

I n t r o d u c t i o n

- a Conditions in Illinois.
- b Sources and manner of obtaining information.
- c How the libraries were classified.

a The law of Illinois passed in 1872 was the model for much library legislation, on account of its comprehensiveness and exactness. It has been revised at times and the latest form will be found in the most recent edition of the Revised Statutes of Illinois.

In brief , it consists of two parts ,one for cities, the other for towns, villages and townships.

The mayor and council of any city may establish a library and provide the necessary funds without appealing to the voters. The mayor with the approval of the council, appoints nine directors who control the library, reporting annually to the council on the points specified in the statute.

In towns, villages and townships, on the presentation of a petition from fifty legal voters to the town clerk, or in counties not under township organization to the trustee of schools, asking that an annual tax be levied for the establishment and maintenance of a free public library, and specifying a rate of taxation not greater than two mills on the dollar, the question

must be presented to the voters at the next legal annual election. The tax must be voted every year, and it ceases when a majority of the votes cast are against it. Six directors are elected by the voters, who take charge of the library.

The township libraries of the State are under this provision of the law.

b For the present investigation, I selected from the chapters on library statistics and legislation in the report of the U. S. Commissioner of education for 1895-96, the free public libraries having less than 10000 volumes. To these were added eight or ten which had been founded since that report was made, as recorded in Public Libraries, 1896-99. Others were discovered from the Illinois State Library Association statistics, making a total of sixty.

All the information possible was gained from the two sets of statistics mentioned; the questions sent out by the State Library Association furnished in general, name, place, date of founding, volumes and circulation. This was supplemented by material from Public Libraries, and the reference books and encyclopaedias.

Then a personal letter was sent to each library, with a copy of the general statement given below; in the special letter information on neglected points was asked for and inquiries were made as to the size and character of the town, the estimation in which the library was held, its condition as to funds and

popularity, and the worth of the present law for townships.

Copy of general letter.

Urbana, Ill.,

1898.

To the Librarian:-

I am writing a paper on " Founding a public library in Illinois", as my thesis in the State Library School, University of Illinois. I hope to make it a collection of practical plans, classed and arranged according to the size and character of the communities in which they were used; it is intended to serve as an aid to those who wish to start such a library, by telling how it has been done in other places of a similar character and under like difficulties. The libraries taken as instances are the free public libraries in the State, having 10000 volumes or less.

May I ask you to aid me by answering quite fully as many of the following questions as you can conveniently? If you are not familiar with the early history of the library, will you kindly refer this to some one of the founders, or others who can give details? I should like to have all answers by (dates varying from January 30 to March 30)

Thanking you in advance for whatever information you may be able to give,

I am

Respectfully,

Marion E. Sparks.

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The letters were sent from December to March; the returns and information from books did not give as much as had been expected on the character of the towns, so that portion of the paper is deficient; for the rest, the replies were ready and cordial.

c The facts and figures were carefully arranged and tabulated in five lists, according to the population of the towns when the libraries were founded, i. e. became public; to these tables a sixth was added, giving special figures on the township libraries included in the number.

These six classes will be taken up in order, beginning with those in the smallest towns, and ending with the township list. Each chapter is prefaced by a table of statistics for that group, and closes with a brief summary of the most successful schemes for towns of that size.

A map of the State is given on which the towns considered are indicated.