

*Wm. B. F. North*  
*B. Pine*

ADDRESS

OF THE

TRUSTEES

OF THE

NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY,

TO

THE MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY,

RELATIVE TO THE

MANAGEMENT AND PRESENT CONDITION

OF

THAT INSTITUTION.

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1833.

**TRUSTEES**  
OF THE  
NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY.

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EDWARD W. LAIGHT,  
JOHN I. MORGAN,  
DAVID S. JONES,  
J. AUGUSTINE SMITH,  
GULIAN C. VERPLANCK,  
EZRA WEEKS,  
J. KEARNEY RODGERS,  
JOHN LE CONTE,  
EVERT A. BANCKER,  
JAMES RENWICK,  
CHARLES BALDWIN,  
JAMES CAMPBELL.

## ADDRESS.

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A Pamphlet has appeared, in which the present Trustees of the New York Society Library are denounced. It is alleged against them and their predecessors, and it is manifestly the great argument of the book, that, although the Library has existed eighty years, it has not at the present day, in this flourishing city, more than 18,000 volumes. This the persons making the attack profess to think is conclusive evidence of the mismanagement of the Library, and of the propriety of a change of trustees.

It is known that the persons most active in this movement have very recently become members of the Library; and had they shown as much solicitude to have made themselves acquainted with the history and the means of the Library, from its foundation, as they have to find out the names of the members, they would hardly have ventured to take the ground they have thus assumed.

Under the circumstances, the Trustees think it due to themselves, to their predecessors, and to the members, to give a short sketch of the history of the institution. It is true that the Library has existed about eighty years; but it was entirely broken up by the revolution, its members scattered, and its books lost. In the year 1789, an act of the legislature confirmed the charter, and the Library was again brought into existence, by the exertions of some of its earliest trustees. The price of shares under the charter was \$12.50, and the annual payment on each share \$1.25. On the re-establishment of the Library in 1789, the price of shares was raised to \$15, but the annual pay-

ment continued the same. With these slender means did the trustees of that day undertake to restore a Library, which now, by the confession of those who attack the present trustees, is the only public institution in this populous city worthy of the name of Library. The price of the shares—\$15—was taken in books from all those who wished so to pay; and to this circumstance, which induced the purchase of shares, is the Library indebted for many of its most rare and valuable books. The Corporation of the city gave the institution the use of a room in the old City Hall, and the annual payments of \$1.25 on each share enabled the trustees to pay a librarian. The Trustees, however, soon found it impossible to keep the Library, such as it was, open for the use of the members, without increased means, and they obtained an act of the legislature raising the annual payments to \$2.50. Even with this aid the struggles of the institution continued, and it was attempted to relieve them by raising the price of shares to \$25, and afterwards to \$40; but it was found that this expedient did not answer: for at the low prices some new shares were bought, but at the high prices none. Another application was made to the legislature in 1819, and a law obtained raising the annual payments on shares to \$4, and the price of shares was reduced. In the mean time, the accommodation afforded to the Library by the Corporation having been found altogether inadequate, a lot of ground was taken on lease, and afterwards purchased, and the present Library building erected; and to defray the expense of it, all the disposable means of the Library for several years were applied, and a debt of 5250 dollars contracted. In May, 1826, the present Library Committee was first appointed, and has been annually continued. It does not appear that any importations of books had been made previous to their appointment. Since that time, large importations have been made, and most of the books published in our own country of any value have been pur-

chased. In the year 1828, a change was made in the salary of the Librarian. His salary had been 500 dollars, and the rents of those parts of the Library building not appropriated for books. His whole salary was then fixed at 600 dollars, and the rents of the offices under the Library constituted a fund for the payment of the debt of 5250 dollars, contracted for the Library building and lot. By this means that debt has been reduced to about 2700 dollars, and by a prompt collection of the annual dues of the Library, the Society has been enabled to discharge all its other debts, including large sums for the opening of streets. The great increase of the books of the Library since the year 1826, and the payments of debts, and great economy in the ordinary expenses of the Library, have kept up the price of shares in the market, so that many new shares have been purchased of the Library. The number of books is twenty-one thousand, many of them rare, and of great value.

Having thus given a concise history of the re-establishment of the Library after the revolutionary war, and detailed the efforts of its trustees, the difficulties they surmounted, and their untiring industry through so many years, by which they have sustained the institution of which they have had the charge, and have given it a costly building and a valuable lot of ground, and formed much the greatest and most valuable Library in the state, it is natural to enquire, by what means have these things been accomplished? Has the great state in which it is situated presented it with some great endowment? Has the flourishing city to which it belongs applied any of the city funds to its use, or even given it a home?—or have wealthy individuals made liberal donations to it during their lives, or left it rich legacies by their wills? *Not one of these things has happened.* The institution has been left to itself, and to itself alone, and all that has been done, has been done by the books, and money received as the price of shares, and the annual payments, as detailed:—And now, whenso

much has been done, by the good management of such small means, when the Library has attained a state of prosperity that never could have been expected, now it is that its trustees are denounced, and that the members are told that the welfare of the Society requires different men to manage it : and by whom are they told this? By persons who have been members of it only a few months, who are desirous of obtaining the management of an institution created, sustained, and made flourishing by the labors of others, who would probably lavish an income which has been increased and economized by every means within the power of those who formerly had and now have the charge of it, and who possibly, instead of paying the debts of the institution, as is now done, would contract new ones, under which an institution which ought to be dear to the city for its antiquity, and for the liberality with which it has always opened its doors to its fellow citizens, and to strangers, would probably sink.

The main allegation of the pamphlet, grounded on the small number of books collected in 80 years, having been thus answered, the other charges less important, but not more reasonable, will be also noticed.—It is said that the “whole concern is a close borough, that the members have no voice in the matter, and that the Trustees nominate themselves and their friends from year to year.” If this be true, it would be vain to attempt to correct the evils of which the pamphlet complains, except by an application to the legislature to give the elective franchise to every member.—Although by the writers of the pamphlet it is attempted to excite a prejudice against the present Trustees, as if a denial of that right had been attempted by them, or the right had never been used by the members, yet it is by the exercise of this very right, a right constantly and freely used at every election, that those who make this movement hope to succeed.

It is asserted in the pamphlet that the Trustees have exhibited so much jealousy of the members to whom they owe their existence, that, until the last year, they never condescended to furnish a statement of the actual condition of the Library. Is it possible that the writer of the pamphlet, and those connected with him, could be so ignorant of the affairs of the Library? Even allowing for their recent membership, it seems unaccountable. The truth is that an annual report of the condition of the Library, its receipts and expenditures, is required by the By-Laws to be made, and is made accordingly, and these reports are remarkable for the full and detailed information they give of the Library. They are always left at the Library, and the Librarian has directions to show them to any member that wishes it; and of late, in order to attract the attention of the members to the affairs of the institution, summaries of the reports have been put up in the Library room.

The pamphlet states that certain queries were addressed to the Trustees, the first and most important of which was, "is there any annual report of the state of the finances?" The answer stated in the pamphlet to have been given by a member of the Library Committee, is, "There is no annual report." The member of the Library Committee who answered this and the other queries, so authoritatively put, says that the answer he intended to give was, there is *an* annual report made of the finances, and this he says is manifest from the context of the answer. Should it be charitably concluded that the author of the pamphlet and his associates mistook the word "an" for the word "no," in the written answer of the member of the Library Committee, it would still be difficult to excuse the entire unacquaintance with the settled practice of the Library Committee, and the requisitions of the Trustees and the By-Laws which such mistake would involve, and that this utter ignorance should exist in their setting themselves up for reformers, and avowing their intention of changing the present Trustees

for neglect of their duties, and particularly for the very important one of making no reports of the state of the Library for the information of the members, is certainly not calculated to persuade the members of the institution that they have any peculiar fitness for the charge they are so desirous of undertaking.

The charge that useless or trifling books only are allowed to circulate, while those of any value are confined to the Library, is answered by the statement that there are many books in the Library which if lost could not be replaced, and many books containing valuable plates which ought to be carefully preserved, and that for the preservation of such books and plates, the charter and the by-laws authorise and require the Library Committee to confine them to the Library room, or to exercise a discretion as to the persons who are allowed to take them out of the Library. This has in a considerable degree always been done, and of late years, in consequence of the loss of some very valuable books which the price of the share upon which they were taken out would not replace, the Trustees and the Library Committee have become more convinced of the propriety of the caution. When, however, there is any reason to think that, in any particular case, the rule may be safely dispensed with, the Library Committee have always considered it their duty to do so.

There is no want of accommodation for members wishing to examine books in the Library room : on the contrary, the room is very large, neatly kept, and perfectly comfortable, and loud or continued conversation in it not allowed. The hours during which the Library is opened, are, in winter, from 10 A.M., to 3 P.M. ; in the summer, it is open also, from 4 P.M. to sunset. The practice of opening the Library in the afternoon has obtained only the two last summers ; it was adopted on the suggestion of two or three members ; but very few persons visited it at that period of the day.



The present Trustees have been long desirous of obtaining for the Library a more central location. The only means they have of doing so, however, is by the sale of their present building ; and being of opinion that, although the sum which would remain after the payment of the incumbrance on their property would be sufficient to erect a suitable building, but not sufficient to purchase ground also in a good situation, they determined to apply to the Common Council of the city, for the use of some piece of public ground in the neighborhood of the City Hall, upon which they might erect a building, creditable to the city and themselves, and offering to the Corporation free access to the books for themselves, and the officers of the state and general governments. On the presentation of their petition, the friends of the Library in the Common Council suggested that there was but little chance of obtaining ground for the purpose desired, but the building formerly used as a Bridewell might be obtained : of course the Trustees did not object, and that matter is yet pending in the Common Council.

It is said in the pamphlet, that last year, almost for the first time in 80 years, a contested election took place. It is only eight years since several persons, supposing that the charter of the Library contained banking powers, endeavored to possess themselves of the institution, for the purpose of turning it into a bank. Although an unusual number of shares was bought for some months before the election, the project was conducted with such secrecy, that the Trustees had no notice of it. Though surprised, they were determined, if possible, to save the Library, and a high legal opinion having been given, that the election, which it was contended had gone against them was void, the Trustees held over ; and at the next annual election, an overwhelming vote put down the bank projectors, and saved the Library, for a time, from all other projectors.

The pamphlet states that in the year 1813, the Trustees estimated the Library to contain between 12 and 13000 volumes, "so that for the last 20 years, the Library has increased at the prodigious rate of 250 volumes annually." But in truth the Library now contains 21,000 volumes, so that an increase of books has taken place in the last twenty years at the rate of 425 volumes a year, instead of 250. Is not this a fair, and even great increase, considering the means of the Library? And it ought not be forgotten that many books must be annually worn out, as The New York Society Library is, in a considerable degree, a Circulating Library. The project developed in the pamphlet would soon make it nothing but a Circulating Library.

It is true that a note signed James E. Dekay, W. L. Clarke and L. L. Daponte, and dated 27th March last, was presented at the Library, demanding of the Library Committee the names of the persons entitled to vote at the coming election, and it was stated that the information was wished that they might have the means of making a selection for Trustees. It is rather unfortunate that this reason should have been stated, because by a note addressed to a gentleman who declined the nomination, now in the possession of the Library Committee, it appears that they had made their selection of Trustees on the 20th day of the same month. The applicants say that the note was a respectful one. The one they publish may have some little claim to this character, but the one left at the Library has none. The most extraordinary part of the affair, however, is that the pamphlet states, in italics too, that no reply whatever was made, and immediately after gives the reply of the Library Committee at length, and assails it with all its powers of argument and wit. The wit turns altogether upon the reply of the Library Committee having been dated on the first of April, the argument is best answered by the reply itself. "The Library Committee have taken into consideration the application signed James E. Dekay, W. L. Clark and L.

L. Daponte. The Library Committee renew on this occasion to the Librarian, a direction which he has always had, to furnish to every member of the institution full information as to the funds of the Library, its actual receipts, its expenditures, whether for books imported or bought here, whether for the usual annual expenses of the Library, or its extra payments on account of the opening streets, or the extinguishment of its debt.

This information, which it is proper every member should have, if he ask it, it seems particularly proper to give to the gentlemen who signed the application above mentioned, as they have so recently become members of the institution.

In regard to the demand made by these gentlemen of the names of all the members of the institution entitled to vote at elections, as the Library Committee have never thought, and certainly do not now perceive that the demand is in any way connected with the good of the Library, they have never given, and they now abstain from giving to the Librarian any direction about it."

The pamphlet concedes that the list of the present Trustees is composed of the names of highly respectable citizens, but asserts that it cannot be concealed that some of them reside in other states, and others never appear at the Board; and it declares that "such respectability as they possess is but a poor equivalent for non-residence, non-attendance, indifference to the interests of the Society, or the want of a requisite amount of knowledge to form a suitable collection." The Trustees positively deny that a single one of their number resides in any other state, or that there is any one of them that never appears at the Board: as to the charge of indifference to the interests of the institution, the contrary it is thought is fully shown by the details herein given; and as to the want of knowledge sufficient to make a proper selection of books, the Trustees are content to refer to the shelves of the Library. It is difficult to imagine what could have led to this charge of non-residence and non-atten-

dance, unless it be that one of the Trustees is occasionally absent, as a representative of the city in Congress, and that one is now absent, and has been at other times occasionally absent collecting, in the Southern states, materials for a splendid scientific work now publishing in Paris.

The Trustees cannot doubt that when it is recollected that the payments on the 450 shares of the Library produce only 1800 dollars, and that the rents of the offices in the Library building are appropriated to the discharge of the debt of the Library, that it will be admitted that the \$1000 laid out annually in the purchase of books, abroad and at home, is as much as can be so applied. About \$800 are left, and calculating the annual receipts for new shares to be between 2 and 300 dollars, there is only enough to pay the salary of the Librarian, the five per cent. on the collection of dues, and the usual and incidental charges of the institution. If after payment of these demands there be any residue, it of course goes to the fund for the purchase of books.

Having thus given the history of the Library from its foundation; having stated the efforts of its Trustees, at every period of its duration, to preserve and increase it; having detailed the very slender means with which they have always had to act, and presented an account of the present state and prosperity of the Library, which nothing but untiring industry, a rigid responsibility, and a wise economy could with such means have effected; and having they think satisfactorily answered all objections made against them, it remains for the present Trustees to submit their conduct to be passed upon by the members of the institution.

JOHN I. MORGAN, *Treasurer.*

EVERT A. BANCKER, *Secretary.*