

By the Book

Delving into the stacks of Sutton's Lending Library, circa 1890



By Jay Sames¹

In the late 19th century, before there was television, movie houses or the Internet, people read. In addition to newspapers, which offered news and notice of current events, local libraries offered a selection of more timeless reading matter, mostly in the form of books.

What did Suttonites read near the end of the 1800s? There's no way to know conclusively, but a document called *Catalogue of Books of Sutton Lending Library*, which has found its way into the Héritage Sutton archives from the Brome County Historical Society, offers a clue.

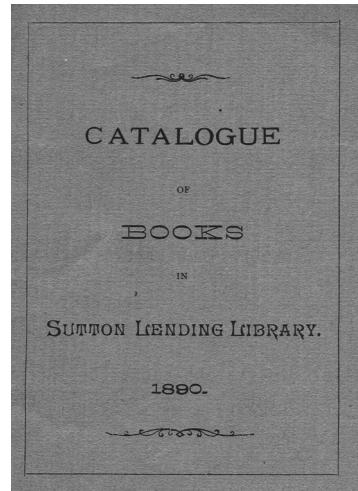
1. Special thanks to Meredith McKeen for the inspiration and early research on this project.

This catalogue—a list, really—is dated 1890, and represents the only evidence we have that a library even existed in Sutton at that time.

Where was this library? A plausible assumption is that it was located in the Town Hall, as were many community functions. Sutton's Town Hall was built about 1859, and it housed a school, the same school that moved to Academy Street in the mid-1880s. Was there a library in Sutton before the Town Hall was built? We don't know. Our 1890 catalogue is all we have.

This catalogue lists lendable books numbered from 1 to 215 (only 195 entries because 20 numbers are missing), listed on pages 1 through 7 of a booklet.² The entries are neither in chronological nor alphabetical order, and there's no evidence that the list was ever added to or altered. Without renumbering the entire list, there seems no way to insert an entry. Only by extending the list (e.g., in order of acquisition) could additions be gracefully effected.³

Thus, we take our *Catalogue* as we find it. Let's have a look. We will start with history, as did our forebears.



2. The eighth and final page includes the following note. From it we know that a Reference Library also existed, the contents of which are not specified except as noted. No similar reference catalogue has yet been found. "The Reference Library in connection with this Lending Library contains *The Encyclopedia Britannica* in 24 volumes, *Websters[sic] Unabridged Dictionary*, *Smith's Large Bible Dictionary*, and several other useful books".
3. These difficulties were among those the Dewey Decimal System (US Patent, 1876, by Melvil Dewey) sought to correct.

History First

The first heading, encompassing the first 10 entries, is *Parkman's Histories*. Francis Parkman was an American historian who was famous both for his scholarship and his writing style, though today he suffers criticism for bias against the French, Roman Catholics, and native peoples. Included are the six then-extant volumes of his monumental series *France and England in North America* (1847–1892), as well as *The Oregon Trail* (1847) and *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* (1859).

Following Parkman are headings for Macaulay's⁴ then Hume's⁵ histories of England, both iconic, multi-volume works. The later Macaulay history is considered by many as a counter to Hume's history. Hume is noted for his fear of revolution—natural, perhaps, writing when he did—as well as for the notion that “government by consent” rested on public opinion alone rather than being something inherent in humanity. Sutton lists these 11 volumes separately, a badge of their relative importance. These three authors comprise the first 21 entries, more than 10% of the list.

Entries 22 to 29 are also works of history. There are four volumes of battles, including William Robson's *The Great Sieges of History* (1856), and Edward Shepherd Creasy's *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World* (1851). *Dufferin in Canada*⁶ is there too, as well as Dickens' *A Child's History of England*⁷.

4. *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second* (1848) is the full title of this five-volume history by Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859).

5. *The History of England*, published in six volumes from 1754 to 1762, was by Scottish polymath David Hume (1711–1776).

6. The full title was the rather verbose *The History of the Administration of the Right Honorable Frederick Temple, Earl of Dufferin, K.P., G.C.M.G., K.C.B., F.R.S., Late Governor General of Canada* (1878). See or download text at, http://archive.org/details/cihm_15459

7. This was serially published (1852–54), and later appeared in three volumes. Unlike Hume and Macaulay, Sutton lists it only once and without volume numbers.



Francis Parkman

Following these 29 history entries are the aforementioned missing entries, nos. 30 through 49. Were these numbers used on another list for another purpose? Were they reserved for other books of great importance should they come along? We don't know. They are merely a gap in the sequence.

Moral Instruction

Starting with no. 50, there are 44 entries dedicated to just two authors, and placed under the rubrics *Pansy Books* and *By E.P. Roe*.

The Pansy Collection is numbered 50 through 77 in the catalogue. *Pansy* was a father's childhood nickname for the author, Isabella Macdonald Alden, who was born in Rochester, NY, in 1841. *Pansy* became her *nom de plume*. Born of well-educated parents, and married to a



Isabella Macdonald Alden

minister, Alden became part of the Chautauqua adult education movement in the US.⁸ She wrote a total of 170 *Pansy* books, spanning the years 1865 (nine years before Chautauqua was founded) to 1931; the final volume was finished and published by an aunt after Alden's death in 1930. Alden's *Pansy* books were mostly novels that extolled the virtues of right, Christian

living, as well as a woman's role in the guidance of her family.⁹

Following Alden's *Pansy* books are 16 novels by Edward Payson Roe (1838–1888). Roe was also from New York State. He had gone to seminary and had been a chaplain in the calvary during the US Civil War. After the war, he spent nine years as a Presbyterian pastor before

8. "Named after Chautauqua Lake [in New York] where the first [meeting] was held, Chautauqua assemblies expanded and spread throughout rural America until the mid-1920s. The Chautauqua brought entertainment and culture for the whole community, with speakers, teachers, musicians, entertainers, preachers and specialists of the day."

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chautauqua>

The movement died out in the early 1930s; the automobile had brought individual mobility, and the Great Depression left communities with little funding for circuiting Chautauqua troops.

See, http://www.univie.ac.at/Anglistik/easyrider/data/zen_and_the_art_of_motorcycle_ma.htm

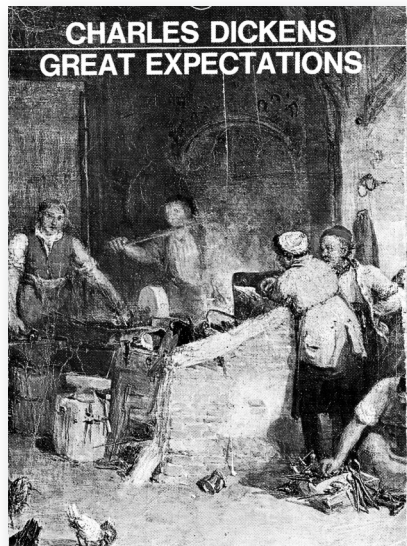
9. "Most of her works are didactic fiction, heavily salted with religious principles, which concentrate on translating Biblical precepts into acceptable Christian behavior in a modern world".

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

quitting the ministry, in 1874, to write full time. Roe was less prolific than Alden, even considering his short life, but his œuvre of more than 25 books was staggeringly popular. Like Alden, his theme was one of moral guidance and Christian rightness, and he has been described as a “Christian Agrarian writer... The most popular writer of his day.”¹⁰ During his lifetime, “[h]is books sold more copies than even those of Mark Twain.”¹¹ Sutton had 14 novels by Roe, including his very popular *Barriers Burned Away* (1872), and two volumes of short stories.

The Classics

More fiction follows. Numbered 94 through 135 are 42 novels by just seven writers, all but one immediately recognizable. There are 10 volumes by Charles Dickens, including the earlier *Nicholas Nickleby* and the later *Great Expectations*. Following that are eight novels by Sir Walter Scott, who had been, since 1827, the admitted author of the “Waverley” novels, including Sutton’s *Ivanhoe* and *Guy Mannering*. (*Waverley*, 1814, which is also listed, had been published anonymously; when it became popular, Scott promoted his subsequent books as “by the author of *Waverley*”, but otherwise anonymously.)



10. <http://thedeliberateagrarian.blogspot.ca/2007/10/ep-roe-christian-agrarian-of-1800s.html>

11. <http://www.txbobsc.com/books/epro.html>

Following Scott was George Elliot—actually Mary Ann Evans—with five novels, including *Middlemarch* and *Mill on the Floss*. This latter work was the first work published after her pseudonym became known.

Tour of the World in Eighty Days—a more literal translation from the original French than we know today—and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* are two of four books by Jules Verne. Sutton had all five of James Fenimore Cooper's "Leatherstocking Tales", plus an earlier novel, *The Spy* (1821). ("Leatherstocking" was one of several names for Cooper's leading character, Natty Bumppo, who appears through the entire series.) And Edward Bulwer-Lytton—the heading incorrectly written "Bulwer Lytton"—has five novels on the list, including the once widely-read *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834). Bulwer-Lytton is the author of the oft-ridiculed opening line with which he began his 1830 novel *Paul Clifford*: "It was a dark and stormy night..."

Between Cooper and Bulwer-Lytton are collected four novels by one "Wm. Black." William Black was a Glasgow-born Scot, a war-correspondent during the Franco-Prussian war, and was once compared favourably with Anthony Trollope, though it seems his style relied too much on the minutia of hunting and fishing for his popularity to endure into the 20th century. Sutton's collection begins with *A Daughter of Heth* (1871), the book that made Black famous, and also contains three later novels.

Reminders

Less easy to categorized are the remaining 80 entries, numbered 136 through 215. They are randomly ordered and appear under the rubric *Miscellaneous Works*. Some are instantly recognizable, like William Makepeace Thackeray's *Barry Lyndon* (1844) and *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852). Also, *Grimm's Fairy Tales* (1812/14), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726/35), and Johann David Wyss' *Swiss Family Robinson* (1812). Finally, for the contemplative Suttonite, there is



Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*

*Emerson's Essays*¹², *Bacon's Essays* (1597), and the two-volume *The Life of Alexander Duff, D.D., LL.D.*, by George Smith (1879). Duff "was the first overseas missionary of the Church of Scotland to India". There he helped found The Scottish Church College (1830) and the University of Calcutta (1857).¹³

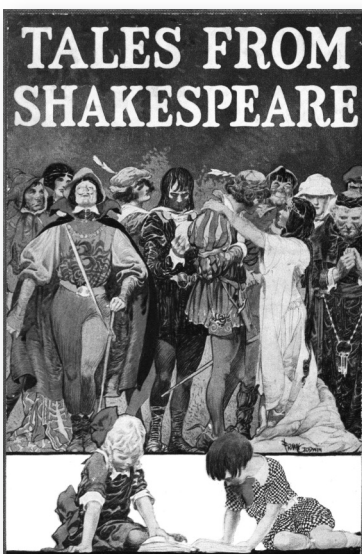
There is also more history scattered through *Miscellaneous Works*. Robert Southey's *The Life of Nelson* (1813), *Macaulay's Essays and Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842)¹⁴, and Sanford Fleming's *England and Canada* (1884), a recounting of his travels¹⁵.

12. What edition is not clear. These were published in two series, *Essays: First Series* (1841) and *Essays: Second Series* (1844).

13. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Duff_\(missionary\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Duff_(missionary))

14. Probably the "authorized" edition of 1888. In it, Macauley's essays are collected; his "Lays" had been written in 1842. A "lay" is a short, narrative poem of which this work contained four. These "describe semi-mythical heroic episodes in Roman history with strong dramatic and tragic themes". See, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lays_of_Ancient_Rome

15. Fleming was a polymath and a Scottish-turned-Canadian engineer and inventor.



Also in *Miscellaneous Works* are more books for the instruction of children. *Tales of Shakespeare* (1807) is the famous and delightful volume by the English essayist Charles Lamb and his older sister Mary. In it, stories from Shakespeare's plays are told in easy prose, the comedies by Mary and the tragedies by Charles. Many, then and since, have learned their Shakespeare holding the Lambs' helping hands. John Ruskin's *Ethics of Dust* (1865) teaches by analogy. Stemming from his association with

Winnington Hall, a progressive girl's school in northern England, Ruskin wrote this "imagined conversation with Winnington girls in which he cast himself as the 'Old Lecturer'. On the surface a discourse on crystallography, it represents a metaphorical exploration of social and political ideals".¹⁶

Sutton's only volume by Mark Twain was *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), which might indicate that Canadian readers found the American South rather more alien than they did New England. In 1890, the US Civil War was only 25 years over, and Canada had been the destination of many escaping southern slaves. Also supporting this contention might be the presence of *The Breakfast Table Series* by Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., a collection of three previously-published volumes of essays. Holmes, Sr., a doctor and medical lecturer, who lived most of his life in Boston, was well connected with the literary lights of the era, including Emerson, Longfellow, and James Russell Lowell. While officially against the abolition of slavery, he was married to Amelia Lee Jackson, daughter

16. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Ruskin

of a northern judge and eventually an abolitionist in her own right. Holmes' essays masqueraded as light fiction but were actually Yankee wisdom served up in crotchety, seriocomic style. The first and best known is *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table* (1858), followed by *The Professor...* (1859) and *The Poet...* (1872), similarly situated.¹⁷

Two volumes became more mysterious with searching: No. 197, *Boy's Own Book of Out-Door Sports*, and No. 198, *Boy's Own Book of In-Door Sports*. While seemingly famous, the term "boys' own" has been so appropriated that learning exactly what these volumes were proved surprisingly difficult. What is sure is that, by 1878, Hurst & Co. had published an edition which collected these into a single volume: *Boys' Own Book of Indoor & Outdoor Sports*. Sutton's two volumes must have predated that collected work.¹⁸

Scanning through Sutton's 1890 *Catalogue* makes for interesting reading, and certainly the eyes of each scanner might well alight on different entries than have mine. A bit of Internet searching can make for an enlightening trip through the 19th century literature that made up Sutton Lending Library. I encourage you to do that for yourself, to stop by Héritage Sutton some Wednesday morning and ask for a copy of the list!

There's one final thing that we know about Sutton's 1890 Library. It's found on page 8 of the booklet, in the closing note of our *Catalogue of Books of Sutton Lending Library*:

"The Library is open every Tuesday and Friday night, and is free for reference to everyone. Lending books are loaned for 5 cts. per volume or \$1.00 per annum."

There is no mention of late fees. ●

17. Holmes, Sr., was father to the more famous Oliver Wendell Homes, Jr., who sat on the US Supreme Court from 1901–1932.

18. As early as 1851, there existed a multi-volume *The Boy's Own Book Extended: A Complete Encyclopedia of All Athletic, Scientific, Recreative, Outdoor and Indoor Exercises and Diversions*.