

# NEW YORK'S NEW PUBLIC LIBRARY RANKS WITH THE WORLD'S GREATEST

Cost \$10,000,000 and Has  
Been More Than Ten  
Years In Building

Measured by Number of Read-  
ers It Exceeds All  
the Others

By JAMES A. EDGERTON.  
THE new building of the New York Public Library is one of the most beautiful edifices in America. It is of marble throughout, except for a small amount of wood trimmings and the supports for the bookshelves, which are of steel. It is situated between Fifth avenue and Bryant park and between Fortieth and Forty-second streets, extending two full blocks in width and nearly as far in depth. While on the statistical slant it may be as well to add that the building contains over eighty miles of bookshelves, capable of accommodating 3,500,000 books; that the reading room is the largest in the world; that the structure and furnishings, exclusive of books, cost \$10,000,000 and that it has been more than ten years in building.

In a city architecturally hideous from skyscrapers, tenements, apartment houses, elevated railroads, electric and other kinds of signs and made still more unattractive by the constant tearing down of old buildings and the erection of new and by the ripping up of streets to put in subways the New York Public Library building shines like an oasis in a desert or a temple in a wilderness. I think those who know about such things say its architecture is a combination of the Italian and French renaissance. Anyway, it is simple and strong and has a restful look. Any book can feel honored to be invited to such a house.

### Three Libraries Consolidated.

This magnificent library, which is just now opening to the public, is a consolidation of the old Astor and Lenox libraries and the Tilden foundation and already contains more than 1,000,000 volumes. Measured by the number of books alone there are two or three larger libraries in Europe and one—the Congressional library—in America. But measured by the size or capacity of the building it has no equal. In number of readers the New York Public Library also exceeds all others. It has forty branches scattered about the city, and from these millions of books circulate yearly.

No, gentle reader, Andrew Carnegie did not contribute anything to the erection of this greatest of libraries. It was built solely by public money. He did give some millions to New York city for library purposes, but this was used in smaller edifices. Carnegie is like the Emperor Titus, who said "I have lost a day" when he remembered that he had done no good action that day. Carnegie thinks he has lost a day when he has not founded a library.

The late Sir Caspar Purdon Clarke once said that New York had few satisfactory buildings, but rather pieces of scenery—structures with elaborate facades of stone and side and rear walls of plain brick. The library building is of the same material in all its parts and is beautiful from every side. The back of it has a columnar effect owing to the long and narrow slits that serve as windows for lighting the miles of bookshelves. These slits extend from the bottom to within one story of the top of the building. The reading room is on the top floor and is splendidly lighted by broad and high windows.

Despite its palatial appearance and fashionable location on Fifth avenue, the New York Public Library is open to the poorest in the city. As a matter of fact, most of those who patronize it come from the middle and lower classes. If your member of the smart set does any reading at all, which is doubtful, he does it in his own library or club. It is the student, the seeker after knowledge, the specialist looking for technical information, the newspaper or magazine writer, the college professor, the historian and the great masses seeking light that crowd the public libraries. The vast numbers of foreigners at the old Astor library were a revelation to the average American. Their presence made him more hopeful of the future of his country.

### Some Statistics.

Now for some more statistics. There is seemingly no way to avoid figures when talking about anything so monumental as the New York Public Library. The building contains 300 rooms, vaults and halls. It covers a floor space of about nine acres. The shelving of the entire stack room if placed end to end would extend from New York to Philadelphia. This stack room, where most of the books are stored, is 297 feet long by 78 feet wide and is made up of seven floors which are seven and a half feet apart. The reading room, which is just over the stack room, is 295 feet long, 77 feet wide and 50 feet high. One side of it overlooks Bryant park. In the center of this immense chamber is a double screen, behind which the attendants work. It is so placed as to break the great length and also to accord it. A narrow balcony runs around the room, giving a pleasing effect. Below and above the balcony is a wall of books extending as high as a man can reach. These are the reference books, accessible to all. They are to be read in the

library. The reading room is supplied with chairs and tables with numbered seats. It will accommodate 1,000 or more readers. In addition to this there are numerous smaller reading rooms devoted to special subjects. There is likewise a circulating library in connection, prepared to loan 25,000,000 volumes per year.

Despite the immense number of volumes the books are so classified, indexed and cross indexed that any given volume can be procured in a few minutes. It is the most up to date library on earth with all the latest appliances for labor saving, speed and convenience. Dust is kept from the volumes by electric fans. Fire is next to impossible, since there is but little wood-work. The bookshelves are of marble, so that the volumes themselves constitute practically all of the inflammable material.

### The Bookworm's Paradise.

This library is the bookworm's paradise. It is the house of wisdom, the home of science and art, the abiding place of the best thoughts uttered by man in 4,000 years. It is the temple of mind, the palace of the soul's expression, and should have all the majesty and beauty befitting its high estate.

Suppose we pay it a visit. Approaching the main entrance by climbing the broad flights of steps from Fifth avenue, we pass through high arched doors into the main rotunda, two stories in height, floors, walls and ceilings of

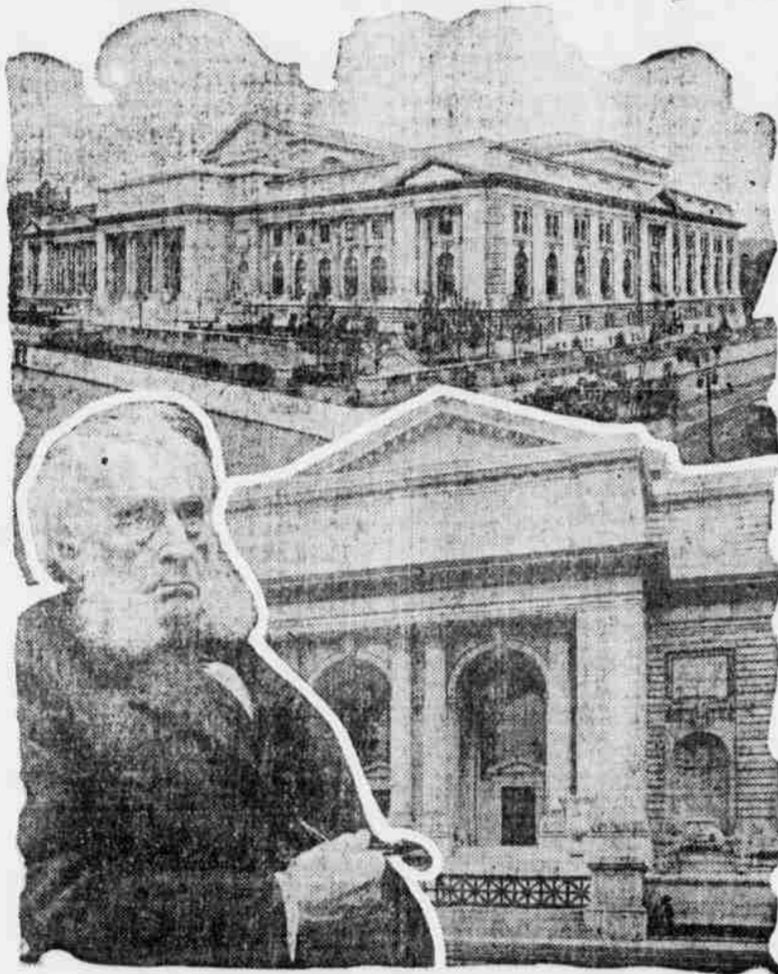
simple, dignified and yet rich. It has been much admired by the visitors to whom woodcarving is its best familiar. There are pediments and wreaths of fruits and flowers, busy frescoed ceilings, the facillate cupids and mermaids, roses, and groups over-lying octagons and other effects that I could not describe were I to try except to lump them all by exclaiming like a schoolgirl, "Exquisite—bee-you-tiful!" Best of all, the fruits represented are American fruits just as most of the woods used are American woods.

Throughout there is the same unity and harmony of design found in the architecture. There are, as yet, few mural paintings such as have made the Boston Public Library and the Congressional library famous, but these will come in time. Now that the building is actually completed and occupied the attention of its trustees can be concentrated on perfecting the interior decorations and enlarging the book collection. By the way, the chairman of the board is John Bigelow, now past ninety, whom some people regard as the grandest old man in the world.

The moving of the books from the Astor and Lenox libraries to the new building occupied weeks of time. On the Forty-second street side there was seen constantly a string of moving vans extending the entire width of the edifice. The moving men were only allowed to approach a certain line. There the library attendants took the boxes and disposed of their contents. It required a pull stronger than that of a Tammany alderman to get into the structure at any time up to the opening day. After that it was accessible to the humblest hobo. The highbrow foregathered there with the Russian Jew, the millionaire with the Socialist, the east sider with the scions of the oldest and proudest "Van" families of Dutch lineage. The only aristocracy of a library is that of brains.

### History of the Building.

The history of the building was one of litigation and vexatious delays. After two contests the architects chosen were Carrere & Hastings. Because their bid was not the lowest a



TWO VIEWS OF THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY AND ITS PRESIDENT, JOHN BIGELOW.

white marble, great marble monoliths supporting the ceilings, broad marble stairways on either side and noble archways above and below. On the entrance floor is the periodical room, where magazines and newspapers from all the world may be found. On the second floor above is the famous Stuart collection of paintings and rare works of art. To the west is the catalogue room, containing over 7,000,000 index cards alphabetically arranged. Directly off this is the great reading room, with the stack room divided into seven floors underneath. There are many other chambers of interest—the pure science room and the technical science room, for example. There is the reading room for the blind, the training school, the exhibition rooms. There is the patent room, the lending room and, best of all, the children's room. There are eight smaller rooms, or studies, where distinguished writers can "get up" their subjects. Then there are rooms devoted to American history, the Hebrew department, music room, photograph room, print room, containing a fine collection of old prints removed from the Lenox library; a reading room for economics, a map room, picture galleries and many more. One of the finest rooms in the building is that for the trustees. After the sixteen years of delays and troubles since they first voted to combine the three libraries the trustees deserve this sumptuous chamber and anything else good that may come their way.

### Woodcarving a Feature.

A notable feature of the library is the woodcarving. This was done by Germans and is in the best style of an old and now neglected art. The woods used for the most part are Circassian walnut, French walnut, Indiana white oak, quarter sawed, and other American oaks. The carving is

suit was brought, which was in the courts for a year. There was another suit over awarding the contract for the steel frames of the cases. Then much of the marble did not come up to specifications and had to be rejected. The result justified all the time and trouble, however, for it furnished the world its noblest library building, one that will stand for centuries and will grow more beautiful with time.

One pathetic incident attended the completion of the work. A few weeks ago John M. Carrere, the senior member of the firm of architects in charge, was fatally injured in an automobile accident. He died on the very eve of the dedication of the building that will perhaps be known as the greatest monument of his genius.

### By Way of Comparison.

The largest library on earth, measured by the number of books, is the British museum, and second to this is the Bibliotheque Nationale of Paris. The Congressional library at Washington and one in St. Petersburg are next in rank. The New York Public Library stands fifth, not counting its branches. In the matter of indexing it surpasses all those abroad, since the foreign libraries have not introduced the system of card indexing. The great library in Paris has no complete index, and the British museum's index is unwieldy, consisting of hundreds of volumes.

America now has at least three great libraries of which she may be proud—the Congressional library, already mentioned; the New York Public Library and the Boston Public Library. It is at the Boston library that Sargent's celebrated paintings of "The Prophets" are among the mural decorations. In the size and capacity of the building and perhaps in nobility of architecture the New York edifice exceeds them all.

**Two Men.**  
He has an easy, graceful air—  
He is not thinking of his pose.  
You'd know to see him standing there—  
His mind was not upon his clothes.  
His broad expanse of shirt front gleams,  
His tie is spotless, pure and white,  
But that to him a trifle seems—  
He wears his dress suit every night.  
The other man, who twists and turns  
And fidgets every little while,  
Whose face with conscious feeling burns,  
Who seems too agonized to smile,  
Who feels his coat is much too small,  
Whose high starched collar cuts his ear,  
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—Somerville Journal.

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A few suggested subjects at which to kick! The weather, of course. Tight fitting shoes. The high cost of living. The hobble skirt and the Harem trousers. High hats on week days. Suffragism, etc., etc., etc. The funnier the better.

Several people have asked us if the fifty-word letters containing kicks have to be signed. How else will we know to whom to award the prizes? Whether in the event of the letter winning a prize and being published, the name of the kicker would appear is another question. Undoubtedly the writer's wishes would be followed on that score. Our idea of the "Kick Contest" includes everything except direct and offensive personalities. Sit right down now and dash off fifty words about anything you don't like and want to register a kick against. It won't take you five minutes and you may win a prize. The more original the subject the better chance for a prize. One dollar for less than five minutes work is pretty good pay. Of course you can make your kick as short as you wish. A clever fifteen-word kick may win a prize over a full-length fifty-word one. The shorter the better.

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