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FREDERICK BEECHER PERKINS: LIBRARY PIONEER AND CURMUDGEON

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Library and Information Science

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Library and Information Science

by

Michael D. Murray

December 2009

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SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

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FREDERICK BEECHER PERKINS: LIBRARY PIONEER AND CURMUDGEON

by

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ABSTRACT

FREDERICK BEECHER PERKINS: LIBRARY PIONEER AND CURMUDGEON

by Michael D. Murray

In the following thesis, I will argue that Frederick Beecher Perkins is an overlooked figure in library history who deserves to be listed among the great library pioneers. Perkins was involved with many of the people, organizations, and major debates that shaped the field of librarianship in the late 1800s. He was associated with such figures as Melvil Dewey and Justin Winsor. He was involved in the critical issues of the day such as best reading, cataloging and classifying books, and administering libraries. He also played a role in important organizations and libraries such as the American Library Association, the Boston Public Library, and the San Francisco Public Library. Perkins was a major voice in the important debates taking place in library science and produced a large body of work that established a strong foundation upon which the library profession grew.

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I want to give special thanks to my thesis advisor, Debra Hansen. My interest in Perkins was sparked by a lecture on California library history in her class on the history of books and libraries. Without her guidance, encouragement, and tireless work, I could not have produced this thesis. Finally, I want to dedicate this to my wife. She endured countless evenings and weekends without me, as I studied, read, and wrote. None of this work would have been possible without her patience and undying support.

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Chapter One

Introduction: The Forgotten Library Pioneer

The 1850s until the early to mid-1900s was a tumultuous time in American history. It was a time of rapid technological and social change. The United States went through the Civil War and also experienced rapid growth with immigration and migration to the West. This was also the time that librarianship was being established as a profession. There were many pioneers who worked in numerous and varied ways to establish and further libraries and librarianship. People such as Justin Winsor, William Poole, and Charles Cutter were prominent scholars, bookmen, writers, and librarians. They forged the way for later practitioners such as Melvil Dewey and played important roles in the establishment of the library profession. Prominent libraries arose during this time and served as an example for countless other libraries being established in cities and towns throughout the country. The consummate example (and perhaps most famous public library of the day) was the Boston Public Library, founded in 1854. Here, under the leadership of Justin Winsor, many library methods and procedures were developed that were adopted all over the world.

The mid to late 1870s saw a flurry of activity in the library profession. The United States government published the first major report on public libraries in the U.S. in 1876. The American Library Association (ALA) had its beginning in Philadelphia in 1876 as well, and the *Library Journal* was founded and first published in that same year. Many issues were hotly debated in the *Library Journal* and in papers and lectures at the ALA conferences during this time. These issues included cataloging and classification, shelving practices, services to patrons, and the best books to have in a library. The

practices established by pioneering librarians and honed through these debates would have a long-lasting impact on the library profession.

Much has been written about the profession's pioneering men, women, and organizations as well as about the issues that arose during this era. Despite this plethora of literature, not everyone involved in the shaping of the library profession is well known. The roles they played and their contributions go unnoticed. One such person is Frederick Beecher Perkins, who was involved in many of these pioneering organizations, journals, and debates of the time. Perkins was born on September 27, 1828, in the town of Hartford, Connecticut. He was part of a very famous American family, the Beechers. His mother was Mary (Beecher) Perkins and his father was Thomas Clap Perkins. His maternal grandfather was Lyman Beecher, a famous revivalist preacher involved in the temperance movement and a leader in the Second Great Awakening. Perkins's aunt was Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and his uncle was Henry Ward Beecher who was a very popular preacher and leader in the abolitionist movement. At one point in time, Henry was considered the most famous man in America.¹

Two of Perkins's aunts were famous in the 19th-century reform and women's rights movements. Catherine Beecher worked to further women's education, opening many higher education institutions for women. Isabelle Beecher Hooker was a leader in the women's suffrage movement and a feminist writer. One of Perkins's daughters would follow in their footsteps. She was Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a famous feminist writer and lecturer. Unfortunately, Perkins largely abandoned the family when Charlotte

¹See Debby Applegate, *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher* (New York: Doubleday, 2006).

was very young. She describes her father as a “stranger” and states that he was “distant and little known.” Despite this estrangement, Charlotte Perkins Gilman continued the Beecher legacy in her fight for women’s rights.² Acknowledging this connection in her autobiography, she wrote: “By heredity I owe him much; the Beecher urge to social service, the Beecher wit and gift of words and such small sense of art as I have.”³

Like many of his forebears, Perkins had a gift for words and the use of them. He loved books and writing, and this love would dominate his life. He was a consummate scholar, bookman, and theorist. His daughter wrote that he

took to books as a duck to water. He read them, he wrote them, he edited them, he criticized them, he became a librarian and classified them. Before he married he knew nine languages and continued to learn more afterward....In those days, when scholarship could still cover a large portion of the world’s good books, he covered them well. Uncle E. E. Hale told me that he never asked my father a question that he could not immediately answer, or tell him where to find the answer.⁴

Perkins entered Yale in 1846, but left in 1848 before he finished his degree. However, his obituary in the “Obituary Record of Graduates of Yale University” states that he “was admitted to a degree and enrolled in his former class in 1860.”⁵ He went to work in his father’s law office in 1848 and was eventually admitted to the Connecticut Bar in 1851. Despite this, there is no evidence that he ever actually practiced law. He was employed as a schoolteacher for a short time in the early 1850s. He was married to

²See *American National Biography Online* s.v “Gilman, Charlotte Perkins.” (by Ann J. Lane), <http://www.anb.org/articles/15/15-00272.html>. (accessed September 15, 2007).

³Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman An Autobiography*, Wisconsin Studies in American Autobiography (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 6.

⁴*Ibid.*, 4.

⁵“Obituary Record of Graduates of Yale University Deceased During the Academical Year Ending in June, 1899,” no. 58 (1899): 611.

Mary Anne Westcott in May 1857, and they had two sons and two daughters (one being Charlotte Perkins Gilman).

Throughout the late 1850s and 1860s Perkins worked as a writer and editor. He wrote short stories, edited books, and worked as an editor (and sometimes founder) for many different newspapers and magazines. These include the *New York Tribune*, the *Independent*, the *Christian Union*, the *Galaxy*, *Old and New*, the *American Journal of Education*, and the *Saturday Magazine* of Boston. He wrote many anonymous works that appeared in some of these newspapers and magazines. His best-known books are a biography of Charles Dickens; *Scrope, or the Lost Library*; *Devil Puzzlers* (a collection of short stories); *The Picture and the Men* (a history of Lincoln and his cabinet); and *The Best Reading*.

Besides his many literary endeavors, Perkins was also a librarian. He worked as the librarian at the Connecticut Historical Society from 1857 to 1861. In the late 1870s, he worked with Justin Winsor at the Boston Public Library (BPL). While there, he produced two major bibliographies. He also contributed five articles to the 1876 report on public libraries. This report would prove to be a huge success and a major influence in the field of library science. It has even been called the “magnum opus of library economy.”⁶ He also presented papers and participated in debates at the ALA conferences and wrote numerous articles in the *Library Journal*. He was a founding member of the ALA’s Cooperation Committee, which was influential in helping the profession create

⁶Francis Miksa, “The Making of the 1876 Special Report on Public Libraries,” *Journal of Library History, Philosophy, and Comparative Librarianship* 8, no. 1 (1973): 30.

many of its early practices. As an officer in ALA, he also served as an editor for both the *Library Journal* and the *ALA Catalog*.

After he left the Boston Public Library, Perkins was involved with Melvil Dewey at the Reader's and Writer's Economy Company (a precursor to the Library Bureau) as both an employee and board member.⁷ He also worked freelance for ALA as editor of the catalog and "consulting librarian." He was then appointed head librarian of the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) and served in this position from 1880 to 1887. While at SFPL, Perkins accomplished a great deal and helped the relatively new library become established. He was especially instrumental in building the collection and increasing circulation. While at SFPL, Perkins wrote and published a classification system and a cataloging manual. As Dewey was creating and establishing his famous "Dewey Decimal System," Perkins was competing (and debating) with him by offering his own classification system.

Despite his achievements, Perkins's time at SFPL was also full of controversy. He was steadily attacked in the papers for his strict policies and censorship of certain types of fiction. He also endured a controversial and somewhat ambiguous incident with a patron. He allegedly roughed up a boy who was misbehaving in the library. The boy's father, an army officer, had Perkins thrown in jail. He was eventually released and ordered to pay a fine. Even though the library board investigated the matter and cleared

⁷The Library Bureau was a supply company that Melvil Dewey started in 1881. Though not directly involved in the day-to-day operations of the company, Dewey maintained control by being the majority stockholder. However, his control slowly eroded throughout the 1890s and by 1910 he gave up all interests in the company. By then it had 3,000 employees in thirty-two cities. See Wayne A. Wiegand, *Irrepressible Reformer: A Biography of Melvil Dewey* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1996), 70-76 & 234-242.

Perkins of wrong doing, his image never recovered. Not long after this incident he resigned.

Unfortunately, Perkins's tenure at SFPL was characteristic of events throughout his life. Despite his immense abilities and boundless energy, he could not overcome his weaknesses and live up to his full potential. His weaknesses would severely limit the impact he had on the field of library science. In her autobiography, Gilman describes this well. She writes, "But—with all these abilities went certain marked characteristics which prevented assured success. While a student at Yale he thrashed a professor, who had, he said, insulted him; which exhibition of temper cut short his college attendance. He was keen to feel injustice and quick to resent it; impatient of any dictation, careless of consequences when aroused."⁸

The inability to control his temper seems to be something Perkins struggled with his entire life. In November 1848, Mary Perkins wrote to her sister (Harriet Beecher Stowe) about her son's problems since going away to college. In this letter Mary expresses her great sadness that, despite revivals on his campus, Frederick had not chosen to have an active and vibrant faith. Furthermore, he was "being head strong and insubordinate." She writes that he is "coming into collision with the faculty & within a few weeks has gotten into a fight with a city clerk who gave him some petty insult in the street & was arrested by a civil officer & prosecuted & fined for breach of the peace—now this head strong violent temper has from early life been the trait I have striven most

⁸Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman an Autobiography*, 4.

to cure.”⁹ This tendency to be easily offended and inability to control his temper remained with him throughout his life.

When studying Perkins’s career it is also apparent that his broad interests and restless spirit limited his ability to have a large impact in any one field. Perkins had a brilliant mind, was well read, articulate, and highly productive. However, his interests were wide ranging and he invested his energies in many areas. Librarianship was only one of many fields where Perkins invested his time. While in Boston and San Francisco he wrote short stories and articles and edited newspapers, magazines, and books. He was involved in local politics and gave public lectures on various topics. He also got involved with local societies and other interest groups. This dissipation of his energies prevented Perkins from making a big impact in any one field and this, combined with his tendency to be offended and easily angered, often led to him leaving a job prematurely. He left BPL and SFPL under controversial circumstances. He stopped his work on the *ALA Catalog* because he had difficulty working with Dewey. This culminated in his complete withdrawal from the library profession after his resignation from SFPL. Perkins continued to live in San Francisco afterwards, working in editorial capacities and assisting Adolph Sutro on several projects. One of those projects included lobbying Congress, which brought him to Washington, D.C., for a summer. Once back on the East Coast Perkins remained there until his death in 1899.

⁹Mary (Beecher) Perkins to Harriet (Beecher) Stowe, November 19, 1848. White Collection, Harriet Beecher Stowe Center Archives, Hartford, Connecticut.

Literature Review

In the following section I will briefly survey the literature about some of the library pioneers, organizations, and their ideas. Due to time and space constraints this should not be viewed as an exhaustive list of all pertinent literature. Instead, I will only discuss those works that are directly about Perkins or mention him in some way. By focusing only on these materials one can readily see the dearth of knowledge about him and his contributions to library science.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, there were several prominent people who made a lasting impact on librarianship. Perhaps the most well known is Melvil Dewey. There has been much written about Dewey's life, work, and contributions to librarianship. Perkins worked closely with Dewey in several arenas and became a major opponent to his classification system. Despite these connections he is only briefly mentioned in two sources on Dewey. The first book that mentions Perkins is a compilation of papers from a seminar held at the New York State Library in 1981. The seminar and the book share the same title: *Melvil Dewey: The Man and the Classification*.¹⁰ Ten different authors contribute to the work, including some well-known library historians such as Dee Garrison, Francis Miksa, and Wayne Wiegand. The book is broken into three parts discussing 1) background information; 2) "Dewey: The man, The innovator, The organizer"; and 3) Dewey's classification. This is an excellent resource for information on Dewey's contributions to the library profession. The essays cover the breadth of Dewey's work, discussing his entrepreneurial spirit evidenced in his many business

¹⁰Gordon Stevenson and Judith Kramer-Greene, eds., *Melvil Dewey, the Man and the Classification* (Albany, NY: Forest Press, 1983).

ventures, his work with ALA, and the development of his classification system. Francis Miksa's chapter, titled "Melvil Dewey and the Corporate Ideal," discusses Dewey's relationship to ALA's Cooperation Committee as well as his establishment of the Reader's and Writer's Economy Company. In doing so he mentions Perkins and his involvement with these entities:

At least two of the three persons on the Committee—Perkins and Jackson—represented in many respects Dewey's assessment that there were librarians in the Association who, though "less widely known," were especially "qualified" for leadership. Perkins was at that time no more than a secretary and cataloguer at the Boston Public Library, and while he was a member of the prominent Beecher family of New England, could not be said to have been in the first, or even the second, rank of known and notable librarians.... Their appointment to positions of central importance in the ALA could only have placed them in a deferential relationship to Dewey.¹¹

I will argue that Perkins was well known and should be considered in the first or second tier of prominent librarians. Also, when one learns more about Perkins's personality and studies the correspondence between him and Dewey, it becomes clear that Perkins was in no way "deferential" to Dewey.

The most recent biography of Dewey is Wayne Wiegand's extensive work titled *Irrepressible Reformer*.¹² Compared to other biographies, this is a much more scholarly work. Wiegand's research is meticulous, and he provides excellent notes and bibliography as documentation of his work. Wiegand covers Dewey's life from his childhood to his death. He focuses on Dewey's many endeavors, from library work to the Lake Placid Club. This book does not focus solely on Dewey's accomplishments, but

¹¹Ibid., 77.

¹²Wiegand, *Irrepressible Reformer*.

attempts to paint a well-rounded picture. The result, while maybe a bit harsh, is a more complete picture of Dewey and his legacy (both good and bad).¹³ Of particular note, is Wiegand's mention of Perkins in the context of the Reader's and Writer's Economy Company and Dewey's struggles with money. However, the details regarding Perkins's involvement are brief and there is no discussion of his role in the issues at hand. Wiegand also neglects Perkins's ongoing debate with Dewey over their vying classification systems.

Despite Perkins's work with Justin Winsor at BPL, he is barely mentioned in the major histories of that library or in the major work on Winsor. In 1956, Walter Muir Whitehill wrote a history of the BPL titled, *Boston Public Library: A Centennial History*.¹⁴ This study contains a chapter on Winsor's accomplishments at BPL, such as improved bibliographies and branch libraries. It briefly mentions Perkins and others Winsor worked with, but does not discuss any of the contributions they made to the institution.

The most extensive treatment of Winsor is Joseph Borome's PhD dissertation titled, "The Life and Letters of Justin Winsor."¹⁵ It consists of five parts focusing on 1) Winsor's early life and preparation for his career; 2) Winsor's work in Boston; 3) Winsor's work at the Harvard Library; 4) Winsor's historical work; and 5) the latter years

¹³Some reviewers of the book point out that Wiegand may be overly harsh. See Rutherford W. Whitthus, "[Irrepressible Reformer]," *Technical Services Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1999): 78.

¹⁴Walter Muir Whitehill, *Boston Public Library: A Centennial History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956).

¹⁵Joseph Alfred Borome, "The Life and Letters of Justin Winsor" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1950).

of Winsor's life. The chapter on BPL is especially helpful for understanding the library's history and the role Winsor played. For the purposes of this thesis, the section on Winsor's work with bibliographies while at BPL was very helpful. Perkins and some of his work at BPL are also briefly discussed, providing helpful context for Perkins's work at BPL.

Perkins was the third librarian at SFPL and the first one to stay for any significant amount of time (seven years as opposed to the two previous librarians who only stayed a few months each). Throughout the years, there have been a few pieces written about SFPL. However, the only extensive history of was written in 1996 when the library opened a new main building. Peter Booth Wiley, a local author and journalist, wrote the volume titled, *A Free Library in This City: The Illustrated History of the San Francisco Public Library*.¹⁶ While it is the most comprehensive history available, it is not really a scholarly work. It does not have notes or a bibliography, and it is difficult to verify facts. The brief portion on Perkins (2 pages) does not read well and is difficult to follow. It also does not get the facts right, calling Harriet Beecher Stowe Henry Ward Beecher's daughter. The book largely focuses on the controversies surrounding Perkins's tenure and is therefore an unfair and incomplete picture of his work at SFPL.

There are two sources that mention Perkins in discussions of the early days of the ALA. First, in 1958 Lucy Jane Maddox wrote a PhD dissertation titled, "Trends and Issues in American Librarianship as Reflected in the Papers and Proceedings of the

¹⁶Peter Booth Wiley, *A Free Library in This City: The Illustrated History of the San Francisco Public Library* (San Francisco: Weldon Owen, 1996).

American Library Association 1876 – 1885.”¹⁷ This is an in-depth look at the issues that developed in librarianship between 1876 and 1885. Since the focus is so narrow, it goes into great detail about the debates taking place in the ALA during its first decade. It covers many of the debates in which Perkins was involved, including classification, cataloging and catalogs, library cooperation, library service, library architecture, and various other topics. The fact that Perkins shows up in many of the debates covered by Maddox bolsters my argument for his importance. This thesis will provide a more in-depth look at Perkins’s role in these issues.

Another important work on the early days of the ALA is Wayne Wiegand’s *The Politics of an Emerging Profession: The American Library Association, 1876-1917*.¹⁸ This work is also narrowly focused and subsequently provides considerable detail about these early years. Wiegand’s focus is the struggle for dominance within the professional community. According to Donald Davis, “The plot of this book is [concerned] with the struggle for power between leaders of the large, urban libraries of the Northwest and the more rural, public library interests of the Midwest.”¹⁹ Wiegand also shows how this fight progressed through the early years of the ALA. Perkins is mentioned in the book, but only briefly in the context of his work with the ALA Catalog. A more thorough discussion of Perkins’s contributions to this topic is warranted.

¹⁷Lucy Jane Maddox, “Trends and Issues in American Librarianship as Reflected in the Papers and Proceedings of the American Library Association, 1876-1885” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1958).

¹⁸Wayne A. Wiegand, *The Politics of an Emerging Profession: The American Library Association, 1876-1917*, Contributions in Librarianship and Information Science, No. 56 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986).

¹⁹Donald G. Davis, “[the Politics of an Emerging Profession],” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 12(1986) 236.

Dee Garrison's famous (or infamous) 1979 book, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society 1876-1920*, also briefly discusses Perkins.²⁰ She explores the ideas of the public library as an "urban reform designed to cope with the problems of an industrializing society" and assesses the impact of feminization of librarianship. Though criticized as unfairly biased against librarians, most agree that this book is a classic because it provides a new look at old assumptions. Garrison uses Perkins as an example of the "genteel librarian," who saw public libraries as tools to shape society. According to Garrison, librarians like Perkins embraced certain ideals about the importance of books, reading, education, and the library. Although her depiction of Perkins is not flattering, her characterization of him is certainly warranted.

Very little has been written about Perkins himself. The earliest resource is a four-page article written by Della Haverland that appears in *Pacific Bindery Talk* in 1935.²¹ Simply titled "Frederick Beecher Perkins," Haverland's article provides interesting information about Perkins. Unfortunately, the article lacks footnotes or a bibliography, so it is difficult to know where the information came from or whether it is accurate. For example, Haverland frequently quotes Mary Foy, third librarian of Los Angeles Public Library, who had personal interaction with Perkins and considered him one of her teachers. Unfortunately, none of these quotations are documented.

In 1951, John Butters wrote a master's thesis titled, *Concepts of Library Purpose in the Professional Works of Seven Founders of the American Library Association*. He

²⁰Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920*, Print Culture History in Modern America (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

²¹Della B. Haverland, "Frederick Beecher Perkins," *Pacific Bindery Talk* 8(1935).

lists these seven founders in the preface as “Bicknell, Cutter, Dewey, Green, Perkins, Whitney, and Winsor.”²² Butters’s thesis focuses on the purpose of the public library as outlined in the writings of these seven people and is a useful introduction to the issues of that time period. Butters discussion of Perkins is necessarily limited by his thesis (determining the purpose of the public library) so he only discusses Perkins’s writings that touch on this theme. None of Perkins’s other work is discussed in this study, leaving a great deal for further investigation.

Two more relatively recent biographical entries have been written on Perkins in major reference resources. The first is an article by Michael B. Wessells in *The Dictionary of American Library Biography*; the second is by Martin Manning and appears in *American National Biography Online*.²³ Both are similar and briefly outline Perkins’s life and contributions to libraries and library science, but because of their limited nature they do not tell the whole story concerning Perkins’s contributions to the field.

In this section I have argued that Frederick Beecher Perkins is an important figure who has been largely overlooked in the library literature. I have briefly discussed some of the literature where Perkins appears in some way, whether he is the focus of the discussion or merely a player in a broader topic. He worked with Winsor and Dewey

²²John Avery Butters, “Concepts of Library Purpose in the Professional Works of Seven Founders of the American Library Association” (Master’s Thesis, Catholic University of America, 1951), v.

²³Michael B. Wessells, “Perkins, Frederick Beecher 1828-1899,” in *Dictionary of American Library Biography*, ed. George S. Bobinski, Jesse Hauk Shera, and Bohdan S. Wynar (Littleton, Co: Libraries Unlimited, 1978). ; *American National Biography Online* s.v. “Perkins, Frederic Beecher.” (by Martin J. Manning), <http://www.anb.org/articles/20/20-00777.html>. (accessed September 15, 2007).

(both major figures), wrote extensively on library practice, was involved in the early days of ALA, and served as an administrator at two major public libraries (BPL and SFPL). Despite this, little has been written about him.

Thesis Outline

With this general introduction to Perkins' life and work, as well as the overview of the library literature, it becomes apparent that a more in-depth study of Perkins is warranted. In the following chapters, I will describe Perkins's career as a librarian and detail his involvement in and contributions to the field of librarianship. Chapter 2 will discuss Perkins's career at BPL. Here, I will discuss Perkins's work as a bibliographer and cataloger, demonstrating the contributions he made to the field. Throughout the chapter, I will argue that Perkins was influenced by BPL's professional environment. At the same time, his work added to the prestige afforded the institution during this time period. I will close with a brief discussion of the circumstances leading to Perkins's resignation. Chapter 3 will discuss Perkins's professional contributions in three main areas: his work with the ALA, his writings in the *Library Journal*, and his contributions to the *1876 Special Report*. This chapter will continue to demonstrate Perkins's contributions to the discussions on library practice going on during this time. I will also describe his relationship and brief work with Melvil Dewey, showing that Perkins was a well-respected and well-known figure in his own right. Chapter 4 will describe Perkins's work at SFPL. Here I will demonstrate how his ideas on library practice were implemented in real life situations. I will discuss his ideas concerning fiction in public libraries and how this affected his time at SFPL. I will close with a brief explanation of

the controversy leading to his resignation. Chapter 5 will discuss his classification scheme and cataloging manual, which can be seen as the capstone to his career as a librarian. I will also outline his debates with Dewey about classification and describe Perkins's attacks on Dewey's scheme. Finally, Chapter 6 will be the conclusion. Here I will summarize my arguments from previous chapters concluding that Perkins deserves a place among library pioneers.

Research Methodology and Collections

In conducting the research for this thesis, I have found a surprising amount of primary material from which to draw. There were several collections scattered throughout the US that had information pertaining to Perkins. Since Perkins worked closely with Dewey on several ventures, the Melvil Dewey papers at Columbia University in New York City had a wealth of information. There was information regarding Perkins's involvement with ALA as well as The Reader's and Writer's Economy Company. There were also several correspondences between Dewey and Perkins that dated from 1859 until 1877 and covered a variety of topics. I also gleaned important information from studying several years of ledgers from The Library Bureau. Columbia University also had pieces of information regarding Perkins in several smaller collections. These included a contract with Harper Brothers to edit an edition of *Haydn's Dictionary of Dates* and correspondence between Perkins and William Mason Grosvenor, Moncure Conway, and Edmund Clarence Stedman.

New England archives and libraries also provided invaluable primary sources for this study. The Boston Public Library contained a good deal of information in the form

of primary sources. A rich resource was a scrapbook that Perkins put together and donated to the library shortly before his resignation in 1879. It contained many articles written by Perkins that appeared in the *Boston Daily Globe* regarding local politics. The official records of the Library Trustees as well as the City Council had information pertaining to Perkins as well. The Boston Athenaeum also proved to be a useful resource as it contained many works written by Perkins, some that had been donated by him. Of particular note were three letters written to Boston Mayor F. O. Prince. These were bound together with a handwritten note from Perkins to fellow librarian Charles Cutter explaining that the letters were sensitive and for his eyes only. The Boston Athenaeum also had the only copy I could locate of the first edition of Perkins's classification. Harvard University's library has an interesting copy of *The Best Reading* (available via Google books) with a handwritten note from Perkins on the front end papers. It explained in his own words the evolution of the book from the first edition to the present copy, which was the fourth edition. The information about Perkins's early life comes from letters his mother wrote to her siblings, which are part of several collections at The Harriet Beecher Stowe Center in Hartford, Connecticut.

A number of archives in San Francisco also have primary resources pertaining to Perkins. The San Francisco History Center at SFPL has considerable information on Perkins. The official reports of the Library Board of Trustees contained important information about Perkins's tenure as director of SFPL. The History Center also has a biographical file that contains notes on Perkins, including various newspaper articles with information about Perkins. The California Historical Society Library in San Francisco

and the Bancroft Library at Berkeley both have a set of Adolph Sutro papers that include correspondence between Perkins and Sutro. These were helpful in providing information about what Perkins did after he resigned from SFPL. These collections along with the early issues of the *Library Journal* and other miscellaneous professional publications combined to create a relatively complete portrait of Perkins's life and career as a librarian.

Frederick Beecher Perkins is an important figure in early library history who has been largely overlooked. He was a respected colleague of prominent library pioneers such as Justin Winsor, Charles Cutter, and Melvil Dewey. He was also involved in many of the important debates that took place in the late 1870s and throughout the 1880s. These include such topics as library economy and administration, cataloging, and classification. He also worked at important institutions such as BPL and SFPL and contributed to the professionalization of the field through the ALA and the *Library Journal*. Despite these important connections and contributions, little is known about him or his work. This thesis will correct that deficit and demonstrate that Perkins deserves to have his name in the list of library pioneers alongside his more well-known colleagues.

Chapter Two

The Boston Years: 1870-1880

On March 18, 1848, the Massachusetts legislature passed a bill that allowed the City of Boston to tax its citizens in order to support a public library. This paved the way for the establishment of Boston Public Library (BPL), which became one of the greatest libraries in the U.S. in its time and a model for all public libraries. Large gifts of books and money began pouring in to support a public library. The most important was a large monetary gift from Joshua Bates. Despite these gifts, it would be several years before BPL would become a reality. Finally, in February 1852, after recommendations from Benjamin Seaver, Mayor of Boston, efforts intensified and civic leaders appointed a library board that, in turn, hired a librarian. Edward Everett, Board President, and George Ticknor, a strong public library supporter, were important figures in establishing BPL. These two single handedly wrote the report to the city council that would become the basis upon which BPL was built. This report was presented to the city council on July 6, 1852, and became an historic document because of its influence on BPL and the public library movement in general. In his biography of Winsor, Joseph Borome explains the report's significance:

This historic document—"the first real code of a public library", says Jesse Shera—traced the growth of the library movement up to that day, pointed up the need for supplementing the work of the public schools by granting free access to books, emphasized the fact that libraries 'owned by private corporations' were not able, by reason of proprietorship, to assume the role of a public library; and set forth four categories for the library collections: (1) books that could not be taken from the library because of cost or rarity, (2) books few people would wish to read, (3) books that would be often asked for and have to be duplicated, and (4) periodicals. But more important, it advocated in clear and unmistakable language the then revolutionary plan of free, unrestricted circulation of books, a plan conforming, in the main, with Ticknor's firm belief that 'not only the best books

of all sorts, but the pleasant literature of the day, should be made accessible to the whole people at the only time when they care for it, i.e. when it is fresh and new.’¹

The board chose Edward Capen to be the first librarian, and a small library was set up on Mason Street. The library quickly outgrew this building and a more substantial building was built on Boylston Street, which opened in 1858. That same year the library trustees decided that they would provide general direction, but the library needed someone to provide day-to-day management oversight. They created the position of superintendant to fill this need and appointed the most prominent librarian of the day, Charles Coffin Jewett, to fill the role.

Over the next ten years, Jewett guided BPL to a position of prominence amongst all libraries in the United States. When, upon Jewett’s death in 1868, Justin Winsor was appointed superintendant, he inherited the second largest library in the country with 144,000 volumes and 50,000 pamphlets.² It was second in size only to the Library of Congress. Winsor was appointed to his post despite his lack of library experience. He was a library trustee for one year and distinguished himself as chairman of the 1867 Examining Committee.³ In this committee, Winsor demonstrated his extensive administrative skills, drawing the attention of the trustees and many others in the library community. When the came time to appoint Jewett’s successor, the trustees remembered

¹Borome, “The Life and Letters of Justin Winsor,” 75-76.

²See Whitehill, *Boston Public Library*, 77.

³The examining committee was a sub-committee of the BPL Board of Trustees. It created a yearly report of the conditions and performance of BPL.

Winsor's excellent work and turned to him to guide BPL in the next phase of its existence.

Despite Jewett's considerable talents and his excellent progress in developing BPL, Winsor found a great deal of work to do when he became superintendant. There was a growing backlog of books and pamphlets to be processed. He also had to find solutions for the increasing use of the library, which was straining current systems, and for more philosophical issues such as raising reader's tastes in books and establishing the library's role in the community.⁴ Even though Winsor had no experience as a librarian when he was appointed superintendant, he quickly established himself as a premier administrator, capable leader, and excellent librarian. He immediately implemented procedures to mitigate the inadequacies of the Boylston Street building and established new departments to better handle the great influx of books and pamphlets overwhelming the library. A few of his many innovations were 1) establishing a shelf-reading department and ceasing closures during the library's annual inventory; 2) establishing branch libraries throughout the city; and 3) publishing bibliographic essays and notes to help people access the many and varied works in the BPL collection.

Under Winsor's leadership, BPL continued its progress toward becoming the preeminent public library in the country. Winsor's success at BPL led him to a place of preeminence among librarians as well. Many copied what was being done at BPL, and Winsor became a leader in the establishment of the profession. Librarians from all over the United States and Europe wrote Winsor praising his bibliographic work. When

⁴See Borome, "The Life and Letters of Justin Winsor," 89.

Melvil Dewey began making his plans for a national library convention he sought Winsor's help. When John Eaton decided to create the massive report on public libraries in the US he, too, turned to Winsor. Winsor and BPL were at the center of all the major activity establishing the library profession during that time.

As gifted as Winsor was, he could not have accomplished all this without the help of others. Borome points out that Winsor's work to compile the book catalog for history, biography, and travel alone took "the greater part of his spare time for one year."⁵ A part of being a good leader is finding other gifted people and empowering them to use their gifts toward a common goal. Winsor surrounded himself with talented people who also contributed to the library's success. Borome writes about Winsor that "while he labored in the bibliographic vineyard, he encouraged his assistants to do likewise....Certainly he surrounded himself with bookmen and accomplished bibliographers."⁶ Borome goes on to name many who made major contributions in the area of bibliography. These include William Wheeler, James Whitney, James Hubbard, and Frederick Perkins.

Wheeler, Whitney, and Hubbard all distinguished themselves as catalogers and bibliographers while at BPL. Wheeler was Assistant Superintendant and Chief of the Catalog Department. Whitney succeeded him upon his death in 1874, and Hubbard became Wheeler's Deputy. Beginning with Wheeler, these men all provided invaluable assistance to Winsor in the preparation of many of BPL's famous catalogs. They also produced bibliographies of their own in various subjects that were well received by other

⁵Ibid., 167.

⁶Ibid., 214.

libraries. While these men contributed to the success of BPL through their bibliographic and cataloging work, their work has been overshadowed by Winsor and overlooked in library history. This is particularly true in the case of Frederick Beecher Perkins. In this chapter, I will describe Perkins's major contributions to BPL and the library profession as a whole while he worked at BPL. I will also offer some reasons why he has been overlooked despite his many contributions.

Perkins moved to Boston in 1870 where he worked with his brother-in-law, Edward Everett Hale, as an editor for the magazine *Old and New* (which later merged with *Scribner's Monthly*). He continued in this role until May 1874, when Winsor recruited and hired him to be "office secretary" at BPL.⁷ Perkins's expertise as an editor, his previous work as the Librarian at the Connecticut Historical Society, and his continued interest in the library field through his bibliographic work (e.g. *The Best Reading*) qualified him for the position.⁸ Whitehill calls Perkins Winsor's "third mate," and there is some evidence that he had a position of some importance in helping Winsor in the administration of BPL. Perkins also held the title of Assistant Librarian and Special Cataloger for a short time in 1879.⁹

⁷See Boston Public Library, *Boston Public Library Superintendent's Monthly Report 1873-1878*, May 1874, No. 47.

⁸There is some evidence that Perkins worked on cataloging issues during this time as well. In the 1876 preface to Cutter's *Rules for a Printed Dictionary Catalog*, Cutter mentions Perkins modifications of Panizzi's "famous 91 rules," which appeared in "the American publisher for 1869." See Charles Cutter, *Rules for a Printed Dictionary Catalog. U.S. Bureau of Education Special Report on Public Libraries Part 2*, 4th ed. (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1904), 3.

⁹See Whitehill, *Boston Public Library*, 96. In his history of Boston Public Library, Whitehill states that Perkins was "Office Secretary and sub-executive officer." Most biographical sketches of Perkins state that he was a bibliographer, special cataloger, and office secretary.

There is no direct evidence of Perkins's exact duties as office secretary. An investigation in BPL's records demonstrates that he was involved in a variety of tasks as they were assigned to him by Winsor. He spent the majority of his time on bibliographic and cataloging work, and this is where he makes his biggest impact. Winsor also tapped Perkins for his writing skills, and asked him to write a number of essays for *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition, and Management, Special Report* [hereafter referred to as the *1876 Special Report*], of which Winsor was an editorial consultant.¹⁰ Finally, while at Boston, Perkins became involved with the ALA and was an editor for the *Library Journal*. His work with the *1876 Special Report*, ALA, and the *Library Journal* will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Perkins's Cataloging and Bibliographic Writings

Perkins is probably best known for his bibliographic and cataloging work while at BPL. His obituary in the *Library Journal* states that "his contributions to library literature were many and varied; among the best known were his... 'Check-list of American local history'; and the fourth edition of 'Best Reading,' prepared by him for G. P. Putnam's Sons."¹¹ These bibliographic works were well received at the time of their printing and became standard works for helping libraries and individuals choose books. To understand the importance of the bibliographic and cataloging work going on at BPL one must understand the state of cataloging in the US during this time. Before the mid-1800s, cataloging in this country was not very mature. Catalogs provided little

¹⁰*Public Libraries in the United States of America; Their History, Condition, and Management. Special Report* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876).

¹¹"Frederick Beecher Perkins," *Library Journal* 24, no. 2 (1899): 82.

information about a book, and entries were frequently very short. Books were often listed merely alphabetically and sometimes divided by the size of the books. In describing cataloging in the US, Ruth Strout points out that up to this time US catalogers were following the same patterns that European catalogers had followed a century earlier. She further writes, “For example, of the three catalogs which Harvard printed, one had been divided into three alphabets according to the size of books, all three contained the briefest of entries, and none provided much in the way of subject approach.”¹² The state of cataloging was much further along in Britain than in the US, as British librarians had been developing cataloging rules and classification systems since the early 1800s. Anthony Panizzi became the most influential person in the British debates taking place about catalogs during this time. He was appointed Assistant Librarian at the British Museum in 1831 and later became Keeper of the Printed Books. It was in this role that he developed a cataloging code, which he called the “Ninety-One Cataloging Rules.” These rules formed the basis upon which all other cataloging rules in Britain and the US were formed.

Cataloging in the US did not begin to advance until 1850 when Charles Jewett, then Librarian at the Smithsonian Institution, published his cataloging code. Jewett based his code on Panizzi’s “Ninety-One Rules” with only a few adjustments in areas with which he did not agree. There were two basic parts to Jewett’s plan. The first part developed the idea of a national union catalog listing the holdings of all libraries in the

¹²Ruth French Strout, “The Development of the Catalog and Cataloging Codes,” in *The Catalog and Cataloging*, ed. Arthur Ray Rowland, *Contributions to Library Literature* (North Haven, CT: The Shoe String Press, 1969), 25.

US. The second part consisted of thirty-five cataloging rules covering how librarians should create titles, headings, and cross-references for their catalog entries and how to order them. Jewett's rules represented the first attempt to develop national standards to be followed in making library catalogs. Despite his efforts, Jewett's rules were never widely adopted and his idea for a national catalog was never fulfilled. It would be another twenty years before the next major development in cataloging.

In the pivotal year of 1876, Charles Cutter published his *Rules for a Printed Dictionary Catalog* as the second part of the *1876 Special Report*.¹³ In the preface to these rules, Cutter explains that since there was no comprehensive manual for cataloging, this was his effort to create one. Cutter also explained that there were three different types of dictionary catalogs that librarians could create: short title, medium title, or full title (which he also called bibliographic). The type produced by a library depended upon how much information the librarian wanted to provide in the cataloging entry. Although the first edition contained 205 rules, Cutter claimed that his system was not complicated and that only a small number of the rules were generally applied. He goes on to state that the rules "are especially designed for Medium [medium title], but may easily be adapted to Short [short title] by excision and marginal notes."¹⁴ Cutter's cataloging rules had three main objectives: 1) to enable a person to find a book whose author, title, or subject is known; 2) to show that the library has a book by a specific author, on a certain subject, or in a certain form; and 3) to assist people in choosing a book based on its edition or its

¹³Charles Cutter, *Rules for a Printed Dictionary Catalog*. U.S. Bureau of Education *Special Report on Public Libraries Part 2* (Washington DC: U.S. Bureau of Education, 1876).

¹⁴Cutter, *Rules for a Printed Dictionary Catalog*, 12.

character. To achieve these goals, the cataloging entry should include five key elements, author entry, title entry, subject entry, form entry, and analysis entry. By “analysis” Cutter meant added notes indicating editions or imprints.”¹⁵

Between the time Jewett published his rules and the time Cutter published his, there was a growing sense of discontent with the way cataloging was done in the US. It became clear that librarians wanted to provide more than just alphabetical lists of titles and forms of books in their libraries. They wanted a much more extensive record of their holdings that made the materials more accessible to their patrons. In a sense, Jewett started a conversation that would mature in the 1870s with Cutter’s much more extensive and detailed rules. His rules were widely read and adopted by many librarians throughout the country. They also spurred a national debate about the best way to catalog books. These debates would go on for years to come. Cutter’s rules were not the only innovations taking place in cataloging during this time. Other libraries and librarians were enhancing their catalogs to better serve their patrons.

Some of the most innovative catalogs and bibliographic lists were being produced at BPL. Their catalogs became popular because of the extensive notes about each work to aid patrons in their book selections. In 1873, Justin Winsor produced the first catalog containing these notes; it listed the books in the history, geography, and travel sections of BPL.¹⁶ Similarly notated lists of BPL holdings followed. This list had a dramatic effect

¹⁵For an excellent summary of Cutter’s rules see Kathryn Luther Henderson, “Treated with a Degree of Uniformity and Common Sense: Descriptive Cataloging in the United States, 1876-1975,” *Library Trends* 25, no. 1 (1976): 228.

¹⁶Justin Winsor, *A Catalogue of Books Belonging to the Lower Hall of the Central Department in the Classes of History, Biography, and Travel, Including the Histories of Literature, Art, Sects, Etc., Politics*

on circulation, so much so that it caught the attention of other librarians. Melvil Dewey praised these lists as providing clear “evidence of the wonderful influence for good exerted by the annotated catalogue,” noting that in some months circulation increased 200 percent. Dewey also believed that the public was reading better books, which was again “traceable directly to the preparation and printing of such notes.”¹⁷

Because the annotated catalog was so popular, Winsor began enlisting the help of his staff (i.e. Wheeler, Whitney, and Perkins) to create more of them, as well as other bibliographic lists and articles. Perkins’s first involvement with producing annotated catalogs was with BPL’s fiction list, which was printed, with explanatory notes, in 1877. Perkins published several other lists and bibliographical articles during this time as well. One, which appeared in the BPL *Bulletin*, was on “the study and progress of mental philosophy”¹⁸ He also published a bibliographic article on American local history, which would become the basis for his longer and separately published *Checklist for American Local History* (discussed below).

In addition to these annotated lists and bibliographical articles, Perkins worked on longer treatises. The two most important efforts were his *Checklist for American Local History* (pertains directly to BPL’s holdings) and his *Best Reading* (which was meant for

Geography, Voyages, Sketched, and Manners and Customs, Together with Notes for Readers under Subject Headings, 2nd ed. (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1873).

¹⁷Melvil Dewey, “The Coming Catalogue,” *Library Journal* 1, no. 12 (1877): 424.

¹⁸Borome, “The Life and Letters of Justin Winsor,” 216.

a broader audience).¹⁹ Both would prove to have a lasting impact on the library world. Perkins's *Checklist for American Local History* [*The Checklist*] was published in 1876. Based on the history holdings at BPL, *The Checklist* included both titles of books the library owned and titles it hoped to acquire. Arranged by state, it listed many entries for major cities like Boston and New York City, but also covered smaller locales, such as Ypsilanti, MI, and York County, PA. Although originally created as a collection management tool for BPL, it proved so popular with other librarians that Perkins modified the original list so it could be used as a tool for other libraries to use in their local history collection development as well.

In *The Checklist's* preface, Perkins reflected on the state of bibliography at that time and lamented its limitations. Noting that "American bibliography, so far as it exists, is predominantly historical," he bemoaned the fact that there was "no great general work on American books as there are in Britain and Europe."²⁰ While he admits that some bibliographic work had been done on religion, Indians, Masonry, genealogy and biography, and literature as well as a "glut" of lists on American history, *The Checklist* provided the first comprehensive list of local histories of the nation's towns, counties, and regions.

¹⁹Frederic Beecher Perkins, *Checklist for American Local History: Reprinted with Additions from the Bulletins of the Boston Public Library* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1876); Frederic B. Perkins, *The Best Reading: Hints on the Selection of Books; on the Formation of Libraries, Public and Private; on Courses of Reading, Etc. With a Classified Bibliography for Easy Reference*, 4th rev. and enl., continued to Aug. 1876, with the addition of select lists of the best French, German, Spanish and Italian literature. ed. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1877).

²⁰Ibid.

Perkins's *Checklist* continued to be useful and popular for many years. Indeed, twenty years after its initial publication, it was included in Edward Channing and Albert Hart's *Guide to the Study of American History* published in 1896. Listed as the first entry in the guide's section on state and local history, its breadth and depth still made it the best resource to guide librarians in selecting books for local history collections.

Perkins's best-known bibliographic work is the fourth edition of *Best Reading*, which was published in 1877 while Perkins was still at BPL. Before describing Perkins's fourth edition, a brief discussion of the book's previous history is warranted. The first edition of *Best Reading* was published in 1872. The bibliography was designed to serve as a guide for librarians in purchasing the most important books for their library collections. It was not a comprehensive bibliography but a selective list of books all medium sized libraries should possess.

Best Reading was so well received by librarians (and the reading public) that a revised edition was quickly reissued in 1873 that "corrected errors and omissions." Perkins was very involved in the compilation of these first two editions, though the work was done in collaboration with G. P. Putnam, a prominent American book publisher. As Putnam states in the 1873 edition's preface, "In the plan and arrangement of this work, and the selection and classification of titles, we are largely indebted to the valuable aid of Mr. Frederick B. Perkins, whose suggestions in regard to 'The Owning of Books,' 'Book Clubs,' and 'Courses of Reading,' are given at the end of the Bibliographical list."²¹ The

²¹Frederic B. Perkins and George Palmer Putnam, *The Best Reading. Hints on the Selection of Books; on the Formation of Libraries, Public and Private; on Courses of Reading, Etc., with a Classified Bibliography for Easy Reference*, Rev. ed., Putnam's Handy-Book Series (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1873), 6; Also see Note from Fred B. Perkins, May 7, 1877, found in Frederic B. Perkins and George

work continued to be popular and was revised and enlarged again in 1875. Finally, the fourth edition was prepared and released in 1877, with Perkins serving as its managing editor.

Like many librarians of his day, Perkins was a bookman, writer, and scholar. He believed in the power of books and reading for people's education and improvement. With this in mind one can see that Perkins's general purpose in writing *Best Reading* is to encourage the selection and reading of good books. His hopes are expressed in the preface. "Nobody can know the deficiencies of such a piece of work half as well as they who do it," he wrote, "but imperfect as it is, it is confidently believed that this list is a safe one to purchase books by; and that, while a library containing all the books named in it would indeed not be complete in any one general or special department, it would nevertheless be an uncommonly comprehensive, instructive and readable collection, either for a citizen or for a town."²² Perkins's goal is to provide his readers with a simple, clear, and effective list to guide them in selecting books.

Best Reading is divided into two parts. The main part is a comprehensive list of recommended books, while the second part contains essays on books and reading. Part

Palmer Putnam, *The Best Reading. Hints on the Selection of Books; on the Formation of Libraries, Public and Private; on Courses of Reading, Etc., with a Classified Bibliography for Easy Reference*, Putnam's Handy-Book Series; (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1872). (Google Book Search) http://books.google.com/books?id=d1GErWH9f14C&printsec=titlepage&source=gbs_summary_r&cad=0#PPP6,M1. An interesting note appears to have been attached to one of the front end papers of Harvard's copy of the 1st edition of *Best Reading*. It was then digitized by Google when they digitized Harvard's collection. The note is on Boston Public Library letterhead and signed by Perkins. It clarifies Perkins's work on *Best Reading*. In it he states that he made out the original plan and list for the 1st edition while Putnam did the editing. In the last edition (the fourth) Perkins did all the work except some of the foreign language lists.

²²Ibid., vi. For a thorough discussion of the library professions' wrestling with the idea of "best books" see chapter one of Wiegand, *The Politics of an Emerging Profession*, 14-39.

one is made up of eight different sections that list some 100,000 books in just over 300 pages. The first and largest section is the “Classified List of English and American Publications.” It is made up of about 525 topics listed in alphabetical order. Each topic has several titles listed (some topics obviously have more than others). Topic titles were chosen for ease of use, so common names were used with cross reference notes where needed (e.g. the entry for “birds” states “see cage birds or ornithology”). To guide the librarian in selecting books, some of the titles are listed with an “a” to the left of them and some are listed with a “b” to the left of them. Those marked with an “a” indicated that it was the best book “at a moderate cost,” while those marked with a “b” are the best books that are “more elaborate or costly.” A slightly more sophisticated system was used to rank the fiction portion of the list. It contained “a,” “b,” and “c” rankings as well as an “*” system. Those marked with an “a” were considered “standard literature.” Those marked with a “b” were considered “good novels,” and those marked with a “c” were considered “less desirable,” but not detrimental. These ratings were followed by a series of asterisks that identified the best books in the fiction category.

Perkin’s list of the best American and English books is followed by seven additional lists that are considerably shorter (each about three to four pages long). The second is a list of “Complete Works, English and American;” the third, a list of “Periodicals, English and American;” the fourth, a list of French books; the fifth a list of German books; the sixth a list of Spanish books; the seventh a list of Italian books; and eighth a list of juvenile books in English. These eight lists make up the bulk of the book and are followed by the second part, which consists of a few short essays either compiled

or written by Perkins. These are about books and reading. They are titled 1) “Readings on Reading”; 2) “Suggestions for Courses of Reading”; 3) “On Owning Books”; and 4) “Hints on Book Clubs.” Taken together these essays seek to encourage people to read and to guide them in what and how they read. A brief description of each section will demonstrate this intent clearly. The “Readings on Reading” section is a compilation of quotations from various authors that extol the virtues of books and reading. The authors range widely, from contemporaries of Perkins’s (e.g. Henry Ward Beecher) to ancients such as Cicero. Perkins includes an interesting mix of quotes on topics such as “the duty of owning books,” “how to read books,” “treasures of libraries,” and “book-buying.” For example, in discussing one’s duty to own books, Henry Ward Beecher claimed that “among the earliest ambitions to be excited...among all that are struggling up in life from nothing to something, is that of owning, and constantly adding to, a library of good books....A library is not a luxury, but one of the necessities of life.” When discussing the value of reading, Socrates encourages his readers to “employ your time in improving yourself by other men’s documents; so shall you come easily by what others have labored hard for.”²³

The next section, “Suggestions for Courses of Reading,” is a rambling piece of prose where Perkins discusses different approaches to reading. He first explains that there are a great many books that one can read so one should choose what he or she reads with great care. He then briefly argues that reading is important. He does this by comparing reading to other forms of “mental exercise” (e.g. oratory, debate, listening to

²³Perkins, *Best Reading*, 306-307.

lectures, etc.) and concluding that reading is the most important. His argument is best summed up in the following statement: “But if only one of these kinds of mental exercise might be had, it should be books, books, books, a thousand times to one.”²⁴

After establishing *why* it is important to read, Perkins turns his efforts toward *what* one should read. He begins by explaining that some will argue that it is futile to create a course of reading since there is so much that one can read. However, he goes on to argue, “It is very agreeable to sit down and plan out a full and rounded series of noble books, which shall train the mind in strength and swiftness and beauty.”²⁵ He then discusses several different “courses of reading” that can be used to guide people in choosing what to read. Some of the courses are quite long discussions about what one should read (the Bible, “classics,” different histories, etc.) and the order in which they should read them. Others are small lists of rules such as: “1) Never read any book that is not a year old; 2) Never read any but famed books; and 3) Never read any books but what you like.”²⁶

Following the discussion of *what* people should read, Perkins moves on to suggest a few methods of *how* to read. These suggestions are simple and practical words of advice that are still helpful 140 years later. They range from simple suggestions, such as do not read too much at a time and carry reading with you so as to be able to read in idle moments, to more complex plans about the best approach to reading. Some examples of these latter suggestions include reading the front matter of a book (preface, title page,

²⁴Ibid., 320.

²⁵Ibid., 322.

²⁶Ibid., 329.

introduction, and table of contents) and reading more than one book or author to search out both sides of an issue. Perkins concludes this section of the *Best Reading* by recommending that one have several good reference works on hand to help with his or her understanding of a book's content.

The final section under "Courses of Reading" is a discussion of the "physiology of reading." This section is full of advice regarding the physical act of reading. It begins with the suggestion that, "Until you are twenty years old, do not use your eyes before breakfast. All the system is relaxed then, and any exertion is unnatural and injurious."²⁷ It continues with other suggestions and comments, covering such problems as reading in dim light and the harshness of gas lighting. Some suggestions sound like speed reading techniques in that they recommend taking in whole words and lines at once as this is easier on the eyes. Finally, this portion closes with the suggestion that one could be reading two or three different books, all of varying difficulty, at once.

The third essay in part two is titled "Owning Books." Here, Perkins goes on at length about the large number of books available and how it is impossible to own them all. He then spends time suggesting books that the reader should own, including the Bible, Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, and other reference works. He goes on for a few pages and then catches himself by stating, "But I am sliding back into Courses and Methods of Reading. I have said enough to show how difficult it must be—how out of the question, in fact, to give one single lot of even a dozen books which are the best

²⁷Ibid., 334.

dozen for everybody.... I shall only say, in the closing chapter: Own all the books you can. Use all the books you own, and as many more as you can get.”²⁸

The final essay in *Best Reading* is about book clubs. Perkins lays out a step-by-step plan about how one could run a book club. To begin, he suggests that one recruit no more than twenty people. He then estimates how much money each member should contribute (four dollars per person). He also advises on what books could be purchased by the club and how they should circulate among the members. Finally, he makes suggestions for how to maintain the book club’s collection. In *Best Reading*, the librarian and average reader gets the practical advice of a brilliant bookman and scholar who spent his life reading, collecting, and learning. Through the closing essays, Perkins acts as a guide through the literary world and attempts to help readers make the best use of their reading time and effort. That he was successful in his attempts is evident from how the book was received and how widely it was used.

At the time of its release, the fourth edition of *Best Reading* was reviewed in the bibliography section of the *Library Journal* where it received high praise. The reviewer acknowledged that this was “almost a new work” increasing in size by “more than a third.” He compliments Perkins by stating, “The difficulty of the task which the editor has undertaken is one which will be appreciated only by the librarian and professional cataloguer. A guarantee for its completeness and accuracy is to be found both in the long experience of Mr. Perkins in such work, and in the fact that all the bibliographical

²⁸Ibid., 339.

resources of the Boston Public Library were at his disposal.”²⁹ The reviewer goes on to praise Perkins’s selections of books and the arrangement of his lists, concluding, “Taking the work as a whole, with a single reference to its object, there can be no question that it is simply invaluable to every librarian or book-buyer.”³⁰ In an article titled “The Coming Catalogue,” Melvil Dewey also praised Perkins for his “admirable” work in *Best Reading*. These two reviews and others that followed made clear the respect and admiration Perkins enjoyed among his colleagues and the significant contribution his *Best Reading* made to current professional practice.

Best Reading proved to be so successful that Putnam and Sons decided to print a regular update. Titled *The Library Companion*, this bibliography was also compiled by Perkins. As described in the *Library Journal*, *The Library Companion* was a quarterly list of new publications that would be combined into a single annual at the end of the year. The books included in the lists would be annotated by Perkins, who according to the journal, had “a remarkable faculty for putting a great deal into a few bright words.”³¹ The first volume of *The Library Companion* appeared in March 1877, and it continued on a quarterly basis until 1880, when Perkins left Boston.³²

From May 1874 through late 1879 Perkins was involved in many endeavors while employed at BPL. As described in this chapter, he not only was kept busy by his daily

²⁹J.M.H., “Best Reading,” *Library Journal* 1, no. 7 (1877): 260.

³⁰*Ibid.*: 261.

³¹“The Best Reading,” *Library Journal*,” 236.

³²“Putnam's Library Companion,” (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1877). There is little evidence for how long this publication lasted. However, it seems to have ended with volume 4 in 1880. This would coincide with the year Perkins left Boston and moved to San Francisco.

work, he also produced bibliographic tools and cataloging manuals that would prove to be major contributions to the field. At the same time, Perkins was extremely involved in professional activities involving the ALA and the *Library Journal*. I will discuss his involvement in these areas as well as his contributions to the *1876 Special Report* in the following chapter.

Controversy at BPL

Even as Perkins seemed to be gaining in influence in the library profession, things were not going well at BPL. In May 1877, Justin Winsor resigned his post as Superintendent of BPL (taking a position at Harvard) because of his concern over the direction the library was taking under the trustees' leadership. The exact circumstances surrounding Winsor's departure are a bit convoluted. The City of Boston was struggling financially and so the City Council adopted an ordinance that allowed them to adjust the salaries of library staff. Prior to this ordinance, council members only had the power to hire the superintendent and set his or her salary. The Library Board of Trustees had the responsibility of setting the pay for all other employees. As a result of the new ordinance the City Council lowered several employees' salaries, including that of Winsor. The Library Trustees were outraged and they said so in the annual report of 1877. Shortly after Winsor's salary was lowered he received an offer from the President of Harvard University to take over the recently vacated librarian position there. Winsor was enjoying his service at BPL and was hesitant to leave. The Library Trustees, in hopes to entice Winsor to stay, requested that the City Council raise Winsor's salary back to its previous amount, retroactive to the day it was cut. After some debate the council decided

to raise Winsor's salary, but not retroactively. This angered Winsor, and he resigned his post and accepted the position at Harvard.³³

The BPL position remained empty until Mellen Chamberlain took office in October 1878, as "Librarian" rather than "Superintendent" so the City Council could maintain control over the library's operations. Though Perkins remained on staff after Winsor's departure (even gaining a new title of Assistant Librarian), he quickly grew unhappy about the way the library was being run. His unhappiness would eventually lead to his resignation in December 1879. In the minutes from the trustees meeting of January 20, 1880, Perkins's resignation is officially announced. It states, "The librarian read a communication from Mr. F. B. Perkins dated Dec. 18, 1879, resigning his position after the month of Dec. 1879, and reported that by subsequent arrangement Mr Perkins left the service at the close of Dec. 23."³⁴ Perkins's resignation was also announced in the January issue of the *Library Journal*.³⁵

Following his resignation, Perkins wrote a series of letters to Boston Mayor F.O. Prince expressing his opposition to the administration of the library.³⁶ In the first letter, dated February 1, 1880, one learns that Perkins did not feel he could address his grievances while he was still an employee. Furthermore, he believed that the Board of

³³For an excellent summary of these events see Whitehill, *Boston Public Library*, 103-09.

³⁴Boston Public Library, *Board of Trustees Records of the Corporation*, Vol. 1, 1878-1885. Boston Public Library Microtext Department, Boston, MA.

³⁵"Cooperation Committee Appointment," *The Library Journal* 5, no. 1 (1880): 12. This same announcement also includes news of Perkins's resignation from his position on the ALA Cooperation Committee and his editorship of *The Saturday Magazine*.

³⁶See Whitehill, *Boston Public Library*, 116-17. Whitehill gives a brief synopsis of Perkins letters in his history of BPL.

Trustees was inadequate and so he was addressing his concerns to the mayor directly rather than to them. He writes, "It is precisely the composition and methods of the Board, that need reforming; and therefore to address it directly is the least likely way to reform it."³⁷ Perkins's chief complaint concerns the high expense of cataloging books. He explains that it costs about \$100,000 to catalog and circulate \$25,000 worth of books. He then claims that he could save the city between \$5,000 and \$7,000 a year by changing the way cataloging was done. He urges the mayor to save the city money by making necessary changes, though without elaborating elaborate on what specific changes should be made.

In Perkins's second letter, dated March 15, 1880, he mentions "unexpected references in the common council on Feb 19th [1880] to my former letter." He defends himself to the mayor by claiming that the person who mounted the public attack against him focused on his "character" because that person could not attack him (Perkins) based on the facts. He continues to argue that library management has serious flaws that he could only address after leaving his library employment. Perkins then reiterates that he wants to see a change in the way cataloging is done because it is wasteful and sloppy. He writes, "In spite of the contradiction in the council, I repeat that at least five thousand dollars a year is wasted in the salaries alone in the cataloguing department of the Boston Public Library, and that I can at any time prove this to any competent tribunal."³⁸ He

³⁷Frederick Beecher Perkins to F.O. Prince, February 1st, 1880: 1. In [1st]-3d letter on the Library, Frederick Beecher Perkins, 1880. Boston Athenaeum.

³⁸Frederick Beecher Perkins to F.O. Prince, March 15, 1880: 2. In [1st]-3d letter on the Library, Frederick Beecher Perkins, 1880. Boston Athenaeum.

goes on to claim that there are great “errors and defects in the catalog,” even though a large amount of money is spent in that department. He also complains that there is only one copy of an official catalogue and that this creates huge problems. He closes this letter by reiterating his complaint that the administrative organization is defective because it is run by committee and has no proper head.

Perkins wrote the third letter, dated April 29, 1880, after meeting with a sub-committee of BPL’s trustees. Reiterating what he had said at the meeting, Perkins outlines how he thinks the cataloging should be done to save money. He painstakingly walks through the process of cataloging a book and gives an allotted time for each step. According to Perkins’s calculation, cataloging of BPL’s books should take “seven persons working 1,995 days . . . for \$8660, instead of sixteen persons, working 3328 days for \$12,972.”³⁹ He ends with a bit of sarcasm, stating that someone could “make a handsome living” cataloging books for \$10,000 a year instead of what is currently paid.

Despite Perkins’s efforts, nothing ever came of his plea for a change in the administration and cataloging practices at BPL. There is no record of Mayor Prince’s actions or whether he ever directly responded to Perkins. However, in the Common Council meeting of February 19, 1880, Perkins’s concerns are briefly mentioned. In the midst of a discussion on the local hospital, a councilman raises concerns over the waste pointed out in Perkins’s “circular.” Councilman Williams then addresses these concerns when it is his turn to speak:

³⁹Ibid.

I also received a copy of the circular which the gentleman had from Mr. Perkins, and took a little pains to investigate it. The cost of cataloguing in The Boston Athenaeum is greater than that quoted by Mr. Perkins in regard to the Public Library. There is also another reason why the cost of cataloguing in the Public Library has been large. The library left to the city by Mr. Ticknor, consisting largely of Spanish and Portuguese books, had a condition in it that it should be catalogued in a certain manner. That cataloguing has added very largely to this expense, but it is nearly finished. In this mere item, I think that the expense is not larger in the city library than it is elsewhere. A good catalogue is necessary. You cannot get along without it.⁴⁰

This seemed to quiet any concern over Perkins's protests and nothing ever came from his letters to Mayor Prince.

Conclusion

Despite the contributions outlined above, Perkins's work while in Boston has been largely overlooked. This is partially due to the huge personalities that surrounded him. He was closely connected and involved with library giants such as Justin Winsor and Melvil Dewey. These legendary figures simply overshadowed Perkins and they became the focus as historians told the story of the development of the library profession. Perkins's personality also lessened the long-term impact of his work. He was brilliant, hard working, and extremely productive. However, his energies were spread out over several areas including, editing, writing, lecturing, working with organizations, politicking, and librarianship. This diffusion of his energies meant that he never pursued anything in depth and didn't push any of his ideas in the same way that Dewey (and others) did. He also had a restless spirit and tended to move from location to location and job to job. He never stayed in any one area for more than ten years. His impatience,

⁴⁰City of Boston, *Proceedings of the Common Council*, February 19, 1880, 103. Boston Public library, Government Documents Department, Boston, MA.

tendency toward anger, ease in feeling slighted, and general inability to get along with people also contributed to his downfall. In leaving BPL, these weaknesses stand out. Rather than staying and working through the proper channels to improve BPL, he resigned and chose to “fight” from a distance through letters to the mayor. In these letters he came across as condescending, which alienated him from those he was trying to persuade. He also seemed to exaggerate to make a point, which allowed his opponents to easily dismiss his ideas.

These personality issues can also be seen in his resignation from the editorship of *The Saturday Magazine*. In his final issue as editor, he makes a public statement explaining his resignation. His opening sentence explains that he is resigning because of other “business offers,” which the reader is led to believe will require more of his time. However, the rest of his statement reveals the true reason for his resignation. He writes:

I leave it, short lived as it is, with reluctance, and indeed, would have willingly overworked, if necessary, to continue it, if I could have agreed with Mr. William Guild, my associate, upon the necessity (as I consider it) of absolute punctuality in the issue. I have found myself totally unable to secure this punctuality; and the sort of disrepute which has already begun to be the consequence is something to flee from, and would necessarily frustrate any exertions of mine, should I continue them.⁴¹

It is clear that his inability to work through a disagreement with his business associate led him to run from his work on *The Saturday Magazine* rather than stay and find solutions.

By mid-1880 Perkins would leave Boston to become the director at the San Francisco Public Library. Unfortunately, many of these same problems would follow him there. He would remain there only seven years before he resigned after an often

⁴¹Fred B. Perkins, “Editorial Notice,” *The Saturday Magazine* 3, no. 6 (1880): 196.

tumultuous tenure. Before turning to Perkins's work in San Francisco, in Chapter 4, I will discuss his professional contributions through his work with the ALA, the *Library Journal*, and the *1876 Special Report* in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

The Founding of a Profession: Frederick Perkins and the American Library Association, the *Library Journal*, and the 1876 *Special Report*, 1876 – 1887

Eighteen seventy-six is a landmark year in American library history. It witnessed the first significant conference of librarians, the establishment of the American Library Association, the founding of the *Library Journal* and the publication of the *Special Report on Public Libraries in the United States*, which has been described by library historian Francis Miksa as the “magnum opus of library economy.”¹ The ALA provided a forum for librarians to work out important aspects of their profession. In the pages of its *Library Journal*, new ideas were tested and refined, leading to the improvement and codification of new professional practices. Released during the Librarian’s Conference of 1876, the *Special Report on Public Libraries in the United States* became a textbook for every aspiring librarian for years to come. Indeed, the professional achievements of 1876 were so monumental one eminent librarian declared that “through all coming time 1876 will be looked upon as the most eventful year in the history of libraries—the year in which the librarian fairly claimed and received at the hand of the public his place among the recognized professions.”²

The history of this important year and the professional advances made in the decade that followed are well documented. However, not everyone’s story is known and their contribution to the profession’s development has gone unnoticed. Frederick Perkins

¹ Francis Miksa, “The Making of the 1876 Special Report on Public Libraries,” *Journal of Library History, Philosophy, and Comparative Librarianship* 8, no. 1 (1973): 30.

²As quoted by Melvil Dewey, “The American Library Association,” *Library Journal* 1, no. 7 (1877): 245-46. Also see Thomison, *A History of the American Library Association, 1876-1972*, 10.

is one of these people. Not only did he play a role in founding the American Library Association and the *Library Journal*, he was also a major contributor to the *1876 Special Report*. In the following chapter, I will describe Perkins's role in the ALA, the *Library Journal*, and the *1876 Special Report* and provide some explanation as to why his work has largely gone unnoticed.

Perkins and the American Library Association

Most historians trace the origins of the ALA to the “convention of librarians” held in 1853. This was the first time that American librarians met in an organized fashion. Though the conference did not succeed in establishing a lasting professional organization, it did have a lasting impact. As Dennis Thomison explains in his history of the ALA:

At the time of this meeting, it was the intention of those in attendance that there should be annual meetings and that a permanent organization should be established. In both respects, this convention failed; but the idea was implanted in the minds of librarians....The convention is significant, then, not for what was accomplished during its sessions, but because it was the progenitor of the more famous conference of 1876.³

It was twenty-three years until there was another national conference of librarians. However, this second meeting, held in 1876, was much more successful. There is some debate about who first initiated the idea. However, it is generally agreed that the first mention of a conference appeared in March 1876 in the pages of the London periodical, the *Academy*. The article was seen by Frederick Leypoldt, publisher of the American *Publisher's Weekly*, who reprinted it in the April 1876 issue of his magazine. Shortly thereafter, Charles Cutter referred to the *Publisher's Weekly's* article in a piece he wrote

³Dennis Thomison, *A History of the American Library Association, 1876-1972* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1978), 1.

for the April 1876 issue of the *Nation*, and a movement had begun. These articles probably stirred the interest of many librarians across the country. The most important person who took notice was Melvil Dewey. He met with Fredrick Leypoldt and R. R. Bowker of the *Publisher's Weekly* in May. After consulting with Justin Winsor, arguably the most influential librarian at that time, the three decided to issue a call for a librarian's conference.⁴

Eventually, a preliminary call was sent out to "librarians and all interested in library and bibliographical work." It was signed by twenty-eight librarians, including Frederick Perkins and other prominent librarians.⁵ The initial suggestion was to meet in Philadelphia on August 15, 1876. After some negotiation the time was changed to October 4-6, 1876, and a new call was sent signed by even more librarians. The response to these calls was favorable and the librarians' conference of 1876 was held on schedule. One hundred and three people attended the conference in Philadelphia. Though Perkins signed the call for the conference, for some unknown reason he did not attend.

The conference proved to be a wild success. There were papers presented on a broad range of topics, the *Special Report* was distributed, Cutter's rules for cataloging (part two of the *Special Report*) were presented, and the first edition of Dewey's classification system was discussed. During the conference's last session, the "Committee on Permanent Organization" presented a constitution for an American Library Association. This was followed by discussion and motions that eventually led to

⁴See *Ibid.*, 5-10. At this same meeting the three discussed creating a professional journal for librarians. So this meeting can arguably mark the beginning of both the ALA and the *Library Journal*.

⁵"Call for a Library Conference," date unknown. Box 1, ALA Conference 1876-1879. Melvil Dewey Papers, Columbia University.

the establishment of the ALA. Justin Winsor was elected the organization's first president, A. R. Spofford, W. F. Poole, and H. A. Homes were elected vice-presidents, and Dewey was elected secretary.⁶ The "Committee on the Sizes of Books" was established as well as the "Committee on Cooperative Indexing." These two became the first two official committees of the new organization. Finally, the *Library Journal* was established as the official journal of the new organization.⁷

Despite his absence from this very important convention, Perkins quickly became involved in the ALA. He was appointed to the ALA's Cooperation Committee, which was considered part of the executive board, and was involved in the many discussions taking place at the annual conferences and in the pages of the *Library Journal*. In addition to his years as part of the Cooperation Committee, Perkins was a vice-president in 1882 and a councilor in 1883. Finally, he served as the first editor of the *ALA Catalog*, and briefly held the position of "consulting librarian" for the ALA.

One of the most significant contributions Perkins made to the ALA in these early years was his work as a member of the Cooperation Committee. As discussed above, the officers of the ALA were elected at the October conference. One of their first tasks was to finalize the constitution presented at the conference. This was completed in the spring of 1877 and the constitution was printed in the March issue of the *Library Journal*.

Article four of the constitution discusses the appointing of officers and standing

⁶Ainsworth Rand Spofford was the Director of the Library of Congress from 1864 – 1897. William F. Poole was Director at the Boston Athenaeum from 1856 – 1869, Director at Cincinnati Public Library from 1869 – 1873, and Director of Chicago Public library from 1873 – 1887. H.A. Homes was the Director of the New York State Library from 1862 – 1886.

⁷For a detailed discussion of the events of that day, see Maddox, "Trends and Issues in American Librarianship," 52-54.

committees. Section six (of article four) states, “The Co-operation Committee shall consider and report upon plans designed to secure uniformity and economy in methods of administration; and the Association, Board, or Committee shall have power to refer subjects to special committees.”⁸ As already noted, the members of this committee were also considered part of the executive board of the ALA.

The Cooperation Committee was important because of the role it played in helping to standardize the work of librarians. Before this time, little discussion was taking place on the “how” of librarianship. The Cooperation Committee would take the lead in the movement to standardize and professionalize library practice. In his introduction to the ALA constitution, Dewey discusses the importance of the Cooperation Committee. “Of the standing committees,” Dewey claimed, “the one on Co-operation will probably prove the most important organ of the Association, as most of the practical work will fall to its share or to that of its sub-committees.... We must have on this committee men able and willing to give much time and hard study to their work.”⁹ With these high expectations, the Executive Committee chose Charles Cutter, Fredrick Jackson, and Fredrick B. Perkins as the original members of the first Cooperation Committee.¹⁰

The committee’s first report was printed in the April issue of the *Library Journal*. The beginning of the report is a call for libraries to send two copies of all “business blanks” (reports, call slips, etc) to the ALA secretary. This collection of library forms

⁸“The American Library Association,” *Library Journal* 1, no. 7 (1877): 254.

⁹Melvil Dewey, “Editorial,” *Library Journal* 1, no. 7 (1877): 251-52.

¹⁰Frederick Jackson was Superintendent of Newton Free Library, Newton, MA.

was intended as reference for other ALA members as well as to aid the Cooperation Committee in designing standardized forms that would be promoted and sold by the association. At the time of the release of this call for forms, the Cooperation Committee had already been selling catalog cards. Indeed, 150,000 of these standard cards had already been ordered at the time of the publication of the report.¹¹

Subsequent reports appeared in each issue of the *Library Journal*, totaling five reports in volume one. These reports described the committee's work in "minor" matters, such as the development of accession books and catalog cards, and in more important issues concerning cooperative cataloging and indexing. The second report, for example, recommended that libraries create an accession catalog (described in detail in a previous article) and then offered a list of standard abbreviations for use in cataloging. The committee hoped that a finalized abbreviations list could be adopted at the next ALA annual meeting. The third and fourth reports describe different tools created by the committee for use in the administration of libraries. Report three includes more discussion of the accession catalog while report four suggests a uniform covering for books with a short list of circulation rules printed on the front. These proposals were also intended for discussion and adoption at the next annual meeting.

The fifth and final report is a much longer report and covered more topics. The first is a discussion of library statistics and how to make them uniform for the sake of comparison between libraries. Other topics addressed library binding, abbreviations,

¹¹The committee advertised its supplies throughout the *Library Journal*. They sold catalog cards, accession books, catalog binders, and even bookcases. See Melvil Dewey et al., *Library Journal* 1 (1877): 346, 83, and 454.

binders, printed numbers, call slips, catalog slips, shelf catalogs, bookcases, and the ALA's supply department. The discussion of the supply department is really an announcement that it would have "everything needed in a library except the books, pamphlets and periodicals themselves."¹² The committee also encourages librarians to use the supply department for their needs so the endeavor to standardize forms and cataloging supplies would be successful.¹³

The reports from the Cooperation Committee that appear in volume one of the *Library Journal* are a good representation of those submitted in subsequent years. The Cooperation Committee continues to report on its work in improving library administration. Committee members also advised on practical matters, such as shelving, indexes, book sizes, card sizes, cataloging issues, covering papers, and library manuals (the list goes on and on). In the three years that Perkins was on the committee, it addressed many professional practices and provided important recommendations for libraries to follow in their day-to-day operational duties. It helped facilitate the conversation on best library practice and disseminate the findings to the larger professional body.

Participation in the Cooperation Committee was just one way that Perkins contributed to the development of the ALA. He was also involved in the many

¹²"Co-Operation Committee-Fifth Report," *Library Journal* 1, no. 12 (1877): 433.

¹³Initially, the supply department seems to be successful in their attempts to standardize forms, etc., but this is short lived. By the end of June 1879 (at the third annual ALA conference) the Cooperation Committee announced the dissolution of the supply department. See C. A. Cutter, "Cooperation Committee-Supply Department," *Library Journal* 4, no. 7 (1879): 286-87. Also see Wiegand, *The Politics of an Emerging Profession*, 24.

discussions taking place at the association's annual conferences and in the pages of the *Library Journal*. His wide array of interests quickly becomes evident in the many topics he discusses with ease. In 1877 the ALA conference was held in New York. Perkins did not present a paper at this conference, but his comments frequently appear in the proceedings. One can see his involvement in the discussions concerning *Poole's Index*, accession catalogs, book purchases, uniform title entries, and book bindings.¹⁴ Some of these comments are mundane, while others provide more substance. For example, his suggestion to send the issue of accession catalogs back to the Cooperation Committee is endorsed and his suggestion for amending the fifth rule for uniform title entries (under the new cooperative cataloging rules) also gains approval.

In later conferences Perkins continues to weigh in on a variety of subjects, but most of his contributions are in the area of cataloging and classification. In 1879 the annual conference was held in Boston, and Perkins again takes an active part. For this conference he continues in his role on the Cooperation Committee and is part of the Committee on Papers. He also contributes to the cataloging conversations by presenting a paper titled "Classification in Dictionary Catalogues." As discussed in the previous chapter, cataloging in the US at this time was only just beginning to mature. Jewett had published his cataloging code for the Smithsonian in 1852 and Cutter had published his "Rules for a Printed Dictionary Catalog" in 1876. While these cataloging rules had begun to have influence on the profession, librarians across the U.S. were far from

¹⁴See "The Proceedings," *Library Journal* 2, no. 1 (1877): 16-39.

agreement on the best way to catalog books in their libraries. Most still used locally developed methods, and this meant that uniformity was mostly nonexistent.

In this paper at the 1879 ALA conference, Perkins advocates for a standard cataloging code for subject headings. Up to this point no standard code existed, and it seemed to Perkins that this was a great need. Lucy Jane Maddox refers to his presentation as “an unusually entertaining, but factual, paper” in which Perkins “pleaded eloquently for the introduction of a systematic use of subjects in the dictionary catalog with adequate cross references.”¹⁵ Perkins further promotes the “use of a fixed, completed, detailed, written-out indexed classification of literature as a guide in cataloguing.”¹⁶ He wanted this code to be simple enough for anyone with “fair education and intelligence” to be able follow with only “moderate practice.” He argued that such a guide was “constantly needed for deciding what subject entry shall be selected, and what cross-references shall or shall not be made; for avoiding synonymy, cross-classifying, mis-reference, and non-reference.”¹⁷

Perkins’s code sought to produce a catalog that would lead the reader to every book in the library on a given subject without too much work on the reader’s part. Perkins goes on to clarify that he is arguing for a classification of literature (printed material) not a classification of knowledge or a scheme for arranging books. Instead, he

¹⁵Maddox, “Trends and Issues in American Librarianship,” 134-35. On pages 134 – 41, Maddox gives an excellent summary of Perkins’s argument in this paper as well as the subsequent work based on it.

¹⁶Fred B. Perkins, “Classification in Dictionary Catalogues,” *The Library Journal* 4, no. 7&8 (1879): 227.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

is arguing for a way of arranging entries in a catalog that enables the reader to easily locate the most titles on a given subject. Perkins then provides three detailed examples of his own searching, using the current catalogs at the Boston Public Library, which did not have such a classification system in place. He eventually found all he was looking for, but the searches were long and involved, leaving him frustrated. He claims that “it took hours of careful investigation by a systematic cataloguer and librarian of 20 years’ experience to mine out the facts.”¹⁸ Next, Perkins explains that Charles Cutter had proposed such a scheme in his chapter on dictionary catalogs in the *1876 Special Report*. However, Cutter eventually determined that such a systematic catalog was impossible because of the “immense labor” involved in creating it. Perkins disagrees with Cutter, “He is right in recommending the scheme of classification,” Perkins argues, “and wrong in substantially saying it can’t be done.”¹⁹

Perkins’s classification system begins with eight broad subject areas: 1) theology; 2) philosophy; 3) sociology; 4) literature; 5) history; 6) biography; 7) science; and 8) art. He briefly describes why he has chosen these categories and explores how various topics might fit hierarchically within them. Perkins called this top level of his hierarchy “classes.” These classes were then subdivided into “chapters” that were further divided into “sections.” He explains that “the name of each section is a topic or subject, and under it are to be entered the names of books relating to it, alphabetized by authors’

¹⁸Ibid., 229.

¹⁹Ibid., 230.

names.”²⁰ After explaining the organization of this system, Perkins gives two examples of how one can apply his scheme to existing catalogs. After these examples, he tells his listeners that they can find an example of his cataloging rules implemented in the New York Mercantile Library catalog (where he did the work). He then closes his presentation by addressing questions that might be raised and invites the audience to discuss his plan further.

Perkins’s ALA presentation was followed by a paper from Charles Cutter. In his opening remarks, Cutter comments on Perkins’s paper, saying he still did not think that such an undertaking could be accomplished by one library. However, with the new-found cooperation through the ALA, he did think that such a cataloging project could be accomplished by a person or a committee for all libraries. Cutter’s paper was followed by a paper from W. I. Fletcher, Assistant Librarian at the Watkinson Library in Hartford, Connecticut, on indexing and then a paper on binding from F. P. Hathaway of the BPL. Following questions regarding binding, there is further discussion on the issues raised by Perkins, Cutter, and Fletcher. According to the conference proceedings, “Mr. Bowker, speaking on the first three papers, expressed the opinion, in which he was prompted by Mr. Perkins, that there was an essential agreement, and not diversity, among them.”²¹ After further discussion, Bowker proposes the establishment of “a committee of five on an Index to Subject-headings,” which was agreed to without opposition.

²⁰Ibid., 232.

²¹“The Proceedings,” *Library Journal* 4, no. 7&8 (1879): 287.

These early discussions of standardized cataloging were well received by the conference attendees, as evidenced in a subsequent letter to the *Library Journal*. Here a librarian writes about his enthusiasm in hearing the papers read and his subsequent reading of them once they were published. He praises both Perkins's and Cutter's plans, concluding, "We need the aid of the best minds and the largest experience in perfecting a system of classification, and I look on it as a hopeful augury that the custodians of our most important libraries are showing an interest in the subject."²²

The Committee of Five appointed to develop the Index to Subject-Headings was comprised of some of the most influential men in librarianship: C. A. Cutter, W. I. Fletcher, S. B. Noyes, R. R. Bowker, and Frederick Perkins. They began their work by making a list of all the subject headings used at the Boston Athenaeum, but thereafter the committee found the project elusive. According to Charles Cutter, the committee's goal had been to "compile and publish an alphabetical [*sic*] list of subject-headings, as complete as possible, with some indication which was to be preferred, and a sketch of the principles upon which choice should be made." Yet in an 1881 report on their progress, Cutter admits that their work ceased because some committee members left the area (Bowker and Perkins) and the others were too busy with other projects. "Whether it will ever be resumed is very doubtful," Cutter concedes, especially as "one member of the committee, at least, is opposed to it"²³ Here, Cutter was referring to W. I. Fletcher. In a letter to Cutter, Fletcher explains "the one difficulty in the whole matter...namely, we

²²E.C.A., "On Classification and Alphabetical Cataloguing," *Library Journal* 4, no. 12 (1879): 446.

²³Charles Cutter, "Subject Headings," *Library Journal* 6, no. 4 (1881): 114.

can't agree!"²⁴ As a result of these disagreements, worked stopped on the index and the illustrious Committee of Five disbanded.

In subsequent years, Perkins continues to contribute to the growing discussion about cataloging and classification still taking place in ALA circles. At the 1882 conference in Cincinnati, J. N. Larned, the yearly reporter on classification, discusses Perkins's own classification system that was published the previous year.²⁵ At the 1883 conference in Buffalo, Perkins was the yearly reporter on shelf classification. Unfortunately, his report and the record of discussion were lost. As the conference proceedings explain,

In the absence of Mr. F. B. Perkins of San Francisco, his Report on Shelf-classification was read by Mr. Linderfeldt. (The report was accidentally lost; we have found it impossible to get a duplicate from the author, and reluctantly go to press without it). Mr. Dewey answered the objections brought forth by Mr. Perkins to the relative shelf arrangement.²⁶

I will discuss the Perkins/Dewey debates further in Chapter 5.

Perkins and the Library Journal

Between 1876 and 1887 Perkins also participated in other professional dialogs in the pages of the *Library Journal*. His interests are evident in the many topics he discussed, such as library management, collection development, and bibliography. For example, Perkins wrote to the editor complaining about an article written by "L. E. J." criticizing the cataloging of the New York Mercantile Library. Here he defends the

²⁴Ibid., 115.

²⁵Josephus Nelson Larned was Superintendent at the YMCA Library in Buffalo, NY, from 1877 – 1913. He served many roles in ALA including a term as President from 1893 – 1894.

²⁶"Second Session," *Library Journal* 8, no. 9-10 (1883): 264.

catalog and complains that the writer was improper in his tone. Immediately following Perkins's letter was the original author's rebuttal. It is interesting to note that Dewey supports "L. E. J." in an editorial he wrote in that same issue. Dewey surmises that Perkins was probably being defensive as he had done a bulk of the work on the catalog.²⁷

Perkins also led discussions on collection development appearing in the pages of the *Library Journal*. In the January 1877 issue, Perkins published an article titled "The Best Hundred Novels."²⁸ The article begins with an explanation of Perkins's choices as well as a suggestion on how one might use the list. A writer for the *New York Daily Times* commented on the list calling it "imperfect" and offering suggestions of his own.²⁹ Responding to these criticisms, Perkins defends his work in a subsequent *Library Journal* issue, arguing that no one could create such a list that would be universally accepted. "Who will furnish a Best Hundred Novels universally received?" Perkins wondered, continuing:

There have been objections to one at least of the Ten Commandments. If ten items proposed by divine authority do not command unanimous acquiescence, how many times less likely is it that a hundred items, proposed by a very human non-authority, will do as much? If I get suggestions enough, I will prepare a new list.³⁰

²⁷For the two letters see Fred B. Perkins and L.E. Jones, "The Mercantile Library Fiction-List," *Library Journal* 1, no. 7 (1877): 258-60.

²⁸F.B. Perkins, "Best Hundred Novels," *Library Journal* 1, no. 4-5 (1877): 166-67.

²⁹See Fred B. Perkins, "Hundred Best Novels," *Library Journal* 1, no. 8 (1877): 291. Perkins discusses his critics but does not mention any by name and no other evidence appears to more definitively identify them.

³⁰*Ibid.*

Apparently no one took him up on his suggestion since Perkins never revised his original list.

Another example of Perkins's *Library Journal* contributions is his participation in a seven-person symposium on "The New Poole's Index." Appearing in the June 1878 issue, Perkins introduces his ideas about the need for classification in dictionary catalogs as well as his idea about rules for use in cataloging. Others respond to Perkins's ideas in symposium, and it is clear that his thoughts have an impact on the discussion.³¹ Perkins also wrote extensively in the journal on other topics relating to library management. For example, he writes an article on the effects of gas-lights on book bindings in the April 1878 issue. He also writes an article on accession catalogs in 1879, brief notes on painted class numbers in 1882 and 1883, and describes a revolving card rack he invented in 1885.³²

Perkins as Consulting Librarian and Editor of the ALA Catalog

In addition to his submissions to the *Library Journal*, Perkins also did freelance work for the American Library Association. The bulk of this freelance work took place between December 1879 (after Perkins resigned from BPL) and June 1880 (when he moved to San Francisco) and revolved around two important projects: editing the first *ALA Catalog* and serving as ALA's "consulting librarian." In early 1880, the ALA hired

³¹See William F. Poole, "The Index Symposium and Its Moral," *Library Journal* 3, no. 5 (1878): 182. and R.R. Bowker, "On a Co-Operative Scheme of Subject-Entry, with a Key to Catalog Headings," *Library Journal* 3, no. 9 (1878): 326, 328-29.

³²F. B. Perkins, "Gas-Light and Bindings," *Library Journal* 3, no. 2 (1878): 64.; F. B. Perkins and Melvil Dewey, "The Accession Catalogue Again," *Library Journal* 3, no. 9 (1878): 336-38.; F. B. Perkins, "Painted Class Numbers," *Library Journal* 7, no. 11 (1882): 273.; F. B. Perkins, "Painted Class Numbers," *Library Journal* 8, no. 1 (1883): 16.; F. B. Perkins, "Charging Card Rack," *Library Journal* 10, no. 3 (1885): 63.

Perkins as its “consulting librarian.” This position was created to serve ALA members and their libraries by providing professional guidance to the many new and developing libraries cropping up all over the U.S. The consulting librarian would also serve the ALA by filling in the gaps when its members and officers were too busy with their own libraries to attend to ALA business. In the January 1880 issue of the *Library Journal*, Dewey announces “that the man pre-eminently qualified by ability and experience for the work [of ALA consulting librarian] has now been secured....The Boston Public Library has suffered no small loss, but the general cause of library progress has made an even greater gain in securing Mr. F. B. Perkins for this special work.”³³ He goes on to explain that Perkins will also be working on the *ALA Catalog*, but will immediately be available for consultation. In a letter to Dewey dated January 13, 1881, Perkins briefly discusses the consulting librarian position and suggests that he envisions it as a professional consulting business. “I thought when I came away that in a year or two I should be making a decent amount by the business in closing collateral matters that might grow out of it, such as cataloguing, furnishing libraries with books & charging a commission, etc.”³⁴ Unfortunately, this is all the evidence that remains of any of the work Perkins might have done as a consulting librarian.

The other freelance job Perkins did for the ALA is work on the *ALA Catalog*. The catalog was a project initiated by Melvil Dewey to help librarians in choosing books for their libraries. It was also meant to help patrons in selecting books. As discussed in

³³Melvil Dewey, “Consulting Librarianship,” *Library Journal* 5, no. 1 (1880): 17.

³⁴Frederick B. Perkins to Melvil Dewey, January 13, 1881. Box 9, ALA Publication, ALA Catalog. Melvil Dewey Papers, Columbia University.

Chapter 2, cataloging was still in its infancy in the early 1870s. Most library catalogs were not much better than a list of available titles with no information provided to help people in their choice of books. The *ALA Catalog* would remedy this by providing more thorough descriptions and notes for catalog entries. The list would contain around 5,000 titles, covering the “best books” in a given subject area. Once completed, the catalog would be printed and sold to ALA members.³⁵ Though Dewey’s call for a cooperative catalog went out in 1876, it would be three years before any work began. The Cooperation Committee picked up the cause and began to push it forward, but it proved a slow process. It wasn’t until November 1879 that enough funds were raised to begin work.

In the November 1879 issue of the *Library Journal*, an announcement was made that the *ALA Catalog* had received \$1,207 pledged to the work. This would allow the ALA to maintain control of the catalog without giving it over to a publisher. The project was given high priority status by the ALA Executive Board who appointed Perkins editor. The announcement states, “Mr. Perkins was selected to take the direct editorial charge, with authority to call any needed assistance in the name of the Association.”³⁶ Apparently, Perkins expected to be paid for his work on the *ALA Catalog*, though there is no evidence of a formal agreement between Perkins and the ALA.

³⁵For a complete discussion on the ideas for the *ALA Catalog* see Dewey, “*Coming Catalogue*,” 423-27.

³⁶“The American Library Association,” *Library Journal* 4, no. 11 (1879): 404. Also see Wiegand, *The Politics of an Emerging Profession*, 25.

After the November announcement, Perkins worked feverishly on the catalog and published a “provisional list of 5,000 books” in the *Library Journal*’s January 1879 issue. Perkins planned to divide the catalog into eight “departments” (religion, philosophy, society, history, biography, natural science, arts and trades, and literature) and under each department he would provide a list of topics. Perkins intended to enlist “the aid of specialists” to review his books for each topic and make suggestions for “revisions and annotation.”³⁷

Perkins used his professional connections to secure the expert help needed in compiling the catalog. For example, in a letter dated January 27, 1880, Perkins asked Justin Winsor for help in finding experts in twenty-one different fields. Winsor sent the letter back to him with names of experts in each field.³⁸ One of the experts Perkins consulted was Ezra Abbott, a professor at Harvard’s Divinity School.³⁹ In a letter dated April 5, 1880, he asked Abbot to help with his list of books on the Bible, suggesting that the books Abbot selected be “suitable for a New England town, mostly in English, and readily available.” Abbot responded by making additions and subtractions to the list and sending it back to Perkins.⁴⁰

³⁷F. B. Perkins, “A.L.A. Catalog,” *Library Journal* 5, no. 1 (1880): 12.

³⁸Frederick B. Perkins to Justin Winsor, January 27, 1880. Box 9, ALA Publication, ALA Catalog. Melvil Dewey Papers, Columbia University.

³⁹Ezra Abbot was a well respected Biblical scholar and librarian. He was the Assistant Librarian at Harvard from 1856 – 1872 and the Bussey Professor of New Testament Criticism and Interpretation at Harvard Divinity School from 1872 – 1884.

⁴⁰See F. B. Perkins, “A.L.A. Catalog: Report of Progress up to March 1, 1880,” *Library Journal* 5, no. 3 (1880): 77. Also see Frederick B. Perkins to Ezra Abbot, April 5, 1880. Box 9, ALA Publication, ALA Catalog. Melvil Dewey Papers, Columbia University.

The evidence available points to Perkins's work on the *ALA Catalog* moving full steam ahead until about May or June 1880 when he left Boston to become the Director of San Francisco Public Library. However, his responsibilities at SFPL did not leave him any extra time to continue working on the catalog. Moreover, Perkins had agreed to compile the catalog if he was paid for the work. He received some money directly from Dewey, but no regular schedule of payments was made. Faced with mounting pressures from SFPL and his frustration with the lack of payment, Perkins began corresponding with Dewey about remaining the editor of the catalog. In a letter dated October 20, 1880, Perkins writes Dewey about some money issues and about the *ALA Catalog*, asking if any definite plans have been made to "manufacture or make" the catalog. "When I know exactly how this matter stands," he advised, "I will be ready to say my own say about it."⁴¹

In the next letter Perkins complains about having too much work to do and again raises the issue of payment. "If I can draw pay," he writes Dewey, "I will go on with the A.L.A. Catalogue, with pleasure. What terms are offered me to complete the copy and carry the book through the press? You know I never agreed to do it without the cash."⁴² He goes on to explain that if he receives some money he will be happy to send some copy and "keep the press going." On December 19, Perkins writes to Dewey again concerning the catalog. It is apparent from his tone that he is becoming exasperated with the

⁴¹Frederick B. Perkins to Melvil Dewey, October 20, 1880. Box 9, ALA Publication, ALA Catalog. Melvil Dewey Papers, Columbia University.

⁴²Frederick B. Perkins to Melvil Dewey, November 9, 1880. Box 9, ALA Publication, ALA Catalog. Melvil Dewey Papers, Columbia University.

situation. He tells Dewey, “I am not such an ass as to give away for nothing the work I’ve already put into the A.L.A.C. \$100 is mighty little for it; but I am willing to hand over the Ms...upon a settlement at that rate for my work so far.” He concludes, “I shall be pleased to escape from the rest of the work, and I shall not do the rest of it except for cash as I require it. That was always my demand and I stick thereto.”⁴³

At an ALA Executive Board meeting held February 28, 1881, two matters were discussed pertaining to Perkins and the catalog. The minutes from the meeting state,

The following resolution, offered by President Winsor, was unanimously passed: Voted, that the chairman of the Finance Committee be authorized to pay Mr. Dui \$200 on account of outlay for the A.L.A. Catalog and on sending vouchers from Mr. Perkins, to close the account by such payments or receipts as may be needed. Voted, that the secretary receive from Mr. Perkins the unfinished MSS. of the A.L.A. Catalog and hold it subject to the decision of the Board as to its continuance.⁴⁴

Based on the Perkins – Dewey correspondence, it appears that Dewey had made an agreement with Perkins on behalf of the ALA without the board’s prior knowledge. He must have given Perkins \$200 for his work on the catalog from his own pocket and was demanding that Perkins return the money. When he refused, Dewey went to the rest of the ALA Board asking that they reimburse him for his expenses related to the catalog (i.e. the \$200 he gave to Perkins). The Board agreed, but only if proper receipts were given to Dewey and the catalog manuscript was returned.

⁴³ Frederick B. Perkins to Melvil Dewey, December 19, 1880. Box 9, ALA Publication, ALA Catalog. Melvil Dewey Papers, Columbia University.

⁴⁴ Melvil Dui, “American Library Association,” *The Library Journal* 6, no. 6 (1881): 181. Dewey was deeply involved in spelling reform and by this time in his life he was spelling his name using simplified spelling so it appears as “Dui.” He attempted to legally change his name to this form, but ultimately failed and eventually went back to spelling it “Dewey.”

On March 18, 1881, Perkins returned the catalog manuscript to Dewey. He states that he is shipping Dewey the “A.L.A. matter” and explains that “it is tied in various parcels, each of which will I believe be found intelligibly enclosed.” Perkins then describes in detail how he would proceed in creating the catalog and closes by stating “I wish the work good luck.” At this point he raises the money issues once again, arguing that any interest charged to him by Dewey on “the \$350.00” is “not a proper charge against me” because any delay in the printing of the catalog was not his fault. Perkins claims that he would have been ready to go to the printer just a few months after he began the work. After a little more discussion on money matters he closes the letter by stating, “I do really suppose that the work already done on the A.L.A. Cat. is worth more than \$150.00.”⁴⁵ With this letter Perkins’s work on the *ALA Catalog* unceremoniously ended. Though Dewey kept the manuscript for sometime, it is unclear whether any of it was ever used and the *ALA Catalog* would not be revised for several more years.

Perkins and the 1876 Special Report

Perkins’s writings in the *1876 Special Report* also stand as important contributions to library science. This report was produced by the U.S. Bureau of Education under the leadership of the U.S. Commissioner of Education, John Eaton. General Eaton became U.S. Commissioner of Education in March of 1870. He was an educator, clergyman, politician, and Civil War soldier. During the war, he worked with slaves who were coming to the Union Army for help after being freed. He worked to

⁴⁵Frederick B. Perkins to Melvil Dewey, March 18, 1881. Box 9, ALA Publication, ALA Catalog. Melvil Dewey Papers, Columbia University.

educate them so they could take their place in society. This was an immense organizational and political challenge that prepared Eaton for tasks that would come later in his life. After the war he briefly served as “State Superintendent of Instruction” for the state of Tennessee. Eventually, his old friend from the war, President Ulysses S. Grant appointed him U.S. Commissioner of Education. In his article about the making of the *1876 Special Report*, Miksa points out that Eaton believed that “libraries served as an extension of the nation’s formal education program.”⁴⁶ When he became the U.S. Commissioner of Education, Eaton’s respect for libraries led him to collect statistics on them for inclusion in his annual reports. Eventually his interest in libraries went beyond statistics, and he began to follow the profession’s developments. In October 1874 he sent a letter to several prominent librarians asking for data and informing them of his plan to “issue a circular on the origin, growth, present condition, uses, and special needs of libraries in the United States.”⁴⁷ This announcement led to the making of the *1876 Special Report*.

The *1876 Special Report’s* purpose is best summed up in its preface. Here, the editors acknowledge the importance of public libraries and librarians as extensions of public education. The preface also explains that the U.S. Commissioner of Education began keeping statistics on public libraries in 1870. This quickly led to

...more frequent calls for information regarding not only the number and extent of libraries already existing, but also respecting the different plans of organization, sources of revenue, etc.; and asking advice and information on the subjects of

⁴⁶ Miksa, “The Making of the 1876 Special Report,” 32. Miksa provides an excellent summary of Eaton’s life and work.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

library economy and administration, the selection, arrangement, cataloguing, binding, and preservation of books, the proper buildings, and all the multifarious interests of a public library. Similar calls came from librarians, from library committees, and from others charged with the duty of organizing new libraries, but having little experience in such affairs.⁴⁸

The growing interest in libraries and their administration led Eaton, in 1874, to enlist the help of Justin Winsor in finding experts to put together a book on libraries covering various topics. In the end,

There were thirty-five contributors to this monumental work, and the list reads like a Who's Who of Librarians in 1876. For diversity of subjects, Fred B. Perkins, Secretary of Boston Public Library, leads the list. He wrote five of the articles; A.R. Spofford wrote four and Winsor... W.I. Fletcher..., [and] Otis H. Robinson..., each wrote three articles; while Homes, Poole, Cutter, Noyes, and Bailey signed their names to two apiece.⁴⁹

With Eaton prodding them, these and other preeminent librarians contributed essays that would cover nearly every topic of consequence to library science, including library economy, history, bibliography, and cataloging. The latter topic was covered by Cutter's *Rules for a Printed Dictionary Catalog*, which became part two of the report. As mentioned, Perkins contributed five articles to the report on topics ranging from library history to administration.

The first chapter Perkins contributed is Chapter 9 on "Professorships of Books and Reading," coauthored with William Matthews.⁵⁰ This chapter had originally been

⁴⁸1876 *Special Report*, xi-xii.

⁴⁹M. Anne John O'Loughlin, "The Emergence of American Librarianship: A Study of Influences Evident in 1876" (PhD. diss., Columbia University, 1971), 147.

⁵⁰F.B. Perkins and William Matthews, "Professorships of Books and Reading," in *Public Libraries in the United States of America; Their History, Condition, and Management. Special Report* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876).

assigned to James Russell Lowell, an American romantic poet and diplomat, but Eaton could not persuade him to write it so he turned to Perkins and Matthews instead.⁵¹ To understand the importance of this essay one must understand its place in the history of bibliographic instruction. In the 1870s, the idea of bibliographic instruction in colleges and universities was still in its infancy. In her essay on the history of bibliographic instruction, Mary Salony points out that “As early as the 1820s, evidence of instruction was found at Harvard College. Occasionally, a librarian there lectured undergraduates on rare books found in the library.”⁵² Later, Ralph Waldo Emerson argued that universities should have a “professor of books” and these ideas were picked up on in the late 19th century as librarians argued for the creation (and importance) of such positions.

Eventually these ideas would take root and be cultivated (by people such as Justin Winsor and Raymond Davis), growing into the type of bibliographic instruction academic librarians still practice. Perkins’s article in the *1876 Special Report* has a direct connection with the idea of the importance of “bibliographic instruction” and should be seen as one of its earliest manifestations. As Miksa points out, Eaton “had conceived the original idea for the chapter [on “Professorships of Books and Reading”] from Emerson’s essay on ‘Books.’ In Eaton’s mind, a professorship of books and reading was for

⁵¹Also see Miksa, “The Making of the 1876 Special Report,” 30-43. Miksa’s work was invaluable for understanding the role Perkins played in getting many of the essays in the report completed.

⁵²Mary F. Salony, “The History of Bibliographic Instruction: Changing Trends from Books to the Electronic World,” in *Library Instruction Revisited: Bibliographic Instruction Comes of Age* ed. Lynne M. Martin (New York: Haworth Press, 1995), 33.

instruction of good reading.”⁵³ According to Miksa, Eaton would not be disappointed with Perkins’s article, which skillfully argued for the need of such a professorship, discussed current methods of reading, and suggested an approach to such a professorship.

Perkins begins the essay by arguing that a professorship of books and reading is about “methods, not subjects, to be taught.” He suggests that some would argue against this professorship because it would be “too large or too indistinct” from other disciplines. After describing other professorships Perkins explains the purpose of this new professorship of books: “It is something higher than any of these; it is not any one subject, any one field of investigation, but it is a method for investigating any subject in the printed records of human thought.”⁵⁴ Next Perkins briefly describes the inadequacies of the current literature on books and reading, which make it difficult for someone to teach themselves the proper ways of reading and studying. Perkins goes on to argue that the amount of printed matter that represents human knowledge has become so large that no one can read everything. Therefore, students need “technical professional guidance in examining it and selecting from it.”⁵⁵

The next section of this essay is titled “Reading as now Managed.” Here Perkins describes the current state of reading in America as “unorganized and unscientific.” He laments the “comparatively low merit of American literary work,” which he blames on

⁵³Miksa, “The Making of the 1876 Special Report,” 35. For further discussion of this idea see John Mark Tucker, “Emerson’s Library Legacy: Concepts of Bibliographic Instruction,” *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, no. 18 (1984): 15-16. In his essay Tucker points out that librarians in the late 18th century picked up on this idea. Here he quotes Perkins’s article in the *1876 Special Report* as an example.

⁵⁴Perkins and Matthews, “Professorships of Books and Reading,” 231.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 234.

the relative young age of the U.S. and its focus on the manual labor necessary when settling a new land. According to Perkins, the U.S. lagged far behind European countries in the quality of its literature. For these reasons universities should implement a professorship of books and reading. He argues, “Certainly, the influence of trained thinkers and students in directing the choice and valuation of books, and times and modes of reading, will do much to cause a demand for better and better books, and thus to cause the appearance of better and better writers.”⁵⁶

The final section of the essay is titled “Methods and Men.” In this section, Perkins made a few suggestions for how a professor of books and reading could approach his work. He recommends that instructors create an introductory general course of reading and then encourage their students to pursue more deeply whatever subject they enjoy. Perkins also advised professors that “If inferior books are preferred, the pupil should not be too suddenly forced away from them, but should be gradually trained to like better ones.”⁵⁷ Next, Perkins outlines three purposes for reading: 1) entertainment; 2) acquisition of knowledge; and 3) literary production. Of these three purposes, Perkins claimed that the third is the pursuit that should be emphasized in these courses.⁵⁸

Perkins arguments for the importance of a professorship of books and reading can be summed up in the following statement. He writes,

⁵⁶Ibid., 236.

⁵⁷Ibid., 237.

⁵⁸Also see John Avery Butters, “Concepts of Library Purpose in the Professional Works of Seven Founders of the American Library Association.” (Master’s Thesis, Catholic University of America, 1951). Butters briefly discusses Perkins essay in light of other library pioneers and claims that Perkins was perhaps unique in his emphasis on literary production as the highest purpose of reading.

And in like manner it [a professorship of books and reading] is in accordance with the spirit of the educational movement of to-day; for the knowledge of what to read and how to read it is the indispensable completion and finish to any one of the previous or other courses of study in any university or high grade institution of learning. No other department, in fact, could be contrived, so adapted to be the last symmetrizing and polishing process to a complete education.⁵⁹

Perkins believed that this professorship would fill a gap in higher education. The literature to teach proper reading skills was inadequate and therefore this professor's expertise was greatly needed. Perkins argued that people needed expert advice to navigate the vast sea of written human knowledge. Once they completed their studies people could continue their education on their own.

In his work on Emerson's influence on bibliographic instruction, Tucker points out that many librarians would subsequently argue for the very things Perkins argues for here. He writes, "A consistent theme throughout the development of the idea of bibliographic instruction is that it is essential to the well-rounded college graduate." He then goes on to explain that "Bibliographic instruction is permeated by another Emersonian principle of liberal education, that of great respect for human intellect, creativity and curiosity." He concludes by describing Poole's arguments for the importance of a student's independence from their teacher and the ability to pursue their own intellectual interests. He states, "Books themselves were the best teachers. Though no longer formally affiliated with a college or university, properly educated graduates needed only to be near a good library in order to use books independently throughout

⁵⁹Perkins and Matthews, "Professorships of Books and Reading," 237.

their lives.”⁶⁰ Perkins’s call for a “professorship of books and reading” can be seen as an early step in pointing out the importance of bibliographic instruction. While the position of “professor of books and reading” may have never caught on, the idea behind it did.

Perkins made significant contributions to the historical pieces of the 1876 *Special Report*. These chapters proved to be the most difficult to compile, and Eaton needed a great deal of help to see them completed. Perkins came through at many levels to help Eaton with his task. First, he wrote Chapter 14 titled “Young Men’s Mercantile Libraries.” This is a brief history of these types of libraries in which Perkins discusses their origins and early history. Perkins points out the importance of these libraries as the only library available in many cities and acknowledges that many are fine libraries. However, he also points out that these libraries were historically subscription libraries and therefore charged a yearly fee. With the strong growth of free public libraries throughout the country, Perkins did not believe “that many additional libraries will be joined to the existing class of mercantile libraries.”⁶¹

Perkins considered mercantile libraries as unique from those that came before (proprietary libraries) and those that come after (free public libraries) because of their connection with the educational movement of the time. He calls them a sort of a “business college” established “to furnish a general higher education to those who had

⁶⁰Tucker, “Emerson's Library Legacy,” 16.

⁶¹F. B. Perkins, “Young Men's Mercantile Libraries,” in *Public Libraries in the United States of America; Their History, Condition, and Management. Special Report* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876), 380.

not been able to go as far as desirable at school.”⁶² He concludes by briefly discussing the nature of mercantile library collections and how they are governed. He sees their biggest challenge in securing proper funding, and he finds their form of governance a weakness. The chapter concludes with a list of mercantile libraries (including other libraries in the same vein) with their founding date and collection size.

Perkins also edited and wrote many of the essays for Chapter 38. Titled “Public Libraries of Boston and Vicinity,” this chapter consists of eighteen individual essays, with Perkins serving as general editor. Of the eighteen essays, ten are written by Perkins and eight by others. These essays provide brief histories of the region’s libraries (many no more than a paragraph), discussing founding dates, collection size, and present conditions of the library and collections. Not surprisingly, the longest history is that of BPL, which runs on for several pages including a few pictures of the library. This essay concludes with a list (compiled by the editors of the *1876 Special Report*) of “Other Collections” in the Boston vicinity of at least 1,000 volumes.

Evidence suggests that Perkins was rushed in putting this chapter together.⁶³ According to O’Laughlin, Commissioner Eaton had trouble finding authors for some of the essays and turned to Justin Winsor for advice. “Have you anyone to suggest for the work?” Eaton asked Boston’s librarian. Suggesting that his could be a group effort,

⁶²Ibid., 381.

⁶³See F. B. Perkins, “Public Libraries of Boston and Vicinity,” in *Public Libraries in the United States of America; Their History, Condition, and Management. Special Report* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876), 851; Also see Miksa, “The Making of the 1876 Special Report,” 34. Here he points out that Eaton had trouble finding authors for this section and Perkins filled in at the last minute “with Winsor’s urging.” He even suggests that Eaton had to pay all the authors other than Perkins.

Eaton writes, “Could not Mr. Perkins get the librarian or secretaries [of each library] to send him on a scheme outlined by him historical papers on the respective libraries.”⁶⁴ In the end it appears that Perkins agreed with Eaton’s plan and prepared this essay in the requested format. O’Laughlin points out that Winsor wrote a note stating that “F. B. P wrote much.” This essay was the only one of the historical sketches written in this manner.⁶⁵

Perkins also played an important role in the production of another historical essay. Eaton wanted an article on historical society libraries because he believed they helped cultivate a sense of American history among the American people. He thought of them as “aids to education and culture.” First, he tried to recruit Samuel Haven from the American Antiquarian Society to write the essay but he was not successful. Miksa then points out that Perkins offered Eaton some suggestions as to the Commissioner’s approach and Eaton replied, “You showed me the cause of my failure to get the paper on Historical Libraries.”⁶⁶ Eaton also wanted to collect data from historical libraries to add to the essay and asked Perkins to “advise him as to the proper questions to ask.” These two obstacles overcome, Eaton was able to recruit Henry Homes and W. I. Fletcher to write the final essay.

The final way Perkins contributed to the *1876 Special Report* was in the arena of library administration and economy. He does this in two essays. One is on “Book

⁶⁴Eaton to Winsor, February 27, 1875, quoted in O’Loughlin, “The Emergence of American Librarianship,” 147.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Miksa, “The Making of the 1876 Special Report,” 35.

Indexes” and the other is titled “How to Make Town Libraries Successful.” The chapter on book indexes (Chapter 35 in the *1876 Special Report*) is brief and to the point. In it Perkins argues for the relative usefulness of indexes and gives advice on the best way to make them. His advice is rather detailed but he believes it is sound. He writes, “These directions seem prolix, but they do, in fact, constitute a well proved practical working method...Any experienced indexer will see the force of this consideration, while he may prefer many variations in detail.”⁶⁷

In Chapter 19, titled “How to Make Town Libraries Successful,” Perkins discusses many aspects of running a successful library. He addresses three main areas: 1) the fiction question; 2) important functions (such as cataloging and circulating books); and 3) proper administration. Throughout this essay, one can see ideas and attitudes that would influence Perkins throughout his career as a librarian. First, Perkins echoes the sentiments of many of his colleagues by weighing in on the fiction question. In the late 19th century, a debate was well under way about the appropriateness of fiction in a public library. There were people who felt fiction had no place in a public library meant to “educate the masses.” Others felt that a public library was meant to serve the people and should therefore provide whatever the masses desired. Many librarians tried to chart a middle course. Led by Justin Winsor, these librarians believed that fiction should be provided so that people at all reading levels could be satisfied. They also believed in the

⁶⁷F.B. Perkins, “Book Indexes,” in *Public Libraries in the United States of America; Their History, Condition, and Management. Special Report* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876), 731.

importance of “taste elevation.”⁶⁸ By providing lower levels of reading, people would be drawn into the library and gradually introduced to higher levels of reading.

In his work at BPL, Winsor was forced to tackle this issue head on. When he became superintendent the library trustees held a very conservative stance on fiction in the library. Throughout his time as superintendent, Winsor worked against this stance. His basic argument is summed up in his 1874 annual report to the trustees where he argues simply and eloquently:

I do not share the opinion held by many, who indulge in a wholesale denunciation of the reading of novels. After several years' observation, I am fully cognizant of the fact that the censure of fiction is a good deal a matter of class feeling—educationally speaking. Books of one literary grade are held to be valueless by critics on a higher one, who do not appreciate the fact that lower grades of readers should be supplied with mental pabulum suited to their powers of assimilation. The failure to allow for this difference in readers is, I think, at the bottom of many unconsidered assertions regarding the character of certain writers, and the literary necessities of corresponding classes of readers. Nevertheless, there can be nothing more deserving of official recognition, or of the encouragement of those who are fortunate in literary culture, than endeavors to improve the standard of that reading which free libraries supply. The question is only one of method, and it seems to me that persuasion and kindly assistance to the unskilled in books is more gracious procedure than to deprive them of the only books that allure them to partake of the library stores.⁶⁹

Two years later Winsor's thoughts had not changed, and he communicated the same sentiments in a short article in the *1876 Special Report* titled “Reading in Popular Libraries.”

In Perkins's essay on creating a successful town library, one can clearly see Winsor's influence on his approach to fiction. In his opening remarks he urges the new

⁶⁸For a thorough discussion of Winsor's ideas concerning fiction see Borome, “The Life and Letters of Justin Winsor,” 153-73.

⁶⁹Boston Public Library Reports, 1874, 28-29. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 162-63.

town library to quickly attract patrons by providing “entertaining reading.” He argues, “It cannot wait for the resort of scholars and students; it must attract readers for pleasure, rest, and amusement...; as well as learning, it must have popularity; as well as instruction, it must primarily furnish entertainment; while waiting for the scholarly few it must attract the many”⁷⁰ Later in his essay, Perkins discusses the selection of books for the library. He argues that the first mistake many libraries make is buying books that are too “thoughtful or solid [of] character.” Instead, libraries should buy what people want to read and then do what it takes to “elevate their tastes and habits.”⁷¹

Perkins encouraged providing “lower” forms of reading or what he called “silly” reading in order to draw people in so they could be taught to enjoy the higher and more proper forms of reading. He urged librarians to establish the “habit of reading” in people so they would then move on to better forms of reading. He states this very clearly when he writes,

No case has ever been cited where a reader, beginning with lofty philosophy, pure religion, profound science, and useful information, has gradually run down in his reading until his declining years were disreputably wasted on dime novels and story weeklies....But the experience of librarians is substantially unanimous to the contrary: that those who begin with dime novels and story weeklies may be expected to grow into a liking for a better sort of stories; then truer narrative of travels and adventure, of biography and history, then of essays and popular science, and so on upward.⁷²

⁷⁰F. B. Perkins, “How to Make Town Libraries Successful,” in *Public Libraries in the United States of America; Their History, Condition, and Management. Special Report* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876), 420.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid., 421-22.

It is clear that Perkins shared Winsor's ideas concerning fiction as he encourages librarians to provide for readers at all levels with the expectation that their tastes will rise. However, he appears to differ slightly from Winsor in his willingness to reject some books. In describing what he called "silly" reading, Perkins expressed concern about what he defines as immoral books. He even lists some of these (e.g. Jack Sheppard, Decameron, Rabelais, etc.) and warns against the "thief books and other fictions provocative of crime." He believed that librarians must "clearly define the line beyond which readers must not be indulged, and up to which they should be. The line is that of immorality, and it permits silliness."⁷³ Perkins follows this argument for indulgence of "silly reading" by encouraging libraries to also include what he calls "stronger reading." He calls for a good reference collection as well as other "solid standard literature" and periodicals.

The second area Perkins covers in discussing a "successful town library" is a library's day-to-day management. He introduces his topic by stating, "To begin with, businesslike management is the whole story."⁷⁴ Perkins emphasizes the importance of a well run library, which he claims is often overlooked. Later, when discussing the management of the library, he calls for a "thorough and simple" system for inventorying, shelving, and receiving and delivering books. He lists five things that are required for a good record keeping system: 1) a daybook and ledger; 2) a file of book invoices; 3) an accession list; 4) a catalog; and 5) a record of delivery and return of books. Perkins

⁷³Ibid., 421.

⁷⁴Ibid., 419.

describes each of these areas in some detail, giving instructions on how to prepare and use each one. Most of his instructions are straight forward and the methods he outlines were common practices of the day.

In Perkins's discussion of catalogs one can see the beginnings of his more comprehensive manual on cataloging that he writes while in San Francisco. In Chapter 5 I will discuss this work in detail. Here, Perkins attempts to give a relatively detailed, but simple, outline on how to catalog books. He encourages librarians to make three entries per book: by title, by author, and by subject. Perkins provides examples of how to catalog a book simply, showing how an entry would appear (including an example and description of a shelf mark). He also encourages libraries to print their catalogs even if they only have a small local printing office. The main difference between Perkins's advice here and what he later writes while in San Francisco is the addition of a classification system. Given his audience (small town libraries) he encourages librarians to organize books using an "alphabetical method" as opposed to a "classification method" as this is the simplest and most people know the alphabet better than a system of classification.

The third area Perkins addresses in making a successful town library is administration. He begins by emphasizing that public libraries should be supported by local public monies and not by state funds or private fees. He believed that this was the "most American, that is, the most direct and effective, method of promoting the library department of our systems of public education."⁷⁵ Perkins's emphasis on proper funding

⁷⁵Ibid., 429.

is interesting to note as this would be a major problem for him in San Francisco. In discussing administration and money, Perkins encourages libraries to employ women. Ray Held in his book *The Rise of the Public Library in California* quotes Perkins, claiming that many libraries heeded his advice in the late nineteenth century.⁷⁶

Unfortunately, it is clear from the context in which Perkins's statement is found that he is not advocating for women's rights. In fact, his attitude toward women and their place in the workforce is somewhat derogatory. For while he indicates that they are, by nature, fit for library work, he claims that they have interpersonal issues with other women and need strong supervisory oversight. Instead of championing women's rights, Perkins sees employment of women as a way to save money. He states that,

The least satisfactory feature of our present library systems is the excessive proportion which the annual cost of administration bears to the whole annual expenditure for the library. This state of things should be remedied as soon as possible by means of mechanical appliances in library service, of better arrangements of book rooms, and by other sufficient contrivances of that American ingenuity which has thus far done pretty well in devising means of escape from much greater difficulties. Women should be employed as librarians and assistants as far as possible, as the nature of the duties is, to great extent, and in many cases, suited to them. Where the work is too heavy, men must be employed instead. Precautions will sometimes be needed against curious troubles arising from the fact that women in such places often do not get along with other women as well as men do. A good board of trustees, or other supervisory authority, can, however, remedy this sort of friction by admonition, or, if necessary, by a change in the service.⁷⁷

⁷⁶See Ray E. Held, *The Rise of the Public Library in California* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1973), 13.

⁷⁷Perkins, "How to Make Town Libraries Successful," 430. Also see Garrison, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920*, 175. Here she points out that Perkins was "no crusader for women's equality." She also points out Perkins's abysmal record with his family. Perhaps his attitude toward women comes from his own issues with his family. One can also find evidence of staff issues involving women at BPL during his years there. See Borome, "The Life and Letters of Justin Winsor", 193-97.

His argument for employing woman is clearly a monetary decision. While his call may have been heeded by many libraries, it was clearly not for noble purposes.

In discussing administrative functions of the library, Perkins also addresses the appropriate attitude to have toward patrons. “A sour face, gruff and disobliging manners, sharp or contemptuous answers, contentiousness, slowness to give information or to wait on customers,” Perkins contends, “will promptly and deeply wound the usefulness of the library.”⁷⁸ He calls on librarians to be “kind and courteous” to all patrons, even those who are “evil and unthankful.” These words about “customer service” are ironic given the fact that accusations of his and his staff’s poor treatment of patrons would dog him throughout his tenure in San Francisco.

These problems were due, in part, to Perkins’s high expectations of library patrons. He claims that they should take responsibility and take care of the library and its books as well as approach the library workers with courteousness. He even provides a list of things that the public should not complain about (calling these “unreasonableness”). Elsewhere, he complains about a certain type of patron who is “one of those helpless nuisances who come in with a feeble grin, and say ‘I want a nice book.’”⁷⁹ These witty, but harsh words may hint at a larger problem. I will discuss Perkins’ troubles with the public in more depth in Chapter 4.

The impact and importance of the *1876 Special Report* cannot be overestimated. Many library historians would agree with Miksa’s assessment that the *1876 Special*

⁷⁸Perkins, “How to Make Town Libraries Successful,” 427.

⁷⁹Ibid., 425.

Report was “the magnum opus of American library economy, [and] covered enough of the essentials of librarianship to become ‘must’ reading for the aspiring librarian.”⁸⁰ At the time of its release, Dewey praised it highly in an editorial in the *Library Journal*, calling it “the most valuable and practically useful work specifically devoted to libraries.” In a subsequent *Library Journal* issue, Dewey encouraged librarians to get a copy while they still lasted (though 10,000 had been printed they were going fast). “As we predicted,” Dewey writes, “the Government Report on Libraries is everywhere regarded as one of the most important contributions to educational literature ever published, and is in increasing demand all over the country.”⁸¹ The influence of this work was far reaching and long lasting. Perkins played an important role in its creation, and many of his ideas were widely disseminated through his contributions. In reading through his essays, one can see how Perkins contributed to the ongoing discussions taking place at a formative time in the library profession. One can also see the beginnings of many of the ideas and attitudes that would be prevalent throughout Perkins’s career.

Conclusion

As this chapter demonstrates, Perkins was very active and contributed a great deal to the library profession during its formative years. He was highly active in the ALA as a participant in the annual conferences as well as an officer and committee member. Through the Cooperation Committee he helped standardize and improve library practice. He also played an important role in the development of the *ALA Catalog*. He was active

⁸⁰Miksa, “The Making of the 1876 Special Report,” 30.

⁸¹“Editorial Pages,” *Library Journal* 1, no. 4-5 (1877): 177. Also see O’Loughlin, “The Emergence of American Librarianship,” 152-57.

in debates taking place through the ALA conferences and in the pages of the *Library Journal*, adding his voice to important discussions on library economy, cataloging practices, and classification. Finally, he was a major contributor to the *1876 Special Report*, where he contributed five essays (the most of any librarian) to the “magnum opus” of library economy that became a textbook of library practice for years to come. Despite all this activity his work has largely gone unnoticed. This historiographical neglect has much to do with Perkins’s personal weaknesses.

One of his major weaknesses was a tendency to do too much, in too many areas, which dissipated his energies and lessened his impact. After leaving Boston for San Francisco, Perkins writes Dewey that he has no time to contribute to the *Library Journal* and his work with the *ALA Catalog* ceases. Related to his lack of focus, Perkins also had trouble persevering in one area. He frequently moved from city to city and job to job and his move to San Francisco is just a continuation of this cycle. Though Perkins was in the heart of the American library movement in Boston, he did not see the importance in staying in that city (or did not care). Once he left for San Francisco, he remained involved in the ALA through his writings, but he never attended another ALA meeting. This hindered his ability to be involved in ongoing conversations and limited his ability to influence others.

Perkins’s tendency to feel slighted and quickness to anger also hampered his impact. While he certainly took on too many responsibilities, some of his lack of progress on the *ALA Catalog* is directly related to his not being paid. It is unclear whether Perkins ever fought with Dewey as he worked more closely with him on the *ALA*

Catalog and as consulting librarian. However, in his correspondence with Dewey about money one can see his penchant for disagreeing with his colleagues. His stubbornness in refusing to work on the catalog without being paid meant the work went undone. Perhaps, one cannot blame Perkins for wanting to be paid for his work, but this shows that it was definitely not a “labor of love.” This is another example of Perkins’s inability to navigate difficult situations. Instead of working through problems he gets angry, lashes out, and ultimately withdraws from the situation. If he had chosen to complete the work he could have continued his influence in the area of bibliography, but this seemingly did not matter to him and the catalog went undone. So despite Perkins’s great success in the areas outlined above, his success is mitigated by his weaknesses and his work faded into the background as others took the spotlight. As one will see in the next chapter, Perkins continued to produce a great deal of influential work, but once again his weaknesses would lessen their impact.

Chapter 4

The San Francisco Years: 1880-1887

Before the gold rush that began in 1848, San Francisco was a sleepy little town of about 1,000 people. By the end of 1849 San Francisco had grown to more than 20,000 people and this trend continued throughout the 1850s. In 1859 a huge silver find in Nevada (known as the Comstock Lode) encouraged the astronomical growth of the city. By 1870 there were 149,000 people in San Francisco and by 1880 more than 230,000. Throughout these years San Francisco not only grew in population, but culturally as well. Beginning in the 1850s San Franciscans created a vibrant print culture. Many famous writers, such as Mark Twain and the poet Ina Coolbrith, got their start in San Francisco. In his history of the San Francisco Public Library, Wiley describes the city's literary life during this time. He writes, "By the middle 1850s, the city could boast that it had a well-developed book trade and more newspapers (in more languages) than London, and that it published more books than all other cities west of the Mississippi."¹

To compliment this vibrant literary life, San Francisco also had many libraries. These libraries were subscription, social, or private libraries started by different groups of people or by ambitious individuals for varying reasons. Some of the better-known libraries were the Mercantile Association Library, the Odd Fellows Library, the YMCA Library, the Mechanics Institute Library, the Bancroft Library, and the Sutro Library.²

¹Wiley, *A Free Library in This City*, 91.

²The Mercantile Association Library was founded in 1853 and was San Francisco's first subscription library. The Odd Fellows Library and the YMCA Library were also founded that same year. Two years later, in 1855, the Mechanics Institute Library was founded. Not officially founded as libraries until the early 1900s, the Bancroft and Sutro Libraries were private libraries collected by prominent businessmen Hubert Bancroft and Adolph Sutro respectively. In the late 1800s these libraries were not

Despite the many different libraries available, a group of citizens desired a free public library modeled after the well-established public libraries on the East Coast. This group was led by Andrew S. Hallidie, inventor of the cable car, and state Senator George H. Rogers. Their work on behalf of public libraries eventually led to the passage of the Rogers Act, which was signed into law on March 18, 1878. The Rogers Act is the birth of the public library in California as it established the legal basis for towns and municipalities to tax its citizens for the purpose of a funding free public libraries or reading rooms.

As Ray Held points out in his book *The Rise of the Public Library in California*, “The general library law of 1878 was the outgrowth of the public library movement in San Francisco....The Rogers Act was, in effect, two laws in one,...a combination of general legislation for all cities and special legislation for San Francisco.”³ The “special legislation” included the appointment of a self-perpetuating board of trustees. This was to help prevent corrupt politicians from gaining control of the library. The library board had the power to hire employees and create library policy. However, it could not determine the number of employees or their salaries. This power was held by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. The supervisors were also responsible for providing the financial support the library needed. Unfortunately, they did not take this responsibility seriously. The San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) suffered for many years because it was grossly underfunded.

open to the public, but were nevertheless well known among San Francisco’s literary and book communities.

³Held, *The Rise of the Public Library in California*, 3-4.

SFPL's problems with money would haunt it for much of its early history. The trustees requested \$75,000 to start the library, but the supervisors only granted them \$24,000. They also requested free space from the city, which was promptly denied. Despite the supervisors' approval of funds, some in the city government tried to hold up the funds. It took a court order to finally get the money from the city and, even after receiving it, the amount was so little that the library opening had to be delayed for one year. Despite all these setbacks, the SFPL finally opened on June 7, 1879, but there were not enough books to allow for circulation the entire first year. The lack of funding and the sheer amount of work getting the small library up and running took a toll on the first librarian, Albert Hart, who resigned after just five months. He was replaced with Charles Robinson, who also resigned after just six months. Finally, in June 1880, the SFPL hired Frederick Perkins to be its third librarian. The financial woes continued throughout Perkins's tenure, but he endured for the next seven years before resigning in 1887.

Perkins is probably best known for his troubles at SFPL. His administration began well, but his relationship with the city's Board of Supervisors quickly soured as they continued to lower the library's annual funding. The local public also found his running of the library heavy handed and overbearing. Perkins was frequently viewed as the patronizing dictator of the local public library. While his intentions were good, his policies and procedures were often met with disdain by the public. His relationship with the public deteriorated over the years, culminating in his arrest for "roughing up" a young patron. Facing an unsupportive Board of Supervisors and a public unsympathetic to his strict views concerning proper library etiquette, Perkins became overwhelmed and lashed

out at his critics. He proved incapable of navigating the pressures he faced under these circumstances. As Held points out, “Perkins lacked the flexibility and adaptability required by the circumstances.”⁴ The weaknesses that haunted Perkins throughout his life continued to affect him even as he made a new start in the West.

Despite his failures as city librarian, Perkins also accomplished a great deal during these seven years. As described in the previous chapter, he continued his involvement with the ALA and wrote pieces for the *Library Journal*. He spent a great deal of energy developing the library’s collection, which was woefully inadequate for a city of San Francisco’s caliber. Based on his work at SFPL, he also developed a cataloging manual, which he first published in 1884.⁵ In the following pages I will describe the accomplishments and failures of Perkins’s time at SFPL in more detail.

Perkins’s SFPL Administration

Perkins’s position at SFPL began in June of 1880. There is little evidence concerning Perkins’s connection with SFPL or how he became a candidate for director. All that exists is a brief reference from Melvil Dewey, written in the September-October 1880 issue of the *Library Journal*. In an article updating members on happenings in the

⁴Ibid., 10.

⁵Frederic B. Perkins, *A Rational Classification of Literature for Shelving and Cataloguing Books in a Library. With Alphabetical Index*, (Rev.). ed. (San Francisco: Francis, Valentine & Co., printers, 1882).; Frederic B. Perkins, *San Francisco Cataloguing for Public Libraries. A Manual of the System Used in the San Francisco Free Public Library* (San Francisco: C.A. Murdock & Co., 1884). The manual for cataloging was sold with or without the classification. With the classification the cost was one dollar and without the classification the cost was fifty cents. They were sometimes bound together and sometimes apart depending on how a specific library acquired them. I have found copies of them in both formats. It is also interesting to note that Perkins did not use his own classification at SFPL. When he arrived the decimal system was already in use and he did not want to take the time to change. His use of the decimal system during his years at SFPL fueled his hate for it. I will discuss this further later in the paper.

ALA, Dewey briefly mentions his high hopes for Perkins's work with the ALA. He then describes how this work was cut short by the offer from SFPL. He writes, "But with only a few days' warning, there came in June the urgent offers of the San Francisco Public Library. The opportunity to do work he had long desired to do made it seem necessary to Mr. Perkins to take the position, and we accepted his resignation with great regret."⁶

When Perkins arrived he immediately set to work on making SFPL the type of library befitting a city the size and stature of San Francisco. There was much work to be done, and he dove in with his usual zeal and vigor. One of Perkins's first orders of business was to create a catalog of books available to the public, which was printed in November 1880. In subsequent years, new catalogs were printed to include all the books acquired that year.

As can be expected from a bookman/scholar such as Perkins, the collection grew quickly. In 1881 SFPL had a collection including 20,548 volumes. This grew to 28,758 by June 1882, and did not include 10,000 volumes that Perkins had acquired, but could not catalog because he was too busy. By the end of 1883 the collection had grown to 47,126 books and pamphlets with 1500 more unbound pamphlets and 100 un-mounted maps and charts. By 1884 there were 58,890 items in the library, but by 1885 the growth of the library slowed so that by the end of Perkins's tenure in 1887, the number of items in the library totaled 67,780.

The slowing of the library's growth was the direct result of one of the major challenges Perkins faced as SFPL director. His ability to properly grow the library's

⁶Melvil Dewey, "Past, Present, and Future of the A.L.A.," *Library Journal* 5, no. 9-10 (1880): 275.

collection was greatly hampered by a lack of proper funding. In Perkins's first year at SFPL the total budget for the library was \$26, 247.83 of which \$9,563.10 was earmarked for books. This remained relatively constant for the next couple years, with a slight increase in 1883 so that \$9,740.17 was spent on books. The next year the budget for books was cut nearly in half to \$5,632.88, and by 1887 only \$1,882.52 was spent on books while the total budget that year had fallen to \$17,533.12.

While clearly demonstrating the problem, the numbers only tell half the story. In many of the yearly reports Perkins made to the city's Board of Supervisors, he complained about the budget. Perkins closes his 1882 report by stating, "It is to be regretted that it has been thought necessary to so diminish the usual appropriation that it...will not even provide (out of that appropriation) for the purchase of any books during the coming year."⁷ Despite Perkins's veiled plea for more funds, more money would not be forthcoming. He ended his 1883 report with a more plainspoken request for an increase in funding. He writes, "For the sake not only of the Library itself, but of the city and all its inhabitants, it is earnestly to be desired that the crippling and inadequate scale of support allowed the Library for the year now closing and for that now beginning shall in the future be replaced by a more liberal policy."⁸ Despite his efforts, the library's budget continued to drop every year.

⁷Fred B. Perkins, "San Francisco Free Public Library Report of the Board of Trustees for the Year Ending 1882; Librarians Annual Report" (San Francisco: W.M. Hinton & Co., 1882), 13.

⁸Fred B. Perkins, "San Francisco Free Public Library Report of the Board of Trustees for the Year Ending 1883; Librarians Annual Report" (San Francisco: W.M. Hinton & Co., 1883), 13.

Perkins grew more and more exasperated by the situation and seemed to find no other recourse but his pen. His frustration led him to write a paper to be read at the 1885 ALA Conference concerning SFPL's plight. In an August 1885 letter, Perkins writes Dewey about his plans to send him a paper "intended to set forth the right financial and educational relations of a Free Pub. Lib. to its community and is caused by the state of things here."⁹ The paper, which was published in the September-October issue of the *Library Journal* and in the October issue of *Overland Monthly*, launched an attack on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.¹⁰ Perkins claims that SFPL was "advancing with creditable speed towards a size and usefulness corresponding to the position of San Francisco," but the city government suddenly cut down the annual allocation to the bare minimum to keep the library operational.¹¹ This meant that no new books could be purchased nor could worn out books be replaced. Perkins goes on to explain that people want to read new books not old ones and that a library whose collection is not up to date is a dying library. He then speculates that the restriction of funds is a ploy to shut down the library by those on the Board of Supervisors who do not support the idea of free public libraries. In making this accusation he mentions "Supervisor Pond and Auditor Strother" by name and states, "It is not known that any member of it [the Board of Supervisors] is a particularly energetic friend of the institution." Perkins follows this

⁹Frederick B. Perkins to Melvil Dewey, August 21, 1885. Box 2, ALA Conference, Lake George M-Z. Melvil Dewey Papers, Columbia University.

¹⁰Frederic B. Perkins, "Public Libraries and the Public, with Special Reference to the San Francisco Free Public Library," *Library Journal* 10, no. 9-10 (1885): 223-29.; Frederic B. Perkins, "Free Public Libraries: Especially That of San Francisco," *Overland Monthly* 6, no. 34 (1885): 424-29. Though the titles are different the text for each article is identical.

¹¹Perkins, "Public Libraries and the Public," 223.

with a warning to the citizens of San Francisco that “if they wish the library to continue, this early notice is due them.”¹²

Perkins continues his argument with a table of statistics demonstrating the deplorably low expenditures on SFPL. In the table, Perkins compares the budgets for ten other libraries to that of SFPL. He also compares population, city taxes, volumes in the library, circulation numbers, and volumes added per year. He then draws several conclusions from the numbers shown in the table. First, other cities of comparable size and prominence give a much higher percentage of their tax revenues to their libraries. Second, if San Francisco was as generous as these other cities (Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, and Milwaukee) then the SFPL yearly budget would be much higher. For example, if the yearly budget was proportional to that of Boston then it would be \$84,000 or if it were proportional to that of Milwaukee it would be \$27,000.00, etc. Third, these other libraries are comparatively much larger with only Milwaukee’s being slightly smaller. Fourth, he points out that the rate of budget increases at these other libraries was significantly higher than at SFPL since its budget had been reduced to zero. Finally, when comparing circulation numbers to salaries, it becomes apparent that SFPL should have a much larger staff. Following his data analysis demonstrating SFPL’s poor position among its peers, Perkins adds to his argument by stating that the low budget prevents him from printing a library catalog thus impeding proper access to the collection. Perkins sums up his arguments against the Board of Supervisors and their lack of funding by stating, “These brief statements sufficiently show what our city is

¹²Ibid., 224.

doing, and what other cities are doing, for or against public libraries. It is not in the scope of this paper to inquire after the real reason for the stop put to the progress of the San Francisco Free Public Library.”¹³ Despite this statement, Perkins goes on to “hypothesize” that the reasons for the budget cuts are meant to force the citizens into accepting higher taxes to improve library service. He then transitions to a new theme in the paper where he describes the purpose of a public library. I will briefly discuss this portion later in this chapter.

There is no evidence that Perkins’s essay made any difference in his fight to secure proper funding for the library. Instead, he grows silent as the funding continues to drop, suggesting his increased frustration with the situation. Beginning with his 1885 report to the board, Perkins stops providing commentary and remarks. He simply reports the pertinent statistics, such as volumes added, circulation, fines, cards issued, etc. This practice continues until his last report given in 1887.

Despite his unsuccessful attempts to secure more funding for books, Perkins used his considerable knowledge of bibliography to create a solid core collection for SFPL. During his tenure the collection grew from about 20,000 volumes to nearly 70,000 volumes. In a 1904 history of SFPL, Joy Lichtenstein writes about Perkins’s legacy at SFPL. He states,

Perkins’s task was to stock the library with the solid foundation of standard works which form the backbone of the present collection. It takes something more than money to buy books....It is particularly difficult to purchase for a public library, where attention must be paid to a proportionate development of diverse lines, and to the peculiar needs of the community. That there are today no gaps of

¹³Ibid.,226.

consequence in the collection is due largely to the intelligent buying of the first fifty thousand volumes.¹⁴

The lack of funding affected more than just the size of the collection. Perkins also sought better quarters for the library, which had quickly outgrown its first location, a rented space on the second floor of Pacific Hall located on Bush Street. This space was terribly inadequate right from the start. Everything was located in one room, with the book stacks separated from the reading room by a wire screen. An office where all business was expected to be carried out was created in a corner of the room.¹⁵ Perkins bemoaned the lack of space right from the outset. In his first three yearly reports (the only reports of any substance), he addressed the space issues repeatedly. In the 1882 report he states, “While the work accomplished by the institution thus far is remarkably great, and has been executed with a satisfactory degree of smoothness, little or no further progress of any kind can be made in the present location.”¹⁶

Perkins goes on to outline five problems caused by the lack of space. First, there was not enough space for continued growth in the collections. In 1882 more book cases were added to accommodate more books, but Perkins believed the space had been exhausted. Second, the cramped conditions slowed the delivery of books, especially during peak hours. This, of course, led to unhappy patrons who stood in long lines

¹⁴Joy Lichtenstein, “San Francisco's Public Library,” *Sunset Magazine* 1904, 166. Lichtenstein was just a young boy of 13 when he went to work for the SFPL. He was hired by Perkins in 1886 to retrieve books from the stacks. He continued in this position until the great fire of 1906. His “recollections” of Perkins and the library under Perkins’s tenure can be found in an essay he wrote for the *California Library Association Bulletin* in 1950. Lichtenstein was also one of the founding members of the California Library Association, being member number four.

¹⁵For an excellent physical description of the first library as well as a sketch, see Wiley, *A Free Library in This City*, 101-02.

¹⁶Perkins, “Librarians Annual Report, 1882,” 12.

waiting for their selections. Third, Perkins desired to better serve readers by creating separate areas to serve different groups. The current setup provided only enough space for one service desk. This meant all patrons were served from one area. As was common practice of the day, Perkins wished to create three separate areas for different types of readers. He wanted to provide one space for “special students” (those doing more serious research), another for ladies and regular students, and a third for fiction, juvenile, and popular reading. This, he believed, would greatly improve the service the library provided for its patrons. Fourth, Perkins greatly desired a proper workroom for cataloging and preparing the books for the shelves. The current location had no space for book processing, so it had to be done in the already cramped office space. Fifth, the library was on the second floor of a building that also housed a theater. In that time period it was common for theaters to burn. Perkins claimed that,

this considerable and increasing collection of books is now constantly exposed to the extra-hazardous fire risk, and that its actual destruction by fire is, in all human probability, only a question of time. On average, as history of such buildings shows, a theater is burned within about seven years from its opening; and whenever the California Theater shall burn, this Library will necessarily burn also.¹⁷

Despite Perkins’s articulation of the problems with the library space, no additional funding was allocated and no other space offered. He continued his pleas in his 1883 and 1884 reports, but they also fell on deaf ears. This added to Perkins’s frustration, and, as mentioned earlier, he wrote no remarks in his 1885 report. In 1886 the Secretary of the SFPL Board of Trustees, C. Stevens, joined Perkins in bemoaning the inadequate facilities. In his opening remarks, Stevens outlined the board’s plan to reallocate what

¹⁷Ibid., 13.

little funds were available and put them all toward the effort to secure adequate space. “And in this connection,” he writes the Board of Trustees, “they would say that they have frequently called the attention of your Honorable Body to the hazardous location of the property of this Library...about which the Trustees have received no advice or response. Consequently they have unanimously decided to economise [*sic*] the Fund under their control and to enter upon the finishing apartments for the Library in the new City Hall.”¹⁸

The lack of funding for the library was a major hurdle Perkins faced during his time at SFPL. Unfortunately, his efforts to raise the annual allocation of funds to a proper level would not see fruit until after he left. In 1888 the budget was raised by \$10,000, and the library moved to a new location in City Hall. It’s unclear exactly why these needed changes did not happen while Perkins was in office. Undoubtedly some fault falls on the corrupt politicians in power in San Francisco during this time. They were much more concerned about their own pocketbooks than about providing a proper public library. Blame should also fall on Perkins himself as he did not possess the proper skills to be successful in such a highly politicized environment. His short-tempered and easily offended nature, coupled with his tendency to attack his opponents through the press, surely alienated him from the members of the Board of Supervisors. A more adept politician may have been successful in securing the proper funding. Despite Perkins’s pleas, the public did not rally behind him and insist on the proper funding. This is largely because Perkins’s policies also alienated him from the general population. It’s to these policies that this chapter now turns.

¹⁸C. Stevens, “San Francisco Free Public Library Report of the Board of Trustees for the Year Ending 1886” (San Francisco: W.M. Hinton & Co., 1886), 1.

Perkins and the Library's Patrons

When Perkins arrived in San Francisco, he found a library that needed to be set in order. Books needed to be purchased and prepared for the shelves, a catalog needed to be made, and policies needed to be put in place. Much has already been said about Perkins's efforts to fill the shelves, but there were many other things to be done. No catalog existed so he quickly created one. It consisted of eight short-title lists divided into 1) general list, 2) fiction, 3) juvenile, 4) German, 5) French, 6) Spanish, 7) Swedish, and 8) other languages. According to his 1882 report, Perkins was not pleased with the list because of the necessity of providing short-titles only. He wanted to catalog the library in a fuller manner with "explanations, directions and notes as are employed in first-class cataloguing work." In his 1882 annual report, Perkins explains the importance of these additions to a simple title list. He writes, "Such additions are guides to readers, and very greatly increase the accessibility, and thus the usefulness, of the books."¹⁹ In his 1883 report, Perkins discusses his progress on updating the catalog, pointing out that there were so many mistakes in the first catalog (due to the expediency by which it was made) that he was forced to start over again. He was working on the improved catalog, but for the time being lists of new additions were posted in the reading room to supplement the printed catalog.

Unfortunately, it appears that Perkins never finished the much needed (and improved) catalog. Nothing about the catalog is mentioned in any of the remaining

¹⁹Perkins, "San Francisco Free Public Library Report of the Board of Trustees for the Year Ending 1882," 10.

annual reports and there is evidence that Perkins stopped working on it at some point in his tenure. In the 1888 report, the President of the Board of Trustees mentions that cataloging at SFPL had been “brought to a halt” because of the extremely low appropriations given to the library in the past.²⁰ Perkins’s successor, John Cheney, raised Perkins’s ire by commenting on the lack of a proper library catalog. Although Perkins no longer worked for the library, he appeared before its Board of Trustees to defend himself. The *Library Journal* reported, “At the May meeting of the directors ex-Librarian F. B. Perkins presented a request for an investigation into certain charges brought against him by the present librarian John Vance Cheney, to the effect that he had not properly attended to his duties while filling the office in the matter of cataloging books. In lieu of such an investigation, he demanded that a full and explicit retraction should be made by Mr. Cheney.”²¹ There is no evidence of an investigation or any apology from Cheney, and it appears that Perkins ultimately let the matter die.

Despite his failed cataloging effort, Perkins also filled other important duties during his time as the head of SFPL. One of the more prominent issues Perkins tackled was that of fiction in the SFPL collection. As discussed in the previous chapter, he believed that patrons should be provided with “silly reading” so they could develop a taste for the higher forms of reading. However, anything that was considered “immoral” should not be provided by the library. In practice this meant anything that Perkins deemed immoral, and his highhandedness contributed to the public’s disdain for the way

²⁰See Edward R. Taylor, “San Francisco Free Public Library Report of the Board of Trustees for the Year Ending 1888” (San Francisco: W.M. Hinton & Co., 1888), 3-4.

²¹“San Francisco (Cal.) P.L.,” *Library Journal* 13, no. 6 (1888): 192.

he ran the library. From the very beginning, it is clear that he was concerned about the reading tastes of SFPL patrons. In every annual report of substance (1881-1883), Perkins has a section where he addresses the reading of fiction. In his 1881 annual report, for example, he brags that the people of San Francisco read far less fiction than the average major city. He claims that 75% of reading in most libraries is fiction while in San Francisco it averaged only around 50%. The following year he presents the same statistics on fiction reading and then more fully discusses his policy. He states, “The question of fiction supply is at present one of the most debatable and debated of library questions. The arguments both for and against furnishing it have weight, and accordingly a medium policy appears wisest, and has, under the advice and approbation of the Book Committee of your Board, been followed in selecting and purchasing.” Perkins goes on to state that while he believes that “public money should be cautiously employed for mere amusement,” it is still important to make the library popular.²²

He closes the section by explaining that he employs the rule that no “vicious” books are allowed to circulate. He acknowledges that adults have the right to choose what they read, but since the library serves young girls and boys it is not proper to provide these types of books. In his 1883 report, Perkins elaborates on this line of thinking. He states, “For the future, it is proposed not to replace the books of a certain number of the more sensational novel writers, and not to buy their new ones if any appear.”²³

²²Perkins, “San Francisco Free Public Library Report of the Board of Trustees for the Year Ending 1882,” 11-12.

²³Perkins, “San Francisco Free Public Library Report of the Board of Trustees for the Year Ending 1883,” 12.

Perkins also removed books from the shelves that he felt were “dirty” books. This caused some patrons of the library to protest, and on at least one occasion the Board of Trustees made him put a book back in circulation. In 1885 just such an incident arose and Perkins fought against the patron using his pen. He wrote an article that appeared in the *Library Journal* and was published as a separate pamphlet titled *Free Libraries and Unclean Books*.²⁴ He opens the article with a clear statement of purpose:

I make this appeal to clergymen, teachers, mothers; to all clean-minded people; to the healthy public opinion of San Francisco, against a direct attempt to make its Public Library serve unclean purposes instead of clean ones....A person in this city is making an obstinate effort to force permission for himself to read a dirty book which was in the Library, and which I have removed from circulation, and have refused to him.²⁵

He goes on to explain that he found many of these “dirty books,” which he locked away so no one could access them. He even names some of these books and their authors. These included William Ainsworth’s *Jack Sheppard*, some of Emile Zola’s novels, crime stories by George W. M. Reynolds, and Henry Fielding’s *The Life and Death of Jonathan Wild, The Great*.²⁶ In Perkins’s view, the free public library should be considered an educational institution and a partner, in form at least, of the public school. Its highest priority should be to educate (Perkins called this “being useful and doing good”), not to amuse its patrons. He later nuances his argument by stating that some people believe so strongly in the educational purpose of the public library that no fiction should be

²⁴F. B. Perkins, “Free Libraries and Unclean Books,” *Library Journal* 10, no. 12 (1885): 396-99.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 396.

²⁶These books would be considered rather mild compared to today’s standards. However, many people objected to them in Perkins’s day. They feared what the books might teach impressionable young minds. Perkins described books like these as being “scoundrelly and vulgar.”

provided. However, he disagrees, arguing, “I do not go so far as this, but I do say that it ought to choose its fiction carefully, so as to use what influence it can to elevate the character of the books it distributes and of those who read them.”²⁷ In the remainder of the article Perkins rebuts what he sees as the five main arguments for supplying the dirty books to the public. He then ends the article with another plea to all of the “clean-minded” people of San Francisco to help him stand up to the “few prurient literary dirt-eaters of the town.”²⁸ There is no evidence of how the people of San Francisco responded to Perkins’s plea or whether or not Perkins was forced to hand over the book. However, this is a clear example of his inability to handle difficult situations and his tendency to resort to the pen for vindication. While he was well-meaning and genuinely sought the good of the public, he comes across as condescending, which did little to ingratiate him to the public. Instead of having the effect Perkins hoped, his position probably had the opposite effect and only added to his persona as the “dictator” of the public library.

This persona of dictator was something that Perkins would never be able to shake while at SFPL. He was a disciplined and orderly person, and this is the type of atmosphere he created as he attempted to organize the young library. Unfortunately, his policies also contributed to an atmosphere that felt oppressive to the public. Contributing to the negative atmosphere was Perkins’s combative communication style. This is best exemplified in his article on “Public Libraries and the Public.” As discussed previously

²⁷Perkins, “Free Libraries and Unclean Books,” 397.

²⁸Ibid., 399.

in this chapter, the first half of this article is about the proper funding for a public library.

In the second half he outlines the purpose of a public library. To catch the tone of

Perkins's writing it is best to quote him at length:

First (to limit the discussion). What a free public library is *not* for. It is not for a nursery; a lunch-room; a bedroom; a place for meeting a girl in a corner and talking to her; a conversation-room of any kind; a free dispensary of stationary, envelopes, and letter-writing; a free range for loiterers; a campaigning field for mendicants, or displaying advertisements; a haunt for loafers and criminals. Indeed; not to specify with inelegant distinctness, a free public library, like any other similarly commodious place of free public resort, would, if permitted, be used for any purpose whatever, no matter how private or how vicious, which could be served there more conveniently than by going to one's own home, or than by having any home at all. It would be so used systematically, constantly, and to a degree of intolerable nuisance; and its purification from such uses, if they have been set up, will be met with such clamor, abuse, and with any degree of violent resistance which may be thought safe, or likely to succeed. Let it not be supposed that this is an imaginary picture. It is in every point taken from actual and numerous instances, and could be illustrated by a sufficiently ridiculous series of single adventures, by any librarian of large experience.²⁹

Perkins goes on to discuss his view of what public library should be. First, a public library should be a place where good "manners and morals" are regularly practiced. Second, it should provide the public the latest "good" books (as opposed to the "dirty" books described above). Third, a public library should care for its books so that they are kept in the best condition and last as long as possible. This article is an example of Perkins's attempt to educate the public so they might use the library in an appropriate manner. While he brings up valid points he does so in a way that alienates people rather than teaching them.³⁰

²⁹Perkins, "Public Libraries and the Public," 227.

³⁰See "San Francisco Free P. L.: Information and Rules for the Guidance of Borrowers." *The Library Journal* 6, no. 11 (1881): 291. This is a short review of a small paper Perkins wrote outlining and explaining the rules for SFPL. It clearly has the same tone as "Public Libraries and the Public."

Eventually the public tired of Perkins and the seemingly oppressive atmosphere he created at the library. The more educated citizens of San Francisco began to speak out against Perkins in numerous ways, including in the local newspapers and magazines. The most notable is a satirical cartoon with extended commentary that appeared in the January 23, 1886, issue of *The Wasp*.³¹ The cartoon bears the caption “Our Free Library” and portrays the reading room of SFPL. There are signs on the walls outlining the many rules for library and reading room use. They include such proclamations as “complaints about the library are strictly prohibited” and “Notice: everybody leaving the library is to be searched.” Meanwhile, two desk clerks sit and play cards and drink wine, while children climb and play on the railings around the room. Standing in the middle of the room is a whip-wielding Perkins with several patrons bowing before him and begging. The magazine explains that “so many complaints come up to us as to the management of our ‘free public library’ that we cannot ignore the general clamor.”³² The article next outlines a couple specific grievances and closes with a summary of patrons’ complaints:

In a few words and without going through the long list of complaints, what is wanting in the management of the library is a wiser discretion as to delivery or refusal of books, more consideration for the convenience of the public, a greater degree of politeness in the subordinates who serve their patrons; more self sacrifice and less indifference in the assistants, and generally an atmosphere throughout the building that the management of San Francisco’s Free Public Library is the servant of the people and not their master.³³

³¹“Our Free Library,” *The Wasp*, January 23, 1886, 2-3.

³²*Ibid.*, 3.

³³*Ibid.* Also see “The Free Library,” *Truth*, August 16, 1882, 2. In this article Perkins is criticized for making people purchase a copy of the library catalog. If they refused and demanded to see a copy they were escorted to the back room and shown a copy under strict supervision.

Such criticisms were common in San Francisco, and Perkins appears to have done nothing to address them to combat his poor image. Instead, he was defensive and attacked his “enemies,” justifying his actions in his attempts to “educate” the public.

The public outcry against Perkins came to a head in the spring of 1887 in an event that would, unfortunately, become the defining moment in Perkins time at San Francisco. The *Morning Call* reported that Perkins was arrested because of a complaint filed by a Captain Eagan of the U.S. Army. According to the news report, Eagan claimed that Perkins had “beat his son on Saturday last for making a disturbance on the stairs of the library.”³⁴ Apparently, a trial was held the next day and Perkins was found guilty and charged a fine of twenty dollars. The newspaper also reported on this and added a little detail from the proceedings. “Perkins admitted on the stand to ‘shaking the boy,’” the article said, but [he] explained that he did not use any more violence than necessary. “‘Did you find it necessary to use any violence with a sickly boy, who is neither your son nor your pupil?’ asked Judge Hornblower. Librarian Perkins was eloquently silent.”³⁵ The newspaper also points out that Captain Eagan planned to take his complaint to the SFPL Board of Trustees.

He apparently did take the incident to the SFPL board and after some deliberation the board acquitted Perkins of any wrong doing. The *Library Journal* reported that the “Trustees of the Free Library have decided that the recent charges against Librarian Perkins were not sustained, but they restored his admission card to the small boy whom

³⁴“Librarian Perkins Arrested,” *The Morning Call*, May 25, 1887, 3.

³⁵“Librarian Perkins Fined: Judge Hornblower Asks the Defendant Some Questions,” *The Morning Call*, May 27, 1887, 3. Also see “Perkins, Frederic B.,” *Library Journal* 12, no. 6 (1887): 239.

Mr. Perkins shook up for making noise in the hall.”³⁶ The citizens of San Francisco were outraged by this incident, and one wrote a letter regarding Perkins’s behavior to the *San Francisco News Letter*, which was published on June 18th. Titled “Oust the Upstart,” the writer expressed outrage over the “whitewashing decision in the face of a conviction in the Police Court.”³⁷ The writer is clearly angry and repeatedly states that Perkins is unfit for the office and should be fired. He or she also threatens the board with action if they continue to ignore the public on this matter. The letter closes with a call for a cut in the library’s appropriations if Perkins is not replaced.

Conclusion

Finally, in August 1887, the *Library Journal* reports that Perkins resigned as Librarian of SFPL on August 10th.³⁸ It is unknown whether the fallout from the above incident forced Perkins’s resignation. What is clear is that Perkins struggled with his post nearly from the outset. He was very frustrated by the lack of funds provided for the library, and this problem worsened with each year he was there. He also alienated himself from the public by creating an image of a dictator and making policies and procedures that created an unfriendly environment at the library.

After his resignation, Perkins spent several more years in San Francisco. He continued working in editorial capacities and assisted eminent local book collector Adolph Sutro on several projects. He wrote a draft of a biographical sketch of Sutro as well as a draft of “laws” for the Sutro Library. In 1894 Sutro paid Perkins to travel to

³⁶“San Francisco F.L.,” *Library Journal* 12, no. 7 (1887): 269.

³⁷“Oust the Upstart,” *The San Francisco News Letter*, June 18, 1887, 12.

³⁸“Perkins, Frederic Beecher,” *Library Journal* 12, no. 8 (1887): 303.

Washington, D.C., and lobby Congress against the passing of a bill to fund the indebtedness of Pacific railroads. Perkins worked with two other men throughout the summer and early fall to raise public awareness and lobby congressmen in order to defeat the bill. He describes their work in a letter to Sutro dated September 6, 1894. He writes,

The object for which we came, viz., to prevent the passage of the re-funding bill at this session was handsomely attained. Had we not been there Huntington would certainly have obtained from Congress anything he wanted. As it is, the members have been filled full of facts to prove the rascality of the four great railroad thieves, the wrongfulness of the re-funding scheme, and the justice of looking to the four private estates for the amount due the government from the Central Pacific R.R.³⁹

Perkins apparently loved the work and later in this same letter told Sutro, “This enterprise is however beyond comparison the most congenial to me that I have ever engaged in, and desire you to accept my sincere thanks for giving me the opportunity to be concerned in it.”⁴⁰

In late September 1894, Perkins once again wrote Sutro about Huntington. In the closing of this brief letter he stated that he liked living in the East once again. However, he still had not found work. The fact that books and libraries had become a significant part of his life is evident when he bemoans his lack of access to substantial libraries. “Instead of the half million or more books to which I used to have access in Boston,” he complained, “or the seventy or eighty thousand in San Francisco, besides your great collection, I have now to confine myself to two little circulating libraries...containing together about 10,000 volumes, and each 2-3 miles away. But I am trying to write a

³⁹Frederick Beecher Perkins to Adolph Sutro, September 6, 1894. MS 2115 Volume 3, scrapbook 3. Adolph Sutro papers, California Historical Society Library.

⁴⁰Ibid.

little.”⁴¹ Little evidence remains about how Perkins spent the last few years of his life. His obituary published in the “Obituary Record of Graduates of Yale University” states that “He died in Morristown, NJ., from a lingering paralysis which had for some time removed him from active life, on January 27, 1899, in his 71st year.”⁴²

Perkins’s time in San Francisco was both a success and a failure. He was successful in building a solid collection of books upon which future librarians could expand. Perkins also continued to contribute to the field of librarianship through his articles and books. His classification scheme and vigorous debates about classification contributed to the establishment of practices that would last for the next hundred years. Unfortunately, Perkins also struggled while he was San Francisco. The weaknesses that dogged him throughout his life also limited his success on the West Coast. His propensity to participate in many fields stretched him too thin and limited his ability to really dig deep in any one area. For instance, while in San Francisco Perkins continued to write and lecture as he had in Boston. He presented four separate lectures to the Chautauqua Literary Association of California in 1882 and 1883 and these were published once they were completed.⁴³ He also dabbled in politics as he had done in Boston. He was a member of the Knights of Labor and ran for City Assessor in 1886 on

⁴¹Frederick Beecher Perkins to Adolph Sutro, September 26, 1894. MS 2115 Volume 3, scrapbook 3. Adolph Sutro papers, California Historical Society Library.

⁴²“Obituary Record of Graduates of Yale University,” 611.

⁴³See Frederic B. Perkins, *Pre-Historic Man: Two Lectures. I. The Facts. 2. The Conclusions. Being an Outline of Pre-Historic Archaeology. Intended as a Syllabus of Two Lectures on the Subject, for the Benefit of the Boys and Girls Aid Society of San Francisco.* (San Francisco: C.A. Murdock & Co., 1883).

the Labor Party ticket. He continued to write short stories, articles, and books, many of which focused on San Francisco or California politics.

Perkins's personality also limited his ability to be successful as a library administrator, for he was unable to navigate the tumultuous political climate in San Francisco during this era. Rather than working toward some sort of compromise, Perkins lashed out at his perceived enemies through the written word. This only served to isolate Perkins and further entrench his opponents. Perkins's inability to control his anger also contributed to his downfall by getting him arrested for manhandling a small boy.⁴⁴ He also was a traditionalist who clung to the old ways of doing things as others moved into the future. This is evident in the way he handled fiction at SFPL and his refusal to embrace modern technologies or methods, such as the movable location system for shelving books. Finally, he alienated the public by appearing dictatorial and condescending. As one investigates Perkins work, it becomes apparent that Dee Garrison's characterization of him in her seminal work *Apostles of Culture* is indeed accurate. He is a perfect example of the "genteel librarian" who embraced certain ideals about the importance of books, reading, education, and the library.⁴⁵ He believed that there were certain books one should read and certain ways one should read them and by doing so one could improve themselves and their lot in life. Perkins devotion to these principles, coupled with his condescending communication style, alienated him from the

⁴⁴It is interesting to note that there is some evidence that Perkins was arrested twice while living in San Francisco. In the biographical file on Perkins at the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library, there is a note that Perkins was arrested on August 26, 1887, for making a libelous statement against Michael Joseph Kelly. I was unable to find any hard evidence that this actually took place, but it certainly fits Perkins's volatile personality.

⁴⁵See Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*, 36-63

public. All these things contributed to Perkins's lack of success as the librarian at SFPL. After Perkins left SFPL he never worked as a librarian again nor did he contribute in any direct way to the librarianship or library science. He seemed to have lost all zeal for the field that occupied much of his adult life.

Chapter 5

Classification and Cataloging: The Culmination of Perkins's Library Work

When Perkins came to San Francisco, he faced challenges in getting the library in order and putting it on a trajectory to become as great a library as the one he left in Boston. As described in Chapter 4, he worked hard in growing the collection and setting out the policies and procedures needed for the smooth operation of a good public library. However, consistent with Perkins's past, he did not (or could not) focus his energies on one activity. He was also involved in other endeavors that took his energies in many other directions. Some were related to his work in the library, but did not directly impact SFPL. The most significant were his work on a classification system, first published in 1881, and his cataloging manual, published in 1884. These were Perkins's contributions to a broader, ongoing discussion among librarians about the best way to classify and catalog books. His conversation partners (and competitors) were people like Melvil Dewey, with his decimal classification, and Charles Cutter, with his rules for cataloging. In this chapter, I will briefly describe Perkins's contributions to this debate over library cataloging and explore how his ideas compared to other classification and cataloging systems being developed at the time.

Perkins's Classification System

Throughout the late 1870s and 1880s, there was vigorous debate in the library profession about the best way to classify the mass of books (and other items) being collected in America's libraries. During these years, Perkins was one of several librarians who developed his own classification scheme. Of course, the most well known, and the only one widely adopted and still in use, was Melvil Dewey's "Decimal

Classification and Relative Index,” which was first published in 1876 with revisions in 1885 and again in 1888.¹

Dewey’s system was first released during the 1876 American Library Association convention where it aroused a great deal of interest among librarians. Many librarians began using the system in their libraries and over the years its use grew. Dewey developed his system while employed as a librarian at Amherst College. There are two main elements to the system. First is the classification itself, which consists of three levels. At the top level are ten broad classes numbered from zero to nine: 0 = general works, 1 = philosophy, 2 = religion, 3 = sociology, 4 = philology, 5 = natural science, 6 = useful arts, 7 = fine arts, 8 = literature, and 9 = history. These ten classes are further divided into ten divisions (also numbered zero to nine), with each class containing divisions pertinent to its subject. Finally, each of the ten divisions is divided into ten sections, which are again numbered zero to nine. In the “complete tables,” Dewey provides an extensive list of topics that fall under each class division and section that appear along with their corresponding number. For example, under the class “Philosophy” (100) is the division “mind and body,” “Anthropology” (130), which contains the section “mental derangements” (132), and the sub section “insanity” (132.1).

The second main element in Dewey’s classification manual is what he called the “relative index.” This index is an alphabetical list of subjects with their corresponding class number. It was not an exhaustive list of subjects, but rather included “the heads of

¹Melvil Dewey, *Tables and Index of the Decimal Classification and Relative Index for Arranging and Cataloging Libraries, Clippings, Notes, Etc.*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Library Bureau, 1888). Dewey himself oversaw thirteen revisions to his decimal system. It has undergone many revisions since and continues to be revised as needed. The 22nd edition of the Dewey Decimal System was released in 2004.

the tables.” It was meant to “help a reader find readily the subject sought.”² Another useful aspect of Dewey’s system was its mnemonic characteristics. Dewey used certain numbers to correspond to a given subject (e.g. China was 1 and France was 4, etc.). These numbers were consistent across the different classes so that the number for China under ancient history is 931 and the number under modern history, Asia, is 951. Dewey’s classification system quickly gained popularity. However, it also had its critics, inspiring some (such as Frederick Perkins) to create alternative classification systems. As Librarian of Congress Ainsworth Rand Spofford observed, “If there is any subject which, more than any others, divides opinion and provokes endless controversy among librarians and scholars, it is the proper classification of books.” Spofford also noted that, “A writer upon this subject has well observed that there is no man who can work out a scheme of classification that will satisfy permanently even himself.”³

This debate over Dewey’s classification scheme, which was released in 1876, would continue over the next decade. Indeed, as historian, Lucy Maddox points out, “By June, 1883, at least six classification schemes had been devised by members of the association [ALA] – Dewey, Cutter, Smith, Schwartz, Perkins, and Edmands.”⁴ For example, in 1878, J. Schwartz published an article in the *Library Journal* presenting his

²Ibid., 6.

³Ainsworth Rand Spofford, *A Book for All Readers: Designed as an Aid to the Collection, Use, and Preservation of Books and the Formation of Public and Private Libraries* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1900), 362-63.

⁴Maddox, “Trends and Issues in American Librarianship,” 94. Maddox provides an excellent summary of the debates surrounding classification taking place at this time. It is beyond the scope of this paper to include details on every new classification scheme developed during this time. Instead, I will focus on Perkins’s contributions and his debates with Dewey.

own classification scheme, and he continued to promote it throughout the 1880s. This was followed by a system designed by Charles Cutter presented in 1879.⁵ Cutter worked on his scheme throughout the 1880s, continually adding to and refining it and regularly presenting the additions at ALA conferences and in the *Library Journal*. Between 1881 and 1882, several more new classification systems were proposed, including one by Perkins, first published in 1881, and another by Lloyd P. Smith, librarian at the Philadelphia Library Company, published in 1882. Parts of Smith's system were based on Dewey's classification and parts based on Perkins's. Still other systems were developed and debated throughout the 1880s. In 1886, Perkins and Schwartz joined forces to write a long and rather scathing critique of Dewey's system, which, in turn, sparked more debate. I will discuss these debates in further detail after introducing Perkins's classification.

It was Perkins's intense dislike of Dewey's classification system that motivated him to create one of his own. As Perkins admits in the second edition of his classification manual, "I have now for two years been using Mr. Dui's plan in the San Francisco Free Public Library, which had already at my coming been arranged according to it. The more I use the plan the less I like it."⁶ Much like Dewey's system, Perkins's classification manual consists of two main sections, a classification scheme and a numbering system.

⁵See Charles Cutter, "Classification on the Shelves: With Some Account of the New Scheme Prepared for the Boston Athenaeum," *Library Journal* 4, no. 7 & 8 (1879), 234-43.

⁶Frederic B. Perkins, *A Rational Classification of Literature for Shelving and Cataloguing Books in a Library. With Alphabetical Index*. (Rev.) ed. (San Francisco: Francis, Valentine & Co., printers, 1882), iv. Despite Perkins's dislike for Dewey's system, he never had the time to do the extensive work required to reclassify the SFPL collection using his own system.

Perkins's classification scheme is based on classes, chapters, and sections. There are eight main classes designated by a letter of the alphabet: A – Religion, B – Philosophy, C – Society, D – History, E – Biography, F – Science, G – Arts, H – Literature. These eight classes are further divided into chapters, with each class having as many chapters as necessary. The classes and chapters are then further divided into sections that are numbered consecutively, beginning with one and continuing until all topics for that class are numbered. In the end, there are a total of 1,500 sections, but this number can expand as needed.⁷ The second section in Perkins's classification manual is an alphabetical list of topics. This is much like Dewey's relative index and is used to aid readers in finding a given subject and its class number.

Perkins's classification system actually originated with S. Hastings Grant, Librarian of the New York Mercantile Library. Perkins had worked at the New York Mercantile Library, revising its catalog in 1866, 1869, and 1872. The Mercantile Library's catalog consisted of an alphabetical author list and an alphabetical list of topics, a system Perkins adopted for his own classification. According to Perkins, his system was superior to Dewey's in several respects. First, he considers his approach a "rational classification" scheme as opposed to Dewey's arbitrary decimal system. As he explains in the manual's introduction, his classification "is a reasoned scheme of subjects, naturally connected, related and developed, instead of being forcibly compressed within a fixed number of divisions." Perkins further explains that his main classes can be arranged in any order without making a difference, though he did admit that there was a

⁷Ibid., iii.

“natural succession” in the way he had arranged them. On the other hand, Perkins considers Dewey’s system as “arbitrary” because it distorts the natural division of a given subject by forcing it into ten divisions. He believed that this “unnatural division” led to some topics with too many divisions and some with too few. He believed that one should only use as many subdivisions as are “required by the subject.”⁸ Perkins also believed that his system was more flexible than Dewey’s for it was intended merely as a classification aid for libraries and not a classification for knowledge. Thus small libraries were free to use only the classes, while medium libraries could use the classes and chapters, and large libraries could use the entire scheme.

Perkins’s classification manual was a by-product of the professional debates about classification during this time period.⁹ One of the major issues had to do with the idea of fixed location versus movable location for shelving. Up to this time period, most librarians used a fixed system for arranging books. According to Maddox, “fixed location [was] a method of marking books so that the symbols on the books corresponded to a certain physical location in the library.”¹⁰ Dewey’s classification system proposed arranging the books on the shelves according to the classes, a revolutionary idea that

⁸Ibid., v. In the note explaining his preference for the order of classes he outlines why it is “natural.” He starts with God and his interaction with people (A – religion). Then moves to human nature (B-Philosophy), followed by people’s social activities (C – Society). This is then followed by the record of these social activities as a group (D – History) and as individuals (E – Biography). Next is the “truth as to the materials of the universe within which man lives” (F – Science). This is followed by the record of people’s dealing with the material universe (G – Art) and finally, the mechanism for recording all of the above (H – Literature).

⁹See Maddox, “Trends and Issues in American Librarianship,” 105-07. Here she does an excellent job summarizing the debates about classification taking place during the early years of the ALA. I will follow her summary in placing Perkins in the debates.

¹⁰Ibid., 66.

sparked considerable debate. On one side of the debate were those librarians who supported the new movable location approach. Dewey supported this system and claimed that after much use people's fears about this new system proved unfounded. Charles Cutter also supported the movable location arrangement of books. He called the fixed system the "old system" and criticized it for its inability to accommodate a growing collection. As Cutter saw it, librarians using a fixed system had few choices when they added new books. One solution was to reclassify and rearrange all the books. A second approach would be to start the classification over and store new books in another room. A third method was to leave gaps in the numbering for the additional new books. Finally, a library could expand its shelving to add more books.¹¹ As one can see from these options, the fixed location system was not ideal. Thus Cutter encouraged his fellow librarians to adopt a movable system whereby a book would be assigned a permanent number that would never change even if its location on the shelf changed "a hundred times." By the mid-1880s many librarians saw the wisdom of adopting the movable location and were quite happy with the results.

On the other side of the argument were Frederic Perkins and Justin Winsor. These library pioneers were not convinced that this new way of arranging books would work. Perkins was, perhaps, the most vocal opponent of the movable system. He argued against it in his classification manual and in articles published in the *Library Journal*. In one article, simply titled "Movable Location," Perkins sums up his arguments against the system. First, the frequent movement of books tends to injure them. Second, Dewey's

¹¹See Charles Cutter, "Classification on the Shelves"; Also see Maddox, "Trends and Issues in American Librarianship," 69-70.

movable plan doesn't allow for memorizing where a book is located on the shelf. Third, the system wastes shelf space because large and small books are shelved next to one another.¹² As more and more libraries used the movable location plan, Perkins's complaints against the system proved to be unfounded. In the end, the fixed location system would fade from use.

Other issues in the classification debate included: 1) logical versus artificial order; 2) close classification; and 3) the type of notation used in a system. Perkins's place in these arguments is best summed up in a two-part article he co-authored with J. Schwartz.¹³ Known as "The Duet," this article is a thorough and scathing review of Dewey's classification system. As discussed earlier, Perkins believed his system had a "natural" or "rational" order that made it superior to others. Dewey's order, on the other hand, seemed arbitrary to him. In "The Duet," Perkins and Schwartz attack Dewey's order of classification because of his use of classes, divisions, and sections based on tens. This arbitrary use of ten, they felt, forced Dewey to make glaring mistakes in his classification hierarchy. One example was Dewey's treatment of Geography, Travel, and History. Perkins and Schwartz maintain that, "nobody who examines his scheme can fail to be struck by his unnatural and troublesome plan of numbering Geography (with Travel) as one tenth of History, for it requires just as much space, or nearly so, as

¹²Fredric B. Perkins, "Movable Location," *Library Journal* 7, no. 2 (1882): 29.

¹³F. B. Perkins and J. Schwartz, "The Dui-Decimal Classification and The 'Relativ' Index. A Duet Part 1," *Library Journal* 11, no. 2 (1886): 37-43. And F. B. Perkins and J. Schwartz, "The Dui-Decimal Classification and The 'Relativ' Index. A Duet Part 2," *Library Journal* 11, no. 3 (1886): 68-74.

History.”¹⁴ Elsewhere, they claim, Dewey added what they called “superfluous topics.” This happened because of his combining the functions of a catalog with shelf arrangement. Finally, Perkins and Schwartz were concerned that Dewey omitted some important topics, such as America (discovery of) and American literature.

“The Duet” also weighed in on the issue of “close classification.” Close classification was the breaking down of topics to such a degree that all books on a given subject (no matter how minute) would be shelved together. This was in opposition to a broader system that shelved books by general subject area and did not attempt to keep books on very specific topics together. According to Perkins and Schwartz, there were five reasons why close classification didn’t work. First, it rests on the assumption that all books are available to patrons for browsing and shelved in the same area. This overlooks collections that are closed to the public and special collections that are shelved separately from the main collection. Second, it doesn’t take into account books that have multiple subjects. These books cannot be shelved in more than one place at a time. Third, close classification can be too close and end up dispersing books on similar subjects that should be kept together. For example, “It is perfectly clear that if we divide animals into bird, mammals, etc., and then go on subdividing the mammals in to their various orders and species until we reach the lowest possible point, that we must look under each of our divisions if we wish to get ‘all’ the books on one species.”¹⁵ Perkins and Schwartz also worried that Dewey’s classification could be carried out “reduction ad absurdum,” so that

¹⁴Perkins and Schwartz, “The Dui-Decimal Classification and The ‘Relativ’ Index. A Duet Part 1:” 38.

¹⁵Ibid.

subject divisions become so minute that they become absurd. They use Dewey's 839 class (Minor Teutonic Literature) as an example. Here, Dewey apparently lists several obscure Dutch, Flemish, and Scandinavian writers whom no one would ever look for. Finally, close classification overlooks the importance of classing some books by their form rather than their subject. The form of a book (poetry, drama, essays, etc.) was taken into account more prominently (or so they argued) in Perkins's and Schwartz's classifications.

In addition to Dewey's faulty classification hierarchies and overly close subject analysis, Perkins also criticized his numbering system. Dewey, of course, used all numbers in a decimal format, while nearly all the other classification systems used a combination of letters and numbers (with some using symbols). In Perkins's view, a library numbering system should observe four general principles. First, the system should provide an "economical and intelligible key to the shelves." Second, the shelf numbers should be short since long numbers encourage shelving errors. Third, since American users are familiar with two sets of symbols (Arabic numerals and the English alphabet) only those symbols should be used. Though Dewey employed Arabic numerals he did so using a decimal format, with which, "The Duet" argued, Americans were unfamiliar. Fourth, the law of proportion should be followed to keep shelf marks short. This, they claim, can be accomplished by having the number of books on hand (taking into account growth) determine the number of classes. Based on these evaluation criteria, the Duet declared that Dewey's numbering system failed miserably in each case.

The profession's response to Perkins's and Schwartz' attack was, for the most part, equally hostile and dismissive. In fact, in the same issue in which "The Duet" appears, the *Library Journal's* editors write a disclaimer, describing "The Duet" as "a somewhat savage attack on Mr. Dewey's Decimal Classification." The editors suggest that Perkins and Schwartz are demanding a level of "perfection rarely reached in bibliographical or other mundane enterprises." They then dismiss "The Duet" by stating, "our readers will probably see without having it specifically pointed out to them that many points made against the scheme are in the nature of hypercriticism so as scarcely to need reply."¹⁶ Charles Cutter also came to Dewey's defense. He supported the use of close classification or what he called "minute classification," and he wrote a rebuttal to "The Duet's" critique of the practice. In the rebuttal he takes on the authors point by point, clearly exposing the weaknesses in their arguments.¹⁷ Dewey himself wrote a two-part rebuttal to the Duet's criticisms, dismissing many that he felt were unfounded or unfair. Other readers also wrote to defend Dewey's system and Dewey himself.¹⁸

Perkins and Schwartz seemed to let things drop at this point in the debate. Their only reply to Dewey's rebuttal was a short rejoinder in the *Library Journal's* May issue titled, "'The Duet' Explains." However, instead of giving explanations or defending their stance, they simply state, "With your permission we will just say that Mr. Dewey has not,

¹⁶"Mr. Perkins's and Mr Schwartz's 'Duet'," *Library Journal* 11, no. 2 (1886): 36.

¹⁷Charles Cutter, "Close Classification: With Special Reference to Messrs. Perkins, Schwartz, and Dewey," *Library Journal* 11, no. 7 (1886): 180-84.

¹⁸See Melvil Dewey, "The Decimal Classification: A Reply to The 'Duet' Part 1," *Library Journal* 11, no. 4 (1886): 100-06. And Melvil Dewey, "The Decimal Classification: A Reply to The 'Duet' Part 2," *Library Journal* 11, no. 5 (1886): 132-39. Also see B. Pickman Mann, "The Dui-Decimal Classification," *Library Journal* 11, no. 5 (1886): 139-41.

we think, disposed of the objections we made to his system; and we have accordingly nothing more to say on the subject at present.”¹⁹

Perkins’s thoughts about Dewey’s classification seemingly never changed. In late December 1887, Perkins writes a letter to Dewey and is again plain spoken in expressing his distaste for Dewey’s system. “A happy new year to you,” Perkins writes to his colleague, continuing:

I haven’t changed my views, but as the young lady says in the opera, ‘I love thee still the same!’ I like you very much, as I always did, & hate your (epithets) old plan as much as ever. I haven’t changed this library because I couldn’t, & the more I have to keep in with your (more epithets) plan the madder I get & the more I hate it....I think your classification of books the most unsatisfactory point in your scheme.²⁰

With this final salvo, Perkins’s involvement in the classification debate comes to an end. Evidence shows that some libraries did adopt Perkins’s system, but certainly not on a large scale.²¹ History has shown that Dewey’s system was the clear winner of these early debates.²² However, the debates themselves were crucial in the development of the

¹⁹F. B. Perkins and J. Schwartz, “‘The Duet’ Explains,” *Library Journal* 11, no. 5 (1886): 144.

²⁰Frederick B. Perkins to Melvil Dewey, December 31, 1887. Box 33, Personal Correspondence, Peoples to Pierson. Melvil Dewey Papers, Columbia University.

²¹See Library Bureau ledgers. Box 62, Library Bureau, 1889-1897. Melvil Dewey Papers, Columbia University. When one studies the ledgers of Dewey’s company he or she will find several entries a month dating well into the mid 1890s for sales of Perkins’s classification. This shows that it was popular enough to continue selling well after its publication and despite the lack of any updates to keep it current.

²²An interesting snippet appears in an oral interview with Mary Foy, the third librarian of Los Angeles Public library. She had been sent to San Francisco to learn from the librarian who happened to be Perkins. She said she received “the most help from Fred Perkins.” She went on to say that, “...the fight was very bitter, just at that time, between Dewey and Perkins on how to classify the books on the shelves, and, of course, was advancing his ideas and they finally prevailed. I think it’s a good thing that they did, but Perkins was holding to the old classification.” See Transcript of Oral Interview with Mary Foy. Box 7, Folder 9. Collection no. 873. UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections.

field. As Maddox points out, “The value of these discussions lies in the fact that librarians were becoming increasingly aware that exchange of opinion was valuable, and that some system of classification was becoming a necessity because of their rapidly expanding libraries. The literature of classification upon which future schemes were based was written during this time.”²³ Perkins was a major voice in these debates, and his tenacity forced Dewey and others to refine and improve their systems. His work will remain as an important part of the early literature upon which future classification schemes were built.

Perkins’s Cataloging Manual

Perkins contributed to the development of cataloguing rules with the publication of his manual, *San Francisco Cataloging for Public Libraries*, in 1884. “I have tried to make this manual so distinct and detailed,” Perkins writes in the introduction, “that anybody of fair education and intelligence who has never done any cataloguing, can with my treatise in hand catalogue an ordinary town library well enough for practical purpose.”²⁴ The manual was intended for use in small libraries containing 50,000 volumes or less. A larger library, Perkins contended, required an entirely different manual. His goal was to address the deficiencies he saw in Cutter’s cataloging manual and in the cataloging suggestions offered by the ALA. Perkins believed that Cutter’s rules did not have enough detail to be helpful to beginners and lacked any kind of

²³Maddox, “Trends and Issues in American Librarianship,” 106.

²⁴Perkins, *San Francisco Cataloging for Public Libraries*, 1.

classification system. He also argued that the ALA's rules for an author and title catalog were "too condensed" to be helpful to beginning catalogers.

Perkins's manual also provides step-by-step instructions on how to create titles, subjects, authors, and form entries as well as cross references. To start, three cataloging entries should be created for each book, a main entry and two "side" entries. The main entry should always be an author entry, while normally the side entries are based on the book's subject and title. Perkins's rationale for these three entries was that this was how most people searched for books. Depending on the book, a form entry may also be needed, for experience taught him that people also come to the library searching for a certain type of book (e.g., poems or plays). Finally, in some cases cross references may be added. Perkins's manual also outlines how a cataloging entry should look. It should contain a heading (the author, title, subject, form, or cross reference), a shelf mark (for showing the book's place on the shelves), a title, accession number, and notes of some kind (if warranted).²⁵

This outlines the basics of Perkins's cataloging manual. He also encourages his readers to use the fixed location system for shelving books and includes a guide on how to prepare the catalog for printing. In the fixed location discussion, Perkins reiterates the arguments already outlined in favor of this system. He also states that his classification that follows the cataloging manual is "primarily for cataloguing and not controlling shelf

²⁵Perkins encouraged the use of explanatory notes as pioneered by Justin Winsor at Boston Public Library. He claimed these helped people see "the relation of fiction to historical or other subjects" and helped to frame a book's context for the reader. See *Ibid.*, 32-33.

marks.”²⁶ He goes on to describe in detail how to prepare books for the shelves using a fixed location system. It is unclear how popular Perkins’s cataloging manual became. There is no discussion of it to be found in the *Library Journal*, but it did sell along with his classification well into the mid-1890s if not longer. This demonstrates there was at least some interest even if it was not sustained.

Conclusion

By the early to mid 1880s, Perkins had a wealth of experience and knowledge. He had been working as a librarian in some capacity for twenty years, addressing many of the important classification and cataloging issues of the day. While at SFPL, Perkins used his broad experience and knowledge to create a cataloging manual and classification scheme. He also participated in the important debates concerning classification and cataloging, helping the profession improve its practices. Despite all of his experience and knowledge, Perkins’s own systems were never widely adopted. This is mainly due to his personal weaknesses, which hindered him from making a larger impact. His lack of focus kept him from creating a system that could be widely used. His classification scheme only had two editions (one year apart), and his cataloging manual had no editions besides the first. This is compared to Dewey’s three editions of his Decimal Classification during this same time period as well as Cutter’s many editions of his cataloging manual and classification scheme. Dewey and Cutter were interested in creating a good system that could be used by the broadest number of people. As Perkins and others critiqued their systems, they responded with improvements, which helped the

²⁶Ibid., 40.

manuals extend their usefulness. In contrast, Perkins only made one change to his system, eventually losing interest.²⁷ It was never improved and were therefore quickly outdated. Perkins's entrenchment in familiar ways of doing things also contributed to his systems not being adopted. The prime example is his refusal to adopt the movable system, which was quickly proving to be superior in practice. Finally, he felt easily slighted and attacked his opponents. Even when his critiques were correct, they were presented in a way that alienated others and enabled them to more easily dismiss what he was saying.

²⁷In the first edition of Perkins's classification he only used "a single series of numbers" for classifying books in each subject area. In the second edition he added a letter to more clearly identify each class. For example, class A = Religion, class B = Philosophy, etc. See Perkins, *A Rational Classification of Literature for Shelving and Cataloguing Books in a Library*, iii.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

In 1876, three major events happened that catalyzed librarians and help birth a new and dynamic profession. The US Bureau of Education published the first major report on American public libraries. That same year, the ALA had its beginning in Philadelphia and the *Library Journal* was founded and first published. The *1876 Special Report* provided data that validated a rapidly growing part of US society and served as a manual that spurred more growth and educated new professionals in the field for years to come. ALA and the *Library Journal* provided a forum for librarians to share ideas and work out practices helping to establish librarianship as a legitimate profession. As described in the previous chapters, these events involved prominent people and institutions that are well known and well documented, such as Justin Winsor, Charles Cutter, and Melvil Dewey. However, not everyone who made significant contributions to these events has been included in the history.

As demonstrated throughout these pages, Frederick Beecher Perkins is one such person. He was born into a prominent religious family. The Beechers, perhaps the most famous American religious family, left an indelible mark on US history. They were a literary family who greatly influenced US society through the power of their pens and their voices. Perkins continued in their footsteps as a bookman, writer, and scholar.

Perkins also had many of the same characteristics of his better known colleagues. He was born in the 1820s to a New England family of clergy and professionals (his father being a lawyer). An intellectual, he loved books and writing and devoted himself to these endeavors. As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, Perkins lived and worked

alongside pioneering librarians as a well-respected colleague, and he contributed in major ways to the important events that shaped the field of librarianship. To quote his obituary from the *Library Journal*, he is truly “one of the pioneer workers in the library field.”¹

Perkins made his first major contributions to the library field while living in Boston and working for the Boston Public Library. For many years, BPL was the consummate American public library and administered by the foremost statesman of librarianship, Justin Winsor. While Perkins benefited from working with Winsor at BPL, his excellent work also contributed to the library’s prestige. Here he gained the most respect for his bibliographic work. He contributed to the BPL catalogs, in an effort to educate readers and increase the circulation of books. This was a major innovation in cataloging, and was copied in many libraries throughout the U.S. Ten years later, when Perkins published his own cataloging manual, he encouraged librarians to use the same note system in their catalog entries. While at BPL he also published one of the most well-known books on reading available in its day. In *Best Reading* Perkins shared his considerable bibliographic talents with the library profession, guiding librarians in their book selections and advice to patrons on what to read

Perkins’s influence in libraries and librarianship goes beyond the bibliographic contributions he made while at BPL. Spanning his career in Boston and later in San Francisco, Perkins made significant contributions to ALA, the *Library Journal*, and the *1876 Special Report*, as well as the fields of library practice, cataloging, and classification. The ALA, through its conferences and committees, was particularly

¹“Perkins, Frederick Beecher,” 82.

important because it provided a context for librarians to debate and formalize library practice. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, Perkins was active in the ALA, participating in conferences and serving as a founding member of the Cooperation Committee. This work increased Perkins's influence by giving him a venue to express his ideas. His voice was also heard in the many articles he wrote for the *Library Journal*. As the journal's editors noted in their obituary of him, "for over a decade the Journal contained frequent and valuable contributions from his pen."² His ideas were many and varied, as he commented on a variety of subjects ranging from gas lamps and shelf mark paints, to revolving card racks, and cataloging and classification.

The *1876 Special Report* also gave Perkins the opportunity to promote his ideas to others in the profession. This report, which served as a library science textbook for many years, included five essays penned by Perkins. These essays dealt with key areas involved in the professionalization of librarianship: 1) bibliographic instruction; 2) library history; and 3) library economy and administration. He also provided valuable guidance to the report's editor, which helped make it a success.

The capstone to Perkins's career is his contributions to cataloging and classification. During this era, these two professional areas experienced a great deal of growth, facilitated by the healthy debates taking place through the ALA and the *Library Journal*. Perkins participated in these debates and ultimately produced his own cataloging manual and classification system. His system was used by many librarians throughout the 1880s and 1890s. While his system ultimately faded from use, it provided

²Ibid.

important intellectual fodder for librarians like Melvil Dewey and Charles Cutter, who too wrestled with the enormous problem of cataloging and classifying the vast and rapidly expanding body of literature in the nation's libraries. The classification and cataloging guidelines produced by these library pioneers, including Perkins, served as a foundation for a professional conversation that is still taking place today.

When one looks at Perkins's twenty-five-year career, it becomes clear that he was an important figure in the history of library science. He was a well-respected colleague of many of the most prominent librarians of his era. He worked for the most influential organizations of his day and contributed to or created some of the most well-known and important pieces of professional literature in his field. Despite all this, Perkins has been largely overlooked or easily dismissed in library history. For although he was both brilliant and hard working, Perkins's contributions to the field have been all but forgotten. Unfortunately, this is largely his own doing as his weaknesses often overshadowed his accomplishments.

There are two main reasons for his failures. First, Perkins had trouble focusing his energies in one place. In addition to all of his professional activity, he was also quite a successful writer and editor. He worked for many prominent publications of his day, including the *New York Tribune*. He wrote histories, short stories, biographies, and even produced a novel.³ He also lectured on various subjects when he lived in Boston and San Francisco. He was involved in local politics and political issues, writing editorials in local newspapers and running for office in San Francisco. These are just some examples

³For a complete list of Perkins writings see the appendix at the end of this thesis.

of his many endeavors that kept him from focusing deeply on any one area. After Perkins's death an American essayist and novelist, Charles Dudley Warner, wrote that "He had talents of a very high order—a touch of that which is called genius—and it is safe to say that if he had confined his effort to any one pursuit he would have attained great distinction."⁴ Unfortunately, Perkins did not have the self-discipline to focus on one pursuit, which lessened the impact he might have had.

Perkins's other liability was his contentious personality. He was easily offended, quick to anger, and impatient with others. When faced with adversity or challenged by someone with whom he did not agree, attacked those he saw as enemies rather seeking compromise. Perkins's anger and lack of self-control led to his premature departure from both BPL and SFPL. Perkins seemed incapable of working within the system to affect change. Instead, he angrily confronted his superiors and attempted to sway the public against his "enemies." This tactic completely backfired, and in both Boston and San Francisco he ultimately left his library employment feeling wronged and slighted. These traits are also manifested in his debates with Dewey. His critiques of Dewey's ideas and work were couched in aggressive, confrontational language, allowing them to be easily dismissed by others. If Perkins had been able to overcome these personal shortcomings, he could have made a bigger impact on the field of library science.

Perkins's condescending attitude also hampered his effectiveness as a library policymaker. In many ways Perkins was supremely confident and was convinced that he knew what was best. He strongly believed that there were certain books one should read

⁴"Perkins, Frederick Beecher," 82.

and certain ways one should read them. He felt that public libraries existed to provide proper, uplifting reading to the masses. Libraries were the people's university, and an extension of the public educational system. Further, Perkins believed that people should act in certain ways and follow certain rules. When the public had other ideas about what they wanted to read and how they wanted to act, he lashed out at them. His patronizing tone and dictatorial air alienated him from the public as well as his colleagues and superiors. This made it easy to dismiss his ideas and contributed to his quickly fading from the professional scene. In some ways people were probably very glad to see him leave the field of library science.

Frederick Beecher Perkins was a pioneer who worked hard in advancing the field of library science. His brilliant mind and keen wit were frequently on display as he contributed to the important discussions taking place in this formative era. His strong abilities and outspoken nature put him in the middle of most of the important events in the profession's development. Unfortunately, Perkins's weaknesses undermined his ability to leave his imprint on the library world. His lack of focus and curmudgeonly personality minimized his otherwise stellar abilities. Still, his work deserves a place in the history of library science. In writing about Perkins, Della Haverland has summed up his life's work well:

But every professional worker meets difficulties and in the solution of these problems Mr. Perkins, always mentally alert, quick in repartee, keen of wit, with a lively sense of humor and a brilliant mind, became one of the most accomplished librarians in the country, noted for his knowledge of books as well as for his administrative ability. Miss Foy writes of her teacher, '...My idea today is that he must be classed with those early librarians who led in making of public libraries

the great modern institutions for service which are today the pride of our large and small cities.’⁵

⁵Haverland, “Frederick Beecher Perkins,” 22.

Appendix
Writings of Frederick Beecher Perkins

1858

The Station and Duty of American Teachers as Citizens, in View of the Materialism of the Age. An Address before the Alumni of the Conn. State Normal School, October 7, 1857. Hartford: Press of Case, Lockwood and Co., 1858.

1860

Perkins Family of Connecticut. Hartford, Conn.: s.n., 1860.

1864

with Guild, W. H. *The Central Park.* New York: Carleton, 1864.

1865

with Guild, W. H. *The Episcopal Churches of New York City.* New York: W.H. Guild, Jr., 1865.

1867

The Picture and the Men: Being Biographical Sketches of President Lincoln and His Cabinet. New York: A. J. Johnson; F. G. Cleveland, & A. C. Rowe, 1867.

1870

Charles Dickens: A Sketch of His Life and Works. New York: G.P. Putnam, Sons, 1870.

1872

with Hodge, James, Thomas Prentice Thacher, T. Addison Richards, L. P. Brockett, Henry Barnard, George B. Prescott, D. A. Heald, and Jacob Lyman Greene. *First Century of National Existence.* Hartford, Conn: L. Stebbins, 1872.

1873

with Putnam, George Palmer. *The Best Reading. Hints on the Selection of Books; on the Formation of Libraries, Public and Private; on Courses of Reading, Etc., with a Classified Bibliography for Easy Reference.* Rev. ed, Putnam's Handy-Book Series. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1873.

1874

Scrope; or, the Lost Library: A Novel of New York and Hartford. Boston: Roberts Bros., 1874.

1875

The Best Reading: Hints on the Selection of Books; on the Formation of Libraries, Public and Private; on Courses of Reading, Etc. With a Classified Bibliography for Easy Reference. Rev. enl. and continued to December, 1874. ed, Putnam's Handy-Book Series;. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1875.

translated *Narrative of Le Moyne: An Artist Who Accompanied the French Expedition to Florida under Laudonniere.* Boston: J. R. Osgood and Co., 1875.

1876

“Book Indexes.” In *Public Libraries in the United States of America; Their History, Condition, and Management. Special Report*, 727-32. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876.

Checklist for American Local History: Reprinted with Additions from the Bulletins of the Boston Public Library. Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1876.

“How to Make Town Libraries Successful.” In *Public Libraries in the United States of America; Their History, Condition, and Management. Special Report*, 419-30. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1876.

“Public Libraries of Boston and Vicinity.” In *Public Libraries in the United States of America; Their History, Condition, and Management. Special Report*, 851-78. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1876.

“Young Men's Mercantile Libraries.” In *Public Libraries in the United States of America; Their History, Condition, and Management. Special Report*, 378-85. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1876.

with Matthews, William. “Professorships of Books and Reading.” In *Public Libraries in the United States of America; Their History, Condition, and Management. Special Report*, 230-51. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1876.

1877

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