



Ada North

Ada North
State Librarian
1871-78
Founder, Iowa Library Association

- Appointed by Governor Merrill as the seventh Librarian for the State of Iowa, first female Librarian of the state, and the first person to hold the title of State Librarian (created in 1872, along with the creation of the State Library board of trustees). Served in that position 1871-1878 (when she was “relieved by Governor Gear – the office the being in politics”)
- Initial salary \$1,200 per year
- State Library contained 14,500 volumes in 1872
- With an appropriation of \$1,000 to purchase new books, more attention was paid to the development of the general library, while at the same time creating “one of the five best collections of law books in America” (Report of the State librarian 1885)
- Born November 19, 1840, died January 9, 1899

Mrs. North was held in high regard by her contemporaries and her successors. In a celebration of the 80th anniversary of the State library, Johnson Brigham indicates that progress in development of the library was slow “until 1871, when Mrs. Ada North became the librarian, under her inspiration the general library began to assume proportions commanding the attention of research workers in Iowa and surrounding states..”

Some excerpts from a biographical sketch in the Report of the State Librarian 1903, following her death:

“Mrs. North’s administration was characterized to a remarkable degree by vigor and judgment in organization, discrimination in the use of the

limited funds placed at her disposal and gentle courtesy which gave new dignity to the position she so well filled.”

“By correspondence and personal visitation [she] made herself thoroughly acquainted with the progress then well begun in library science.”

“But Mrs. North was not content with faithful and efficient service in the library. She was quick to grasp the modern idea of library service. To her mind libraries maintained by the people were for the people and not for a privileged few. She gladly availed herself of the opportunity cheerfully accorded her by the Clarkson Brothers to use the columns of the Iowa State Register for the dissemination of information as to the uses which might be made of public libraries and the duty of the State toward these invaluable adjuncts to the education of the schools.”

“For twenty-one years, from 1871-1892, this pioneer librarian of Iowa dreamed, planned and worked for the inauguration of the library movement now (1903) grandly sweeping over our State, and it is surely fitting that in this splendid era of fulfillment the name and career of this Prophet of the New Day should be honored by those who are enjoying the fruits of her labors.”

Inspired by her attendance at two annual conferences of the American Library Association, Ada North was the organizer and founder of the Iowa Library Society, now known as the Iowa Library Association, in 1890.

After her tenure as State Librarian, Mrs. North was appointed city librarian of Des Moines, then librarian for the State University at Iowa City until 1892, when “failing health compelled her to relinquish her post”.