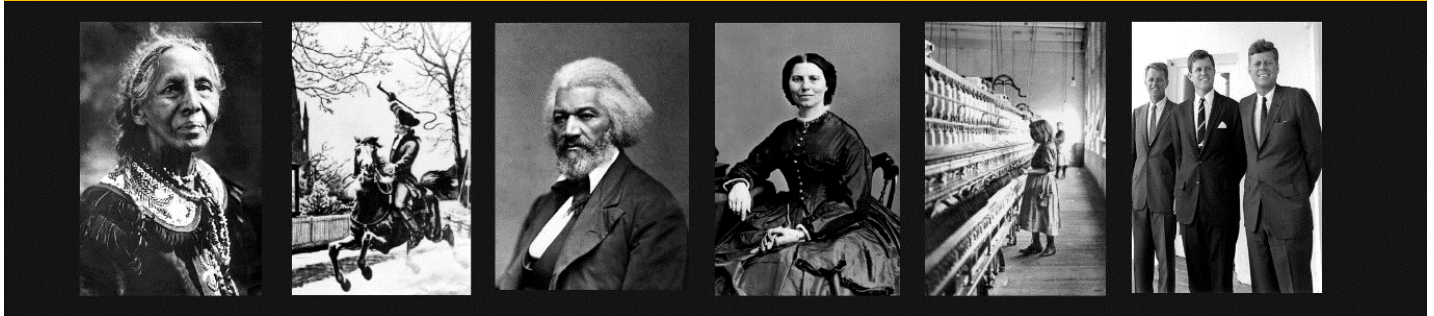


# *The Historical Journal of Massachusetts*



“Hannah Packard James, Newton Librarian: Economic Motives of Nineteenth-Century Professional Women.”

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Source: *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, Volume 44, No. 2, Summer 2016, pp. 88-111.

Published by: Institute for Massachusetts Studies and Westfield State University



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**Hannah Packard James (1835–1903)**

Hannah Packard James, ca. 1885. From Myra Poland, “Miss Hannah Packard James,” in *Proceedings and Collections of the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society for the Years 1902–1903* (Wilkes-Barre, PA: The Society, 1904), 300–304.

# Hannah Packard James, Newton Librarian: Economic Motives of Nineteenth-Century Professional Women

BERNADETTE A. LEAR



**Abstract:** *Scholars often divide nineteenth century working women into two groups: middle class charitable volunteers and lower class paid laborers. A case study of the economic life of Hannah Packard James (1835–1903), one of the most prominent librarians of her generation, shows compelling evidence that financial necessity was a significant motive for some women entering the professions in the nineteenth century. Census, probate, and other records illustrate that industrialization and the Civil War compelled James and other daughters of once-prominent families to seek paid employment in the nonprofit sector. Librarianship not only gave them an outlet for their talents but also provided income necessary for survival. Author Bernadette Lear, an associate librarian at Pennsylvania State University, has written on the history of library science.*

\* \* \* \* \*

In 1897, Hannah Packard James (1835–1903) stood before an international audience in London and presented a paper titled “Special Training for Library Work.” After describing the entrance requirements, curriculum, and students of several library education programs, James concluded with a thought-provoking statement:

There is something in the profession that appeals strongly to [women], and their ability to fill some of the most important positions has been proved by their successful management of State libraries, college libraries, large city libraries, and hundreds of smaller ones. . . . Happily, however, the question of sex in library science seems not to be recognized, and, apart from occasional local prejudice or reason in favour of either man or woman, library positions are bestowed according to ability, and not according to sex. Character, intelligence, executive ability, and a thorough training are the factors that count.<sup>1</sup>

After returning from London, James reflected upon the differences between American and European libraries. She surmised that institutions in Great Britain were subject to more “tradition and habit” and that males had been “built up slowly as conservators of literature of the ages.” Conversely, the “independence of women in America is the result, in large measure, of economic conditions.” Interestingly, she noted that “the elder son is not obliged to maintain his sisters” in the United States and this led to females’ strivings within librarianship.<sup>2</sup>

James’ self-casting as a business woman who had “executive ability” and her description of librarianship as an enterprise which gave women economic independence contradicts scholar Dee Garrison’s *Apostles of Culture: the Public Librarian and the American Society, 1876-1920* (1979), the most heavily-cited history of gender and librarianship to date, which argues that library women were merely “tender technicians,” docile, poorly-paid clerical workers who did not demand or require income. Garrison and other researchers have focused on individuals’ social views as primary reasons for females entering professional careers. However, in James’ case, there is compelling evidence of economic necessity as well. Despite scholarly assumptions that the “gentry” of female librarians were “unlikely” to have been “driven to outside work because of financial need,” socioeconomic and family upheavals faced by Massachusetts women due to industrialization and the Civil War did compel

some daughters of once-prominent families to seek paid employment.<sup>3</sup> Piecing together data from censuses, probate records, and a variety of other documents, one finds that, in James' case, "economic conditions" were strong motivators for seeking a profession. This is an important, if neglected, factor in the history of librarianship, and in the history of middle class women's work. Librarianship not only gave these women cultural and social outlets but also provided income necessary for survival.

## PRIOR SCHOLARSHIP

When discussing the entry of nineteenth century women into public life, many historians take cultural and social approaches rather than economic ones. Though Barbara Welter's thesis about the cult of true womanhood is now a half-century old, the mantra "piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity" continues to lurk in our consciousness when imagining women of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> There are now abundant challenges to the scholarly notion of "separate spheres" for males and females, however, scholarly understanding of female, middle class, paid employees, especially within cultural and social organizations, remains limited.<sup>5</sup> Existing scholarship tends to artificially divide women into two distinctly different camps: charitable volunteers and paid laborers. Women of the middle class are often associated with charitable, cultural, educational, and religious volunteerism, while women of lower classes are consistently linked with industrial paid labor and other for-profit ventures. Anne Prior Scott, who focuses on suffrage and political participation, argues that volunteer networks taught middle class women to "conduct business, carry on meetings, speak in public, [and] manage money." She states that such careers generated "income" which was "psychic rather than material."<sup>6</sup> In a similar way, cultural and social historians who view charity work during the Civil War as an important conduit for Northern women to enter public life tend to focus on individuals' trajectories into other causes (such as suffrage or temperance) rather than into paid occupations like librarianship.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, these works highlight volunteers' beliefs about the chosen social problem rather than their experiences, negative or positive, as laborers.

For their part, labor historians focus primarily on manufacturing and trades. For instance, in her seminal book *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (2003), Alice Kessler-Harris suggests that nineteenth century technological developments, particularly those pertaining to household clothing and food production, "created a reservoir of underemployed, reasonably-well-educated young unmarried women whose

mothers no longer required their services at home.” Local mixes of “economic opportunities, immigrant peoples, and well-intentioned reformers” attracted many women into the workforce.<sup>8</sup> And yet, professional women remain on the “edges of the narrative.”

Similarly, in her work *Breadwinners: Working Women and Economic Independence, 1865–1920* (2009), Lara Vapnek uncovers that “even women from privileged backgrounds might find themselves seriously short of cash when fathers died, marriages dissolved, or family business failed.” She noted that after the Civil War, thousands of middle class Northern women were “forced to become self-supporting” because they had lost their husbands, sons, and brothers during the conflict.<sup>9</sup> Still, Vapnek’s work does not highlight women in librarianship, which was one of the “principal professional pursuits” of literary- and scientific-minded women during the 1870s–1920s.<sup>10</sup>

Among library historians, gender receives far more attention than economics. Because early histories of the profession largely ignored women, Dee Garrison’s seminal work *Apostles of Culture* casts a long shadow.<sup>11</sup> Her analysis typecasts females as lacking “a professional sense of commitment to work, a drive to lead rather than to serve, and a clear-cut conception of professional rights and responsibilities.”<sup>12</sup> Such conclusions have been renounced by subsequent scholars. For instance, in her article “Gender, Culture, and the Transformation of American Librarianship, 1890–1920” (1998), Mary Niles-Maack argues that women entering librarianship in the 1890s contributed to “the creation of a people-centered profession that bore the imprint of their values.”<sup>13</sup> In a similar vein, Suzanne Stauffer’s portrait of Mary E. Downey (a “library organizer” in Ohio, Utah, and North Dakota) reveals librarianship as a vehicle for ambitious women who desired leadership positions within professional organizations or state governments.<sup>14</sup> Yet Garrison’s economic assumptions about early female librarians being part of a “gentry” that did not need to work have largely gone unchallenged.

In terms of socioeconomic class, women librarians are commonly discussed in a manner quite similar to the “contributions” approach that Gerda Lerner identified forty years ago as an attempt to fit women within a narrative that describes others’ experiences.<sup>15</sup> For example, there are explorations of Jane Maud Campbell providing library services for immigrants;<sup>16</sup> Edith Guerrier forming reading clubs among working girls in Boston;<sup>17</sup> and Mary Frances Isom working for soldiers stationed in France during World War I.<sup>18</sup> These examples of women’s professional experiences are crucial for comprehending the extension of library services to diverse groups. Yet scholars typically focus on new constituencies served rather than delving into how a librarian’s economic circumstances may have influenced her choice of profession or how

personal finances influenced her relationships and operations within it. The present case study seeks to fill such gaps by illustrating one Massachusetts middle class woman's economic pathway into and through the world of paid work.

## A FAMILY'S FADING PROMINENCE

Although Hannah Packard James did not leave behind any writings which explain her choice to pursue employment, existing records make clear that her family fell from acclaim during the mid-nineteenth century. Opening a dusty history of Scituate, Massachusetts, one reads:

It is interesting to note how . . . [a] family will continue to be prominent in the social, political and religious life of the community, always having a representative in the town government . . . in the church and . . . in the business and social activities of the place as well. Then a day will come when by death and removals . . . [when] finally nobody will remember that such people ever existed . . . *such a family was the James family of Scituate and South Scituate* [my emphasis].<sup>19</sup>

Facing Massachusetts Bay, the town of Scituate (now Norwell) was defined by water. During Hannah Packard James' childhood, the community made its living from the sea. If one rode on horseback along the North River's edge toward the ocean, one would pass "Fox Hill," "Brick Kiln," and other shipyards. The Jameses had lived there since the 1660s and were shipbuilders throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>20</sup> William James (1789–1854), Hannah's father, started as a shipbuilder but was later also a farmer, lawyer, and president of the Scituate Institution for Savings. When Hannah was a child, he was the largest landowner in the area and a prominent figure in regional politics. In 1836, he was elected to the state house; in 1848, he was sent to the senate; and in 1853, he attended the state constitutional convention.<sup>21</sup>

He and his wife Welthea (1792–1871) filled their home with children, giving them middle names which underscored the family's connections to other important families. Seven of their children lived to adulthood: Mary Randall James (1820–1854), Anna Appleton James (1822–1877), William Henry James (1825–?), Albert James (1827–1901), Welthea Alden James (variously spelled, 1830–1914), Frederic Augustus James (1832–1864), and Hannah Packard James (1835–1903).<sup>22</sup>

Notably, the James family lived at the periphery of “Core Boston” when the Brahmin culture was most influential.<sup>23</sup> Brahmins had the tendency to be “imaginative” and “hard-working,” to “seize opportunity afforded by changing conditions,” and to seek “control over thought and culture” through leadership in community institutions.<sup>24</sup> While not part of Boston’s elite, the James family was certainly middle or upper middle class and shared some of these traits. Hannah likely learned that people of her social and economic station took responsibility for civic betterment.

Religion and education likely shaped her as well. The family was active in Scituate’s First Parish (Unitarian) Church which was led by Reverend Samuel May (1797–1871), a leader in various education, peace, and temperance movements.<sup>25</sup> While one finds no primary sources explicitly linking James’ beliefs to her choosing a career as a librarian, her choice reflects a typical Unitarian model of social form, which, as historian David Turley explains, included a “distinctive concern for individual development” and a program of “self-culture” which would engage the seeker’s conscience, feelings, and mind.<sup>26</sup> Such convictions dovetail nicely into a career in free libraries, where library users pursue betterment through reading materials.

James’ own schooling likely shaped her future as well. Today, we know Massachusetts as a sort of foundational center for education; however, prospects for children in the 1830s and 1840s were not so rich. During James’ childhood, the physical condition and resources of Scituate’s public schools were terrible, “a standing outrage upon things creditable and respectable.”<sup>27</sup> The well-known reforms that occurred in the 1850s were a response to such problems but came just a few years too late for James.<sup>28</sup> Thus, James attended a “district school,” then a private school, but never a high school or college.<sup>29</sup> Later in life, perhaps unsurprisingly, she became a firm advocate of free kindergartens, basic and higher education for girls, and lecture series for adults, resources which she could not access as a child.<sup>30</sup>

While charitable expectations, religious values, and educational experiences likely shaped Hannah James’ choice of librarianship as a career, sources suggest that economics may have been a proximal cause for her entering the workforce. Financially, the 1850s and 1860s were challenging ones for the James family. Notably, the 1850 U.S. Census lists William James as a farmer, which lands to an interpretation that his primary occupation was neither banking nor the law at that point. His property was only valued at \$4,000.00, not a princely sum even in the 1850s. Furthermore, the wooden shipbuilding industry, which had once provided for families in the region, had declined precipitously. In Scituate, the North River shipyards were “on the brink of failure” by the 1850s, and production ceased completely in



1871.<sup>31</sup> In order to be closer to timber, technological advances, and cheap Irish labor, the industry migrated north—first to the Merrimack Valley and East Boston, then to Maine.<sup>32</sup> According to William Tilden, who had worked in the James family shipyard as a young man:

The Block-House Yard[s] . . . ground was mostly springy and wet; the way to it was through a rocky pasture, with only a cart path, where deep ruts and frequent stones tried the heavy wheels . . . Beside this, when the vessel was launched, she had to run directly across the river into the mud on the other side. Souther & Cudworth's yard a half mile up the river, and Foster's, above that, were far better yards.<sup>33</sup>

Records suggest that the family dispersed soon after William James' death in 1854. An inventory of his estate shows he owned 122 acres of land in Scituate consisting of a house, barn, outbuildings, fields, and woodlots, as well as a house and woodlot in Watertown, a suburb of Boston; these holdings were worth little more than \$6,100. Combined, his investments, cash, household furnishings, and livestock were valued at about \$7,200. Therefore, his descendants petitioned the probate judge to divide the land into seven shares. Scouring all available probate documents, it appears that Hannah James received a single disbursement of \$419.72 and about thirty-six acres of land.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, probate records of Hannah's mother, Welthea (died 1877), indicate that she owned only a quarter interest of a house in Nonantum, worth approximately \$1,300, and about \$4,900 in investments and personal property. After other bequests were made, the two unmarried sisters, Anna and Hannah, split the remainder, \$2,640.87.<sup>35</sup> Although one can only approximate the value of such inheritances relative to costs of living, suffice it to say that Hannah only gained a few years of economic security, if any, through her parents' estates.

Although unmarried persons often lived with relatives in order to pool financial resources, it appears that most of the James siblings were not in a position to provide for their youngest sister. Mary, the eldest, died the same year as their father. Edward Delano, her husband, became a naval contractor and worked in Brooklyn, New York, Norfolk, Virginia, Pensacola, Florida, and Charlestown, Massachusetts, then died in 1859. Hannah's next-oldest sister, Anna, was an unmarried schoolmistress in Boston and Newton. Brother William Henry was a clerk for Delano and according to the 1850 U.S. Census, and followed him to Pensacola, Florida. In the 1860 census, he is listed as a civil engineer at the Escambia Navy Yard, but he cannot be

located in later records. Another brother, Albert, became a farmer. No later than 1863, when his name appears in Civil War draft registration records, he had migrated to Benton, Michigan. An 1870 U.S. Agricultural Census record indicates that his livelihood was modest, as he owned only twenty-two acres of land, two horses, two cattle, and one pig. He remained a farmer until his death in 1901. A third brother, Frederic Augustus, moved to East Boston in the 1850s and worked as a ship joiner there.<sup>36</sup> In August 1862, he enlisted in the Navy as a landsman, the lowest rank. Ultimately, he was captured by Confederates and perished at Andersonville, the notorious prison camp.<sup>37</sup>

Thus Hannah James' siblings were not able to provide a comfortable life for her. Furthermore, if she had ever wanted to marry, she lived in a place and time that made finding a husband quite a challenge: in Massachusetts during the 1860s and 1870s, women outnumbered men at a rate of about 1.06 to 1. Prospects for marrying someone of James' age were even worse, as women born in her decade outnumbered men more than 1.1 to 1.<sup>38</sup> Thus she had to rely on the charity of relatives with limited means—or support herself economically.

Around the time of William James' death, Hannah and her mother left Scituate for Newton. The 1855 Massachusetts State Census lists the two women as living alone within a neighborhood that appears to have been poorer than one would expect of the family of a former banker and state senator. On the same census page can be found an ice dealer, an upholsterer, a teacher, a clerk, a salesman, and several laborers, most native-born but also some from Ireland. The women cannot be found in the 1860 U.S. Census, but five years later, they were residing with Hannah's older sister, Welthea, her husband Benjamin Merritt, and their children. Listed as a "machinist" and "inventor" in various censuses and city directories, Benjamin Merritt's financial circumstances may have been better than other relatives.<sup>39</sup> His work address remained consistent: Utica Street in Boston. According to the 1865 Massachusetts State Census, the Merritts employed an Irish servant and their neighbors included a "builder," "merchant," and "shipmaster."<sup>40</sup> As of 1870, they no longer reported a servant, but the family's income sustained husband, wife, three children, an orphaned nephew (the son of Edward Delano and Mary James), Hannah, and her mother. Although Benjamin Merritt's employment appears to have been stable, it is doubtful that he was wealthy. According to studies done in 1875 by the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, families who relied solely on a father's income often had a "hard struggle to pay bills" and seldom saved money.<sup>41</sup> This is confirmed by the 1870 U.S. Census which reports that Benjamin and Welthea Merritt owned personal property and real estate worth about \$10,000 in total.



**Newton, Massachusetts, 1878**

Centre Street in Newton. The building marked "3" at the center of the image is the Newton Free Library. Detail from *View of Newton, Mass.: Comprising Wards 1 & 7 & Environs of the City of Newton* (Boston: O. H. Bailey and Company, 1878).

Regardless of whether she mourned the dispersal of family members or regretted not having a husband, Hannah Packard James did not remain idle during this period of time following her parents' deaths. During the Civil War, she ran Newton's Channing Sewing Circle, a group which contributed clothing and other goods to the New England Women's Auxiliary Association (NEWAA), a chapter of the United States Sanitary Commission (USSC).<sup>42</sup> Few details about her service are known, but if Channing was like other soldiers' aid societies, James probably encountered a variety of social situations. Female volunteers often used pre-existing church and social networks to solicit donations, but the USSC's "district system" meant that she would have been required to contact households that she didn't know and may have communicated with women in different areas of the state.<sup>43</sup> In addition, the USSC was greatly concerned with the uneven, inappropriate, and wasteful distribution of supplies—a managerial outlook which she learned from her time of service and that undoubtedly served her well when she later became a library administrator. Although the Civil War did not affect all women in the same way, it seems likely that James' service amplified her sense of civic responsibility. The government's and organizations' entrance into people's lives had another implication: that women like James could depend less on the social and financial resources of male relatives if they learned to cooperate with entities outside the home.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, while we do not know the precise reasons for her entrance into the working world, by 1870, various circumstances predisposed Hannah Packard James to apply for a position at Newton Public Library. From early childhood, she learned that middle class people used their social and financial influence to improve civic life. Her Unitarian faith encouraged her to become active in causes relating to human development. Limited formal educational opportunities in Scituate may have awakened a particular interest in books. An older sister, schoolteacher Anna, had set a family precedent for a female having a career. At the same time, the death of her father in 1854, the scattering of her brothers, and limited marriage prospects left her without sure financial support. Although she boarded with in-laws, the breadwinner's income was likely modest, and the home was filled with children. Employment through the Newton Free Library would have been a welcome personal and economic opportunity.

## **A LIBRARY CAREER BEGINS**

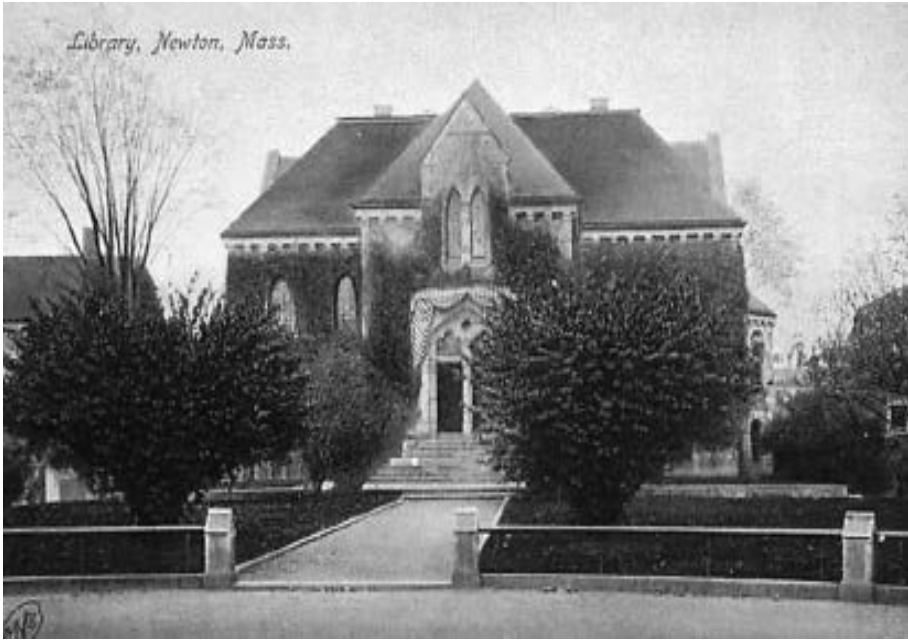
Neither James' nor the Merritts' names appear as library subscribers or volunteers in any of the Newton Free Library documents, nor do the annual

reports or meeting minutes mention why Hannah was hired. Yet, it is known that the library presented a position that had not previously existed in that community. Other cultural institutions had predated the Newton Free Library, including the Newton Lyceum, the Newton Literary Association (NLA), and the West Newton Athenaeum Literary Society. However, judging from coverage in local newspapers, these organizations focused more on public entertainment than on reading material and appear to have utilized volunteers rather than paid staff.<sup>45</sup>

The movement for a free library gathered steam after the Civil War, especially as Springfield, Waltham, and other Massachusetts towns started to organize book collections. In Newton, the movement for a free library was largely the result of the efforts of Dr. David K. Hitchcock, members of the Newton Literary Association, and H. M. Stimson, a newspaper editor who promoted the idea. In 1865 or 1866, Hitchcock proposed that the NLA raise an endowment for a free public library. A committee then organized a meeting with representatives from Newton Corner, West Newton, and other nearby villages. Everyone agreed to raise funds for a library to serve the entire area. By September 1866, the group had appointed a board of trustees, acquired land in Newton Centre and begun a subscription campaign. In mid-January 1868, when J. Wiley Edmands offered to donate a gift of fifteen thousand dollars if residents could raise the same amount of money, the *Newton Journal* urged everyone to contribute. Even “ladies . . . young men, mechanics, clerks, and students” were expected to give their share.<sup>46</sup>

Ultimately, however, demands that the Newton Free Library serve Newtonville, West Newton, Newton Highlands, and other villages ultimately forced the board to seek “more liberal husbandry.” In 1876, they transferred the library to the newly incorporated City of Newton.<sup>47</sup> Such administrative details may seem trivial, but the evolution from privately-funded, volunteer-run associations to municipally-subsidized, professionally-staffed libraries may have enabled persons who were previously engaged in charitable work to obtain paid positions. Such changes also expanded employees’ authority by mandating them to fulfill the needs of an entire city, rather than just those of dues-paying members. At least this was the result for the Newton Free Library and Hannah Packard James.

When the library first opened, James worked under a volunteer “superintendent,” board member George W. Bacon. She, another assistant, and the building’s janitor each earned about three hundred dollars per year. At first, James’ authority was quite limited, and she did not select items for the library’s collection. Instead, the board hired William Frederick Poole (1821–1894), who had once headed the Boston Athenaeum and was then



### **Newton Free Public Library**

The main entrance of the Newton Free Library on Centre Street, ca. 1910. Postcard from the author's collection.

leading the Cincinnati Public Library, to compile a list of purchases. Later, it appointed a “Library Committee” to acquire materials.<sup>48</sup> It was probably James’ task to catalog, process, and shelve them. In his first annual report, Bacon noted that James and assistant Cornelia Jackson had circulated more than three thousand volumes each month (quite a large number considering that customers could only borrow one book at a time). The Newton Free Library’s records reveal James’ penchant toward detail during this period. In an age before computers, she tabulated the number of residents that had registered to use the library for each month since the library opened; the percentage of fiction, biography, history, and other topics customers borrowed; the busiest and slowest times of the year in terms of circulation; and the number of volumes the librarians repaired.<sup>49</sup> In other words, it appears that her role was primarily clerical—roughly equivalent to a “library assistant” today.

Over the course of a decade, however, James became increasingly involved in intellectual aspects of the library's work—especially deciding which patrons could access which books. Her role expanded when Bradford K. Pierce became the Newton Free Library's superintendent. He urged the board to hire a cataloging assistant to allow James to spend more time with children.<sup>50</sup> Although the idea to collaborate with schools was probably not hers, James made such work her own.<sup>51</sup> Describing her efforts as an attempt to “train up” children to “relish and demand something besides a fictitious and sensational literature,” she began by visiting each school in the city, meeting with nearly every teacher, and placing a catalog of the library's collection in each principal's office. After receiving lists of topics from instructors, James made “selections of books” herself and sent them to the classrooms. Children could take volumes home, but teachers were responsible for ensuring that items were returned to the library.

Ultimately, James asserted a great deal of authority over the schools' usage of the library. For instance, she warned teachers that the program was “for the mental and moral culture of the pupils”; thus, books “intended for mere amusement will be withheld.”<sup>52</sup> It seems James sent many titles on history, foreign countries, and sciences as well as a great deal of biographies but scarcely anything on political or social questions. Regarding fictional literature, James preferred the works of Jacob Abbott, Louisa May Alcott, James Fenimore Cooper, Mrs. George Cupples, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Horace Elisha Scudder.<sup>53</sup> Her strategy of connecting books to classroom assignments was innovative for involving public libraries in the academic support of formal education rather than simply providing recreational reading. Moreover, making teachers responsible for the books' circulation mitigated concerns of charging books directly to children. *Library Journal*, which at the time was the only American periodical pertaining to this emerging profession, often reprinted excerpts from Newton Free Library's pamphlets, annual reports, and press coverage. Thus James came to be considered a national expert on library outreach to children.

James' successful interactions with school administrators, instructors, and pupils seemed to augment the trustees' confidence in her. In 1883, she requested four months' leave “partly for rest . . . and partly for the benefit of the Library.” Specifically, she proposed to travel to Europe to purchase books for Newton Free Library's collection. The board granted her request and sent her with several hundred pounds as well as a “letter of instruction” (an authorization to transfer additional funds).<sup>54</sup> When she returned from her time away, James not only brought hundreds of new items but also a photographic collection of the English cathedrals which she had visited during her trip.<sup>55</sup>

Around that same time, she began to publicly voice strong opinions about what Newtonians—both adults and children—should read. In one report, she asked the rhetorical question of whether “an enormous circulation,” obtained by “giving the people what they wish to read,” would “be a sure evidence of the greatest amount of benefit conferred by the Library?” James’ answer was that it was a “matter of grave doubt” that reading “three to six volumes a week of weak and improbable fiction—juvenile or otherwise—is a benefit to anyone.”<sup>56</sup> Apparently James was within her bounds to deny patrons books they had requested, for “kind and wise restraint can be, and is, exercised by the Librarian.”<sup>57</sup>

It must be said that local residents did not always agree with her. The fiction debate came to a head in late 1884 when Newton’s Common Council debated the library’s appropriation of funds for the coming fiscal year. Councilman Albert F. Upton “solemnly protest[ed] against the class of books added to the library.” In his opinion, it had recently acquired no “books of any interest or value to a person of ordinary literary tastes.”<sup>58</sup> Further concerns about NFL’s collection were aired in local newspapers in subsequent weeks.<sup>59</sup>

James responded to these criticisms point by point in two lengthy editorials and her library’s annual report. First, she defended their collection, indicating that some of the cited objectionable purchases were actually gifts. Others (such as those on electricity) were actually among the most frequently borrowed books in the collection. For example, T. Jeffery Parker’s *Course of Instruction in Zootomy* was “bought with special reference to two Natural History Societies of Newton—the Linnaean Society and the Agassiz Association—composed of young lads who pursue the study with a great deal of enthusiasm, and spend many of their spare moments in the Library gathering information for their essays and debates.”

She also explained some of the library’s practical constraints. Particularly, the NFL’s budget could not afford nor could its building possibly contain multiple editions of every novel. Among 48 novels that she deemed “the best and most popular of the works of adult fiction” published during the preceding year, it would cost the city more than \$750 to obtain the twenty duplicate copies that one write-in to the paper had demanded. Perhaps most importantly, she criticized Councilman Upton’s assumptions that professional classes were unimportant constituencies in Newton and that working people did not require scientific or technical information.

She rallied taxpayers to consider “what . . . a Public Library stands for in a community.” James asked rhetorically, “is it intended as an opposition establishment to the Circulating Library, wherein fiction is furnished in unlimited quantities, free to all, or is it one of the great working forces for



the uplifting and education of the community?” For an answer, James urged doubters to “spend a day in the Library and listen to the constant calls upon the librarian for all kinds of information.”<sup>60</sup> Doctors, lawyers, ministers, laborers, and other readers “with a purpose” each deserved to find needed material within the institution for which they all paid. Even laborers, who were often presuming to desire “light reading,” were actually avid users of technical books to assist “their labors.”<sup>61</sup> With all this in mind, demands for popular fiction were not “in accordance with the dictates of reason, or for the highest good of the community.”<sup>62</sup> This exchange illustrates that by the mid-1880s, James was confident enough in her professional voice to defend her philosophy in print and not waver from it.

## WILKES-BARRE AND BEYOND

Given the success Hannah Packard James enjoyed, as well as her family ties to the Newton area, her next career step may have been a surprise to some. In 1887, she left Massachusetts to become the first Librarian of the Osterhout Free Library (OFL) in Wilkes-Barre, a rapidly-growing coal mining community in Northeastern Pennsylvania. All the factors that compelled James to move are unknown, but her resignation letter, published in the *Newton Journal*, indicates a combination of career ambition and financial need. She explained that “Pennsylvania has no such free libraries as New England is so rich in;” thus heading OFL would enable her to “become a pioneer” in her profession. In addition, she pointed out that Wilkes-Barre was offering a much higher salary. Most significantly, James also understood that her professional example would serve as a model for other women. In Pennsylvania, where nearly all libraries were funded through subscription and were administered by all-male boards of trustees, a strong, female executive would encourage everyone to think “if one woman can be a successful librarian in Pennsylvania, why not others?”<sup>63</sup>

In some respects Hannah Packard James’ professional success continued after her move to Wilkes-Barre.<sup>64</sup> Although she had difficulties addressing the needs of the laborers and working class families and ultimately relocated to Dorranceton, a Wilkes-Barre suburb, in 1897, she continued to head the OFL until her death in 1903. She served repeatedly on the Council of the American Library Association and was selected as its vice-president in 1896. James was also a founder of the Pennsylvania Library Club and the Keystone State Library Association, two predecessors of today’s Pennsylvania Library Association. Many junior librarians apprenticed or visited NFL and OFL during the 1880s–1900s and emulated her work. For example, when

cataloger and future library educator Mary Salome Cutler traveled from the Columbia Library School to the Boston area in 1889 or 1890, she devoted more words to her visit at the NFL than she did to the Boston Athenaeum, the Boston Public Library, and other famous institutions. Even though James had left several years earlier, Cutler and other visitors admired her “cathedral books” and the peaceful atmosphere she had helped create.<sup>65</sup>

A story that is less widely known, however, is the persistent economic vulnerability that James experienced and the lifeline that librarianship continued to provide through the end of her life. Despite becoming head librarian in Newton and Wilkes-Barre, it appears that financial disappointment dogged her persistently. Perhaps the most poignant evidence of her struggles comes from a list of pews at Channing Church in Newton. James’ seat, one of the least expensive in the congregation, was paid for by Gardiner M. Jones, a trustee of the library, and James’ sister, “Mrs. B. Merritt.” In other words, James may have not been able to afford to worship where she wanted.<sup>66</sup>

At OFL, her starting salary was eighteen hundred dollars per year, significantly higher than most Pennsylvania librarians were earning at the time. Yet this income was apparently still inadequate for a single woman with no other source of support who wished to achieve fiscal security. Although she had long wanted to reside in a rural area, it was not until 1897, when the mother of her colleague and friend Myra Poland died and left Poland the bulk of her estate, that the two women were able to jointly purchase a home in the suburbs.<sup>67</sup> It was a transformative experience for James, who wrote to her longtime friend Melvil Dewey that moving to Dorranceton meant “we have begun to live” (her emphasis).<sup>68</sup> Despite her elation, James’ other letters to Dewey reveal her ongoing concern about encumbering much of her meager savings in her home and in the Lake Placid Club (LPC), a resort for educators that Dewey was building in the Adirondacks. Her worries grew as she aged and recognized that the time was approaching when she would be unable to work. For example, in 1896 the sixty-one year-old librarian described her hesitation in writing a check for the LPC by explaining, “I’m getting old and want to be careful.” Similarly, in another letter from the same year, she commented that she had become “so used to having my money invested in a sieve.”<sup>69</sup> Though she ultimately contributed \$1,000 and became a “life member” in the club, it does not appear that she realized significant returns.

When she wrote her will in January 1903, there was still a mortgage of \$1,200 against her portion of the house she co-owned with Myra Poland. She directed that her personal property be sold to satisfy it, and that remaining furniture, rugs, and other fixtures be left in place to enable her friend to remain there.<sup>70</sup> Upon her death three months later, James’ entire estate was valued at only \$8,500, nearly

all of it comprising her investment in their property. Besides a life interest in the house, which was bequeathed to her sister, Welthea Merritt, James left only a “seal ring” and an antique chair to a nephew.<sup>71</sup>

## CONCLUSION

An examination of the early life and career of Hannah Packard James reveals that a combination of factors contributed to middle class women’s paid employment. As other scholars have discovered, some females were enthusiastic about utilizing their talents to influence conditions within their communities. In James’ case, her increased knowledge and responsibility for the quality of reading materials in Newton motivated her to collaborate with schools and argue against spending public funds on popular fiction. It also prompted her to leadership roles within the American Library Association and other professional organizations. Yet besides enabling her to act upon her personal values, sources suggest that James’ financial exigency was another strong motivator for entering and remaining in the workplace. Having inherited no significant estate of her own, and lacking a father, brother, or husband to support her, James accepted a low-paying position within the Newton Free Library and strived to become its head. She parlayed her library work into international travel, as her 1883 and 1897 ventures to England suggest. Approaching sixty-eight years of age, James continued working during her final illness, selecting new books from publisher’s catalogs as she lay in bed.

Knowing the large number of New England women who became librarians during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholars must ask whether stories like James’ are more common than previously acknowledged. Given the difficult life she may have led if she had refused to work or had settled for menial or temporary positions, James’ appreciation of libraries as places where “character, intelligence, executive ability, and a thorough training” were rewarded speaks to librarianship as an occupation where women could achieve some form of independence and agency. Much remains to be learned about middle class professional women.

HJM

## Notes

1. *Transactions and Proceedings of the Second International Library Conference Held in London, July 13–16, 1897* (Edinburgh: Morrison and Gibb Limited, 1898): 34–39.
2. Hannah P. James, “Women in American and British Libraries,” *The Library World* 1, no. 6 (December 1898): 89–90.

3. Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876–1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2003), 20. Garrison specifically mentions James in her analysis.
4. Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2, pt. 1 (Summer 1966): 151–174.
5. For example, see Jeanne Boydston, “Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis,” *Gender & History* 20, no. 3 (November 2008): 558–83; Alison Easton, R. J. Ellis, Janet Floyd, and Lindsey Traub, “Introduction: Becoming Visible,” in *Becoming Visible: Women’s Presence in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Rodopi, 2010), 2–6, as well as chapters by Anne Boylan, S. J. Kleinberg, and others in the same volume; Linda Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” *Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (June 1988): 9–39; and Alice Kessler-Harris, “Reframing the History of Women’s Wage Labor: Challenges of a Global Perspective,” *Journal of Women’s History* 15, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 186–206.
6. Anne Prior Scott, *Natural Allies: Women’s Associations in American History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 2–4.
7. See Jeannie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the Civil War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Judith Ann Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood: The U.S. Sanitary Commission and Women’s Politics in Transition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000); Anne Prior Scott, *Natural Allies: Women’s Associations in American History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Nina Silber, *Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).
8. Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, 20th Anniversary Edition (Oxford University Press, 2003), 108–113.
9. Lara Vapnek, *Breadwinners: Working Women and Economic Independence, 1865–1920* (Urbana and Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 2, 12.
10. As of 1900, there were more than 3,100 women employed as librarians or library assistants in the United States. Though dwarfed by the number of female nurses and teachers, librarians were the largest group within the “literary and scientific professions.” See Joseph A. Hill, *Women in Gainful Occupations, 1870 to 1920* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1929), 42.
11. Suzanne Hildenbrand, “Library Feminism and Library Women’s History: Activism and Scholarship, Equity and Culture,” *Libraries & Culture* 35, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 51–65.
12. Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*, 188.
13. Mary Niles-Maack, “Gender, Culture, and the Transformation of American Librarianship, 1890–1920,” *Libraries & Culture* 33, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 51–61. Quotation is from pg. 59.
14. Suzanne Stauffer, “‘She Speaks as One Having Authority’: Mary E. Downey’s Use of Libraries as a Means to Public Power,” *Libraries & Culture* 40, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 38–62.

15. Gerda Lerner, "Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges," *Feminist Studies* 3, no. 1/2 (Autumn 1975): 5–14.
16. Plummer Alston Jones, Jr., "The Awakening of the Social Conscience: Jane Maud Campbell, 1869–1947," *The Library Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (July 2012): 305–35.
17. Kate Clifford Larson, "The Saturday Evening Girls: A Progressive Era Library Club and the Intellectual Life of Working Class and Immigrant Girls in Turn-of-the-Century Boston," *The Library Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (2001): 195–230.
18. M. E. Kingsbury, "'To Shine in Use': The Library and War Service of Oregon's Pioneer Librarian, Mary Frances Isom," *The Journal of Library History* 10, no. 1 (January 1975): 22–34.
19. Joseph Foster Merritt, *Old Time Anecdotes of the North River and the South Shore* (Rockland, MA: Rockland Standard Publishing Company, 1928), 61.
20. For descriptions of the area, see L. Vernon Briggs, *History of Shipbuilding on the North River, Plymouth County, Massachusetts, with Genealogies of the Shipbuilders, and Accounts of the Industries upon Its Tributaries, 1640 to 1872* (Boston: Coburn Brothers, 1889), 214; John Bradford Hunter, "Boston and Its Maritime World, 1790–1850: Trade Circuits, Proto-Industrialization, and the Historical Geography of Shipbuilding in New England" (Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1999), 96–97; and Norwell Historical Society, *Historical Homesteads of Norwell, Massachusetts*. (Norwell, MA: The Society, 1992), 12–15.
21. Alix Quan, e-mail message to author, August 25, 2006. Quan, a staff member of the State Library of Massachusetts, used the library's "Biographical Files" on the state's legislators
22. Merritt, *Old Time Anecdotes of the North River*, 14; Briggs, *History of Shipbuilding on the North River*, 261–2; Joseph Foster Merritt, *Narrative History of Scituate-Norwell Massachusetts* (Rockland, MA: Rockland Standard Publishing Company, 1938), 104, 108; South Shore Genealogical Society, *An Index to the First Parish Cemetery of Norwell, Massachusetts* (Norwell, MA: The Society, 1987), 24–25. Note, there are various spellings of Welthea's name in the historical record.
23. See frontispiece map in Douglass Shand-Tucci, *Built in Boston: City and Suburb, 1800–1900* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).
24. Frederick Cople Jaher, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 25, 32, 37, 39, 42.
25. For May's biography, see Donald Yacovone, "Samuel Joseph May," in *American National Biography*, ed. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, vol. 14, 762–3. Also available online at [www.anb.org](http://www.anb.org). In addition, see Roger Hiemstra, "Samuel J. May," May Memorial Unitarian Universalist Society, [www.mmuus.org/who-we-are/history/sjmay.html](http://www.mmuus.org/who-we-are/history/sjmay.html) (accessed June 10, 2014).
26. David Turley, "Religion and Approaches to Reform: Boston Unitarians Versus Evangelicals in the Context of the 1820s and 1830s," *American Nineteenth Century History* 10, no. 2 (2009): 187–209.

27. Jarvis Freymann, *Scituate's Educational Heritage, 1630–1990* (Hanover, MA: Scituate Historical Society, 1990), 59–64, 76–7, 91–3, 315–21.
28. Carl F. Kaestle and Maris A. Vinovskis, *Education and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 2–8.
29. Myra Poland, “Hannah Packard James, 1835–1903,” *Bulletin of Bibliography and Dramatic Index* 8 (October 1914): 91–2.
30. Bernadette A. Lear, “Yankee Librarian in the Diamond City: Hannah Packard James, the Osterhout Free Library, and the Public Library Movement in Pennsylvania,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 78, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 123–63.
31. Hunter, “Boston and Its Maritime World,” 10–20, 73.
32. Hunter, “Boston and Its Maritime World,” 108, 154; George Michael O’Har, “Shipbuilding, Markets, and Technological Change in East Boston” (Ph.D. diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1995), 158–60, 177–87.
33. Briggs, *History of Shipbuilding on the North River*, 267.
34. Plymouth County [Massachusetts] Probate Court, probate records of William James (#11356), record book 13 (1854), page 23, available from the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Archives, 3 Pemberton Square, 16th Floor, Boston, MA.
35. Middlesex County [Massachusetts] Probate Court, probate records of Walthia James (#5799), record book 11 (July 1872), page 23, available from the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Archives, 3 Pemberton Square, 16th Floor, Boston, MA.
36. Briggs, *History of Shipbuilding on the North River*, 227; O’Harr, “Shipbuilding Markets,” 189.
37. Frederic Augustus James, *Prison Diary of Frederic Augustus James: Sumter to Andersonville*, ed. Jefferson J. Hammer (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1973), 9, 23–28, 39, 42–45, 61, 78–79. Unfortunately, the diary offers little insight about Hannah’s activities during the war. Frederic only mentioned her once, in the fall of 1863, when he received a letter from her.
38. Susan B. Carter et. al., *Historical Statistics of the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1-53–1-55 and 1-264–1-266. Rates for Massachusetts and the United States were calculated with population numbers reported in the volume.
39. C. C. Drew, *The Newton Directory: Containing a General Directory of the Citizens, a Business Directory, and the Town Record ...* (Worcester, MA: C. C. Drew, 1868); [W. A. Greenough], *Boston Business Directory*, (Boston: Greenough and Company, 1878, 1881, and 1884); C. C. Drew, *The Newton Directory*, (Worcester, MA: Drew, Allis, and Company, 1885). In the late nineteenth century, Merritt earned no fewer than fifteen patents for his work with firearms, machine belts, and various mechanical processes. See U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1840–1965), especially alphabetical indexes for 1862–1900 in each volume.

40. Unfortunately, the 1855 and 1865 Massachusetts state censuses did not record residents' street addresses, incomes, or the values of their personal property or real estate. Thus their utility for investigating social class is limited.

41. Henry F. Bedford, *Their Lives and Numbers: The Condition of Working People in Massachusetts, 1870–1900* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 50–52, 116.

42. NEWAA was a “tributary” to the United States Sanitary Commission, a civilian-run, national relief organization which assisted the Medical Department of the Union Army. Records of NEWAA are closed to the general public. According to Susan Waide, a manuscripts specialist at the New York Public Library when this research was conducted in 2006, a “catalog” of volunteers links James to the Channing Sewing Circle, and the sewing circle to the NEWAA. James' involvement with the sewing circle/NEWAA is probably the basis for Myra Poland's and others' claims that James worked for the U.S.S.C. during the war. For a guide to the NEWAA Archives, see New York Public Library, Archives and Manuscripts Division, “United States Sanitary Commission Records. New England Women's Auxiliary Association Archives, 1861–1865,” New York Public Library, <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/18579> (accessed June 16, 2014).

43. Jeannie Attie, *Patriotic Toil*, 22–28, and Melinda Lawson, *Patriot Fires: Forging a New American Nationalism in the Civil War North* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 23.

44. For analysis of the Civil War's transformative effects on women, see Attie, *Patriotic Toil*, 87–111, 254–75; Lawson, *Patriot Fires*, 17–21, 32; and Nina Silber, *Daughters of the Union*, 277–84.

45. For example, see articles about these organizations in *Newton Journal*, October 13, 1866, October 5, 1867, and November 28, 1868.

46. Smith, *History of Newton*, 663–82; *Newton Journal*, September 8, 1866, September 22, 1866, February 9, 1867, and March 7, 1868.

47. Newton Free Library, 1875 *Annual Report*, 6–9, 15–16, 19.

48. Newton Free Library, 1872 *Annual Report*, 24–5; Newton Free Library, Board of Trustees meeting minutes, June 4, 1872.

49. Newton Free Library, 1870 *Annual Report*, 30–31 and 1871 *Annual Report*, 8–9; Newton Free Library, Board of Trustees meeting minutes, November 6, 1876.

50. Newton Free Library, 1879 *Annual Report*, 9.

51. NFL was probably following a course recommended by William Howard Brett, Samuel Swett Green, and others. See Sybille Jagusch, “First Among Equals: Caroline M. Hewins and Anne C. Moore, Foundations of Library Work with Children” (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1990), 162.

52. Newton Free Library, “How Public Libraries May Benefit Public Schools,” *Library Journal* 11 (1886): 115–116; Hannah P. James, “Cooperation of the Newton Free Library with the Public Schools, 1885-6,” *Library Journal* 11 (1886): 224–25; Hannah P. James, “Public School Use of Public Libraries,” *Library Journal* 11 (1886): 418.

53. Newton Free Library, 1885 *Annual Report*, 24–35, 51.

54. Newton Free Library, Board of Trustees meeting minutes, May 2, 1883.
55. James may have been inspired by a gift of eighty large photographs of French cathedrals, presented to the library in 1877 by former Mayor William Fowle. See Smith, *History of Newton*, 682, and Newton Free Library, 1883 *Annual Report*, 17.
56. Newton Free Library, 1872 *Annual Report*, 30.
57. Newton Free Library, 1881 *Annual Report*, 16.
58. "The Appropriation Bill for 1885 Adopted," *Newton Journal*, November 15, 1884.
59. See "The Selection of Books for the Newton Free Library," *Library Journal* 9 (1884): 209–10; "The Accessions Made By the Newton Free Library," *Newton Journal*, November 22, 1884; Francis B. Hornbrooke, "Something About Our Free Library and Its Assortment of Books," *Newton Journal*, November 22, 1884; "Something More About the Character of Books for the General Reading Public," *Newton Journal*, November 29, 1884; "Our Public Library," *Newton Journal*, November 29, 1884; "The Class of Books Selected for the Newton Free Library," *Newton Journal*, November 29, 1884; "An Appreciative Patron of the Newton Free Library," *Newton Journal*, December 6, 1884; and "A Workingman's Opinion of the Newton Free Library," *Newton Journal*, December 20, 1884.
60. Hannah P. James, "On the Selection of Books for the Newton Free Library," *Newton Journal*, November 29, 1884.
61. Hannah P. James, "The Newton Free Library," *Newton Journal*, December 6, 1884.
62. Newton Free Library, 1884 *Annual Report*, 12–14.
63. "The Newton Free Library: Resignation of Miss Hannah P. James, as Librarian," *Newton Journal*, May 6, 1887.
64. For a scholarly examination of James' career in Pennsylvania, see Bernadette A. Lear, "Yankee Librarian in the Diamond City: Hannah Packard James, the Osterhout Free Library, and the Public Library Movement in Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 78, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 123–63.
65. M. F. Sweetser, *King's Handbook of Newton* (Boston: Moses King Corp., 1889), 66; Mary Salome Cutler, "Library School Visit to Boston," *Library Journal* 15 (1890): 176–178.
66. "List of Pews in Channing Church," ledger, ca. 1884, in folder "Channing Unitarian Church, now Newton Presbyterian Newton Corner," Historic Newton (Newton's historical society).
67. Will number 211 of 1897, Will Book Q, 408–9, available at Luzerne County Register of Wills Office, Luzerne County Courthouse, Penn Place Annex, 20 N. Pennsylvania Ave., Wilkes-Barre, PA. See also Lear, "Yankee Librarian in the Diamond City."
68. Melvil Dewey Papers, box 5, "ALA Conference 1898," letter from James to Dewey, April 26, 1898, Columbia University.
69. See Letters from James to Dewey, May 7, 1896 and November 19, 1896, Box 31A, "Correspondence, Hasse–Jordan," Melvil Dewey Papers, Columbia University.



70. Will number 206 of 1903, Will Book W, 40–41, available at Luzerne County Register of Wills Office, Luzerne County Courthouse, Penn Place Annex, 20 N. Pennsylvania Ave., Wilkes-Barre, PA.

71. “Wills Probated Yesterday,” *Wilkes-Barre Record*, April 22, 1903.