86. Deeds, 101:119.

87. Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue*, 11–27.

88. Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble*, 309–311, 321–392.

89. Timothy Gilfoyle, "Strumpets and Misogynists: Brothel 'Riots' and the Transformation of Prostitution in Antebellum New York City," *New York History* 68, no. 1 (1987): 65.

90. Gilfoyle, "Brothel Riots," 58.

91. See John M. Werner, *Reaping the Bloody Harvest: Race Riots in the United States during the Age of Jackson, 1824–1849* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986); cf. Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 201–204.

92. Rockman, *Scraping By*, 246–252; Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 349–352.

93. Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 371.

94. Town Council Records, 10:601; see also Town Papers, 112 doc. #0039155.

95. Patrick T. Conley, *Democracy in Decline: Rhode Island's Constitutional Development, 1776–1841* (Providence: RIHS, 1977), 290–371.

96. Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 361–364; Sullivan, "Olney's Lane Riot," 51.

97. Sullivan, "Olney's Lane Riot," 51, 53; Clark-Pujara, *Dark Work*, 109.

98. "To the Public," *Rhode Island American and Gazette*, September 27, 1831.

99. "Committee's Report," *Rhode Island American and Gazette*, September 30, 1831; the Hardscrabble Riot was similarly well-organized, see Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 353–354.

100. Providence County Court Records, *Dinneford v. Jones*, May 1833; Deeds, 71:214.

PATRICIA RAUB

"A Bewildering Variety"

The Beginning of Libraries in Providence

In 1753, eighty-six "prominent citizens" in the town of Providence agreed to contribute twenty-five pounds or more toward the purchase of a collection of books to be borrowed among them.[1] Among this group of men were Stephen Hopkins, later a Rhode Island governor, a Superior Court chief justice, and a signer of the Declaration of Independence; and several members of the Brown family, the leading merchants in Providence. Other public officials, merchants, and early manufacturers joined the Browns and Hopkins as founding members of the Providence Library Company.[2] They ordered books from London that arrived the following year and were housed in the Town House council chamber on what is now Meeting Street.

Perhaps the most astonishing thing about the Providence Library Company is that it was founded at all. In 1753, the year of its formation, Providence had a population of only about 3,000 people—less than half the number of Newport residents.[3] By the mid-eighteenth century, Providence's wealthy neighbor to the south had become a cultural center, supported by a thriving trade in rum, molasses, slaves, and privateering. While Newport ranked with New York and Boston as one of the "commercial leaders of the New World," Providence remained a provincial backwater.[4] Nevertheless, Providence, too, had its successful merchants engaged in much the same activities as were those in Newport. These men supported the formation of the Providence Library Company, which began less than a decade after Newport's Redwood Library was formed and lasted for more than eight decades, surviving a fire and relocating several times. It shared its books not only among the shareholders, or proprietors, but also free of charge to Protestant ministers, members of the Rhode Island General Assembly, and, for a time, the officers and students at Rhode Island College, now Brown University, "until a library could be procured sufficient for that respectable establishment."[5]

Like most libraries begun prior to the second half of the nineteenth century, the Providence Library Company was not a public library as we know it today, although at the time it often was referred to as such. Instead, it was a social library, funded and operated by "a voluntary association of individuals who had contributed money toward a common fund to be used for the purchase of books."[6] Library historian Jesse Shera divides social libraries into two main groups: the "proprietary library," in which one bought shares in the property of the group, and the "subscription library," in which one paid an annual fee for the privilege of borrowing books from the collection. The Providence Library Company was an example of a proprietary library: with the exceptions of those persons listed above, no one had borrowing privileges unless they had paid to become shareholders, or proprietors.

The Providence Library Company was incorporated by the State of Rhode Island in 1798, a half century after Newport's Redwood Library was granted this status. Incorporation gave the organization the legal right to charge members for overdue books, tax shareholders, permit the selling or transfer of library shares, provide a salary to the librarian, and confer "such further powers as might be necessary to carry into effect the purposes of the company..."[7] State governments at first passed specific acts of incorporation with provisions tailored for each library. However, as social

libraries increased in number by the early nineteenth century, New England states enacted more streamlined legislation setting forth general provisions that could apply to any library, with Rhode Island the last to do so in 1839.[8]

Social Libraries and the Expansion of Public Literacy

Early social libraries such as the Providence Library Company assembled general collections, filling the shelves with works providing "'useful knowledge' and 'virtue'" and eschewing books that offered only "light amusement."[9] Many libraries printed catalogues of their holdings from time to time, and these lists indicate that such libraries primarily purchased history and biography, geography and travel, science, serious literature, and religion—with religious books frequently staying on the shelves rather than borrowed. While libraries avoided popular novels well into the nineteenth century, librarians eventually would feel compelled to offer such books to compete with the growing popularity of for-profit circulation libraries.[10]

Like many proprietary libraries of the day, the Providence Library Company could not sustain its early momentum. Membership declined, and, with it, income from the sale of shares. Likewise, yearly membership fees dwindled. Consequently, the library was unable to maintain its stock of books, resulting in a further drop in membership. While the Providence Library Company had attracted master craftsmen in addition to merchants and professional men in its early years, many artisans shifted their membership to the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers, which offered a library and reading room beginning in the 1820s. In 1831, John Russell Bartlett, then a bookkeeper and cashier in Cyrus Butler's Bank of America—no relation to today's financial corporation of the same name—took the lead in founding a new library, the Providence Athenaeum, leasing two rooms in Butler's new Arcade building.[11] It did not take long for the founders to realize that Providence could not support two libraries so similar in nature, and by 1832, members of a series of the Providence Library Company committees began to meet with their counterparts from the newly formed Providence Athenaeum to discuss a merger. Among those active in these negotiations were industrialist Zachariah Allen Jr., members of the Brown and Ives families, Butler, and the ever-energetic Bartlett, but they were unable to reach agreement. Instead, the two library corporations dissolved, and on January 25, 1836, "a public meeting of citizens generally and of the proprietors of the Providence Library and the Athenaeum companies in particular" formed a new library.[12] They applied to the General Assembly for a charter, which was granted that year, and the shareholders purchased the books of the two older library companies. The newly incorporated library was known simply as The Athenaeum until 1850, when it was renamed the Providence Athenaeum. While the library initially was located in the Arcade, members soon were able to erect an imposing Greek Revival structure at Benefit and College Streets.

By 1836, Providence was a very different place than it had been when the Providence Library Company opened in 1753. The British blockade of New-

Butler Exchange Building, ca. 1915. The first quarters of the Providence Public Library were on the second floor facing Exchange Place from 1878–1880. RIHS collection RHiX39412.

port during the Revolution had wreaked havoc upon that town's economy, and, although Providence also suffered economically from the war, it had nevertheless been able to take advantage of its sister town's ill fortunes. Maritime trade had expanded, including the lucrative China trade; industry was on the rise; the financial sector was growing; and population was increasing rapidly. While the business center of Providence was clustered around Market Square on the East Side of town, it was beginning its shift west of the Providence River, as symbolized by the completion of the Arcade in 1828. And in 1832, four years before the Athenaeum's incorporation, the town of Providence was incorporated as a city.

Unlike the Providence Library Company, the Providence Athenaeum grew and prospered over the next seventy-five years, increasing its number of shareholders from 293 in 1836 to 1,000 in 1911, its book holdings from 4,162 to 75,000 volumes, and its endowment from $5,000 to $51,669.[13] Women often visited the Athenaeum, and female readers borrowed a substantial proportion of the library's books. By 1861, women made up more than fifty percent of the library's users. By that time, about ten percent of the shareholders as well were women.[14] The Providence Athenaeum has continued to make adjustments as times change, retaining its place in the cultural life of the city up to the present day.

Libraries and More Libraries

The Providence Library Company and the Providence Athenaeum were not the only libraries in the city prior to February 4, 1878, the date on which the Providence Public Library began operations in the Butler Exchange Building in downtown Providence. According to print-culture scholar Ronald J. Zboray, there was a "bewildering variety" of libraries in Providence during these years, as there was throughout much of the United States, and the number of libraries here and elsewhere grew rapidly after the Revolutionary War era.[15] There were only four social libraries in all of Rhode Island in the half century from 1731 to 1780, counting the Providence Library Company; an astounding 63 opened in the state between 1776 and 1850, and many of them in Providence.[16]

What precipitated the flourishing of libraries at this time? Library historians point to several factors. Apart from several economic downturns, this was a period of prosperity and growth. The country was expanding and, with it, the market for manufactured goods produced in Providence and its environs, enriching many merchants, industrialists, and professional men who had the financial resources to found and sustain social libraries, while their younger counterparts had sufficient disposable income to pay the dues or other fees to use the reading rooms and libraries.

In eighteenth-century New England, "as in England, press runs were small, prices high, and distribution a matter of catch-as-catch-can."[17] Printers focused on a limited number of steady sellers that didn't vary much from one year to the next, with the Bible at the top of the list. Households typically owned only a few books besides the Bible, and people read and reread them until they could recite many passages by heart.[18] By the first part of the nineteenth century, however, improvements in technology led to books and newspapers being produced in more abundance and in the expansion and greater efficiency of distribution networks. With more reading material available, readers spent less time poring over the same household texts again and again, and the production of steady sellers dwindled by the 1830s.[19] Instead, the rising popularity of novels and newspapers ushered in a different style of literacy, one characterized by an emphasis upon the new, where "people moved 'hastily' from one day's paper to the next, and from one novel to another."[20] Instead of purchasing a handful of books for their own use, readers borrowed or rented a succession of books from the various libraries available to them and frequented reading rooms to consult the latest newspapers and magazines.[21]

The proliferation of libraries also presupposes widespread literacy. While statistical evidence of literacy is not definitive, as people self-reported their ability to read and write when asked by census takers,[22] the data nevertheless points to widespread ability to read and write by 1850, even when taking into account the lower rates among immigrants and Blacks.[23] Many scholars have asserted that most native-born White New Englanders, both men and women, were literate by the mid-eighteenth century.[24] Although children primarily were taught to read by their parents throughout most of the colonial era, the responsibility had shifted to schools by the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1800, Providence had four schoolhouses; by 1871, there were more than fifty, including a high school, as well as several private schools, evening schools, and, starting in 1871, summer or "vacation" schools.[25] Sunday schools taught reading and writing early in the century but focused more heavily on religious instruction once public schools were available to teach these basic skills.[26] However, as we shall see later, Sunday schools throughout the city provided libraries whose collections often rivaled most social libraries in number of volumes.

Scholars also point to prevailing beliefs in republicanism, progress, and self-improvement in accounting for the increase in library formation at this time. The successful outcome of the Revolutionary War, the adoption of the U.S. Constitution and establishment of a new government, the expansion to the west made possible by the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, and the triumphant conclusion of the War of 1812 reinforced a belief in progress and a faith in republicanism. Americans regarded reading, education, and libraries as essential to public and individual welfare. The supporters of social libraries believed that "reading was a fundamental good. For one thing, it provided the basis for an informed, self-reliant citizenry, capable of defending its rights." It also was "the key to social mobility."[27] Many young men were attracted to reading to attain "useful knowledge" that would contribute to their self-improvement.[28] Furthermore, as the century wore on, libraries increasingly would be regarded by many as a wholesome alternative to less reputable environs. Young men who spent their leisure in the respectable confines of a library were diverted from wasting their time in saloons and pool halls, activities frowned upon by middle-class citizenry, especially their employers.

Clarence E. Sherman, librarian of the Providence Public Library from 1930 to 1957, states that in the nineteenth century in addition to several private library collections "notable in size and also as to intrinsic value" as well as more modest household collections of books purchased in the city's bookshops, dozens of social libraries and reading rooms were opened during this period. In every case, Sherman notes, these collections were "neither public nor free."[29] We will be tracing the development of those libraries that were not purely private in nature, which can loosely be defined as social libraries.[30] While some libraries—such as the Providence Library Company and the Providence Athenaeum—were founded by men for the specific purpose of acquiring books to share among their members, many of Providence's libraries prior to the opening of the Providence Public Library in 1878 were maintained as a supplementary benefit for members of professional societies and occupational groups. Others were provided by philanthropic or religious associations; by organizations seeking to broaden members' cultural, educational, and professional horizons through lectures and debates; and by factory owners for the use of their workers. Many lasted for decades, while others appeared and then disappeared much more rapidly.

Most of these libraries had general collections of books, but others were narrower in scope, particularly those associated with organizations by and for men in specific professions or with specialized interests. The Rhode Island Medical Society was founded in 1812

by Amos Throop, "Providence's first male obstetrician" and a three-term member of the Rhode Island General Assembly.[31] The Rhode Island Society for the Encouragement of Domestic Industry, chartered in 1820, maintained a modest collection of donated periodicals, government reports, and other books relating to its membership of farmers and fishermen.[32] Two years later, John Howland, an early advocate of public schools, was the driving force behind the founding of the Rhode Island Historical Society. Access to the Providence Bar Library, which opened in 1833, was "confined to gentlemen of the legal profession"[33] and stocked its shelves accordingly, while the Rhode Island Horticultural Society, incorporated in 1840, had on hand a small library of books on garden cultivation and management.[34] In 1850, women's rights advocate Paulina Davis began the Providence Physiological Society, with a library offering members "nearly or quite one hundred well-selected volumes, with a neat bookcase." Many of the health-related books in this collection were donated by area physicians.[35] The Rhode Island Dental Society, formed in 1878, offered a library of current books of specific interest to its members, while the Engineers Association of Rhode Island, organized the following year, could boast a "well-selected library of mechanical and scientific works."[36] As was the case in most cities, only a few of these early organizations had library buildings of their own. Most facilities were rented rooms, or materials were kept the home of the society's librarian.[37]

Among the earliest social libraries were those founded by young men for their own edification. In his doctoral dissertation submitted to the Department of History at the University of Chicago, Thomas S. Harding notes, "In the history of almost every college, even the most poverty-stricken and primitive, two rival literary societies sprang up almost as soon as the first classes began."[38] These societies were primarily debating societies, and they began to collect books as background material for debates. At Brown University, students founded the United Brothers' Society and the Philermerian Society, with libraries containing approximately 4,000 volumes each by the mid-nineteenth century.[39] While the size of these collections by this time was considerably smaller than that of the university's official library, which numbered 23,000 volumes by 1848, such had not been the case only fifteen years earlier when the college library's holdings were only "slightly larger" than those of the two societies.[40] According to Harding, student literary organizations established their own libraries in the late-eighteenth and first few decades of the nineteenth century because the college libraries typically were small, difficult to access, and excluded contemporary works, thus making it nearly impossible for students to use these libraries as a resource in preparing for the debates that were the main activity of these societies.[41]

These college literary societies were not the only Providence organizations providing members with debating experience supported by book collections. The Franklin Society was founded in 1823 "to cultivate and disseminate scientific knowledge by means of lectures and discussions" and offered members a small library of scientific works. A similar organization was the Franklin Lyceum, formed in 1831 as the Providence Lyceum (its name changed in 1832) and

Franklin Lyceum Building, ca. 1904 on Westminster Street, demolished in 1926. RIHS collection RHiX35876.

incorporated about a decade later. Founded by students of G. A. DeWitt, who ran a small private school on Waterman Street, the Franklin Lyceum was typical of many similar "Societies for Mutual Education" that opened in the antebellum period. Members paid an initiation or admission fee and yearly taxes; in the 1860s, the admission fee was two dollars, and the annual assessment was three dollars.[42] It held weekly debates and sponsored an annual public lecture series in Lyceum Hall at 19 Westminster Street that attracted large audiences who paid admission to hear prominent speakers including Oliver Wendell Holmes, Daniel Webster, Henry Ward Beecher, and Sam Houston. A star of the lecture circuit was Ralph Waldo Emerson, who delivered the first in a series of lectures on "Human Life" "to a large and respectable audience, whose silent attention attested their deep interest."[43]

As Shera notes, "The lyceum, like the school, was book centered," and most lyceums established libraries for the "continuous study and reading of the members."[44] Franklin Lyceum was no exception. By the 1860s, it had more than 700 members, both male and female, and a library of nearly 4,000 volumes.[45] According to its 1857 catalogue, members could borrow books on geography and travel, history and biography, science and medicine, law and mathematics, poetry and literature, and contemporary novels—including *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Jane Eyre,* and *Moby Dick*. In addition, it offered periodicals such as *The Knickerbocker* and *Illustrated London News*.[46] Although its collection had grown to 6,775 by 1890, the organization had declined in popularity by then, and it sold its furniture and books to the new Providence Public Library.[47] "The Lyceum has served a useful purpose," according to one contemporary writer, "in fitting young men for public life, its discipline in parliamentary practice alone being of sufficient value to enlist many young men in its membership."[48]

Libraries for Workers

The Franklin Lyceum was founded by upwardly mobile young men who utilized the knowledge and rhetorical skills they acquired as members of the Lyceum to establish successful careers. Those who established this organization included a future U.S. Army surgeon, minister, physician, manufacturer, and secretary of the U.S. Treasury.[49] The Franklin Lyceum can be categorized as a "mercantile library," defined as being for the use of merchants' clerks, salesmen, bank tellers, and

bookkeepers; in contrast, the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers, established in 1789 and first opening at 19 Market Square, primarily was for tradesmen, artisans, and their apprentices.[50] As its name suggests, the association attracted mechanics, or, in today's parlance, "artisans," as well as "manufacturers," which also had a different meaning when the organization was formed than it does today. In the eighteenth century, a "manufacturer" referred to an "artisan, a craftsperson; a worker in a factory or workshop,"[51] the latter employing only a handful of workers in the late-eighteenth century. The members of this organization "shared a common identity as small-scale producers operating in a town dominated economically by a coterie of merchant princes and in a state dominated politically by a multitude of farmers. By banding together, the members hoped to affirm their social worth, provide mutual assistance in times of need, and gain leverage over public policy."[52] According to an 1853 newspaper notice, members paid $2.50 in dues annually, as well as a reduced fee for the various courses offered.[53] Members honed their public speaking skills by discussing "matters of mutual interest and concern."[54]

It was Henry Cushing, who had formerly operated a circulating library and currently sold wallpaper at his Westminster Street shop, who introduced the motion at the association's January 8, 1821 meeting to establish a library for the use of members and their apprentices. The vote was carried unanimously, and the library began operation the same year. Subsequently the association also opened a reading room.[55] The library attracted ambitious artisans and tradesmen of limited means as it was "broader in scope, less exclusive, and cheaper than the proprietary libraries" such as the Providence Library Company, the principal alternative at the time.[56] It grew rapidly, with a collection of 1,000 books by 1832,[57] increasing to 3,500 volumes by 1853[58] and swelling to 6,000 volumes when the organization ultimately transferred its library holdings to the Providence Public Library in 1877.[59]

The association was explicit about the advantages for young men as members of the organization. One 1847 newspaper advertisement for the "Mechanics and Apprentices Library" noted that time spent among the association's books would be highly beneficial to readers, as it "may ultimately raise them to the highest posts of respectability and usefulness." As proof, the advertisement pointed to a bookbinder's apprentice in New Hampshire who recently had risen to judicial office in Maine. It seems that the "secret of his success is, that he devoted that leisure to books, which most young men give to frivolous or criminal amusement." [60] One might observe that it was this American dream with its ideology of material and social success that had inspired Benjamin Franklin in 1727 to form the Junto, the organization upon which subsequent social libraries were loosely based, especially mechanics and mercantile libraries such as those associated with the Franklin Lyceum and the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers. In fact, many social libraries underscored their connection to Franklin through their names, such as Providence's Franklin Society and Franklin Lyceum.

Library supporters also claimed that employers utilized these libraries as "reference bureaus," turning to

working men's libraries such as those maintained by the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers and the Franklin Lyceum to determine whether to hire or promote an employee.[61] Library membership provided useful—if dubious—evidence of a prospective employee's probable worth on the job, as "'none who are frequenters of the dram-shop, none who seek the society of the vicious and profane, and few, if any, who are devoted to the theatre'" were likely to be found among those furthering their knowledge among the books and periodicals provided in these libraries.[62]

In addition to those organizations established early on by members of various working groups themselves, other libraries available to workers could be found by the late-nineteenth century in the many large factories in New England industrial centers. A notable early example was the one established by Pacific Mills in Lawrence, Massachusetts. In his 1876 overview of libraries in manufacturing communities, William I. Fletcher, who later would serve as president of the American Library Association, commented approvingly, "No one familiar with the workings of this great mill can fail to see the benefit of the library in cultivating among the operatives literary tastes and ambitions, and an *esprit du corps* of great value to all the interests of the corporation."[63] Several factory owners in the Providence area also provided libraries for their employees. *King's Pocketbook of Providence* (1882) points to the Woonasquatucket Library at Atwells and Harris Avenues, which was the property of the Richmond Manufacturing Company and offered operatives "a collection of over 1,600 well-selected vols., and a reading-room supplied with the leading periodicals." The company extended library privileges to neighborhood residents, although it reserved the right to forbid its use by "objectionable persons."[64]

A library also was available at the Brown & Sharpe Manufacturing Company on Promenade Street, "free of charge, to all persons connected with the Works."[65] A rough estimate of the size of the holdings based upon the library's printed catalogue from 1882 indicates that employees could choose among approximately 1,000 to 1,400 books to select the one volume they were entitled to borrow for two weeks.[66] The collection included books with general appeal, such as travel, biography, history, science, self-help, literature, and popular novels, as well as more specialized works on engineering and mechanics tailored to the firm's machine-tool trade. It appears that workers were encouraged to bring books home for the rest of the family, as, for instance, the collection included the popular Rollo children's books by Jacob Abbott, who authored the first series of popular children's books in the United States with a child as the main character.[67] And for female readers, the collection included *Live, and Let Live; or, Domestic Service Illustrated* by novelist Catharine Maria Sedgwick; Harriet Beecher Stowe's novels; *Why Not? A Book for Every Woman* by Horatio R. Storer, M.D., and similar books.[68]

Yet another manufacturing company providing reading material for its operatives was the Wanskuck Company, a woolen manufacturer on the outskirts of Providence. In the late 1870s, the company built Wanskuck Hall across from the main factory complex on

Branch Avenue as a multifunction space for the use of factory employees, and the wife of mill co-owner Jesse Metcalf invited the nearby Roger Williams Baptist Church to hold its Sunday school classes in the building since the classes had outgrown their home in the chapel.[69] In 1903, the factory opened a library in Wanskuck Hall for mill workers.[70] The collection remained small; by the time the company turned the library and its contents over to the Providence Public Library in 1910 as its second neighborhood branch, its collection totaled 1,117 volumes. The branch library stayed in Wanskuck Hall until it moved in 1928 into a new purpose-built home around the corner on Veazie Street.[71]

Libraries for Moral Improvement

Still other nineteenth-century libraries were associated with organizations aiming to improve society. The Second Great Awakening ushered in the temperance, women's rights, and abolitionist movements, and organizations were formed to achieve their goals. The founders of these organizations were mostly Protestant, middle-class men. Temperance was the cause around which many reformers initially mobilized, spearheaded by the Baptist and Congregational churches. In 1830, the Providence Association for the Promotion of Temperance was the first temperance organization in the city and was joined by several more before the end of the decade. Alongside the temperance movement, abolitionists also marshaled their forces, forming Providence's Anti-Slavery Society in 1833 and founding other associations soon afterward.[72]

The mission of the Providence's Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), begun in 1853 at 56 Broad Street, was a charitable one, informed by its Christian identity. It aimed to "promote the social, mental, and moral good of young men who come to the city as strangers, to seek them out, introduce them to suitable companions, open to them a pleasant Reading Room and a well-furnished library, aid them in getting accommodations in suitable boarding houses or families, and also in obtaining seats in such churches as they wish to attend."[73] Furthermore, it sought to remove young men from the temptations of liquor. As the *Providence Daily Journal* noted in an 1886 article, "There are in the city about six hundred places where liquor is sold . . . Licentiousness is rife amongst them, and the streets of the city too often of an evening are scenes of temptation and schools of vice."[74] The YMCA provided a counterbalance to these pernicious forces for its more than 1,000 members who had access to its 4,000-volume library,[75] reading room, gymnasium, lecture hall, and parlor by the early 1880s. Members could take classes in literature, music, and photography as well as in relevant job skills such as elocution and penmanship. Religious services and temperance meetings, lectures, musical programs, and other entertainments were available. Those young men in need of suitable accommodation could consult the YMCA's list of available rooms with private families.[76] While women ("ladies") as well as men were admitted as members upon payment of the annual fee of one dollar, a government study of YMCA libraries across the country in 1876 found that YMCAs "were almost wholly composed of young men, the majority of whom are clerks and artisans,"[77] and most directed their attention primarily toward young middle-class men, while "little was offered for the young factory and industrial worker."[78]

After several decades of operating out of rented rooms, Providence "gentlemen prominent in business and professional circles" met in 1886 to discuss the building of a permanent home for the city's YMCA. They emphasized the need to provide for the welfare of the growing number of young men in the city, who were the "least cared for and the most exposed to temptation." Providence needed a permanent place "to meet the wants of the ever-increasing number of young men in the city." Erecting such a building would not only benefit the young men themselves but also would be "of great importance to the employer," as young men living in dismal lodgings and attracted to the temptations of the streets were a threat to sound business operations. In addition to the lure of the city's saloons, these gentlemen warned, "Many a young bank clerk has found it convenient to alter his balance at the end of the night to secure funds to pay a gambling debt."[79] The Providence YMCA did, in fact, construct a new building, which opened in 1890 one block east of Grace Church on Westminster Street. As in its earlier location, the organization again included a library and reading room.[80]

As the YMCA was an evangelical organization, its libraries included Bibles and other religious books on their shelves, but librarians were advised to avoid acquiring too many with "pietistic" themes. "Do not be misled with the idea that because yours is a Christian Association, therefore all your books should be religious," counseled Cephas Brainerd, chairman of the YMCA's Executive Committee, in 1881.[81] An overabundance of such books was likely to turn young men away. Even though the library's priority was to support the Bible-study classes offered, it also was important to offer books on business that would help young men get ahead in their work. In addition, the library should provide basic reference books, as well as books of general interest to readers—works on government, politics and law, biography and history, travel, the arts and sciences, literature, and some judiciously chosen novels.[82]

While the YMCA provided for the welfare of young men, a sister organization ministering to young women was founded in the early 1880s and incorporated in 1887. Providence's Young Women's Christian Temperance Union was an affiliate of the city's Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), itself part of a worldwide organization with chapters primarily in North America. The WCTU chapters had a membership of about 150,000 by 1892, with 50,000 young women in its auxiliary programs.[83] Providence's branch of the WCTU was one of several Christian women's organizations in the city in the second half of the nineteenth century.[84] The group recognized a need in the city to provide a respectable location where working women could spend their lunch hour eating and relaxing, sheltered from "corrupting influences," particularly the temptations exerted by city establishments serving liquor.[85] Therefore, the WCTU formed the Young Women's Christian Temperance Union, and this auxiliary group opened the Young Women's Tea Room in 1883 behind the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul then under construction.

The tea room was intended to provide inexpensive, wholesome lunches in pleasant surroundings for the city's female workers. Although union members' primary motivation had been to reform those "bad girls" who already had been drawn to the liquid temptations of the streets, it turned out that few of these women crossed the tea room's threshold; instead, "a nicer class" of shopgirls and bookkeepers was attracted to the establishment, and they became the primary clientele of the new facility. Having finished a reasonably priced dinner of meat and potatoes, coffee or tea, and a piece of pie, the women spent the rest of their lunch hour resting in rocking chairs, chatting, and perusing the assortment of newspapers and magazines, as well as temperance literature. Gradually, the union provided more books as well: One journalist reported in 1889 that a "cosy [sic] little library, daintily furnished, has supplanted the two or three little bookcases on the wall, and a librarian's services are now in demand to supply its patrons with literature at the price of 3 cents a volume."[86] The following year, the *Providence Daily Journal* noted that the library held about 500 volumes, "varied in character, yet all instructive."[87]

Members of the Union for Christian Work, organized in 1868 by representatives of the "higher social and intellectual class" of the city, committed themselves to the organization's "self-imposed mission of benefiting and helping the boys and girls of the streets, and in other ways extending the influence of Christian charity"[88] by delivering donated fruit and flowers to the sick, aged, or poverty-stricken and by providing health outings for invalids.[89] To supplement its education-outreach goals, the organization opened a library and reading room; over time, the library's holdings increased from approximately 700 volumes in 1868 to 3,000 by the early 1880s, the result of steady purchases and book donations from members and others.[90] The library and reading room offered "books, games, and kind influences" to street boys on weekday and Saturday nights during the winter, and the union also maintained "three branch-rooms for this purpose in other sections of the city" by 1882.[91] The union's members aimed to improve the manners and morals of the working-class children by enticing them to spend their evenings playing checkers and jackstraws, leafing through *Youth's Companion* or *St. Nicholas Magazine*, or selecting a book to borrow for a week.[92] It takes "comfort, care and intelligent sympathy, as well as kindliness," the *Providence Daily Journal* concluded in an 1883 article on the Union for Christian Work, to have "success in attracting the youth from the streets." And by using this method, the "ladies and gentlemen who give their time to helping the poor children . . . accomplish a most valuable as well as charitable work in countering the evil influences of the streets."[93] Like many of the other evangelical organizations of the era, the Union for Christian Work opposed the use of alcohol.[94]

Despite the praise lavished upon the organization's activities in the *Providence Daily Journal*, historian John S. Gilkeson Jr. concludes that the Union for Christian Work may have sought "to teach the boys self-control and 'instill in their minds the germs of manly being and upright living' [but] they were not particularly successful."[95] The union eventually turned the task of socializing boys over to the Providence Boys Club, founded in 1898.[96] The following year, the Boys Club opened in the first of several temporary quarters before it settled into a more permanent home in 1916 on South Main Street in the Fox Point district.[97] In addition to a game room containing a "library with good books and magazines," pool tables, and two bowling alleys, the club also featured a gymnasium, facilities for showing motion pictures, and a large washroom and bathing room. Unlike the Union for Christian Work, which was open only one evening a week, the Providence Boys Club was open all day and two hours in the evenings. Despite a posed photograph of children intently reading books and magazines that was published in a Providence Boys Club booklet announcing the opening of its Fox Point home, one doubts that the club's library was the organization's main attraction for youngsters.[98]

Larger than any of the libraries discussed so far in this section were those formed by Sunday schools. The earliest Sunday schools in this country were established by the first generation of textile factory owners and were intended to teach working children reading and writing and the basics of religion on their only day off from work. Sunday schools soon added Bible instruction to their curriculum and relocated in the basements of church buildings.[99] Although Sunday schools at first were not run by the churches themselves, after a decade or so, churches of all denominations took them over: Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Unitarians, and Catholics all maintained Sunday schools. The importance of the Sunday school to the church could not be overemphasized, according to the Reverend J. G. Vose in 1888. The pastor of the Beneficent Congregational Church asserted, "If the church is to be self-perpetuating . . . in part, it must have young blood in its veins for from the young only can come ardent workers."[100] Thus, the Sunday school came to be regarded as the "nursery of the church."[101]

Given the emphasis upon reading and scriptural instruction, Sunday schools soon established libraries to reinforce the lessons in piety taught by the instructors. As early as 1827, speakers at the Eleventh Anniversary of the New York Sunday School Union Society "earnestly recommend[ed] every School the establishment of a *Sunday School Library*."[102] There were nearly 2,000 Sunday Schools in the United States by 1850, and by 1870 that number had risen to almost 34,000.[103] It did not take long for publishers to begin to offer books, tracts, and pamphlets for the Sunday school market. The American Tract Society produced periodicals to be distributed in Sunday school classes, while the New York Sunday School Union Society focused upon supplying books for Sunday school libraries as well as tracts and pamphlets for Sunday school classes.[104] The Westminster Street Sunday School Depository, which opened in 1834 at 12½ Westminster Street, was the primary Sunday school depository in nineteenth-century Providence.[105] In 1846, it was appointed the general agent and depository for the Rhode Island Sunday School Union, with a "good assortment of Theological and Miscellaneous publications, suitable for S[unday] school, church, ministerial and maternal association libraries, constantly on hand."[106]

Given the plethora of books for Sunday schools on the market, librarians were admonished to make selec-

tions carefully. Collections need not contain only religious volumes; works of biography, geography, history, poetry, travel, and the like also should be available for young readers, so long as the offerings were "*good, sound, sensible* books . . . [and not] trash and nonsense. "[107] Librarians were warned that they should purchase books that actually will be read and not languish on the shelves;[108] at the same time, they should avoid "highly seasoned food," such as fairy tales.[109] Although some might be tempted to avoid missteps in selection by ordering full sets of books such as the American Tract Society's ten-dollar library of one hundred preselected Sunday school books published in 1847, even this apparently safe alternative might be the wrong choice.[110] In 1878, the Reverend F. E. Davison of Pawtucket counseled the Free Baptist Association that Sunday school librarians should avoid buying books "by the cubic foot, or the box library. Let them all pass through the hands of some judicious persons for examination before placing them on the shelves."[111]

Sunday school library collections rivaled many contemporary social library collections in size. The secretary of the Rhode Island Baptist Sunday School Convention announced at its fifteenth anniversary meeting in 1855 that thirty-one Sunday school libraries held a total of 12,000 volumes for an average of 387 volumes per library.[112] Thirteen years later, the average number of books among Rhode Island's forty-five libraries was just over 700 volumes per library.[113] According to its catalog, the Sunday school library at Providence's First Baptist Church held 897 volumes in 1864.[114] By 1875, the *Providence Evening Press* reported that the First Baptist Church in Valley Falls, a mill village along the Blackstone River, had the largest Sunday school library in the state, with 1,300 volumes.[115] With Sunday school libraries across Providence providing reading material to members of their congregations, these libraries are of great importance in the history of the nineteenth-century library. Although adults patronized many of these Sunday school libraries, the primary patrons were youngsters, making these libraries among the first in Providence to open their doors to children. As former University of Minnesota librarian Frank Keller Walter points out in his 1942 study of the Sunday school library, "The path from Sunday school library to the modern children's and school library is practically continuous."[116]

Blacks and Providence's Early Libraries

Although some social libraries and literary societies were open to women and working-class patrons and, with the increase in immigration throughout the century, to the foreign-born as well, little evidence exists that these organizations also welcomed Blacks. Providence provided two schools in 1838 for the education of Black children, but it was not until 1866 that the Rhode Island General Assembly passed legislation opening admission of "any [public] school in the state" to any student regardless of the "race or color of the applicant."[117] The reluctance of white residents to share their schools with non-whites attests to the widespread racism that would continue well beyond the formal integration of the school system. For this reason, the Black community built its own institutions. At a time of white animosity toward free Black populations, these "societies formed by people of color tended to emphasize providing for mutual support and defense, strengthening community identity, and demonstrating sound moral values—strategies to combat white hostility."[118] In Providence, these organizations included the African Union Meeting House, which was formed in 1789 and revived in 1819 ; a school for Black children that opened in 1821 and that met whenever the congregation was able to pay a schoolmaster[119]; the Mutual Relief Society, founded in 1826 to aid elderly members; temperance societies; and anti-slavery groups.[120]

An estimated half of the city's small Black population of more than 1,000 was literate by 1840, and the Black community also formed literary societies.[121] One scholar maintains that the city was host to at least two such organizations in the 1830s and 1840s: the Literary Society (1833), perhaps called the Female Literary Society, and the Debating Society (before 1837). Prior to the Civil War, members of the community formed a debating and dramatic organization named the Rachel Club.[122] The early literary societies often were short-lived, lasting only a few years before being replaced by others, and it appears that few of the records of these organizations have survived.

These literary societies, sometimes called debating societies or reading rooms, often offered their members access to small libraries of books, periodicals, printed speeches, globes, and maps. Rhode Island historian Keith Stokes writes that his family "still owns reams of literary works from the early 19th century and later that were obtained and passed on through church and literary memberships."[123] Through their activities, these societies endeavored to spread knowledge, enable members to gain practice in public speaking, and provide young men with a wholesome alternative to the "baneful attractions" of the public house.[124] With their focus on personal improvement, these objectives paralleled those of the white literary organizations. However, Black associations had additional goals resulting from their members' inferior and often precarious status in nineteenth-century American society. With fewer opportunities for public education, Black literary societies often sought to strengthen their members' reading and writing skills. As Elizabeth McHenry, author of *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies*, writes, "For African Americans in the early nineteenth century, these societies offered a protected, collective environment in which to develop a literary background as well as the oral and written skills needed to express and represent themselves with confidence."[125] McHenry suggests that these organizations served as "vehicles of empowerment" in the early nineteenth century: Black literary societies aimed to "shape their membership into educated individuals who would be considered exemplary, respected citizens," thus demonstrating that Black persons deserved admission as equal citizens within the American democracy.[126] These benefits were as important to women as they were to men, and for essentially the same reasons. Literary societies were gender-based, and women's reading groups, as Black literature and culture scholar Jeannine Marie DeLombard remarks, provided their members with a "socially acceptable forum in which

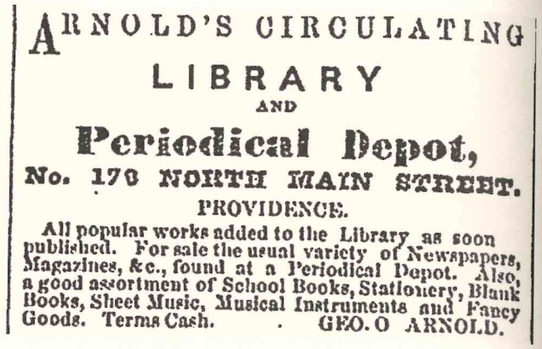
to pursue educational opportunities, cultivate literary and political skills, and even on rare occasions address a public audience through the medium of print."[127] These societies were especially important for Black women, whose lives were constrained by sexism as well as racism.

The need for separate literary associations lasted into the early twentieth century. Arthur Elmore Bostwick, head librarian of the St. Louis Public Library at the time, acknowledged in 1917 that, while there was no overt discrimination against Black patrons, nevertheless, the "Negro in the North does not use the public library as much as would be expected . . . It would seem that the race feels instinctively, whether with justice or not, that it is not wanted."[128]

Circulating Libraries

Most of the libraries we have discussed so far have been social libraries. Throughout their history, social libraries were weighted with social and cultural expectations. They were, variously, a means to economic advancement, an avenue by which the country's residents could obtain the information and insight to become responsible citizens, an opportunity for patrons to further their education and to gain cultural capital, a bulwark against the dangers of the city, or, in the case of Sunday school libraries, a means to inculcate a set of values—to engender of love of literature while fostering a "[s]pirit of divine obligation and human service."[129]

Circulating libraries, however, carried less of the ideological baggage associated with these other


ARNOLD'S CIRCULATING
LIBRARY
AND
Periodical Depot,
No. 170 NORTH MAIN STREET.
PROVIDENCE.
All popular works added to the Library as soon published. For sale the usual variety of Newspapers, Magazines, &c., found at a Periodical Depot. Also, a good assortment of School Books, Stationery, Blank Books, Sheet Music, Musical Instruments and Fancy Goods. Terms Cash. GEO. O ARNOLD.

Advertisement. *Providence Evening Press*, July 13, 1860, page 1.

types of libraries.[130] Circulating libraries first appeared in colonial towns and cities by the mid-eighteenth century and grew in number and popularity over the next century. These libraries provided access to books either by payment of membership dues or by a per-book charge. Since membership dues also were the cost of admission to many social libraries associated with community or professional organizations, one cannot distinguish between the two types of libraries purely based on payment mechanisms. The basic difference was that most social libraries or their parent organizations were incorporated as nonprofits presumably providing a social good, while circulating libraries were profit-oriented commercial enterprises. They operated out of bookstores, millinery shops, printers' establishments, and other businesses. Books were regarded by most proprietors simply as another commodity, little different from hats or envelopes. According to Shera, many merchants saw circulating libraries as a sound business venture, requiring a considerably lower outlay of money to build and maintain a collection than did most social libraries. Furthermore, "returns on investment were immediate and large in proportion to the original expenditure."[131] The customers, too, might find circulating libraries more attractive since they usually could borrow books from such libraries more economically than they could maintain membership in a social library.

According to David Kaser, in *A Book for a Sixpence: The Circulating Library in America*, Providence's first

Interior of the Providence Athenaeum (the art room) ca. 1925. RIHS collection RHiX171286.

library of this type appeared in 1789 and was operated by Foster, Drown & Company, who were primarily druggists.[132] As Kaser points out, because these libraries generally were linked to businesses, they provided daily access to their customers rather than the couple hours a week that many social libraries were at first open.[133] When the Providence Library Company was organized in 1754, for example, its founders stipulated that it would be open one afternoon a week,[134] unlike Foster, Drown & Company, which presumably was open every workday.

Circulating libraries, a writer for the *Providence Journal* wrote in 1853, catered to "readers who are prevented either by inclination or circumstances from using the more select public libraries of the city."[135] Shera has found that patrons of typical circulating libraries could choose among yearly, six-month, or quarterly subscription rates, for $7.00, $4.50, or $2.00, respectively. Or, if they were unwilling or financially unable to make a commitment for three months or more, they could pay a weekly rental for each book borrowed, with the cost dependent upon the size of the book.[136] By 1853, on the other hand, those purchasing shares in the Providence Athenaeum were charged $15, with an annual tax of $5.[137]

Because the proprietors of circulating libraries were in business to make money, they stocked those books and pamphlets most likely to appeal to their

clientele. While both social libraries and circulating libraries might offer "improving" fare characterized by works of theology, history, and serious literature, circulating libraries also offered popular novels and romances, with fiction eventually becoming their main stock in trade.[138] Perrin's Circulating Library, one of the city's largest circulating libraries, had an estimated 4,000 volumes by mid-century, nearly a quarter of the 18,000 volumes held by the Providence Athenaeum.[139] In its 1852 newspaper advertisements, it touted its up-to-date offerings, claiming "new books added as soon as published."[140] An 1865 notice listed novels by Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mrs. E.D.E.N. Southworth, Lydia M. Child, and Charles Dickens, as well as other popular writers of the day.[141] As we see from some of the authors on this list, many circulating library renters were female. Kaser suggests that it was the willingness of circulating libraries to cater to women readers that was a major factor contributing to the success of these enterprises.[142]

The circulating library run by Daniel Perrin appears to have been the longest-lasting rental library in the city. In 1849, Perrin got his start by taking over another circulating library, one that had been in business for twenty-nine years under the proprietorship of George Dana.[143] In 1883, Perrin's book and stationery business, including the circulating library, passed to his nephew Albert F. Davis, who eventually would sell his stock to the Shepard Company Department Store, one of Providence's leading stores, in 1905.[144] Most of Providence's circulating libraries were more short-lived than Perrin's. The various enterprises often moved from place to place, mostly in the Market Square area and later in the vicinity of lower Westminster Street. Proprietors sold their stock to one another, dissolved partnerships to form new ones, or operated alone. Most lasted only a few years. Besides Perrin's Circulating Library, those that stayed in business for a decade or more included circulating libraries operated by Jacob Frieze (1828–42), George O. Arnold (1850–65), and John Wilcox (also 1850–65).[145] While it is difficult to make an exact count, it appears that about forty circulating libraries operated in Providence between 1789, when Foster, Drown & Company opened its library business, and the decade or so after the establishment of the Providence Public Library in 1878.[146] Public libraries and circulating libraries for a time coexisted harmoniously, with the circulating libraries providing the novels that most public libraries refused to supply. Eventually, public libraries gave in to patron pressure and began to stock popular novels, often establishing rental collections of those titles most in demand. Because public libraries were subsidized by tax monies, they could rent books at a lower rate than could circulating libraries, and the proprietors of most circulating libraries concluded it was not cost-effective to continue to compete with public libraries.[147]

Although diminished in number and influence from their mid-nineteenth-century heyday, commercial circulating libraries survived well into the twentieth century. Increasingly, however, the circulating libraries located in the center of the city and offering a large stock of books to customers were replaced by small selections for rental in train stations, soda fountains, and department stores,[148] a development highlighted in Providence by the sale of Perrin's Circulating Library in 1905 to Shepard Company Department Store.

While some social libraries also remained in operation into the twentieth century—with the Providence Athenaeum still thriving today—their shareholders eventually found that voluntary support was "not a sufficiently solid foundation upon which to build a universal library service."[149] State legislatures in New England paved the way for the formation of truly public libraries by the 1830s and 1840s by enacting legislation "permitting school districts to raise and expend funds for the purchase of libraries selected by the school committee," with Rhode Island doing so in 1840. It was not until 1867, however, that the Rhode Island legislature gave cities and towns the right to levy taxes to establish and support public libraries in their municipalities.[150] Eight years later, the General Assembly enacted legislation to aid local free libraries by providing funds for the purchase of books. In Rhode Island, however, most libraries that were free and open to the public by the turn of the century were privately incorporated but supported in part by local taxes and to a lesser extent by state funding. Only seven out of forty-nine free libraries receiving state funding by 1898 were under public ownership and operation and were therefore truly public libraries.[151] As Shera notes, "Though the tax-supported free public library eventually overshadowed the social library, the corporate library form was far from obsolete," especially in New England.[152] One such corporate library is the Providence Public Library.

The Early Years of Providence Public Library

Although the early libraries in Providence often were referred to as public libraries by contemporaries, this term merely meant that they were not personal, or private, collections in individuals' homes. As discussed earlier, none of the social libraries in mid-nineteenth-century Providence qualified as public libraries, defined as one that is "'established by state laws, is supported by local taxation or voluntary gifts, is managed as a public trust, and every citizen of the city or town which maintains it has an equal share in its privileges of reference and circulation.'"[153] Lancaster comments in her history of the Providence Athenaeum that the YMCA and the Union for Christian Work considered their libraries to be public, but Providence was "no longer a homogeneous, Protestant society" and therefore discouraged many residents from using the collections. Likewise, the Providence Athenaeum primarily was open to members and their guests, and by the 1870s, it had been quite a while "since the board actively welcomed the general public."[154]

By the 1870s, the public library movement was well underway, beginning with the formation of the Peterborough (NH) Town Library in 1834, followed by the establishment of public libraries in many other New England towns and cities, including Boston Public Library in 1854 and Worcester Public Library five years later. Providence took notice and, by the early 1870s, a *Providence Daily Journal* writer reflected that "the lack of a free public library became rather a reproach to the civic pride of many Providence residents. Cities of one-third her size possessed stately library buildings, well-stored with books and containing, besides

books, collections of curiosities or specimens of natural history."[155]

Providence political leaders could indeed boast of the city's population growth, its vibrant industrial base, and its cultural institutions. According to the U.S. Census, Providence's population climbed from some 7,600 residents in 1800 to nearly 69,000 by 1870. As the number of residents grew, building construction spread far out from the original settlement area hugging both sides of the Providence River, and by the 1870s, the city was bursting at the seams. Between 1868 and 1919, Providence grew from 5.4 to 18.5 square miles by annexing sections of Cranston, North Providence, and Johnston, setting the stage for further development beyond the city center. Meanwhile, Providence was becoming an industrial powerhouse. Textile factories lined its rivers, along with companies producing tools, steam engines, railroad cars, silverware, rubber goods, and jewelry. Banks and insurance companies moved into tall and ornate office buildings in the city's financial district. Huge department stores attracted customers on Westminster and Weybosset Streets. The imposing Second Empire City Hall was completed in 1876, joining the Romanesque train depot at Exchange Place. It was no wonder that the *Providence Daily Journal* would bemoan the absence of a public library in a city that was otherwise fast becoming a major metropolis.

Several local organizations were particularly anxious for Providence to open a public library. In 1869, representatives of the Union of Christian Work made it clear that they regarded their library as a transitional one, which they hoped would grow in size "so as to meet the wants of the people until the project now in agitation for a large free library, under the control of the city, shall be truly established and opened to the public."[156] Like the Union of Christian Work, the officers of the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers also believed the time had come for Providence to open a public library. According to a speech given in 1889 by association president Samuel H. Tingley, "The want of a Public Library for the people of Providence was a matter in which the Association between the years 1865 and 1870 felt a deep attitude."[157] Tingley and other proponents presented a mixture of reasons for establishing the city's free library, motives similar to those espoused by the founders of the earlier social libraries in Providence. In their original 1871 rationale, Zachariah Allen, Edwin M. Stone, and Welcome O. Brown began with the lofty sentiment that the "continued well being [sic] of any community, and especially of one under a free government, can only be secured by elevating the condition of the people—by inducing in them healthy, intellectual, moral and physical culture" through books, art, and lectures. Should Providence not extend the opportunity for education and self-improvement to all community members, they warned, the city might well rue the consequences, as "otherwise, a short-sighted ignorance, guided by selfish, brute animal instincts, becomes 'Communism,'—subversive of all 'the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.'" Thus, they concluded, "Self preservation [sic], as well as philanthropic principles" should convince Providence to establish a "Free Library, in connection with a Museum of Natural History, and the products of the Mechanic and Ornamental Arts." Tacking on one more argument for moving forward with the project, the authors reminded their readers that smaller cities such as New Haven and Hartford already had established institutions to uplift their citizens. Would Providence permit itself to stay behind?[158]

The issue was put to the city's voters in May 1770, calling for a tax of five cents per hundred dollars of ratable property to support a public library, but the measure was rejected.[159] Thus, as former University of Massachusetts Boston economics professor Mary Huff Stevenson wrote in her unpublished study in 1981 of the founding of Providence Public Library, "By the middle of 1870, it was clear that if Providence was to acquire a free library, it would have to be established through private philanthropy rather than public taxation."[160] According Tingley, "The subject was discussed at the Mechanics Association meetings and in [late] 1870, largely through the influence of their President, Zachariah Allen, a movement was made toward the establishment of such an Institution."[161]

As Tingley later recalled, representatives from the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers, the Union of Christian Work, the Rhode Island Society for the Encouragement of Domestic Industry, the Providence Franklin Society, and the Rhode Island Horticultural Society met in 1871.[162] With Allen taking a leading role, supported by, among others, Unitarian minister Stone and Quaker physician Brown from the Providence Franklin Society, the group formed the Friends of the Free Library and discussed how best to proceed. Their initial plan was an ambitious one. They drafted a charter, granted by the state, for the formation of a library, art gallery, and natural history museum to be financed by donations from trustees and contributions of either land or money from the city. After three years of fundraising, they concluded that their proposal was too complex—and too costly. Therefore, they lowered their sights and submitted an amended charter in 1874 for the organization of a library only, financed entirely by trustees.

The organizers' first task was to find a space for the construction of a new library. They asked the city for help, but none was forthcoming. Eventually, the Friends of the Free Library decided to open the library in a rented room rather than delay any longer.[163] The members of the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers voted to transfer the approximately 6,200 volumes in their library to form the beginning of the new public library's collection.[164]

On February 4, 1878, the Providence Public Library opened in room 9 on the second floor of the Butler Exchange, facing Exchange Plaza and near the new Providence City Hall, which would be dedicated in November of the same year. The library opening was well attended, according to a report in the *Providence Daily Journal*, with a "swift current of people coming and going" and "many of the best people in the city" dropping by. Overall, "there was general interest and admiration."[165] "And so," in the words of Clarence E. Sherman, Librarian from 1930 to 1957, "the Providence Public Library, a puny, toddling infant, was brought into the bibliothecal world."[166] Quickly, its patron base grew. A year after the public library opened, William E. Foster, the library's first director, reported that 10,400 people had registered for a card,

representing about 14 percent of the eligible population of Providence over the age of 14.[167] In contrast, the Providence Athenaeum had only 679 shareholders in the year ending August 1877.[168]

Quickly, the library outgrew its first home and moved to street-level rooms on Snow Street in 1880, and by the close of the library's first year at the new location, it had 15,000 registered borrowers.[169] It soon was clear that this location was too small as well. The trustees began to search for land on which to erect their own building and purchased property along Washington Street several blocks to the west. With bequests and other gifts, augmented by a substantial donation from John Nicholas Brown, the building was completed and opened on March 15, 1900, by which time the collection had swelled to 88,723 volumes from the 10,307 books owned by the library when it began in 1878.[170]

In these early years, the Providence Public Library largely was supported by private gifts rather than by public taxation. It was not until 1889, eleven years after the library's founding, that the city began to provide some financial support, allocating $3,500 to the library and gradually increasing the amount to $10,000 by 1895.[171] Although the city's payments to the library would continue to rise in the decades to follow, library officials frequently had to grapple with lower revenue than could adequately fund operations, observing as early as 1900[172] that Providence's per capita expenditure for libraries was significantly less than that provided for public libraries in other New England cities of comparable size, a complaint the library director would continue to make for years to come. This situation was in part a function of the Providence Public Library's status as a private nonprofit organization rather than a full-fledged city department.

Conclusion

By the time the Providence Public Library moved into its new building on Empire Street in 1900, it had become an urban institution of which residents could be proud. But even as it took its place as the city's preeminent library, it simultaneously was finding it more and more difficult to serve everyone in Providence. When the Providence Public Library opened in 1878, Providence was a walking city of about 100,000, with most people living no more than a mile or so from Exchange Place. By 1920, only 55 percent were within a mile-and-a-half radius of the city center.[173]

Although the Providence Public Library had the capacity to serve the city's burgeoning population, its remoteness discouraged many from using it. In addition, potential patrons were daunted by traffic congestion and hazards that seemed to worsen year by year. By the mid-teens and through the 1920s, the *Providence Journal* and the *Evening Bulletin* regularly published articles and letters to the editor decrying gridlock in the center of the city. With the introduction of the motorcar onto Providence's narrow streets, sharing the poorly regulated roads with streetcars, wagons, bicycles, and pedestrians, traffic problems were inevitable. The *Evening Bulletin* reported in the summer of 1922 that "Acute Congestion of Cars, Autos, Trucks, and Horse-Drawn Vehicles Chokes Arteries of Business Daily," in part the result of a steep rise in auto registrations in Rhode Island that had more than doubled over

ABOVE: Interior of the Providence Athenaeum (the card catalogue room) ca. 1925. RIHS collections RHiX171288.

RIGHT: Providence Public Library, ca. 1901. RIHS collection RHiA33185.

the past five years.[174] The press also covered automobile collisions with other cars, crashes with streetcars, and accidents involving pedestrians. For the month of July 1922, the *Evening Bulletin* counted 302 "traffic mishaps," with two people killed and 83 others injured, half of them children.[175] Across the country the previous year, there were more than 12,000 auto-related deaths, averaging one every thirty minutes.[176]

Given these problems, members of neighborhood associations established libraries beyond downtown that would enable those in their communities to walk safely to a library near their homes. Thus, a reporter for the *Providence Sunday Journal* welcomed the opening of the new Knight Memorial Library in 1924, observing, "The distance from the centre of the city, the congested traffic conditions, make the use of the Providence Public Library impossible to many of the residents of the Elmwood section."[177] Most of these neighborhood facilities began as independent entities, but over time the Providence Public Library would adopt them as branches in an urban library system that could serve residents throughout the city. The founding of Providence Public Library was the culmination of the first phase in Providence library history. The formation of community libraries between 1874 and 1923 constitutes the second phase. It is this story we shall trace next.

NOTES

1. Kenneth E. Carpenter observes that the founders of early libraries were "often identified in local histories as 'prominent citizens'—usually, doctors, judges, or businessmen." "Libraries" in *A History of the Book in America: Volume 2: An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790–1840*, edited by Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley. (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 274. Joseph Le Roy Harrison, "The Providence Athenaeum," *New England Magazine*, n.s. 45:1 (September 1911): 52.

2. Jane Lancaster, *Inquire Within: A Social History of the Providence Athenaeum since 1753* (Providence: The Providence Athenaeum, 2003), 6–10.

3. For statistics on Newport's population from 1708 to 1790, see "I. Population in the Colonial and Continental Periods" https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/colonialbostonpops.pdf, which puts Newport's population in 1755 as 6,753. Jesse Shera estimates Providence's population in the early 1750s at 3,000. *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England, 1629–1855* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1949), 117.

4. Shera, 35.

5. Harrison, 55.

6. Shera, 57.

7. Harrison, 57.

8. Shera, 62–63. Shera notes that "in the laws of Rhode Island the social library received only brief treatment in but one section of a larger act codifying the general legislation for the public school system." 63.

9. Robert A. Gross, "'Much Instruction from Little Reading': Books and Libraries in Thoreau's Concord," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 97:1 (April 1987): 39.

10. As scholars have attempted to determine the collection range of early social libraries such as the Providence Library Company, they have been fortunate that the library made a list of its holdings prior to a fire that destroyed all the books remaining on the shelves. Combined with the list of the items saved from a fiery fate because they had been signed out by borrowers, it is possible to see not only the types and proportions of books on various subjects that the library had purchased but also the types of books that members actually were reading. According to Shera, "History, biography, and travel were prevailing interests, the classics of English literature were a library staple, concern with scientific inquiry was on the march, and theology was more revered on the library shelf than in the reader's hand." 117–118.

11. Bartlett later became a dealer in foreign and British books. As literary adviser to John Carter Brown, he helped to assemble the books that would become the nucleus of the John Carter Brown Library collection.

12. Quoted in Harrison, "The Providence Athenaeum II," *New England Magazine*, n.s. 45:2 (October 1911): 190. For a discussion of the composition of the founders and early proprietors, see Lancaster, 48–50.

13. Harrison II, 197.

14. Lancaster, 7–73, 104,

15. Ronald J. Zboray, *Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University, 1993) 106. ProQuest E-book.

16. Shera, 69.

17. David D. Hall, *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 59, 60.

18. Hall, 61–70.

19. In his detailed study of reading patterns at this time in the Connecticut Valley, William J. Gilmore traces a similar pattern:

In rural northwestern New England, almanacs, broadsides, books, and pamphlets, including the Bible, prayer books, hymnals, psalm books, devotional works, and schoolbooks, were the print vehicles most frequently read in the 1780s. By the late 1790s novels, travel narratives, geographies, and histories had been added to the list. Within another decade rural weekly newspapers had become central in Upper Valley reading.

Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780–1835 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 26.

20. Hall, 76.

21. See David D. Hall, "Introduction: The Uses of Literacy in New England, 1600–1850," in *Printing and Society in Early America*, ed. William L. Joyce, David D. Hall, Richard D. Brown, and John B. Hench (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1983), 1–47. Among those wealthy men who amassed large libraries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were John Carter Brown, C. Fiske Harris, and Royal C. Taft. Harry Lyman Koopman, "Library Progress in Rhode Island," *Library Journal* 31 (August 1906): 12–13.

22. See Gerald F. Moran and Maris A. Vinovskis, "Schools," in *A History of the Book in America, Volume 2.* ProQuest E-book.

23. J. D. B. DeBow, *Statistical View of the United States . . . Being: a Compendium of the Seventh Census* (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Office, 1854), 153. https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1850/1850c/1850c-01.pdf.

24. Hall, "Readers and Reading in America: Historical and Critical Perspectives" in *Cultures of Print,* 172.

25. Thomas D. Stockwell, *History of Public Education in Rhode Island from 1836 to 1876.* Comp. by Authority of the Board of Education (Providence: Providence Press Company, 1876), 200–202. Apart from the Friends School, which had a collection of about 15,000 books in its library by the mid-nineteenth century, Providence's public schools had only a few reference books available. "Report of the Commissioner of Public Schools," *Rhode Island Educational Magazine* 1:2, 3 (February and March 1852): 213. In 1853, the *Providence Daily Journal* cited the Brown University Librarian's count of 500 reference books in use at Providence's public schools, not a large number when divided among more than forty schools. "The Public Libraries of Providence," *Providence Daily Journal* (October 25, 1853): 2. NewsBank, accessed June 4,

2020. Not all children had equal access to school facilities. Black students were limited to the two segregated and substandard primary schools until 1866, when the General Assembly finally voted to abolish segregation. Bartlett, 59. And girls, regardless of race, attended school in substantially lower numbers. In 1846, Henry Barnard, Rhode Island Commissioner of Education, decried the "early and extensive withdrawal of females from schools, and their employment in large masses away from home and home occupations." *Report and Documents Relating to the Public Schools of Rhode Island. 1848,* (Providence: General Assembly, 1849), 37.

26. Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790–1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 24. Nevertheless, for the many children working in textile mills and other factories rather than attending public schools, Sunday schools provided these youngsters with a rudimentary education.

27. Gross, "Much Instruction from Little Reading," 162.

28. Gross, "Much Instruction from Little Reading," 167.

29. C. Sherman, *The Providence Public Library: An Experiment in Enlightenment* (Providence, 1937), 12.

30. In his history of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century public libraries in New York City, Tom Glynn characterizes the early notion of public libraries as being libraries that were "public in the same sense that a public house or public conveyance was public. The term meant not that the collection was free but simply that it was available ostensibly to any member of the public, as opposed to one belonging to an individual or a closed, private organization such as a school." *Reading Publics: New York City's Public Libraries, 1754–1911* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 18. ProQuest Ebook.

31. Rhode Island Medical Society, "Dr. Amos Throop (1736–1814)," https://www.rimedicalsociety.org/about-our-first-president.html.

32. The Society for the Encouragement of Domestic Industry listed all books, pamphlets, and periodicals donated during the year in its annual report. For example, see *Transactions of the Rhode Island Society for the Encouragement of Domestic Industry in the Year 1858* (Providence: Knowles, Anthony & Co., 1859), 139–41. https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433007610029&view=1up&seq=9.

33. *Providence Daily Journal* (October 25, 1853), 2. NewsBank. Accessed November 5, 2019.

34. According to C. Sherman, the Rhode Island Horticultural Society possessed about 300 volumes in its library in 1878, the year the Providence Public Library opened. 12.

35. Paulina W. Davis, "The Providence Physiological Society," *The Water-Cure Journal*, 12:2 (August 1851), 41. https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015014700143&view=1up&seq=1. Accessed January 5, 2021.

36. Moses King, *King's Pocketbook of Providence.* (Boston: Franklin Press, 1882), 36.

37. Carpenter, "Libraries" in *The History of the Book in America : Volume 2*, 278.

38. Thomas S. Harding, "College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to the Development of Academic Libraries, 1815–76: I. The Golden Age of College Society Libraries, 1815–40," *The Library Quarterly* 29:1 (January 1959): 1.

39. Barnard, 27. This was about 1,700 more volumes than the society recorded in the late 1820s. See "Philermenian Society Records, Minute Books." (Unpublished manuscript, September 1, 1829), handwritten. Hay Archives Manuscripts.

40. Harding, 10.

41. Harding, 5. As Harding points out in Part II of his account of college literary societies, they began to disappear after the Civil War, as college and university libraries increased in size and established more accessible hours and more liberal circulation policies. By 1876, the editors of "College Libraries" in the *Public Libraries of the United States* reported that the Brown University Library held some 45,000 volumes, while none were listed for college societies. Harding, "College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to the Development of Academic Libraries,1815–76: II. The Decline of College Society Libraries, 184–76," *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 29:2 (April 1959), 104–108. Also, see "College Libraries" in *Public Libraries in the United States of America Part I* (Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, 1876), 126.

42. Christine Lamar, "The Franklin Lyceum: A Century of Ideas, in Preparation for the 350th Anniversary of the City of Providence" (Providence, RIHS, 1985), 8. Photocopy of typescript.

43. "Mr. Emerson's Lectures," *Providence Daily Journal* (March 25, 1840), 2. NewsBank. Accessed December 23, 2019. Members of the public paid $1.00 per person for his series of lectures, while couples were charged $1.50. Lamar, 5–6. Emerson had delivered these lectures in Boston in 1838. For more on Emerson's role as a public lecturer, see Mary Kupiec Cayton, "The Making of an American Prophet: Emerson, His Audiences, and the Rise of the Culture Industry in Nineteenth-Century America," *American Historical Review* 92:3 (June 1987): 597–620. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1869911. Accessed December 30, 2019.

44. Shera, 227.

45. Lamar, 8.

46. *Catalogue of the Library of the Franklin Lyceum, Providence* (Providence: A. Crawford Green & Brother, 1857).

47. Lamar, 6–8.

48. King, 43.

49. Lamar, 5.

50. For further discussion of the characteristics of mercantile libraries, see F. B. Perkins, "Young Men's Mercantile Libraries," *Public Libraries in the United States of America,* 379.

51. *Oxford English Dictionary* (September 2000). https://www-oed-com.providence.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/113772?redirectedFrom=manufacturer#eid.

52. Gary J. Kornblith, "'Cementing the Mechanic Interest': Origins of the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers," *Journal of the Early Republic* 8 (Winter 1988): 372. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3123177. Accessed: December 30, 2019.

53. In 1854, for instance, the Mechanics Association advertised a series of twenty-four drawing lessons, costing member five dollars and eight dollars for others, while a member's sons and apprentices were charged at the membership level. *Providence Daily Journal* (November 6, 1854), 3. NewsBank. Accessed November 6, 2019. Yearly dues in 1867 were $2.50. "Mechanics Association Tax," *Providence Daily Journal* (June 1, 1867), 3. NewsBank.

Accessed November 7, 2019.

54. Kornblith, 384.

55. "Rules and By-Laws of the Library," *Catalogue of the Mechanics and Apprentices' Library, Established by the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers, in the Year 1821.* 1866. See also "Minutes from the Quarterly Meeting of the Association, Held in Blake's Hall, January 8, 1821." (Unpublished manuscript, January 8, 1821). MSS 635, Box 5, RIHS.

56. Lancaster, 10, 29.

57. *Providence Daily Journal* (April 14, 1830), 2. NewsBank. Accessed November 7, 2019.

58. *Providence Daily Journal* (October 25, 1853), 2. NewsBank. Accessed November 7, 2019.; King, 84.

59. C. Sherman, 12.

60. Advertisement, *Providence Daily Journal* (October 7, 1847), 2. NewsBank. Accessed November 7, 2020.

61. Carpenter, "Libraries" in *The History of the Book in America, Volume 2*, 283.

62. Sidney Ditzion, "Mechanics' and Mercantile Libraries," *Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*. 10:2 (April 1940): 211–12.

63. William I. Fletcher, "Public Libraries in Manufacturing Communities," in *Public Libraries in the United States of America,* 403–404.

64. King, 123. In 1888, the library was merged into the Olneyville Free Library. "Temperance Cadets," *Providence Daily Journal* (June 8, 1889), 3. NewsBank. Accessed May 29, 2020.

65. *Catalogue of the Library of the Brown & Sharpe Manf'g Co.* (Providence: Rhode Island Printing Company, 1882).

66. This is a rough estimate based upon counting random pages from the 1882 Brown & Sharpe library catalogue.

67. Boles, John B. "Jack Abbott and the Rollo Books: New

England Culture for Children." *Journal of Popular Culture* 6: 3 (December 1972): 507–528.

68. *Catalogue of the Library of the Brown & Sharpe Manf'g Co.*

69. Robert O. Jones indicates that Wanskuck Hall was built in 1884. "Wanskuck Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Providence, RI (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1983), Continuation Sheet 7, Item Number 7, Page 7. However, the *Providence Daily Journal* began to print announcements for upcoming Sunday school classes in Wanskuck Hall as early as 1881.

70. Jean Douglas, "Wanskuck Branch, Providence Public Library," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Providence, RI (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, April 1997, Section 8, Page 8.

71. Providence Public Library, "News and Notes: Dedication on the New Wanskuck Branch Building," *Books for All* 3:10 (December 1928): 402.

72. See chapter 1 in John S. Gilkeson Jr., *Middle-Class Providence, 1830–1940*, 12–54.

73. *Providence Daily Journal* (15 June 1853), 2. NewsBank. Accessed May 30, 2020.

74. "Providence and Vicinity. A Permanent Home. Movement to Secure the Erection of a Building for the Young Men's Christian Association," *Providence Daily Journal* (April 3, 1886), 8. NewsBank. Accessed December 27, 2019.

75. The size of the collection seems to have remained static over the years, as the number of volumes reported in the 1863 *Providence Directory* was 4,000, Moses King again reported its library contained approximately 4,000 volumes in 1882, and the YMCA Yearbook for 1891 continued to give the same number. (*Directory*, 205; King, 124; Joe W. Kraus, "Libraries of the Young Men's Christian Associations in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Library History*, 10:1 (January 1976): 8.

76. "Wanted," *Providence Daily Journal* (November 16, 1881), 5. NewsBank. Accessed December 28, 2019.

77. Cephas Brainerd, "Libraries of Young Men's Christian Associations," in *Public Libraries in the United States of America*, 386.

78. Kraus, 10.

79. "A Permanent Home," *Providence Daily Journal* (April 3, 1886), 8. NewsBank. Accessed December 27, 2019.

80. Cynthia Gomery Ferguson, "The History of the YMCA of Greater Providence, 1853–2003," 28. (Unpublished manuscript, 2003). Typescript. Rhode Island Collection, Providence Public Library.

81. Kraus, 13. Brainerd, a lawyer, was instrumental in bringing Abraham Lincoln to speak at Cooper Union in 1860; he also is known for representing Blacks whose property was destroyed during the New York Draft Riots of 1863. "Overview of the Cephas Brainerd Collection," Linda Lear Center for Special Collections and Archives, Connecticut College.

82. Brainerd, 387.

83. Alison M. Parker, "'Hearts Uplifted and Minds Refreshed': The Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Production of Pure Culture in the United States, 1880–1930." *Journal of Women's History* 11:2 (1999): 137. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/jowh.1999.0010.

84. The Young Women's Christian Association was begun in 1867 and originally was named the Providence Women's Christian Association, and the Providence Evangelical Young Women's Christian association was founded in 1888. These two organizations merged in 1902. Mary McKone, "A Guide to the Young Women's Christian Association of Rhode Island Records in the Rhode Island Historical Society Library," December 1991.

85. "Young Women's Tea Room: A Charitable Organization Laboring among Working Girls to Promote Temperance," *Providence Sunday Journal* (March 30, 1890), 16. NewsBank. Accessed April 27, 2020.

86. "The Young Women's Tea Room," *Providence Daily Journal* (April 28, 1889), 8. NewsBank. Accessed April 27, 2020.

87. "Young Women's Tea Room: A Charitable Organization Laboring among Working Girls to Promote Temperance," *Providence Sunday Journal* (March 30, 1890), 16. NewsBank: Accessed April 27, 2020.

88. "The Flower Queen," *Providence Daily Journal* (June 11, 1883), 8. NewsBank. Accessed May 29, 2020; "The Union for Christian Charity," *Providence Daily Journal* (November 9, 1883), 4. NewsBank. Accessed May 29, 2020.

89. The organization would become Union Settlement in 1908. John S. Gilkeson Jr., *Middle-Class Providence, 1820–1940* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986): 268. According to the *Providence Daily Journal* in 1911, the Union Settlement had transitioned away from maintaining a library to starting an immigration bureau by 1911. "Starts Immigrant Bureau," *Providence Daily Journal* (October 23, 1911), 5. NewsBank. Accessed January 6, 2020.

90. "Union for Christian Work: Proceedings at the Annual Meeting," *Providence Sunday Journal* (October 7, 1870), 1. NewsBank. Accessed January 6, 2020; King, 113.

91. King, 113.

92. "Street Gamins. Reading, Studying and Recreation at the Union for Christian Work. President Crandall Explains How the Lads Spend Their Evenings Profitability," *Providence Sunday Journal* (February 12, 1888), 10. NewsBank. Accessed April 26, 2020.

93. "The Union for Christian Work," *Providence Daily Journal* (November 9, 1883), 4. NewsBank. Accessed April 26, 2020.

94. "Street Gamins," 10.

95. Gilkeson, 241.

96. In 1905, the Union for Christian Work would open the first settlement house in Providence at 31 Chestnut Street. It offered evening entertainment, a reading club, a reading room and library, and various classes. The facility was intended "to reach the adult poorly paid workers, the workingmen and workingwomen receiving from $9 to $20 a week, with few pleasures in life." According to a 1905 *Providence Daily Journal* article, the library was integral to the work of the settlement house. "'Every settlement,' said one worker, 'should have a central point of interest, and the library here brings all classes together.'" (December 24, 1905), 23. NewsBank. Accessed March 21, 2020.

97. Within the next decade or so, two more Boys Clubs opened in Providence, one in Olneyville and the other in Wanskuck.

98. *A Brief History of the Providence Boys Club* (Providence: The Club, 1916). In fact, the *Providence Boys' Club Bulletin* 1:2 (November 1908) included a "Letter to the Boys" written by Providence Public Library Director William E. Foster, encouraging youngsters to visit the Children's Room at the Providence Public Library, where they would find the type of book that "takes a boy where it finds him, but [also] that which will help him to get to a more advanced stage" and enable him to rise from newsboy or errand boy to "positions of influence." 1–2.

99. See J. Stanley Lemons, *The First Baptist Church in America* (East Greenwich, RI: Charitable Baptist Society, 1988), 55–58.

100. *Providence Daily Journal* (November 5, 1888), 3. NewsBank. Accessed December 29, 2020.

101. Ibid.

102. *Independent Inquirer* (May 17, 1827), 4. NewsBank. Accessed December 28, 2020.

103. Kenneth E. Carpenter, "Sites of Reading: Libraries" in *History of the Book in America, Volume 3: The Industrial Book, 184–1880*, edited by Scott E. Casper, et al. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 308. ProQuest Ebook.

104. Frank Keller Walter, "A Poor but Respectable Relation—The Sunday School Library," *Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 12:3 (July 1942): 731–739.

105. In 1847, the depository moved to 48 Westminster, where it would stay until 1856, when it moved again to 17 Westminster. At this point, there seems to have been a division of bookstore business, with the depository opening in 1857 at 21 Westminster and run by Snow & Greene, while 17 Westminster became the location of an antiquarian bookstore opened by Sidney S. Rider in partnership with G. Stewart, who previously had partnered with William Coggeshall when the depository was at this address. (See various advertisements in the Providence newspapers of the period.)

106. *Providence Daily Journal* (May 20, 1846), 1. NewsBank. Accessed January 16, 2021.

107. *Providence Daily Journal* (May 24, 1878), 1. NewsBank. Accessed December 27, 2020.

108. *Evening Bulletin*, First ed. (May 16, 1866), 2. NewsBank. Accessed December 28, 2020.

109. *Providence Daily Journal* (February 16, 1850), 2. NewsBank. Accessed December 28, 2020.

110. See advertisement. *Providence Daily Journal* (June 1, 1847), 4. NewsBank. Accessed December 28, 2020.

111. Quoted in *Providence Daily Journal* (May 24, 1878), 1. Accessed December 27, 2020.

112. *Providence Daily Journal* (June 15, 1855), 2. NewsBank: Accessed January 16, 2021.

113. *Providence Daily Journal* (June 4, 1868), 1. NewsBank. Accessed December 27, 2020.

114. *First: The First Baptist Church in America* (Providence: Charitable Baptist Society, 2001), 121 n. 17.

115. "By Telegraph to the Press. Later Foreign News. England." *Providence Evening Press* 34:120 (February 4, 1876), 3. NewsBank. Accessed December 27, 2020.

116. Walter, 734.

117. Irving Bartlett, *Slave to Citizen: The Story of the Negro in Rhode Island* (Providence: Urban League of Greater Providence, 1954), 50.

118. Joanne Pope Melish, "Introduction," *The Life of William J. Brown of Providence, R.I., with Personal Recollections of Incidents in Rhode Island* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2006), xxxi. Originally published in 1883.

119. The Providence African Union House began in 1789 as a chapter of the Newport African Society and became the Union African Society by 1820. See Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, *Creative Survival: The Providence Black Community in the 19th Century* (Providence, 1985), 52, 55.

120. Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, 56, 61.

121. Bartlett, 37. According to the Rhode Island census of 1835, 1,223 Providence residents were Black.

122. Email message to author from Robb Dimmick, co-founder of Stages of Freedom, November 8, 2020. Dorothy B. Porter, longtime librarian at Howard University who assembled a world-class collection of Black library materials and published bibliographies on various aspects of African and African American history and culture, provides a list by city and state of Black literary societies in the 1830s and 1840s in "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies, 182–1846," *Journal of Negro History* 5 (1936). She identifies two societies in Providence in this period—the Literary Society (1833) and the Debating Society (before 1837). Porter, 558. These generic names seem more like place markers than the names of actual organizations. If there were, indeed, literary societies with these names in Providence at that time, their records have not yet been found.

123. Email message to author, October 19, 2020.

124. William Whipper, "An Address Delivered in Wesley Church on the Evening of June 12, before the Colored Reading Society of Philadelphia, for Mental Improvement, 1828," in Dorothy Porter, ed. *Early Negro Writing, 1760–1837, Selected and Introduced by Dorothy Porter* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 109.

125. "Dreaded Eloquence: The Origins and Rise of African American Literary Societies and Libraries," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 6:2 (Summer 1995), 47. Reprinted in Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2002), 23–83. Jeannine Marie DeLombard also discusses Black women's literary groups in "African American Cultures of Print," in *History of the Book in America, Volume 2*, 36–373.

126. Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 79, 82. See also *A History of the Book in America : Volume 3*, 364.

127. DeLombard, "African-American Cultures of Print," 364. See also Elizabeth McHenry, "Reading and Race Pride: The Literary Activism of Black Clubwomen," in *A History of the Book in America: Volume 4: Print in Motion: the Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 188–1940*, edited by Carl F. Kaestle and Janice A. Radway (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 49–510. ProQuest E-book.

128. *The American Public Library* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1917), 52.

129. *Providence Daily Journal* (May 24, 1878), 1. NewsBank. Accessed December 27, 2020.

130. Shera makes much the same point. 127–128.

131. Shera, 140.

132. Based upon the fact that advertisements for the circulating library appeared only in May and June of 1789, this first circulating library seems to have been remarkably short-lived. The proprietors probably were Theodore Foster and Solomon Drown (also spelled Drowne in the press), who had been classmates at Brown. Drown was a physician, while Foster was active in politics and served in the U.S. Senate. He also established a library in Foster Rhode Island, amassed a collection of early Rhode Island works, and helped found the RIHS.

133. David Kaser, *A Book for a Sixpence: The Circulating Library in America* (Mu Chapbook no. 14. Pittsburgh, Beta Phi Mu, 1980).

134. Harrison, 53.

135. "The Public Libraries of Providence," *Providence Daily Journal* (October 25, 1853), 2. NewsBank. Accessed November 5, 2019.

136. Shera, 128.

137. "The Public Libraries of Providence," *Providence Daily Journal* (October 25, 1853), 2.

138. Shera, 149.

139. E.R. Potter, *Report upon Public Schools and Education, in the State of Rhode Island; Made to the Legislature, January, 1854* (Providence: Sales, Miller & Simons, 1854), 102.

140. See, for example, "Perrin's Circulating Library," *Providence Daily Journal* (November 9, 1852), 4. NewsBank. Accessed December 8, 2019.

141. "Advertisement," *Providence Evening Press* (December 15, 1865), 3. NewsBank. Accessed December 23, 2019.

142. Kaser, 117.

143. Kaser, 152.

144. "Forty Years a Bookseller. A. F. Davis Has Sold Out and Will Enter Real Estate Business," *Providence Daily Journal* (March 22, 1905), 8. NewsBank. Accessed December 8, 2019.

145. These dates are based upon advertisements placed in contemporary newspapers; however, the businesses may well have remained in operation longer than these time spans. See listings in Kaser and in H. Glenn Brown and Maude O. Brown, *A Directory of Printing, Publishing, Bookselling & Allied Trades in Rhode Island to 1865* (New York: New York Public Library, 1958) for approximate dates of circulating libraries in Providence.

146. Kaser, 127–163. See also Brown and Brown. Searching the *Providence Journal* database for circulating library advertisements and news articles provides a supplementary listing that mostly corroborates the Kaser and Brown and Brown lists.

147. Kaser, 86–111.

148. See Kaser, 108.

149. Shera, 78.

150. Shera, 184–85. Harry Lyman Koopman, "Library Progress in Rhode Island," *Library Journal* 31 (August 1906): 11. The Rhode Island legislature took a further step in 1875 when it passed a law approving the allocation of state funds to public libraries across the state; the state continues to do so today.

151. *Thirtieth Annual Report of the State Board of Education, Together with the Fifty-Fifth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Public Schools of Rhode Island. January 1900* (Providence: E. L. Freeman & Sons, 1900). https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.a0005241799&view=1up&seq=36. Accessed Feb. 1, 2021.

152. Shera, 125–26. He adds, "Though in such cases the body politic may lack representation in the government and administration of the library, as the agency retains full autonomy in operation, the library does become a municipal service so far as the patrons are concerned."

153. Statement by prominent nineteenth-century librarian William F. Poole in the *1876 Report of the United States Bureau of Education* and quoted by Shera, 157. Horace Mann surveyed the counties of Massachusetts in 1839 and reported that only one-seventh of the state's population was being served by the several social libraries and lyceums of the period. While Providence's proportion of residents served was undoubtedly higher by the 1870s, it hardly would have risen to the degree that a public library would have attained. See Shera, 222.

154. Lancaster, 106. The Union for Christian Work possessed one of the characteristics of a public library: its collection was open to patrons free of charge. Consequently, the organization maintained in 1870 that its library was the "only *free public library* in the city." Nevertheless, with its emphasis upon Protestants, its lack of public funding, and the fact that only 296 persons borrowed books in 1870, it hardly qualified as public library by most standards. *Providence Daily Journal* (October 7, 1870), 1. NewsBank. Accessed December 7, 2019. Likewise, in her unpublished history of the association, Ferguson asserts that the YMCA and the YWCA were the only libraries in Providence open to the public prior to the establishment of the Providence Public Library in 1878. Although the YMCA's reading room was available to the public free of charge, there was a membership fee to join the organization, and among the members' privileges was access to the library. This, in conjunction with the YMCA's private funding, disqualifies its library from meeting the criteria used to define a public library. See Kraus, "Libraries of the Men's Christian Associations in the Nineteenth Century, *Journal of Library History* 10:1 (January 1975): 16. The YWCA also mostly attracted Protestant users.

155. "Our Free Library," *Providence Daily Journal* (February 4, 1878), 5. NewsBank. Accessed January 12, 2020.

156. *Providence Daily Journal* (February 6, 1869), 1. NewsBank. Accessed December 30, 2019.

157. Samuel H. Tingley, Historical Address at Centennial Festival of the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers, February 27, 1889, 23. MSS 635, Series 3, Box 6, Folder 10, RIHS.

158. Allen, Stone, Brown, 15, 19–20, and 21.

159. *Providence Daily Journal* (May 12, 1870), 2. NewsBank. Accessed December 30, 2019. While more than 5,000 citizens voted for the mayoral candidates, only around 2,000 voted for or against the library question. The smaller figure reflects Rhode Island's exclusion of non-property holders from voting on tax questions. In a city of nearly 70,000, the fact that only native-born male property owners made the decision not to fund a public library meant that most people had no say in this matter.

160. Stevenson, "'For the Benefit of the Laboring Classes': The Founding of the Providence Public Library" (April 1981), 27. Draft manuscript donated to the RIHS.

161. Tingley, 23.

162. For a complete list of the committee members from each organization, see Zachariah Allen, Edwin M. Stone, and Welcome O. Brown, *Free Public Library, Art-Gallery, and Museum in the City of Providence R.I.* (Providence: Hammond, Angell & Co., 1871), 10–11.

163. An overview of the early history of Providence Public Library is presented in William E. Foster, *The First Fifty Years of the Providence Public Library, 1878–1928* (Providence: Providence Public Library, 1928); Clarence E. Sherman, *The Providence Public Library: An Experiment in Enlightenment* (Providence: Privately printed, 1937); Stuart C. Sherman, *The Providence Public Library: A Century of Service, 1878–1978* (Providence: Providence Public Library), 1978.

164. According to Tingley, "The Association voted to donate their Library to the Public Library and raised by subscription nearly $5000 which they presented in cash. In February 1878 they had the satisfaction of seeing the Library opened freely to the public with upwards of ten thousand volumes, about two-thirds of which were the gift of this association." 23.

165. "The Opening of the Public Library," *Providence Daily Journal* (February 5, 1878), 1.

166. C. Sherman, 25.

167. Children could not use the library in its first few years; however, the public library began to allow any city of Providence schoolchild below the age of fourteen who could read and write to do so "under the judicious guidance of his teacher" by the mid-1890s. See *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Providence Public Library for the Year Ending December 31, 1894* (Providence: Providence Press, 1895), 6.

168. Stevenson, 44–45. Since a shareholder's spouse, children, and friends often borrowed books as well, the Providence Athenaeum had considerably more than 670 users in 1871, but nowhere near the 10,400 cardholders registered at the Providence Public Library at this time. Lancaster, 110.

169. C. Sherman, 28.

170. Collection numbers as reported in the *Providence Daily Journal* (March 16, 1900), 9.

171. C. Sherman, 29.

172. In the address given at the dedication of the new library building in 1900, the Honorable Thomas Durfee, president of the Providence Public Library Board of Trustees and former chief justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court, noted that "unless the city increases its appropriation, we shall have to look to our capital or elsewhere for means to supply the deficit . . . The library must not, for the good name of the city, be left to languish or decline without assistance," *Providence Daily Journal* (March 16, 1900), 9.

173. George D. Strayer, *Report of the Survey of Certain Aspects of the Public School System of Providence, Rhode Island* (Oxford Press: Providence RI, [1924]), quoted in Stephenson, 40–45.

174. *Evening Bulletin* (July 24, 1922), 1. NewsBank. Accessed March 1, 2021.

175. "Motor Accidents in City Average Eleven Every Day," *Evening Bulletin* (August 1, 1922), 2. NewsBank. Accessed March 1, 2021.

176. "One Life Every Half-Hour," *Providence Journal* (August 28, 1922), 12. NewsBank. Accessed March 2, 2021.

177. "New Knight Memorial Library on Elmwood," *Providence Sunday Journal*, Three Star ed. (March 30, 1924), 45. NewsBank. Accessed January 6, 2020.