Circ. '03 270,000 1900: 181,000
'02. 297,000

When Win asked me to give a talk on the history of the library, my first thought was that this was absolutely impossible, since I knew little or nothing about the Library's history. But since saying "no" did not seem to be an option, I began to seek out the necessary information. I first turned to this enormous and very authoritative tome, History of the New York Public Library, by Harry Miller Lydenberg, published by The New York Public Library in 1923. This book has the advantage of being an amazing source of information on the Library's early days. But at the same time, it has the disadvantage of being, well, enormous. Nevertheless, I pored over as much of it as I could, and I found it to be an invaluable source of information. But it contains very little information on the Bloomingdale branch itself. For this, I spent many hours in the NYPL's Archives division, poring over annual reports and other documents pertaining to Bloomingdale. What I am going to present to you this evening is far from a complete history, but nevertheless I hope it will inform and maybe even entertain you.

The roots of The New York Public Library go back to the 19th century, when several wealthy gentlemen each decided to devote a portion of their estates, as well as their personal libraries, to the public good. These civic-minded individuals were John Jacob Astor, James Lenox, and Samuel Jones Tilden. Even today, the official name of the institution is The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

THE ASTOR LIBRARY, 1848 - 1895

John Jacob Astor was a German immigrant who made his fortune in the fur trade. He set sail for America in November of 1783, and his ship reached Chesapeake Bay in early January. But before it could land, it was frozen in and remained ice-bound for two months. One of the other passengers was a German immigrant who had been to America before, and had successfully traded furs with the Indians. Astor questioned him about everything concerning the fur trade, and made up his mind that that would become his occupation. He was America's richest citizen when he died in 1848.

Astor wanted to create a fitting testimonial to his adopted country, and a New England school teacher named Joseph Green Cogswell persuaded him to use a part of his vast fortune to establish a public library. The Astor Library was eventually built on the east side of Lafayette Place, and it opened to the public in early 1854 with Cogswell as the librarian. Cogswell had taken great pains in his acquisition of suitable books for the library, most of which were purchased on overseas book-buying trips to various European countries.

The Astor Library was never meant to be a circulating library. In Cogswell's view, "a free library of circulation is a practical impossibility in a city as populous as New York. In the first place, it could never supply one out of a hundred of the demands in the case of popular books; and in the next place, it would be dispersed to the four winds within five years."

Cogswell reported that the readers "read excellent books, except the young fry, who employ all the hours they are out of school in reading the trashy, as Scott, Cooper,

Dickens, Punch, and the *Illustrated News*." At first, the minimum age for admission was 14. But this was soon changed to 16 because the library could not accommodate "the crowds of school boys who came in at certain hours of the day to read, more for amusement than improvement, and shun their classical lessons by the use of English translations." The library was only open until 4 PM in winter, because of the expense and danger from fire of lighting it with gas.

There was a good deal of criticism about the library's limited hours of operation. A cartoon appeared in *Life*, January 7, 1892 with the caption: "Jan. 9, 1854. Astor Library Opened." It depicts a heavily fortified library entrance, from which an angry-looking man peers out, brandishing a club. He is threatening a distinguished-looking gentleman who is reading the sign on the door, which states, "This Library Open Every Other Monday from 9:58 AM to 10:00 AM."

Although Cogswell labored long and hard to produce a printed catalogue of the library's holdings, this project was never completed. A New York Times article of June 8, 1881 bemoaned this fact, stating, "A library without a suitable catalogue is a collection of buried treasures."

The Astor Library was an important factor in the intellectual life of New York, and was consulted at one time or another by most of the scholars of the day. But in the end, it failed to keep pace with the changing times. The American public demanded a popular, as opposed to a scholarly, library. And even the scholars and intellectuals were turning to new questions and problems in which the Astor Library, with its traditional focus on history, the humanities, and the classics, could not serve them.

The library also suffered from its name. It was a free public library, but it had been founded and chiefly supported for nearly 50 years by one wealthy family. This funding eventually became inadequate to meet the library's needs. And the public, although it freely criticized the library, was reluctant to contribute to its support.

THE LENOX LIBRARY, 1870 – 1895

James Lenox was born in New York City on August 19, 1800. His father, Robert Lenox, was a Scottish immigrant who had become a wealthy merchant. James received advanced degrees from both Columbia and Princeton, studied law and was admitted to the bar, then spent some time in Europe before returning to help with his father's business. After his father's death, James carried on the business until 1840. He then retired to his residence at 5th Avenue and 12th St. and devoted himself to his estate, to collecting books and objects of art, and to charitable and religious work. He was a shy and retiring man. He never married, and died on February 17, 1880 at 80 years of age.

Lenox's book collecting interests included early editions of the Bible; everything pertaining to the 'Age of Discovery;' various editions and translations of 'Pilgrim's Progress,' and the works of Milton. It was for him that the first copy of the Gutenberg Bible was sent to the United States.

According to Henry Stevens, who purchased many rare books for Mr. Lenox, "From about 1845 to 1869 Mr. Lenox was actively collecting his library so rapidly, and doing all the work himself, that he had no time to catalogue or arrange his accessions, except a few of the smaller and tidier nuggets which he could put away in the few book cases in his gallery of art which was also being filled at the same time with paintings and sculpture. The great bulk of his book collections was piled away in the numerous spare rooms of his large house, till they were filled to the ceiling from the further end back to the door, which was then locked and the room for the present done with. The accessions after examination and careful collation, approval and payment, were entered or ticked off in interleaved catalogues...or in small and special memorandum books, with sufficient clearness for his own use but unintelligible to others. The books were then piled away like cord wood."

Lenox's books soon came to fill the great house at 53 Fifth Avenue and to offer a serious problem, which he solved by giving the books and objects of art to the Lenox Library, incorporated in 1870. A building for the library on Fifth Avenue between 70th and 71st Streets was completed by 1878, and was used to exhibit Lenox's collection of paintings and sculpture. Ten years after the library had been incorporated, there were still no books available for consultation by the public. Gradually, the library came to be used by scholars and special students. The trustees did not want the Library to become "an asylum for the idle population" of the city. They debated how best to make the Library available to those scholars and students who could profit by its use, while at the same time "repressing and excluding mere curiosity" and the general public, who were not equipped to make proper use of the Library's treasures.

The Trustees felt that the Lenox should be considered more of a Museum than a Library, and that it "was not intended to be a free circulating library for the benefit of the poor of New York...Imagine its "Jesuit relations' circulating about Five Points, or its "Thevenot voyages' in the Chinese quarter. One might as well complain that the Zoological Museum does not give up its stuffed birds to furnish Christmas dinners to the poor, or that [medieval atlases] are not used to teach geografy [sic] from in the public schools."

Needless to say, the public was not happy about this. A satirical skit that appeared in *Life* on January 17, 1884, depicted the Library as perpetually locked, to keep people out; with brass canons on the roof, to blow the heads off students who wanted to get in; and gallows, from which hung the bodies of students who had somehow managed to do so without proper authorization. The skit goes on to describe the Byzantine process of gaining admittance to the Library, beginning with a humble letter of application to the kind Lord High Librarian, which is then passed on to such officials as the 1st Assistant Inspector of Character; the Third Deputy Examiner of Morals; the Commercial Agency (for a proper understanding of the applicant's solvency); the sub-janitor, to find out whether the Astor or Mercantile Libraries have the book (in which case, the applicant is told to go there instead); the Sub-Committee on Private Inquiry (to ascertain if the applicant has any real necessity for consulting any particular book in the library); and the Commissioner of Vital Statistics (to ascertain if the applicant is still living). If the applicant passes all these tests, he must then await the next annual meeting of the Board

of Directors. If there is a quorum present (which there sometimes is), the applicant may be granted a ticket entitling him to admission to the Library between the hours of two and three on a specified day. If the applicant is busy on that day at that hour, he forfeits his ticket.

In response to this, Charles Ammi Cutter, editor of Library Journal, declared, "It was not creditable to the public, that, instead of being grateful for what was given, it should now abuse the library for not being what it was never meant to be."

Beginning in November 1887, tickets of admission were no longer required.

No complete catalog of the entire collection was printed. Many special collections were donated to the Library. A Mrs. Stuart, widow of a sugar refiner, who inherited her husband's valuable collection of books, pamphlets, paintings, objects d'art, minerals, shells and other objects of natural history, had planned to leave some of it to the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum. But she ended up leaving it all to the Lenox Library, because she was afraid the other two institutions would bow to public pressure to open their doors on Sunday, "the Lord's Day." L. p. 122.

Among the many rarities acquired by the Lenox Library was a letter from the first minister of the Dutch Reformed Church in America, addressed to a colleague in Amsterdam, dated August 11, 1628, from the island of Manhatas. This was thought to be one of the earliest documents written in the city. The Library also acquired a draft in the handwriting of Thomas Jefferson of a proposed constitution for Virginia, written in June of 1776, with a preamble containing many phrases and sentences subsequently repeated in the Declaration of Independence. L. p. 127.

THE TILDEN TRUST, 1886 – 1895

Samuel Jones Tilden was born in New Lebanon, Columbia County, New York, in 1814. He studied at Yale and New York University. He practiced law, was a leader in the movement against the Tweed ring, Governor of New York from 1875-1876, and the Democratic candidate for President in 1876. Tilden won the popular vote in this election, and the final outcome – the election of Rutherford B. Hayes – was hotly disputed. By the time of his death, Tilden had amassed a fortune of about five million dollars. A public man his whole life, and never married, he felt it a privilege and a duty to devote the greater part of his estate to the interests of science and popular education. For this purpose, he provided for the establishment after his death of the Tilden Trust, which would create and maintain a free library and reading room in the City of New York. Mr. Tilden died on August 4, 1886, and the Tilden Trust was incorporated in March of 1887. But one of Mr. Tilden's heirs contested the will, and after a five-and-a-half year legal battle, the Trust was left with only about a third of what Tilden had intended. This was not enough to provide a suitable building for the library and to equip and operate it. So the trustees sought to join forces with some other institution or institutions. They felt that New York already had enough small, incomplete and struggling libraries. They suggested that the city should secure for itself a vital, world-class library by agreeing to provide a

home for it, and allowing the Tilden Trust to equip and operate it. They thought the best plan would be to remove the obsolete Croton water reservoir on 5th Avenue between 40th and 42nd Streets and erect a building there, using much of the material then in the reservoir. There was also talk of moving the City Hall building from the park at Chambers Street, placing it in the center of Reservoir Square, and giving it to the Tilden Trust. This latter plan was approved by the City authorities, but was never put into action.

Eventually, after rejecting offers from Columbia College and New York University, the Tilden trustees decided to consolidate with the Astor Library.

THE HARLEM LIBRARY, 1825 – 1903

In 1820, Harlem was a village with few people, one church, and one small schoolhouse. It had three roads leading to the City of New York, one of which was the Bloomingdale Road that followed the lines of present-day Broadway. The scattered houses were mostly of wood, and there were a score or so of farms, some of which were as large as 90 acres. There was a "commons" between the City to the south and the Township of Harlem. There had been many disputes over this land and the exact dividing line between the City and the Township. Finally in 1820 legislation was passed authorizing these common lands to be sold and the money given to various entities, including schools and churches and the Harlem Library.

For some time before this, there had been a voluntary association of 32 life members who had each paid a subscription fee for the support of a library. This was the beginning of the Harlem Library, which eventually received some of the funds that came from the sale of the commons.

Only those who had paid a subscription fee, which was originally $100 but was eventually lowered to $50 due to public protests, were allowed to take books out of the library. Overdue fees were two or three cents a day depending on the size of the volume, and if a borrower lent a library book out of his own house he was fined 25 cents. Over the years, the library had several locations, often with commercial space on the first floor, the library on the second, and living quarters for the librarian on the third floor. Most of the early librarians were men, although in 1884 a suggestion was made to curtail expenses by hiring a woman instead. By 1897, the trend was clearly toward free rather than subscription libraries, and no library that charged a subscription fee could hope to receive any aid from the city or the state. So the Harlem Library became free, and was eventually consolidated into The New York Public Library in 1903.

THE WASHINGTON HEIGHTS LIBRARY, 1868 – 1901

Another early library that eventually became part of The New York Public Library was the Washington Heights Library, which was incorporated in 1868 and opened that same year in rented quarters on 10th Avenue near 159th Street. It, too, was a subscription library, but the fees were much lower than those of the Harlem Library. The first annual

report stated that the library had been open every weekday except holidays from 8 AM to 10 PM.
Throughout its existence, the Washington Heights Library had a hard time remaining solvent. Various moneymaking schemes were tried, including waxworks and a strawberry festival. Then in 1883, an anonymous donor started contributing $100 each month, with the stipulation that the library be made free to all residents of Washington Heights and that it be opened on Sundays. So the library was made free to all residents of the Heights over twelve years of age, and the hours were from 8 AM to 9:30 PM except on Sundays, when they were from 4-9 PM, and on legal holidays, when they were from 9 AM to noon.

The name of the library was changed to the Washington Heights Free Library, and this was consolidated into The New York Public Library in 1901.

THE NEW YORK FREE CIRCULATING LIBRARY, 1878 –1900

The following is from the "Twenty-first and Final Report of the New York Free Circulating Library with a sketch of its history," written in 1901:

"The New York Free Circulating Library owes its beginning to a sewing-class conducted in connection with the charitable work of Grace Church. Early in [1878], while six little girls belonging to this class were waiting for their teacher, they whiled away the time by listening to a sensational story read from a cheap paper by one of their number. This story was overheard by the teacher on her arrival, and she was thus led to inquire regarding the children's reading and to make efforts to better it. The paper was gladly given up in exchange for a book, and each of the girls was offered one such book a week as a loan, on condition that she would never again buy a sensational story paper. This was the beginning of a system for the free circulation of books, which grew rapidly in popularity and extent. Other women became interested, about 500 books were collected, and a room in Thirteenth Street east of Fourth Avenue was obtained for library use. Although no particular effort was made to advertise the plan, except by telling the children to bring their friends, and although at first the room was open only once a week for two hours at a time, the attendance was soon so great that the sidewalk was blocked during the library hours, and on one occasion only two volumes were left in the room. At the end of the first year about 1,200 volumes (all gifts) were on the shelves, and about 7,000 had been [circulated] to the public. An account of the Library, published in the Evening Post for March 18, 1880, states that "the persons seeking books included mere children and men of sixty to seventy years of age, and their dwellings were scattered from the lower part of Broadway to One Hundred and Twentieth Street." This being the condition of affairs, the women in charge of the enterprise appreciated that it must either be abandoned or something must be done to meet the demand for books that it revealed and stimulated. On the advice of a number of men of standing in the community, on whose judgment in the matter reliance was placed, and after some study of library conditions both in New York and in other large cities, the conclusion was reached that the special needs of the city at this time would be met by the establishment of a library for the circulation of books among the very poor. With this in view, the certificate of incorporation of the New York Free Circulating Library was filed at Albany on March 15, 1880. In the article to which

reference has already been made it is stated to be the intention of the society "to establish points of distribution all over the city, but not to attempt the establishment of any large and expensive building, because the very class which they hope to reach instinctively shun such places, and a single library building...would be comparatively useless to a large part of our poor on account of its distance from their homes." It was also felt that the general reference work which forms so large a part of the usefulness of the large public library would always be adequately cared for by existing institutions, although of course the small reading-room with its stock of periodicals would naturally be a useful adjunct to branch work."

From the 13th Street room, the Library was moved to 36 Bond Street where two rooms were rented in a private house refitted and furnished for the purpose. Cardholders and circulation increased rapidly. A reading room was opened, where the public could peruse current periodicals.

Growth in library use and circulation was limited only by growth in the book stock, and this was in turn limited only by fiscal resources. The rest of the New York Free Circulating Library's history was largely a record of its efforts to increase its income, and of the administrative development resulting from increased use and demand.

During the 1870s and '80s, there was recognition in the public press of a need for a system of home circulation of books. It was felt that New York City was behind in this, compared to other Northern cities like Boston or Chicago. At first, there was no support form the city; so wealthy potential donors were appealed to. Enough money was raised to purchase the premises at 49 Bond Street, and the books were moved to these larger quarters in 1883.

According to a letter from the Library committee to the trustees of the New York Free Circulating Library in 1881, "The object of this association is to supply good reading to the public, especially to those who are unable to provide themselves with suitable books either through poverty or ignorance. With this aim in view your committee are decidedly of the opinion that the best and surest means of reaching that object is by the establishment throughout the city of small libraries, similar to the one now projected at 36 Bond Street. In small libraries the applicants are brought more into personal contact with the librarians, their taste in reading encouraged until they learn to enjoy and prefer good literature...The demand for fiction is best satisfied if *only* the best books of this class are provided...We have no difficulty in furnishing a sufficient number of thoroughly good books of this class without calling upon the trash which large public libraries usually too freely provide." L. p. 208.

One objection to the idea of a free circulating library had been the fear that people would not bring the books back after reading them. But in 1885, after almost seven years of operation, the Library could boast that it had lost only three books out of 95,000 circulated, or an average of one in every 32,000.

The Library was originally incorporated according to the "Act for the incorporation of benevolent, charitable, scientific and missionary societies" (chapter 319 of the laws of 1848). This limited the amount of real estate and personal estate the Library could hold, and also limited the amount of income it could realize from these sources. But a special charter enacted in 1884 removed these obstacles. As a result, newspaper editor Oswald Ottendorfer was able to give the Library 8,000 volumes in German and English, in a building on Second Avenue near 8th Street leased to the New York Free Circulating Library. This later became the Ottendorfer Branch of The New York Public Library. Similarly, Miss Catherine W. Bruce funded the purchase of land and erection of a building that became the George Bruce Branch, as a memorial to her father.

The Bond Street, Ottendorfer, and George Bruce branches were followed by the Jackson Square, 125th Street, and Muhlenberg branches and, on June 3, 1896, by the Boomingdale Branch.

The Bloomingdale Branch was first located at 816 Amsterdam Avenue, at the corner of 100th Street. The Reverend Dr. Peters of St. Michael's Church had asked the New York Free Circulating Library to take charge of the parish library. About a thousand volumes were turned over to Bloomingdale by the parish, and another 2,000 were drawn off from the other branches in the system. In preparation for the branch's opening, the cataloguer, Miss Hitchler, handled in twelve days over 2,400 volumes and wrote more than 5,000 catalog cards. The branch circulated close to 4,000 volumes in its first month and over 7,000 in each of the next two months. This was all the more impressive because it took place during an unusually hot summer and a very engrossing presidential campaign involving Republican William McKinley and Democrat William Jennings Bryan.

According to Lydenberg (p. 224), "In August and September the shelves were almost bare; people would sit and wait until books were returned or would call two or three times a day in the hopes of getting what they wanted." Each volume was circulated an average of 17 times during the first year the branch was open. It was clear that larger quarters were required. The lot at 206 W. 100th Street was purchased and a building erected there, which opened on November 1, 1898.

The next branches to be added were Riverside and Yorkville in 1897, and the tenth and final branch of the New York Free Circulating Library, Chatham Square, opened in 1899.

CONSOLIDATION

By the mid 1890s, the spirit of consolidations was in the air, and the various independent libraries in the city began to consider how they might combine for their mutual benefit. In addition to the Astor and Lenox Libraries, the Tilden Trust, the New York Free Circulating Library with its various branches, and the aforementioned Harlem and Washington Heights Libraries, there were the Aguilar Free Library, the Cathedral Library, the University Settlement Library, the Webster Free Library, the St. Agnes Free Library, the New York Free Circulating Library for the Blind, and the Tottenville Library. All were eventually consolidated into The New York Public Library.

First to consolidate were the Astor and Lenox Libraries and the Tilden Trust, which combined in 1895 to form The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. Dr. John S. Billings became its first Director. The Library appealed to the city for a suitable site, and money for a new building. The city agreed to assume responsibility for a new library building and its maintenance, and the Library in turn agreed to operate a public library and reading room free to the public and open every weekday for a minimum of twelve hours, until at least 9 PM, and Sundays from 1 to 9 PM. The Library would also operate in the building a free circulating branch with books for home use, open during the day on Sundays and in the evenings on all other days. Work began on razing the Croton Reservoir in 1899, after which the new building, designed by Carrere & Hastings, was erected on the site. The project took twelve years to complete, and the formal dedication took place on May 23, 1911.

The now famous and beloved lions in front of the Central Building, as it was called, were by Edward C. Potter, who was paid $8,000 for modeling and $5,000 for carving. At the time, however, the public did not take kindly to them. There were numerous comments in the newspapers to the effect that they were too tame or mild or catlike. Artists and architects, however, defended them as admirable decorations that were as realistic as the situation demanded.

In early 1901, The New York Free Circulating Library merged into The New York Public Library. This was the birth of the branch library system, called the Circulation Department up until 1966, and since then The Branch Libraries. This department still operates quite distinctly from the research collections, which were called the Reference Department until 1966 and are now known as The Research Libraries.

Other circulating libraries were eager to merge with the new entity, but if they did so there would be no money to replace their crowded and shabby buildings. This problem was solved by Andrew Carnegie, who donated money for library buildings in New York City and throughout the English-speaking world, providing that municipalities supplied the sites and agree to maintain the libraries thus established. Carnegie offered to build a network of branches in all five boroughs of the city. Brooklyn and Queens, which had not become a part of New York City until 1898, had their own public libraries. For reasons involving politics and local pride, they chose not to be absorbed into The New York Public Library. The Library and the City of New York entered into an agreement in 1901 to acquire sites for Carnegie branches and support them thereafter.

The Carnegie gift led most of the free lending libraries in the city to consolidate with The New York Public Library. By 1906, eleven of them had joined the NYPL.

THE BLOOMINGDALE BRANCH, 1942 - 1961

Miss Emily F. McCormick was Bloomingdale's Branch Librarian for many years. As I read her annual reports for the years from 1942 through 1961, I came to feel as though I knew her. Each report is a narrative of the past year's activities in the branch and the

neighborhood. I came to recognize Miss McCormick's writing style, and to appreciate her cheerful yet practical outlook.

In her 1942 report, Miss McCormick writes, "…as far as space permits, we have engaged in many war activities. We look rather more like a salvage station than a library, with a large and rapidly filling Victory Book Campaign box by the door, and two boxes on the desk, one for collecting keys and other small metal objects, another for silk stockings. We have also collected games for the armed forces. In a small space by the door, we have finger printing two evenings a week…Early in the year, most members of the staff, in common with the rest of New York, took Civilian Defense courses in First Aid and Nutrition." The branch also maintained a War Information File, which she says "gives specific and detailed information on all kinds of War activities; recruiting of both men and women for the armed services, paid and volunteer civilian work, courses, salvage, blackouts and dim-outs, O.P.A., rationing, mail to soldiers, uniforms, insignia etc. The file is kept up to date by almost daily notices, from the Civilian Defense Volunteer Organization, of additions, subtractions, and changes. Keeping the two files in order has taken a great deal of library time as well as our own time. The file is invaluable to us in giving out war information in the library."

As early as 1922, a group of neighborhood residents requested that the Library sell the Bloomingdale Branch building at 206 W. 100th Street and use the proceeds to erect a new building more adequate to meet the current and future needs of the community. More than twenty years later, Miss McCormick was still eagerly looking forward to that event, which she hoped was just around the corner. In her annual report for 1943, she stated, "there is nothing that pleases us so much as news of the new building. With our eager reading public, and a fine New Building (now with a capital "N," and a capital "B"), Bloomingdale should be a branch library about which to dream dreams and make plans." By the 1944 report, Miss McCormick makes frequent references to the NEW BUILDING (now all in caps).

Among the requested titles which could not be supplied in 1944 was Mother India, and Miss McCormick wonders, "Can anything be done about the schools' recommending this to High School students…Frequently, students have required reading lists, of which we have few titles and those invariably out." And "We have readers who make the usual comments: 'Nothing new in this library,' 'Not enough detective stories,' 'I always have to wait months for reserves'" - from which it is clear that some things have not changed at all since 1944.

The report concludes: "We are looking forward to the day when all physical inadequacies will be overcome by the NEW BUILDING and we can hope to give our eminently satisfactory and all too patient public the kind of library it deserves."

By 1945, Miss McCormick's dreams of the NEW BUILDING have become rather more detailed: "Future plans for Bloomingdale are all concerned with the new building, which, we hope, will be everything that the present building is not...I hope we can avoid too high

and too low bookshelves, and that we shall have no dull brown woodwork nor furniture. On the first floor, I should like to try neutral walls, possibly a warm grey, and colored furniture, red or blue. Reading rooms should be supplied with easy chairs and, if possible, ash-trays."

The 1946 report states that "The experiment of having so many men, all veterans, on the staff, has worked well...Both staff and public have taken this revolution in their stride...In general the men have been helpful, perfectly at ease, earnest about their work, willing to do whatever needed to be done, dignified and friendly with staff and public. They have picked up desk and clerical routine easily and have shown a real interest in the branch and in library work, in general. They are, on the whole, perhaps a little slower in working with their hands than are the young women. They have all been extremely courteous in dealing with the public. The public likes them. The men have been a real addition to our staff and have brought us the stimulation of new points of view."

In 1948, Miss McCormick bemoans the ridiculously high turnover rate among librarians. 29 new assistants came to Bloomingdale that year, and 31 left. But, like the veterans of 1946, they brought the stimulation of new points of view. In 1949, another 29 assistants came to Bloomingdale, all bringing fresh points of view, and 28 left.

That spring, Bloomingdale had a series of exhibits of the work of neighborhood artists. Miss McCormick reports that after two such exhibits, "A third neighborhood artist, viewing the exhibits, suggested lending us examples of her work and asked how many pictures we wanted. When I asked her how many she had, she replied, 'O, I haven't any. I thought I'd paint as many as you wanted.' We have not yet seen the results."

In 1950, Miss McCormick reports, "Perhaps the most interesting neighborhood development has been the taking over of three hotels, Midway, Whitehall and Marseilles, all within three blocks of us, for the reception of recent Displaced Persons from Europe. These new arrivals, speaking many languages, are Jewish, Catholic and Protestant. They come to the U.S.A. under the sponsorship of many different organizations and, generally, remain here only a short time before going to permanent homes elsewhere. As their predecessors did, they come to the library immediately upon arrival. We have been accepting anything from them as identification and have noticed no unusual loss of books in consequence. We have had to send a hurry call for books in Yiddish, Polish and Spanish to supplement our German and French collections."

Miss McCormick also mentions work with "an old ladies' home on 103rd Street, an Association for the Relief of Respectable Aged Indigent Females, a dreadful name that is about to be changed." A Miss Thomson gave advice to that institution on its library, and was also asked to give book talks to the residents.

In 1951, Miss McCormick attempts to explain "the unusual and rather humiliating experience of marked decreases in circulation. It is easy to say that the decreases have been due to television, though I am sure there are other causes. I wish I knew what they were. When we changed the Picture Book Hour from Saturday morning, when many

children's television programs are scheduled, to Wednesday afternoon, attendance increased about threefold."

Sadly, she declares, "The New Building seems as far off as it did five years ago...The City of New York is making totally inadequate provision for library service to one of the finest sections of its reading public. Some day, I hope, our public will have the library building that it so richly deserves."

In 1952, Miss McCormick notes a marked increase in the demand for "how to" books: "The prize went to the woman who wanted to know how to breed earthworms on her fire-escape for her husband's fishing (We were unable to answer that one and referred her to Mr. Henderson)." But "The most pressing neighborhood problem is that of the two new Housing Projects planned to replace the slum districts between Amsterdam and Manhattan Avenues. Although many members of the public have told us that their houses have been marked for removal, we have been unable to obtain even probable dates for the beginning of operations." And "Our great Need, it is superfluous to say, is for a new building. It was a little startling, at the Branch Librarians' meeting on the budget, not to hear Bloomingdale mentioned. (A recently retired librarian told me that, when she was on the Bloomingdale staff, thirty years ago, hopes were high for a new building)."

To quote from Miss McCormick's 1953 report (her twelfth): "Progressive housewives come to the library for new recipes, for new ideas about child care, for books on child psychology; to learn how to rear the poodle or the parakeet, how to bring up the baby or understand the adolescent. The progressive father knows that 'Fathers are parents, too.'"

"Although we want our readers to have confidence in our book collection, I was a little concerned about an elderly city man who recently gave up his Riverside Drive apartment, bought a small chicken farm in Connecticut and then came to the library to find out how to raise chickens. I hope the hens are laying well."

"This spring, we had to send in a rush order for more of the works of Culbertson, Goren and other bridge experts. We have never had so many requests for books on golf. Although bridge and golf are Mr. Eisenhower's favorite forms of recreation, I cannot say whether or not the national election has influenced our readers' choice in sports."

"There is a feeling of change in the Bloomingdale neighborhood, particularly in connection with the proposed housing project between Amsterdam Avenue and Central Park West. At a recent meeting of the Park West Neighborhood Association, it was reported that the razing of old structures would begin in July, preparatory to the erection of the new houses. Many readers have reported that their buildings have been condemned. There is great concern about the difficulty of finding new living quarters."

Miss McCormick reports an increasing Puerto Rican population in the neighborhood, and another decline in children's circulation, which she cannot account for "unless television really has had an adverse effect on children's reading."

33 staff members came to Bloomingdale, and 33 left by resignation or transfer.

In 1954, "The whole Bloomingdale community is eagerly awaiting the building of the new housing projects on our eastern border. The neighborhood is rapidly approaching the appearance of a bombed area, as more and more buildings are closed and more and more are torn down."

In 1955, "The neighborhood is eagerly watching the demolition of the slum dwellings in the large area being evacuated in preparation for the building of two Housing Projects. Many blocks of buildings have been completely razed. In our own all important block, 100th Street east of Amsterdam Avenue, the proposed site of the long anticipated new building for Bloomingdale, all of the buildings in the eastern half adjoining Columbus Avenue have been torn down. When the Police Precinct was moved, several months ago, from the site that it had long occupied in the middle of the block, or hopes for immediate action were high."

"Anticipation of the new housing project has not all been pleasant. It has been distressing to talk with readers who have been forced to move from the homes they have occupied for many years. A few feel fortunate in having found other apartments or rooms in the same neighborhood. Others have set forth on the long trek to the Bronx or Brooklyn or Queens. Some have joined the exodus to the suburbs."

In 1956, Bloomingdale's children's room was abruptly closed and a new children's room opened on Broadway, south of 104th Street.

In 1957, "Frederick Douglass Houses," the northern, low income project, is rising rapidly. The buildings appear both attractive and well constructed, more varied in style than in most of the older projects. Some of the apartments are almost ready for occupancy."

"Even the southern, middle income project, newly named "Park West Apartments," presents, after many vicissitudes, a more businesslike appearance since it has been taken over by Webb and Knapp. The start of construction has been promised for the immediate future. The new public school, at 97th Street, is well under way, with most of the concrete shell completed to the third floor. It is hard for us to believe that, with so much building in the area, only the Library must wait for three more years."

Finally Miss McCormick is able to report: "1959 has been a year of watchful waiting, as Staff and Public have seen the long anticipated New Building rising one block east of our present location...Work has gone ahead steadily except for a few recent weeks, when all building throughout the City was held up by the concrete strike. At present, the basement, two floors, and stairway are in place, and the roof is being "poured" at the moment of writing. The first floor room, as seen from the pavement, looks rather smaller than I had hoped it would. However, Mr. Britten, the custodian, who has taken actual measurements, reports that it is as large as our present first and second floors and half of

the third. Nothing about the erection of the New Building has surprised me more than the number of people who have wanted to buy the old one."

"The Bloomingdale neighborhood is changing rapidly, although the area between Riverside Drive and Broadway, where most of our European readers live, remains substantially the same. An article in the New York Herald Tribune of July 19, 1959 reports that the area between Central Park West and Amsterdam from 100th to 110th Streets, including the new Douglass Houses, is now known as Lower Harlem, the scene of more and more acts of teen-age violence reported in the press. The Youth Board has recently sent special representatives to deal directly with the two known gangs, "Assassins" and "Sinners." Some of our older readers have said they were afraid to come to the Library after dark. Yet Bloomingdale remains a Branch with no discipline problem."

By 1960, Miss McCormick could say, "After so many years of deferred hopes for a new building for Bloomingdale, it is hard for staff and Public to realize that our new quarters at 150 W. 100 Street are so nearly completed and that our moving is imminent." She looks forward to the spaciousness of the new building; the reuniting of the children's and adult departments; a reference room on the same floor as the adult department, so that the reference room can be open whenever the branch is open; good light and heat; an attractive story hour and meeting room; an adequate, pleasant staff room and work space; and a working book lift (the old one having been out of order for several years).

But at the same time, there are worries: How long will we be closed? Is the new building really big enough? How much will circulation increase? Will there be sufficient staff to handle it? Will Bloomingdale be a regional library, or a reference center? How are the many radiators to be covered so that wall shelving can be safely placed in front of them?

At long last, "January 3, 1961 was an important date in the history of Bloomingdale, less important only than June 3, 1896, when the first Bloomingdale opened at 816 Amsterdam Avenue on the corner of West 100th Street; and November 1, 1898, when our recently vacated building at 206 West 100th Street first opened its doors to the public." Nearly 3000 books were circulated on the very first day the new building was open to the public.

With this major turning point in Bloomingdale history, I must bring this narrative to a close. Much was left out, and much of course has come after. Maybe some day I will fill in the gaps and bring the library's history up to date.

Miss Emily McCormick retired on November 30, 1961 after twenty years at the old library and supervising the re-opening of the new one. She died in July of 1964, leaving $1000 of her estate to the Bloomingdale Branch Library. I would like to dedicate this project to the spirit of Miss Emily F. McCormick.