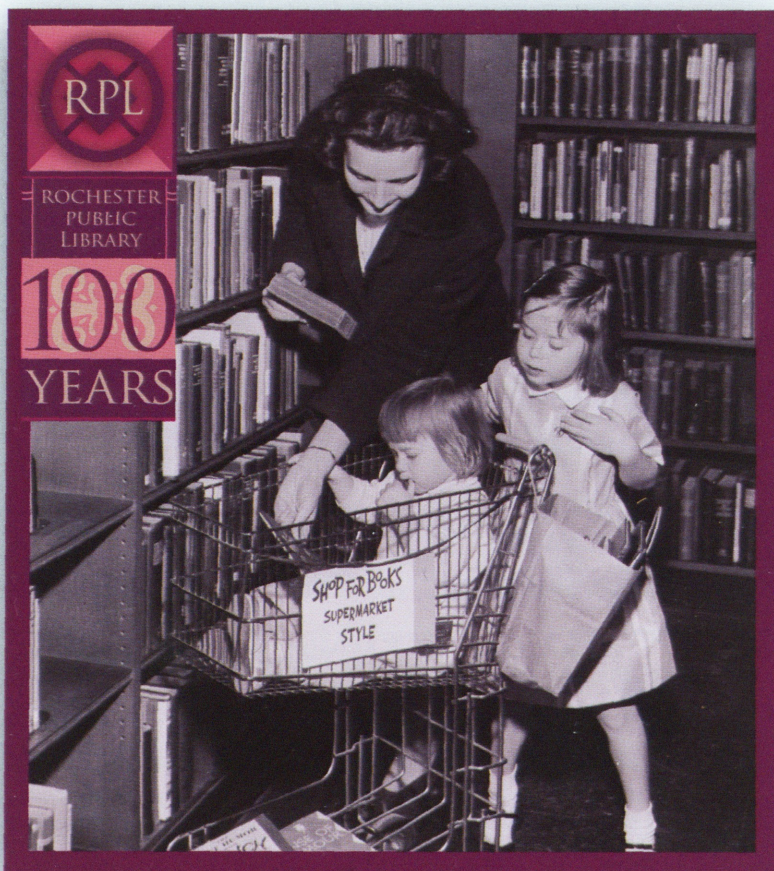


# ROCHESTER HISTORY

## From One Branch Sprouts Many: Celebrating 100 Years of the People's University

by Patricia Uttaro



*A commemorative issue celebrating the  
Rochester Public Library's 100th anniversary, 1911-2011*

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# ROCHESTER HISTORY

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Dear *Rochester History* Reader,

This issue of *Rochester History* marks an important milestone in the history of reading, literacy, and information services in the City of Rochester. For 100 years, the Rochester Public Library has played a fundamental role in the city's growth and development by providing residents free access to a variety of information, education, and entertainment options. Libraries may be best known for lending books and providing reference services—indeed that's where their origins are, but over the past 100 years, the Rochester Public Library has evolved to provide a wider array of services.

Today, library users can borrow not only traditional paper books but music, movies, toys, artwork, GPS units, downloadable eBooks, and eBook readers. But libraries are not only about the physical items patrons can take away. They are vital community centers where residents can use computers, access the Internet, search for jobs, listen to music, view movies and artwork, and participate in public discussions on everything from books to important community issues. It's hard to imagine what Rochester would be today without its libraries.

Christine L. Ridarsky, Editor



## About *Rochester History*

*Rochester History* is a scholarly journal that provides informative and entertaining articles about the history and culture of Rochester, Monroe County, and the Genesee Valley. In January 1939, Assistant City Historian Blake McKelvey published the first quarterly edition of *Rochester History*. Subjects researched and written by him and other scholars were edited, published, and distributed by McKelvey with the goal of expanding the knowledge of local history. Studying local history as a microcosm of U.S. history has brought insight and understanding to scholars and researchers around the globe.

Today *Rochester History* is published biannually (spring and fall) by the Central Library of Rochester and Monroe County. The journal is funded in part by the Frances Kenyon Publication Fund, established in memory of Ms. Kenyon's sister, Florence Taber Kenyon, and her friend Thelma Jeffries.

*Rochester History* invites submissions of manuscripts of 5,000-6,000 words that further its mission of increasing knowledge of and interest in local history and culture and of placing local issues into a national or global context. To receive a copy of the journal's complete submission guidelines, send a request to [HistoryJournal@libraryweb.org](mailto:HistoryJournal@libraryweb.org) or call (585) 428-8095.

Annual subscriptions to *Rochester History* are available for \$8.00. Send a letter and a check, payable to the "Rochester Public Library," to:

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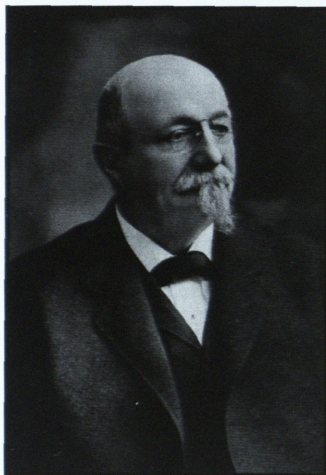
# From One Branch Sprouts Many:

## Celebrating 100 Years of the People's University

by Patricia Uttaro

### Beginnings of the Branch System

At the dawn of the 20th century, Rochester Mayor Hiram Edgerton described the



*Mayor Hiram H. Edgerton, father of the Rochester Public Library. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.*

Rochester Public Library as the one thing “for which posterity will hold us in grateful remembrance” as he made his case to City Council for establishing a public library system in the city.<sup>1</sup> Libraries had flourished in the Rochester area in one form or another since the early 1800s, yet a full-fledged public library system, free to all and promoting self-education, had not been established. Edgerton and others watched as nearby cities such as Syracuse and Buffalo built new public libraries, many of them financed by Andrew Carnegie, and decided that Rochester could wait no longer for its own library.<sup>2</sup>

Legislation enacted by Rochester’s governing body in June 1911 established a Board of Trustees to begin the process of developing a public library. Mayor Edgerton appointed five trustees: Rush Rhees, then

president of the University of Rochester; the Reverend Dr. Charles Albertson; Edward Miner; Daniel Murphy; and Charles Wiltzie.

At the same time, the site of the State Industrial School in the northwest part of the city was being cleared and eventually was named Exposition Park for the annual Rochester Exposition that took place at the site. Mayor Edgerton set aside Building No. 9 for the development of the first branch library, aptly titled Exposition Park Branch. Librarian William Yust was hired to direct the activities of the library in 1912, followed by Berniece Hodges, who served as his secretary; Grace McCartney, who supervised the Catalog and Acquisitions Department; and Adeline Zachert, who supervised services to children.<sup>3</sup>



*Charles H. Wiltzie, president of the Board of Trustees of the Rochester Public Library. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.*





*The Administration Department and Exposition Park Branch of the Rochester Public Library, the first branch library in the RPL system. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.*

Yust and his staff immediately set about creating a public library system of branches throughout the city. In 1912, Yust wrote, "The Rochester Public Library is planning a complete system consisting of a central library, branch libraries, sub-branches, deposit stations, and school collections."<sup>4</sup> By the end of 1912, the library was operating one branch (at Exposition Park) and 405

classroom libraries located in 33 public schools. Funding to create and build a central library had been designated in a bequest to the City of Rochester from the estate of Morton Rundel in 1911, but it was tied up in litigation for many years. Although a central library was opened in the old Kimball Tobacco factory (the current site of the Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial) in June 1926, it would be another decade before the Rundel Memorial Building opened its doors on South Avenue as the permanent home of the Rochester Central Library.

The development of branches was governed by a general rule of thumb that designated type of branch according to the size of the collection. A full-fledged branch had to contain more than 11,000 items in its collection, while a sub-branch held a collection of fewer than 2,000 items. Deposit stations contained fewer than 600 items, while classroom and playground libraries held fewer than 35 items.<sup>5</sup> Over the course of five years, from 1912 to 1917, six branch libraries were opened in the City of Rochester: Exposition Park in 1912; Genesee in 1913; Monroe in



*An exterior view of the City Hall Annex, the original Central Library of Rochester Public Library, located in the old Kimball Tobacco factory building at Exchange and Court Streets. This facility operated as a library from 1926 to 1936. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.*





*William Yust, first director of the Rochester Public Library. Yust's tenure lasted from 1912 to 1931. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.*

1914; Lincoln in 1915; the Business Branch, which was the precursor to the Central Library, in 1917; and the Goodman Branch in 1917. At the same time, sub-branches and deposit station collections were also opened in a variety of locations throughout the city. These sub-branches were the first truly “popular” libraries in Rochester, with the collections strictly circulating materials and no reference work performed.<sup>6</sup> The deposit station collections were deliberately placed in thickly populated areas, with many of them starting out in schools that offered evening classes for adults—the first indication that the public library would serve an essential role in public education and bringing to bear the idea of a People’s University, a place where access to self-education materials was free and available to all.

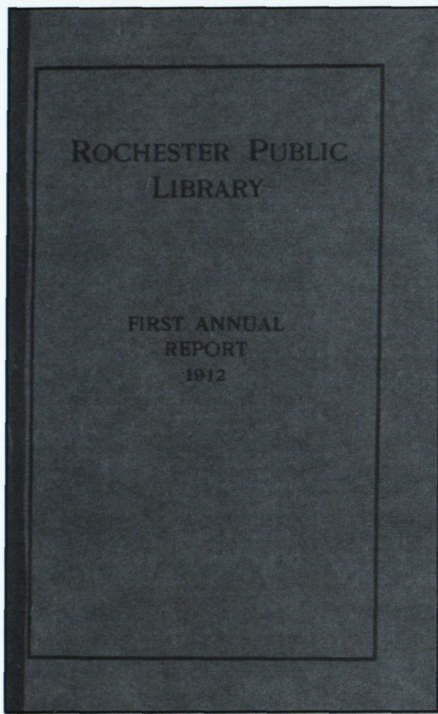
The first deposit station collections were placed in schools 26 and 18, and School 9, which served a large Jewish population where the “need for books was very great.”<sup>7</sup> Other deposit station collections were placed at the Polish Institute on Hudson Avenue, the B’nai Hebrew Zionist Library, the Industrial School on Exchange Boulevard, Adler Brothers Clothing Factory, the YWCA, the Monroe County Penitentiary, and the Housekeeping Center on Lewis Street. In total, by the end of 1913, 21 deposit station collections existed in public schools, factories, social settlements, supplementary libraries, playgrounds, and institutions.<sup>8</sup> This deep penetration into the city indicated the desire of Yust, his staff, and the Board of Trustees to take the library directly to the people.

By necessity, the library proved to be flexible in its early years, showing no resistance to closing an under-performing station or sub-branch and opening anew in another location where the desire for library service was greater.<sup>9</sup> Branches were open seven days a week and 365 days a year, including holidays such as Christmas and Easter, when usage was surprisingly heavy. The locations of



*The Rochester Public Library's deposit station at Rochester General Hospital, 1928. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.*





*The Rochester Public Library's first annual report for 1912.*

deposit station collections continued to spread, with 33 collections placed in firehouses during 1916 alone. Library use was robust in the first few years, with the Exposition Park Branch recording the loan of 63,042 items and the registration of 2,300 borrowers in its first three months of operation.<sup>10</sup> The Genesee Branch issued more than 1,000 library cards in its first two months of service and recorded an average attendance of 100 children at storytelling programs. This branch served a densely populated area in the southwest part of the city where the predominantly German and Italian residents were surprised to find that a library card was free for all people.<sup>11</sup> In 1913, a Pedagogical Library was created in the Municipal Building under the authority of the Board of Education. The collection consisted of copies of all textbooks used in the schools, plus samples of new books from publishers and new pedagogical books purchased by the

Rochester Public Library. This collection eventually was transferred to the Education Division of the Central Library when it opened in 1936.<sup>12</sup>



*The interior of the Genesee Branch of the Rochester Public Library on West Main Street in 1917. Library patrons are shown here reading at tables. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.*





*The Charlotte Branch of the Rochester Public Library, located at 40 Stutson Street, in 1920. The building was formerly a firehouse. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.*

The Rochester Public Library branch system continued its growth through the next decade, with the Charlotte Branch opening in 1919, Brighton and Arnett branches in 1923, Portland Branch in 1924, Lake Avenue Branch in 1926, South Avenue Branch in 1927, and Park Avenue Branch in 1928.

When Yust published the document *Seventeen Years of Service* in 1928, more than 19 million items had been

borrowed from the Rochester Public Library, clearly demonstrating residents' desire for books—both for pleasure and self-education.<sup>13</sup> In the late 1920s, the Board of Trustees anticipated the coming years of financial difficulties and began a campaign to encourage wealthier Rochester residents to donate amounts significant enough to endow a memorial branch. “What more beautiful, enduring, and useful memorial for any individual or family can there be in any community than a suitable branch library building to house the daily vitalizing and uplifting influence of books?”<sup>14</sup> This campaign would continue for many years, and would reap enough rewards to open two new branches over the course of three decades.

The Depression years presented a significant challenge to the library system as municipal funds were reduced and the Board was forced to close branches. However, the public outcry over the branch closures was such that the city found funds enough to reopen all but one branch by 1935. The Park Avenue Branch remained closed, primarily because in 1930 the Monroe Branch had moved to a new, larger building that the Board believed would supply enough materials for the residents formerly served by the Park Avenue Branch. The devotion of Rochester residents to both self-education and libraries continued to be acknowledged by the Library Board and the mayor and was evident in the opening of a new library, the Hudson Branch, in 1933, and the construction and opening of the Rundel Memorial Central Library building in 1936. The library had adopted the slogan made popular by Melvil Dewey: “Education for adults at home through life,” and used that motto to further the cause of library development in Rochester.<sup>15</sup>



## Organization and Staffing

The first library director, William Yust, was recruited from the Louisville Free Library and came to Rochester with the task of building a library system from scratch. He assembled a skilled staff that began the work of gathering, repairing, and organizing existing collections of books from around the city with which they stocked the Exposition Park Branch, school libraries, and deposit station collections. Once the first shelves were filled, the staff turned their attention to acquiring new materials and preparing them for use. Little standardization existed at the time; the Dewey Decimal System was still young, and library schools were scarce. Yust recognized the value and necessity of a trained staff and, in 1914, began developing a course of study for a library apprentice class based on a syllabus borrowed from the Wisconsin Library School.<sup>16</sup> The Rochester Public Library would continue its apprentice classes—later called the Library Cadet program—well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Staff of the Catalog Department were tasked with developing a borrowing process that would help the branch librarians track the use of materials. Early reports from this department show significant time spent recalling books, repairing damage, and replacing borrower slips.<sup>17</sup>

*A view of the fumigation cabinet at Exposition Park Branch of the Rochester Public Library. The cabinet was used to disinfect books with formaldehyde to prevent the spread of contagious diseases. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.*



### ROCHESTER PUBLIC LIBRARY

#### Apprentice class

1929

	Total hours
3 Cataloging	20
4 Reference	<del>20</del> 21
1 Book Selection	10
6 Seminar	<del>20</del> 11
8 Book ordering	2
5 Current events	8
	<hr/>
Hours of class instruction	80
Preparation, including visits to libraries and conferences	80
Practical work	160
	<hr/>
	320

*A page from  
Yust's Staff Training Class curriculum, 1929.*

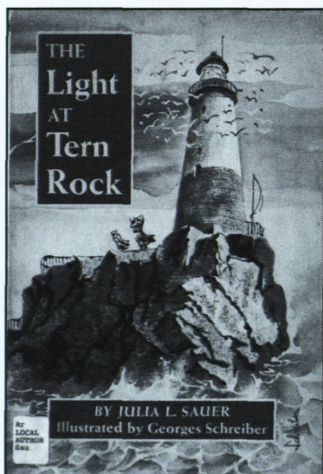
In addition to repairing such things as split spines and torn pages, the Catalog Department staff used a fumigation cabinet to disinfect books that had been exposed to contagious diseases. The books were placed in the cabinet, which was then filled with formaldehyde gas.<sup>18</sup> Once the books were deemed safe for use, they were redistributed to the various branches, sub-branches, and deposit stations.





*The children's room at the Lincoln Branch of the Rochester Public Library, 1920. Located on the first floor, the room is filled with children reading books. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.*

Selection of materials was performed by the Catalog Department staff, which developed methods of evaluating and selecting materials based on community need. Yust encouraged his staff to invite representatives of various social agencies to their staff meetings to better understand the self-education needs of their clients and reported that “the staff is now more thoroughly organized than ever before, more competent and more awake to its opportunities and responsibilities.”<sup>19</sup> In addition, trips were made to various institutions and industrial plants to help the librarians better understand the city and the people they served.



*The Light at Tern Rock, by Julia L. Sauer, who succeeded Adeline Zachert as head of Works with Children Services. The book was published in 1951.*

The Works with Children Services staff, led initially by Adeline B. Zachert, were tasked with establishing small classroom libraries in schools throughout the city. At the end of the first year of operation, there were more than 400 classroom libraries in Rochester, each stocked with 30-35 books. Zachert wrote in various annual reports that a significant portion of her time was spent selecting new materials for classroom libraries and branches and training branch staff to work with children, which included training them to tell stories to large groups. In 1914, Zachert hired Julia Sauer as her assistant. Sauer would succeed Zachert as the head of Works with Children Services and eventually went on to publish two popular children's books, *Fog Magic* and *House at Tern Rock*. Sauer, who died in 1983,



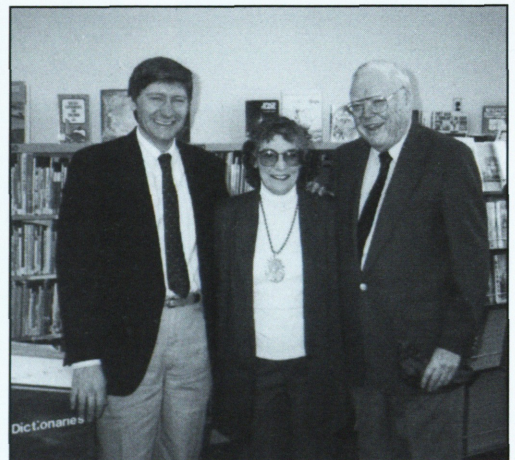


*John Adams Lowe, left, looks on as John H. Schweigert of the library's bindery stamps numbers on the backs of some new books before they go on the shelves, 1947.  
Photo courtesy of the Democrat and Chronicle Media Group.*

was widely recognized as an authority on children's literature and wrote extensively on the educational value of quality literature for children.<sup>20</sup>

William Yust retired from the Rochester Public Library in 1931 and was succeeded by John Adams Lowe, who was recruited from the Brooklyn Public Library. Lowe spent the first decade of his career at the Rochester Public Library moving forward the building of the Rundel Memorial Building and keeping branches open despite the financial difficulties experienced during the Great Depression. Lowe went on to lead the library through two decades of alternating growth and stagnation. He was succeeded in 1951 by Rutherford Rogers, who led the library

through the end of 1953, when he left to become the assistant director of the New York Public Library. Rogers was succeeded by Harold Hacker, who led the Rochester Public Library and Monroe County Library System into the 1970s. Hacker was well-known throughout the library world and was frequently sought after as a lecturer on such things as the importance of communication in the library and applying business organizational practices to the library's administrative structure.<sup>21</sup> Under Hacker's leadership, the Rochester Public Library became the largest member of the Pioneer Library System, which split into the Pioneer and Monroe County library systems in 1989.<sup>22</sup> Hacker was also one of the founders of the Rochester Regional Library Council, a library network that provides programs and services that enhance member library cooperation, service delivery, and resource sharing. In 1978, Linda Bretz succeeded Hacker as director of the Rochester Public Library, becoming the first woman to serve



*Former Rochester Public Library directors Richard Panz, Linda Bretz, and Harold Hacker.*



in the position. Following Bretz's retirement in 1989, Richard Panz was director from 1989 to 2003. Under Panz, the Central Library expanded to include the new Bausch and Lomb Public Library Building, located at the northeast corner of South Avenue and Broad Street. After years of lobbying for a larger Central Library, this airy, modern new building opened in 1997.

## **Collection Development & Library Use**

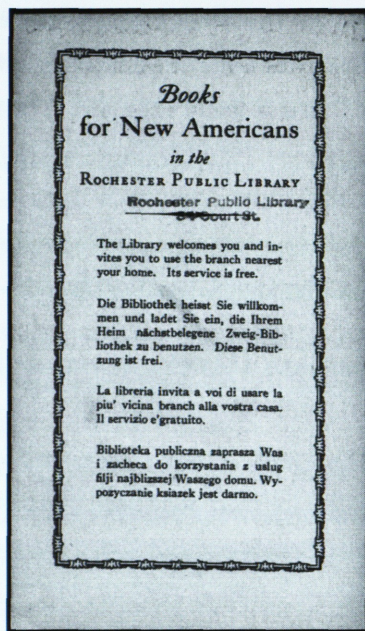
In 1911, there were far fewer book publishers than there are today. Consequently, the library turned to local retailers for most of its book purchases. Vendors such as Edwards, Scrantom's, and Sibley's were the primary sources of new books as early as 1915.<sup>23</sup> However, the head of Works with Children Services, Adeline Zachert, contacted publishers directly as early as 1913 and asked for samples of children's materials to help educate teachers on the value of quality children's literature.<sup>24</sup> This practice continued into the early years of the 21st century when the Children's Consultant position was eliminated due to budget cuts. The library staff used much trial and error in developing a process for collecting and organizing materials. In 1914, local librarians asked the Library of Congress to provide guidance on the development of a classification system that evolved into the card catalog.<sup>25</sup> The card catalog, which classified each item in the library so that it was searchable by title, author, or subject, was used for decades as the key to finding materials in the library; it was completely replaced by a computer database catalog in 1993. The original card catalog cabinets in the Rundel Memorial Building were converted into display cases when they were decommissioned in the late 1980s and are used today to house exhibits throughout the Central Library.

From the beginning, Rochester Public Library staff was committed to developing collections of materials that would appeal to a wide variety of city residents. Emphasis was placed on developing collections of books that would be read and used continuously with the "idea being not so much a well-rounded library as a collection of live books."<sup>26</sup> Librarians regularly solicited suggestions from library users but also read prodigiously. Yust reported in 1929 that "every work of fiction is read and a report written and filed for reference before it is put into circulation."<sup>27</sup> Up until the last decade of the 20th century, librarians from Rochester and Monroe County regularly read and wrote reviews for most new fiction and non-fiction, with



*Construction on the new Bausch & Lomb building of the Rochester Public Library, c. 1996. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.*





*Two book lists, "Children's Books for Christmas Presents" and "Books for New Americans," that were produced by the library.*

those reviews kept on file at the Central Library.<sup>28</sup> Early librarians felt a responsibility to provide reading guidance to their users, and their efforts were appreciated enormously. Yust and his staff produced the first "Christmas Gift List" in 1912, which collected the best of the books published in the previous year. This list was published annually for nearly 100 years, although in later years it was targeted towards both children and families. The development of recommended reading lists continued through the 1920s and 1930s, with such popular lists as "Books for New Americans," which was distributed to new citizens at the suppers given quarterly by the Rochester Chamber of Commerce for those people receiving citizenship papers.<sup>29</sup> Library staff also produced reading lists such as "Light's Golden Jubilee" to promote Thomas Edison's discovery, "Adventures in Reading," "Books for Home Builders," and "Important Books on Religion, 1928-1929."<sup>30</sup>

In the mid-1920s, the library began to take its place next to schools as a recognized educational institution. Librarians became known as "real missionaries of the book," and the library became part of the city system of popular education.<sup>31</sup> Readers' advisory service took a serious turn as librarians began assisting more and more adults with furthering their education. Yust wrote in his annual report for 1928 that a "large increase of serious reading and systematic study" had necessitated the formalization of a readers' advisory service to "help in planning courses for those who wish to read in accordance with a definite plan."<sup>32</sup> Self-education at home



became a mission of the library, with Yust and the Library Board asserting that “it is the business of the public library to...make possible education for adults at home through life. That is what makes our Public Library in a very real sense the People’s University.”<sup>33</sup> By the end of 1929, Yust and his staff were operating under the directive of providing the best reading for the largest number at the least cost.<sup>34</sup> The most borrowed items after 17 years of service included fiction, literature, geography, and travel.<sup>35</sup> Library use increased every year as more residents discovered the wonders of the library. Yust wrote that “people are having the exhilarating experience of discovering how many things the library can do for them, the wide range of its activities, its keen interest in their problems, the lengths to which it will go to accommodate, and the practical value of its service.”<sup>36</sup>

As the library grew to include more branches, sub-branches, and deposit station collections, a diverse group of people regularly used its resources. By the early 1920s, the library was buying materials in English, Polish, Italian, German, and Yiddish in order to accommodate the city’s growing immigrant population. A 1928 survey also noted great variation in patrons’ occupations, listing the following groups as regular library users: farmers, gardeners, nurserymen, teachers, students, ministers, authors, reporters, social workers, business executives, engineers, bankers, and municipal authorities.<sup>37</sup>

Access to the materials available at the public library has traditionally been tied to the library card. When the Rochester Public Library first formed, any resident of the City of Rochester could obtain a library card as long as he or she was able to provide personal references from two people whose names appeared in either the current city directory or the telephone book.<sup>38</sup> After obtaining a library card, a person could borrow at will. The branches placed various limits on the number of items that could be borrowed at one time, usually based on the size of the collection. Most fiction could be borrowed freely, while some non-fiction was limited to one or two volumes at a time. Children were not permitted in the adult sections of the libraries until they completed eighth grade, or until the librarian thought they were mature enough to read adult materials. However, as library use increased, managers were faced with an increasing number of materials that were not being returned to the libraries.

Overdue materials and losses were first mentioned in Yust’s 1913 annual report. At that time, the deposit station collection on Front Street was closed due to an “unusually large loss of books.”<sup>39</sup> Overdue fines started at two cents per item per day, an anachronism that was revisited in June 2011 as the Rochester Public Library rolled back fines to 1912 amounts in celebration of the library’s centennial. It was not unusual for a branch librarian to go knocking on the door of a delinquent patron to collect a book that had been kept too long.<sup>40</sup> The library started using the postal system for the first time to notify delinquent borrowers in 1916. At that time, 547 children





*Jerry Fromm, Jack Brown, and another Xerox executive watch as Rochester Public Library Director Harold Hacker deposits a dime in the first coin-operated Xerox 914 copier in the United States in 1966. The setting is the Central Library. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.*

with outstanding fines were sent postcards asking them to pay their fines. Eighty-one children dutifully paid their fines and signed an agreement that read, "I hereby renew my promise to return library books on time according to the rules of the library."<sup>41</sup> Each branch library kept a list of delinquent borrowers, but due to the length of those lists in 1926, Yust recommended to the Library Board that the newly formed Central Library compile a master list of delinquent borrowers and become the sole issuer of library cards.<sup>42</sup> In 2011, library cards are issued at all branches, with staff having access to a patron database of more than 500,000 library card holders throughout Monroe County. The Circulation Supervisor at the Central Library is responsible for managing the delinquent borrower accounts for the Rochester Public Library, although in 2004 the library began using a third-party collection agency to collect on large delinquent accounts.

Library staff understood the need for diversity of media in collections as early as 1914, when the Exposition Park Branch began circulating player piano rolls. The rolls were donated to the library by Griffin & Bailey, a local business that sold pianos and player pianos, and circulated 920 times in the first month they were available.<sup>43</sup> This kind of innovative thinking has been a constant thread running through the history of the Rochester Public Library. The Central Library was one of the first locations in the country to offer access to a coin-operated copier machine in the 1960s and one of the first libraries in New York State to loan 16mm films. It provided borrowers with vinyl record albums and 8-track and cassette tapes in the 1970s; loaned out videos and recorded books in the 1970s and 1980s; made DVDs and compact discs available in the 1990s; and, most recently, provided GPS units for checkout beginning in 2010. In 2007, the Rochester Public Library led the way in Monroe County and began purchasing



digital downloadable audiobooks and, in 2010, downloadable eBooks. The library staff regularly spots trends and responds to them in an effort to remain current and relevant to the user.

The People's University concept—the idea that anyone can better him or herself with the materials the library has to offer—has been woven throughout the library's 100 years of service to the people of Rochester. It continues today, as library branches have evolved into community centers where city residents go to take GED and ESOL classes or learn how to use a computer. The public library of 2011 offers a bridge in the growing “digital divide” of the 21st century between the people who can afford technology and those who do not have the capacity to buy such things as computers or Internet access. The library provides access to a large network of computers complete with Internet access and containing software programs that facilitate such things as writing school assignments, creating resumes, and developing presentations.

## Services to Children

Early discussions about the formation of the Rochester Public Library invariably addressed how to best provide services to children. The establishment of classroom libraries was



*Adeline Zachert, librarian of Rochester Public Library, c. 1900-1920. Zachert was the first head of Works with Children Services. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.*

part of the first phase of building the library branch system. By the end of 1912, the Rochester Public Library operated 405 classroom libraries in schools throughout the city. Additionally, each branch and sub-branch contained collections of books for children. By the end of 1914, more than half of the items borrowed from the Rochester Public Library were children's books.<sup>44</sup>

Head of Works with Children Services Adeline Zachert set about building children's collections that responded to needs expressed in various parts of the city. In her *Report to the Librarian on Playground Libraries* for 1912, Zachert wrote for the first time about building a collection of books specifically written to appeal to girls, and recommended that folklore and fairy tales written in Italian would be most useful.<sup>45</sup> At the same time,

the library organized the Boys Literary and Debating Club in the branches for boys in seventh and eighth grades.<sup>46</sup> These clubs featured drills in parliamentary law along with debates on literary topics. Meeting on Wednesday evenings, the chief advantage of these clubs was “the



January 20, 1916

Mr. Herbert S. Weet, Supt. Rochester Public Schools  
Rochester, N. Y.

My dear Mr. Weet:

This morning I examined the grade libraries  
of the Charlotte Union School.

I find that each of the eight grades from the  
first through the eighth is equipped with a library aver-  
aging forty books.

With few exceptions these are not books which  
would make live, interesting grade libraries, being made  
up largely of informational books which no doubt correlate  
with the course of study but which do not stimulate to  
reading for pleasure or profit and do not cultivate the  
reading habit.

I find that we can practically equip all the grades  
from the third through the eighth from the "Reserve Col-  
lection." The reserve collection is made up of such titles  
as were left over after each school had received one copy  
of any one title. This is made possible because there are  
no A and B divisions of the grades in the Charlotte School  
and we can place an A and a B title in the same grade.

I recommend that these books be sent to the Char-  
lotte School as a nucleus collection.

I further recommend that the books now in the grades

-2-

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there be assembled, sorted and apportioned as needs  
require.

Respectfully submitted

*Adeline B. Zachert*  
Supt. of Library Extension

BEH

*Letter to the superintendent of Rochester's city schools from Adeline Zachert, 1916.*



stimulating of directed reading and the fostering of a spirit of cooperation between the librarians and the members in making their branch the social center for boys of the neighborhood.”<sup>47</sup> One hundred years later, the Rochester Public Library offers access to a similar “club” for both boys and girls in the branch neighborhoods. The Safe to be Smart program, begun in 2001 and also based on parliamentary law, welcomes young men and women age 13 and older to seven locations throughout the city. This after-school program provides personal counseling, homework and school assistance, life skills training, and literacy activities, all based on the premise that the library is a place where it is “safe” to be “smart.”

In a 1916 letter to the Superintendent of Rochester’s city schools, Zachert recommended that more interesting books be sent to the Charlotte Union School because the books there “do not stimulate to reading for pleasure or profit and do not cultivate the reading habit.”<sup>48</sup> This further defines the intended role of the library to provide popular reading and solidifies Zachert’s position on the types of reading material most beneficial to children. Her relationship with the Rochester city schools can be traced back to 1912, when she took on the responsibility of organizing a mixture of schoolbook collections and established classroom libraries under the purview of the Rochester Public Library. “Every teacher in every grade from the third grade up was supplied with a collection of books in good condition.”<sup>49</sup> Those classroom libraries held a total of 17,569 books and realized a combined circulation of 37,384 during October and November 1912.<sup>50</sup> During 1912, children in more than 400 classrooms had the opportunity to read 50 different books supplied by the Rochester Public Library.<sup>51</sup>

Throughout 1913, Zachert and her staff spent a great deal of time working with children and teachers in sixth- through eighth-grade classrooms to instruct them in the use of the classroom library books versus the “underground library,” presumably of lesser quality literature.<sup>52</sup> The importance of the public library and of reading was emphasized in a report from the United States Committee on Education, which reported that “of every 100 pupils in the fifth grade, only seven enter college and only two graduate. Hope and help, if any, for the other 93 or 98 boys and girls must come through some form of self-education, of which the public library is the chief apostle and agent.”<sup>53</sup>

In 1914, Zachert and the Works with Children Services staff also took on the task of organizing and rejuvenating a number of playground libraries that had operated in the city under the direction of the Parks Department. The playground libraries supervised by Zachert had a minimum of 50 unique titles in their collections; all were popular, quality books for children. These collections were recalled at the end of each summer, when librarians and volunteers would review the books, discard those that were worn, damaged, or of little interest, and prepare a new collection for the next year.<sup>54</sup> The playground libraries offered a unique opportunity to reach





*Children line up at a playground library waiting to check out library books while some boys select books from a trunk, c. 1922-1930. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.*

the children of foreign parents, who often were unaccustomed to the concept of a free public library.<sup>55</sup> In 1929, playground libraries were open year-round in Brown Square, Bronson Avenue, Hartford Street, and schools 7 and 14 and Washington Jr. High. During the summer, five sites were added, providing 25 locations throughout the city, including at two orphan asylums.

The Rochester Public Library's unique approach to taking library services to children wherever they happen to be is evident today in the unique partnership between the library and The Strong museum.<sup>56</sup> Exhibits throughout The Strong are complemented with collections of carefully chosen children's books that enhance and integrate literacy with the visitor's experience. A sub-branch of the library is located within the museum, allowing museum visitors to obtain and use library cards to borrow books when they visit the museum. Books available at The Strong are selected by staff in the Central Library's Children's Center.

Rochester's children's librarians have long recognized the importance of play in the cognitive development of children, and in 2000, the Rochester Public Library collaborated with the Rochester Toy Library to open a Toy Resource Center (TRC) at the Lincoln Branch Library.<sup>57</sup> The TRC allows patrons to borrow toys in the same way they borrow books—free of charge with a Monroe County library card. With a collection of more than 5,000 toys, it is one of the largest toy libraries in the world. As one child said, with his hands over his mouth, when he entered the door on a field trip, "I dreamed of this place last night! It's better than my dream—it's



real!” In addition to delighting children, the TRC serves an important educational purpose. The city’s Northeast quadrant, where the Lincoln Branch is located, is one of the community’s most economically distressed areas, and ensuring its youngest residents’ healthy childhood development and success in school has been a longstanding challenge. Access to high-quality toys such as those in the TRC’s collection is essential to children’s cognitive, creative, social, emotional, perceptual, and physical development. Beyond its collection of toys to borrow, the TRC provides an inviting place to play in a safe, supportive space. With its hands-on environment, the TRC inspires positive interaction between children and adults and builds early connections to the library’s vast world of resources.<sup>58</sup>

## The 21st Century and Beyond

Throughout its 100-year history, the Rochester Public Library has operated on the basic principle of providing the best reading for the largest number at the least cost. Over the years, the emphasis has shifted away from books alone to allow the library to provide access to such things as films, music, computers, toys, and the Internet. In the early decades of the 21st century, that phrase could be better turned to say “the best information for the largest number at the least cost.” The principle hasn’t changed, but the medium has gotten broader. The Rochester Public Library of 2011 is a vibrant network of places, consisting of 10 branches, one sub-branch (at The Strong), and one Central Library. More than 1 million people visit the libraries every year, with more than 2 million items borrowed. Librarians continue to select books, but in digital form as well as print. Library users can access the library catalog and digital resources online 24 hours



*Two children play with the toys in the Toy Resource Center, located in the Lincoln Branch of the Rochester Public Library.*



a day, seven days a week. Librarians continue to instruct community members on how to use various resources, but they also provide assistance in job searching, learning how to use computers, and helping to navigate the ever-expanding world of information.

Today, the Rochester Public Library continues the rich tradition of the People's University concept first described in the 1920s. Public libraries are the equalizers in a world dominated by those who have access to the best information. As the library of 1911 was formed to help provide maximum opportunity for the self-education and print literacy of its users, so the library of 2011 facilitates self-education through information literacy and access to technology. Many library users report that the library is their only access to computers and the Internet—two commodities required for success in the 21st century. Despite the changes in how information is delivered, the Rochester Public Library's mission in 2011 is very similar to what was on the minds of the library founders in 1911. While those early library leaders advocated the wide dissemination of books to a populace that consisted of businessmen, housewives, children, immigrants, and farmers, the leaders of 2011 are tasked with providing free access to print and digital information. The library continues to serve a large population of new immigrants and refugees who come to the United States, often with few possessions and fewer language and learning skills. These newcomers turn to the public library to learn English and gain the skills they need to prosper in this country. In the early years, the Rochester Public Library largely served immigrants from Poland, Italy, and Germany; in the first decades of the 21st century, the newcomers are more likely to be from Burma, Tibet, and Africa. The countries of origin have changed, yet the needs have remained the same: education and information. The Rochester Public Library continues its vital role as the People's University, 100 years after the first book was borrowed.



## End Notes

1. William Yust, *Annual Report to the Board of Trustees for the Year 1912* (New York: Rochester Public Library, 1912), 2.
2. Blake McKelvey, "The Semi-Centennial of the Rochester Public Library," *Rochester History* 23, no. 4 (October 1961), 2.
3. William Yust, *Annual Report to the Board of Trustees for the Year Ending December 31, 1916* (New York: Rochester Public Library, 1916), 254.
4. Yust, *Annual Report to the Board of Trustees for the Year 1912*, 7.
5. William Yust, *Annual Report Statistics for 1916* (New York: Rochester Public Library, 1916), 47.
6. William Yust, *Annual Report to New York State* (New York: Rochester Public Library, 1914), 142.
7. Adeline Zachert, *Report to the Librarian, October 10, 1912* (New York: Rochester Public Library, 1912), 15.
8. Adeline Zachert, *Annual Report to the Librarian*, 1913 (New York: Rochester Public Library, 1913), 33.
9. William Yust, *Annual Report to the Board of Trustees for the Year 1914* (New York: Rochester Public Library, 1914), 120-135.
10. Yust, *Annual Report to the Board of Trustees for the Year 1912*, 6.
11. Marion D. Mosher, *Report of the Genesee Branch, October-December 1913* (New York: Rochester Public Library, 1913), 43.
12. Zachert, *Annual Report to the Librarian*, 1913, 33.
13. *Seventeen Years of Service of the Rochester Public Library, 1912-1928* (New York: Rochester Public Library, 1929), 15.
14. *Ibid.*, 17.
15. Rochester Public Library, *Annual Report for the Year Ending December 31, 1930* (New York: Rochester, 1930), 102.
16. Yust, *Annual Report to the Board of Trustees for the Year 1914*, 91.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Seventeen Years of Service of the Rochester Public Library, 1912-1928*, 59.
19. Rochester Public Library, *Annual Report for the Year Ending December 31, 1930*, 106.
20. Julie Cummins, "Julia Sauer," in *Pioneers and Leaders in Library Services to Youth: A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Marilyn L. Miller (Westport, Connecticut: Libraries Unlimited, 2003), 214.
21. Harold Hacker, Rochester Public Library Director's Office File, 1954-1968.
22. Library systems were created in the mid-20th century in New York State to facilitate resource sharing among libraries in a defined geographical area. Today, the Monroe County Library System provides services to 34 libraries in the county. Those services include shipping and



- delivery of materials from library to library, and computer technology services such as the online catalog and Internet access.
23. William Yust, *Annual Report to the Board of Trustees for the Year 1915* (New York: Rochester Public Library, 1915), 145.
  24. Zachert, *Annual Report to the Librarian*, 1913, 33.
  25. Yust, *Annual Report to the Board of Trustees for the Year 1914*, 89.
  26. Ibid., 90.
  27. *Seventeen Years of Service of the Rochester Public Library, 1912-1928*, 44.
  28. This practice was halted in the late 20th century when staffing was reduced due to ever-increasing budget constraints; the existing review files were discarded in 2001.
  29. Rochester Public Library, *Summary of the 18th Annual Report: Work of the Year 1929* (New York: Rochester Public Library, 1929), 60.
  30. William Yust, *Librarian's Report*, November 14, 1929.
  31. *Seventeen Years of Service of the Rochester Public Library, 1912-1928*, 10.
  32. Rochester Public Library, *High Spots in the Work of 1928*, 83.
  33. *Seventeen Years of Service of the Rochester Public Library, 1912-1928*, 10.
  34. Ibid., 43.
  35. Ibid., 53.
  36. Rochester Public Library, *Summary of the 18th Annual Report: Work of the Year 1929*, 64.
  37. *Seventeen Years of Service of the Rochester Public Library, 1912-1928*, 56.
  38. Ibid., 50.
  39. Zachert, *Annual Report to the Librarian*, 1913, 35.
  40. Julia Sauer, letter to Mr. Robert A. Bernhard, Superintendent of Playgrounds, June 26, 1916, in *Report to the Playground Superintendent*, 160-164.
  41. Rochester Public Library, *Report for the Year Ending December 31, 1916* (New York: Rochester, 1916), 283.
  42. *Seventeen Years of Service of the Rochester Public Library, 1912-1928*, 51.
  43. Yust, *Annual Report to the Board of Trustees for the Year 1914*, 89.
  44. Ibid., 78.
  45. Adeline Zachert, *Report to the Librarian on Playground Libraries, October 5, 1912* (New York: Rochester Public Library, 1912), 26.
  46. Zachert, *Report to the Librarian, October 10, 1912*, 15.
  47. Zachert, *Annual Report to the Librarian*, 1913, 32.
  48. Adeline Zachert, letter to Mr. Herbert S. Weet, Superintendent of Rochester Public Schools, January 20, 1916.
  49. Adeline Zachert, *Report to the Librarian, December 27, 1912* (New York: Rochester Public Library, 1912), 9.
  50. Ibid., 9.
  51. Adeline Zachert, *Report to H.S. Weet, Superintendent of Schools, October 12, 1912* (New



York: Rochester Public Library, 1912), 16.

52. Zachert, *Annual Report to the Librarian*, 1913, 32.

53. *Seventeen Years of Service of the Rochester Public Library, 1912-1928*, 10.

54. Zachert, *Report to the Librarian, October 10, 1912*, 14-15.

55. *Seventeen Years of Service of the Rochester Public Library, 1912-1928*, 62.

56. The Strong includes the National Museum of Play, the International Center for the History of Electronic Games, the National Toy Hall of Fame, the Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play, and the American Journal of Play.

57. The Rochester Toy Library was developed by the Junior League of Rochester (1985-1995) and as a program of the Society for Protection and Care of Children (1995-1999).

58. Toy Resource Center users represent over 50 zip codes in Monroe County and beyond, and more than 200,000 children, parents, and caregivers have benefited from the services. Funding for the TRC has largely come from grants, contracts for service, and private donations. Collaborative partnerships with multiple community organizations, such as Rochester's Childfirst Network, also has enabled the TRC to offer a wide variety of educational programs for children and adults.





### **About the Author**

Patricia Uttaro has been the Director of the Rochester Public Library and Monroe County Library System since 2009; she has worked in Monroe County libraries since 1978. Her current research interest focuses on urban and digital literacy.

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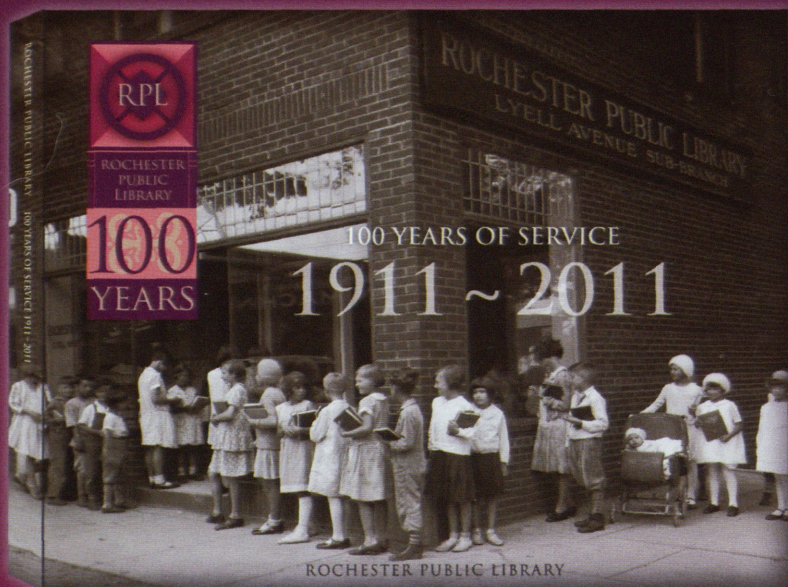
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*Two men relax on a park bench in Riverfront Park between Broad and Court streets looking east across the Genesee River at the back of the Rochester Public Library's Rundel Memorial Building, 1990.  
From the City Hall Photo Lab Contemporary Collection.*





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