

# “So Well Begun and So Much Needed”: Building up Libraries for Residents of Iowa’s State Institutions

LISA R. LINDELL

IN THE FALL of 1905, the state of Iowa committed to an innovative experiment, becoming the first state in the nation to undertake systematic development of library services throughout its state-run prisons, hospitals, and other social welfare institutions. Other states had individual book collections in some of their correctional and charitable institutions, but none had a unified strategy of library management. In Iowa the Board of Control of State Institutions launched this strategic work with the appointment in January 1906 of trained librarian Miriam E. Carey to the newly created position of supervisor of state institution libraries.

Over the next two decades, Carey and four other women librarians served successively in the supervisory role. The librarians came to their posts sharing deeply held convictions: books were essential, and everyone deserved access; books were powerful, and their use required careful guidance. Carey declared, “We all believe with our whole hearts, in the mission of the book – in its power as a tool.” Skilled hands, she maintained, must direct that tool to obtain the desired results.<sup>1</sup> As they carried out their mission,

---

1. Miriam E. Carey, “Libraries in State Institutions – The Book as a Tool,” *Bulletin of Iowa Institutions* 9 (1907), 197. Carey was appointed at a salary of \$100 per month plus traveling expenses. *Fifth Biennial Report of the Board of Control of State Institutions of Iowa* (1906), 3.

Carey and her successors had to adapt their perspectives and practices to address the specific needs of institutions and their inhabitants. The experiences of the Iowa librarians, as they provided books to institutional residents and actively engaged with cultural and professional notions on the roles and purposes of libraries and reading, shine a light on a pioneering social experiment and its contribution to the broader story of librarianship in early twentieth-century America.<sup>2</sup>

A CONFLUENCE of common objectives arising out of the spirit of the times set Iowa's state institutional libraries on their new path. A driving force was the Progressive Era reform movement with its concern for the welfare of vulnerable populations and an emphasis on social control. Further contributing factors were the professionalization of librarianship and a growing interest in organization and efficiency. Progressivism's rise in late nineteenth-century America was triggered by rapidly escalating industrialization, urbanization, and immigration and associated

---

2. Studies providing historical background on libraries for residents of institutions include Patricia Dawson, *History of Institutional Libraries in Iowa* (unpublished manuscript, University of Iowa, 1968); Edith Kathleen Jones, *Hospital Libraries* (Chicago, 1939); Patricia A. Wolfgram, "Hospital Libraries in the United States: Historical Antecedents," *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* 73 (1985), 32-38; Priscilla Older, "Patient Libraries in Hospitals for the Insane in the United States, 1810-1861," *Libraries & Culture* 26 (1991), 511-31; Ruth Holst, "Hospital Libraries in Perspective," *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* 79 (1991), 1-9; Nancy Mary Panella, "The Patients' Library Movement: An Overview of Early Efforts in the United States to Establish Organized Libraries for Hospital Patients," *Bulletin of the American Medical Association* 84 (1996), 52-62; Carol Perryman, "Medicus Deus: A Review of Factors Affecting Hospital Library Services to Patients between 1790-1950," *Journal of the Medical Library Association* 94 (2006), 263-70; Austin H. McCormick, "A Brief History of Libraries in American Correctional Institutions," in *Readings in Prison Education*, ed. Albert R. Roberts (Springfield, IL, 1973), 317-36; William J. Coyle, *Libraries in Prisons: A Blending of Institutions* (New York, 1987); Larry E. Sullivan, "Reading in American Prisons: Structures and Strictures," *Libraries & Culture* 33 (1998), 113-19; Larry E. Sullivan and Brenda Vogel, "Reachin' Behind Bars: Library Outreach to Prisoners, 1798-2000," in Brenda Vogel, *The Prison Library Primer: A Program for the Twenty-first Century* (Lanham, MD, 2009), 1-17; Megan Sweeney, *Reading Is My Window: Books and the Art of Reading in Women's Prisons* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2010); Vibeke Lehmann, "Challenges and Accomplishments in U.S. Prison Libraries," *Library Trends* 59 (2011), 490-508; Kathrina Sarah Litchfield, "A Critical Impasse: Literacy Practice in American Prisons and the Future of Transformative Reading" (master's thesis, University of Iowa, 2014).

fears of social disorder. Along with advances in science and technology, the era brought a focus on moral renewal and social betterment. The library field, as it professionalized during these years (the first library school opened in 1887), reflected the larger culture. Librarians entered the profession with a combined sense of social mission and enthusiasm for efficient methods of organization. The development of librarianship as a female-intensive profession paralleled other emerging, service-oriented fields, including social work and nursing. The profession's low pay and its public service and cultural guardian roles evoked little male objection to women's prevalence and limited male competition chiefly to the top positions.<sup>3</sup>

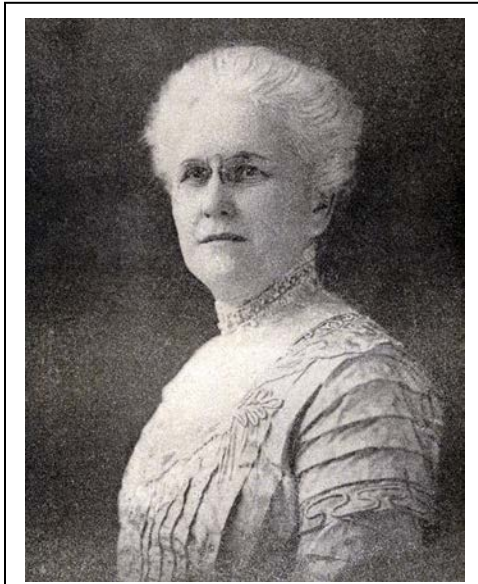
The Progressive Era focus on social reform and regulation brought new impetus to a long history of guiding public morals. The institutions established under the Board of Control themselves reflected that social reform agenda.<sup>4</sup> The reform impetus also included an ideology of reading. "Good" or "bad" reading, as construed by those with cultural authority, was linked to good or bad social behavior. Librarians' training schooled them in this vision of the transformative power of books. Through the edification of readers, librarians desired to assert their own professional authority and contribute to creating a socially responsible citizenry.<sup>5</sup>

---

3. Mary Niles Maack, "Gender, Culture, and the Transformation of American Librarianship, 1890-1920," *Libraries & Culture* 33 (1998): 51-61; Joanne E. Passet, "'You Do Not Have to Pay Librarians': Women, Salaries, and Status in the Early 20th Century," in *Reclaiming the American Library Past: Writing the Women In*, ed. Suzanne Hildenbrand (Norwood, NJ, 1996), 207-19.

4. See, for example, Joyce Mckay, "Reforming Prisoners and Prisons: Iowa's State Prisons—The First Hundred Years," *Annals of Iowa* 60 (2001), 139-73; Douglas Wertsch, "Iowa's Daughters: The First Thirty Years of the Girls Reform School of Iowa, 1869-1899," *Annals of Iowa* 49 (1987), 77-100; Sarah W. Tracy, "Contesting Habitual Drunkenness: State Medical Reform for Iowa's Inebriates, 1902-1920," *Annals of Iowa* 61 (2002), 241-85; and Jane Simonsen, "'This Large Household': Architecture and Civic Identity at the Iowa Hospital for the Insane at Mount Pleasant," *Annals of Iowa* 69 (2010), 173-206.

5. Frederick J. Stielow, "Censorship in the Early Professionalization of American Libraries, 1876 to 1929," *Journal of Library History* 18 (1983), 37-54; Christine Jenkins, "'Since So Many of Today's Librarians Are Women . . .': Women and Intellectual Freedom in U.S. Librarianship, 1890-1990" in *Reclaiming the American Library Past*, 221-49; Wayne A. Wiegand, "The Development of Librarianship in the United States," *Libraries & Culture* 24 (1989), 102-3; Wayne A. Wiegand, *Part*



*Alice S. Tyler, ca. 1900s. From Iowa Library Quarterly 14 (1944), 213.*

Iowa librarians embraced the progressive mission of advancing the social good. In 1900 concerted lobbying by the Iowa Library Association (established in 1890) and the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs (organized in 1893) led to the creation of the Iowa Library Commission, with the purpose of promoting the expansion of libraries throughout the state. As full-time secretary of the Commission, Alice S. Tyler led efforts to establish new public libraries and to improve and assist existing ones, and she directed a summer school course to teach library workers practical and professional skills.<sup>6</sup> The chief objective of librarians, according to Tyler, was "to bring about a more general use of a better

---

*of Our Lives: A People's History of the American Public Library* (New York, 2015), 75–76; Christine Pawley, "Missionaries of the Book' or 'Central Intelligence Agents': Gender and Ideology in the Contest for Library Education in Twentieth-Century America," *Libraries: Culture, History, and Society* 1 (2017), 73, 80.

6. *Laws of the Twenty-Eighth General Assembly* (1900), chap. 116. See also Daniel Goldstein, "The Spirit of an Age: Iowa Public Libraries and Professional Librarians as Solutions to Society's Problems, 1890–1940," *Libraries & Culture* 38 (2003), 218–22; Shana L. Stuart, "'My Duty and My Pleasure': Alice S. Tyler's Reluctant

class of books; not that each one shall read more books, but better ones, and that more people shall read."<sup>7</sup>

TYLER PROVIDED the catalyzing spark for Iowa's library enterprise for institutional residents. Although some of the state institutions already had book collections, they often were haphazardly selected or donated and remained uncatalogued and little used. Reports from a few socially minded individuals, combined with personal institutional visits, inspired Tyler to take up the cause of systematic development and management of institutional library collections.

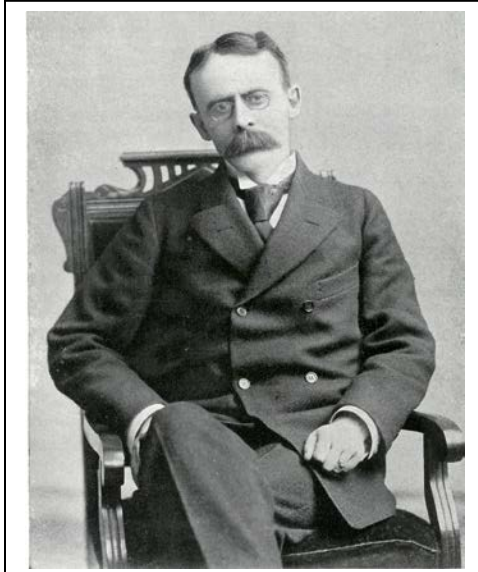
Tyler made her case to the Iowa Board of Control, which had been established by a legislative act in 1898 to centralize the governance of the separate state institutions under one body. The three-member board was predisposed to favor libraries. Two of its members, judges Gifford S. Robinson and La Vega G. Kinne, had previously served on the State Library Board and were involved in the start of Iowa's traveling library program; the third member, John Cownie, was an avowed library supporter. Committed to increasing the number of books in the state institutions, Cownie hailed the 1904 passage of a bill initiated by the Board of Control that allowed funds received from the 25-cent "gate fee" charged to visitors of the state penitentiaries to be used to purchase books for any institution under the board's control.<sup>8</sup>

---

Oversight of Carnegie Library Philanthropy in Iowa," *Information & Culture* 48 (2013), 91-111; Abigail Weaver, "Establishing an Institution: The Public Library Movement in Iowa 1900-1920," *Iowa Historical Review* 7 (2017), 7-36.

7. Alice S. Tyler, "A Working Library Versus a Collection of Books," *Bulletin of Iowa Institutions* 7 (1905), 450.

8. Miriam E. Carey, "Libraries in State Institutions - with Special Reference to Iowa," *Bulletin of Iowa Institutions* 10 (1908), 285; L. G. Kinne, "The Origin, Growth and Development of the Board of Control System in Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 6 (1904), 321-39; Johnson Brigham, "Libraries in State Institutions," *Bulletin of Iowa Institutions* (1905), 334; "Quarterly Meeting of the Chief Executive Officers of the State Institutions with the Board of Control, June 13, 1905," *Bulletin of Iowa Institutions* 7 (1905), 405-6. Library school graduate Fanny Duren, who helped to organize the library at the Industrial School for Boys in Eldora, was an instrumental influence. Miriam E. Carey, "Institutional Libraries - A Phase of Library Extension," typewritten rough draft of lecture transcript, 1933, 2-3, box 1, Miriam Eliza Carey Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul, MN. The 1904 law on the disposition of prison gate receipts stated that "the warden of each peni-



*Johnson Brigham (1846–1936). Photo from State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.*

At the invitation of the Board of Control, Tyler and Iowa State Librarian Johnson Brigham each delivered a paper on institutional libraries at the board's quarterly conferences in 1905, attended by the superintendents of the individual state institutions and other interested parties. Brigham presented a detailed survey on libraries in state institutions in Iowa and other states. Although some individual institutions maintained a library, his research revealed an almost complete absence of formulated institutional library policy. In Iowa he discerned a clear interest in developing a statewide strategy.<sup>9</sup>

---

tentiary shall demand and receive of each person, except those exempt by law and relatives of a convict confined therein, who visits the prisons for the purpose of viewing the interior or precincts, the sum of twenty-five cents, of which the warden shall render an account, which shall be applied, in the discretion of the board of control of state institutions, in the purchase of books and periodicals for the use of the prisons and for the use of all other institutions under their control, provided however, that they may if they deem it best use not exceeding ten per cent of such receipts for lectures, concerts or entertainments for the prisoners." *Laws of the Thirtieth General Assembly* (1904), chap 140.

9. Brigham, "Libraries in State Institutions," 334–49.

Brigham's findings set the stage for Tyler's paper, "A Working Library Versus a Collection of Books," in which she outlined the rationale for hiring a professionally trained librarian to take charge of all the libraries in the state institutions, managing them as elements of one uniform system. Tyler suggested that each institution host this library supervisor in turn, during which time the librarian would make book selections, catalog and classify the collections following current library standards, establish loan procedures, and instruct institutional staff or volunteers, all with the aim of stimulating and guiding reading among the residents. "I know of no state having tried this," she concluded. "Why should not Iowa lead in this matter as she has done in so many others?"<sup>10</sup>

The superintendents and Board of Control members responded to Brigham's and Tyler's presentations with lively discussion. The reports and commentary conveyed a genuine concern for the residents' well-being and rehabilitation; they also revealed moralizing attitudes and, by today's standards, stigmatizing language. The dialogue following Brigham's presentation centered on desirable reading. All agreed that a large proportion of fiction was inevitable. So universal was its appeal, Brigham acknowledged, that "there is practically one general entrance to the world of books, and that is by the fiction gate." Reflecting culturally received views on the purposes of reading, Brigham endorsed books that were "good, sane, helpful, wholesome," though also, he granted, "entertaining," with the goal that such reading might serve as a stepping stone to more substantial content and "elevating planes of thought."<sup>11</sup>

Board members disagreed about the extent to which the preferences of residents should be taken into account, a disagreement that provided a preview of the philosophical choices the institutional librarians would need to make when selecting materials. Cownie declared that he would have a dozen copies of fashion magazines in every ward in the state hospitals, "simply because these unfortunate women enjoy reading and talking over the latest

---

10. Tyler, "A Working Library Versus a Collection of Books," 447-53 (quote from p. 453).

11. Brigham, "Libraries in State Institutions," 341, 343. See also Esther Jane Carrier, *Fiction in Public Libraries, 1876-1900* (New York, 1965); and Esther Jane Carrier, *Fiction in Public Libraries, 1900-1950* (Littleton, CO, 1985).

fashions, and they are surely entitled to our consideration and sympathy in this matter." Judge Kinne opposed such a ready yielding to the tastes of residents, believing that it would lead to "a whole lot of stuff nobody ought to read." He did concede that furnishing a reasonable amount of what was wanted by "the insane people" and other institutional populations was acceptable if properly selected, provided that it was used "to lead up and educate, elevate them to something a little better."<sup>12</sup>

Tyler's proposal to hire a supervising librarian framed the discussion at the September quarterly meeting. The superintendents who participated were for the most part willing (some even eager) to receive the assistance of a librarian experienced in book selection and library organization. The wardens of the two state prisons, which housed the largest and best funded of Iowa's institution libraries, recognized the potential of a professional librarian to supervise and organize. School for the Deaf Superintendent Henry W. Rothert expressed the most concerns. He noted that his school was rebuilding its library collection after a recent fire had destroyed its contents and would welcome the assistance of a trained librarian, but he assumed that in the matter of book selection, he and his teachers knew more about the needs of the children than an outside librarian could. Frank J. Sessions of the Iowa Soldiers' Orphans' Home at Davenport cited his experience of serving on a library board to organize a new library at Waterloo. "I went into the work with an idea that I knew a great deal about libraries and library work. It didn't take me long to find out that the trained experts knew two to one to what I did." At his institution, he further noted, they had no one with the time and skill needed to fulfill all the necessary library tasks. Commandant Charles C. Horton of the Soldiers' Home at Marshalltown agreed. "I wish to plead guilty to the fact that we have no system in our library; I have no one that is capable of carrying this out." The home had a collection of 1,600 books with no space left in the library and would be very glad to have a librarian take charge. Superintendent George Mogridge of the Institution for Feeble-Minded Children at Glenwood summed up the common

---

12. "Quarterly Meeting of the Chief Executive Officers of the State Institutions with the Board of Control, June 13, 1905," 406-7, 409.



sentiment: "We do not use our library enough; our people do not use it enough; our general staff does not use it enough. I think a trained librarian would be beneficial to us."<sup>13</sup>

In the end, the superintendents unanimously approved the proposal to employ a supervising librarian. The Board of Control would secure a skilled librarian "at such compensation as may be reasonable" to travel among the state institutions to build up their libraries. As there was no state fund available to pay the librarian, each institution would contribute a proportionate share, including the librarian's expenses and room and board while she was there.<sup>14</sup> When the board hired Miriam Carey as the library supervisor, it acquired an enthusiastic champion of the social potential of books. "The altruistic possibilities of the work are so great that we unite in feeling that here is work of fascinating interest," she declared.<sup>15</sup>

In March 1906 Carey officially began her work in Iowa supervising the libraries of the 14 institutions administered by the Board of Control: the state penitentiary at Fort Madison; the Men's Reformatory at Anamosa; state mental health hospitals at Cherokee, Clarinda, Independence, and Mount Pleasant; the School for the Deaf at Council Bluffs; the School for the Blind at Vinton; the School for Feeble-Minded Children at Glenwood; the Industrial School for Boys at Eldora and Industrial School for Girls at Mitchellville; the Iowa Soldiers' Home at Marshalltown; the Iowa Sol-

---

13. "Quarterly Meeting of the Chief Executive Officers of the State Institutions with the Board of Control, September 19, 1905," *Bulletin of Iowa Institutions* 7 (1905), 508-13.

14. *Ibid.*, 515; G. S. Robinson, "Institution Libraries of Iowa," *The Modern Hospital* 6 (1916), 131.

15. Carey, "Libraries in State Institutions—The Book as a Tool," 197. Carey had previous experience in social mission work. A family friend of Jane Addams, she had spent time at Hull House in Chicago in the 1890s before attending library school at the University of Illinois. Perrie Jones, "Miriam E. Carey," in *Pioneering Leaders in Librarianship*, ed. Emily Miller Danton (Chicago, 1953), 49-50. During this era, settlement house work provided reform-minded women the opportunity to live among the urban poor and to work with them in efforts to improve conditions. For studies of women librarians and social reform in the Progressive Era, see Margaret Bausman, "A Case Study of the Progressive Era Librarian Edith Guerrier: The Public Library, Social Reform, 'New Women,' and Urban Immigrant Girls," *Library & Information History* 32 (2016), 272-92; Maack, "Gender, Culture, and the Transformation of American Librarianship, 1890-1920," 51-61.



*Miriam E. Carey. From Pioneering Leaders in Librarianship (1953).*

diers' Orphans' Home at Davenport; and the State Hospital for Inebriates at Knoxville.<sup>16</sup> Carey remained in the Iowa position for three years before accepting a newly created post in Minnesota as organizer at the Minnesota Library Commission and supervisor of state institutions. Inspired by Iowa's example, Minnesota thus became the second state in the nation to establish such a position. The Minnesota job evolved into full-time supervision of institution libraries in 1913.<sup>17</sup>

---

16. This list would fluctuate over the next two decades, with the opening of the Sanatorium for the Treatment of Tuberculosis at Oakdale in 1908, the State Hospital and Colony for Epileptics at Woodward in 1917, the Women's Reformatory at Rockwell City in 1918, and the Juvenile Home at Toledo in 1920; the transfer to the Board of Education of the School for the Blind in 1911 and School for the Deaf in 1917; and the closing of the State Hospital for Inebriates in 1919. See Biennial Reports of the Board of Control of State Institutions of Iowa.

17. Miriam Eliza Carey was born in Peoria, Illinois, on February 21, 1858, the daughter of a Presbyterian minister. She attended Rockford Female Seminary in Illinois and Oberlin College in Ohio and then taught African American students at Talladega College in Alabama and Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. After spending time at Hull House in Chicago in the 1890s, she attended library school at the University of Illinois in 1898. She served as director of the Burlington, Iowa, public library prior to her appointment as institution library

FROM ITS START, the Iowa experiment generated attention from other states. In 1906 Mary Wright Plummer, in a presidential address before the New York State Library Association, lauded Iowa's "most advanced step" in placing the state institutional libraries under the charge of a trained and experienced librarian.<sup>18</sup> In 1907 Carey presented a paper on institutional library work at the annual meeting of the American Library Association (ALA), and she continued to promote the work at subsequent national meetings. In 1909, as chair of the recently formed ALA-affiliated committee on libraries in state institutions, she urged library commissions to extend their services to institutions and reported encouraging efforts in New Jersey, Indiana, Oregon, Michigan, and Wisconsin. In 1911 Nebraska became the third state to centralize institution library work, with a special legislative appropriation made to the state's library commission. Political, financial, and organizational factors were among the constraints that hampered other interested states.<sup>19</sup>

Although many prisons and a scattering of hospitals and other institutions in the United States had had libraries during the nineteenth century, systematic development and management of the collections became the model only with the professionalization of librarianship and its attention to modern methods of organization and the rehabilitative role of reading. In 1876, the same year as the founding of the ALA, the New York Prison Association offered initial guidance for prison library development with the publication of its *Catalogue and Rules for Prison Libraries*. In 1904 the McLean Hospital in Massachusetts, a private hospital for mentally ill patients, provided a prototype of hospital library development. The efforts of Edith Kathleen Jones, appointed as full-time librarian in that year, and generous appropriations and cooperation from the hospital resulted in what she termed

---

supervisor. After leaving Iowa, Carey remained at her position in Minnesota until her retirement in 1927. She taught at the newly organized library school at the University of Minnesota from 1930 to March 1936. Carey died January 9, 1937, at the age of 78. Jones, "Miriam E. Carey," 48-60.

18. "Iowa's Advanced Step," *Quarterly of the Iowa Library Commission* 5 (1906), 128.

19. *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 1 (1907), 101-8; *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 3 (1909), 339-42; Miriam E. Carey, "Institutional Libraries," typewritten manuscript, [1927?], 4, Carey Papers; *Sixth Biennial Report of the Nebraska Public Library Commission* (1912), 8.

"pretty near our ideal of what a library in a hospital for the insane should be."<sup>20</sup> At the same time, the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston also reorganized its library for patients and hired a librarian. In the case of state-run institutions, Jones recognized a measure of validity in their claims of insufficient funds to pay a trained librarian and maintain a library but saw a model solution in Iowa's system-wide approach, which "broke through conventions and . . . blazed a trail in the appointment of an institution library organizer."<sup>21</sup>

IOWA'S COURSE was far from secure. Despite broad approbation for Carey's accomplishments and those of her successors, the position continually faced funding issues. The inducement of better pay drew Carey to Minnesota, and the tenures of Iowa's subsequent supervising librarians were interspersed with periods of vacancy.<sup>22</sup> The superintendents lamented the lengthy interval following Carey's departure. "I have never in my experience in hospital work seen anything like the progress made in library development which was made in our institution and the other institutions of the state during the time we had a general librarian," stated Superintendent William P. Crumbacker of Independence State Hospital in March 1911, "and I suspect that the other superintendents all agree with me in saying that in the past two years, without this supervising head, we have made little or no progress."<sup>23</sup> Judge Robinson, who had served on the Board of Control since its beginning, reflected on how poorly the library collections had been selected and managed before the arrival of the supervising librarian. He noted his as yet vain attempts to secure a state fund to finance the work of the supervisor directly from the state treasury but still hoped that the legislature would see the

---

20. Edith Kathleen Jones, "Library Work among the Insane," *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 6 (1912), 321. See also Panella, "The Patients' Library Movement," 53-54.

21. Edith Kathleen Jones, "Importance of Organized Libraries in Institutions," *Library Journal* 41 (1916), 459-62 (quote from p. 461); Edith Kathleen Jones, "The Growth of Hospital Libraries," *The Modern Hospital* 18 (1922), 452-54.

22. *Seventh Biennial Report of the Board of Control of State Institutions of Iowa* (1910), 42.

23. "Quarterly Conference of the Chief Executive Officers of State Institutions with the Board of Control, March 21, 1911," *Bulletin of Iowa Institutions* 13 (1911), 127.

wisdom of adopting that plan. He further wished for a system that would include a trained librarian for each state institution under the direction of the supervisor of institution libraries.<sup>24</sup>

Judge Robinson's financial and staffing ideals would go unrealized, but the supervising librarian position was ultimately continued, though funding remained uncertain. Over the next two decades, four professionally trained librarians successively filled the post: Julia A. Robinson (1912–1913), Eliza E. Townsend (1913–1916), Grace Shellenberger (1917–1919), and Julia Carson Stockett (1923–1925).<sup>25</sup> During the long vacancy following Shellenberger's resignation in May 1919, Julia Robinson, then secretary of the Iowa Library Commission, was among the persistent voices advocating continued funding of the position. She was concerned

---

24. "Proceedings of the Quarterly Conference of the Chief Executive Officers of the State Institutions and Others, with the Board of Control, December 5, 1916," *State of Iowa, Bulletin of State Institutions* 19 (1917), 2–3. Judge Robinson pronounced the system of each institution making pro-rata payments as complicated and "very unsatisfactory." Robinson, "Institution Libraries of Iowa," 132.

25. Julia Almira Robinson was born January 9, 1860, in Dubuque, Iowa, and graduated from the Wisconsin Library School in 1909. She served as secretary to the North Dakota Library Commission and the Kentucky Library Commission before becoming supervising librarian in Iowa in January 1912. In July 1913 she replaced Alice Tyler as secretary of the Iowa Library Commission. Robinson retired in September 1938 and died May 19, 1942, in Ontario, California. "Julia Almira Robinson," *Annals of Iowa* 24 (1942), 89–90; "Institutional Libraries," *Iowa Library Quarterly* 6 (1911), 189; "The Commission's Secretaryship," *Iowa Library Quarterly* 7 (1913), 36–37; California Death Index, 1940–1997. Eliza Ellen Townsend was born in 1879, raised in Missouri and Iowa, and graduated from the Western Reserve Library School in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1905. She served as librarian in Manistee, Michigan, field worker with the traveling libraries program in Iowa, and head of public library branches in Spokane, Washington, prior to beginning the institution library position in December 1913. After her marriage to William C. Ramsay, she resigned from her Iowa position in November 1916. She later served as a librarian in Cleveland and Dayton, Ohio. She died September 29, 1939, in Columbus, Ohio. "Des Moines—Board of Control," *Iowa Library Quarterly* 7 (1913), 62; "Miss Townsend Heads Library," *Quad-City Times*, 10/26/1913; "Mrs. E. Ramsay Dies; Rites Set," *Dayton Herald*, 9/30/1939. Ida Grace Shellenberger took over the Iowa post in April 1917. Born December 29, 1879, in Bolivar, Missouri, and a 1913 graduate of the Carnegie Library School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, she served as children's librarian at the Des Moines public library until her appointment as institution librarian. After resigning in 1919, Shellenberger headed the Kewanee, Illinois, public library and then the Davenport public library. She died March 29, 1933. "Des Moines—Board of Control," *Iowa Library Quarterly* 8 (1917), 12; "Library Notes," *Illinois Libraries* 2 (1920), 46; "Board of Trustees Expresses Loss in Librarian's Death," *Davenport Daily Times*, 3/30/1933; Ida Grace Shellenberger, Certificate of Death.

that the work "so well begun and so much needed in these institutions" was suffering.<sup>26</sup> The appeals eventually bore fruit. Stockett was appointed to the job in October 1923, although with the understanding that the assignment was to be short term, and each library was to be "completed" as quickly as possible.<sup>27</sup>

THE WORK was by no means easy or quickly dispatched, as each librarian discovered. In 1912 Robinson found the resident libraries in disorder after the nearly three-year lack of direction. She embarked on a course of constant travel "up and down the state" to reorganize collections, select new books, instruct staff, and weed out "the worn and unsuitable books which have crept in." Weeding required much time and effort; 5,914 volumes were discarded from 1910 to 1912 and 5,376 volumes over the next two years.<sup>28</sup> Alice Tyler, by now head of Townsend's alma mater, the Western Reserve Library School, warned Townsend, when she applied for the position upon Robinson's departure in 1913, of the unusual conditions and personal discomforts of the work. Townsend declared herself ready for the challenge. "I have been investigating many things since I have seen you, particularly social problems," she wrote. "Consequently I did not apply in any light spirit of irresponsibility, and any idea of physical hardship

---

26. *Biennial Report of the Iowa Library Commission, 1918-1920* (1920), 18.

27. Julia C. Stockett to Mary E. Hazeltine, 3/3/1924, box 38, Library School Student Records, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives (hereafter cited as LSSR). Stockett's initial salary was the same as Carey's in 1906, \$100 per month plus maintenance. She received a raise to \$125 after three months. Stockett to Hazeltine, 11/4/1923, LSSR. Julia Carson Stockett was born June 6, 1889, in Collinsville, Illinois; raised in Montana, where her father served as a mining engineer and railroad executive; and was a 1914 graduate of the Wisconsin Library School. Prior to her Iowa position, she was acting head of the University of Idaho library in Moscow, secretary of the South Dakota Library Commission, supervisor of the ALA's Mexican Border Traveling Library Service, and hospital librarian for World War I veterans. Stockett later served as stations librarian at the Library of Hawaii in Honolulu and as head of the reference department at the Vancouver Public Library in Vancouver, British Columbia. She died April 7, 1979, in Vancouver. Lisa R. Lindell, "'The Spirit of the Builder': The Library Career of Julia Carson Stockett," *Libraries: Culture, History, and Society* 2 (2018), 48-71.

28. Julia A. Robinson, "Some Institutional Library Problems," *Bulletin of Iowa Institutions* 15 (1913), 161; Julia A. Robinson, "Libraries in State Institutions," *Iowa Library Quarterly* 6 (1912), 253; Biennial Reports of the Board of Control of State Institutions of Iowa.

would be never even considered.”<sup>29</sup> Stockett, too, welcomed the challenging conditions she encountered upon her arrival in 1923. She enjoyed the travel and work and found the atmosphere far from depressing. Her labors were slower going than she had expected, however, especially given the long period of vacancy that had allowed the libraries “to run down so badly.”<sup>30</sup>

In their work, all the institutional librarians were obliged to grapple with the cultural and educational ideologies of reading that shaped and guided their thinking. Primed by their library school training to see themselves as part of an educative mission to steer readers in proper paths, they saw children as most vulnerable to undesirable influences but considered all institutional residents as especially susceptible. Incidents that apparently linked negative behavior to the reading of specific books validated for the librarians the need for careful selection. Julia Robinson cited the case of a boy paroled from the Industrial School for Boys who drew a knife and stabbed a woman at a store, allegedly emulating an incident described in the book *Tramping with Tramps* by Josiah Flynt.<sup>31</sup>

The June 1913 quarterly conference of the Iowa Board of Control provided a forum for discussing the power and potential dangers of reading. In an invited paper on the selection of books for prison libraries, Florence Rising Curtis, an instructor at the University of Illinois Library School, warned against works condoning or excusing crime or the lowering of moral standards or

---

29. Alice S. Tyler to Eliza E. Townsend, 10/17/1913, and Townsend to Tyler, 10/22/1913, folder 21, box 53, series 271, Case Western Reserve University Archives, Cleveland, OH. Alice Tyler headed the library school at Western Reserve University from 1913 to 1929 and served as president of the ALA from 1920 to 1921. Cora Richardson Scott, “Alice Sarah Tyler,” in *Pioneering Leaders in Librarianship*, ed. Emily Miller Danton (Chicago, 1953), 192–95.

30. Stockett to Hazeltine, 3/3/1924 and 11/21/1924, LSSR.

31. Julia A. Robinson, “Libraries in State Institutions,” 6 (1912), 254. See also Jennifer Burek Pierce, “‘Why Girls Go Wrong’: Advising Female Teen Readers in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Library Quarterly* 77 (2007), 311–26; Alison M. Parker, *Purifying America: Women, Cultural Reform, and Pro-Censorship Activism, 1873–1933* (Urbana, IL, 1997), 75–110; Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876–1920* (New York, 1979); Wayne A. Wiegand, “United States and Canada,” in *A History of Modern Librarianship: Constructing the Heritage of Western Cultures*, ed. Pamela Spence Richards, Wayne A. Wiegand, and Marija Dalbello (Santa Barbara, CA, 2015), 88–89.

containing biased, cynical, or antisocial themes. She objected to books with sensational or unrealistic plots, among which she classed Horatio Alger stories and popular novels that chronicled "false emotion, secret marriage, jealousy, and revenge."<sup>32</sup>

In the ensuing discussion, Superintendent William L. Kuser of Iowa's Industrial School for Boys offered his opinion that any books deemed unfit should be weeded out. The reading of unsuitable books, in fact, could lure individuals into trouble in the first place.

We legislate against saloons and gambling dens and various other agencies that bring our children to ruin, when as a matter of fact the reading of bad books will do as much and perhaps more harm in some cases than any one of these other things. The inmates in our institutions, and especially in our penal and correctional institutions, prove the fact to us, clinch the argument, that we are not careful enough in selecting or not wise enough in selecting reading for our boys and girls. Every one of us knows how lasting first impressions are; how a book read when we were a child has in a great measure remained with us all through our lives.<sup>33</sup>

Kuser continued his denunciation of undesirable literature at a subsequent quarterly board meeting. "It is not so much a question of getting good books to our boys as it is to keep bad books away from them," he maintained. A headline in the previous day's paper about a bank robbery performed by a 15-year-old boy prompted Kuser to assume that he had gotten the idea "out of some book."<sup>34</sup>

A few of the participants in the discussion displayed an ironic resistance to being directed in their own reading even as they sought to direct the reading of others. Superintendent Crumbacker commended Curtis's paper but noted that she "condemned those authors I like to read, and I have hopes that the

---

32. Florence Rising Curtis, "The Selection of Books for Prison Libraries," *Bulletin of Iowa Institutions* 15 (1913), 168-72.

33. "Proceedings of the Quarterly Conference of the Chief Executives of State Institutions with the Board of Control, June 3, 1913," *Bulletin of Iowa Institutions* 15 (1913), 207. See also W. L. Kuser, "The Boy and the Book," *State of Iowa, Bulletin of State Institutions* 19 (1917), 55-62.

34. "Proceedings of the Quarterly Conference of the Chief Executive Officers of the State Institutions and Others, with the Board of Control, January, 1917," *State of Iowa, Bulletin of State Institutions* 19 (1917), 14.



remarks did not apply to me personally." Curtis acknowledged that she, too, would like to read titles she banished from prison libraries. "A great many books that are undesirable for the prisoner are not necessarily undesirable for normal people." This double standard was largely accepted, though Superintendent Mogridge of the School for Feeble-Minded Children cautioned against eliminating "all the books that each one of us might call bad books," suggesting that some of the books mentioned might not be as detrimental as they were imagined to be.<sup>35</sup>

Documents from Cherokee State Hospital, one of Iowa's four mental health facilities, provided further examples of the cultural proclivity to favor and direct readers to "good" literature. Superintendent Mathew Nelson Voldeng wrote in his 1912 biennial report that a patient had just completed a self-initiated course of reading from the institution's library. She had read all of the historical dramas of Shakespeare and several of Sir Walter Scott's Waverley novels. "While some of the patients do not read as intelligently as the one just mentioned, a great many select their reading with decidedly good judgment; others must be guided."<sup>36</sup> Superintendent Voldeng's wife, Sadie, related her own encounter with an eager reader and her sense of satisfaction in guiding his reading.

A young fellow about 24 years of age came to the library one morning and very noisily said: "I want something exciting; I want something blood and thunder; I want something yellow-back!" I said . . . "We have nothing yellow-back, as you call it, but we do have exciting things!" I took from the shelf a volume of Mark Twain's detective stories. He looked at me a moment as much as to say "Well, your idea of the blood and thunder doesn't come up to mine." However, he took the book and a week later returned saying: "That's the best book I ever read." I asked him if it was exciting enough, and he replied, "It was exciting and it was good." After this he came to the library regularly. It was intensely interesting to me to note the change in his literary taste after just a little directing.<sup>37</sup>

---

35. "Proceedings of the Quarterly Conference of the Chief Executives of State Institutions with the Board of Control, June 3, 1913," 205, 208, 209.

36. M. N. Voldeng, *Sixth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of the Cherokee State Hospital at Cherokee, Iowa to the Board of Control of State Institutions* (1912), 21.

37. Quoted in Miriam E. Carey, "Possibilities of Library Work in State Institutions," *New York Libraries* 3 (1913), 225.

As the supervising librarians forged connections with the various populations in the institutions, concern that reading measure up to strict literary and didactic standards began to give ground before a desire to provide all residents the opportunity to read what most met their individual interests and needs. Miriam Carey, with no precedents or practical experience to guide her, had to learn and adapt on the job. Her first task was to develop a library for the State Hospital for Inebriates. She recalled her confident selection of the "best" books and her initial sense of complacency until she began to fully apprehend that the value of a library, particularly a state institution library, was in its use. To achieve that use, the books must meet the needs of the specific classes of readers for whom they were selected. The recognition dawned as Carey mingled with patients and gained insight into their reading likes and dislikes. Her belief in the power and possibilities of reading, combined with her new-found mission of meeting particular needs, constituted her philosophy as she moved forward.<sup>38</sup>

Each supervising librarian, in turn, followed Carey's path of seeking to honor the reading wishes and preferences of the individuals in the separate institutions. Even as Eliza Townsend laid out her ideal that "every book read should open the way for another of a slightly better caliber," she emphasized the importance of matching readers with books that most satisfied them. "We need stories that will bring comfort, joy and hope," she stated. "The author of the book with this triple message does an untold service even if he splits every infinitive, though we trust he will not."<sup>39</sup>

---

38. Miriam E. Carey, "The Book and the Nurse," *Bulletin of Iowa Institutions* 15 (1913), 173-74. In 1908 Carey provided statistics for Iowa's state institutions. The total number of books purchased over the previous biennium was 7,214, including 1,082 volumes for the new library at the State Hospital for Inebriates, at a cost of \$6,718.79. The total number of volumes in the institution libraries, exclusive of government documents and medical books, was 45,908. Carey reported a circulation of 200,151 volumes over the previous year, with the number of readers each month averaging 2,776 persons out of a population of 9,560. Carey, "Libraries in State Institutions— with Special Reference to Iowa," 287, 290.

39. Eliza E. Townsend, "The Inspirational Power of Books," *Bulletin of Iowa Institutions* 16 (1914), 294.

The Iowa librarians' movement toward gratifying the tastes of their readers aligned with and contributed to the gradual transformation in the library profession from endorsing prescriptive control to advocating the freedom to read. As Christine Jenkins writes, "Very slowly, librarians' practice shifted toward creating and defending diverse collections representing the reading preferences and information needs of many groups of library users, and ALA's attitude toward censorship began its slow evolution toward intellectual freedom advocacy."<sup>40</sup>

Even as they responded to individual needs, the supervising librarians still felt it necessary to make generalizations about the specific types of reading that would bring the most benefit to various populations. For those in prisons or reformatories, for example, they recommended educational and purposeful reading. Books providing practical instruction in trades and occupations would, Townsend envisioned, "lift such work above mere drudgery, thus fostering self-respect and right ambition." Recognizing, too, the need to fill hours of enforced leisure, the librarians upheld the role of fiction, poetry, and biography in providing, at the very least, "a few hours of happy self-forgetfulness."<sup>41</sup> Townsend related the story of a man at the Anamosa prison who had "never read a book through" until his arrival but now found delight in reading all he could. "There is the right book . . . for every reader, no matter on what plane may be his mental and spiritual capacity," she concluded.<sup>42</sup>

In support of her belief in the educational function of prison libraries, Carey cited an essay she found published in *The Reformatory Press*, the weekly paper produced by the inmates at the Men's Reformatory in Anamosa. In the May 1908 issue, a prisoner described how a look through the prison library catalog triggered the realization that "mine for the asking were the works of the world's greatest thinkers, philosophers, poets, and historians." With high expectations, he began with Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

---

40. Jenkins, "Since So Many of Today's Librarians Are Women," 224. See also Evelyn Geller, *Forbidden Books in American Public Libraries, 1876-1939: A Study in Cultural Change* (Westport, CT, 1984).

41. Quoted in "The Interviewer," *Des Moines Register*, 10/7/1914.

42. Townsend, "The Inspirational Power of Books," 293, 294.

Somehow I staggered through the preface. My nerve failing me, I skipped the introduction and tackled the first chapter. The first page made me groggy. By the time I had read the second, I was doubtful of my sanity. What was it all about? It appeared to be written in English, but I would not have sworn it was. I could not understand a word I read. I returned the volume to the library in disgust.<sup>43</sup>

After next attempting other "intellectual high-fliers," all with dismal results, he realized that he must first devote himself to more basic works of literature. A year's persistent work resulted in the ability to derive "both pleasure and profit" from books formerly unintelligible. He described the joys of interspersing his studies with authors such as Dickens, Scott, Balzac, Hugo, Dumas, and Stevenson. The state might deprive him of his liberty and the proceeds of his labor, he conceded, but anything he could learn through reading was beyond its reach. "That would belong to me, and no power on earth could wrest it from me."<sup>44</sup>

Such stories buttressed the supervising librarians' faith in the benefits of well-selected libraries. Julia Stockett emphasized reading's great potential for morale building and rehabilitation as well as education, and she lifted up the Men's Reformatory library as "one of our best places for reading in the state."<sup>45</sup> Every prisoner in his cell received a copy of the library catalog, updated as books were added to the collection, including volumes requested by the prisoners. The magazine list consisted largely of prisoners' suggestions, with multiple copies of many publications, including 100 copies of the *Saturday Evening Post* circulating weekly.<sup>46</sup>

Experiences at all of the state institutions convinced the librarians of the importance of carefully chosen libraries. "Books are not bricks," proclaimed Carey. "They are vital things. Each one has personality and will fairly reach out to the reader and seize his attention if the library has been judicially selected."<sup>47</sup> Grace

---

43. "Getting Even with Iowa," *The Reformatory Press*, 5/30/1908.

44. Ibid. Cited by Carey in "Libraries in State Institutions— with Special Reference to Iowa," 292–93.

45. Stockett to Hazeltine, 2/17/1925, LSSR.

46. Julia C. Stockett, "Progress of the Prison Library," *South Dakota Library Bulletin* 11 (1925), 12–13.

47. Miriam E. Carey, *Prison Libraries* (St. Cloud, MN, 1925), x.

Shellenberger described the summer reading program she led in 1917 at the Training School for Girls (newly renamed from the Industrial School for Girls) in Mitchellville. Selected books were compiled into collections and sent to the cottages where the girls resided, and they read an average of six books each over the summer, choosing favorite characters to dramatize in tableaux staged at an evening presentation. A group of African American girls depicted *Up from Slavery* by Booker T. Washington; other portrayals included *The Old Curiosity Shop* by Charles Dickens and *The Birds' Christmas Carol* by Kate Douglas Wiggin. Shellenberger declared it a most satisfactory experiment.<sup>48</sup> Stockett likewise praised the amount and quality of reading done at the state's juvenile facilities and gave credit to the cooperation of the matrons. "We wish to form the reading habit so strongly," she wrote, "that, when the children go out into the world, they will be familiar with books and libraries and have increasingly as part of their lives the help which literature may bring them. . . . Today's children are to-morrow's citizens and no effort is being spared to bring the child into his kingdom of the book."<sup>49</sup>

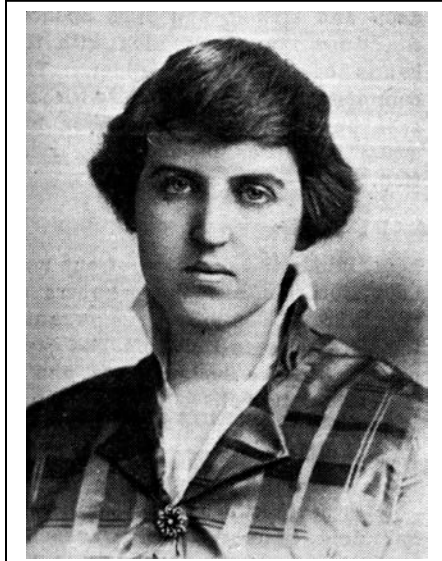
For patients in state hospitals, the librarians came to view and endorse reading as "mental medicine" and to approve any type of literature that brought increased health and happiness. Stockett recommended selecting large numbers of popular items, including detective stories, romances, and westerns. Carey, too, supported collecting westerns ("The cowboy is quite essential to success in such a library") in addition to more standard authors such as Jane Austen, O. Henry, and Mark Twain, and also poetry and popular nonfiction. In published articles, Stockett treated the healing power of books as indisputable, citing her own experiences in hospital library work as well as the influence of Carey, whose views on reading as therapy for persons in mental health institutions were at the vanguard of contemporary thought.<sup>50</sup> Carey advocated placing books on every ward of the hospital,

---

48. Grace Shellenberger, "Summer Reading—1917—Mitchellville," *Iowa Library Quarterly* 8 (1917), 57–58.

49. Julia C. Stockett, "The Growth of Institution Library Work," *Wisconsin Library Bulletin* 21 (1925), 7.

50. "Proceedings of the Quarterly Conference of the Board of Control of State Institutions, December 16, 1924," *State of Iowa, Bulletin of State Institutions* 27



*Julia Carson Stockett. Photo from South Dakota Library Bulletin 3 (September 1917), 27.*

including those wards housing patients classed as violent. "What they do read can be made as effective for their cure as any remedy employed by the physicians. . . . If good results can be had from the use of books, then all the patients should have access to them . . . even [if] some books are destroyed in the process."<sup>51</sup>

The librarians strove to convey how much more reading meant to those inside institutional walls than to those outside. They argued that the value of books and libraries was magnified for residents "shut off from the occupations and recreations of normal life," bringing needed diversion, inspiration, and healing.<sup>52</sup> Carey declared the book omnipresent and democratic. "No lines are drawn about it. Rich and poor, high and low, the free

---

(1925), 31; Julia C. Stockett, "Hospital Library Work," *Wisconsin Library Bulletin* 18 (1922), 109, 112; Julia C. Stockett, "Growth of Libraries in State Hospitals," *South Dakota Library Bulletin* 11 (1925), 30; Carey, "Institutional Libraries," 8.

51. Carey, "Libraries in State Institutions—The Book as a Tool," 193–94.

52. *Biennial Report of the Iowa Library Commission, 1918–1920*, 18.

and the 'detained,' may . . . enjoy the same books."<sup>53</sup> Food, clothing, and shelter might be adequate in Iowa's institutions, "but they cannot be the best in existence, from the nature of the case. But of books, the very best are as easily provided in a hospital as in a palace, in a school for feeble-minded as in a university."<sup>54</sup>

In their efforts to make libraries central to institutional life, the librarians advocated space that was adequate, accessible, and attractive. In her reports, Robinson pled for libraries with enough room for shelving, tables, and reading. She believed that opening the libraries in correctional institutions to at least some of the inmates "at prescribed times and under proper restrictions" would greatly increase their usefulness. Comfortable reading rooms existed in the Women's Reformatory and the Girls' and Boys' Industrial Schools, but, despite the wishes of the librarians, residents were generally not permitted access. Robinson described her most satisfactory moment in institutional work as a Sunday afternoon at Eldora when the boys were brought into the library and encouraged to look at and handle the new books. The experience ignited their eagerness to read, she asserted. Robinson summed up her aspiration for each institution: a library sufficient in size and selection; a system of organization making resources available and accessible to all readers; an interested and competent librarian with enough time to accomplish her duties; and an ever increasing numbers of readers.<sup>55</sup>

GIVEN the number of institutions overseen by the supervising librarians and the limited time they could spend at each place, effective day-to-day library service depended on qualified institutional staff and volunteers, though the availability of such personnel was often limited. Among those the librarians relied on to connect books and readers were teachers and matrons in the schools, chaplains in the prisons, and nurses, doctors, and attendants in the hospitals. The librarians supported training for

---

53. Carey, "Libraries in State Institutions – The Book as a Tool," 197.

54. Miriam E. Carey, "Book Buying and Book Circulation in Institutions," *Bulletin of Iowa Institutions* 13 (1911), 86.

55. Robinson, "Some Institutional Library Problems," 163–64, 167. See also Stockett, "The Growth of Institution Library Work," 5–6.

those individuals in how to organize and maintain library collections and nurture the reading habit but recognized that was often not practical. Library roles within the institutions were usually combined with other duties and often undertaken without extra pay or designated hours, despite arguments, as Robinson made, that giving staff members the needed time would be economical both materially and ethically.<sup>56</sup>

A few institutional workers did find the time and passion to connect residents with reading and libraries. Carey held up teacher S. Frances Rowe at the state hospital in Clarinda as an outstanding example, declaring that her dedicated efforts to organize the books and foster reading had a great, even curative, influence. Rowe conducted classes in nature study and reading, and by using easy books, she taught illiterate women to read. Carey also singled out the accomplishments of the teenaged son of Superintendent Crumbacker at the state hospital in Independence, who had gathered and arranged the books in a central place, prepared a printed finding list, and made the rounds of the hospital urging patients to read. The residents had great confidence in him and would read whatever he recommended, Carey asserted. Although Crumbacker's tastes were "decidedly bookish," his choices were suitably "wholesome," and Carey trusted in the usefulness of even casual scrutiny.<sup>57</sup>

Citing manifold perceived benefits, the librarians encouraged institutional residents to volunteer in the library. They commended the work as offering a stake in promoting books and reading, as well as providing a sense of purpose, service, responsibility, and community. It could also contribute useful skills for life outside the institution. At the Anamosa Reformatory, inmates helped the chaplain run the library. At the Industrial School for Girls, residents assisted the matron with library work in each of the cottages and also assisted with recordkeeping at the central library. And at the State Hospital for Inebriates, a patient served as acting

---

56. Carey, "Book Buying and Book Circulation in Institutions," 84; Julia A. Robinson, "Some Institutional Library Problems," 166.

57. Carey, "Libraries in State Institutions—The Book as a Tool," 194–95; Carey, "Book Buying and Book Circulation in Institutions," 83–84; Carey, "The Book and the Nurse," 174.



librarian.<sup>58</sup> Carey offered the example of a boy at the Industrial School for Boys she described as finding library work so beneficial that his restlessness and unhappiness had been replaced with a willingness to wait quietly for his time of release. The responsibility had made him stronger and more resourceful, she contended. "Satisfaction of helping others has given him an outlook which may lead him to permanent usefulness."<sup>59</sup> In Eldora, when boarding a train, she recognized the porter as a former assistant at the industrial school library. Carey reported that he credited his library experience with inspiring him to work his way up in the railroad position, and she maintained that for residents who took an active part in the administration of the library, "the effect is to vitalize the enterprise and incorporate it more closely into the life of the community."<sup>60</sup>

THE BELIEF in the critical importance of systematic organization of collections and trained professionals propelled the supervising librarians throughout their careers in Iowa and beyond. Carey observed that every superintendent who established a library found sooner or later that it would not run itself: "There must be organization and system before a collection of books becomes a working library, and there is no system which operates automatically or is self-sustaining. In each library there must be some responsible human being to keep it going."<sup>61</sup> However that was achieved – with a supervisor of state institution librarian as instigated by Iowa and emulated by Minnesota and Nebraska or with a trained librarian in each institution – the challenge was to carry on the work after it was begun. In a review of the progress of other states in creating and maintaining libraries for institutional residents, Robinson reported in 1913 that libraries of some kind existed in several state institutions. She highlighted efforts in Indiana, Oregon, Michigan, and Vermont but concluded that

---

58. Carey, "Libraries in State Institutions – The Book as a Tool," 195.

59. Carey, "Librarians in State Institutions – with Special Reference to Iowa," 288.

60. Carey, "Book Buying and Book Circulation in Institutions," 87; Carey, "Librarians in State Institutions – with Special Reference to Iowa," 289.

61. Miriam E. Carey, "Libraries and their Management in State Hospitals," *The Modern Hospital* 5 (1915), 407.

most libraries were "only partially adequate, if not wholly inadequate and unsuitable." Often lacking were funding, space, and organization of the collections, as well as trained librarians. Responsibility for such failings, Robinson concluded, rested with the Boards of Control, the governing boards and superintendents of individual institutions, and state library commissions.<sup>62</sup>

The Iowa librarians continued to promote their cause on the national level. In 1913 Carey and Robinson contributed book selections to *A Thousand Books for the Hospital Library* compiled by Edith Kathleen Jones. In 1915, through the petitioning of Robinson, the ALA established the Committee on Library Work in Hospitals and Charitable and Correctional Institutions, chaired by Carey and then Robinson and on which Stockett later served. Its members wrote articles appearing in *The Modern Hospital* and other medical journals and published the *Manual for Institution Libraries*, establishing standards that would prove instrumental upon U.S. entry into World War I.<sup>63</sup>

The war prompted the growth of institution libraries. Their numbers proliferated in the military hospitals that housed the wounded and sick. During the war, many pioneering institutional librarians served in leadership roles in administering these libraries; after the war, some librarians trained in hospital librarianship took up the work in city and state hospitals.

Iowa's librarians actively participated in war service. In 1918, during her tenure as supervising librarian, Shellenberger was appointed organizer of the Fort Des Moines army hospital library, where she coordinated efforts to provide reading materials for wounded soldiers. Carey served as field representative for the ALA's hospital service in the southern states in 1918 and 1919, and Stockett supervised the ALA's Mexico Border Traveling Library Service and organized libraries in military hospitals in

---

62. Julia A. Robinson, "Book Influences for Defectives and Dependents," *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 7 (1915), 180.

63. Miriam E. Carey, "Assets, Not Liabilities: Citizens, Not Wards," *State of Iowa, Bulletin of State Institutions* 19 (1917), 47; Panella, "The Patients' Library Movement," 54-58; Edith Kathleen Jones, *A Thousand Books for the Hospital Library* (Chicago, 1913); "Institution Libraries to Form League," *The Modern Hospital* 5 (1915), 132; "Report of the Committee on Libraries in Hospitals and Charitable and Correctional Institutions," *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 11 (1917), 312; Carey, "Institutional Libraries," 5.



Soldiers read in the Fort Des Moines hospital library, headed by Grace Shellenberger. Photo courtesy of the American Library Association Archives.

South Carolina, Minnesota, and Wisconsin prior to assuming her position in Iowa.<sup>64</sup>

Library war work proved a catalyst for strengthened faith in the therapeutic effects of reading. The many wounded and ill soldiers and veterans afforded the opportunity for experimental efforts to bring about healing. Librarians collaborated with doctors and nurses to employ reading as therapy as well as a means of vocational education. "Before the war there were very few physicians who believed in the therapeutic power of books," wrote Carey. "Now it is rare indeed to find one who is not at least open-minded on the subject."<sup>65</sup> In the Fort Des Moines hospital, where many educational and recreational reading materials were avail-

64. "Reception and Program to Open Fort Des Moines Library," *Des Moines Register*, 8/25/1918; "Books Help Fighters to Forget Their Wounds," *Des Moines Register*, 3/24/1919; "Hospital Libraries," *Library Journal* 43 (1918), 420; Miriam E. Carey, "Hospital Libraries, Prison Libraries, and Others of a Special Character," typewritten manuscript, [1928?], Carey Papers; Stockett, "Growth of Institution Library Work," 3; Stockett, "Hospital Library Work," 109; Arthur P. Young, *Books for Sammies: The American Library Association and World War I* (Pittsburgh, 1981), 56-58, 89.

65. Miriam E. Carey, "Institutional Libraries," typewritten manuscript, October 16, 1933, Carey Papers.

able, Shellenberger viewed the rehabilitative effect of reading as playing the greatest role in the patients' recovery. She told of a soldier in the psychopathic ward with three years of college, his mind now clouded, who asked for books in psychology, chemistry, and advanced French. "I cannot recall how useful they really were but his satisfaction in just handling them surely had a calming and perhaps a curative effect that was worth while."<sup>66</sup> The belief in books as therapy, soon known as bibliotherapy, would become a robust avenue of study in the following decades, aligned with the behavioral sciences, humanities, libraries, and medicine.<sup>67</sup>

AFTER THE WAR, as the Progressive Era reform agenda receded, the library profession embraced new roles while continuing to face old challenges. The widely accepted dissemination of popular reading material to soldiers and veterans during and after the war, reaction against wartime censorship and propaganda, the availability of and demand for ever increasing amounts of information, and a less restrictive social climate all prompted librarians to move from guiding and guarding readers' choices to providing readers with the material they sought. As zeal for moral and intellectual improvement decreased, advocacy for free access of information for all persons intensified, culminating in the Library Bill of Rights, written by Iowan Forrest Spaulding, head of the Des Moines Public Library, and adopted by the ALA in 1939.<sup>68</sup>

---

66. Grace Shellenberger, "Library Service in a Reconstruction Hospital," *Iowa Library Quarterly* 8 (1919), 152.

67. The large and varied literature on bibliotherapy includes S. M. Crothers, "Literary Clinic," *Atlantic Monthly* 118 (1916), 291-301; Alice I. Bryan, "Can There Be a Science of Bibliotherapy?" *Library Journal* 64 (1939), 773-76; Rhea Joyce Rubin, *Bibliotherapy Sourcebook* (Phoenix, AZ, 1978); Rhea Joyce Rubin, *Using Bibliotherapy: Theory and Practice* (Phoenix, AZ, 1978); Len Levin and Ruthann Gildea, "Bibliotherapy: Tracing the Roots of a Moral Therapy Movement in the United States from the Early Nineteenth Century to the Present," *Journal of the Medical Library Association* 101 (2013), 89-91; Monique S. Dufour, "Reading for Health: Bibliotherapy and the Medicalized Humanities in the United States, 1930-1965" (Ph.D. diss., Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2014); Liz Brewster, "Bibliotherapy: A Critical History," in *Bibliotherapy*, ed. Sarah McNicol and Liz Brewster (London, 2018), 3-22.

68. Stielow, "Censorship in the Early Professionalization of American Libraries, 1876 to 1929," 49-52; Douglas Campbell, "Reexamining the Origins of the Adoption of the ALA's Library Bill of Rights," *Library Trends* 63 (2014), 42-56.

As librarians saw their roles change in Iowa, as elsewhere, they continued to confront the issue of their status as professionals and the perception that once libraries were organized and catalogued, the services of a trained librarian were no longer essential. Cost savings and expediency were often motives for employing nonprofessional library workers or enlisting volunteers. Reiterating her argument for establishing institution libraries as official departments with trained librarians and staff, Carey suggested that the biggest obstacle was that, to the outside eye, libraries did almost appear to run themselves, "and so the absolute need of an executive is not so plainly seen as in a laundry, for instance."<sup>69</sup>

As Julia Stockett was nearing the end of her stint in late 1924, the Iowa Board of Control assessed the future of the supervisory position. At its quarterly conference in December 1924, in response to questioning by Board of Control member John B. Butler on the continued usefulness of the work, superintendents, librarians, and others present offered arguments for its extension. The superintendents agreed that library workers at the individual institutions performed essential work but that someone was needed with the vision, training, and time to creatively build upon and systematize that work. Although the Board of Control ultimately recommended continuing the supervisory role, the necessary state funding was not forthcoming. Formal institutional work lapsed in Iowa after 1925.<sup>70</sup>

Concerns that libraries and readers would suffer without a trained librarian to provide systematic direction and organization were borne out at the Mount Pleasant State Hospital. "At our Hospital the patient library is almost non-existent," wrote the superintendent in 1937, and "there has not been a purchase of new books for the patient library since 1924."<sup>71</sup> Other institution libraries did continue to buy books but in lesser quantities than formerly. From 1932 to 1934, for example, institutions purchased fewer than half as many books as had been bought from 1912 to

---

69. Carey, "Assets, Not Liabilities," 49. See also Goldstein, "The Spirit of an Age," 226-28; and Joanne E. Passet, *Cultural Crusaders: Women Librarians in the American West, 1900-1917* (Albuquerque, NM, 1994), 4-6.

70. "Proceedings of the Quarterly Conference of the Board of Control of State Institutions, December 16, 1924," 19-32.

71. *State of Iowa, Bulletin of State Institutions* 39 (1937), 33.

1914. Circulation figures cannot be compared, as overall totals were not recorded after the 1910s. During much of that decade, over a half-million items had circulated biennially, with a high of 743,856 loans from 1916 to 1918.<sup>72</sup> In 1924 Stockett, after restarting several of the libraries and reinstating careful recordkeeping following the position's four-year lapse, reported 83,000 items circulating in a few months' time. She considered "bare figures" insufficient, however, because "they cannot measure increasing health nor quality of happiness." She saw true success as meeting the needs of individual readers through developed local service.<sup>73</sup>

In later years, some states moved toward centralized systems of library management. In 1953 Perrie Jones, Miriam Carey's successor in Minnesota from 1928 to 1937, reported that 13 states had supervisors of institution libraries: Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. In Iowa, institution libraries continued to exist, though often much neglected. In 1966 federal funding appropriated under Title IV-A of the Library Services and Construction Act provided impetus to improve institutional library services.<sup>74</sup> The Iowa State Traveling Library (successor to the Iowa Library Commission) and the Board of Control of State Institutions (soon to merge with the Board of Social Welfare to become the Department of Social Services) cooperatively hired the Rev. A. Morris Lotte in February 1967 to oversee the institution libraries. In 1968 the *Iowa Library Quarterly* reported that "almost all of the resident libraries have been weeded, have been or are in the process of being catalogued . . . and in many cases, new librarians . . . have been employed."<sup>75</sup> Lotte served as institutional library consultant until

---

72. During the 1910s, resident populations totaled between nine and ten thousand. By 1934, the number of residents had grown to nearly fifteen thousand. Biennial Reports of the Board of Control of State Institutions of Iowa.

73. Stockett, "Growth of Libraries in State Hospitals," 30-31. See also "Proceedings of the Quarterly Conference of the Board of Control of State Institutions, December 16, 1924," 19-20.

74. Perrie Jones, "Miriam E. Carey," 58; Gervase Brinkman, "Correctional Libraries and LSCA Title IV-A," *American Libraries* 1 (1970), 380-83.

75. "The Result of a Professional Conscience: IV-A," *Iowa Library Quarterly* 20 (1968), 409-21.

his retirement in 1978. A proponent of bibliotherapy, he received a federal grant to improve prison services through therapeutic and educational materials and also promoted the benefits of the bibliotherapy program at the Cherokee State Mental Hospital.

In the following decades, institutional goals, libraries, and reading approaches would undergo significant change, but the library profession would continue to uphold the fundamental importance of access to library services and resources. Guidelines and standards issued by the ALA and other associations, educational and networking efforts, technological developments, funding opportunities and challenges, deinstitutionalization and closures, growth of prisons, and concerns over profitability and security versus freedom of access all affected the course of libraries in social welfare institutions.<sup>76</sup>

A LOOK BACK at Iowa's novel experiment in coordinated development of institution library collections and services reveals how it both reflected and influenced librarianship's larger story. The work of the Iowa librarians arose out of the goals of the emerging library profession in convergence with the Progressive Era's sense of social mission. As they connected with institutional residents, the librarians forged a commitment to meeting the individual needs of all. Even as they sought to guide and control reading habits, they showed a capacity to adapt and broaden their philosophies. They believed that everyone should have the freedom to read and, increasingly, the choice of what to read. With that perspective, they applied and helped advance the evolving core principles of their profession.

---

76. "Release Library Report," *Sioux City Journal*, 12/31/1967; "Library Important in Cherokee Therapy," *Hawarden Independent*, 12/30/1976; "Ninety Percent of Inmates Use Library," *Corydon Times-Republican*, 1/18/1977; "Wins \$17,160 Library Grant," *Des Moines Register*, 6/13/1971; "Obituaries," *Des Moines Register*, 8/27/1979.

