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*Williams*

**HISTORY OF THE RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY**

**BY**

**A. SIMPSON WILLIAMS, JR.**

**HISTORY SEMINAR**

**UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND, VA.**

**JUNE 2, 1941**

## DEDICATION

TO:

Major and Mrs. James H. Dooley, whose financial contribution and deep-founded appreciation of the need for a Public Library, made possible the present edifice which so ably and adequately serves the people of Richmond, and

TO:

Mr. John Stewart Bryan, whose undying adeseire was to achieve a great Public Library for Richmond, and who, as Chairman of the Richmond Public Library Board since its establishment, has untiringly devoted his numerous and effective energies in the advancement of the cause for the "University of the Common Man."

## FOREWORD

In writing this history of the Richmond Public Library, I felt it necessary to trace very briefly the library movement in the City of Richmond up to and including the final drive for a Public Library.

Much of the material on the early development of a public library is to be found in newspaper articles. I have not attempted to conduct a thorough and exhaustive perusal of such material, as so much of it is, although faintly connected with the early development of the Institution now known as the Richmond Public Library, beyond the scope of my purpose.

I must confess that I have not only acquired a comprehensive knowledge of the beginning and operation of the Richmond Public Library, but I have received a good amount of personal satisfaction and pleasure as well.

If I have succeeded in contributing some desirable facts for future writers in this field, I must necessarily give credit to the aid I have received, not only from the available material, but mainly to Miss. Mary Garland, member of the Library Staff since its inception, who has given me helpful hints and innumerable facts; to Miss. Ethel Nolin, reference librarian, who has also been kind enough to converse with me concerning my work; and, lastly to the advice

given me by Mr. Thomas P. Ayer, Librarian of the Richmond Public Library at the present time, and the only Librarian the Institution has had thus far. His advice as to the mechanical nature of my study and counsel in regard to source material have proved most essential.

Finally, I should like to state that I was formerly employed by the Public Library as shelf assistant a part-time position, for a period of approximately one and one-half years. My experience acting in this capacity has accorded me, I believe, a more intimate knowledge of the general field of library work than the average layman. I feel that my time was used to great advantage.

A. S. W. Jr.

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"LIBRARIES ARE AS THE SHRINES WHERE ALL  
THE RELICS OF THE ANCIENT SAINTS, FULL  
OF TRUE VIRTUE, AND THAT WITHOUT DELUSION  
OR IMPOSTURE, ARE PRESERVED AND REPOSED."

-BACON

## HISTORY OF THE RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY

The imposing edifice which stands on the south east corner of First and Franklin Streets has a thrilling and inspiring past. It stands as a monument to the accomplishments of its founders who labored untiringly through a long period of years in order that the citizens of Richmond might have such an Institution. To fully realize the significance and value of this library, we must go back a few years in the history of library development in the State of Virginia.

Shortly after the colonists had established themselves permanently at Jamestown, Virginia, the need of education for them was felt by King James, of England. Accordingly, he authorized the collection of funds in England, the purpose of such funds being for the founding of a College at Henricopolis--below the falls of the River James. This section of Virginia is now known as the County of Henrico, and a large part of this County consists of the City of Richmond. To accomplish his purpose, ten thousand acres of land were set aside to serve as grounds and endowment for this institution.<sup>1</sup>

The King and his authorities proposed to collect a

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1. 1. Metcalf, "Authors Books and Imprints," in Richmond Capital of Virginia, p. 140.



library for the convenience and use of the students of this college. This was the first known attempt to found a library in America; and, although the number of books in this library has never been determined, we do know that there were donations at first of four religious volumes, and later of four more religious volumes. When the Rev. Thomas Bargrave died in 1621, he bequeathed to this college his library, then valued at one hundred marks. But the effort was doomed when the college and the library were both destroyed in the Indian Massacre of 1622.<sup>2</sup>

There was a library established in Richmond proper in October, 1812, when the Christian Library was founded. Mr. John Seabrook was Librarian of this Institution, and it met with success for about twenty years.<sup>3</sup>

A little while later, the Library Society was founded, with Mr. Thomas Nicholson as Librarian. Reading was very extensive, and the Library flourished until, as Mordecai says, its failure was caused by the fact that the ladies of the City induced their friends to fill its shelves with "Minerva Library" volumes.<sup>4</sup> After the failure of this Library, about seven years passed before a successor institution was established.<sup>5</sup>

The City of Richmond then appropriated an apartment in the Athenaeum Building, located on Marshall Street, near Eleventh, where it furnished light and the enormous sum of

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2. Ibid.

3. Rhodes, Landmarks of Richmond, pp. 71-72.

4. "Minerva Library" refers to a notorious mint in London, famous for its issue of trash.

5. Mordecai, Richmond in By-Gone Days, p. 187.

one hundred and fifty dollars annually. Every citizen had<sup>6</sup> gratuitous access to volumes in this library. But the importance of this institution was that it marked the first attempt on the part of the City of Richmond to advance the cause of a library. This apartment consisted of two rooms, and many of its valuable books were brought from London by<sup>7</sup> Conway Robinson.

The public sentiment for a library began to grow at this point, and when one citizen classed the above mentioned structure and institution as insignificant, declaring that it could be placed in the category of a curiosity and a shame, there were numerous other citizens who would sanction<sup>8</sup> his opinion.

With the peoples' ideas and desires growing more and more in accord for the establishment of a larger and better library, a reading room was provided for the use of boys by Mr. Thomas Nelson Page in 1890. This room was located on West Cary Street. In 1891, the "Rosemary Reading Club for Boys" was founded by Mr. Page as a memorial to his wife, who had died in 1888. This later became a part of the "Rosemary Library Association," on 17 March, 1891, Mr. Page as President; Major E. T. D. Myers, Vice-president; Mr. Wyndham Meredith, Treasurer; and Mr. H. S. Hutzler,<sup>9</sup> Secretary. The Library was then moved from 201 West Cary Street (where the "Rosemary Reading Club for Boys" had been)

6. Ibid., p. 188.

7. Stanard, Richmond Its People and Its Story, pp. 139-140.

8. Little, History of Richmond, pp. 136-137.

9. Christian, Richmond-Her Past and Present, p. 422.

to 201 East Main Street, and Mrs. Sallie G. Kean was appointed Librarian.<sup>10</sup>

This Library was moved in 1898 to 327 East Franklin Street (south west corner, Fourth and Franklin Streets), and remained there until the year 1916, when, due to financial conditions, it was moved to the John Marshall High School, located on Marshall Street, between Eighth and Ninth Streets. During its stay there, which lasted until the year 1914, it served the dual purpose of a school and public library; the school using it from 8:30 A. M. to 3:30 P. M., and the public from 3:30 P. M. to 9:30 P. M. It was open to the public on Saturdays from 9:00 A. M. to 1:00 P. M.<sup>11</sup>

The Rosemary Public Library was not a public library in the true sense of the word. While it was located at 327 East Franklin Street, membership dues amounted to three dollars per year (one dollar to working people). It also derived funds from silver teas which were given during Lent. This Library was very fashionable in those days, and was considered an excellent place for the ladies of the City to come with their fancy work; and gossiping with the librarians was very much in vogue. It served as an intellectual abode for Father Tabb when in the City, and as a spot of enjoyment and contemplation for such well-known Richmonders as the Honorable Alexander Weddell and Dr. Douglas Freeman.<sup>12</sup>

10. Rhodes, Landmarks of Richmond, p. 72.

11. Ibid.

12. History of the Rosemary Library, Richmond Public

On 2 March, 1901, an offer of one hundred thousand dollars was made by Andrew Carnegie for the establishment of a public library in Richmond. The City was, according to the terms of this offer, to provide the site for the proposed structure and appropriate ten thousand dollars yearly for its maintenance. The City Board of Aldermen on 19 April agreed by a vote of fourteen to two to accept this great opportunity. This decision was concurred in by the Common Council on May 6, and approved by Mayor Taylor on May 10. However, the matter was dropped here because of the race question.

13

In January, 1902, Miss Grace Arents founded the St. Andrews Library, located at 224 South Cherry Street. This Library was, after its name had been changed to Arents Free Library, formally opened to the public on 1 January, 1914, and was supported by Miss Grace Arents until June, 1926, when she bequeathed it to the City, to be used as a branch library, with an endowment of one hundred thousand dollars. When this library became a branch of the Richmond Public Library in 1926, its name was changed to Arents Branch in honor of its founder.

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The Richmond Public Library Association was founded in 1905 under the leadership of Mr. James K. Gordon, and this group earnestly began to tackle the problem of securing a public library for Richmond. In 1912, Dr. George Woodbridge entrusted to the Mayor his private library which numbered six hundred and eighty-six volumes. These books were to become the property of the public library

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Library Filed.

13. Christian, Richmond-Her Past and Present, pp. 478-479.

when it should be established.

Further development in the advancement of the library cause in Richmond was achieved when the John B. Tabb Memorial Association, under the leadership of Mr. G. Watson James, and which constituted a limited number of books for the use of children, was granted space in the Court of Appeals, located in the State Library Building. The John B. Tabb Memorial Library for Children was formally opened on 4 May, 1922, with Miss. Elizabeth Knox as Librarian. This Library contained more than one thousand volumes, and served the young folk of the City marvelously well. It closed in 1924 to become a part of the Richmond Public Library.<sup>17</sup>

Having reviewed briefly the various institutions serving Richmond's library needs, it now becomes my purpose to give the reader an insight into the events that took place in the advancement of the library cause prior to the actual establishment of the Richmond Public Library. That the citizens of Richmond wanted a library was shown by the various newspaper articles which were published during this period. Richmond, from this time on, became "library conscious."

The fact was brought out that the children of the City were not reading as much as they should, and consequently their educational development was not up to existing standards in other cities. They amused themselves by playing in the streets after school hours.<sup>18</sup> Clearly, a public library would

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14. Rhodes, Landmarks of Richmond, p. 72.

solve this problem, and the cause was championed by the newspapers.<sup>19</sup> The Richmond Times Dispatch carried an article which announced the fact that the Richmond Education Association, under the leadership of Dr. J. C. Metcalf, of Richmond College, was to conduct a comprehensive campaign for a City public library, active work to begin in January, 1913.<sup>20</sup>

On 15 December, Mr. Thomas D. Neal, III, advocated the purchase by the City of the property belonging to Richmond College, which was at that time planning to move to the Westhampton area. Mr. Neal declared that this property could be used as a park, a public library, or a playground.<sup>21</sup> Mayor George Ainslie was also in favor of this move. At the time it was believed that this property could be purchased for about seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars. It was ideally located, and would have served the needs of the City admirably, but nothing ever came of it.

The Richmond Times Dispatch mentioned the Seattle Public Library, stating that it required the use of a whole municipal block, and that it was a sound idea for Richmond to copy. The newspaper went on to say that the situation as far as a library was concerned looked "woeful" and "black"<sup>22</sup> at this time, but that there was always hope for the future. In January, 1913, an Administrative Board was urged for the purpose of solving such civic problems as the library problem,

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15. Christian, op. cit., p. 497.
16. Rhodes, op. cit., p. 72.
17. Rhodes, Landmarks of Richmond, pp. 72-73.
18. Richmond Times Dispatch, Oct. 21, 1912.
19. Ibid., Oct. 22, 1912.

and Mayor Ainslie, in an address at the Bellevue Public School, strongly advocated a public library. He stated that Richmond was the "largest City in the United States without a public library." Said he: "Let us hope that this fitting and necessary capstone to our educational system will soon materialize through the united efforts of all of those who appreciate its necessity."<sup>23</sup>

The time had come for practical steps to be taken, and the Richmond Education Association made efforts to make the public of the City even more "library conscious." The opening of the Arents Free Library on 1 January, 1914, an outgrowth of the St. Andrews Library founded by Miss. Grace Arents in 1902, and which I have before mentioned, was in no sense of the imagination to take the place of a public library in Richmond.<sup>24</sup> Dr. J. C. Metcalf, in commenting on the Arents Free Library, expressed his grateful appreciation for the Institution, and said that it showed "how eagerly<sup>25</sup> the City would make use of a public Library."

Thus the work of those public spirited citizens of Richmond went. The fruits of their efforts were soon to be realized; and, when on 5 April, 1922, Mr. John Stewart Bryan was elected President of the Richmond Library Association, action began. Mr. Bryan, always a proponent of a public library for Richmond, urged the citizens to get wholeheartedly behind the movement. At the same time, Mrs.

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20. Ibid., Dec. 14, 1912.
  21. Ibid., Dec. 15, 20, 1912.
  22. Ibid., Dec. 16, 1912.
  23. Ibid., Jan. 22, 1913.

E. C. Minor was elected Vice-president of the Association; Mr. Jesse Binford, Executive Secretary; Mr. Henry E. Litchford, Treasurer; and Mr. B. Roy Dudley, Jr., Chairman of the Executive Committee. Upon assuming office, Mr. Binford stated that at least eighty-five per cent of the citizens of Richmond wanted a public library, and he again reiterated the need for its hasty establishment. In order to make their campaign pleas more effective, the Richmond Library Association circulated petitions among the inhabitants of the City, and by June 4, 1922, over ten thousand citizens had signed and automatically become members of the Association. This task was considered quite remarkable as the campaign had lasted only three days. The campaign was directed by Mr. Charles L. Weaver, and showed beyond doubt that people from all walks of life were practically unanimously in favor of a public library. This list of names was then presented to the Common Council in the form of a petition, calling for the establishment of a public library.

The petition as sent to the Common Council was soon approved, and after passing through the proper legislative channels, it was finally approved by the Board of Aldermen. Meanwhile, the signatures were still being gathered, and by 17 June, these numbered nearly fifty thousand. A two hundred thousand dollar appropriation was voted, this to be financed

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- 24. Ibid., Jan. 4, 1914.
- 25. Ibid., Jan. 18, 1914.
- 26. Ibid., April 6, 1922.
- 27. Ibid., June 4, 1922.



by an issue of bonds. This sum was to be used for the purchase of a lot, erection of a building, and furnishing the same. Cost of books and maintenance were not included. The City Legislature then approved an ordinance which established a library board, known as the Richmond Public Library Board. Mr. John Stewart Bryan was elected Chairman of this Board at its first meeting; and also elected at that time were: Mrs. E. C. Minor, Sub-chairman; and Mr. G. Watson James, Secretary, pro tem. Members of the Board were to hold office for five years; and the Board was to include the Chairman and Sub-chairman of the Council Finance Committee, the City Superintendent of Public Schools, and the Mayor, all three of which were members ex-officio. The reason for the creation of the position of Secretary, pro tem was that the Librarian was to assume these duties upon his selection.

The primary reason for the creation of this Board was for the selection of an appropriate site for the Library. Accordingly, the Board chose the former home of the late Major Lewis Ginter, located on the south west corner of Franklin and Shafer Streets. The selection of this site is adequately expressed in the Richmond News Leader, for February, 1924; part of which I deem advisable to quote here:

"...it has (the Library Board) unanimously chosen the site, not, as the president stated last night, because it is the best possible site, but rather because, under conditions that exist in Richmond today, it is the most available site, the most economical site, and, above all and before all, it is the site that can be used at once..."<sup>30</sup>

The next problem that was tackled by the Board was the selection of a librarian. After considerable and due deliberation, the Board selected Mr. Thomas Parker Ayer, at that time from Washington, D. C., to fill this position. Mr. Ayer, distinguished in the field of library work, both in training and in experience, had served as Librarian of the Federal Trade Commission in Washington, and had been, prior to that, Reference Assistant in the Library of Congress. A graduate of Brown University, class of 1909, he had later studied library work at the Illinois Library School.

With the selection of the Librarian, and the choosing of a site, the two largest problems connected with the initial stage of the Richmond Public Library had been solved, and the task that was ahead was one of administration and direction. At this time, the City Government Library, consisting of various volumes kept in the reception room of the Mayor's Office in the City Hall, was moved to the new location; and, on 11 August, this same year, the John B. Tabb Memorial Library for Children, as I have mentioned before, was transferred from the State Library Building to the new site. The Library numbered about fifteen thousand volumes at this time, and it was expected to open sometime in October.

As it is a custom with all libraries to have an indi-

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29. Ibid., Nov. 8, 1923.

30. Richmond News Leader, Feb. 29, 1924.

31. Richmond Times Dispatch, June 2, 1924.

32. Loc. cit., July 28, 1924.

33. Richmond News Leader, Aug. 19, 1924.

vidual bookplate, the Richmond Public Library became no exception. The Richmond News Leader offered a prize of fifty dollars to the person who submitted the best bookplate design. Sixty-eight persons entered the contest and much interest was created throughout the City. The prize was captured by one DeWitt Farrar, of Richmond.

The Richmond Public Library was formally opened on 13 October, at eight o'clock in the evening. After a brief ceremony, during which Mr. John Stewart Bryan presented Mayor J. Fulmer Bright with the keys to the building, the new structure was opened to public inspection and use. About eight thousand persons witnessed the ceremonies, and honor was paid to those who had helped to make the Institution a reality. The Library contained approximately twenty thousand volumes at this time, but as the cataloging process had not been completed by the time the building was opened, books were not allowed to leave the building.

The library cause had come a long way since the time the City had appropriated one hundred and fifty dollars and paid the light bill for the maintenance of two rooms in the Athenaeum Building; and it is with no surprise that the Richmond Times Dispatch hailed the opening of the Richmond Public Library with the following comment:

"...no evidence of progress the City has made in years

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34. Ibid., Aug. 3, 1924.

35. Ibid., Oct. 13, 14, 1924.

will afford more general satisfaction than this library...as an educational center it will be invaluable to the community." <sup>36</sup>

To anyone who has ever been in the Ginter Home, the fact that it was ideally arranged as to library requirements is well-known. Changes were made of course, but each change made the building more readily adaptable to desirable conditions.

Soon after the opening, Mr. Ayer, Librarian, expressed the need for bound files of newspapers and periodicals for future use. <sup>37</sup> He also declared that much depended on the training and ability of employees, in order to have a well-functioning system. He stated that every part of the City was represented by those persons who used the Library, but that only one-fifth of the desired number of users had been attained. He then advocated more books and more reading space <sup>38</sup> for a children's library.

The Library prospered. But its Chief had larger ideas; ideas of foresight and vision. He realized the importance of a well-knited system of branch libraries, so that the penetration of the Library would be about thirty per cent, which was considered normal. <sup>39</sup> By April 1925, the use of the Institution had doubled, and forty thousand books had been borrowed; <sup>40</sup> and by the end of May, five hundred books were lent daily, and one hundred and fifty new readers were acquired weekly. The circulation since November 1924 had increased to fifty <sup>41</sup> thousand.

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36. Richmond Times Dispatch, Oct. 13, 1924.

37. Ibid., Oct. 15, 1924.

38. Richmond Public Library, Annual Report, 1925.

39. Richmond News Leader, Nov. 18, 1924.

The announcement of the opening of a Colored branch library at the Phyllis Wheatley Y. W. C. A. Building, located at 515 North Seventh Street, was made on June 1, 1925. This branch was capable of serving the needs of the Negro population, as it could accomodate as many as forty-two readers at any one time; and, as it had a capacity of forty-five hundred volumes, of which figure, one thousand had been secured up to that time. The Library occupied two rooms on the second floor of the building, free of rent, and its hours were from four o'clock in the afternoon until nine o'clock in the evening.<sup>42</sup>

This Colored branch showed remarkable growth, as evidenced by the fact that approximately one hundred thousand volumes were lent from the time it was opened (July 27), to 5 September of the same year.<sup>43</sup> On 2 December, it assumed the name of Rosa D. Bowser Branch, a name which was determined by the first five hundred borrowers. Thus the branch took the name of the first Colored woman teacher in the Richmond Public School System.

During this period, the main Library at Shafer and Franklin Streets was growing fast, but this growth was eventually to become much greater. Early in September of this same year, unconfirmed reports began circulating about to the effect that a sum of five hundred thousand dollars would be left to the City of Richmond for Library purposes by Mrs. Sallie May

40. Richmond Times Dispatch, April 1, 1925.

41. Loc. cit. May 28, 1925.

42. Richmond News Leader, June 1, 1925.

Dooley, wife of the late Major James H. Dooley, as a memorial to her husband.<sup>44</sup> These reports were confirmed on September 17, when the will of Mrs. Dooley was made public.<sup>45</sup>

Upon receipt of this much-needed sum, the Board began considering the abandonment of the Ginter Home. They proposed to establish the new building at some focal point of civic activities. Dr. Samuel Chiles Mitchell of Richmond College, made the following suggestion for a site:

"The Battle Abbey stands on a spacious plot, and the beautiful building is enhanced by the ample lawns on either side. Then, too, the width of the Boulevard makes a fine approach. Have we not here an example of what is desirable for a library site?" (46)

While considerations were moving forward for the selection of a site, and plans were being drawn for the new building, the Richmond Public Library and the library cause lost a great friend in the passing of Mrs. E. C. Minor. Her work in establishing a public library in Richmond and her knowledge of the value of such an institution will forever live in the records of the Library.<sup>47</sup>

The principal accomplishment of 1926 was the establishment of the schools division of the juvenile department. The able direction and leadership of Miss. Sara Jane Robinson, who had at her disposal the volumes acquired from the Tabb Memorial Library for Children, was responsible for this progress. During this year, it was determined that the Libra-

43. Ibid., Sept. 5, 1925.

44. Richmond Times Dispatch, Sept 8, 1925.

45. Richmond News Leader, Sept. 17, 1925.

46. Ibid., Oct. 31, 1925.

ry issued a book every ninety seconds, that reference use had doubled since 1925 and that there were at that time thirty thousand volumes in the Library. At this time, the work of supplying hospitals was started, under the direction of Miss. Florence P. Hankins. This practice further extended the scope of efficiency as well as serving the public more adequately. By 1927, the book reserves had increased a little less than fifty per cent, while the use of books in the Library had increased over eighty per cent..The agencies of distribution had grown three times as large as they had been in January, 1926.

On 17 May, 1927, the Richmond Public Library Board selected the south east corner of First and Franklin Streets for the erection of the new building. After much discussion of the proposed site, the move was approved by the City Council in September of the same year. On 22 September, the Board received and accepted regretfully the resignation tendered by Mr. Thomas P. Ayer, Librarian, which was to become effective 1 November. Mr. Ayer had resigned to assume duties of public library nature at Reading, Pennsylvania. On November 30, Miss. Ethel Nolin was appointed Acting Librarian until a successor to Mr. Ayer could be chosen.

The Helen Dickinson School Library was taken over by the Board in December, 1927, to become effective 1 January, 1928. This Library possessed an average circulation of fifteen

47. Ibid., Dec. 31, 1925.

48. Richmond Public Library, Annual Report, 1926.

49. Ibid., 1927.

50. Richmond News Leader, Sept. 12, 1927.

hundred borrowers each month. This was a valuable addition to the central Library which had increased its circulation nearly ten per cent during the year, and whose reference reading had practically doubled.<sup>52</sup>

The death in April, 1928, of Colonel Barton H. Grundy, who had been a member of the Board since its organization, meant the loss of a beloved friend of the Institution. The good Colonel, who was one of the most beloved citizens of Richmond, had given much of his time and many of his efforts for the advancement of the library cause in Richmond.<sup>53</sup>

In June of this same year, the Board extended Mr. Ayer, former Librarian, an invitation to accept his former position as City Librarian. Much to the gratification of the Board and to those citizens who were interested in the Institution, Mr. Ayer accepted, and was seated at his desk in July.

And shifting back to the building of the new structure, we find that the question of purchasing the whole block, instead of the aforementioned corner, led to a movement on the part of certain members of the City Council to defer action on the building plans.<sup>54</sup> However, this plan was not adopted, and the permit for building purposes was issued by Mr. Henry P. Beck, City Building Inspector. While this provision to defer action was killed in the Council by a vote of eighteen to one, there was still much public sentiment in favor of obtaining the entire block, so as to protect the

51. Ibid., Nov. 30, 1927.

52. Richmond Public Library, Annual Report, 1928.

53. Richmond News Leader, Jan. 27, 1928.

54. Ibid., January 6, 1929.



property and to care for future expansion of facilities.

A similiar move for the purchase of forty-six more feet , had the backing of Mayor Bright, the Grace, Broad, East End, Franklin and Main Streets Business Men's Associations, as well as a number of other prominent individuals and civic organizations; and, by August 27, fourteen thousand, five hundred and seventy-seven names had endorsed petitions asking additional frontage. Despite this sentiment, however, the Council defeated the move by a vote of twelve to <sup>56</sup> six.

Normal growth of the Institution took place during 1928 and 1929. In 1928, the home circulation of books had increased nearly ten per cent over 1927, and reference reading had approximately doubled; while in 1929, this same home circulation had increased eight per cent more than the previous year, and a lending station had been opened in Fulton. <sup>57</sup> Four hundred and seventy thousand volumes were lent to thirty thousand borrowers during 1929; and the Library's total book stock now <sup>58</sup> numbered eighty thousand volumes.

The sale by the City of Richmond of the Ginter Home, for the sum of eighty-five thousand dollars to the College of William And Mary, which was approved by the Mayor on 13 June, 1930, marked the end of an era of success for the Institution. <sup>59</sup> Much of what had been accomplished at the Ginter Home was to lead to greater success in the near future.

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55. Ibid., Jan. 8, 1929.

56. Ibid., Sept. 4, 1929.

57. Richmond Public Library, Annual Reports, 1928-1929.

58. Richmond News Leader, Dec. 31, 1929.

The movement of the books, stocks, supplies and all those library accessories which are essential to its effective operation was a marvelous feat. About seventy thousand volumes and hundreds of articles were transferred during a period of three days, a feather in any Librarian's cap!<sup>60</sup>

A physical description of the building itself will suffice to prove that it is one of the best-equipped libraries in this country for the amount of space that it occupies. It embraces an area of twelve thousand and ninety-six square feet, containing three stories and an attic. Its interior area totals thirty-nine thousand square feet, including stack levels and mezzanines; and over seventy per cent of the floor capacity is for book use and public benefit. The exterior walls are of modern design, constructed of George Washington stone; while the interior walls of the entrance and the main front stair hall are of Italian marble. The structure tops these specifications with a storage capacity of three hundred and fifty thousand volumes.<sup>61</sup>

When the building was formally dedicated to public use on 15 December, 1930 (having been opened for public use since 18 July), high praise was received from architects and visiting librarians, and the point was brought out that it differed from other buildings of memorial nature in that its utility was the predominating influence in its construction. The dedicatory exercises were attended by Mr. Adam Strohm,

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59. Richmond Times Dispatch, June 7, 1930.

60. Richmond Public Library, Annual Report, 1930.

61. Ibid.

President of the American Library Association.

Having discussed the background of the Institution, and having briefly giving the events during the period in which the Library was located at the Ginter Home (1924-1930), I now pass to a treatment of the recent history of the Library.

Soon after the new building had opened, "business began to pick up." Increased circulation of books brought the yearly total for 1930 to five hundred and forty-two thousand, two hundred and one volumes. Thirty-five thousand borrowers were served during this period, showing an increase of seventeen per cent in borrowers, and an increase of fifteen per cent in book use. Mr. Byran, Chairman of the Board, was very much elated, and in his letter accompanying the Librarian's Report, he declared that the figures shown therein showed "an amazing fulfillment of prophecies and hopes."<sup>63</sup> By April 1931, the Institution was serving six hundred and eighty thousand citizens annually, which was the largest figure in its history up to this time.<sup>64</sup> By the end of the year it was shown that the central Library had supplied seventy-two per cent of the books lent, branches caring for the remainder. Mr. Ayer at this time expressed the need of seven additional branches in various sections of the City.<sup>65</sup>

The question of keeping the central Library open on Sundays was vetoed by the Board in April of this year;<sup>66</sup> and in

62. Richmond News Leader, Dec. 16, 1930.

63. Richmond Public Library, Annual Report, 1930.

64. Loc. cit., April 13, 1931.

65. Op. cit.

August, a sixteen thousand dollar appropriation was approved by the Board of Alderman of the Council for the establishment of a Negro branch library at 00 Clay Street. 67

But the advance and progress which the Library had shown since its new location had opened was checked by forces over which it had no control. I refer here to the great economic depression that descended upon the World during this period; when homes were wrecked, and men walked the streets in desperate search of employment--employment of any kind; but not even that could be found. One would think that this was the period of all periods to aid and increase allotments for Library use. The citizens of the City--unemployed and employed alike, had more time to spend in reading, in reference work, and in pursuit of knowledge. But the Library could do nothing without additional funds, much less decreased funds. When City revenues were decreased, expenses necessarily had to be curtailed, and the Library had to suffer as any other Institution of public service.

Mr. John J. Corson, III, in the Richmond News Leader for 11 July, 1932, stated that less than three-fourths of one per cent of the annual City income was being spent for Library purposes. <sup>68</sup> The letter of Mr. Bryan to the Mayor, contained in the Librarian's Report for 1932, asked that more money be appropriated, declaring it an absolute <sup>69</sup> necessity. In November of this same year, the Library con-

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66. Richmond Times Dispatch, April 14, 1931.

67. Richmond News Leader, Aug. 12, 1931.

68. Ibid., July 11, 1932.

69. Richmond Public Library, Annual Report, 1932.

sisted of one hundred thousand volumes, an increase of seventy-five thousand since 1924. At the same time, the Institution was receiving six-tenths of one cent per capita for maintenance, which figure was slightly greater than one-half the national standard.<sup>70</sup>

The Library was, however, forging ahead in spite of financial distress. Eight hundred six thousand and ninety-seven books had been lent in 1932. To give some idea of how many volumes are contained in this figure, the following example will be found helpful. If the books lent each day were placed in a single stack, a tower nearly two hundred feet taller than the highest office building in the City would be formed; and, if the number of volumes in the Institution were arranged on a single shelf, that shelf would be equivalent in length to the entire boundary line that marks the City limits. In reference to this example, Mr. Ayer expressed the feeling that, "A City of people that by voluntary habit reads in its leisure an imaginary book-fence of these dimensions is fortifying its temper to withstand assaults of economic adversity."<sup>71</sup>

The Bryan letter to Mayor Bright, included in the Librarian's Report for 1933, again expressed the hope of increased appropriations. Mr. Bryan stated that the Library was most important during this period of strife and depression, and he further declared that something had to be done about the peril-

70. Richmond News Leader, Nov. 11, 1932.

71. Ibid., Feb. 28, 1933.

ous situation. But he, as did the rest, recognized the fact that the Chief Executive was powerless to act; and so the time passed.<sup>72</sup>

The Institution suffered a six and one-half per cent reduction in home borrowing in 1934, which, Mr. Bryan declared was the result of the failure to purchase adequate supplies of new publications.<sup>73</sup> This same year, the Library celebrated its tenth anniversary with a remarkable record. It possessed at this time one hundred and ten thousand volumes, and had distributed over five million books to more than fifty thousand people. The System at this time included the central Library, two branches; Arents and Bowser (Negro), five lending stations, hospital extensions, and two hundred and seventy-five classrooms of public schools. It was a great misfortune that this superb record was marred by the down-swing of economic forces.<sup>74</sup>

Declaring that "we are literally eating up our books," Mr. Bryan again wrote for more funds. The Report for this year showed a seven per cent decline in home borrowing over the previous year (1934). Reading room use had dropped off eleven per cent, and the time was gradually approaching when the "limit beyond which the support of the Library (can) could not be cut without endangering the life of the Library itself."<sup>75</sup> But the Library went on functioning, serving the people as best it could. In March of this year, a memorial to

72. Richmond Public Library, Annual Report, 1933.

73. Ibid., 1934.

74. Richmond News Leader, June 2, 1934.

75. Op. cit., 1935.

Mr. Albert H. Hill, for many years the Superintendent of Richmond Public Schools, was dedicated by the placing of a bronze plaque and memorial collection of books in the Library. The first forty books of this collection were so placed on this occasion.<sup>76</sup> Plans to establish another branch library at the old Stone House in Forest Hill Park were defeated by the City Council in September of this year, the principal reason being that similar situations would arise in the future, which would have to be faced if this were granted,<sup>77</sup> and these could not be afforded by the City at the time.

In 1936, the school library system was meeting the challenge marvelously well. The libraries located in the two principal high schools, John Marshall and Thomas Jefferson, were fast growing and were of great benefit to the students. Five other school libraries existed in the following Junior high schools: Albert H. Hill, Binford, J. A. C. Chandler,<sup>78</sup> Bainbridge, and East End.

The need of more branches was advocated by Mr. Ayer again in 1937.<sup>79</sup> It was also disclosed during the same year that more than two thousand residents of the City had donated to the Library almost twenty-nine thousand volumes during the preceding thirteen years. This was a great record and it proved that the people of the City were very much concerned about the welfare of their Library.<sup>80</sup>

Although still suffering from the lack of an adequate

76. Richmond Times Dispatch, March 22, 1935.

77. Richmond News Leader, Sept. 4, 1935.

78. Loc. cit., May 10, 1936.

book supply in 1938, the Library recorded an increase in the amount of loans for the first time since the dark days of 1932. That the Institution was once more on the up-swing was evident.<sup>81</sup> The year 1939 was much brighter than the year 1938. There were fifty-one thousand regular borrowers at the central Library, which number was thrice as large as the number of voters in the last municipal election. The acquisition in February of this year of the four thousand volumes which constituted the Library of the Westmoreland Club for the exorbitant price of one dollar was a great step forward, as about twenty-five per cent of these volumes were not already possessed by the Library.<sup>82</sup> Certain repairs were made to the building during this year, the outside walls being scoured<sup>83</sup> and general repairs being made.

The sealing and the placing in the Library of a chest containing the official records, proclamations and documents of the Richmond Bicentennial Celebration which was held in 1937, was another of the year's highlights. This chest is to be opened in the year 2037, and was placed over the entrance to the general stack section on the main floor, and it may be seen upon entering the building.<sup>84</sup>

The tenth anniversary of the new building was observed during 1940. Six million, four hundred and two thousand, seven hundred and seventeen volumes had been lent since the doors of the building were opened in 1930. During the same

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79. Richmond Public Library, Annual Report, 1937.

80. Richmond News Leader, Aug. 13, 1937.

81. Op. cit., 1938.

82. Richmond Public Library, Annual Report, 1939.



period, seven hundred and eighty thousand, one hundred and fifty volumes had been consulted in the building; the amount of books in the Institution had increased by forty-eight thousand, three hundred and ninety-four since 1930; and the number of borrowers had increased by twenty-nine thousand, seven hundred and seventy-eight.<sup>85</sup> The circulation of books during 1940 was four per cent more than 1939; and of this circulation, the central Library was handling seventy-four percent. Also, the addition of a fifth deck in 1940 added to the central storage stock, and it was expected that this deck would care for the needs for the next four or five<sup>86</sup> years.

The Richmond Public Library enters the year 1941 with great hopes and prospects. Certainly, if the past record of growth and achievement stands for anything whatsoever, its manifest destiny holds the torch of its progress. Under the able leadership of Mr. Thomas P. Ayer, Librarian, and Mr. John Stewart Bryan, Chairman of the Richmond Public Library Board, the Library cannot help but go forward, unless it again confronts a crisis such as that of the early thirties. But even then, it shall finally prosper, for its challenging history will serve as an incentive for its ultimate success.

The End.

83. Richmond Times Dispatch, Aug. 8, 1939.

84. Ibid., Dec. 15, 1939.

85. Richmond News Leader, July 23, 1940.

86. Richmond Public Library, Annual Report, 1940.

## APPENDIX

(From Annual Reports, 1925-1940)

### EXPENSES OF THE LIBRARY BY YEARS:

1925...\$	37,946.65	1933...\$	61,191.09
1926...	50,153.04	1934...	61,297.03
1927...	54,443.98	1935...	61,072.71
1928...	57,565.79	1936...	66,744.83
1929...	59,960.58	1937...	66,744.69
1930...	72,499.45	1938...	69,132.49
1931...	74,976.59	1939...	82,184.80
1932...	74,548.57	1940...	80,159.28

### MEMBERS OF THE RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD:

1924

John Stewart Bryan, Chairman  
Mrs. E. C. Minor, Vc-Chrmn.  
Dr. J. Fulmer Bright, Mayor  
Barton H. Grundy  
Carter C. Jones  
Albert H. Hill  
Ramon D. Garcin, M. D.  
B. Roy Dudley, Jr.  
Beverley R. Tucker, M. D.  
Thomas P. Ayer, Secy. and  
Librarian.

1940

John Stewart Bryan, Chairman  
Beverley R. Tucker, M. D.,  
Vice-Chairman  
Gordon B. Ambler, Mayor  
Jesse H. Binford  
Mrs. Wyndham B. Blanton  
L. R. Brown  
Ramon D. Garcin, M. D.  
Wilbur J. Griggs  
W. Harry Schwarzschild, Jr.  
Thomas P. Ayer, Secy. and  
Librarian.

### THE LIBRARY SYSTEM AS OF 1940:

MAIN LIBRARY (101 E. Franklin Street)

#### BRANCHES:

~~ARENTS~~FREE LIBRARY (224 S. Cherry Street)  
ROSA D. BOWSER (00 Clay Street) (Colored)

#### LENDING STATIONS:

BAINBRIDGE (Bainbridge Junior High School Bldg.)  
HELEN DICKINSON (Helen Dickinson School Bldg.)  
ROBERT FULTON (Robert Fulton School Bldg.)  
NORTH SIDE (J. E. B. Stuart School Bldg.)

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