Two hundred years of young adult library services: A chronology

Anthony Bernier, San Jose State University
M. K. Chelton, Queens College, City University of New York
C. A. Jenkins, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
J. B. Pierce, Indiana University

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I would also have in every library a friend of the young, whom they can consult freely when in want of assistance, and who, in addition to the power of gaining their confidence, has knowledge and tact enough to render them real aid in making selections.

—SAMUEL S. GREEN.

(from Sensational Fiction in Public Libraries, Library Journal 4, no. 9 (1879): 345-355, 352.)

COMPILED BY ANTHONY BERNIER, MARY K. CHELTON, CHRISTINE A. JENKINS, AND JENNIFER BUREK PIERCE

WHY WE COMPILED THIS CHRONOLOGY

The early scholars of women’s history knew that women were a significant presence throughout the past—the task was not so much to ferret out an obscure history but to make the invisible visible. The same holds true for library scholars who strive to place young people—and the women (and some men) who worked with them—in the mainstream rather than the margins.

Several years ago I wrote a literature review of youth services librarianship historiography for the journal Libraries & Culture, and noted that this history was wide-open for study. There has been some progress since then, but basically the history of youth services librarianship as a field of study is still as wide-open as ever. As with many other activities involving women and children, youth services librarianship has been simultaneously revered and ignored, and the origins and history of library service to youth are only beginning to be seriously examined by library historians.

According to Jesse Hauk Shera’s canonical history of early American libraries, Foundations of the Public Library (University of Chicago Press, 1949), the 1803 founding of the Bingham Library for Youth in Salisbury, Connecticut, was “the first instance in which a municipal governing body contributed active financial assistance to public library service” (160). Thus a library created specifically for young people was the first public library as the term is currently understood. Thirty-one years later in 1834, the Peterborough Town Library in New Hampshire was founded and became a far more well-known claimant to the “earliest public library” designation. Although the Peterborough library was for residents of all ages, it is interesting to note that more than half of its inaugural collection—approximately 200 books out of 370—was described as “the Juvenile Library.” From the very earliest years, children and adolescents clearly have been a significant constituent group of library users.

Interest in compiling this chronology grew out of frustration with several recently published books on YA services that, although otherwise commendable, seem either badly researched or ignorant of YA services history. It also emerged from the need to have a tool to use in teaching so that our students can get a better idea of where YA services came from, and to enhance the poor documentation for the few historical accounts that exist. We hope that such a chronology will inspire state-level counterparts that might be added to the national record. In terms of scope, the chronology attempts to consolidate the history of the two teen-serving divisions of the American Library Association (ALA): the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) and the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) with several other accounts of library history. This chronology is in no way comprehensive in terms of either all possible existing documented sources or in terms of parallel world, national, or local events affecting youth and their library services. Ideally it should be that comprehensive, and our hope is that future authors and scholars will fill in relevant gaps.—MKC.
1803 Caleb Bingham donates 150 books for the use of children 9 to 16 years of age in Salisbury, Connecticut (Stone, 140).

1823 Brooklyn Youth Library opens in Brooklyn, New York (Stone, 145).

1855 New York is first state to pass legislation permitting voters in any school district to levy a tax for libraries (Department of the Interior, 39).

1852 First compulsory school attendance laws passed in Massachusetts—established by all states by 1918 (Alexander and Jordan, 10).

1876 Samuel S. Green’s address at American Library Association (ALA) conference, “Personal Relations Between Librarian and Readers,” includes directions for assisting youth patrons (Cannons, 137).

1879 ALA Annual Conference in Boston emphasizes fiction and reading for the young (McDowell, Pierce).

1892 Landmark model legislation for development of school libraries passed in New York (Ramsey).

1896 ALA appoints Committee on Cooperation with the National Education Association (NEA), and NEA appoints NEA Library Department (Pond, 110-113). [These appointments occurred simultaneously—this initial push was from ALA president John Cotton Dana, with some assistance from Melvil Dewey (Jenkins)].

1903 G. Stanley Hall presents “What Children Read and What They Ought to Read” to the NEA (Pierce).

1914 “Blowing Out a Boy’s Brains” by Franklin K. Mathews, chief librarian of the Boy Scouts of America, is published—leading the call for good books for boys that culminates in the founding of Children’s Book Week in 1918 (Mathews).

1915 School Libraries Section of ALA holds first meeting at ALA Annual Conference (Pierce).

1921 Kansas City Public Library in Missouri sets up separate service for young people (Johnson, 5).
1924 The Horn Book begins publication in Boston (Ramsey).
Albany Public Library sets up separate service for young people (Johnson, 5).

1929 First edition of Books for Young People, subsequently to become Books for the Teenage, is published in New York Public Library (Campbell, 17).
Public libraries in Brooklyn, New York; East Cleveland, Ohio; Newark, New Jersey; South Bend, Indiana; and Springfield, Illinois, set up separate service for young people (Johnson, 5).
Mary Ware Dennett arrested for distributing her book, The Sex Side of Life: An Explanation for Young People—decision overturned 1930 (Jenkins, 137).

1930 Formation of Young People's Reading Roundtable (YPRRT) as part of ALAs Children's Library Association—"young people" referring to those later called "young adults" (Jenkins).
First youth services textbook, Effie L. Power's Library Work with Children, includes a chapter on "library service to adolescents" (Jenkins, 84).
First school and reference assistant is appointed in a New York Public Library branch, Chatham Square (Braverman, 114).

1937 Margaret Edwards appointed full-time young people's librarian at Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore (Braverman, 240).
Publication of first YA professional book, The Public Library and the Adolescent by E. Leyland (Jenkins). Public libraries in Lakewood, Ohio, and San Diego, California, set up separate service for young people (Johnson, 5).

1941 Dedication of Nathan Strauss Branch for Children and Young People in New York Public Library (Braverman, 114).
Office for Service to Youth is established under Jean C. Roos in Cleveland Public Library (Braverman, 178).
Division of Library Service to Children and Young People (DLCYP) formed within ALA, comprised of a School Libraries Section and a Public Libraries Section, which in turn is comprised of a Children’s Library Association (CLA) and a Young People’s Reading Round Table (YPRRT) (Jenkins, 128-129).

1942 Top of the News debuts in October as DLCYP's journal.

1944 Office of Work with Young People at Pratt becomes separate department headed by Margaret Edwards (Braverman, 240).
Margaret Scoggin first uses term "young adult" in title of bibliographies published in Library Journal (Campbell, 21-22).
American Association of School Librarians (AASL) name used for the first time (AASL History).

1947 YPRRT granted separate section status within DLCYP at ALA's annual conference (Jenkins).
YPRRT and General Federation of Women's Clubs join publicity and fund-raising for project, "A Youth Library in Every Community" (Jenkins, 288-289).
Mabel Williams's department is named Office of Work with Schools and Young People in the New York Public Library (Braverman, 114).

1948 Public Library Plans for the Teenage published (Hannigan, 855).
DLCYP/YPRRT sponsors preconference, "Youth and Libraries" (Jenkins, 288-289).
YPRRT program, "Youth and Their Interests," attracts 1,500 attendees (twice the number at Newbery-Caldecott Banquet) to hear Tops with Teens columnist Sheila John Daly and marketing consultant Eugene Gilbert (Jenkins, 308).

1949 Booklist carries first annotated list of "Adult Books for Young Adults" (Jenkins, 313-318).
Margaret Scoggin's Outlook Tower column on books of interest to teens starts in The Horn Book, running until 1987 shortly before her death (Jenkins, 318).

1950 Fiftieth anniversary of organization of youth services librarians (Jenkins, 395).
Last meeting of DLCYP as united group of both school and public youth librarians (Jenkins, 395).
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An Ample Field by Amelia Munson published (Campbell, 20).
1951 AASL becomes separate ALA division (Jenkins, 662).

1957 Young Adult Services Division (YASD) established as a separate division within ALA, splitting from Children's Library Association (CLA); Mildred Batchelder is first Executive Secretary serving both divisions (Starr).

1969 YASD sends delegates to White House Conference on Youth Bookbait: Detailed Notes on Adult Books Popular with Young People, edited by Elmer Walker, is published by ALA (Chelton). Margaret Edwards wins Grolier Award—established 1964 to honor librarians for “unusual contribution to the stimulation and guidance of reading by children and young people” (ALA Web site).

1967 The first edition of Books and the Teen-age Reader by G. Robert Carlsen is published by Harper & Row (Chelton). “Age” is added to the Library Bill of Rights (Krug). YASD cosponsors “Intellectual Freedom and the Teenager” preconference with ALA’s Intellectual Freedom Committee at ALA Annual Conference (Starr).


1970 Young Adult Services in the Public Library published by ALA’s Committee on Standards for Work with Young Adults (Jones et al). YASD sends delegates to White House Conference on Youth with their publication, “Youth in a Changing World” (Starr). Thirteen African American high school students enter segregated main library in Danville, Virginia, refusing to leave (Graham, 71). Standards for School Library Programs published by AASL in cooperation with the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (Ramsey).


1973 Young Adult Alternative Newsletter begun by Carol Starr (Starr, Nov. 2).

1975 At YASD’s “Book You” preconference at ALA Annual Conference, fifteen years of Best Books for Young Adults (BBYA) selections are analyzed to produce “Best of the Best: Still Alive in ’75,” the first of many such exercises (Starr).

1976 YASD establishes their own office and part-time staff as well as their own division’s Intellectual Freedom Committee (Fine, YALSA Web site).

1977 YASD produces Directions for Library Service to Young Adults (Starr). Evelyn Shaevel becomes YASD’s first full-time Executive Secretary (Fine).

1978 Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA) begins publication (Chelton). Emergency Librarian newsletter, founded in 1973, changes focus to school librarianship (Teacher Librarian Web site). The Young Adult Perplex column by Patty Campbell begins in Wilson Library Bulletin (Campbell, 32). “Dispelling the Hi-Lo Blues” preconference, cosponsored with Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), presented by YASD at ALA Annual Conference (Fine).

1980 First edition of Kenneth L. Donelson’s and Alleen Pace Nilsen’s textbook, Literature for Today’s Young Adults, published (Lenz & Mahood, vii). Young Adult Alternative Newsletter ceases publication (Starr, Nov. 2).

1987 Top of the News renamed Journal of Youth Services in Libraries (JOYS) (Fine). YASD preconference, “Courtly Love in the Shopping Mall: Library Programming for Young Adults with a Humanities Focus,” supports the 1985 NEH grant at ALA Annual Conference (Fine).


1989 Evelyn Shaevel leaves YASD as Executive Director; YASD and AASL then share Executive Director Ann Carlson Weeks, with Susan Horiuchi as YASD Deputy Director.
“Access for Children and Young Adults to Nonprint Materials, An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights” adopted (ALA Web site).

Patty Campbell wins Grolier Award (ALA Web site).


1991 SLJ/YASD Author Achievement Award becomes annual Margaret A. Edwards Award (Fine).

“Genrecon” is YASD preconference at ALA Annual Conference.

Susan Horiuchi resigns and Linda Waddle is hired as Deputy Director of YASD (Fine).

Dorothy M. Broderick wins Grolier Award (ALA Web site).

1992 YASD changes name to Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) (Gottschalk).

First edition of Connecting Young Adults and Libraries by Patrick Jones published by Neal-Schuman (Jones et al).

YALSA wins ALA-World Book Goal Award for seminars on “Serving the Underserved: Customer Services for Young Adults in Public Libraries” (Gottschalk).


Revised edition of Directions for Library Service to Young Adults published by YALSA (Gottschalk).

Bare Bones: Young Adult Services Tips for Public Library Generalists published by the Public Library Association (PLA) and YALSA (Chelton).

Excellence in Library Services to Young Adults project to recognize outstanding YA library programs is begun by ALA President Hardy Franklin (Chelton).

Mike Printz wins Grolier Award (ALA Web site).

1994 Los Angeles Public Library opens TeenScape, the first public library space incorporating teen-specific design features (Bernier).


YALSA co-publishes Output Measures and More: Planning and Evaluating Young Adult Services by Virginia Walter with PLA and presents related “Implementing Output Measures for Library Service to Young Adults” preconference at ALA Annual Conference (Gottschalk).

1998 YALSA establishes Alex Awards for adult books for teens, and also Teen Read Week every October (Jones et al. 50).

YALSA revises 1981 “Young Adults Deserve the Best: Competencies for Librarians Serving Young Adults” (YALSA Web site).

Patty Campbell’s Two Pioneers of Young Adult Library Services, profiling Mabel Williams and Margaret Edwards, published by Scarecrow Press in VOYA Occasional Papers series.

Emergency Librarian changes name to Teacher Librarian (Teacher Librarian Web site).

1999 DeWitt Wallace Reader’s Digest Fund supports Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development (Bernier).

YALSA establishes Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature (YALSA Web site).

2001 Los Angeles Public Library reinstates YA Coordinator position and converts most part-time YA librarians to full-time (Bernier).

YALSA’s quarterly electronic newsletter YAttitudes begins with Fall 2001 issue.

2002 First Lady Laura Bush hosts White House Conference on school libraries (Ramsey).

YALSA and ALSC’s Journal of Youth Services ceases publication with Summer issue and YALSA’s own Young Adult Library Services (YALS) begins publication (Murphy).

YALSA “Getting Graphic @ Your Library” preconference about graphic novels draws a crowd at ALA Annual Conference (VOYA April 2002).

Linda Waddle retires as YALSA Deputy Director and Cindy Welch takes her place (YALSA Web site).

2003 YALSA’s first annual list of Teens’ Top Ten Books is chosen by teens online during Teen Read Week (VOYA December 2003).

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Anthony Bernier is Director of Teen Services at Oakland Public Library in California. He served for ten years as Young Adult Specialist Librarian for the Los Angeles Public Library and received a Ph.D. in History from the University of California in 2002. In Fall 2003, he begins the journey toward tenure as Assistant Professor of Youth Services at San Jose State University’s School of Library and Information Science.

Mary K. Cleaton, a co-founder of VOYA, is a professor in the Graduate School of Library and Information Studies, Queens College, City University of New York. Her 1997 dissertation on YA services is Adults-Adolescent Service Encounters: The Library Context. She is the editor of three editions of Excellence in Library Services for Young Adults for the Young Adult Library Services Association of ALA. Among her many articles is The ProblemPatron that Public Libraries Created: The Normal Adolescent. The Reference Librarian, nos. 75/76, June, 2002, 25-33.

Christine A. Jenkins, an associate professor in the Graduate School of Library and Information Sciences, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, received her Ph. D. at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, with her dissertation, Strength of the Inconspicuous: Youth Services Librarians, the American Library Association, and Intellectual Freedom for the Young, 1939-1955. Her research focuses on the history of school and public library service to children and young adults; youth services librarians as canon-shapers and intellectual freedom advocates; U.S. librarians and Cold War censorship; and gay/lesbian content in young adult literature.

Jennifer Burek Pierce is an assistant professor at the Indiana University (IU) School of Library and Information Science’s Indianapolis program. She earned her doctorate at IU’s Department of Communication and Culture in rhetorical studies, with her dissertation focusing on maternal and child health issues during the Progressive Era. Among her recent publications is What’s Harry Potter Doing in the Library?: Depictions of Young Adult Information Seeking Behavior in Contemporary Fantasy Fiction, Selected Papers of From Aesop to E-Book: The Story Goes On... June 2004, 73-82.

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