

**class and culture
in late nineteenth-century chicago**

the founding of the newberry library

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In 1890 Chicago was the most optimistic, successful new city in the nation. During the Civil War her great economic rivalries for control of the Midwest were won. The disastrous fire of 1871 barely slowed the city's rise. Its annual demographic increase since 1850, an astounding 89 per cent, was the largest of any major city in the world. Chicago had already supplanted Philadelphia as the country's second largest city, and there was reason to believe that within a decade New York would become "Second City" to the Midwestern metropolis.¹ Chicagoans were intent on making their home the greatest urban center in the nation and the world.

But economic and geographic primacy, while most important, were not the city's only goals. "In 1854 it was a city without architecture, without drainage, without pavements, without parks, . . . There was no accumulated wealth, no luxury, no carriages, no libraries, no art galleries." In the years after the Fire, Chicago's leaders tried to remedy that situation. They felt "its intellectual hegemony must be the logical consequence" of its economic growth, and "the city that has been the real pioneer in American commerce has before it the splendid duty of being the real pioneer in American Culture."² Thus, the Chicago Public Library was founded in 1874, the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts in 1879, and the Orchestral Association in 1890.³ In 1892-93 the new home of the Art Institute was dedicated, the cornerstone of the Chicago Historical Society building was laid, the World's Columbian Exposition, with its many cultural exhibits, was held and the reborn University of Chicago opened its doors, claiming instant greatness with its brilliant faculty and Rockefeller millions.

That same year the permanent building of the Newberry Library admitted its first readers. This new edifice complemented the rest of the institution, which, although only five years old, had already developed a clearly defined intellectual orientation, social role and internal structure. The Newberry's founders had self-consciously attempted to build the greatest research library in America. Yet, because of their class and cultural interests, the founders had created something else. Rather than a setter of new intellectual trends, as the newer University of Chicago would be, the Newberry became a bastion in the defense of older cultural values and ideals. This was reflected in its early leadership, its administration, the building's architecture and, most importantly, in the books it chose to collect and not to collect.

The benefactor of the Library, Walter Loomis Newberry, was an early settler of Chicago who made his fortune in commerce, railroads, banking and real estate. He was an acting mayor of the city before the Civil War, and served as President of the Chicago Historical Society from 1860 until his death in 1868. Thus it was not surprising that his will contained a codicil for the founding of "a FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY." However, only under the unlikely circumstances that both his daughters died "without leaving lawful issue" would the codicil take effect. But with their deaths in 1874 and 1876, and his wife's in 1885, one half of the Newberry estate became available for the Library.⁴

Thus, the Library came into existence by a unique accident of fate. Unlike many other great libraries, it was not connected with a university. Nor was it guided through its early years by a generous patron-founder, like John Jacob Astor, who gave time and money in the planning of the institution that bore his name. The Library did not grow from the work of a single dedicated collector; there was no James Lenox in Chicago, carefully gathering volumes. The library did not even begin with a pre-existing collection of books, for the founder's personal library had been destroyed in the Fire. The Newberry began with a codicil in a will and a sum of money.

These circumstances gave the librarian and trustees an opportunity to build whatever type of collection and institution they chose. The will required only that the institution be free, open to the public, and located in Chicago's "North Division." The trustees had complete authority "to take such action in regard to such library as they may judge fit and best, having in view the growth, preservation, permanence and general usefulness of such library."⁵

On July 1, 1887, with assets of nearly \$2,150,000, E. W. Blatchford and William H. Bradley, the library's trustees, "resolved to give the new institution the name of THE NEWBERRY LIBRARY and at the same time decided that it be a library of reference." The name would undoubtedly have satisfied Newberry's desire to "perpetuate through a

magnificent public charity a name which there was no longer anyone of his blood to bear.”⁶ However, as a strategy for building a permanent and growing institution, this was perhaps not the best name to use. Although the Newberry name had none of the pejorative connotations of the Astor name,⁷ an institution named for one man might not attract other benefactors who would be competing for prestige with the name of the founder. But, with “the largest foundation for a free library in this or any other country”⁸—a sum five times greater than Astor’s initial endowment—the trustees were not worried about future donations.

The trustees’ decision to create a “library of reference” was related to several factors. Although Newberry left no indication of what kind of library he wanted, Bradley assumed “he had in mind the Astor library in New York.” Newberry had been a business partner of Astor’s son, William B., who was, in the post-Civil War years, supporting the institution his father had founded. Before moving to Chicago Blatchford had known the Astors, and that may have also influenced the decision. Furthermore, Chicago lacked an institution to match Boston’s Athenaeum or New York’s Astor, and as energetic city boosters the trustees undoubtedly wanted to rectify that situation. A reference library would be easier to administer than a circulating or general public library. In any event, Chicago already had a circulating public library by the time the Newberry endowment was available, and that library was an outgrowth of the Young Men’s Library Association founded by Newberry himself in 1849.⁹ Most importantly, as aristocrats in Chicago society the trustees were inclined towards a scholarly gentleman’s library, rather than a less genteel institution. The trustees never considered donating the Newberry endowment to the financially starved Chicago Public Library, or building a workingman’s library, an immigrant’s library or even a mercantile library, all of which the city needed if it were to compete with its Eastern rivals on all levels.¹⁰

The trustees, like Newberry, were successful civic and business leaders dedicated to the development of Chicago. Eliphalet Wickes Blatchford came to Chicago in his youth and made a fortune manufacturing lead products during the Civil War. Bradley, like Newberry and Blatchford, was born in Connecticut. An early settler of Chicago, he served as clerk of the U.S. District Court for most of his life. Both men were well suited to manage the finances of a library and determine its general direction.¹¹ However, for the important function of collecting and organizing books, they relied on the new librarian, William Frederick Poole.

In 1887 Poole was at the height of a magnificent career. At the time of his appointment to the Newberry he was President of the American Library Association and President-elect of the American Historical Association. He was author of the internationally famed Poole’s *Index* to periodical literature and had served as head librarian of the Boston Mercantile Library, the Boston Athenaeum, the Cincinnati Public Library and the Chicago Public, which he left for the Newberry. His essay

on library architecture had been reprinted by the United States Department of Education. He wrote for the *Library Journal*, the *Dial* and the *North American Review*. His historical studies of Salem witchcraft and the old Northwest were well respected by the profession.¹² In library science only Justin Winsor, who had immediately preceded him as President of the A.L.A. and the A.H.A., Charles Cutter and Melvil Dewey rivaled Poole for pre-eminence.

Besides professional stature, Poole brought to the Newberry some very explicit ideas on libraries. These were governed by his great love of books, which developed into what might be termed "organic bookmanship." A true bibliophile, he felt that books were alive—almost human—and should be treated accordingly. As a scholar, he was at home when surrounded by volumes which were to be handled and seen, as well as read. Thus, he fought a lifetime (and losing) battle against the Dewey classification and stack systems. Both systems removed books from the immediate reach of a reader. "Books," he wrote, "cannot live where man cannot live. They are more nearly allied to us as congeners than we are wont to suppose. In excessive heat the leather bindings slowly consumes [sic] and life departs. If we put our friends in torment, they prove to us the doctrine of annihilation."¹³

At the Chicago Public Poole allowed readers "to browse around." After he left the C.P.L. a patron complained that the new librarian "can't bear to have a volume touched only in some red tape-machinery way."¹⁴ In the Newberry Poole would avoid such problems because he would "so shelve and arrange that the books will be accessible to everyone."¹⁵ The same patron also felt that physical conditions at the C.P.L. deteriorated after Poole left, and she hoped the new librarian "would contrive a plan to make people comfortable in one library before spreading out in every part of the city" with the branch libraries then planned. Other patrons felt the same way.¹⁶

In the Newberry Poole would attend to the comfort of his readers. A library, even a large public one, was to Poole like a gentleman's study, with comfortable surroundings and everything within easy reach. A research library was of course better suited to these ideals than a circulating library, which would have to deliver its services to a larger and more diverse group of people. The *Chicago Times*, which felt Poole "eminently fitted" for his new post, suggested he left the C.P.L. because he had "a preference for a more secluded field of effort." While books might be "accessible to everyone," making the Newberry a reference library would "greatly dignify the enterprise and . . . remove it from the reach of the masses."¹⁷ Like the gentleman's study, the Newberry would be, by its own self-conception and the comments of its critics, a reflection of upper class values.

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These values represented what George Santayana has called the

“Genteel Tradition.” Poole and the trustees were members of the “Gentry elite” as defined by Stow Persons. They were college educated (both Poole and Bradley at Yale, a mainstay of Gentry education) descendants of colonial New England families. While perhaps not in the same class as the most exclusive gentry of Boston or Philadelphia, in the newer Chicago they were clearly members of that city’s Gentry elite and its social elite.¹⁸

Poole’s career reflected this “Genteel Tradition.” His first library job was at Yale’s exclusive club Brothers in Unity. He then worked at the Boston Athenaeum, a bastion of that city’s elite. As a historian, Poole was intellectually and socially a colleague of such gentlemen-historians as Francis Parkman, Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Adams. Like most early presidents of the A.H.A., Poole had little professional training in history. Significantly, his last major historical contribution was an essay in Justin Winsor’s “quasi-professional” *A Narrative and Critical History of America*, whose contributors “with a few exceptions, were amateur historians.”¹⁹ Poole, his older colleagues and the leaders of local historical societies (like Walter Newberry) reflected “a higher, or at least a keener, sense of history” often associated with elites and genteel culture.²⁰ They were interested in local history, antiquarianism and the broad national histories such as Bancroft wrote. They “regarded their scholarly activity as an essential component of the whole movement for consolidating American culture.” That movement eventually blended the new historical methods of social science research, the seminar and professional trained historians of a younger generation with the older tradition familiar to Poole. “It also enlisted the cultivated patrician class, for the movement represented a profound reaction against the democratic openness and rawness of the pre-Civil War era. . . . In the late nineteenth century, urbanization, conservatism, and a general weakening of democratic values contributed to a reassertion of leadership by established authorities.”²¹ In the field of culture the Newberry saw itself as such an established authority.

The tension between democratic values and a patrician elite was felt in areas other than history. Members of “society” also “dedicated themselves in extra measure to the cultivation of the arts of social intercourse. Society liked to think of itself not only as the class of the affluent, but as the principle bearers of the burden of culture, of moral and aesthetic refinement, and of intellectual interests.” Thus, its members were “endowing the libraries and art galleries, founding the symphony orchestras. . . .”²² Some of these institutions, such as the Carnegie libraries and the Boston Museum, were endowed so that “society” could spread its culture to the masses. This was consistent with a sense of *noblesse oblige* combined with democratic ideals held by much of the elite. Such forces, no doubt, influenced Newberry’s decision to provide for a free library, open to the public. But, there was a counter movement based on the idea that only the cultured elite could ever appreciate art. This was, of course,

unpopular in egalitarian America where the elite were “forced to sustain themselves by their own efforts, without public support.”²³ This anti-democratic tendency was particularly strong in cultural institutions. Many barred the public, either through their own rules as private clubs, or through the price of admission, structural facilities or content of ostensibly public institutions.

The Newberry, although nominally public, developed as an essentially non-public institution. Endowed with its own funds, the Library made only those few concessions to “democracy” found in Newberry’s will. By concentrating on certain types of collections, and by creating certain institutional rules, the Newberry could effectively shut itself off from Chicago as if it were a private club.

As a library, the Newberry was primarily a depository of collected books. But there was also an historic connection between patrician men of leisure, book collecting and libraries. The most important American libraries, were, with a few exceptions, highly exclusive institutions. Some, like the Harvard Library or the John Carter Brown Library, were connected with private colleges. Others, like the Boston Athenaeum and the defunct Chicago Young Men’s Library Association, were subscription libraries open only to those who could afford to use them. The Lenox and Astor in New York had been condemned because they were responsive to the needs of only a select few. Their hours of admission, if nothing else, precluded use by all but the idle rich and the professional scholar, and the latter often found entry to the libraries difficult. They had become a “select resort of bibliomaniacs.”²⁴ Book collecting, which in the late nineteenth century gained new popularity among gentlemen, tended to re-enforce the “organic bookmanship” that Poole believed in. One manual informed collectors that “the surest way to preserve your books is to treat them as you would your own children, who are sure to sicken if confined to an atmosphere which is impure, too hot, too cold, too damp, or too dry. It is just the same with the progeny of literature.” The volume also suggested ways that a gentleman might furnish and stock his private library.²⁵

Poole’s ideas on library architecture and the care of books would have to wait until a building could be planned and constructed. Before that could be done the trustees, Poole and their eventual architect, Henry Ives Cobb, would visit libraries throughout Europe. The eventual building, with its Spanish Romanesque style and many small, cozy rooms would resemble a large mansion filled with a series of “gentlemen’s libraries.” This too was part of the genteel tradition which was “consonant with a renewal of admiration for important aspects of European culture, particularly British literature, ‘classical’ music . . . and [‘classical’] architecture.”²⁶ Not only in its architecture, but also in its collections, the genteel tradition would be followed.

While the trustees were busy educating themselves about library buildings and administration, Poole was busy with more immediate tasks. "The first thing to be done," he told reporters, "is to begin the collection of books." His buying strategy was to be relatively simple:

The intention is to make a collection of books that will be complete in all its departments, the purpose being to satisfy the wants of scholars. It will not interfere with the Public Library in any way, but will supplement it and relieve the Library Board of the purchase of costly books that they might deem necessary to have. This Library will stand to the Public Library about in the same relation that universities stand to the public schools, one being for higher and the other for general education.²⁷

Just as universities were almost exclusively reserved for the upper classes, so would the Newberry be an institution for gentlemen.

Poole's plan to make the library "complete in all its departments" was not as audacious as it might appear to the mid-Twentieth Century reader. In 1887 it still seemed possible, even to an expert like Poole, that with enough money a library could collect nearly every worthwhile book in print. The publishing industry, although growing rapidly, spent most of its energies reprinting pirated titles because of loose international copyright laws.²⁸ There were few academic monographs, and it was possible for the Newberry to obtain most of them. Graduate education and departmentalized scholarship were just starting to take root in the United States. That Poole and other librarians were involved in the founding of academic fields outside of library science indicates how unspecialized knowledge was at the time.

There were, however, some limits to Poole's plans. He did not "begin, at once, a general collection of books which however valuable, can be found in the market at any time." He also planned to "postpone to a later date the collection of works whose chief merit consists in their being rare and curious and the delight of connoisseurs."²⁹ As will be shown below, the Library in fact began a collection of such books within two years after Poole was hired.

Poole immediately prepared "lists of standard bibliographic works in English and the several continental languages . . . embracing chiefly books on bibliography and reference works which are needed in the selection and cataloging of a large library." He acknowledged the impossibility of "due proportion and symmetry in the accretions to the different departments, or completeness in any one department," but felt "the deficiencies . . . will be later supplied and the collection will become symmetrical."³⁰

Poole's expertise as a bibliographer was supplemented by advice from experienced professionals in various fields. Graham Taylor sent a list of

“valuable periodicals and reports on Economical Science.” Political Scientist Laurence Laughlin felt that “next to President Harper’s persuasions and the great opportunities present” at the University of Chicago, the “siren voice” of Poole with its “inducements for purchase of reference books had a great influence on leading” him to Chicago. He quickly sent Poole a list of books he wanted at the Newberry. Winthrop Dwight Edwards of Yale sent a list on Egyptology, while the director of the Chicago Art Institute requested various books be bought. In a less academic area, one man offered a “pretty complete list of works” on checkers and draughts, because the Newberry “could not afford to neglect such an important (!) branch” if it hoped to be “*the* reference library of this country.”³¹

Although located in a polyglot city, the Newberry only partially filled the needs of its immigrant communities. Classics in French, German, Italian and Spanish were among the first books ordered, and periodicals in some of the continental languages were subscribed to. But these were not likely to appeal to Chicago’s large Eastern and Southern European populations. The trustees appear to have been ambivalent towards the interests of these groups.³²

When the Svea Society asked the Newberry to buy a “Complete collection of the literature of Sweden,” the trustees “were pleased to have their attention called to the wants of the Swedish citizens of Chicago,” and requested “the co-operation of scholarly gentlemen of your nationality in making the selection.” Over one hundred volumes relating to Scandinavian culture were soon purchased.³³ At the request of the trustees Poole sent a long letter to the rector of St. Mary’s Church, asking for a “list of books which you would like to be in the Newberry Library.” He emphasized that the “selection of its books” would be “conducted on the broadest principles,” and the Newberry would “procure books for original and scholarly investigation on topics in which religious students of every shade of belief will be interested.” He added that “if any class of studies are not duly represented, it will be because the scholars of our city” failed to give “their counsel and support in recommending these books.” The problem of urban communication, between the Protestant trustees and the Catholic clergy would be further alleviated if the rector would “give this information” to his “clerical associates.”³⁴

But with these two exceptions the Newberry appears to have ignored Chicago’s ethnics. Although most of the city’s ethnic groups had members who would have been interested in studying their own cultural background, there is no evidence their interests were considered in planning the Library. This stands in contrast to both the Chicago Public Library and the privately endowed New York Public Library. The tax supported C.P.L. naturally catered to the interests of all of Chicago’s citizens. Under Poole’s administration it developed large German, Italian, Polish, Scandinavian and Bohemian collections, and a few years later added Russian

and Chinese. The C.P.L. reported a large percentage of non-English speaking readers, indicating that there were probably many ethnics who would have been interested in more specialized collections, had they been at the Newberry.³⁵ John S. Billings, the first director of the New York Public, initiated its large Slavonic, Jewish and Oriental collections, "not for political but for intellectual reasons" and in "recognition of the status of New York as the leading Jewish community in the United States."³⁶ All three collections served New York's immigrant population. The Newberry might have recognized Chicago's status as the leading Polish, Bohemian, Lithuanian or Greek city in the nation, had the founders been interested in appealing to a "public" larger than their own class.

Similarly, Billings began a massive collection of "everything relating to poverty, the causes and prevention of crime, charity and methods of aid and relief—in short, intelligent philanthropy in the broadest sense of the word." It was "one of the most important in the Library in its influence for the public welfare." A similar collection would have been a useful and important addition to the Newberry. Yet Poole never utilized a bibliography on "charities and corrections" sent to him by a noted expert.³⁷ The Newberry founders were not lacking in philanthropic and eleemosynary endeavors, as much of their non-library work shows. Thus, their selective disinterest in this field may indicate that the "public" they were building their library for was a highly restricted one. Also, as a rather parochial institution in an unsophisticated city, the Newberry, in contradistinction to the N.Y.P.L., failed to develop a diverse collection because its intellectual horizons were, in many ways, quite limited.

The needs of Chicago's "native" community were carefully attended to by the Library. This group was largely Protestant, of Anglo-Saxon origin and Eastern (New England and New York) background. They were Chicago's first settlers, and "until the rise of the proletarian politics of the new immigration after the Civil War,"³⁸ they dominated the city's political scene. While their political power waned they began to dominate the city's cultural life through such institutions as the Newberry.

Many of Poole's early purchases indicate the cultural interests of this group. He offered to "get any books that might be named by the professors of . . . various Chicago [Protestant] seminaries."³⁹ From the beginning Poole purchased material on the Civil War, including a near complete set of the *Liberator* and many other abolitionist papers and pamphlets. Undoubtedly Poole's sense of history influenced these purchases. But, it seems likely that there was more than just casual historical interest involved in these, and purchases relating to the American Revolution, but not to the Mexican War, the Indian Wars or the American South: As transplanted Easterners, the Newberry founders were primarily interested in what their forebears had been doing or in what the East and Europe recognized as important for the attainment of "higher culture." Thus, the Newberry's now famous American Indian collections

were not started until fifteen years after Poole's death, and were the result of private philanthropy, rather than a decision by the librarian or trustees based on what they thought the Library ought to collect.⁴⁰ What Poole and the trustees thought the Library ought to collect is seen in an examination of three early large purchases.

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In the Library's first four years strong collections were built in three areas: U.S. and local history and genealogy; music; and rare editions. Each reflected the social and cultural interests of the founders.

In the Newberry's first annual report "American History, Genealogy and Biography" were listed together, because no real distinctions were made between local and genealogical history and national history. It was quite logical (and for the modern scholar quite fortunate) for the Newberry to build a strong American History collection, as Poole was a professional in the field. Of less lasting academic value, but perhaps of more value to the trustees was the genealogy collection. From the beginning the Newberry was "the place where you look up your ancestors."⁴¹ Most of the "looking up" was done by the transplanted Easterners of Chicago's elite.

This interest in one's roots was not confined to Chicago, but was part of a national movement that E. Digby Baltzell has called "The Social Defense of Caste." In 1896 the Lenox Library purchased a very large genealogy collection and set aside a room for its use. Between 1893 and 1900 over thirty-five "patriotic, hereditary, and historical associations" were formed, including the Sons of the American Revolution, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Society of Mayflower Descendants and the Baronial Order of Runnymede. This "ancestor worship" was "in the end, the last defense of the gentry . . . the bare fact of priority—their ancestors had been here first."⁴² But, for those overwhelmed by immigrants, Catholics and Jews, it was an important defense. Thus genealogy, and after 1889 heraldry, were significant collections in the early Newberry.

Similarly, the building of a great music collection reflected the cultural aspirations of the Newberry's founders. No one questioned that books on the fine arts belonged in the Newberry. The arts were part of the culture that the Newberry was striving to bring to Chicago. This was consistent with the Victorian notion of culture, "signifying the highest and most valued human activities, connected particularly with the high arts. People were defined as cultured according to their interest or proficiency in certain traditional areas: music, painting, architecture, *belles lettres*." Chicago concerts antedated the Fire, and there were many musicians and critics in the city to guide Poole in the selection of books, while "in painting" the city's culture was "provincial, still embryonic."⁴³ Thus, it is not surprising that the Newberry's first fine arts collection was in music.

In building a great music library the trustees were able to apply the full force of the Newberry endowment to this important, but in the United States, relatively neglected field. The *Tribune* could soon brag that "Prof. Paine of Harvard . . . asked permission to borrow titles from it for the use in the University collection." With the acquisition of a first edition of Jacopo Peri's opera *Euridice*, "printed in quarto in Florence and bears the dedication to Maria de' Medici," the Library obtained something that even the British Museum lacked!⁴⁴ For men consciously building a library whose greatness would reflect favorably on Chicago among the elite of the East and Europe, the music collection was a vital symbol of the "high arts."

Perhaps the most significant indication of what the Founders thought their research library ought to be was found in the Newberry's collection of rare books. In November, 1890, after over a year of negotiations, the Library obtained most of the private library of Henry Probasco, a wealthy book collector from Cincinnati whom Poole had known while the latter had been head of the public library in that city. The Probasco collection included thirteen editions of Shakespeare, including the 1st, 2nd, and 4th folios; early editions of Dante, Horace, Petrarch, Cervantes and Homer; Audubon's elephant folios; eighty-eight bibles; fifty-four volumes of incunabula; and 342 examples of rare and artistic binding, including works by Grolier, Cape, David and Bedford. This 6,000 volume collection complemented the rare editions, bibles and incunabula already purchased by the Library.⁴⁵

What finally convinced the trustees to buy the \$53,000 collection was a time-payment plan and the argument of Probasco's agent:

You will have to buy such books sometime and the longer it is put off, the more you will have to pay for them. You are purchasing not only for present use: but for generations yet unborn. This I think is an opportunity of a lifetime and . . . it would be a very judicious and desirable purchase.

Assuming the Newberry should have been collecting such rarities it was indeed a brilliant purchase.⁴⁶

No one ever articulated just why the Library would "have to buy such books sometime." The booster-oriented *Tribune* rejoiced because the purchase would "add to the value and richness of this great library . . . for which the Newberry is famous all over the country." The Library was in a position to challenge its "Eastern competitors in the richness and extent of several of its departments." It was another example of "the young metropolis of the West coming to the front in literature and art and passing its Eastern rivals."⁴⁷

For Poole, the purchase was wise since "the value of these art bindings will go on increasing, and they have already become valuable historically." He felt "A great library is not complete which cannot practically illustrate the development of the art of book-binding," enabling "the

student to go back nearly to the origin of printing and to trace the progress of typography. . . ." The books would "interest equally the scholar and the unlearned," and a public library ought to have them because "their great rarity and cost put them beyond the reach of individuals." Finally, Poole echoed the *Tribune's* boosterism: "In a large community like Chicago, which is supposed by outsiders to be largely engrossed in material interests, such a collection will attract much attention and inspire a taste for art, literature, and a broader culture."⁴⁸

Probasco felt his collection was essential if Chicago was to ever attain "broader culture":

There may not be a standard in Chicago but the Newberry is not a bad place to commence, and it is to be hoped, that as time goes on the Trustees will have the pride of the Astor, the Lenox, the Cambridge, the Boston Public, the John Carter Brown and some others, such as the Boston Athenaeum. So that it can say, here is a standard by which the public can know what is false and what is true.⁴⁹

That Poole and the trustees thought such standards of truth could be found in a collection of rare books indicates their cultural values and those of the Library. Book collecting's traditional association with the genteel elite was increasing in the late nineteenth century. Many millionaires, such as J. P. Morgan and Edward Ayer, were active book collectors. A contemporary periodical compared a book collection to a "Dukedom," and by the turn of the century, "American men of wealth had begun to look upon books as the most distinguished form of collecting not exceeded even by picture collecting."⁵⁰ Thus the founders saw their books as a guide for "what is true." Just as gentlemen wanted to know their genealogical ancestry, so they could maintain "standards" in their newly found prep schools, summer resorts and social clubs, so would a gentleman's library have to maintain standards.⁵¹ The rare books served for what Neil Harris has called the "certification" of the "experience or objects the institution protected," and "of the good taste and social standing of its supporters." Poole and the *Tribune* were proud of Chicago's new treasures because the rich and cultured men of the East (and Europe) respected such things. Blatchford looked forward to the "great pleasure" of showing the new acquisitions to a prominent Chicago lawyer, who would "keenly . . . appreciate the value of this collection."⁵²

Like many other cultural institutions of the period, the Newberry was interested in certifying its standards for a small audience. "Efficiency combined with class bias to dictate that the new cultural institutions be organized more with an eye to protecting the standard of the arts than with the theatricality and mingling of tastes which might have drawn mass audiences."⁵³ The Library was still open to the public, but the beauty and value of the collections made it impossible for a mass audience to either use or appreciate them.

These standards were maintained when a full Board of Trustees was chosen in 1892. All members of the first board were subsequently listed in the national Social Register. Over half had graduated from elite Eastern schools, such as Harvard, Yale and Williams. They were of the same Eastern Protestant background as Newberry and Poole. The board included two judges, two generals and a handful of millionaires. Not surprisingly, this contrasted greatly with the board of the C.P.L. That board always had representatives of Chicago's ethnic communities, while only about one third of its members were listed in the Social Register. From the beginning there were Jews on it, while the Newberry would not appoint a Jewish trustee until 1957. Even the N.Y.P.L. has had at least one Jew and one Catholic on its board since it was first formed.⁵⁴

Similarly, the staff of the Newberry reflected the ethnic background of the trustees. Many of the employees were recruited from Eastern colleges and libraries. A list of the employees for 1892 shows very few names that could be classified as "ethnic" and none of them in supervisory positions. Of the fifteen most prominent employees discussed by Poole's biographer, only two Scandinavian names appear on an otherwise all Anglo-Saxon list. This again contrasts with the C.P.L., where many ethnics were hired, at all levels, from the beginning. In 1886, well over half the assistant librarians had "ethnic" names. The New York Public also hired a number of "ethnics," including some in supervisory positions.⁵⁵

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Thus, during its early years the Newberry became a public gentleman's library. It was superficially like the public art museum, which brought rare artifacts of "high culture" within the reach of all Chicagoans. Actually, it was more like the opera and other "self-conscious cultural institution[s]" which "started to segment portions of the citizenry."⁵⁶ Although anyone could use the library, few people had reason to do so. As the *Times* put it, "a library exclusively for reference is a select affair; it bars out the mob, and limits its use to the better and cleaner classes."⁵⁷ Designed to attract a certain class, the Library's collection proved an effective bar to most everyone else. Even if "the mob" had been interested in the Newberry's books, there were other factors discouraging use.

The eventual building, with its alcove design, was "essentially a gentleman's [home] library magnified in size." It could not accommodate large numbers of people, as could the C.P.L. or the N.Y.P.L. The *Times* berated the trustees for attempting to "thwart" the "beneficent purposes of the testator" by not immediately building a structure for "the benefit of the masses in place of the scholarly few." From the beginning each user was required to fill out a form indicating his residence and reason for coming.⁵⁸ Such a procedure, while perhaps necessary in a research library (although the N.Y.P.L. has yet to institute such a system), could

easily discourage use by browsers or persons insecure about their social position. In addition, the librarians could, and did, ask people to leave if they were unsure of what they wanted to read.⁵⁹

Just who used the Library is impossible to determine. A few remaining statistics indicate that mostly professional men and a few high school students came there between 7:00 and 10:00 p.m. History and Genealogy, Literature and Fine Arts were the most popular subjects.⁶⁰ Poole's correspondence shows that a number of ministers, professional men and professors from midwest colleges inquired about using the Library. The tutor of a prominent lawyer's son, "a Harvard man of 1889—and he doesn't intend to go into commercial life," was introduced to Poole as an ideal user of the Library. More common, perhaps, was the lawyer who asked Poole to guide his wife in "reading up on Shakespearian criticism," or the lady who "needed to consult" all of Thomas Tyrwhitt's "works on literary criticism." Poole felt the Library would "provide for the wants of scholars, scientific students, professional men who want to get below the surface, and inquire into the origin and history of ideas and progress of events who read and seek books in many languages." But, at the time few such scholars lived in Chicago. After the John Crerar Library was endowed the *Times* urged philanthropists to begin "supplementing those library facilities with universities and colleges."⁶¹

The Newberry's founders never clearly defined the institution they were building, perhaps because they never really could. Intellectually they were caught between two worlds: the older one of rare books and gentlemen scholars, and the emerging one of social science research and professional scholarship. Socially they were in a similar situation. Although they might have wanted to build an exclusive library, like the private Boston Athenaeum or the "public" Lenox, they could not, for in Chicago, in 1887, such would have been an anachronism. Also, the testator provided for a library open to the public. They did not want to build a large public library to supplement the C.P.L. Nor could they build a modern research library. That was a task for future librarians and trustees, who would be familiar and comfortable with modern methods of scholarship.

Under Poole the Library acquired bibliographic tools, pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals and important scholarly works. It also bought rare editions and volumes which were "the delight of connoisseurs." At the same time, manuscripts and archival material were neglected. Blatchford even refused to authorize purchase of a collection of Mendelsohn's letters at the time the Library was building its great music collection. In 1892 the Library listed only three manuscripts in its collection. Modern library techniques of stacking and classification were similarly ignored. This was certainly not the beginning of a modern research library, even by the standards of Poole's era. With its incunabula, rare bibles, genealogy, and lack of manuscripts, the Newberry was perhaps the

last great library built without the dominating influence of modern, professional librarianship and scholarship.

As an intellectual institution, the Newberry reflected the reaction against urbanization then taking root among America's social elites. The Library's collection was not affected by Chicago's milieu of immigrants, industry and poverty. If Chicago's immigrants and working class wished to read books in their native languages or popular novels in English, they could go to "the public library . . . the general resort of the reading public," but if they wished to study their cultural roots, they would have searched in vain at the Newberry. As a "resort" for the upper classes, however, the Newberry had a definite function. During this period, as Neil Harris has shown, "museums, libraries, and orchestras were meant to be asylums—the word is used frequently—refuges for the best that world culture had produced."⁶² Among the New England genealogies and incunabula one was unlikely to rub elbows with the uncultured (or cultured) masses. Like the many clubs listed in the *Social Register*, the Newberry was a place where members of the "cleaner classes could escape from the city without actually leaving it." In an age when "decent people," as Edith Wharton put it, "fell back on sport and culture,"⁶³ the Newberry was a welcome oasis of the latter.

Late nineteenth-century Chicago had great wealth and strong class divisions. It was new, raw and lacking in cultural and educational institutions. It lacked a social research library, like the N.Y.P.L.'s economics division, and its public circulating library was perpetually underfunded. The Newberry estate might have been used to buy the vast numbers of inexpensive volumes needed to change this situation. The Newberry might have emulated the contemporary Boston Museum. Instead of spending their resources on expensive works of original art, the Museum's trustees—a group even more aristocratic than the Newberry trustees—bought prints and plaster casts in an attempt to maximize their collecting power. They also bought non-Western works of art, and included popular culture and the applied arts in their collections. The Bostonians were quite successful at bringing culture and education to the general public.⁶⁴

Perhaps they were unsure of their elite status; perhaps they suffered from Chicago's "Second City" complex, and felt only the best, most expensive and culturally acceptable volumes could compensate for not being in New York or Boston; perhaps they simply lacked the will or vision of the Bostonians. In any event, the Newberry trustees did not want to bring culture and knowledge to the people of Chicago. Rather, they wanted to build a library that would bring fame and prestige to Chicago's elite. That there were few true scholars in the city to use the Library was not really important. By collecting and accumulating artifacts of culture, they were able to satisfy their own cultural aspirations. In 1894, with the death of Poole and the appointment of a full Board, the administration of the Library became less centralized. It was no longer three

dedicated men overseeing every aspect of the institution. Yet, future librarians and trustees would carry on the traditions initiated by the Founders that would one day lead to an important, although highly specialized research institution.

University of Chicago

footnotes

1. Adna F. Weber, *The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, 1967), 174, 450; W. W. Belcher, *The Economic Rivalry Between St. Louis and Chicago, 1850-1880* (New York, 1947).
2. *Chicago Times*, January 10, 27, 1890.
3. Bessie Louise Pierce, *A History of Chicago, Vol. III: The Rise of a Modern City, 1871-1893* (New York, 1957), 493-94.
4. George B. Utley, "Newberry, Walter Loomis," *Dictionary of American Biography*, XIII (1935), 447-48; Newberry Library Archives, E. W. Blatchford MSS, Will of Walter L. Newberry, Blatchford MSS to be cited hereafter as E.W.B. papers.
5. Will of Walter L. Newberry, *Ibid.*
6. Newberry Library, *Proceedings of the Trustees . . . for Six Months, from July 1, 1887 to January 5, 1888* (Chicago, 1888), 4-5, hereafter to be cited as Trustees Report, with appropriate date [Note, reports were printed in January for the previous year, but the year of printing will be cited, e.g., this report will be cited as *Trustees Report, 1888*]; Henry W. Newberry v. Eliphalet W. Blatchford . . . *Julia Newberry*, 1877, 10, in E.W.B. papers.
7. Phyllis Dain, *The New York Public Library: A History of Its Founding and Early Years* (New York, 1972), 8-9. As New York's most notorious slum-lord, John J. Astor's reputation hurt the Library he endowed. This was exacerbated by the Library's exclusivity which the general public blamed on the Astors. In declining to serve on the Board of Trustees, William Waldorf Astor cited public opposition to the family name and claimed "my Father told me that he would be very willing, that the name be changed, if by doing so, the public could be made to understand that it was their property precisely as any other public institution." It subsequently merged with the Lenox and the Tilden Trust to form the New York Public Library. Harry Miller Lydenberg, *History of the New York Public Library* (New York, 1923), 309-310.
8. *Congregationalist* (December 31, 1885), quoted in Lawrence W. Towner, *The Library and the Collector: The Newberry Library* (n.p., n.d.), unpaginated.
9. "'The Second Father of the Newberry,'" *Newberry Library Bulletin*, No. 7 (June, 1947), 3-18.
10. Many members of Chicago's elite, such as Louise de Koven Bowen and Jane Addams, were active in Hull House and similar enterprises. It would not have been out of place for Blatchford and Bradley to use the Newberry endowment for social welfare.
11. "'Second Father of the Newberry'" ; William Landram Williamson, *William Frederick Poole and the Modern Library Movement* (New York and London, 1963), 139.
12. Carl B. Roden, "Poole, William Frederick," *Dictionary of American Biography*, XV (1935), 66-67.
13. William F. Poole, *The Construction of Library Buildings* (Washington, 1881), 10-11.
14. Newberry Library Archives, William F. Poole MSS, Mary E. Burt to Poole, 1887, Poole MSS hereafter to be cited as Poole papers, and William F. Poole to be cited as W.F.P.
15. *Chicago Times*, July 15, 1887.
16. Mary E. Burt to W.F.P., *op. cit.*
17. *Chicago Times*, July 17, 1887.
18. Stow Persons, *The Decline of American Gentility* (New York and London, 1973), 44-46.
19. John Higham, *History: Professional Scholarship in America* (New York, 1973), 13, 20.
20. Howard Mumford Jones, *The Age of Energy: Varieties of American Experience* (New York, 1971), 185.
21. Higham, 10-11, 9.
22. Persons, 116.
23. *Ibid.*, 115.
24. Dain, 8-12 and *passim*.
25. Arthur L. Humphries, *The Private Library* (London, 1900), 19 and *passim*.
26. Jones, 216.
27. *Library Journal*, XII (1887), 255-56.
28. Arthur Meier Schlesinger, *The Rise of the City, 1878-1898*, Vol. X of *A History of American Life*, eds. A. M. Schlesinger and Dixon Ryan Fox (New York, 1913), 249-55.
29. *Trustees Report, 1888*, 10-11.
30. *Ibid.*

31. Graham Taylor to E. W. Blatchford, November 30, 1892, in E.W.B. papers; J. Laurence Laughlin to W.F.P., March 10, 28, 1892; Winthrop Dwight to W.F.P., March 26, 1888; W. M. R. French to W.F.P., June 8, 1890; Walter Lee Brown to W.F.P., June 27, 1888, all in Poole papers.

32. Thus, for example, in 1892 the C.P.L. carried newspapers and periodicals in Swedish, German, French, Bohemian, Polish, Dutch, Norwegian, Danish, Italian, Russian and Armenian. The Newberry carried nearly fifty per cent more non-English newspapers and periodicals, but most were in German or French, with a few in Spanish, Italian, and Dutch. *Trustees Report, 1892; Chicago Public Library Annual Report, 1892.*

33. Gustavus L. Swenson to W.F.P., November 3, 1887; W.F.P. to George S. Oleson, November 11, 1887; Albert Bromier to L. P. Nelson, March 9, 1888, all in Poole papers.

34. W.F.P. to Joseph Rolls, March 30, 1888, in Poole papers.

35. *Chicago Public Library Annual Reports, 1873-1885, 1886-1896, 1902-03.*

36. Dain, 115; Ellen Moers, "The Library Murder Case," review of *The New York Public Library: A History of its Founding and Early Years*, by Phyllis Dain, and *Annual Report, 1971/72*, *The New York Public Library*, in the *New York Review of Books*, May 3, 1973, 32.

37. Moers, 32; Blatchford to Rev. Fred H. Wines, August 6, 1888, in E.W.B. papers, Blatchford hereafter cited as E.W.B.

38. Persons, 134.

39. George H. Gilbert to E.W.B., March 10, 1888, in E.W.B. papers.

40. Salem Dutcher to W.F.P., March 18, 1889; F. J. Garrison to W.F.P., October 27, 1887, January 21, November 10, 1888, in Poole papers; L. W. Towner; Among the middle and upper classes of the Gilded Age, "few of them could see anything 'worth while' (a favorite phrase) in the arts of the American Indians," Jones, 183. Poole's correspondence indicates he refused to buy a number of volumes relating to the far West and the South.

41. Trustees Report, 1889; *The Newberry Library Bulletin* I (November, 1944), 4. While the Newberry's genealogy collection is still used by people in search of their ancestors, like much of the Library's early acquisitions, it is creatively being adapted to the needs of modern scholars. The "new" social historians at the Newberry's Family History Project are currently using the genealogy collection in ways that would undoubtedly surprise Poole or Blatchford.

42. E. Digby Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy & Caste in America* (New York, 1964), 109-121; Persons, 296. See also Jones, 184-86.

43. Arthur Mann, Neil Harris and Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *History and the Role of the City in American Life* (Indianapolis, 1972), 26; Pierce, 489-94.

44. *Chicago Tribune*, September 4, 1888; Trustees Report, 1889, 9-11.

45. *Chicago Tribune*, November 22, 1890; W.F.P. to B. F. Stevens, March 29, May 8, 1890, both in Poole papers.

46. Robert Clarke to Trustees, September 23, 1890; The ever critical *Chicago Times* did not think the purchase a wise one, and according to Lawrence W. Towner, *An Uncommon Collection of Uncommon Collections: The Newberry Library* (Chicago, 1972), 13, the newspaper described the Probasco collection as one of "antique lard cans." Such a comment would indeed have been typical of the city's leading Democratic organ. However, although Towner was quoting an article by an earlier director of the Newberry, I have been unable to find the "antique lard cans" quote in available microfilm prints of the *Chicago Times*.

47. *Chicago Tribune*, November 22, 1890.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Henry Probasco to Trustees, December 4, 1889, in Poole papers.

50. *The Bibliographer: A Journal of Book-Lore*, I (1881-1882), 1; Louis Wright and Gordon Ray, *The Private Collector and the Support of Scholarship* (Los Angeles, 1969), 14.

51. Baltzell, 109-142.

52. Mann, Harris and Warner, 34; E.W.B. to E. B. McCagg, Esq., December 2, 1890, in E.W.B. papers

53. Mann, Harris and Warner, 34-5. Harris contrasts the Gilded Age with the ante-bellum period, when concert halls and museums directed their activities towards the general public. However, this does not appear to have been true for the few existing libraries. Jacksonian Democracy had virtually no influence on the Boston Athenaeum, the Astor, or the various subscription libraries in Chicago, Philadelphia and other cities.

54. *C.P.L. Annual Reports, 1873-1885, 1897-1903; Trustees Report, 1895, 1900, 1905; Social Register, Chicago, 1900* (New York, 1899) and *1905* (New York, 1904); Moers, op. cit.; Upper class antisemitism is discussed by Baltzell, Persons and Jones. It was a phenomena that affected much of the gentry elite, including such intellectuals as Henry Adams and Melvil Dewey. Stow Persons points out that "The symbol of the status revolution for many of the gentry was the Jew. A homeless wanderer . . . the Jew represented an alien threat to the regional stability of Gentry culture. He also symbolized the overwhelming threat of newly made money to Gentry values." (296) Jones says that "the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant . . . elite wanted to be amiable to agreeable Jews and cultured Catholics. But they had an uneasy sense that their birthright was being threatened by pagan or decadent art . . . and by hordes of non-Anglo-Saxon, non-Protestant immigrants from all sorts of places, including Asia." (202)

This fear led many cultural institutions to collect only those books, paintings or statues that would reinforce their values. Thus, the early collections at the Newberry were oriented towards classical Europe, Great Britain and New England.

55. William Landrum Williamson, "William Frederick Poole and the Modern Library Movement" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1959), 163-66, 173; *Chicago Public Library Annual Reports, 1873-1885, 1886-1897*; Dain, *passim*. While last names are not a perfect guide to ethnicity, they are helpful. If a number of "ethnics" were in fact working at the Newberry, they must have changed their names, which in itself is indicative of a certain bias.

56. Mann, Harris and Warner, 34.

57. *Chicago Times*, July 17, 1887. Harris notes that the use of opera houses changed during this period, from a concert hall used by nearly all classes, to a highly exclusive center of culture. The *Times* (November 25, 1889) noted "the sale of auditorium seats at prices from \$600 to \$2100 for an opera box . . . makes conspicuous . . . that the wealth is possessed largely by people of refined and cultivated tastes."

58. Houghton Wetherold, "The Architectural History of the Newberry Library," *The Newberry Library Bulletin* VI (November, 1962), 3-23; *Chicago Times*, July 17, 1887, December 24, 1889, November 15, 1890.

59. "Statistics of the Reading Room" in the Newberry Archives.

60. *Ibid.*; *Trustees Report, 1891*, 8, *1892*, 21. For a short time the Library had a large medical collection, which was used a great deal by doctors. However, that collection was transferred to the John Crerar Library in the mid-1890s, and thus I have not discussed it here.

61. Franklin MacVeagh to W.F.P., January 7, 1891; Henry B. Mason to W.F.P., January 7, 1889; Maud Wilkinson to W.F.P., n.d.; G. F. Stone to W.F.P., April 3, 1888, all in Poole papers; *Chicago Times*, September 28, 1890

62. *Chicago Times*, April 8, 1890; Mann, Harris, and Warner, p. 38.

63. Baltzell, p. 113.

64. Neil Harris, "The Gilded Age Revisited: Boston and the Museum Movement," *American Quarterly*, XIV (Winter, 1962), 545-566. The comparison between the two institutions is especially interesting, because the Boston Museum actually grew out of the collections of the Boston Athenaeum, and all but one of the Museum's Trustees were also Proprietors of the Athenaeum. Besides collecting copies instead of originals (first editions of art), the Museum collection differed from the Newberry in one other important way. The Museum contained non-Western art, while the Newberry began by only collecting classical and Anglo-American works.