

BOOKWOMEN

*Creating an Empire in Children's
Book Publishing, 1919–1939*

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Troublesome Womanhood and New Childhood

WHEN ANNE CARROLL MOORE AND ALICE JORDAN began their professional lives as librarians in the late 1890s, they became part of a public library system in the process of modernization. The charter members of the American Library Association (ALA), a small group of gentlemen bibliophiles who had met in 1876 to restructure America's library system, had every reason to envision the revitalized library as one of the nation's premier cultural institutions. A critical technology for many Americans, print represented "social currency" and provided the basis for the library's claim to authority and legitimacy. Other factors, including the heightened popular appeal of democracy, greater access to education, increasing literacy rates, a burgeoning national organizational matrix that altered America's geographically bound communities, and the newly exalted position of expertise in American culture, all contributed to a new and more urgent demand for accessible libraries to offer citizens the opportunity for self-education, self-improvement, and hence, an expanded public sphere. The result of such urgency was increased municipal funding in several cities and the support of benefactors like Andrew Carnegie, further evidence to the charter members of the ALA, including Melvil Dewey, Justin Winsor, and William Frederick Poole, that the library was fortuitously poised for success.¹ Although far from consensus about the particulars of its vision, members of the group shared at least a broad optimism about the potential impact of the modern public library on both individual and collective national life, reflected in ambitious, if contested, goals.

To bolster its prestige and reassure the public of its value, early library leaders developed powerful narratives about the library that tapped directly

into broader national narratives about education, achievement, social mobility and responsibility, and the democratic process itself. Readers, according to the ALA, were more “civilized” and stood a better chance at upward mobility than nonreaders.² The “civilizing” influence of the library would be evidenced, went the narrative, by civic-minded Americans actively engaged with a rational political process. Advocates frequently and enthusiastically declared that the library could fulfill democratic ideals, and insisted that reading be viewed as a “vital part of civic life.”³ The modern library, boasted the *Library Journal*, had expanded, creating a “reading democracy” and providing a crucial foundation for citizenship. “We want citizens,” one contributor to the *Journal* remarked, “and the public school and the public library are the places where citizens are made.”⁴

Although certainly not new, the belief that citizenship rested on education was critical in emerging library narratives. Despite steadily increasing enrollment in secondary schools after 1890, only about 11 percent of America’s youth attended high school in 1900.⁵ This made the mission of the library all the more important, asserted leaders, since the library provided educational opportunities still unavailable to the majority of America’s children in formal school settings. Thus, the library was billed as the capstone of the educational system and librarians frequently encouraged citizens to patronize the library in order to engage in lifelong learning. In addition to developing educated, patriotic citizens, the library promised to be “a destroyer of class distinctions, sectional antagonisms, and international ill will.”⁶

But libraries were, as Abigail Van Slyck notes, “much more than they seem from the sidewalk.”⁷ The pace of social change in late nineteenth-century America produced tensions militating against the easy fulfillment of such cherished goals. In the context of the nation’s radically altered economic and class structures as well as its rapidly shifting cultural composition, many traditional attitudes, including those related to women, children, and education, were in a state of renegotiation. Beneath the gleaming surface of its public claims, therefore, the library struggled with darker issues that threatened to compromise the realization of its purpose. The library’s voluntary nature, amateurism, and a mounting challenge to the traditional texts that it protected all complicated the library’s ability to collect and consolidate authority.⁸ Overcoming these obstacles was a strenuous process, producing long-lasting tensions within the institution; lengthy, ongoing debates proved that generating abstract and high-flown rhetoric was easier than creating measurable goals.

One immediate issue facing library visionaries in terms of authority was the development of professional culture, a process that necessarily included defining the term “librarian.” The term implied a certain level of education, but how much and what kind was open to debate. It is true that the ALA gradually expanded its emphasis on education as one part of an overall plan to create professional culture for librarianship. Such education suggested the development of a specific knowledge base and clearly defined standards.⁹ As early as 1902, for example, the New York State Library School, then located in Albany, was placed on a graduate footing, requiring all applicants to have completed a course of study at colleges registered by the University of the State of New York. But some libraries did not enjoy ready access to individuals who had graduated from such library schools and continued to employ librarians with no such advanced education. So, while “librarian” increasingly implied formal education, the early definition of the term was much more likely to reflect qualities such as “character.” However problematic this term may seem today for its subjectivity, it cannot be viewed as mere professional window dressing in the late nineteenth century. Character was intimately linked to education since educated women, often from “good” families, were assumed to possess it. But because character connoted the *potential* for improvement, it was also an important signifier for librarians who lacked formal education. With or without formal education, “character” was considered a solid indicator of one’s suitability for librarianship.¹⁰

Intersecting with the process of professionalization was another important issue and one gaining significant ground in America during the last half of the nineteenth century: efficiency. This notion, and the excitement it generated, carried powerful implications for library discourse about the type and amount of education librarians needed. Of those present at the 1876 meeting, Melvil Dewey, an energetic force in the early library movement, most spiritedly supported a vision of an efficiency-driven library.¹¹ Traditionalists were less convinced by what seemed reductionist thinking on Dewey’s part. Efficiency mattered, of course; simple proliferation of print demanded it. Still, some library leaders resisted seeing the library succumb to practical questions. Efficiency could be taken too far, they warned, causing the library to look more like a factory than a place of learning and culture. If the library became *too* practical, in other words, it ran the risk of losing respect in the eyes of patrons. On the other hand, the rapidly growing number of libraries required a ready supply of librarians. The broad and frequently advanced education for which their antebellum counterparts were noted was now unrealistic and, some thought, unnecessary.

In an efficiency-minded institution responsible for more and more books, the only realistic goal was training to monitor books, not understand them. In that case, adequate training for librarians would feasibly consist of a high school education supplemented by brief technical preparation. This view fostered the development of a profession wherein expertise and authority were not equivalent: librarians became experts in information brokering without retaining authority over the information itself.¹²

The modern definition of “librarian” was thus a response to both new, pressing social attitudes and practical necessity, not only because of the efficiency issue but also as a result of changing attitudes concerning the role of women in American society. The ALA’s discourse over cultural property, in fact, prominently engaged gender. Gender jurisdiction, particularly in middle-class culture, was frequently divided into “spheres,” where private was associated with female, and public with male. Broadly accepted during the nineteenth century, separate spheres ideology limited women’s access to formal political life and helped to determine the boundaries of their public engagement.¹³

On closer inspection, however, the trope’s ostensible simplicity obscured a highly complicated dynamic: gender was less an actual circumstance than metaphoric negotiation. Far from being confined to their homes in any literal sense, nineteenth-century American women participated substantively in the nation’s organizational life. Moreover, an increasing number of females, with ambitions that extended beyond those dictated by tradition, entered professions. In exchange for higher education and careers, some were willing to forgo marriage and/or children. Yet, excluded from positions of political and professional power, women were generally allowed into those professions frequently associated with children, such as teaching and social work. Thus, women with outstanding credentials and high energy entered such professions precisely as the meaning of childhood was under significant reconsideration.¹⁴ By entering the workplace, women expanded the site of gender negotiation, but this process by no means led to the abandonment of notions about what constituted women’s proper work. Commonly receiving multiple and contradictory messages about their appropriate role in American culture, women were expected to be both “submissive helpmates” and “pillars of strength,” repositories of cultural, but not intellectual, authority.¹⁵

“Separate spheres” reflected more than a gender norm, however, because of its reference to the concept of space. The distinction between public and private space existed before, but grew sharper during the nineteenth

century. Space mattered, both literally and symbolically representing power and success in a complex world. Increasingly associated with distinct function, space was consistent with the modern sentiment that specialization confirmed progress.¹⁶

Space and specialization achieved this level of importance, in part, from nagging anxieties about modern life, including a perceived loss of moral and intellectual fortitude. As old belief systems threatened to disintegrate in the context of rapid change, many worried that authentic experience had been the cost of modern conveniences.¹⁷ Because such anxieties coincided with women's heightened visibility in the public sphere, gender became a convenient code for expressing them, resulting in allegations of cultural feminization. Further heightening fears of feminization by the early twentieth century, the new field of psychology offered a therapeutic orientation that advocated introspection—privatized space—as its primary vehicle. Excessive self-scrutiny, however, was viewed as obsessive and morbid, resulting in psychic conditions such as neurasthenia, sometimes regarded as the prime characteristic of the modern age and often associated with “female.”¹⁸

Fear of feminization made institutions like the library sensitive to their public image, which was frequently situated in gendered terms. The library's insistence on connecting itself with preparation for political responsibility—from which women generally remained formally disconnected—constituted a *de facto* claim about the nature of the library: some of its most fundamental characteristics would be “male.” If, as many librarians envisioned, the library represented serious intellectual pursuit, it needed to reflect “male” values. If, on the other hand, the library offered leadership in cultural matters, the library should exhibit “female” traits. For many librarians, some combination of the two was ideal; that is, the library could and should evidence institutional characteristics associated with “maleness” and others associated with female identity.

Ironically, library leaders sought to establish an institution that upheld and reinforced traditional gender attitudes precisely as librarianship was rapidly feminizing. Indeed, only two years after the ALA was founded, two-thirds of the nation's librarians were women, although solid reasons certainly existed for allowing women into the field.¹⁹ Chronic labor shortages and modest library funding made it difficult to refuse female applicants who would work for less than men in the growing number of public libraries. Then too, women seemed well suited to the mundane, task-oriented operational details that promoted efficiency. Of equal or greater importance, however, was the widespread belief in the moral superiority of

women, an invaluable asset to an institution whose self-determined mission was tied to supervising the integrity of the public's reading taste.²⁰ The editor Montrose Moses, for example, compared the library to a "temple of treasures," wherein the librarian functioned as the "high priestess."²¹

Female influence in public institutions was simultaneously embraced and resisted, resulting in a complex moment in women's professionalization. The astounding pace of feminization in librarianship suggests that women were granted admittance to the profession unchallenged.²² But moral influence and smaller paychecks, while desirable, were insufficient to induce library leaders to embrace women unreservedly. By advertising the library as civic-minded space, leaders emphasized its "male" qualities. Yet, most admitted that women made appropriate guardians of the public's reading selections because "culture" was part of their proper domain. The hesitation about the potentially excessive influence of "female" traits in public spaces thus sat uncomfortably adjacent to positive attitudes about feminine morality.

The protracted debate over fiction throughout the last half of the nineteenth century provides a powerful illustration of the library's institution-specific response to concerns over feminization. The growing presence of fiction on library shelves concerned library leaders, who feared it would dilute the connection between the library and citizenship by luring patrons to read books merely for recreation rather than civic duty or self-education. Typically, fiction and female were conflated, not only because of the preponderance of women novelists but also because the genre was associated with hypothetically female traits of emotionalism and sensationalism. As one library commissioner in Indiana complained, "Women are more emotional, certainly more sentimental, than men . . . We naturally expect women to read more . . . fiction."²³

The fiction question was deeply rooted, extending back to Puritan beliefs about recreation and books that were not "true" since truthful books were considered especially important for children. Opinions as to exactly when children reached an age of spiritual accountability differed, but all agreed it occurred early. The content of children's reading material—and the themes of much adult material, for that matter—reflected that belief, resulting in a scarcity of fiction in colonial America.²⁴ During the late eighteenth century, "sturdy republicanism" depended heavily on education, giving non-fiction fresh importance by its use in preparing children for the grave responsibilities of citizenship.²⁵ But by the early years of the nineteenth century, fiction became more popular and, to the distress of some, more

available. Major authors, such as Jacob Abbott, Samuel Goodrich, Lydia Maria Child, and Catharine Sedgwick, used the genre to create didactic and sentimental stories focused less on the child's spiritual status in the event of untimely death, and more on appropriate behavior in American society.²⁶ Whether or not the author of sentimental fiction was a woman, the nature of the genre was, to many, "female."

By the time the modern library movement was underway, Americans nonetheless demanded fiction to an unsettling degree. By 1880, fiction was the leading category of books published and consumed in America, a lead it maintained until 1909. To the consternation of *Publishers Weekly*, Americans preferred fiction rather than books of "solid character."²⁷ To some, this preference suggested an emasculated reading public suffering from a loss of independence,²⁸ exemplifying the weakening of American culture through feminine influence. To make matters worse, women librarians began compiling lists of recommended books in 1882, powerful tools for setting literary standards and further evidence of female control.²⁹ Furthermore, the presumed "nurturing" qualities of women librarians might signal the public that the library was "female" space. Library leaders were not anxious to foster a "homelike" image, since it would diminish the library as "strong" space.

The library devised several methods for discouraging the public's taste for fiction, and subsequently, female influence. One was to limit the amount of fiction that a library patron could borrow. In 1915, for example, only one of the four books allowed to be charged at the New York Public Library at a time could be fiction.³⁰ Another method was to segregate "cheap" and sensational books from other reading material. At Boston Public Library, such books were kept together in what was known among employees as "The Inferno." But when one employee, upset about what he considered immoral books, launched a one-man crusade against the library, the administrative response revealed that not all fiction was considered bad. The library, administrators said, "is not a goody-goody Sunday school library . . . kept up for the benefit of the Puritan New Englander . . . [but] also intended to meet the requirements of the Roman Catholic Irishman, the atheistic German, the radical Frenchman, all of whom are citizens of Boston, paying their taxes . . . and therefore equally entitled to be considered in the selection of books."³¹ Yet, while not all fiction was considered bad, and library boards did not always become embroiled in moralistic campaigns to censor fiction, tolerance frequently represented the hope that fiction would be a stepping-stone to "improved" reading selections.

Changing attitudes about women also paralleled the tensions marking changing attitudes about children. In colonial America, as in Europe, children were tied both to the practical necessities of the household economy and to the spiritual piety of their elders. Beginning in the eighteenth century, and especially by the nineteenth, childhood took on a more modern look as children increasingly became “economically useless but emotionally priceless.”³² The more affluent, especially, whose children were no longer an ingredient for economic survival, could afford the luxury of reconsidering their perceptions about the natures of children and the purpose of childhood. The severe childhood lessons preferred by an earlier generation softened, as adults increasingly believed that children represented innocence to be protected rather than corruption to be eradicated. Responding to this change, adults adopted child-rearing strategies reflecting new appreciation for such qualities as imagination and creativity.

Children were special people, the new narrative went, and needed special space. Moreover, children were a community concern that extended beyond parents alone; adults, as Ronald Cohen notes, “worried about children—everyone’s children, not just their own.”³³ Given the grand importance of the outcome of child raising, therefore, an infrastructure of cultural institutions, including libraries, evolved to lend a watchful eye over children. One consequence of this “gaze” was that authority over children now resided with adults, including librarians, outside the family. Another was that, by the 1890s, children represented a distinct cultural entity. Taking their place alongside the nation’s other demarcated groups, whether economic, ethnic, or otherwise, children were increasingly segregated from adults in literal as well as figurative ways.³⁴ Library leaders, affected by this important attitude shift toward children, debated the advantages of segregating children from adults in the library and, by the 1890s, several libraries had dedicated space in their facilities to children’s use.

The drift toward age segregation, however, represented only one aspect of changing notions of childhood. Children not only occupied special space but also required special study.³⁵ Since the 1870s, various organizations had emerged to study children, but by the 1890s that movement gained significant momentum, creating a climate of preoccupation with children. In 1890, parents established what became the largest of such organizations: the Child Study Association of America (CSAA); four years later, the National Education Association (NEA) created a Department of Child Study. By the end of the decade, twenty or more states had established similar organizations.³⁶

The informal but undisputed head of the child study movement during its early years was the social scientist Granville Stanley Hall, who urged adults to recognize and respect “natural” stages of child development. Children, he insisted, should be allowed spontaneous self-expression.³⁷ Adults should therefore resist the temptation to impose uniformity on educational requirements and goals. Through his lectures to diverse audiences, including schoolteachers, Hall’s “scientific” pedagogy became enormously popular. His views, however, as they related to education, rested more on the intellectual tradition of romanticism than on either older precepts of intellectual development or science. Child study organizations, in fact, were suspected by some, including John Dewey, of promoting little more than sentimentality about children under the guise of science. Dewey was particularly disturbed that child study had divorced itself from psychology, which might have at least provided the movement with a theoretical basis.³⁸

However devoted they might have been to developmental theory, Hall’s followers did not speak for everyone interested in children. Many more were persuaded by the thought of individuals like Lester Frank Ward than by Hall. To Ward, children were more than interesting objects of study; they were the means to a just society. By more evenly distributing its resources, they claimed, society could ameliorate social ills. In contrast to Hall’s “live and let live” philosophy about children’s natural exuberance and curiosity, Ward regarded children’s education as the master key to social progress.

In any case, adults interested in children typically identified several “problems” among troublesome youth, including feeble-mindedness, stubbornness, strong wills, and emotional disturbance. Frequently, the children most likely to illustrate these traits were poor immigrants in urban settings. Scientific experts like neurologists and physicians in charge of asylums validated these findings and warned of the long term danger of such traits: poor and unreformed habits in children resulted in mentally ill adults. Taking such warnings seriously, adults turned their attention to “saving” children from their “problems.”

According to child-savers, the problem was not so much children as the system in which they lived; change the system, they believed, and the child would be reformed. Their solution thus frequently took the form of legislation designed to improve the economic conditions of families, including child labor, compulsory education, and mothers’ pensions. Since the system, rather than children, was at the root of the problem, child-savers viewed “problem” children with the same sentimentalism with which they viewed

middle-class children.³⁹ Reformers argued for a sheltered childhood for *all* children, although they viewed children hierarchically according to class and ethnicity.⁴⁰ Considering themselves “doctors to a sick society,”⁴¹ they agitated for broad social changes that, they believed, would ameliorate the living conditions of children. By 1919, they achieved several of their goals, including more or less universal education, a reduction in infant mortality rates, improved health care, and a decrease in the exploitation of child labor.⁴² The White House Conference on Dependent Children in 1909 was a milestone in such reform efforts, establishing a clear link between children and rights. The conference resulted, three years later, in one of the child-savers’ greatest achievements: the U.S. Children’s Bureau.

For children refusing more benevolent forms of child saving, however, a reforming institution of a legal nature was instituted. Consistent with new middle-class attitudes about the value of segregating children from adults, the United States established a federal court system in 1899, specifically designed to deal with juvenile offenders.⁴³ But the juvenile court failed to produce the reduction in delinquency for which its founders, including Julia Lathrop, first chief of the Children’s Bureau, had hoped. Turning to science for help, progressives hoped to solve the most difficult child cases.

The “scientific” approach to children’s problems was not altogether new in the early years of the twentieth century when reformers became disappointed with the juvenile court system and, at the outset, science and social reform mingled well. When, for example, in 1909, a committee was formed to study juvenile delinquency, Lathrop—representing “old” forms of child-saving—sat side by side with psychiatrist Adolf Meyer—representing “scientific” forms of child-saving—to create the National Committee for Mental Hygiene (NCMH), determined to promote mental health rather than cure mental illness. Such cooperation was possible because the overlap between scientifically minded and child-oriented individuals was substantial. Individuals intimately associated with progressive reform hailed scientific child study as an important breakthrough. Jane Addams regarded it as a “tool for social betterment” by getting “at the root” of why children “go wrong”; the Harvard philosopher William James supported a scientific approach to children as well. Indeed, much of the funding for child guidance came from progressive philanthropies such as the Commonwealth Fund and the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Foundation.

As a result of the shift toward a scientific model of child helping, Ethel Sturges Dummer, a progressive philanthropist, both inspired and financed the Juvenile Psychopathic Institute (JPI) in 1909. The JPI was intended to

serve as an expert body upon which the courts could rely for medical and psychological evaluations, especially in cases involving recidivism. Until a second clinic was established in Boston in 1917, the Chicago-based JPI was the nation's center for psychiatric research. Its director was William Healy, a student of William James at Harvard and a graduate of the Rush School of Medicine in Chicago. Healy's child research became the basis of new and improved methods of combating juvenile delinquency. Together with Augusta Bronner, the clinic's first psychologist, Healy quickly bolstered the prominence of the JPI by writing and by speaking to national conferences.

Eventually, however, the relationship between the psychologically oriented study of children carried on at the JPI and the broad, legislatively oriented agenda of social reformers grew uneasy; their views about the causes and solutions of delinquency were fundamentally contradictory and defied reconciliation. In the view of Healy and others, interventions directed at improving living conditions addressed the symptom but not the root of the problem, which lay in psychological distress exhibited as maladjustment and emotional complexes of various kinds. Unlike pediatricians ("pediatrists") who agreed with reformers that economic deprivation tended to cause problems with children, Healy was persuaded, in fact, that the overindulgence of affluent families toward their children produced "bookish" children who, unaccustomed to physical labor, became vulnerable to hysteria. Children with such problems, Healy claimed, would have a difficult time assuming prescribed social roles later in life.⁴⁴

Two books, published within three years of each other, illustrate the difference of opinion between old and new child-savers. Their conclusions are all the more interesting because they were drawn from observations of delinquents in the same city. In 1912, Edith Abbott and Sophonisba P. Breckinridge published a study of Chicago delinquents, entitled *The Delinquent Child and the Home*. In typical progressive fashion, the book explained its findings in environmental terms, citing poverty, poor parenting and family relationships, substandard education, and lack of healthy recreation as the causes of delinquency.

Three years later, Healy published *The Individual Delinquent*. He acknowledged the importance of environmentalism so central to progressive reform, but emphasized the individuality of the child, insisting that the "emotional content of the child's mind" would ultimately subvert the broad legislative reforms that child-savers typically advanced. In addition to rejecting reformers' theories that delinquency stemmed from broad social causes, he also rejected theories of biological determinism. Going beyond

child study's developmentally based search for the "normal" child, Healy wanted not only to observe personality but also to change it.⁴⁵ Indeed, he questioned whether "normal" and "abnormal" were useful terms in considering delinquency.

To get at the "content" of a child's mind, Healy used the psychiatric interview. This treatment modality, Healy believed, would unearth deeply buried emotions that offered explanations for delinquent behavior. Each child had a unique "story"; by exposing it, behavior would change, and juvenile delinquency could be prevented. This approach was agreeable to the court both because it was "scientific" and because it avoided institutionalizing children, either in jails or asylums.⁴⁶

Thus, by the early twentieth century, psychiatry not only began paying more attention to children but also shifted its focus from institutional to outpatient care, from curative to preventive treatment modalities. These changes were particularly critical as the search for workable solutions to juvenile delinquency proceeded. Equally significant, ties to the juvenile court system enhanced the position of the relatively small group of psychiatrists who focused their attention on children, positioning them as serious contenders for authority over children. To a concerned public, the therapeutic view of children carried appeal; science now seemed more impressive than traditional folk wisdom.

The influence of the child study movement, psychology, and legal-political forms of child-saving on the library was informal but unmistakable, and activities in the library both were affected by and validated the child study movement. Children's rooms, especially, reflected clearly the impact of new theories about children and, at the same time, advanced those theories by giving them tangible expression. A librarian in Tacoma praised the "new" library for eliminating the "old-fashioned idea of the child . . . that he should be seen and not heard. His existence as an individual was not recognized; his natural desires were ignored; the necessity for right training in youth was yet to be appreciated. While this idea of childhood was in vogue, there was a similar old-fashioned conception of the library . . . But such a narrow conception of things could not continue . . . Nations began to wake up to the fact that for their future strength the right training of youth was a vital necessity. Very soon this forced educators to consider . . . the psychology of childhood."⁴⁷ Library programs for children modeled child study's most fundamental belief—the "natural" expression of children—by fostering imagination and encouraging curiosity in children's rooms. Yet, believing that children were important keys to a more

just society, librarians also set limits, by creating expectations that presumably led to responsible adulthood. As education became increasingly regarded as a means to “saving” children from crime or insanity, librarians felt confident that their role in child-helping was crucial.

Concern over children was also evident in the popular press. Advertising campaigns advised parents that books were an indispensable part of the well-maintained, closely scrutinized, lovingly nourished, and well-educated child’s life.⁴⁸ Such advice fit well with the library’s dual image as educator/cultural supervisor. With this advice, parents looked to public libraries for help and the ALA felt qualified to offer it. By formalizing its work with children in 1900, the organization revealed its belief that children were part of its repertoire of expertise and anticipated that parents would turn confidently to libraries, such as those in Boston and New York, for expert advice about their children’s reading.

The Boston Public Library (BPL) was the older of the two. By the time the ALA was created, the Boston Public Library was already more than twenty years old, and one of about seven hundred public libraries nationwide. Its original structure on Boylston Street, opened in 1858 at a cost to the city of \$364,000, was established in response to public demand and through the efforts of benefactors like George Ticknor and Edward Everett.⁴⁹ With an annual circulation of 179,000 volumes, the library initially required the services of twenty-two employees: the superintendent, chief librarian, eleven male and eight female attendants, and a janitor.⁵⁰ Patronage increased steadily and reports to the examining committee made the need for improvements clear, particularly in the area of children’s services. Administrators were informed that children were frequently standing outside the library in cold weather, waiting for space inside to become available. There were routinely twice as many children as space allowed, and even inside, half remained standing because there were not enough chairs.⁵¹

Such observations made BPL leaders acutely mindful of children’s reading needs, and in the 1870s, well in advance of other libraries, BPL bolstered its commitment to children and reading. Although children had to be ten years old to borrow books, the examining committee’s report in 1895 declared that the children’s room should be “the most important place in the city for the training of those readers without whom the Library is a mere ornament . . . instead of the nursery of good citizenship which it was meant to be.”⁵² Based on this commitment, the library purchased three thousand volumes and doubled the size of the space designated for children within three years.⁵³ By 1900, Boston’s services for children were significant

enough to require a full-time director, and Alice Jordan was appointed to the position.

Like Boston, libraries in New York were also undergoing dramatic changes. When its new facility officially opened on May 23, 1911, the New York Public Library (NYPL) represented nothing short of a temple of American Progressive idealism. Sixteen years in the making, the impressive neoclassical building became home to a not-so-new library in the process of carving out a place for itself in American culture, merging its traditional function as a depository of knowledge with its new goal of knowledge dissemination. Located on New York's Fifth Avenue, the marble structure was described as a "temple to the tutelary goddess of Democracy, Popular Education."⁵⁴

Considering the size of New York City, NYPL developed relatively late, possibly because of the heterogeneity of the city's population and relative lack of a middle class, from which the impulse for a strong library often sprang. Until their consolidation in 1895, New York's libraries ranged from the ostentatious and scholarly Astor and Lenox reference libraries to small, audience-specific circulating libraries scattered throughout the city. The need for a consolidated and organized library was discussed frequently in the press for nearly twenty years before it actually occurred, the Astor and Lenox being routinely lampooned for their sometimes less-than-friendly treatment of visiting scholars and inaccessibility to the general public. In addition to the fact that the library system, lacking even a pretense of unity, seemed unwieldy and outdated, periodicals like *Scribner's* and the *Nation* had complained since the 1880s that poor ventilation and lighting were "scandalous" and "humiliating."⁵⁵ These facts prompted the general public to view libraries as both physically remote and philosophically irrelevant at a time when the idea of physically and ideologically accessible institutions was gaining strength.

Once consolidated, NYPL's board generally consisted, unsurprisingly, of aged men of Anglo-Saxon descent and ample means. Such a board hardly represented the cultural composition of the city; by 1910, the population was 41 percent foreign born. But unlike libraries in other cities, NYPL was entitled to municipal funds only on a discretionary basis, forcing it to beg for support and to prove its worth. In such a fiscally dependent position, politically connected board members were crucial to NYPL's survival.

The process of consolidation segmented NYPL into reference and circulation departments, the result of marrying the Astor and Lenox holdings with common circulating libraries. John Shaw Billings, the library's chief

executive, retained supervision of reference material, while Arthur Elmore Bostwick was made chief of circulation. Bostwick, a nervous, talkative man, was open to innovation at NYPL, since he viewed the library as an active agent of popular education, but struggled with the unenviable task of bringing the hodgepodge of libraries scattered throughout New York in fraternal, YMCAs, settlement houses, and workingmen's reading rooms under NYPL's direction. Reporting directly to Billings, his overall task—and a large one—was to coordinate, integrate, and supervise all the branch libraries that fell to NYPL as a result of the consolidation.⁵⁶

Bostwick's work proceeded slowly because, despite the fact that he was committed to efficiency, NYPL had no reputation for it. Frederick C. Hicks, president of the New York Library Club, for example, complained to R. R. Bowker that New York's librarians lacked efficiency because "most of them have not made a direct application of the principles of scientific management and of individual efficiency to the activities in their own libraries." Hicks added that he had "asked the Efficiency Society to speak to [librarians] on the general principles of the movement."⁵⁷ Whatever Hicks may have imagined, however, creating an efficient library was not a simple matter of sending guest speakers to NYPL to teach the principles of scientific management. New York's librarians, accustomed to autonomy in their branches, did not always view centralized supervision in a positive light. Thus, Bostwick received external pressure to create efficiency and internal resistance to the implications of doing so. But one key to achieving efficiency, he felt certain, lay in creating an expert staff.

To make his point clear and to remedy the situation, Bostwick created two groups of experts in 1903. First, he organized a group of outside consultants, including Franklin Giddings (sociology), John Dewey (philosophy), and Frank Damrosch (music) to offer the public the highest possible quality of information available on any given subject.⁵⁸ Second, he created a board of library specialists, including supervisors of various NYPL departments, to advise him on internal matters. Significantly, Bostwick was able to draw certain kinds of expertise from within the library, but actual content knowledge came from outsiders who, by association, lent their authority to the library. He intended to give a degree of autonomy to his internal board of experts, but they would remain accountable to him.⁵⁹ Among those departments was one specifically devoted to children. Its first head would be Anne Carroll Moore.