

FIRST REPORT  
OF THE  
PUBLIC LIBRARY COMMISSION  
OF  
NEW JERSEY.

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OCTOBER 31, 1900.

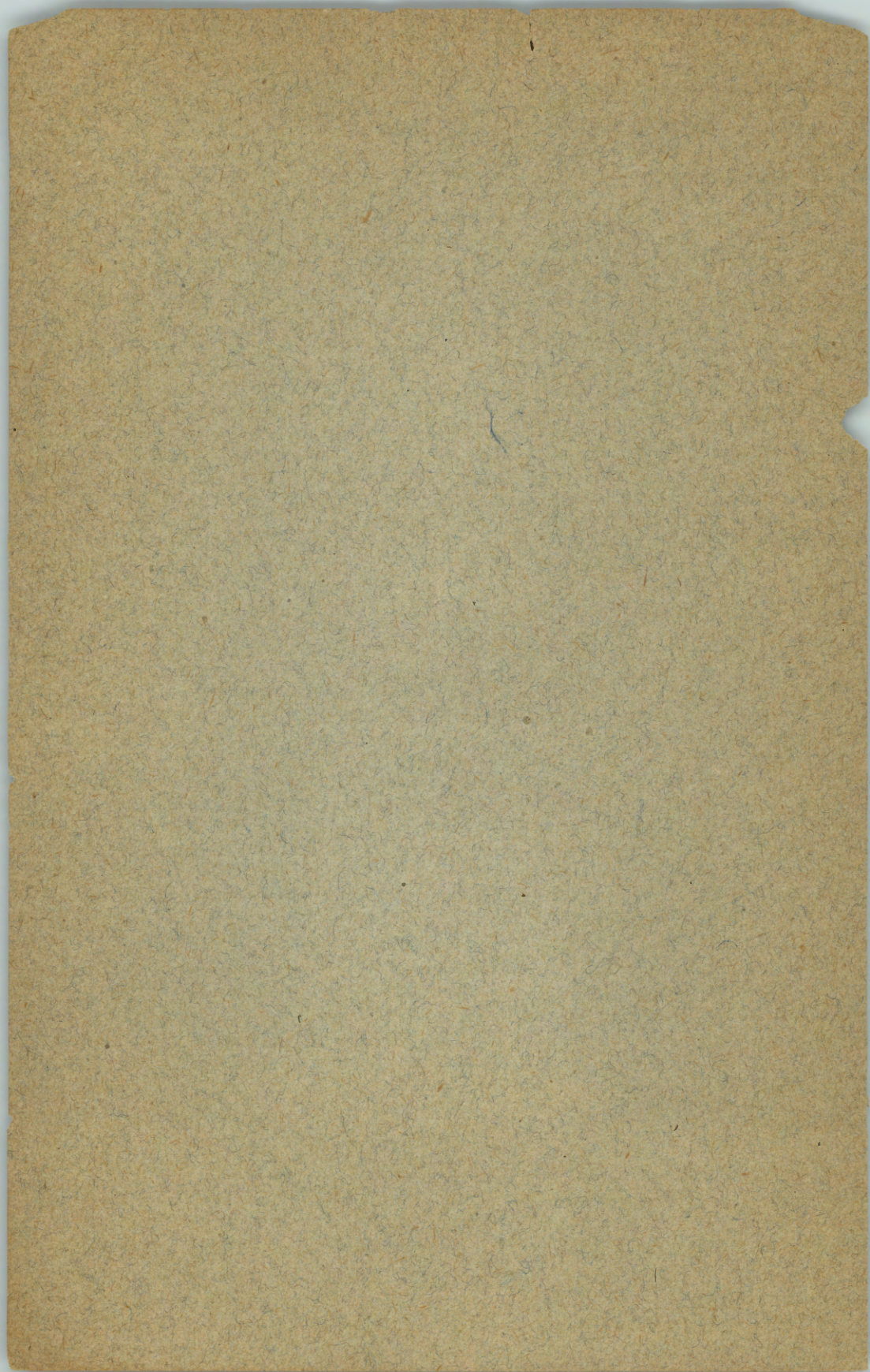
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TO THE LEGISLATURE.

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# REPORT.

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*Hon. Foster M. Voorhees, Governor:*

DEAR SIR: Pursuant to the requirement of Section 1 of "An act to promote the establishment and efficiency of free public libraries," approved March 20, 1900, the New Jersey Public Library Commissioners submit the following report for transmission to the Legislature:

Immediately after receiving notice of their appointment, the members of the Commission met in the State Library, at Trenton, and organized by choosing William C. Kimball, of Passaic, as Chairman, and H. C. Buchanan, State Librarian, as Secretary. By reason of the failure of the Legislature to make provision for the necessary expenses and for carrying on the work for which the Commission was created, the members found that they were unable to begin operations. They were restrained by the act under which they were appointed from incurring any debt or making any donation or expenditure exceeding the appropriation made for their use; and when it was suggested that work be begun and carried on as far as possible at the personal expense of the Commissioners, they were advised that the State did not expect them to give their services and also pay for the work that is to be done.

Thus, the Commission is unable to make such a report of results accomplished as should be possible in view of the field that is before them, and the condition of public library affairs in New Jersey. Some preliminary work has been done through correspondence, but here also the Commission was hampered by reason of its inability to secure the necessary printed circulars and blanks for use in securing data from the various municipalities in which their work will lie.



Undoubtedly, one of the first acts of the Commission should be to secure a collation of the laws of New Jersey governing the establishment of libraries in cities and towns. These acts are scattered through many volumes of the Pamphlet Laws, and most of the inquiries from applicants for information are in regard to the provisions of the laws, which are inaccessible to those residing in the smaller towns. It is conceded that the New Jersey acts of 1884 and 1890, for the encouragement of public libraries, are the best that have been enacted in any State, and while a number of libraries were organized under them, it is evident that many more towns would take advantage of them if the people had a knowledge of the liberal provisions.

The popular library of the future will be that maintained at the expense of the municipality. It is the lesson of experience that the people are interested more largely in those institutions which they help to maintain. Private libraries, even when liberally endowed, are apt to suffer from a lack of interest on the part of that portion of the public that is looked to for aid in their support, and the restrictions that often prevail prevent many persons from using their books.

The popularity of the small traveling libraries during the year they have been in operation in New Jersey is an indication of the interest that the people have in books. This interest is not confined to this State, but prevails throughout the country. According to a report made by a committee of the New Jersey Library Association early in the year, there are but seventy-six libraries in the State, including half a dozen college and school libraries. Of these there are fourteen that contain less than one thousand volumes. Forty-seven, or a little more than one-half, are free, supported wholly or in part by the city or town in which they are located.

There are one hundred and twenty-nine cities and towns in New Jersey with a population exceeding seven hundred and fifty that are without a library of any kind. It is to this class that the Public Library Commission desires to give its aid. The donation of \$100, contemplated by the law, is the only financial assistance that will be required, and that amount, added to a similar sum which the municipality is required to raise, will go a great way in the purchase of books for a public library in a small town.



But this financial assistance is by no means the only help that can be given. The chief obstacle in the way of interesting the people of a town in the organization of a public library is apparently their ignorance of the provisions of the law, lack of knowledge of library administration and of facilities for the selection and purchase of books. This information the Public Library Commission desires to give; and since the cities, by reason of their size and other advantages, may be regarded as able to care for themselves, special attention will be given to the smaller municipalities.

It is unnecessary to argue that public libraries are accessories to the public schools in affording means of education to those who are compelled to leave school early in life, as there are too many examples of men who have achieved success in the professional and business world, whose education has been acquired through books. Yet while money has been generously spent for the schools, little has been done in the past to aid the libraries and those who from necessity are obliged to depend upon them for the means of gaining knowledge.

Massachusetts is far in advance of the other States in the interest shown for public libraries, and while New Jersey can scarcely hope to equal the showing, your Commissioners are of the opinion that a great advance may be made, and that at an expense to the State that will be but trifling. If every one of the one hundred and twenty-nine towns in New Jersey with a population exceeding seven hundred and fifty is aided to the amount authorized by the law of 1900, the cost cannot exceed \$1,500 per year for a period of ten years. And that it is possible to secure library facilities for nearly all these towns is shown by the Massachusetts Free Public Library Commission report for 1899, in which it is stated that there are but "seven towns in the State that are not fully entitled to the privileges and rights of a free public library. In three of these towns there are association libraries that are not free." In the printed classification of towns it is shown that two hundred and sixty-nine have libraries owned and controlled by the town and free for circulation to all the people; thirty-five towns have free libraries in which the town has some representation in the management; twenty-six have libraries to which the town appropriates money; fourteen have free



libraries which have no connection with the town, and two have the free use of public libraries in other places. It is noteworthy that of the seven towns without free library privileges, six show a loss of population in the last ten years.

In New Hampshire there remain but about a dozen towns that are without free public libraries; and in the States of Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Wisconsin, where Public Library Commissions have been organized, great progress has been made and plans adopted for carrying on library work.

Never in the history of New Jersey has there been such an awakening on the public library question as within the past eighteen months. Jersey City's new library building will be completed before this report is printed, and the Newark building will probably be opened within the next two months. Hackensack's new library, the gift of Hon. W. M. Johnson, is being erected; Paterson is making large additions and improvements through the generosity of Mrs. Ryle; work is well under way in Orange; plans have been adopted for the new library in East Orange; Congressman Charles N. Fowler's gift to Elizabeth will be a credit to that city; Rutherford has been presented with a new library building; Bloomfield is to have a public library in connection with the new church house which James N. Jarvie is to give the Westminster Presbyterian Church, and Somerville also is interesting itself in the cause.

Trenton has adopted the free public library law, and is putting up a fine building which will be completed during the coming year. Hoboken, aided by a generous gift from the Stevens family, is steadily progressing in its new and commodious building. In Asbury Park, East Rutherford and Camden the leaven is working, and doubtless those prosperous cities will soon adopt the law of 1884 and establish public libraries.

Especially worthy of mention is the new library of the town of Madison, a gift from the Hon. D. Willis James. It is attractively designed and is so handsomely endowed as to insure its proper support indefinitely. This library is entirely independent of municipal control, but every safeguard has been thrown around its organization to secure its careful management and



continued prosperity. The building is pleasantly situated, and is a model of architectural beauty, the interior decorations of which display exquisite taste.

In conclusion, we respectfully ask that you bring to the attention of the Legislature the needs of the Commission, in order that an appropriation may be made that will enable us to begin the work for which the Commissioners were appointed.

Respectfully submitted.

WILLIAM C. KIMBALL,  
ERNEST CUSHING RICHARDSON,  
FRANK P. HILL,  
M. TAYLOR PYNE,  
EVERETT T. TOMLINSON.



