation seemed to be in the hands of an uneducated and potentially disaffected working class. By 1820 these developments had begun to produce tensions and fears that sharply contradicted the idealized view of the artisanal republic.

In response to these perceived threats, an emerging liberal middle class undertook a variety of reform efforts. Although most reformers were evangelical Protestants, it is difficult to generalize about the reform movement, since it encompassed reactions to so many social, political, and economic conditions.¹³ Many historians, however, have noted two fairly distinct strains within antebellum reform. One element that was most prevalent before the 1830s sought to impose external controls upon the behavior of the working class.¹⁴ These reformers hoped to forcibly remake industrializing America into their own vision of a productive, moral, pious, and orderly society. Certainly the most significant example of this coercive aspect of reform is the campaign to abolish the sale and consumption of alcohol. Before the rise of the factory system, social drinking was commonplace in the typical artisan's workshop. The master often imbibed with his journeymen and apprentices, and the practice was normally not frowned upon, provided it was done in moderation. As master craftsmen became industrial employers, they became increasingly concerned about the effects of alcohol in the workplace. The first temperance society was organized in Moreau, New York, in 1808, and by 1833 there were approximately 4,000 such organizations with over a half million members. Their aim was not simply to curb the use of alcohol but to ban it altogether.¹⁵

A more dramatic example of coercive reform involves the treatment of criminals and the administration of penitentiaries. Prison reformers abandoned all pretense of rehabilitating lawbreakers and sought instead to break their unrepentant spirits through extraordinarily harsh discipline. In the state prison in Auburn, New York, prisoners were kept in solitary confinement at night and forced to work in complete silence all day. Any infraction of the rules was punishable by flogging. Radical proponents of this system proposed that it be applied to factories, orphanages, schools, and even private homes. Louis Dwight, the founder of the Boston Prison Discipline Society, predicted its adoption would help ensure "order, seriousness, and purity."¹⁶ Although this is an extreme example, it aptly illustrates the harshly repressive character of some of the antebellum reformers.

There was, however, another side of the reform movement that was less coercive and more progressive. This humanitarian aspect of reform

was most prominent in the three decades before the Civil War. Although issues such as temperance continued to enjoy widespread support, other concerns began to occupy middle-class reformers. The two major reform movements of the period, the campaigns to abolish slavery and to extend political and other rights to women, reveal a more optimistic and democratic approach to effecting change. In a sense, the goals of these later reformers were not radically different from those of men such as Louis Dwight. They too yearned for a pious, orderly, and productive society, but the means they employed were less coercive, and they looked to the future with as much hope as fear. Whereas the earlier generation of reformers intended to force others to help themselves, those who followed them were more inclined to help them help themselves. The General Society's Apprentices' Library was part of this more humanitarian element within antebellum reform.¹⁷

Education was perhaps the most important means of self-help that reformers sought to make available to the less fortunate. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, free school societies were organized to educate the children of the urban poor. They also lobbied state and local governments to establish tax-supported school systems.¹⁸ However, these efforts were by no means directed solely at the young and the indigent. Throughout the antebellum period there was an unprecedented movement to educate all ages and classes within society. Museums, libraries, and lecture societies were established in villages, towns, and cities throughout the country to provide a universally accessible means of self-improvement.¹⁹

Reformers established these educational institutions for a variety of reasons. Perhaps most important, education was seen as a bulwark of democracy. Without it, an illiterate electorate would fall prey to demagogues, and elected officials would be unable to carry out their duties effectively. Related to this was a more general focus on cultural improvement. The ideal democrat was not simply literate but well-informed and well-rounded culturally as well; he was familiar with current events, literature, and the principles of science. Antebellum educational reform was also concerned with moral improvement. Civic and religious education would help combat the crime and vice that reformers came to fear in industrializing urban areas. Education would provide an alternative to drinking, gambling, and other dangerous and immoral pursuits. Finally, on a more practical level, vocational instruction was a means of economic advancement. With an education in business or mechanical principles, a young journeyman or clerk could compete successfully in the marketplace and thus contribute to the general prosperity. The founders of the Apprentices' Library had all of these educational purposes in mind in 1820.

The General Society and the Apprentices' Library

As the various antebellum reform campaigns began to gain momentum, interest in the more traditional activities of the General Society began to wane. For most of 1819, so few members attended the monthly meetings that there was no quorum to conduct business. In March of that year, a special committee was appointed to “inquire whether any, and if any, what arrangements can be made for the education of the children of indigent members.” Reporting nearly a year later, the committee strongly recommended establishing a school, and a second committee was named to hire a teacher and rent rooms. The original committee also urged another course of action, “from which, if properly conducted, results equally beneficial will doubtlessly follow, to wit, the establishment of a Library for the use of the apprentices of mechanics generally.” Its purpose would be to provide for “the gratuitous reading of elementary, moral, religious, and miscellaneous books, and others as may have a tendency to promote them in their several vocations.” A library committee of nine members was appointed to make the necessary arrangements.²⁰ The founding of the school and library signaled the beginning of a new and more active role for the General Society. It also began a debate within the society over its primary purpose. In the decades before the Civil War, less attention was paid to its original goal of “reliev[ing] the distressed of its members that may fall in want by sickness, or other misfortunes,” as the society concentrated its efforts more upon maintaining and improving the library. By 1865 the General Society was similar in many respects to the myriad of other reform organizations devoted to education.

On 4 March 1820 Thomas Mercein, a master baker and the chairman of the library committee, wrote a letter to William Wood requesting advice. Wood was a merchant and philanthropist from Canandaigua, New York, who played a leading role in establishing apprentices' libraries in Boston, New Orleans, and Montreal. He subsequently traveled to New York and helped solicit financial support and donations of books from the city's employers. The library was officially opened on 25 November, Evacuation Day, an important patriotic holiday that celebrated the British withdrawal from the city during the revolution. A large audience attended the ceremonies, including the mayor and members of the Common Council and State Legislature. Apprentices later checked out nearly three hundred books.²¹

Thomas Mercein delivered the keynote address. Parts of his speech reflect the original character of the General Society. He celebrated patriotism, craft pride, and republicanism. Mercein stressed, for example, the “importance and respectability” of the city's artisans and referred to

the library as one of “the securities which we are planting around the fortress of Liberty, erected in the glorious and triumphant struggle of the Revolution.” There were also allusions to the traditional paternal role of a master towards his apprentices. The library would be a place where young men could acquire “those sound and commendable habits, that will mold the character, and elevate it to a standing, equally congenial to individual and general happiness.” However, he also emphasized other values more closely associated with the liberalism of the emergent middle class. Mercein assured the apprentices in the audience that their “opportunities [were] great and liberal;” that “industry, ardour, sobriety, and perseverance will lead to successful competition . . . [and] prosperity.”²² The founding of the library suggests the beginning of a subtle shift in the values espoused by the General Society.

The various purposes of the library, as explained by Mercein, closely reflect the aims of antebellum educational reform organizations generally. First, it would strengthen American democracy by enabling young men to fulfill “the representative and official capacities, which they may find it necessary to assume, in a government like ours.” “Ignorance and despotism have shown their kindred qualities.” The library would also be culturally enriching, producing well-rounded, cultured gentlemen, as the readers joined “the march of education, literature, and science.” In addition, the library would provide moral guidance. Mercein urged the apprentices to “avoid the alluring but fatal paths of vice and dissipation” and always to be sober and industrious. Finally, Mercein implied a practical, vocational purpose for the library, calling it a “source of rational and useful information,” and extolling “new combinations and new discoveries . . . constantly developed in the useful arts.”²³ Mercer’s address reflects both the traditional artisanal republican outlook of the General Society and the more modern, liberal values typical of an antebellum reform organization.

Some of the rules and regulations adopted for the Apprentices’ Library in 1820 would seem somewhat onerous to modern library patrons. Borrowing privileges were available at no cost to any apprentice who was able to “produce from some responsible person, a certificate that they are worthy of confidence, and guarantying the safe return, in good order of all books.” Loans circulated for two weeks and could be renewed. Two volumes of duodecimos or one volume of folios, quartos, or octavos could be checked out at one time. Overdue fines were assessed at three to twelve and a half cents a week, depending on the size of the book. The borrower or his guarantor was liable for the entire value of a book not returned within a month. The library was opened from six until nine in the evening, but closed on Sundays. A separate reading room was provided for newspapers and magazines and the rules for this room were

particularly strict. "No conversation [was] allowed . . . under any pretense whatever." Smoking and spitting on the floor were prohibited and "all boys admitted . . . must have clean hands, face, and shoes, and sit with their hats off."²⁴ New regulations published in 1833 required apprentices to check out and return books only one evening a week; each was assigned a day according to the first letter of his last name. They also stated that the "librarian is particularly directed to withhold books from any coming to the library with dirty hands."²⁵ The General Society was eager to help young apprentices help themselves, but only under the strict supervision of their betters.

The library grew steadily in the 1820s, both in terms of the number of patrons and the size of its collection. As it developed, there was clearly a debate within the society over the manner in which it would be funded and the role it would play relative to the society's original purpose of aiding its destitute members. A special committee was appointed in 1830 to inquire into "extending the usefulness of the Mechanics' Society . . . so far as it relates to education generally, and the application of the Sciences to the Mechanic Arts."²⁶ The committee recommended erecting a new building in order to enlarge the school and the library. It also suggested instituting a series of free lectures on science and establishing a vocational school for apprentices to teach mathematics, drawing and design, architecture, and engineering. Its report urged that "every dictate of duty and of patriotism, every impulse of Mechanic pride" required the society to adopt the recommendations. The committee estimated that \$20,000 to \$25,000 would be needed, and proposed that it be raised by subscription from the city's craftsmen. It emphasized that "they do not contemplate in any manner to impair the general funds," which were "pledged to the sacred cause of charity."²⁷ The society adopted most of these changes. In 1832 it purchased a building on Crosby Street and expanded the school and the library.²⁸ In 1833 it began an annual series of free lectures.²⁹

The expansion certainly improved the library's usefulness, but it did not involve substantial alterations in the way the library was administered or the role it played within the General Society. The report of the Library Committee for 1831, which was appended to the special committee's report, urged more fundamental changes. In effect, it recommended that the school and library become the society's primary functions. Without them, the General Society would be nothing "more than a mere common *benefit society* [*sic*], . . . an old, venerable matron, sore beset, to find means to satisfy its widowed dependents, and its host of juvenile starvelings." Its "twin daughters," the school and the library, had "increased in splendour, they yearly renew their age and add to their lustre, until in the brightness and beauty the matron is almost

eclipsed."³⁰ The library committee proposed that the society expand dramatically and focus its efforts on educating the city's apprentices.

In order to "lay a sure foundation for the preservation of the library and its gradual increase," the committee identified three potential sources of income. It recommended that apprentices be charged an initiation fee of twenty-five cents, that journeymen who had been patrons when they were apprentices be admitted for an annual subscription of one dollar, and that members of the society pay a dollar annually to use the library.³¹ Only the last of these proposals was adopted. For a time after 1830, there was a separate fund that consisted of the members' annual fees, the interest on which was included in the library's appropriation.³² The Library Committee's report suggests there were tensions within the General Society over the future role of the library. Members disagreed over the manner in which it should be funded and whether it should become the society's primary function.

Over time it seems that a majority came to adopt the committee's view that education should be the society's most important purpose. This is clearly indicated in a comparison of the annual appropriations for charitable pensions and the library. In 1847, the year for which figures are first available, \$2,900 was spent on pensions, while the library received only \$1,000. In 1854 \$3,100 was allocated for pensions, and \$2,300 was set aside for the library. Finally, in 1865 the library's appropriation was \$8,000, and \$5,075 was paid out in pensions.³³ Thus, while the society spent progressively more for both education and fraternal charity during this eighteen-year period, the proportions changed significantly, until far more money was appropriated for the former than for the latter. By the end of the Civil War, the library was clearly the General Society's primary feature.

The Library Committee's report for 1830 is also significant in that it proposed that certain journeymen be allowed the use of the library for an annual fee. This was the first time the society considered charging a subscription and admitting anyone other than members and apprentices. Although this proposal was initially rejected, it was later adopted, apparently for financial reasons. The library was evidently affected by the Panic of 1837, a severe depression that lasted until 1843. The numbers of readers rose from 1,536 in 1834 to 1,844 in 1843, while, at the same time, appropriations for new books were limited by the increased demand for charity for the society's indigent members.³⁴ Under these conditions, the library, according to the committee report for 1842, "was not and could not be self-sustaining."³⁵ A new source of income was needed to help maintain the collection.

On 7 February 1842 the state legislature passed an act authorizing a change in the General Society's charter. It permitted the society to admit

persons other than members to use the library for an annual subscription.³⁶ Initially subscribers paid one dollar annually. The regulations in 1855 required that employers pay two dollars, but by 1865 all subscribers paid that amount.³⁷ They did not need to be artisans; any "suitable person" could apply. Although the number of pay readers increased steadily over the years, they were always far outnumbered by the free readers. In 1851, the first year in which such figures were included in the annual reports, there were eighteen subscribers, and by 1854 that number had risen to only 39. In 1860 there were 199 pay readers, and in 1865 there was a record number, 829. At no time during this period, however, were subscribers more than one quarter of the total readership.³⁸ Nonetheless, the admission of men who were not artisans was a very significant departure for the General Society. It indicates the society had lost some of its craft conscious character and that the library itself was no longer solely a charitable institution. It could be a means of self-improvement for members of the middle class who were not craftsmen.

With the additional funds from the annual subscriptions, the society was able to expand its educational efforts in the 1840s and 1850s. In 1845 it inherited the personal collection of Benjamin Demilt, a member of the special committee in 1830. According to the terms of Demilt's will, it was to be maintained separately, "to be used and improved as a pay library."³⁹ In 1854 the De Milt collection became a noncirculating reference collection.⁴⁰ Members and pay readers were allowed to use it at no cost, but free readers had to be at least sixteen years of age and were required to pay an annual subscription of fifty cents.⁴¹ In his inaugural address in 1857, Thomas Earle advised that the collection be better advertised, since it had "not been as productive as the donors anticipated." The Demilt library seems to have been intended primarily for the cultural improvement of its subscribers. The collection contained, in Earle's words, "little of light literature."⁴² Of 895 titles in an 1855 catalogue, none were classified as "novels, tales, romances, etc.," but there were 15 works of "prose fiction" and 76 works of poetry. Approximately 36% of the collection was classed as "history and geography," and another 29% was "mental and moral science," a very broad class that included philosophy, music, literature, and fine arts.⁴³ Earle suggested that it would have been more successful if Demilt had not required in his will that it be maintained by subscriptions.⁴⁴

In 1850 both libraries were moved into new rooms after the construction of an addition to the north wing of the building on Crosby Street. Extensive improvements were financed, in part, by donations of two thousand dollars from Benjamin Demilt's sister, Sara Demilt, and five thousand dollars from his sister Elizabeth Demilt.⁴⁵ This expansion was perhaps the most important event in the library's early history. The

re-opening was marked by a ceremony on 23 September, at which the keynote address was delivered by judge and editor Mordecai M. Noah.⁴⁶

In explaining the purposes of the library, Noah touched upon many of the same republican themes in Thomas Mercein's speech at its opening thirty years earlier. He stressed, for example, the importance and respectability of the craft community and advised parents that "a knowledge of the mechanical arts, steadily and industriously carried out, must in this great and increasing country be forever . . . the true road to independence."⁴⁷ Further, the maintenance of the library was an act of patriotism as well as charity, since it would promote equality and civic responsibility. The unprecedented growth of the republic was due, "above all, [to] that free education which visits all alike, . . . and places mankind on an equality in all that relates to genius and intellect." Young men in particular needed to be educated in order to carry out their duties as citizens in a democracy. Noah argued that "the time has arrived when it has become apparent that the destinies of our country are finally to be placed under the control of the mechanics and laboring men of the Union," and predicted that "[w]ell-educated mechanics will fill our legislatures and the halls of Congress; their numerical strength will accumulate until they are able to command the highest stations in the Government." At the same time, however, Noah placed a greater emphasis upon the benefits of competition, for both the individual and society as a whole, that was typical of liberal reformers. He explained that "the great secret of [America's] success" was the fact that "each man is for himself, and the energy of each combined constitutes the wealth and power, the genius, resources, and permanency of the republic."⁴⁸

In some respects, however, Noah's speech was somewhat less optimistic than Mercein's. It reveals greater anxieties, and implies a desire to use the library to control as well as to help the working class. For example, the young factory worker who, "being privileged to take a book home with him, . . . sinks into a calm refreshing slumber and awakens at the dawn of day refreshed and invigorated, with his head clear, his mind calm and ready for the day's occupation." In 1820 Mercein simply advised young men to "abjure the path of vice." Thirty years later, Noah warned that, without an institution such as the library to direct them to higher things, they would be "scouring the streets, visiting barrooms or theaters, mingling with idle, vicious companions."⁴⁹ In fact, an uneducated working class threatened the very foundations of society. The Apprentices' Library would protect American democracy from an ignorant, disaffected working class. After referring to the important role that working men must play in elected bodies, Noah asked, "in what will be our guarantee for the safety of the country? I answer, in the education and intelligence of this class of our citizens."⁵⁰ Parts of Noah's address,

like Mercein's, expressed confidence in the country's ability to progress indefinitely. Still, there was perhaps as much fear as hope in his vision of the future. There was a mingling of pessimism and optimism that is typical of antebellum liberal reform.

In the 1850s and 1860s the society changed how it identified gratuitous readers in a way that reflected important shifts in economic and social relationships. Before this time, free readers were always referred to simply as "apprentices." In a new set of by-laws adopted 1 June 1855, this class of patrons was redefined as "Apprentices of Mechanics and Tradesmen, and Youths employed as Apprentices of Mechanics and Tradesmen."⁵¹ This was apparently a distinction between young men serving formal apprenticeships and those who simply worked in factories. In his inaugural address in 1857, President Thomas Earle proposed another significant change. He recommended granting free access to "a class of operatives for whom no provision of this kind has ever been made, . . . the large number of females engaged in the various employments connected with the mechanic and manufacturing interests."⁵² This measure was finally adopted in 1862. The Library Committee's report for that year states that the "usefulness of the library has been considerably extended" by the new rule and that "little, if any, inconvenience has arisen from admitting the females at the same time with the males."⁵³ Young women were by far the fastest growing class of readers during this period. There were 200 in 1862, 606 in 1863, and 1,703 in 1864. By 1865 there were 2,599 female readers, compared with 3,663 male readers.⁵⁴

By the time of the Civil War, the General Society had altered its definition of free readers in a manner that indicates its new role in antebellum reform. These changes acknowledged a deterioration in the traditional relationship between master and apprentice and the rise of more modern forms of economic production. The ideal of the harmonious artisan's workshop had faded as more and more goods were fashioned through mechanization and the division of labor. By the 1860s members of the society were far more likely to be charitable industrialists than benevolent master craftsmen. According to Thomas Earle, "the mission of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen is to all the working-classes."⁵⁵ Although it was still ostensibly a common benefit society, it had been completely transformed from its pre-industrial beginnings, when its primary purpose was to "relieve the distressed of its members that may fall in want by sickness, or other misfortunes." By 1865 it was similar to other liberal middle-class reform organizations that provided the means for educational self-help to the urban poor.

TABLE 1
TOTAL NUMBERS OF VOLUMES, FREE AND PAY READERS, AND ANNUAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR 1820, 1839, 1850, AND 1860

Total volumes include the Demilt Library for 1850 through 1865.
 Annual appropriations do not include additional sources of income, such as the annual subscription fees.

	Total Volumes	Total Readers	Annual Appropriation
1820	3-4,000	800	*
1830	7,697	1,576	*
1839	11,161	*	\$1,200
1850	14,940	1,533	\$1,250
1860	22,469	2,359	\$2,899
1865	33,700	7,282	\$8,000

Source: Annual Reports of the Library Committee for 1839, 1850, 1860, and 1865. Report of the Special Committee, 1830.

*Figures not available.

Antebellum Libraries and Librarianship

The early and middle 1860s were very prosperous years for the library. The combined funding for the Demilt and Apprentices' Libraries increased from \$2,898 in 1860 to \$8,000 in 1865. The total number of volumes in both collections grew approximately 50%, from 22,469 to 33,700. In 1860 there were 2,359 readers and 47,756 volumes circulated. In 1865 there were 7,282 readers and 135,840 volumes circulated.⁵⁶ The library was one of the most substantial in New York during this period. In 1859 in his *Manual of Public Libraries, Institutions, and Societies in the United States and British Provinces of North America*, William J. Rhees, the chief clerk of the Smithsonian Institution, listed only nineteen libraries in the city with collections of over ten thousand volumes. The Apprentices' and Demilt Libraries ranked sixth with 19,026. The list also includes two collections for seminaries, one for a private college, Columbia University, and one for the Free Academy, a publicly supported high school. The largest library in New York, the Astor Library, contained 80,000 volumes and was supported by a bequest from John Jacob Astor. It was free to anyone over sixteen years of age but did not loan books. The second and third largest, the New York Society Library with 35,000 volumes and the Mercantile Library Association with 31,647, were both subscription libraries. The

Apprentices' Library was the only collection in the city that was free to working-class youths.⁵⁷

At this time, most "public libraries," that is, those that were not privately owned or maintained by schools or learned societies, were not free. In 1849 Charles Jewett, the librarian of the Smithsonian Institute, listed twenty-nine libraries supported by state governments in his *Report on Public Libraries in the United States of America*. Of these only thirteen were open to the public, and all of them loaned books only to members of the government or officers of the courts.⁵⁸ Ten years later, Rhees reported 153 "state and city libraries." Most of these were probably public libraries in the modern sense of the term—free, tax-supported, circulating collections.⁵⁹ The majority were in New England, where state legislatures had passed laws in the late 1840s permitting municipalities to levy taxes to support them. The movement for public libraries elsewhere did not gain momentum until after the 1860s.⁶⁰

Libraries that were not supported by schools or learned societies, or state or local governments, were known as "social libraries." Rhees listed a total of 812 in his *Manual of Public Libraries*.⁶¹ Social libraries were an important part of the popular enthusiasm for universal education during the antebellum period. They were also precursors to modern public libraries, in that they helped develop support for the notion of publicly accessible, circulating collections.⁶² In some cases the municipal public library actually originated as a social library. In New York City, for example, the New York Free Circulating Library was incorporated as part of the original New York Public Library System in 1900.⁶³

The majority of social libraries were financed entirely through annual subscriptions, although a few were proprietary libraries, in which members actually owned stock in a public company.⁶⁴ There were several types, with different clienteles and different emphases in their collections. Athenaeums were middle- and upper-class literary and scientific societies. Most maintained a library of scholarly journals and reference books, and offered lectures and debates as well. They tended to be more expensive than other social libraries. The Boston Athenaeum, for example, charged an annual subscription of ten dollars. Lyceums had similar aims but were less expensive and catered to the middle and working classes, especially in villages and towns.⁶⁵ Mercantile libraries were usually founded by and for young clerks and merchants. They circulated popular and refined literature and also served as business reference collections.⁶⁶ The Mercantile Library Association of New York City was the largest of its kind in the country and loaned out more volumes than any other library in the United States in 1859.⁶⁷

There were also libraries which, like the Apprentices' Library, catered to industrial employees and employers. Rhees listed at least thirty-four

mechanics' institutes and twenty-three apprentices' libraries.⁶⁸ Mechanics' institutes were founded by prosperous craftsmen and industrialists to educate urban workers. The institutes sponsored lectures, classes, debates, and exhibitions. Probably all of them supported a library. In some only members or apprentices were allowed to use the collection for free, and in others apprentices paid a lower annual subscription than the general public.⁶⁹ Apprentices' and mechanics' libraries were established under a variety of circumstances. The majority, like the Apprentices' Library of New York, were founded by older craft benefit societies and were free to members and to youths employed in workshops or factories. The Mechanics' and Apprentices' Library of Boston, probably the first of its kind, was organized by the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanics Association in 1820, but control was relinquished to an Association of Apprentices in 1828. Members paid one dollar annually to use the library and elected a board of managers to direct its affairs.⁷⁰ Whether free or not, the apprentices' and mechanics' libraries were an important part of the social library movement during the antebellum period.

As social libraries grew in size and number, librarianship began to evolve into a profession. Early in the nineteenth century, the job was considered mostly clerical, requiring no special qualifications other than basic literacy. In most colleges and universities it was assigned to a junior member of the faculty.⁷¹ When the first tax-supported public library was established in Petersborough, Massachusetts, in 1833, the town's postmaster was its first librarian.⁷² However, as libraries attracted more readers and developed more extensive collections, librarians assumed more complex responsibilities and began to develop a sense of professionalism. The annual report of the Mercantile Library Association of New York for 1852 stated that "a librarian requires a distinct education upon the prominent parts of his profession—an education that can only be acquired by years of preparation and study."⁷³ The following year the world's first library convention was held in New York to bring together "those believing that the knowledge of Books, and the foundation and management of them for public use, may be promoted by consultation and concert among librarians."⁷⁴ In 1859, in his *Memoirs of Public Libraries*, Edward Edwards listed eighteen "routine duties" of librarians in order of their importance, including collection development, cataloguing of books, and the preparation of catalogues.⁷⁵ Although the American Library Association was not founded until 1876, by the 1850s there was clearly a growing sense among librarians, if not the general public, that librarianship was a distinct and valuable profession.

This trend toward professionalism is evident in the history of the Apprentices' Library. The special committee that first proposed establishing a library in 1820 recommended that the teacher in the school be

given charge of it, in order to “save the expense of a librarian.”⁷⁶ A librarian was hired, but his duties appear to have been mainly clerical. According to the by-laws adopted in December of 1823, a six-member library committee, elected annually by members of the society, was directed to “take charge of and generally superintend the concerns of the library [and] to employ and discharge librarians.”⁷⁷ By 1855 new regulations stipulated that “the Libraries and Reading Rooms shall be under the care and administration of the Librarian.” He was required to submit detailed monthly and annual reports enumerating, among other things, the total number of volumes in both libraries, the number of pay and free readers, and the number of overdue and damaged books. More menial tasks, such as lighting fires and shelving books, were delegated to an assistant librarian.⁷⁸

Perhaps a librarian’s most important professional duty during this period was the preparation of catalogues. Because they were extremely expensive, printed catalogues were relatively rare in the antebellum period and were published only by larger institutions. They were often used by social libraries as a promotional device, to solicit books and recruit subscribers.⁷⁹ With very few exceptions, catalogues in the colonial period were simply alphabetic lists, usually with the author as the main entry.⁸⁰ In 1807 the Library Company of Philadelphia produced a catalogue with both an alphabetic listing by author and a classified index arranged under thirty broad subject headings.⁸¹ This method was widely used by other libraries, although some adopted the arrangement employed in the catalogue of the Mercantile Library Association of New York in 1844. Instead of broad subjects, its classed index consisted of a long list of specific subject headings arranged alphabetically.⁸² Regardless of the relative merits of the various cataloguing systems, their development helped to democratize libraries by making their collections more accessible to users. Patrons could browse for books by topic and were no longer required to know the author or title of a work in order to find it. Cataloguing was also becoming a distinct body of knowledge that was unique to librarians. As such, it was an important element in the professionalization of librarianship.⁸³

The Collection

The General Society printed six catalogues between 1820 and 1865. The first and third, published in 1820 and 1839, were arranged by title in roughly alphabetic order. For example, the first section lists all works beginning with the letter “a,” but not alphabetically. The second catalogue, produced in 1833, was arranged in the same manner but was first divided into four parts by size: folio, quarto, octavo, and duodecimo. In all

three the title sometimes included the author's name. In 1820, for instance, two copies of the same work appear as *Guthrie's Geography* and *Geography by Guthrie*. Some titles were listed with a subject word first, as in *Geography (Introduction to)*. An apprentice might have to know the title, the author, or the subject of a book, and even then he would have to browse under the first letter in order to find it.

The catalogues published in 1855, 1860, and 1865 were "classed" catalogues. The first two were divided into five parts. The first and second parts listed all titles in the Apprentices' Library, except "novels, tales, romances," and all the titles in the Demilt Library, alphabetically by author. The third and fourth parts were all the fiction in the Apprentices' Library arranged alphabetically by author and by title. The fifth part was a classed subject index of all the nonfiction works in both libraries. It consisted of nine major classes: theology, mental and moral science, political science, geography and history, mathematics, natural sciences, medical science, technology, and encyclopedias. Each major class was divided into several subclasses. Geography and history, for example, had more than fifty subclasses, including the United States, all the countries of Europe, ethnology, Indians, and female biography. The major classes, the subclasses, and the titles within each subclass were not arranged in alphabetic order. The 1865 catalogue added a sixth part that listed the books under the approximately five hundred subclasses found in the fifth part. In this part the subclasses were arranged alphabetically.

Although these later catalogues, particularly their nonalphabetic, classed indexes, may have been somewhat difficult to use, they were vast improvements over their predecessors. They were designed, in the words of the preface to the 1855 catalogue, to "furnish, to some extent, at least, the necessary guidance in selecting books, and also afford greater facility in finding a book, not only on any subject, but on any branch of a subject that one may desire to peruse."⁸⁴ For the first time, readers could select a book by topic, and they no longer needed to browse haphazardly through roughly alphabetic lists of titles to find a known item. The catalogues therefore offered greatly improved access at a time when the number of readers and the size of the collections were increasing rapidly. At the same time, they indicate that the General Society's librarians were acquiring skills unique to their profession.

The Apprentices' Library contained between four and five thousand volumes in 1820 and approximately eight thousand in 1833.⁸⁵ The Apprentices' and Demilt Libraries totaled 17, 931 volumes in 1855 and 33, 700 in 1865.⁸⁶ It is difficult to compare the proportions of different subjects in the catalogues for these years, since the first two were simply roughly alphabetic lists of titles and the second two included classed

indexes. For the 1855 and 1865 catalogues, I simply counted the number of titles under each major class and subclass, and the number of titles under "novels, tales, and romances," and calculated the percentage each represented of the total of both collections. For 1820 and 1833, I first selected a random sample of one hundred works from each catalogue. I then assigned each title one of the nine major classes from the 1855 and 1865 indexes or classed them as fiction. In a sample of one hundred, the number in each of these ten categories is an estimate of the percentage of that major class within the whole collection. If an item in the 1820 or 1833 sample was also in the Apprentices' or Demilt Library in 1855 or 1865, I used the major class heading from the later catalogue. If it did not, I had only the title from which to infer the subject matter of a work, and some were so generic that the major class assigned was sometimes an educated guess. The sampling method was therefore somewhat subjective. Nonetheless, it suggests some broad generalizations regarding the varying proportions of different subjects in the libraries during the period from 1820 to 1865.

Generally, the percentages of different kinds of titles changed relatively little in the four catalogues. By far the two largest major classes in all of them were geography and history, and mental and moral science. Together they comprised at least half of the collection in each year. Theology was a somewhat distant third, and proportionally it actually decreased slightly, from 16% and 10% of the 1820 and 1833 samples to

TABLE 2
PERCENTAGE BY CLASS OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF TITLES
IN THE APPRENTICES' LIBRARY FOR 1820 AND 1833,
AND COMBINED TOTALS OF THE APPRENTICES' LIBRARY
AND THE DEMILT LIBRARY FOR 1855 AND 1865

Class	1820	1833	1855	1865
Geography and history	30%	40%	36%	32%
Mental and moral science	42%	34%	19%	19%
Theology	16%	10%	10%	9%
Political science	5%	2%	5%	6%
Natural science	1%	6%	5%	5%
Technology	1%	4%	5%	6%
Medical science	—	—	2%	2%
Mathematics	1%	—	.59%	.44%
Encyclopedias	—	—	.36%	.28%
Novels, tales, and romances	4%	4%	16%	20%

10% and 9% of Apprentices' and Demilt Libraries in 1855 and 1865. The remaining classes were very small. Political science, natural science, and technology each were never more than 6% of the collection for any year.⁸⁷ Medical science, mathematics, and encyclopedias were 2% or less of the total in all four years.

On the whole, therefore, political science, natural science, technology, medical science, mathematics, and encyclopedias were relatively unimportant. However, this generalization needs to be qualified in a number of respects. First, the error rates for the samples in 1820 and 1833 were slightly less than 5%, so that it is possible that these major classes were underestimated for those years.⁸⁸ Also, the library in 1820 consisted entirely of donations, so the initial collection of books was dependent upon what members were willing to donate. More important, there were external constraints upon the areas in which the collection might develop. It is not surprising that the major classes listed above were proportionally smaller, since publishers issued relatively few titles for those subjects during the period under consideration. For example, American publishers between 1819 and 1849 printed 636 works in history, but only 30 in mathematics and geometry.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, it is accurate to generalize, for example, that the collection offered little that, in the words of the 1820 report that recommended establishing a library, would "have a tendency to promote [apprentices] in their several vocations."

Noah's address at the re-opening ceremony in 1850 provides the most explicit exposition of the purposes of the library. In it he suggested a course of reading for "a poor, little ragged apprentice boy" who wanted to take full advantage of the "rich repast spread before him." It begins with "fiction, wit and humor, always the first to whet the appetite for reading."⁹⁰ Popular fiction, that is, the titles listed separately under "novels, tales, and romances" in the 1855 and 1865 catalogues, comprised a relatively small proportion of the collections, but it increased more than any of the major classes in the classed indexes. Fiction was 4% of the samples for 1820 and 1833, and 16% and 20% of the combined libraries in 1855 and 1865. During this period there was also a dramatic increase in the works of fiction available for purchase. American publishers issued 128 such titles between 1820 and 1829, 290 between 1830 and 1839, 765 between 1840 and 1849, and 90 in 1850 alone.⁹¹

As Noah implied, novels, tales, and romances seem to have been intended to lure young readers into the library, but members of the society never wholly approved of recreational reading, especially earlier in the century. In 1829, for example, the library committee was instructed to "inquire into the expediency of discontinuing hereafter the issuing of Plays, Novels and Romances; and report what proportion of such books compose the present library."⁹² The librarian in 1857, W. Van Norden,

reported that the free readers probably borrowed titles of fiction much more frequently than nonfiction but hoped that this would “gradually change for the better.” Moreover, he argued that such works did serve some purpose “by withdrawing them from idle and vicious associations, and cultivating a habit of spending their leisure” time in reading.⁹³

Moreover, the distinction between fiction and “literature” was somewhat ambiguous. Several titles in the 1855 and 1865 catalogues, including *Robinson Crusoe*, *Don Quixote*, and *Ivanhoe*, that were designated as prose fiction within the major class of mental and moral science also appear in the lists of novels, tales, and romances. In addition, much popular fiction during this period had an explicitly moralizing aspect. Various reform movements used novels and short stories to dramatize their causes. The 1865 catalogue, for example, includes among its titles of fiction *Temperance Tales* by Lucius Manley Sargent, one of the leading temperance propagandists of the time.⁹⁴ Many other works, such as *Rising in the World* by Timothy Shay Arthur or *The Mechanic's Bride* by William G. Cambridge, also appear to have been intended to reform or instruct the reader. Still, despite its popularity and its increase proportionally in the later catalogues, fiction was considered inferior to more serious literature.

The next step in Noah's suggested course of reading was history. The major class of history and geography comprised 30% and 40% of the 1820 and 1833 samples, and 36% and 32% of the Apprentices' and Demilt Libraries in 1855 and 1865. It was the largest class in every year except 1820. Only 75 of a total of 2,795 titles within this major class fell under the subclasses of geography and physical geography. There were also small subclasses for ethnography; correspondence; and antiquities, manners, and customs. Most of the others were for particular countries or regions, including Africa, Asia, China, and the Pacific, all of which contained both historical works and travel literature. By far the largest subclass was individual biography, with 371 titles listed. There were also subclasses for collective biography, with 125 titles, and biography of females, with 48. Ten separate subclasses dealt with the United States or North America. American history and travels alone had 203 titles. According to Noah, works in history were to be the “foundation” upon which the apprentice “builds his superstructure,” after he had progressed beyond popular fiction.⁹⁵

The end of Noah's course of reading was achieved when the apprentice “slides insensibly into a course of *belles-lettres* and polite literature . . . [and] becomes familiar with the fine arts.” The major class that most closely approximated these subjects was mental and moral science. It was 42% and 34% of the samples of the 1820 and 1833 catalogues, and 19% of both libraries in 1855 and 1865. Mental and moral science was

the most broad and eclectic of all the major classes. It included such subclasses as temperance, slavery, elocution, anecdotes, and games and sports. Most of them, however, dealt with some aspect of literature or philosophy. Miscellaneous literature was the largest subclass, with 149 titles, and practical ethics or morals was second with 119. Once he was thoroughly versed in all the mental and moral sciences, Noah's "poor, little ragged apprentice boy . . . steps forward as accomplished a gentleman as many who have taken their degrees at Oxford and at Eton."⁹⁶

For Noah and, I would argue, for most members of the General Society, mental and moral science was clearly the most important part of the library. Although it decreased at approximately the same rate that novels, tales, and romances increased, it was the key major class in the collections. Its relative decline in relation to fiction is probably best explained by the necessity of attracting more readers. The General Society felt it needed to lure young boys and girls from less constructive pastimes and to compete with subscription libraries in attracting subscribers. At the same time, mental and moral science was the most essential major class in achieving the broad purposes of the Apprentices' Library.

The way in which the classed index sections of the 1855 and 1865 catalogues were organized reveals a great deal about the worldview of members of the General Society. Mental and moral science brought together a great variety of subclasses that, to a modern reader, would seem very dissimilar. For Noah and others like him, however, they were all related, in that they included the books a young worker would need to read in order to become "an accomplished gentleman." This, I think, was the essential purpose for maintaining the Apprentices' Library. For members of the society, a gentleman was not a mere aristocrat; he was moral, industrious, cultured, and fully capable of carrying out his civic duties in a democracy. Mental and moral science therefore comprehended all of the qualities outlined, for example, in Thomas Mercein's address at the opening of the library in 1820, as well as Noah's speech thirty years later. In the most general sense, what the society members hoped to accomplish was to mold young workers in their own image, or at least in the image that they preferred to have of themselves. This goal was a hallmark of reform during the antebellum period.

The history of the Apprentices' Library of New York is significant in several respects. Its founding and development represent major trends within antebellum libraries and librarianship. Its growth in terms of readership and the size of its collections reflects the importance of social libraries as precursors of modern public libraries. The increase in fiction shows a grudging acceptance of recreational literature, if only as an alternative to less constructive pursuits and a stepping stone to more

serious reading. The development of classed catalogues was an essential aspect of improving access to libraries, as well as the professionalization of librarianship. At the same time, the transformation of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen from a traditional craft benefit society to a humanitarian reform organization mirrors changes in the American economy and society. It reflects a shift from the craftsman's workshop to factory production and the consequent alteration of the relations of production that was evident in the breakdown of the system of apprenticeship. It also shows a change in outlook from artisanal republicanism to modern liberalism. Finally, the society's educational efforts are clearly representative of antebellum humanitarian reform and the popular enthusiasm for universal education.

Notes

1. Lawrence Martin, *The General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of the City of New York* (New York: The Society, 1960), 3. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Charter and Bye-Laws of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen* (New York: The Society, 1798), 1.

2. *Ibid.*, 10–1.

3. Thomas Earle and Charles T. Congdon, *Annals of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of the City of New York, from 1785 to 1880* (New York: The Society, 1882), 242. This is a history commissioned by the society that consists mostly of primary documents. Earle was the society's president in 1857.

4. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Charter and Bye-Laws of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen* (New York: The Society, 1798), 12.

5. Earle and Congdon, *Annals*, 243.

6. Sean Wilentz, "Artisan Republican Festivals and the Rise of Class Consciousness in New York City, 1788–1837," in Michael H. Frisch and Daniel J. Walkowitz, eds., *Working-Class America: Essays on Labor, Community, and American Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 45.

7. The classic works on republicanism in early American history are Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969); and J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). For an excellent discussion of the historiographical debate surrounding their work see Daniel T. Rodgers, "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept," *The Journal of American History* 79 (June 1992): 11–38.

8. *Ibid.*, 50.

9. Earle and Congdon, *Annals*, 326.

10. There is a substantial literature on various aspects of the industrial revolution. Some important works include George R. Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815–1860* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964); Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815–1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester New York, 1815–1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Bruce

Laurie, *Artisans into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1989); Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); and Paul G. Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers in the Early Industrial Revolution: Lynn, Massachusetts, 1780–1860* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981).

11. The seminal study of liberal thought in the United States is Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1955). For a later work that responds, in part, to Bailyn, Wood, and Pocock, cited above, see Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

12. Marchette Chute, *The First Liberty: A History of the Right to Vote in America* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1969), 298.

13. There is a very extensive literature on various facets of the antebellum reform movement. Some important monographs are Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History to 1860* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1944). G. S. Griffin, *The Ferment of Reform, 1830–1860* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967); Thomas Bender, *Toward an Urban Vision: Ideas and Institutions in Nineteenth-Century America* (Louisville: The University of Kentucky Press, 1975); Paul S. Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1860*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978); Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); and Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1991).

14. W. David Lewis, "The Reformer as Conservative: Protestant Counter-Subversion in the Early Republic," in Stanley Coben and Lorman Ratner, eds., *The Development of an American Culture* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 67.

15. *Ibid.*, 79–82.

16. *Ibid.*, 82–3.

17. The concept of social control has been a central theme in the scholarship on reform and charity in the nineteenth century. For a well-rounded discussion of its strengths and weaknesses, see the essays in Walter I. Trattner, ed., *Social Welfare or Social Control?: Some Historical Reflections on Regulating the Poor* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1983).

18. Richard D. Brown, *The Strength of a People: The Idea of an Informed Citizenry in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 133–51.

19. *Ibid.*, 126–32.

20. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Some Memorials of the Late William Wood, Esq., the Eminent Philanthropist, with Resolutions of Respect for his Memory* (New York: The Society, 1858), 16–9. This is a special report by the Apprentices' Library Committee investigating Wood's role in establishing the library. The society's school closed in 1858.

21. *Ibid.*, 19–20. Earle and Congdon, *Annals*, 60–1.

22. Thomas Mercein, "An Address upon the Opening of the Apprentices' Library," reprinted in Paul A. Gilge and Howard B. Rock, eds., *Keepers of the Revolution: New Yorkers at Work in the Early Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 52–4.

23. *Ibid.*, 52–3.

24. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Catalogue of the Apprentices' Library* (New York: The Society, 1820), n.p. Hereafter cited as *Catalogue 1820*.
25. *Catalogue, 1855*, 168.
26. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Report of the Special Committee to Whom was Referred the Resolution for Extending the Usefulness of that Institution* (New York: The Society, 1830), 1.
27. *Ibid.*, 4–7.
28. Earle and Congdon, *Annals*, 277.
29. Martin, *General Society*, 7.
30. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Report of the Library Committee, 1830*, reprinted in General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Report of the Special Committee* (New York: The Society, 1831), 21–2.
31. *Ibid.*, 16–8.
32. *Ibid.*, 9. The regulations published in 1855 state that members could use the library for free (*Catalogue, 1855*, ix.)
33. The General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Report of the Finance Committee* (New York: The Society, 1847), 4. Hereafter cited as *Annual Report, 1847*. See also *Annual Report, 1854*, 5; *Annual Report, 1865*, 7.
34. Kathy Casey, "Archaic Remains or Paradise Regained: A Study of the Historical Significance and Current Significance of Two of the United States' Urban Subscription Libraries," Seminar Paper, 1981, 78 (copy found at the Mercantile Library Association of New York).
35. Earle and Congdon, *Annals*, 105.
36. *Ibid.*, 272.
37. *Catalogue, 1855*, ix; *Catalogue, 1865*, 9.
38. *Annual Report, 1851*, 12; *Annual Report, 1854*, 8; *Annual Report, 1860*, 12; *Annual Report, 1865*, 13.
39. Earle and Congdon, *Annals*, 107.
40. *Annual Report, 1854*, 8.
41. *Catalogue, 1855*, viii–ix.
42. Earle and Congdon, *Annals*, 320.
43. *Catalogue, 1855*, passim.
44. Earle and Congdon, *Annals*, 320.
45. *Annual Report, 1850*, 7. In 1849 Elizabeth Demilt also donated three thousand dollars to the Mercantile Library Association and five thousand dollars to the New York Historical Society Library. Charles C. Jewett, *Report on Public Libraries in the United States* (Washington: The Smithsonian Institution, 1850), 86, 93. Jewett's report was an appendix to the Smithsonian's annual report for 1850. Rhees drew upon it extensively for his report ten years later.
46. Martin, *General Society*, 8.
47. Earle and Congdon, *Annals*, 278.
48. *Ibid.*, 273–4.
49. *Ibid.*, 278–9.
50. *Ibid.*, 274–5.
51. *Catalogue, 1855*, viii.
52. Earle and Congdon, *Annals*, 319.
53. *Annual Report, 1862*, 13.
54. *Ibid.*, 12; *Annual Report, 1863*, 11; *Annual Report, 1864*, 11; *Annual Report, 1865*, 13.
55. Earle and Congdon, *Annals*, 322.
56. *Annual Report, 1860*, 10–2; *Annual Report, 1865*, 10–3.

57. William J. Rhees, *Manual of Public Libraries, Institutions, and Societies in the United States and the British Provinces of North America*, University of Illinois Graduate School Monograph Series, Number 7 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 255–97.

58. Jewett, *Report on Public Libraries*, 190–1, *passim*.

59. Rhees, *Manual of Public Libraries*, xxvi–xxvii.

60. Nicholas Truebner, *Bibliographical Guide to American Literature: A Classed List of Books Published in the United States During the Last Forty Years* (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1969), cxix–cxxi. Elmer D. Johnson, *Communication: An Introduction to the History of Writing, Printing, Books, and Libraries* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1973), 157.

61. Rhees, *Manual of Public Libraries*, xxi–xxii. The Smithsonian's report for 1850 states that "in some states, almost every town has, under some name, a social library." Smithsonian Institution, *Fourth Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution* (Washington: The Printers to the Senate, 1850), 157.

62. Michael H. Harris, *History of Libraries in the Western World*, compact textbook edition (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984), 174.

63. Sidney H. Ditzion, *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture: A Social History of the American Public Library Movement in New England and the Middle States from 1850 to 1900* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1947), 149. Phyllis Dain, *The New York Public Library: A History of Its Founding and Early Years* (New York: The Library, 1972), 201.

64. Harris, *History of Libraries*, 172.

65. D. W. Davies, *Public Libraries as Culture and Social Centers: The Origin of the Concept* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1974), 15. Rhees, *Manual of Public Libraries*, 93.

66. Sidney Ditzion, "Mechanics' and Apprentices' Libraries," *Library Quarterly* 10 (1940): 76–9.

67. Rhees, *Manual of Public Libraries*, xxi, *passim*.

68. *Ibid.*, 585–650, *passim*. These numbers are probably underestimated. Rhees included a list of libraries by state at the end of the *Manual*, not all of which are described in the text. I simply counted all the libraries with "mechanic" or "apprentice" in their names and others that Rhees described and that were clearly for workers. However, there are others, such as the ubiquitous "Franklin Libraries," that are not described, but may well have catered to the working classes.

69. Davies, *Public Libraries*, 18–9. Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 272–4. Rhees, *Manual of Public Libraries*, 35, 60, 277, 315, 409, 467, 489, *passim*.

70. *Ibid.*, 108–10.

71. Harris, *History of Libraries*, 168. Johnson, *Communication*, 150.

72. *Ibid.*, 157.

73. Quoted in Seymour Thompson, *Evolution of the American Public Library, 1655–1876* (Washington: Scarecrow Press, 1952), 190.

74. Quoted in C. Seymour Thompson, *Evolution*, 194, and James Thompson, *History of the Principles of Librarianship* (London: C. Bingley, 1977), 112.

75. Quoted in Rhees, *Manual of Public Libraries*, xi–xvii.

76. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Some Memorials of the Late William Wood*, 18.

77. Earle and Congdon, *Annals*, 257.

78. *Catalogue, 1855*, vii–viii. It is interesting to note that the librarian was paid considerably less than his counterparts at other institutions. Rhees estimated in 1859 that the average annual salary of a librarian was \$450 and the General Society's librarian was paid \$350. Rhees, *Manual of Public Libraries*, xxiii, 259.

79. James Ranz, *The Printed Book Catalogue in American Libraries: 1723–1900* (Chicago: The American Library Association, 1964); Association of College and Research Libraries Monograph Series Number 26, 3, 7.

80. *Ibid.*, 24.

81. *Ibid.*, 26.

82. *Ibid.*, 29.

83. As early as 1850, Charles C. Jewett had started work on a union catalogue of the largest libraries in the United States. A union catalogue brings together all the holdings of several libraries. Jewett also proposed using stereotyped cards for producing catalogues, so that the preparation of a new catalogue would require only the inserting the cards for new acquisitions and rearranging the old ones. Both of these ideas were abandoned when Jewett left the Smithsonian, but were adopted later in the century.

84. *Catalogue, 1855*, v.

85. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, *Report of the Special Committee, 1830*, 12.

86. *Annual Report, 1855*, 9; *Annual Report, 1865*, 12.

87. Political science comprehended several subclasses that would be classified elsewhere in modern catalogues, including bookkeeping, statistics, and various areas of the law.

88. The formula for calculating the rate of error is the square root of $(1-n/N)(.25/n)$, where n is the number of items in the sample and N is the total population. Leslie Kish, *Survey Sampling* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1965), 120.

89. Truebner, *Bibliographical Guide*, 198–202, 261–98.

90. Earle and Congdon, *Annals*, 276.

91. Lyle H. Wright, "A Statistical Survey of American Fiction, 1774–1850," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 2 (April 1939): 309.

92. C. Seymour Thompson, *Evolution*, 91.

93. Rhees, *Manual of Public Libraries*, 260.

94. Lyle H. Wright, "Propaganda in Early American Fiction," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 33 (1939): 104–5.

95. Earle and Congdon, *Annals*, 276.

96. *Ibid.*, 276.