

Writing, Books & Libraries

People have had libraries for about 6,000 years. They have kept written records on bone, clay, metal, wax, wood, stone, papyrus, silk, leather, parchment, paper, film, plastic, and magnetic tape, and have collected these records into libraries.



Cave Drawings

The development of writing and visible language had its origins in simple pictures. Among the earliest examples of such *pictographs* are paintings of animals on the walls of caves.



Hieroglyphic Writing

The ancient Egyptians wrote on papyrus, a reed that grew in the Nile River. They cut the papyrus stems into strips, pressed the strips into sheets, and joined the sheets together to form scrolls. Some scrolls were more than 40 meters long. The English word *paper* is derived from the Egyptian word *papyrus*.



Cuneiform Writing

Some of the oldest clay tablets that have been discovered were made more than 4,000 years ago by the Sumerians, who lived in southern Mesopotamia. Their *cuneiform* (wedge-shaped) characters, pressed or scratched into the clay, represented words or syllables.

The most famous library of ancient time was a Greek library located at Alexandria, Egypt. It contained the greatest collection of scrolls in the ancient world, perhaps more than 700,000. The first government-owned library was established in Athens during the 500s B.C. Since most people at that time could not read, "public" libraries were used by only a small part of the population.



The Chinese established libraries in ancient times. They originally wrote on wooden tablets, but by A.D. 105 had invented paper. The oldest known printed book was a scroll made in China in 868, printed from type made of baked clay.

When papyrus was not available, scholars of the ancient western world wrote on leather, made from animal skins. Later, leather was replaced by parchment, which was made from thin layers of animal skins. Parchment was developed in Pergamum, a city in Asia Minor that had one of the great libraries of the ancient world. One of the advantages of parchment was that, unlike papyrus, both sides could be written on. Parchment sheets could not, however, be satisfactorily joined into rolls as could papyrus. Therefore, scribes and librarians began the practice of folding several sheets of parchment down the middle and sewing them together through the fold. Thus was established the form that books have had ever since.

In recent years the concept of a public library has expanded to meet the needs of an ever-greater segment of the population. In the United States, as in many other parts of the world, bookmobiles—traveling libraries in converted trucks or buses—make books available in rural areas and to elderly or incapacitated urban residents for whom travel to a stationary library is difficult or impossible. Also, technological advances have enabled libraries to provide a number of services beyond the lending of books.



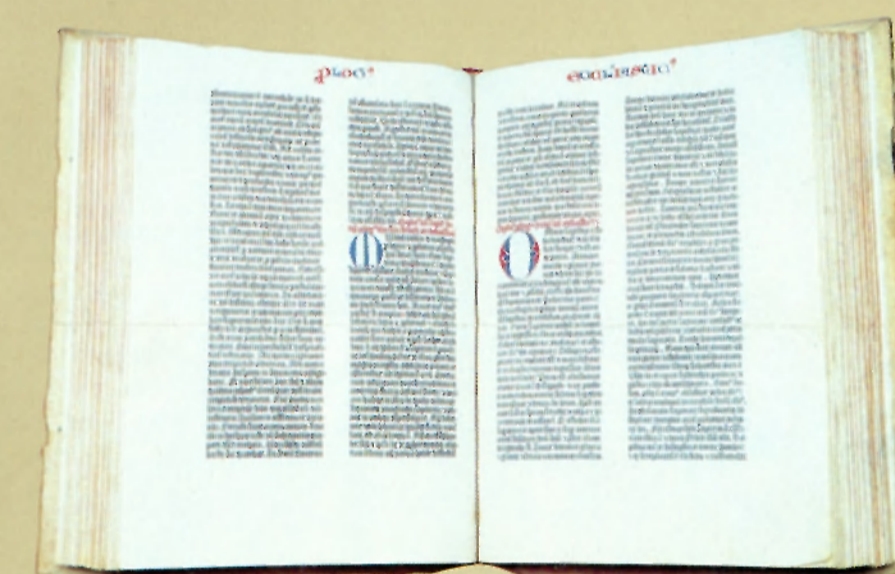
Many have multimedia centers and make available audio and video material recorded on discs, tapes, and cassettes, as well as microfiche, microfilm, and CD ROMS. With all these enhancements, however, the heart of a library—as the derivation of the word from Latin *liber* ("book") suggests—remains, as in the

beginning, a depository for meaningful marks written on a page: a collection of books.



New York Public Library

The American ideal of free public schooling for every child led naturally to a movement for free public libraries. These were established in every city and even in small towns (in many cases through the help of Andrew Carnegie). Founded in 1895, the New York Public Library (shown above) is the largest city public library in the United States, according to the number of volumes it contains and the number of branch libraries it includes. Pictured at right is one of the two guardian lions that are positioned on either side of the front steps of the New York Public Library. In the 1930s the mayor of New York City, Fiorello H. LaGuardia, named the lions *Patience* and *Fortitude*, because those were the qualities "New Yorkers most needed to survive the Depression." On pleasant days, people sit on the steps of the New York Public Library to read. This activity is sometimes humorously referred to as "reading between the lions."



Illuminated Manuscripts

For thousands of years all books were written by hand, painstakingly copied, illustrated, and richly decorated. The gold leaf used in the books caught and reflected the light, and so gave rise to the term *illuminated manuscript*.

The demand for books increased as the emerging middle class and the growing number of university students created a vast new market for reading. At the same time, papermaking from China was making its way into western Europe; this paper was bountiful and less expensive than parchment. The time was right for a change in the art of bookmaking, and around 1550 Johann Gutenberg brought together all the necessary components and invented movable type and the printing press. Books could now be mass-produced for an ever-growing reading public. Bookstores and libraries soon came to be an established part of people's daily life.



Andrew Carnegie came to the United States from Scotland as a young man and made a huge fortune in the steel industry. Afterwards, he gave away most of his wealth to colleges and universities and to organizations that worked to promote peace. He also used a large part of his fortune to build libraries. Between 1880 and his death in 1919, he built 2,507 public libraries in the English-speaking world. More than 1,700 of these were in towns and cities in the United States. Because of his generosity, Carnegie came to be known affectionately as "Father Andy."