Progressive Reform and the Moral Mission in Australian Public Libraries at the Beginning of the "Information Age"

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Abstract

Progressive ideas about library economy, emanating from American and British libraries, contributed directly to the development of local procedures in public libraries in Australia in the late nineteenth century. The new consciousness of library professionalism, and scientific approaches to classification and library organization, led to new ideas on library design and functioning in the major Australian public libraries, building upon a consideration of local conditions and requirements. These developments coincided fruitfully with the Federation period, when the separate Australian colonies joined to form the Australian nation. Librarians sought to modernize their institutions in a positively charged climate of national progress, self-awareness, and pride. However, the transition to progressive practices was not uniform across the major Australian libraries. Conflicts between moral and technological values meant that some librarians rejected progressive practice and maintained older approaches, particularly in the area of classification. The Tasmanian Public Library, led by Chief Librarian Alfred J. Taylor, was an example of this. This paper examines Taylor's approach in the wider context of changing attitudes to professionalism and library economy, his own paternalistic and humanistic approach to library organization, and the specific needs of the Tasmanian community.

The inception of the "information age" at the end of the nineteenth century, which changed both the conceptualization and utilization of information, stimulated newly scientific approaches to library economy and a new climate of professionalism among librarians.[1] The development and implementation of new subject classification schemes, such as Melville Dewey's Decimal System and Otlet's Universal Decimal Scheme, signifi-

cantly changed the way information was considered in the library context, while efficiency imperatives in information delivery and book distribution to a wide audience underpinned the new progressive thinking in public libraries. Progressive library practice ran counter to older ideas of librarianship as stewardship and the primacy of the public library's moral mission, however, and this created some broad tensions in public libraries. This article examines this phenomenon in the context of Australian public libraries, where progressive imperatives, taken up enthusiastically by many key public librarians, became enmeshed into wider social trends in Australia in the dynamic "Federation period." It explores how the transition to progressive practices was not uniform across the major Australian libraries, with some librarians in key institutions rejecting progressive practice and maintaining older approaches, particularly in the area of classification. To illustrate this tension, this paper examines the career and professional attitudes of the chief librarian in one of Australia's major public libraries, the Tasmanian Public Library in Hobart, in the island colony of Tasmania. While participating actively in national forums and international information-sharing opportunities about new library methods, Chief Librarian Alfred J. Taylor chose to adhere to old-fashioned "Gladstonian" mores of public library utility and methods of classification. This paper explores some of the possible reasons for Taylor's stance, including Taylor's personal history and the history of the Tasmanian Public Library, within the larger context of Tasmanian social development.

New Library Professionalism in Australia in the Federation Period

The new library professionalism that emerged in United States in the 1870s began to have an effect in Australia in the final decade of the nineteenth century. The growth of library professionalism coincided fruitfully with a new sense of shared national purpose in the Australian colonies. From the 1880s, the six separate, British, self-governing colonies began to give serious consideration to the advantages of uniting under a federal government. The desire for uniform laws, a united defense force, coordinated immigration policies designed to "keep Australia white," and removal of protectionism and promotion of fair trade between the colonies all contributed to the drive to federate, in a climate of growing national pride across the population. A nationwide Constitutional Convention was held in stages across the country in 1897–98, leading to the Federation of the newly named "States" (the former colonies), and the creation of the Australian nation in 1901. The social, intellectual, and at times political engagement of library leaders and library advisors with nationalism and federal issues coincided fruitfully with what Boyd Rayward has identified as a readiness for professionalization among Australian librarians in the

1890s (Rayward, 1983; Gaunt, 2008). The first professional library association in Australia, the Library Association of Australasia, was established in 1896 when (to quote its founders) "federative movements of more than one kind occupied the minds of men" (Lynravn, 1948, p. 19).

The Library Association of Australasia drove a new consciousness of professionalism and best practice in Australian libraries based on international ideals emanating from the United States of America and Great Britain. The Australians believed that "American minds understood the practical benefits of organization," and were keen to follow American example for the purpose of "advancing the library system" ("Public Library Association of Australasia," 1900, p. 3). Gathering this international library expertise and disseminating it widely among Australian librarians was an enormous challenge, partly due to what historian Geoffrey Blainey has called the "tyranny of distance": the effect of the geographical separation between white Australians and their cultural and social roots in the northern hemisphere, and between cities and communities within the great continent itself (Blainey, 2001). The newly formed national Association ran four conferences between 1896 and 1902, the final conference being the only one in which each of the states was represented. To disseminate the shared expertise to the many librarians who were unable to attend, the Association published the papers of all conferences in full. It also published an annual journal that helped to further disseminate information about library economy and current developments (Keane, 1985). National projects, such as shared professional training and examinations and interlibrary loans across the country, were actively discussed at the national forums, though the individual schemes fared better or worse depending on the energy, enthusiasm, and financial resources that were available at the local and state level. The Association also encouraged its members to read the latest publications about library economy, to develop skills in cataloging, classification systems, and "labour-saving system[s] of issue and record" (Armstrong, 1901). A small number of Australian public librarians funded by major state libraries also kept abreast of international developments by attending international conferences and bringing back information and expertise to their Australian colleagues. Sydney Chief Librarian H. C. L. Anderson, for example, travelled to the 1897 British Conference of Librarians in London, establishing contacts with various businesses specializing in products for the new library economy (Rayward, 1983). These were featured at the 1898 Australian national librarians' conference, where there were "two excellent exhibits of library appliances from the Library Bureau and the Library Supply Company of London" (Anderson, 1898, p. 4)

Dissemination of information about developments in the Northern Hemisphere had a direct effect on Australian library development. In

a paper delivered at the first national conference in 1896, retired Melbourne Public Librarian Thomas Bride referred to public libraries in Australia as the "Public Library *System*" [my italics] and a "great educational agency," articulating the vision shared by many Australian librarians of organized and systematic delivery of knowledge in these institutions, and of a nationally unified effort towards progress and advancement (Bride, 1896, p. 47). Bride, like a number of his colleagues, was a keen proponent of new classificatory schemes developed in the Northern Hemisphere. At the 1898 national conference William H. Ifould (at that time librarian at the Public Library of South Australia, but soon to become the principal librarian of the Public Library of New South Wales from 1912 to 1942) recommended the Dewey System for Australian libraries, with modifications for Australian subject needs (Ifould, 1898). Reclassification of the collections of most of the major public libraries with the Dewey Decimal System was one of the most significant advances brought to Australia with the new professionalism and progressive approach to library economy. All the major state libraries, apart from the Tasmanian Public Library, reclassified their collections with Dewey by 1901, and in 1903 H. C. L. Anderson produced a revised version of Dewey's original classificatory system, adapted to the requirements of local conditions (Fletcher, 2007).

Modernization was central to the Australian librarians' perception of participation in the Federation-period nation-building project. However, a parallel imperative was the evolution of a differentiated and distinctly "Australian" library culture through the assertion of the values of civic reform and egalitarianism as well as the building of collections that reflected national history and place. Edmund la Touche Armstrong, principal librarian at the Melbourne Public Library, claimed that Australian public libraries were among the most "liberal" in the world through the provision of unrestricted public access to their institutions. He wrote in 1898, "This is our pride, and in Melbourne at least, unrestricted admission to the building, and, what is practically free access to the shelves, have become traditions" (Armstrong, 1898, p. 14). The major public libraries also became increasingly interested in collecting books, ephemera, and archival materials that related to Australian history and place. Indexes as ways of codifying information on a local and national scale were also discussed. Sydney librarian Hugh Wright prepared a paper on this issue for the 1898 Librarians Association conference. Evoking the success of American William Frederick Poole's *Poole's Index to Periodical Literature*, Wright urged fellow Australian librarians to produce a unified subject index of Australian magazines and newspapers, on "Australian topics," specifically, "scientific reports . . . accounts of explorer's travels, historical items, and anything that created a widespread interest"; poetry that was published largely in ephemeral periodicals, such as the Sydney *Bulletin*; and "illustra-

tions of our prominent men, of places of historic renown, &c." He urged a farsighted nationally collaborative approach, with each colony indexing its own magazines and newspapers, with results sent to a center where they could be "harmonized and edited for the press under the direction of the advising committee" (Wright, 1898, p. 75). Unfortunately, Wright's vision for a unified index never materialized, like many of the schemes discussed at the national forums.

The stimulus of Federation and the ideal of national confraternity were not enough to sustain the ambitious activities and nationalistic schemes of the Library Association. The Association struggled from the start, largely due to the geographical, financial, and logistical challenges of running an organization with a relatively small number of libraries spread across a great geographical area. Inevitably the Association became top heavy in its organization and in the benefits that the Association brought, as only the key libraries in major cities had the necessary funding and institutional energy to promote the national association and its aims. The Association ceased to exist by 1904. The sentimental impulse toward nationalization in the profession did not easily manifest in practical measures, and, arguably, the generally unified response to new library classification procedures was the most substantial and lasting outcome of the brief nationalistic flurry of shared information and enthusiasm.

A CASE STUDY OF "LOCAL" VERSUS "NATIONAL": THE TASMANIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY

The remaining part of this article will examine the Tasmanian Public Library in the Federation period, under the management of Chief Librarian Alfred J. Taylor. The principal library in the Australian colony of Tasmania, the Tasmanian Public Library, had opened in Hobart as a free public library in 1870. Taylor became chief librarian soon after, in 1874, and remained at the helm of the organization until 1921. Taylor was very influential in the development and progress of his library, and was an active member of the Library Association of Australasia. Taylor presented papers on "The Librarian and His Work" at the 1896 national conference, and in 1902 on "The Management of Small Reference Libraries." While Taylor appears to have had an active interest in international developments in public library management—stating at the 1898 national conference of Australian librarians that "population, municipal wealth, educational status, the commercial enterprise of [the] citizens and their democratic aspirations all require that [we] should keep in touch with the rest of the world"—he did not embrace progressive practice for the Tasmanian Public Library. He choose to maintain older models of library organization, and declined to adopt Dewey Classification, despite Armstrong's and Anderson's specific recommendation of the system to him in

1903 (Taylor, A. J., 1896, p. 94; Rayward, 1983). In addition, Taylor showed very little interest in emulating the nationalistic enthusiasm for developing collections of Australiana, seen in all of the other major Australian public libraries in the Federation period. It became evident to fellow librarians and Taylor's Library Trustees that there was significant distance between Taylor's conception of library management and the progressive vision of library efficiency that was increasingly accepted in other public libraries around Australia.

The reasons for Tasmanian Public Library's differing development are to be found in a combination of the personal characteristics of the principal librarian as well as the nature of Tasmania itself—a relatively isolated island colony with a pervading penal past. In these aspects, Tasmania stood apart from the other Australian colonies in the second half of the nineteenth century, which had shrugged off any early penal associations through strong population growth and prosperity, bolstered by the gold rushes and pastoral development. Tasmania's economic growth was slow, its population remained low, and an atypically high proportion of the residents were descended from ex-convicts (compared to the rest of Australia), a fact that shadowed Tasmanian self-perception well into the twentieth century. In these contexts, the Tasmanian Public Library held the moral mission of public library service especially close to its heart. At the Library's opening in 1870, Tasmanian Governor Charles Du Cane emphasized the aspect of "self-improvement" that was fundamental to Tasmanian society in the context of post-penal development, observing that "in the great towns of England, no better and easier means of aiding that supplemental self-cultivation has been found than by the establishment of Public Libraries." Du Cane articulated the virtues of a public library under three key themes: the sacred philanthropic duty to cultivate the "intellect which God has given us," the importance of a library in providing immediate tools for the education of the citizens in a young society—"as no new nation has ever risen to eminence which has neglected to provide at the outset for its intellectual cultivation"—and the dissemination of generalized intellectual heritage (preceding quotation from "Inauguration of the Tasmanian Public Library," [1870]). Taylor was to follow Cane's ideas closely in his management of the organization over the next half century.

Taylor was an almost stereotypical product of Tasmanian society as it emerged from its penal origins. Where H. C. L. Anderson had served as the New South Wales's Government's first Director of Agriculture prior to his appointment at the Sydney Public Library, and E. L. Armstrong grew up with all the advantages of being the son of a prominent Melbourne barrister, Taylor's father, by contrast, was a forger who had arrived in Tasmania as a convict in 1842 (Roe, 1976; Robson, 1991; Roe, n.d.). Unlike most of the other influential public librarians in the period, who were typically university graduates and active public servants across a variety of

fields, Taylor moved into his position of responsibility at the Tasmanian Public Library from working-class origins and received no formal training in librarianship nor any extended period of mentorship. Taylor was an entirely self-made man, an energetic autodidact who educated himself by "borrowing books . . . [in order] to read incessantly and widely" (Taylor, A. J., 1919). While still a teenager, his passion for self-education was rewarded with an appointment as the librarian at the subscription library in the small Tasmanian town of New Norfolk, and he soon progressed to running his own mixed business of circulating library and stationery in Hobart. He was given the position of assistant librarian at the Tasmanian Public Library soon after it opened in 1870, and became chief librarian on the death of the incumbent in 1873.

Taylor used his intellectual gifts and what Michael Roe has described as his "Spencerian-cum-Unitarian faith" with conviction and persistence over many decades in the cause of social and educational advance in Tasmania (Roe, 1976). He wrote extensively in pamphlets and in local and mainland papers on reform in legal, political, welfare, and health systems, and "sociological questions generally." He was passionate about education and was instrumental in the establishment of technical education in Tasmania. He played a prominent role in a variety of political and social forums, such as the Southern Tasmanian Political Reform Association, which focused attention on manhood suffrage and electoral reform during the mid-1880s (Reynolds, 1963), and the Minerva Club, an intellectual liberal club formed in Hobart in the early 1870s, influenced by the philosophy of John Stuart Mill (Young, 1996). Taylor's period as librarian was described by the *World* correspondent as "45 years spent in incessant labour in the cause of enlightenment and education" (Taylor, A. J., 1919). His central tenet of librarianship was liberality of access, and he told fellow Australasian librarians at the 1896 national conference in a paper entitled "The Librarian and His Work" that "it is of great importance that the public librarian should ever remember that the institution over which he presides has been established not for the benefit of the privileged few, but for the benefit of the people as a whole; and that, subject to certain necessary restrictions, all alike should have free access to the library shelves" (Taylor, A. J., 1896, p. 33). In this he shared the liberal views of Armstrong (expressed at the 1898 national conference), but it is likely his position was held all the more passionately and personally in light of his own progress through life. Taylor's personal conviction about his librarian role is evident in his quoting from the influential English librarian Edward Edwards ("dear sympathetic Edwards") in his conference paper, noting that "without the liberal spirit that gives ungrudgingly, and the open hand that delights to sow beside many waters, no man, be his other qualifications what they may, can worthily discharge his duties by making the collection entrusted to him attain its full purpose and end." On the

theme articulated by Governor Du Cane in 1870, Taylor conceived the "true librarian" as one with a "liberal" and "missionary" spirit, his primary duty to make the institution in his paternal care "useful to others" (p. 34). His description of a public library as "a Cathedral, the very air of which is full of sacred memories and sweet with the incense of the thoughts and inspirations that have made the world's progress in the past and that will influence its destiny in the time to be" (p. 34) confirms his reverence for the institution. In all forums, Taylor was not afraid to voice his contrary opinion or criticize the practice of other major libraries. At the 1902 conference, for example, he described purchasing practices in regional public library services as the "great waste of public money on erotic, exotic, and tommyrotic literature," recommending that the selection of all books should be left to the central public library in each state ("Library Association of Australasia," 1902).

"Tradition" verses "Science" in A. J. Taylor's Approach

Inevitably, Taylor's idealized vision of the public library and the role of the librarian conflicted with the increasingly progressive and systematic approaches to library provision and library professionalism that were widely embraced on the Australian mainland. While the majority of members of the Board of Trustees of the Tasmanian Public Library were conservative in their approach, key individuals were well informed about progressive library practice interstate and internationally, and found Taylor's management of the library backward and inefficient and his paternalistic approach unprofessional. Taylor was criticized for his poor practical management of the Library and its contents and his distraction from professional duties by his many extracurricular interests. Trustee—and prominent Tasmanian solicitor—James Backhouse Walker found Taylor guilty of "gross ignorance and neglect" in the 1890s (Walker & Walker, 1978, p. 125). A decade later Trustee Edmund Morris Miller (who had worked as a librarian at the Melbourne Public Library prior to moving to Tasmania to take up a role as an academic at the University of Tasmania) considered that Taylor "did not know the preliminaries of library technique" and found him responsible for what he considered was the "appalling" state the library had fallen into by the early twentieth century (Miller, n.d.). Walker and other trustees initiated a "cleansing of the Augean stable" in the mid-1890s, instigating reforms that included "a new catalogue, the rearrangement of the books in the large room, which was wasted as a news room, and the constant presence of the librarian in the Library room itself." Taylor was leery of the perceived interference and opposed all these schemes, "except the catalogue, of which he did a part" (Walker and Walker, 1978, p. 123). Walker, who was also a historian and one of

the very first Tasmanians to actively explore the state's penal history with enthusiasm and an open mind, was also critical of Taylor's lack of interest in local history and disinclination to actively collect publications relating to the island's early development (Gaunt, 2009).

At the root of Walker's concern with Taylor's library management was the latter's approach to classification, which made no concession to modern developments of the "information age." Taylor based his classification of the Library's collections in its first decade on recommendations made by William Gladstone (British politician and Prime Minister during much of the 1870s and 1870s) in his essay "On Books and the Housing of Them," first published in book form in 1890 (Gladstone, 1898). Gladstone was a keen bibliophile, amassing a private library of some thirty thousand volumes (Clayton Windscheffel, 2008). He believed that the ultimate purpose of books was the "generational transmission of knowledge," and that public libraries were in a unique position to encourage this process across all classes (p. 42). Taylor's paper, *Management of small reference libraries*, presented at the 1902 national library conference, was closely based on Gladstone's principles. By 1902 Gladstone's work was twelve years old and appeared dated in comparison to the progressive approaches published in the journals of the American and British Library Associations. It also reflected Gladstone's amateur status. As Ruth Clayton Windscheffel has revealed in a recent study, Gladstone found classification an imaginative rather than a scientific task, offering opportunities to create "maps of knowledge that were essentially intangible, personal and poetic" (2008, p. 28); while seeking order in the management of books, she argues, Gladstone found "favouritism" in classification, treating books like sentient beings that responded to the "company" in which they stood in a library.

For Taylor, the attraction of Gladstone's approach was multifold. On a personal level, Gladstone represented that amateur scholarly tradition upon which Taylor had based his own education. In addition, Taylor was attracted to the concept of iterative learning across generations: white Australians as a whole, and Tasmanians in their island state in particular, had worked extremely hard over a number of generations to recreate British society on the opposite side of the globe, asserting their "Britishness" through the transmission of cultural values well into the twentieth century, even as a growing nationalism promoted the creation of a new parallel "Australian" identity. Tradition remained a crucial factor in substantiating Tasmanian identity. In addition, Gladstone's conviction that the public library served a central role in transmitting the culture of previous generations to all classes of people fitted well with Taylor's egalitarian principles. Taylor saw that to serve all classes and all levels of education, the information structures of the library must be thoroughly transparent.

Thus simplicity of information structure was at the center of his approach, in opposition to what he conceived as overly scientific complexity of the information organization and the specialization of knowledge promoted by many of his professional colleagues.

The New Carnegie Tasmanian Public Library

As we have seen, Taylor reluctantly participated in a partial reclassification of the Tasmanian Public Library in the mid-1890s, under the direction of his trustees. A dramatic opportunity to make major changes to the library's classification systems across all the collections arose in the first decade of the twentieth century, when the Tasmanian Public Library successfully negotiated funding for a new building from American business magnate Andrew Carnegie. The agreement was signed in March 1903, for £7,500 of funding, and the Tasmanian Public Library became the second library in the southern hemisphere to receive a Carnegie gift (Browning, 1959). Carnegie stipulated that the new library must incorporate a lending library, and to stock this facility, thousands of additional volumes were acquired (largely through donation), and the existing collections sorted into lending and reference collections. The new buildings were commenced in January, 1905. In this year, Taylor took the opportunity to travel to Europe "to make myself as well acquainted as possible with the practice of up-to-date Library economy" (Taylor, A. J., 1905). During his time in London, he visited prominent municipal public libraries at Chelsea, Finsbury, and Bermondsey, under librarians including John Henry Quinn and James Duff Brown. These librarians were well known as Progressives, and Taylor had read their "standard works on Library Economy" prior to his visit (Taylor, A. J., 1905). Taylor made himself acquainted with the "systems of cataloguing, classification and issuing books" in these London libraries, collected their catalogues and examples of forms used for issuing books, and paid "careful attention to the plans they adopt for the display of Newspapers and other Literature in the Public Reading Rooms."

Upon his return to Tasmania, Taylor informed his Trustees that he had "learned much that will be useful" about library layout, and "the most efficient and economical methods of arranging the Libraries and Reading Rooms" in these in the "up-to-date Institutions" (Taylor, A. J., 1905). Taylor launched enthusiastically into changing the classification system for his library, in readiness for the opening of the new building on 11 February, 1907. However, it became evident that his international experience had not changed his conception of library classification. He did not adopt Dewey or other modern systems that he had seen, instead reclassifying the entire collections in the new reference and lending libraries with an old-fashioned system that replicated similar schemes used in British libraries between the 1850s and 1880s. Taylor's central principal was public utility in the context of open access. Therefore his greatest attention was given

to clear and simple labelling within broad subject areas, for browsing purposes, rather than close classification in the new scientific methods.

Taylor's new scheme was described in the local press when the Carnegie library building opened in 1907 as follows:

> The classification, for which the librarian is solely responsible, deserves special mention. All Latin and scientific terms have been avoided, and, in place of the technical, and, to some people, unintelligible, nomenclature . . . the simplest English words have been used . . . the result being that the most uneducated person can find, in a few moments, without the aid of a catalogue, any branch of literature which the library contains. Each case has its distinguishing letter, and below is placed the subject matter contained in the case. Each division of literature is further subdivided, and each subdivision is labelled in clear block letters so that everything can be easily found. The botanical section, for example, is broken up by labels indicating the book relating to ferns, mosses, fungi, grasses, plants, forestry, general flora, etc. ("The New Public Library," 1907, p. 5).

Prominent British librarian and progressive reformer James Duff Brown had roundly criticized this type of scheme in 1897 in the British journal *The Library*. Brown had noted:

> It is when you come to examine closely this shelf arrangement which is misnamed classification that its defects become obvious. The mere fact that it is a handy and easy method of finding books, which any child could understand, is no reason at all why it should be regarded as an absolute and perfect plan of classing and shelving. There is positively nothing very clever in gathering two or three thousand volumes on various sciences, arts or trades, calling them class D, and then proceeding to number them higgledy–piggledy from 1 onwards, and finally dump them on to the shelves in that order. This is not classification at all, but simply shelf numbering in its crudest form. (Bowman, 2005: 144)

Conclusion

It may be that Taylor's exposure to J. D. Brown's philosophy and library techniques, through his reading and his visit to London in 1905, only confirmed Taylor's faith in his own methods. Significantly, the local press viewed Taylor's classification scheme in a very positive light. Some of the trustees were also impressed with the practicality of the new arrangements in the Reference section of the library, noting that the new classification system ensured that "old books might easily be weeded out, and replaced by new ones without destroying the order of the shelves" ("Tasmanian Public Library," 1906). There is little evidence in the press that the Tasmanian public found any cause for complaint in Taylor's classification system. In fact, the classification of the books went generally unremarked in the larger public debate about what proportion of the books in the library should be made available for lending purposes rather than "locked up from the public" in the reference collection ("The Public Library," 1907,

p. 6). Taylor's traditional sense of vocation at the Library appears to have served the community's needs adequately, if unexceptionally, until his death in 1921. The institution failed to progress in the following decades, largely as a result of inadequate government funding, which meant the organization was understaffed and ill-equipped. Perhaps ironically, it was an international review conducted by the Carnegie Corporation of New York into the state of libraries in Australia in 1934 that brought public attention to the parlous state of the Tasmanian Public Library (Munn and Pitt, 1935). Complaints such as that published in 1937 in the local press complaining that the Library had "declined so far that it stands as a monument of inadequacy" and that it failed to "carry out its true function in the community" were common in the 1920 and 1930s, and the institution did not find a more financially stable and progressive path until the enactment of the Tasmanian Library Bill on 16 November 1943, which created the new "State Library of Tasmania" ("Tasmanian Library," 1937, p. 8).

As this paper has shown, Taylor and his library embodied some of the broader tensions that animated the development of public libraries in Australia and internationally, between the traditional vocational role of the public librarian as gentleman–amateur and the new scientific professional approach of the "information age." It could certainly be argued that Taylor's humanistic conception of knowledge and of general library utility for all members of the public, from the least to the most educated, was the best approach for a small community that needed to consolidate its unstable self-perception and that was cast in the role of the poor relative in the wider stage of national development. Taylor's lack of interest in local history or archival material also accurately reflected the general Tasmanian disinclination to dwell on the island's dark-hued history, as well as being a product of his own convict heritage. The deep attraction to traditional values associated with "Home," which most Tasmanians maintained well into the twentieth century, was well served by Taylor's belief that the historical knowledge that the Library should transmit concerned the European heritage that almost every Tasmanian citizen shared. It is impossible to know whether an active adoption of more progressive library practices would have given the Library a better chance to flourish in the difficult period of the 1920s and into the 1930s. The major interstate public libraries, such as those in Melbourne and Sydney, where modernization had been actively embraced, certainly fared better in this period than the Tasmanian library. However, they were placed in a more economically robust environment and benefited from a much larger population base. Perhaps aspects of Taylor's moral mission, his traditional sense of the vocation of the public librarian in creating an environment in which knowledge can be freely and easy discovered, and his belief in the public library as a cultural resource across generations that underpinned

the Tasmanian Public Library through the Federation period still has relevance for public libraries today in the midst of the current information deluge and the challenge of acquiring real "knowledge" in the twenty-first century.

NOTE

1. Rejecting the commonplace view that the "information age" arose with the development of computer technology after the First World War, a number of scholars—among them Black, Muddiman, & Plant (2007); Rayward (2008); Rayward (2014); Robins & Webster (1989, pp. 33-53); Yates (1989)—have identified the half century or so before the First World War as ushering in the original information revolution. Others have identified even earlier information ages; in this regard, see Darnton (2000); Weller (2011); and the article by Black & Schiller in this collection of essays.

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