

Justin Winsor

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JUSTIN WINSOR was born in Boston, on January 2, 1831. He attended a boarding school at Sandwich prior to entering Boston Latin, where he prepared for Harvard. During his preparatory school days he became interested in the history of the town of Duxbury, Massachusetts, with which the Winsor family had long been associated. The notes that he collected on this subject became so extensive that he was able to publish his first book, *A History of the Town of Duxbury* (1849), during his freshman year at Harvard.

Harvard proved to be somewhat of a disappointment to young Winsor. He apparently studied hard and read widely, but the collegiate life did not appeal to him. In fact, he never completed college, leaving Harvard in October, 1852, early in his senior year in order to travel abroad. Fifteen years later Harvard granted him his A.B. degree as of the Class of 1853. While abroad he continued to study and spent most of his two years there at Heidelberg and Paris.

Having returned to Boston in 1854, he married Miss Caroline T. Barker on December 18, 1855. Winsor soon began to produce a steady stream of criticism, poetry, comment, and fiction. Today this literary aspect of Winsor's life is little known. One relic of this period is a

ten-volume manuscript study of the drama and life of Garrick that is now in the Theatre Collection of the Harvard College Library. It is curious, however, that he did not publish any book written in this period until 1880, and that on the American Revolution. The products of his short-lived literary career have dropped into darkness.

In 1866 Winsor was appointed a trustee of the Boston Public Library, and at last his intellectual curiosity was once more thoroughly aroused, as he himself clearly demonstrated in the "Report of the Examining Committee Made to the Trustees of the Boston Public Library" for the year 1867. Winsor was chiefly responsible for this report, and although it does not contain any new ideas in librarianship, it does show that Winsor investigated the condition of other libraries through their reports and catalogs, in order to judge more accurately the quality and quantity of the service in his own library. His suggestions for improvement were practices that had already been tried in other institutions, but he was able to determine where improvement was necessary and his powers of observation were undoubtedly good.

In Charge of Library

In January, 1868, C. C. Jewett, superintendent of the Boston Public Library, died and Justin Winsor took temporary charge. He demonstrated a real execu-

tive ability, and apparently enjoyed the work for he soon accepted an appointment as superintendent and held that position until 1877. During this period the Justin Winsor that is now remembered found his place in life. Winsor at 36 was a little-known critic and poet; ten years later he was the leader of the library profession in America. Undoubtedly his ability as a littérateur was slight. As an historian and administrator, however, he was able to make lasting contributions to society.

Increased Use of the Library

His greatest service to librarianship was his insistence on the use of books as opposed to their collection and storage. He had rather a head start in this direction for, as he had pointed out in his report of 1867, in other institutions "much more stringent regulations are in vogue." A specific accomplishment was that he facilitated increased use of the Boston Public Library by reducing the number of closed days from eighty-six in 1867 to five in 1877. The circulation of books jumped from 209,000 per annum to nearly 1,200,000 during this period.

To obtain liberality in the use of books he removed many barriers. He interested the public in good literature and made it more readily obtainable by establishing branches for the distribution of books. The effectiveness of these actions was increased by his administrative ability. He was a realist and his direct, sincere approach and understanding enabled him to comprehend the problems of library machinery and to produce new models. He also understood people, and by delegating responsibility and using various technical devices and administrative schemes, he made an excellent job of directing the Boston Public Library.

President of A.L.A.

In 1876 Winsor played an extremely important part in the foundation of the American Library Association and the *Library Journal*. He was the A.L.A.'s first president, holding that post from 1876 to 1885. He was once again elected president in 1897 for the specific purpose of representing the A.L.A. at the international meeting of librarians in England. The only men in the American library profession who approached Winsor in stature were W. F. Poole and C. A. Cutter.

Winsor's tenancy of his Boston position was marred by his conflict with city politics. It was therefore with pleasure that he accepted President Eliot's invitation to become the librarian of Harvard University in 1877. He was now free from the annoyances of his former position and also found himself in a society much more to his liking. For the last twenty years of his life he worked hard at Harvard, and not only maintained a position as one of the leaders of the library profession but also became an outstanding historian and the leading student of American cartography in the United States.

The first book that he published during these years was the still useful *Reader's Handbook of the American Revolution* (1880). This was followed by a four-volume *Memorial History of Boston* (1880-81) and later by his famous eight-volume *Narrative and Critical History of America* (1884-89). In the next decade he published *Christopher Columbus* (1891), *Cartier to Frontenac* (1894), *The Mississippi Basin* (1895), and just before his death *The Westward Movement* (1897).

Winsor's profession either as librarian or as historian would have been more than

most men would have been able to maintain, but he made time for pursuing his historical studies by his remarkable organization of the Harvard College Library and an efficient use of old Gore Hall. Winsor's aim to make books useful produced a new kind of college library, for he watched closely the development of Harvard and cooperated with the Harvard faculty to the utmost of his ability. It is not possible to overestimate the importance of the role Winsor played in the development of the then new elective system of education that employed the library as a laboratory. Had there been a conservative man in Winsor's place, the elective system would probably not have been the success that it was.

Reserved Books on Open Shelves

He expressed his attitude toward library service in his second annual report at Harvard when he wrote that "there should be no bar to the use of books but the rights of others. . . ." The practice of reserving books on open shelves for the use of students in connection with their courses began at Harvard in 1875. When Winsor became librarian in 1877 he found that only two or three instructors were using the reserved-book system, and he immediately began to increase its application. Twenty-one instructors were reserving books in 1878 and thirty-four in 1879. In 1879/80, 3330 volumes were reserved. This same year Winsor also adopted the practice of issuing cards to students that entitled them to use the book stack, a privilege which before that time had been reserved for the officers of

the university. The number of students using the stack rose from sixty in 1879/80 to two hundred in 1881/82. In his first report (1878) Winsor expressed the desire to illuminate the Gore Hall reading room by electricity so that the library could be kept open in the evening, but he did not realize this ambition until January, 1896. Beginning with October 3, 1880 he opened the building Sunday afternoons. In 1875, 57 per cent of the students made use of the library. By increasing the library's facilities Winsor was able to raise this percentage to 77 in 1880 and to 90 in 1885/86.

Advocate of the New Education

Winsor undoubtedly remembered his own unhappy experience at Harvard, and probably for that reason was a strong advocate of the new education. One of his students still tells how he refused to give an examination in his course on cartography until the college office forced him to do so. Having then lined up the rather small class in a corridor outside his classroom in Sever Hall, he put a simple question to each man, and when each one had answered he was dismissed for the day. They all passed.

In October, 1897, Winsor was taken ill and died after a short sickness. During the last thirty years of his life he had made many friends, and many tributes to his life appeared in publications in both America and Europe. He had lacked a power for literary expression, but he had possessed a warm frankness that came from a sincere, realistic nature. He was mourned as a great historian, a great librarian, and a great friend.