



# The undergraduate and the Harvard Library, 1877-1937

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## The Undergraduate and the Harvard Library, 1877-1937

**B**ETWEEN 1877 and 1937 the Harvard Library grew from a collection of 414,215 volumes and pamphlets, the bulk of them kept in a building already forty years old and open only during daylight hours, to a collection of 3,863,150, scattered for convenience in many places, but the greater part housed in a relatively modern building, kept open until ten at night.<sup>1</sup> Of course the undergraduate enrollment increased during this time too; from 813 to 3,735, to be exact. But whereas there were 509 books for each undergraduate in 1877, there were 1,034 in 1937. However, had the complexities inherent in a great collection of books offset the more liberal provision of material? Both the Faculty and the students were aware of this problem and attempted in various ways to meet it. These included, in the early part of the period under consideration, subscription libraries managed by the students, and reserved books; later, class-room and laboratory libraries; and finally, Widener's great reading room, a separate library for freshmen, and the House libraries. No one of these was ever the complete answer, but during two thirds of the period the main effort was directed towards the attainment of a single large reading room, while it has been of recent years that the value of smaller, more strategically placed libraries has been realized. Changing methods of instruction have been reflected in the library system; and through all the expedients, the gropings, the heated discussions, real contributions to librarianship and to education have emerged.

The modern conception of the relation of the college library to the undergraduate is generally credited to Justin Winsor, who became Librarian in 1877, after nine fruitful years as head of the Boston Public Library. But just as some of President Eliot's reforms were foreshadowed during the administration of his predecessor, Thomas Hill, so some of Winsor's were attempted under Library Sibley, though not, probably, with his wholehearted consent. The obstacles to the free

<sup>1</sup> These figures include all the University Libraries, for undergraduates may use the Departmental Libraries, if necessary, and cards for these libraries appear in the Union Catalogue at Widener.

use of books by students from the building of the second Harvard Hall to the retirement of Sibley have been portrayed by the present Librarian in a preceding article.<sup>2</sup> One compensating factor, as he points out, was the 'society libraries of the students'; in 1873, the last year they appear in the college catalogue, they numbered 16,000 volumes. But these were not available to all students, nor could they keep up with current publications. Accordingly, in 1872, the students organized their own Reading Room Association, designed to supply current newspapers and periodicals for the sum of two dollars a year. The *Harvard Advocate* took up the cause; President Eliot agreed to allow the use of the lower floor of Massachusetts Hall. Four hundred subscriptions were raised, enough to furnish the room, to pay a sophomore curator \$2.50 a week, and to buy subscriptions to a respectable number of newspapers, including foreign. But difficulties soon arose over persons who tried to use the room without subscribing. And after a lapse in 1879 and a reorganization in 1883, the Association dissolved for good in 1884.<sup>3</sup> Presumably the newspapers went to the College Library. Another library open only to subscribers was that of the Harvard Union, established in 1901. That too finally was taken over by the University; quite rightly, libraries-by-subscription were not to be the answer to the problem of the student and the library.

The introduction of the reserved book system, and of the methods of teaching which it implies, was first undertaken by Professors Henry Torrey and Henry Adams of the History Department. Writing in the *Boston Evening Transcript* of 5 November 1913, 'K.V.S.' recalls: 'There came Torrey, watchful for his history alcove that it be supplied with everything new and valuable. . . . It was he who first took down the "No admittance" bars and opened his alcove for the free access of his students, placing in it tables and chairs, and making it attractive, that his classes might love to live with the books and not merely refer to them.' The contribution of Henry Adams to the new methods of teaching is well known; he describes it himself in the *Education*: 'Since no textbooks existed, the professor refused to profess, knowing no more than his students, and they read what they pleased and com-

<sup>2</sup> Keyes D. Metcalf, 'The Undergraduate and the Harvard Library, 1765-1877,' *Harvard Library Bulletin*, I (1947), 29-51.

<sup>3</sup> Notes on the new reading room appear in the *Advocate* for 21 December 1871, 9 and 20 February and 22 March 1872. The annual *Harvard Index* contains lists of officers of the Association.

pared their results.'<sup>4</sup> Dissatisfied with conditions in the Library, Adams in 1875 addressed the following petition to the Corporation:

The Undersigned, Assistant Professor of History, respectfully presents the following petition to the Honorable the Corporation of Harvard College.

The Undersigned has the duty of instructing a number of students in the department of History. He requires of them that each one shall use to the utmost possible extent the resources of the College Library. Without doing so, they cannot acquire the training which it is his principal object to give them.

As the Library is at present arranged it is impossible for them to use it to proper advantage. The students require room, especially table-room, which is not given them.

The Undersigned respectfully represents that this inconvenience is wholly unnecessary. One half the floor of the library is now occupied by show-cases, stands, or other fixtures, which do not necessarily belong there and which add nothing to the proper usefulness of the institution.

The Undersigned respectfully requests that these cases, &c, may be removed and that a long table may, so soon as the Honorable Corporation think proper, be substituted. If this be done, the Undersigned believes that the students will have sufficient accommodation for all their immediate wants.

Respectfully presented

Cambridge. 14 Decr. 1875

/s/ Henry Adams<sup>5</sup>

The petition brought action, for President Eliot, in his report for 1876-77, states that the floor has been cleared and 'is to be given up entirely to the accommodation of persons who are consulting books.'

Justin Winsor, himself a scholar, approved completely of the new methods of teaching and the system of reserved books. An excellent statement of his attitude is to be found in his preliminary report to President Eliot, for 1876-77: 'Books may be accumulated and guarded, and the result is sometimes called a library: but if books are made to help and spur men on in their own daily work, the library becomes a vital influence; the prison is turned into a workshop.' Winsor soon did away, as he had already done at the Boston Public Library, with the calling in of books for annual examination and the closing of the Library for cleaning. He inaugurated a system of 'Notes and Queries,' whereby questions could be posted, for anyone with the requisite information to answer. By 1880 students were being admitted to the

<sup>4</sup> *The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston and New York, 1918), p. 303.

<sup>5</sup> This petition, with similar documents quoted in this account, is preserved in the Harvard University Archives.

stacks; tickets were given for limited periods of time. Of his extension of the alcove and reserved book collections, he writes in his first complete report, for 1877-78:

The students can handle — this absolute contact with books is, in my judgment, humanizing — the newer books, as they stand on certain shelves, for a while after their accession; and alcoves, with tables, are also given to an ever-changing collection of books, designated by the several professors as collateral reading for their classes. These latter books, now conspicuously labelled with a different color for each professor, are retained from circulation, except at hours when the Library is not open . . . With this rearrangement of the hall, I had reserved in my mind the series of lower alcoves — removing the present central cases and substituting tables — to contain a succession of collections of the most useful books in all departments of knowledge, each alcove being given to a particular branch, of which the students could have unfettered enjoyment. I think there can be no difficulty about sufficient oversight; and I have confidence that it will stimulate inquiry, and give new resources to the instructors. I would not have these collections permanent, but shifting from year to year. Ten and even twenty thousand volumes can thus, I judge, be most profitably disposed.

The results of Winsor's activity were described by Henry Ware in the *Harvard Register* for October 1880:

The books have been re-arranged in the new wing since his accession; the old Gore Hall has been devoted to the purposes of a reading-room; the hours of use have been extended, so that the doors are open even in vacation nearly as many hours as they formerly were in term time. Sunday even sees them open; and, as soon as proper means of lighting are devised, the evenings as well as the days can be devoted to study within the walls of the library. A new life and spirit seem to pervade the place; and it is safe to say that a public library does not exist to which readers are more cordially welcomed, or more intelligently and courteously aided in their researches, than the library of Harvard College under its present enlightened and modern management.

The new Librarian had the full support of the President, who, in his report for 1877-78, rejoiced that 'the Library gives abundant evidence of the inventiveness, experience, and energy of the Librarian.'

Problems raised by overcrowding, which were to plague the Library authorities for the next thirty-five years, soon faced Winsor. Space gained by the addition of 1877, in which modern stack construction was used for the first time in America, was soon filled up. Here, in a letter from Winsor to Eliot, dated 29 October 1892, is a typical statement of the case: 'I wish to notify you that of this day, at the beginning of cold weather, we are all blocked in our Reading Room, and

every chair, we can find space for on the floor and in the gallery is filled, and many of the sitters are without table facilities. Our Cloak room is packed, and we have been obliged to let students carry their overcoats into the reading room. Our delivery room is crowded to the detriment of its administration. Our stack is gorged, and confusion is increasing. The thought of what we shall experience a few weeks hence is alarming.' That part of the quotation referring to crowded conditions in the reading room might easily have been written today. Without electricity, the Library had to close before four o'clock on some winter afternoons. Though an effort was made to raise funds for lighting in 1886, and the students petitioned that lights be installed in 1889, the Corporation, with an eye on the College treasury, was reluctant to go ahead. The plaster was crumbling (Sibley had noticed this back in the seventies); and on Thanksgiving Day, 1889, a fifty-pound corner ornament fell onto a table in the reading room, 'where on ordinary days a student might be sitting.'<sup>6</sup> Planning and hoping for an addition, or even a new building, became the Librarian's chief concern.

Early plans for enlargement hinged on a separate reading room, perhaps with smaller rooms for class libraries opening off it. Winsor favored this arrangement; writing in the *Harvard Register* for January 1880, he states: 'We can hardly hope our college libraries will do all that they should in connection with the classes, until libraries are built with class-rooms contiguous to the alcoves. A disused apartment in the Harvard Library has been divided into three stalls, with shelves about the tables to hold a large number of books; and here the professor brings his class, and illustrates the modes of research.' President Eliot, in his report for 1883-84, urged a separate reading room. If the new building had ample coat-rooms and dressing-rooms, he felt that 'students who had no rooms in Cambridge might find themselves comfortably provided for at the reading-room during the whole working day.' Still no donor came forward, and in 1890 the students started a subscription. They raised \$3,530; a subsequent appeal to the alumni brought in an additional \$18,000. Even in those days this was much too little; so everyone took heart when it was rumored that a donor had been found. Plans were actually drawn up for an octagonal building, to be located on the hill towards Quincy Street. It was to be connected to Gore Hall by a lean-to, which would house the delivery

<sup>6</sup>Letter of Winsor to Eliot, 2 December 1889.

desk. The prospective donor<sup>7</sup> died, however, before the gift was made. Although the failure to obtain a new library at this time was a heavy blow, it now seems obvious that the plans were such that deferment of the new building was really a blessing.

Finally, in 1895-96, the Corporation, using the money raised by subscription in 1890, plus some of its own, renovated Gore Hall. Part of the old lofty reading room was turned into stacks and a new reading room constructed across the top of the former. This provided seats for 225 students, while the History Room, over the Delivery Desk, accommodated 50 more. And at long last the Library was wired for electricity. It was realized that the reading room arrangements were only temporary; in fact, ventilating problems soon made the use of the large reading room in summer almost impossible. A rotary fan proving unsuccessful, a large awning like a tent-fly was spread over the entire roof. All of this was too much for the editors of the *Lampoon*, who, in a fake issue of the *Crimson*, dated 30 May 1901, ran a scratched-up picture of a monumental room, which purported to be a new reading room for Gore Hall offered by an unknown donor. 'The present accommodation having become manifestly insufficient,' the news item states, 'it was deemed advisable to remove the stacks in Room E, to the left of the present reading room, as one enters. The books have been placed in carefully sealed boxes in the basement, until suitable accommodations can be obtained for them. The desks are to be of hard Georgia pine, and are fitted with a new system of drop lights, as seen in the cut.'

Balked in his efforts to obtain a new building, Winsor turned to the multiplication and strengthening of the class and laboratory libraries, outside Gore Hall, and to the provision of special collections within. Libraries in United States History and in Political Economy were the first two class-room libraries of importance. They had been set up in University Hall in 1886; shortly they were transferred to Harvard Hall where, with collections in Social Questions and European History, they formed a reading room for the elementary courses in the social sciences. The Social Questions books were transferred to Emerson Hall in 1905, but the other collections remained in Harvard Hall, which grew more and more crowded, until the construction of Widener. In 1897, the Child Memorial Library, a collection of books in English literature, was opened as a tribute to Professor Francis

<sup>7</sup> Later identified as Frederick L. Ames, '54, Fellow of Harvard College 1888-93.

James Child. Special collections in French, German, Romance, and Sanskrit were established in Warren House in 1899. Some of these were closed collections, open to graduate students with keys, and so became the ancestors of the rooms on the top floor of Widener.

Efforts to make more books available to undergraduates within Gore Hall itself included selections of reference books, periodicals, and modern literature, maintained in the reading and delivery rooms. Reporting on this material for the year 1886-87, Winsor wrote: 'In addition to the books reserved by instructors, now amounting to 6280 volumes, there are in the reading-room 1784 volumes carefully selected for students' reading by the instructors in the several departments. Of these, 1300 are English, 335 French, 105 German, and 44 Italian. The use of these books is not governed by the restrictions applied to reserved books, but the books may be taken out as other books are.' Here, perhaps, is the ancestor of the browsing collections so common today. With the construction of the Union, a student activities center, in 1901, recreational and extra-curricular reading was made much more attractive. In his first report, for the year 1897-98, Librarian Lane wrote of these collections: 'To these [reserved and reference books] should be added the books in the Harvard Hall reading-room (3,959) and those in the other class-room and laboratory libraries (16,546), making altogether, at present, about 40,000 volumes which are directly accessible in an informal manner to the members of the University.' In spite of the disadvantages of breaking up the collections, not wholly offset by centralized cataloguing and supervision, these class-room libraries have increased, accounting now for a large part of the fifty-two special libraries in the Harvard Library system.

Winsor died in 1897, just after his return from England, where he had represented the American Library Association at an international conference. Though his chief contribution to the Harvard Library was the liberalizing of the lending of books, he still believed there was no substitute for owning them. He wrote to Eliot: 'The pressure is constant to buy duplicates. It is met sparingly . . . I deem it one of the most unsatisfactory phases of our student life that there is a disinclination to count the ownership of books among the necessities of a college course.'<sup>8</sup> His successor was William Coolidge Lane, Librarian of the Boston Athenaeum, and a former member of the Harvard Library staff. As Winsor's extra-curricular interests lay in American his-

<sup>8</sup> Letter of Winsor to Eliot, 17 October 1887.



tory, particularly of the period of exploration, so Lane's lay in antiquarian investigations, especially into Harvard history. From his first report, it was evident that Lane meant to follow the paths laid out by Winsor. And during the next dozen years, as during the previous twelve, the Library's history may be written in terms of the need of larger quarters. But now the basic purposes of a college library came up for consideration, and President Eliot at times found himself on the opposite side of the fence from the librarians.

Hints of Eliot's position are to be found in his report for the year 1885-86: 'The justification of the enormous expense which is involved in the accumulation and maintenance of a great university library is not to be found in the daily use which the mass of the students will make of it. A much cheaper instrument would serve them. The justification must be found in its indispensableness to teachers, authors, and other thorough scholars, and to students having exceptional work in hand.' In his report for 1892-93, however, the new methods of instruction receive his complete support: 'However troublesome and costly it may be to teach thousands of students the abundant use of books, it is the most important lesson that can be given them during their student life.' By 1898-99 he was willing to put some limit upon the number of books to which the students need access: 'A library for the use of young students feels the encumbrance of masses of dead books on the shelves, and of useless cards in the catalogue drawers more than any other sort of library; for large bodies of young men in process of education want easy access to many live books in rapid succession, but have small interest in superseded books.' Addressing various library clubs in 1902, Eliot advocated a division of books into 'live' and 'dead', and a storage of the dead ones in economical fashion. Many librarians jumped to the defense of their complete collections. And Professor Kittredge marked in the backs of the books which he consulted in the stacks of Gore Hall the date and his initials, so that they at least would not be considered 'dead.' Today, in somewhat modified form, President Eliot's suggestion has been acted upon by a group of libraries in the Boston region, including Harvard.

So much for the public record. In private, Lane wrote to Eliot; 'Should not the primary object of a great university library be to supply the needs of professors and advanced students? By a selection of books placed in the Reading-room, or elsewhere, by special lists, and by personal guidance, the Library meets the needs of beginners.

Hence the accumulation of books in a library does not work to the injury of elementary students, for their wants are served in a different way.'<sup>9</sup> To which Eliot replied: 'I agree with you that the primary object of a university library should be to supply the needs of professors and advanced students; but the way to do that seems to me to get the additional books which such persons need at the moment, and not to undertake to make huge collections in advance of the expressed wishes of the professors and advanced students.'<sup>10</sup> With such a difference of opinion as to methods, if not ends, between President and Librarian, it was obvious that more study was necessary. So began the period of committees. The first committee was weighted in favor of the Librarian, for it was made up of the Librarians of the Law, Divinity, Museum of Comparative Zoology, and College Libraries, plus the Director of the Observatory, and Lane was Secretary. Its recommendations were:

I. Two or more large reading rooms, in which are to be kept general reference books and current periodicals, and reserved books for all the elementary courses and for some of the more advanced courses; — with provision for 500 readers, and shelving for 35,000 volumes.

II. A series of rooms of moderate size having as far as possible the privacy and attractiveness that belong to a good private library, one or more for each of the departments that maintains or desires to maintain a separate working reference library for its advanced students.<sup>11</sup>

Here Widener, with its large reading room and its departmental libraries, is definitely foreshadowed.

Deciding it would be wise to have these findings checked by outside authorities, the Corporation appointed another committee, consisting of Herbert Putnam, Librarian of Congress, John Shaw Billings, Librarian of the New York Public Library, Edward C. Pickering, Director of the Harvard Observatory, and Lane. The last two named had been on the earlier committee. Lane objected to the appointment of Billings, whose field had been medicine, for fear that the committee would be overweighted in favor of science. As it happened, Billings turned in a minority report advocating a limit, within the next twenty-five years, of 500,000 volumes for the University Library. In the call for the committee, the Corporation had stated:

<sup>9</sup> MS memorandum to Eliot on the President's report for 1900-01.

<sup>10</sup> Letter of Eliot to Lane, 26 February 1902.

<sup>11</sup> Submitted 31 March 1902; quoted in Lane's fifth report (1901-02), p. 214.

'The President and Fellows are ready to spend money in order to procure one handsome reading-room, but, in general, they feel compelled to be distinctly frugal and to consider very carefully the running expenses of the projected building.' In the majority report, the proponents of library expansion stated: 'We believe that a collection of books indefinitely growing, containing also the material precious from its form or from association, is a cultivating influence which ought not to be withdrawn from the student body.'

So far neither of the committees had actually decided the question of keeping Gore Hall, though both had recommended the employment of an architect to study the subject. The Corporation's views at this time appear in a letter from Eliot to Lane, dated 21 June 1904: 'Moreover, there is not a single member of the Corporation who is converted to the opinion that it would be expedient for Harvard University to maintain an immense, very comprehensive library in the College Yard.' And in his report for 1902-03 Eliot was of the opinion that 'a million books would seem to be a reasonable current stock to be kept on hand from generation to generation in the same building with the administrative offices and the reading-rooms.' Therefore, Lane began consulting with Herbert L. Warren, Professor of Architecture, on the enlargement of Gore Hall. Warren drew up plans for a series of additions, which would eventually surround that building completely. The Committee of 1901 was asked to study these plans, and found them not wholly satisfactory. So outside professionals were again called in, in the persons of Guy Lowell, Désiré Despradelle, and Charles A. Coolidge, architects. Their reports once and for all banished Gore Hall; their plans, in fact, became the basis for Widener Library. One of the few differences in the over-all plan is that they placed the delivery desk in the position occupied by the memorial room in the finished building.

During this period of planning, the Library continued to function as best it could in Gore Hall. In 1900, Librarian Lane was wondering why 501 students out of 1,092 did not use the Library. 'Most of them, probably all,' he wrote in his report, 'used the reading-rooms and class-room libraries, but it is a little remarkable that so many should have been satisfied with this, and not have been tempted to borrow additional books. The fact that several of the social clubs now support much larger and better selected libraries than they formerly did is doubtless one reason why many students do not find occasion to bor-

row from the College Library.' One way to bring more students into the Library, he suggested in his report for 1901-02, would be to provide a more comprehensive collection of books in the reading room. 'In the meantime,' he wrote, 'it is fortunate that the library of the Harvard Union has begun to offer some of the advantages of such a collection, and especially in fields which the College reading-room has not attempted to occupy.'<sup>12</sup> These fields included literature, biography, history, travel, and sport, and the collection was an open-stack one. Some of the decline in the circulation of books from the main library Lane attributed to this fact, finding it 'striking evidence of the greater pleasure to be had in picking out one's own books from well selected open shelves, even though the books must be read on the premises, than in sending for them by messenger after searching in a card catalogue, though the stock to select from be larger and though the books may be taken to one's own room and kept for a month.'

In 1907 there occurred one of the frequent waves of complaint concerning the service to students. A member of the junior class wrote to the Librarian: 'It would be asking none too much, I think, to ask for freer access to the shelves, for the privilege [*sic*] of taking out one book for each course pursued (perhaps with the restriction to the number of four), for the removal of the high and inconvenient fences placed along the center of all the tables in the reading room, for a better form of chair in place of those on spindles and above all for prompt and courteous attention.'<sup>13</sup> A graduate student who was later to meet academic administrative problems of his own came to the Library's defense, in a letter printed in the *Crimson* for 13 May 1907: 'I beg to testify to the uniform courtesy of the hard-worked men, women and boys who make the Harvard Library the most efficient and the most liberal circulator of books I have ever seen.'<sup>14</sup> It is significant that it was the undergraduate who was attacking, the graduate who was defending the Library. That the undergraduate had some reason on his side is to be seen in the following description of the old Gore Hall reading room, taken from the *Boston Traveller* for 6 September 1912.

<sup>12</sup> In connection with the work of the Committee of 1902, Lane questioned the members of the Faculty as to the use of the Library by their students; unfortunately only one reply has been found.

<sup>13</sup> Walter M. Stone, '08, to Lane, 21 May 1907. The reference to one book for each course seems unjustified, for students then were allowed to take out three books at a time, and to keep them for a month.

<sup>14</sup> Henry N. MacCracken, Ph.D. 1907.

'The bare reading room,' the reporter states, 'with its poor lighting arrangements, its uncomfortable, stiff-backed swivel chairs, its inconvenient, antiquated racks and its inevitable susurrus of subdued voices has not been an incentive to earnest study.'

New names and faces appeared on the scene during the years just preceding the building of Widener; many were to come into close contact with the students. In 1904 Charles A. Mahady became Superintendent of the Reading Room, a post he held until his retirement in 1943. In 1909 President Eliot was succeeded by Abbott Lawrence Lowell. The next year Professor Archibald Cary Coolidge, for some time a benefactor of the Library, was appointed to the newly-created post of Director. Finally, in the summer of 1912, came the announcement of a new building, the gift of Mrs George D. Widener, in memory of her son, Harry, who had been lost in the sinking of the 'Titanic.' The books were removed from Gore Hall without delay, two thirds of them going to Randall Hall (now the home of the Printing Office), the rest to Andover, Robinson, and other buildings. Reading rooms were set up in Massachusetts Hall during the three-year building period. (Massachusetts Hall, in the course of its varied history, had served as a reading room during the reconstruction of 1896, and also as the home of the students' library in 1872.)

The new building represented a compromise between the library theories current at the time and the necessity that it be a memorial. Trumbauer, the Philadelphia architect, drew heavily on the plans of the earlier committees, especially that of the architects prepared in 1910. The belief that a reading room should be large and monumental was deeply entrenched. Putnam, the Librarian of Congress, told the Overseers in 1903 that the present reading room 'lacks the large spaces conducive to meditative study, and is barren of the architectural beauty and dignity which in a great library can exercise a practical influence for good.'<sup>15</sup> It was hoped that the fine new building would meet the needs of both undergraduates and scholars. But as is so often the case with ends that are not wholly compatible, one soon outdistanced the other. It was inconceivable that the Harvard Library should not be a great scholarly library; all its past history pointed towards that goal. The *Boston Transcript* for 5 September 1912 had this to say of the proposed building: 'It is to be not merely a storehouse for books, not merely a place where the undergraduate may go to read, or the instruc-

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Lane's sixth report (1902-03), p. 199.

tor to study. It will be a centre for the ripe scholarship of the world, a workroom and a laboratory for the men who are to give direction to the world's thought.' At last there would be studies enough for the professors (though not for long), cubicles for graduate students, and separate rooms for seminars. Anxious to defend the displacement of the delivery room in favor of the memorial library in the heart of the building, Lowell wrote to Putnam, on 30 October 1912: 'My interest in the arrangement of the library is centered about making it as useful as possible for scholars who are engaged in study by providing them with working rooms, and with stalls or cubicles, leading off the stacks. The arrangement of the delivery room has seemed to me less important.' Lane, writing in the *Library Journal*, May 1913, echoes this argument. But many a student must have counted wearily the 68 steps to the delivery desk, and the 46 additional to the top floor, where the Business School Library was housed until 1927.

In spite of the emphasis on use by scholars and graduate students, many innovations on behalf of undergraduates were introduced into the new building. The History Library was moved from Harvard Hall and installed on the ground floor, with a convenient entrance. Here it remained until expansion of the Treasure Room required its transfer to nearby Boylston Hall in 1929. From the start, it was planned to furnish a room in the new library solely for recreational reading. In 1916, Mr and Mrs William Farnsworth made it possible to equip this room, adjacent to the main entrance, in memory of their son Henry, who was killed while serving with the Foreign Legion. Under the guidance of Mrs Florence Milner, this room became a model for several similar collections in colleges across the country. Her experience was valuable when it came to establishing the Freshman and House Libraries. A somewhat similar room, for the reading of verse, was dedicated in 1931, in memory of George Edward Woodberry. Changes were made in the organization of the reference service, partly as a result of a survey of the Library made by two Business School students in 1914. Though their report is mainly concerned with the technical processes of the Library, the authors do say of the service to students: 'It seems that the treatment of students is the most serious problem in this library. Every effort should be made to overcome this defect. A reference department should be organized and a competent man with a strong personality put in charge. The circulation department should be organized so as to give efficient and willing service and should be

under the control of the reference librarian.' <sup>16</sup> This recommendation was carried into effect the following year with the appointment to this post of Walter B. Briggs. Visiting scholars and students alike found Mr Briggs ever ready to help them. In another effort to acquaint the students with the Library, a pamphlet, 'Notes on the Use of the Harvard College Library,' was issued in 1915; several new editions have since appeared. It has also long been the annual custom at Harvard for freshmen in small groups to be taken on a tour of the Library early in the college year. These remedies helped, but could not cure the basic disease of bigness.

The new building, which was dedicated in 1915, had not been in use long before flaws began to appear. The *Crimson* became particularly adept at picking them out; many of them petty, some serious. Almost every editorial board or group of candidates tried its hand on the subject of Widener. Just how much these editorials represented the feelings of the undergraduates as a whole would be hard to say. On smaller matters, we find noise in the reading room a subject of discussion in 1922, censorship in 1924, various utilities in 1925, ventilation in 1926.<sup>17</sup> It is interesting, in the midst of such criticism, to find the *Crimson* editors in 1923 approving the purchase of unique books for scholars, rather than the duplication of texts for students. 'The University's debt to the general cause of learning,' says an editorial, 'is greater than to the personal convenience of a few students.'<sup>18</sup> But in 1925, urging the appointment of a Professor of Books, an editorial states: 'The Widener of today is cold, formal, business-like, if not super-efficient. It is a ponderous mechanism which only the skilled graduate can rightly use. It should be the heart and soul of the University. It should be a treasure trove of knowledge, but not one that is locked to all but the initiated.'<sup>19</sup> This is the perennial complaint, presented in humorous form by the *Lampoon*, 19 May 1926. A student is shown requesting a copy of Plato at the delivery desk and is told: 'Sorry, we haven't any Platos today. It's either lost, strayed, stolen or reserved. Couldn't interest you in O. Henry could I?' To correct the complaints based upon the size of Widener, little could be done, except to develop library facilities outside the building. Complaints

<sup>16</sup> Ralph Fensterwald and Marion Folsom, Final Thesis, 9 April 1914.

<sup>17</sup> *Crimson*, May 1922; 18 November 1925; 25 March, 4, 22, 26 May 1925; 2 December 1926; 13, 14 January 1927.

<sup>18</sup> *Crimson*, 5 February 1923.

<sup>19</sup> *Crimson*, 22 January 1925.

about the impersonality and quality of the service were another matter; here the administration and the students might well differ as to the degree of difficulty.

With the physical expansion of the University under Lowell in the twenties, the Library also expanded. In 1926 a separate library for freshmen was opened in McKinlock Hall; this was a double collection, one for the large survey courses, and one for general reading, somewhat like the Farnsworth Room. When the Houses for upperclassmen were completed and the freshmen concentrated in the Yard, these libraries were transferred to the Union. Of this move, Mrs Milner wrote, in the *Harvard Alumni Bulletin* for 14 February 1936:

The most interesting development since moving into the Union has been the steady increase in general reading. For the first year [1931] the men seemed quite unconscious of anything on the shelves except books needed for courses. The change has come about largely through the generous buying of new books by the Union Committee and by calling especial attention to them. On shelves opposite the desk, so placed that everyone entering the rooms must pass them, is kept a constantly vitalized selection of recent acquisitions. These shelves usually contain about 350 volumes, which circulate constantly. The habit is also growing of wandering through the alcoves in search of older books of interest and in becoming familiar with what the Library offers.

Too many freshmen became satisfied with the Union Library, and remained almost completely ignorant of Widener. The fault was not wholly theirs.

Plans for each of the seven Houses called for a library of from seven to ten thousand volumes. The selection included many of the books needed in course and tutorial work, as well as reference sets, and books for general reading; the furnishings suggested a club or private library. As many freshmen did not venture from the Union Library, so many upperclassmen came to prefer the House Libraries to Widener. Those electing to try for honors their senior year, however, welcomed the temporary permits admitting them to Widener's stacks. For besides the improved facilities offered to students for the reading of books, there were also changes in the methods of instruction, resulting generally in the increased use of books. These included the Tutorial System and the Reading Period. In most fields, students were assigned to tutors who were to guide their out-of-course reading. And for most courses, the two weeks prior to mid-year and final examinations were allotted to extra reading. The Reading Period, as it was called, began



in 1928, the same year that Professor Robert P. Blake succeeded Mr Coolidge as Director of the Library. Of its effect, Mr Blake wrote as follows in his first report: 'In spite of the great strain put upon the Reading Room staff through this important innovation in college teaching, the Reading Rooms, although crowded to their utmost capacity (especially during the midyear period), functioned smoothly during this time. There were almost no complaints that books were not available and the majority of the readers were pleasantly surprised to find how liberally the books were issued to them. . . . This last fact [the purchase of books by students] shows clearly that students are being brought in contact with more books they wish to own.'

It is well the expansion came when it did, for during the depression years the Library had to economize. The Widener building was closed at six for two years, arousing such a storm of protest from the students that the Corporation was relieved to be able to open it for the usual hours in 1934. So many books were lost that it became necessary in 1930 to install turnstiles at the exits. The students accepted the necessity for this check with a minimum of grumbling. The administration, in fact, showed itself sympathetic to several of the demands of the *Crimson* during the thirties; though the improvements would probably have come anyway. New lights were installed in the reading room in 1935, lights which are already outmoded; the loan period was cut from a month to two weeks in 1938; a study was made of the time required to obtain a book, and a simplified charging system introduced. Some improvements were made in the number and currency of newspapers, and in provisions for using them. A book chute was installed, so books could be returned at times when the Library was closed. Most of these changes benefited users of the Library in general as well as the undergraduates. It would be a mistake to assume any real division between the treatment of undergraduates and that of graduate students and scholars. For though the undergraduates in general used the reading rooms and House Libraries, many were admitted for special periods to the stacks; and the graduate student might often have occasion to consult a reserved book in the main reading room.

However, the question of whether the undergraduates were making the best use of Widener, or whether Widener was really effectively usable by the undergraduates, still remained. Mr Blake's report for 1932-33 underlined previous observations that students were to a large degree merely reading their own notes and textbooks in the

Library, and not using the Library collections. In the *Critic* for 15 December 1932, the members of the National Student League held: 'The simple fact is that the course system at Harvard so emphasizes reading for examinations and so discourages independent research that only a few students utilize Widener to full advantage.' Finally, at the close of the period under discussion, the *Crimson* carried a series of editorials on the coldness and impersonality of Widener. 'Alumni and visitors,' the first editorial states, 'are awed by its murals, marble, and majesty, by its steps and circumference, its showcases and treasures. But, except at reading and examination periods, they may well wonder at the scarcity of students amid the swarm of employees and professors . . . Widener is wondering, too, and very much interested in finding the answer. . . First, is the old recommendation for personalization. Like Grand Central Station, Widener is big, moving, and impersonal, and it is difficult to add a "homey" note to a building constructed for dignity rather than coziness.' The final editorial in the series asserts that improvement 'can only come through a basic change in the library's attitude toward the undergraduate. Until the latter feels that the library is his, that attendants are there to help and not restrict him, he will continue to regard the friendly and hospitable air of the Farnsworth Room as an oasis in an otherwise grim and inhuman desert.'<sup>20</sup>

In such quotations as these, written by the students themselves, lies the justification for a new and radical attempt to solve the difficulty. The great specialized collections in the stacks, the extensive catalogues, are invaluable to the scholar; for the undergraduate they all too often serve to confuse and discourage. The lack of contact with books, which the reading rooms and even the House Libraries cannot wholly remedy, is the most serious loss. The provision of reference assistants, the compilation of a guide book, the tours for new students, all these help, but until the student can live with a goodly collection of books he is missing an important part of a college education. And so the experiments and the makeshifts, from which many lasting benefits have come, still leave the University the problem with which this paper started; how best to bring the student and the books together. The Librarian, Mr Metcalf, will describe a new approach to a solution of the problem in the next issue of this BULLETIN.

ROBERT W. LOVETT

<sup>20</sup> *Crimson*, 14, 19 October 1937.

## List of Contributors

- KEYES D. METCALF, Professor of Bibliography, Director of the Harvard  
Harvard University Library, and Librarian of Harvard College
- AGNES MONGAN, Keeper of Drawings in the William Hayes Fogg Museum of  
Art, Harvard University
- CLIFFORD K. SHIPTON, Custodian of the Harvard University Archives;  
Librarian of the American Antiquarian Society
- HAMILTON VAUGHAN BAIL, Deputy Treasurer of the Franklin Institute,  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- REGINALD FITZ, Lecturer on the History of Medicine, University Marshal, and  
Assistant to the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Harvard University
- ROBERT W. LOVETT, Assistant in the Harvard University Archives
- WILLIAM A. JACKSON, Professor of Bibliography and Assistant Librarian of the  
Harvard College Library in charge of the Houghton Library
- ADRIANA R. SALEM, Department of Printing and Graphic Arts, Harvard  
College Library
- EVA FLEISCHNER, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, Massachusetts
- LOUISE B. GRAVES, Boston, Massachusetts
- PHILIP HOFER, Curator of Printing and Graphic Arts in the Harvard College  
Library
- PHILIP J. McNIFF, Superintendent of the Reading Room in the Harvard College  
Library
- FRANK N. JONES, Administrative Assistant in the Harvard College Library