

## TRAVELING LIBRARIES

WHAT WOMEN'S CLUBS HAVE DONE  
IN THE VARIOUS STATES TO  
FOSTER THESE USEFUL INSTI-  
TUTIONS.

MISS MYRTILLA AVERY, who from the beginning of the traveling library work of the State Library at Albany has been the assistant of the director of that department, Mc-Vil Dewey, talked interestingly on this subject during a recent visit in town.

"The traveling library principle," said she, "has developed enormously since Mr. Dewey began to put it in operation at the New York State Library in 1893. It is in line with the spirit of the day. Libraries must be mobilized. Books must travel more. The traveling library fills a place not occupied by any other collection of books. Even where a library has been established, if the community is small and poor, so that there is no money for the purchase of fresh books, and the contents of the shelves become old and stale, public interest dies out and the usefulness of the library declines. The traveling library boxes, visiting the old libraries, one after another, maintain the interest. Considering the object of State Library work to be the securing of the greatest number of readers of good books in New York State, at the lowest possible cost, results have proved that a given amount of money will accomplish more good in this way than any other.

"Traveling pictures have now taken their place with the books, and they are now being followed by apparatus, scientific collections, maps, charts, and other educational agencies, too costly to be owned by a single locality, which, however, can get what it needs from a few months' use in the year, thus dividing the cost among a number. We are even sending out traveling libraries for the blind, of whom there are more than 5,000 in the State of New York. When we first thought of this we found that there seemed to have been an impression among publishers of books for the blind that because a person has lost his sight he will want to spend his time with distinctive religious literature. In consequence the blind were cut off from the whole body of general literature. Our first publication for them was 'The Bonnie Brier Bush,' which was welcomed with delight. Two of our new publications for the blind will be Mr. Howells's 'Heroines of Fiction' and 'The Making of an American.'

"We have now 1,000 libraries traveling over New York State all the time. But the possibilities for the development are almost infinite. The rural free delivery system might well be utilized for library extension to scattered farms.

"A development of the system which we have under consideration is the book wagon. The book wagon would hold 100 or more 'house libraries'—packages of ten or more books. A skilful man could drive from house to house, leave and exchange the packages, and find out the tastes, needs, and interests of the people from conversation. We believe that, properly managed, as large returns could be secured from a system of book wagons as from any educational work now being done at public expense.

"The success of the New York State system of traveling libraries," continued Miss Avery, "has spread the idea throughout the entire country since 1893. In thirty-four other States there is now some form of the system. In this remarkable growth of the idea the women's clubs are entitled to almost the entire credit. In nearly every State the work has been started by the clubs, and the State has afterward taken it up at their solicitation.

"Michigan was the second State to adopt the system, and the action of the Michigan Legislature was due to the efforts of Mrs. Mary C. Spencer, the State Librarian.

"In Maine, the State Federation of Women's Clubs started the work, and secured a law for a Library Commission and an annual appropriation of \$1,000 in 1900.

"In 1900 the Vermont Free Library Commission began its work with libraries turned over to it by the State Federation of Women's Clubs.

"Under the library law of Massachusetts \$100 worth of books may be given as the nucleus of a public library to any town making a certain annual appropriation. Owing to this nearly every town in Massachusetts has a library. But as the annual appropriation is too small to permit of the purchase of books, interest in many of these libraries was almost dead. In 1894, the Boston Women's Education Association began to send traveling libraries and pictures to these moribund local institutions. The plan is filling its aim admirably.

"The Connecticut Public Library Committee has sixty-three traveling libraries, many of which have been given by women's clubs and by the Connecticut Society of Colonial Dames.

"The traveling library system established in New Jersey in 1893 was largely due to the work of the State Federation of Women's Clubs.

"In Delaware the Legislature in 1899 provided for an annual appropriation to aid the State Federation in its traveling library work.

"In Maryland and North Carolina women's clubs are sending out libraries, and in Georgia they are trying to supply the deficiency in the work of the State Library

Commission, caused by the fact that the State made no appropriation for the work. For instance, the county in which Atlanta is situated has fifty-six rural schools. The Atlanta Women's Club is gradually establishing in each of these school districts a neighborhood library association, generally composed of both men and women, for the purpose of providing a school library in that district. To each of these associations the club lends a library. Several thousand volumes are at present in circulation in the State through the agency of the women's clubs, together with mounted pictures, plaster casts, &c. In addition to this, traveling libraries of sixty volumes each, given by Hoke Smith, are circulating among the rural schools of thirty counties of Georgia.

"In Alabama the State Federation has fifteen or twenty libraries in circulation; in Texas several counties are supplied with traveling libraries by clubs within their borders; in Tennessee the women have twenty-six libraries. In nineteen mountain counties of Kentucky the libraries of the State Federation are circulating.

"The library legislation of Indiana, which in 1890 provided for a library commission, an appropriation of \$3,000 for the equipment of traveling libraries, and \$500 a year for expenses, was largely due to the agitation of the Indiana club women. The Illinois Federation of Women's Clubs endeavored to secure the same results, but failed. It has now about 100 libraries of its own in circulation.

"Wisconsin has had a remarkable history in the way of traveling libraries. There are a number of different systems in the State, generally circulating in one county each. Three of them have been founded and supported by philanthropic men—the first by Senator J. H. Stout, now President of the Board of Regents of the State University. In five other counties the systems are supported by the women's clubs. There is a new Wisconsin law, under which about eighty libraries are sent out direct from Madison, equipped chiefly by interested individuals. Then the State Federation has about fifty in circulation, making in all between 300 and 400 libraries in circulation through the State.

"The club women of Minnesota turned over many books and cases to the Public Library Commission, when the latter was established by law in 1893. In Missouri the

State Federation of Women's Clubs is sending out sixty libraries from Kansas City and St. Louis. The first traveling library sent out was the means of starting, in Jefferson City, where it was stationed, a movement for a public library which resulted in a gift of \$25,000 from Mr. Carnegie.

"In Kansas the traveling libraries department was established in the State Library entirely through the efforts of the Women's State Federation, which then turned over 3,000 volumes and thirty-four cases to the State as a nucleus. Through the efforts of the Nebraska State Federation that State established traveling libraries in 1901, with an appropriation of \$1,000 for their support. In Idaho the bill placing traveling libraries on a splendid basis in the State was secured entirely through the efforts of the Columbian Club of Boise City. In this State half the cases go by stage, and some stations can be reached only in July and August, on account of the snows the rest of the year.

"In Colorado the women secured the first appropriation ever made by the State for the support of the State Library; and they have now a traveling library of about 2,500 volumes in seventy cases, which they stand ready to turn over to the State whenever they shall have induced the latter to establish the work as a State institution. In Washington, Kansas, Idaho, and numerous other States where the work has been taken up by the State the State Federations have been recognized by the law, which provides for the appointment of club women upon the State Library Commission.

"Mr. Dewey states in his last report that the New York State Federation of Women's Clubs has been the most active promoter of the traveling library system in this State. A Library Committee was appointed by the federation for the purpose, among other things, of introducing State traveling libraries in rural communities where many of the people were ignorant that a library could be secured from Albany. Six months after the committee got to work one member had introduced the libraries into thirteen communities which had never had them before. Another member visited twenty-five neighboring localities in the interests of the work and corresponded with many more. In another county two permanent libraries were established as the result of a member's work. The result of the work of the committee was apparent in a largely increased correspondence in the library at Albany. The federation is now pushing the appointment of a Standing Library Committee in each federated club, whose duty it shall be to introduce traveling libraries, establish local libraries, and improve school and Sunday school libraries."