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March 9, 2011

THIS WEEK: The Future of the State Law Library

BACKGROUND: In 1938, the Iowa State Library consisted of four departments: the general library, the library of sociology and economics, the law library, and the medical library. The south end of the law library was being used for the library of sociology and economics.

Proceedings of the Forty-fourth Annual Meeting of the Iowa State Bar Association, Des Moines, 1938

THE FUTURE OF THE STATE LAW LIBRARY

Paul B. De Witt, State Law Librarian

(The following are excerpts from Mr. DeWitt's address.)

I am, of course, very happy to be here this morning and to meet you for the first time as representative of a century old Iowa institution that has a national reputation. It was just one hundred years ago this week that the Congress of the United States had before it the bill to establish the territory of Iowa. As an integral part of that bill there was appropriated \$5,000 to establish a library for the territory. Thus, I am glad to invite you to celebrate the centennial of the State Law Library....

Thus, I am not going to waste your time by cataloguing the library for you. I do, however, want you to understand precisely what kind of a library we have here in Iowa. We have one of the four or five really great law libraries in the country. We do not have merely a working library. We have a great depository of the law. The Library has in the neighborhood of 150,000 volumes, which means that we can take rank with the great libraries of the Harvard Law School, the Yale Law School, the Library of the Bar Association of New York. It means that we have a library that aims at a complete coverage of the Anglo-American legal system....

If the profession does want to maintain the Iowa Library and to build it up until it is the peer of the best, then there are certain things that must be done and done now.

And, of course, the first need is for more money to be appropriated to the Library. Our appropriation for books has remained the same for the last twelve years....

At present we get about \$4,000 a year for the purchase of books. It would help us to keep our rank with the great libraries if this fund were only increased \$1,000 a year, which would mean a much better investment for the state than is often made of public monies.

We need, in the second place, more people on the staff of the library. At present we have three assistant librarians and one page boy. Libraries the size of the Law Library generally operate with a staff of at least ten trained librarians....

The library of the Supreme Court has recently installed an elaborate mechanical device to support the huge volumes of the American Digest system because they are so large that they cannot be supported by the reader....

I accepted appointment as Law Librarian only on the condition that I would not be asked to conduct a rest home for the intellectually indigent....

If the library is given a trained staff, then there are many services it may perform for the State. Since the Library is also designated as a Legislative Reference Bureau, it should furnish technical drafting services to our legislative bodies. At present the drafting of legislation is done in a remarkably inept and casual way. The Library should offer trained, technically trained, draftsmen whose only interest in legislation would be that the statutory law be carefully phrased and coordinated with the existing body of our written law. Here is a splendid opportunity to utilize young law graduates from our local law schools; to enlist in the service of the state government minds professionally trained to do professional work. Technical drafting services are already available in seven states and have proved their worth. I invite the consideration of the Bar to such a step forward for Iowa....

A learned profession, if it is truly learned, knows the worth of books....

If I am right then the Law Library need not fear for the future. Sound scholarship, the disinterested pursuit of knowledge, the reverence for the wisdom that is to be found in the old books of our law—these are the things by which the legal profession grows great. These are values without which a law library cannot long prosper.



**During 1838-39, Theodore S. Parvin served as the librarian for the Iowa Territory
(Statehouse in Burlington, Iowa Territory)**

Theodore Sutton Parvin was born in Cumberland County, New Jersey, January 15, 1817. He graduated from Woodworth College, Ohio in 1833, and from the Cincinnati Law School in 1837. Between these dates, he made for himself a reputation in Ohio as a successful educator. He was a private secretary to Iowa's territorial Governor Lucas and also served as Territorial Librarian. After Parvin served as U.S. District Attorney for the middle district of Iowa, he filled three terms as probate judge. From 1846 to 1856, he served as clerk of the U.S. District Court. In 1857 he was elected Register of the Iowa State Land Office. He was one of the first trustees of Iowa's State University, and for ten years was professor of natural sciences in that institution. He was one of the organizers of the State Historical Society, and for several years edited the *Annals of Iowa*. Theodore Parvin was one of the founders of the Masonic order in Iowa. He died at his home in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on June 28, 1901, at the age of 84.

History of Johnson County, Iowa containing a history of the county, and its townships, cities and villages from 1836 to 1882. together with biographical sketches... Iowa City, IA: 1883. 764-766

This author biography is from the publication—*State Librarians of Iowa: 1837-2008*, compiled by Karon S. King, Library Resource Technician, State Library of Iowa, 112 East Grand Avenue – Des Moines, Iowa 50319 – 2008.



The Iowa State Capitol Law Library during the end of the 19th century