Two hundred years of young adult library services: A chronology

Anthony Bernier
San Jose State University, anthony.bernier@sjsu.edu

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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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.

Historically children have been viewed as peripheral to history, and those who work with them have often been dismissed as inconsequential. But the library record tells a different story. Throughout the history of American public libraries, photos of young people using libraries have adorned annual reports from coast to coast. We know they were there. Now it is time to find them.—CAJ.

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.
Given what I feel is a culture ever hardening to its young people, the untold story of the struggle to legitimize our work with them remains a damaging omission in librarians' professional legacy. On the other hand, this first substantial step toward documenting that legacy offers us the opportunity to take back some of what is truly ours, as well as to advance what we contribute to our institutions and to our society. It will also help us to call forward tomorrow's leaders, strengthened by learning about the works of yesterday's leaders. We did not create the values that our professional world exhibits toward service to young adults. But we can choose how to thrive in this world if we recognize it for what it is—and we can't do that without knowing its history. I also hope we do not wait too long for writers and scholars in the future to pursue the many questions still only incubating in this time line. —AB.

[Editor's Note: This chronology has been edited for length in this print edition. The complete chronology, with entries for every year from 1920 onward, appears on VOYA's Web site at http://www.voya.com. It is a work in progress. Submissions are welcome from anyone in the library profession who wishes to suggest additional items to round out this first attempt to integrate the history of young adult library services into one place. The chronology will be updated annually on the Web site. It will also be accessible through a link on the Young Adult Library Services Association's (YALSA) site at http://www.ala.org/yalsa. Compiler Anthony Bernier will manage additions and updates. If you wish to contribute, please word your submission briefly in the format of this chronology. Include a complete citation of your source as well as your own contact information with street address, phone, and e-mail. Send your submission by e-mail to voya@voya.com, with "Chronology Submission" in the subject line.]

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).

1862 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)].
1924 The Horn Book begins publication in Boston (Ramsey).

1929 First edition of Books for Young People, subsequently to become Books for the Teenage, is published in New York Public Library (Campbell, 17).

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).

The Library in the School by Lucile Fargo is published (Ramsey).

1937 Margaret Edwards appointed full-time young people's librarian at Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore (Braverman, 240).

Development of dedicated separate service for young people in New York Public Library (Braverman, 114).

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 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 columnists Sheila John Daly and marketing consultant Eugene Gilbert (Jenkins, 508).

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).

Margaret Edwards is appointed Coordinator of Work with Young People with an assistant coordinator and a head of the Central Y Collection in Baltimore (Braverman, 240).

An Ample Field by Amelia Munson published (Campbell, 20).

Margaret Edwards' Outlook Tower column on books of interest to teens starts in The Horn Book, running until 1987 shortly before her death (Jenkins, 318).

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Youth, Communication, and Libraries presented before the Library Institute at the University of Chicago (Bernier).

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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).

1960 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).

1967 The first edition of Books and the Teen-age Reader by G. Robert Carlser 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).

1969 The Fair Garden and the Swarm of Beasts: The Library and the Young Adult by Margaret A. Edwards published by Hawthorn Books (Jones et al.).

Library Trends publishes theme issue, "Young Adult Service in the Public Library" (Jones et al.).

The School Library: A Force for Educational Excellence published by Bowker (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).


Young Adult Alternative Newsletter ceases publication (Starr, Nov. 2).

Young Adult Literature: Background and Criticism published by ALA (Chelton).

Mabel Williams wins Grolier Award (ALA Web site).

YASD Executive Secretary Evelyn Shaevel's title is changed to Executive Director (Starr).

D. Philip Baker is AASL president and AASL holds its first national conference in Louisville, Kentucky, with the theme "80s and Beyond" (AASL History).

1985 First Frances Henne/YASD/VOYA Research Grant awarded to fund research in the areas of young adult services and/or materials (Fine).

Mary K. Chelton wins Grolier Award (ALA Web site).


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).

1988 First National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) national survey of YA services in public libraries published (Fine).

Library Trends publishes theme issue, "Library Services to Youth: Preparing for the Future" (Jones et al).

SLJ/YASD YA Author Achievement Award begins biannually, funded by School Library Journal (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.
1999 DeWitt Wallace Reader's Digest Fund supports Public Libraries
as Partners in Youth Development (Bernier).

1999 YALSA publishes "Serving the Underserved: Customer Services for Young Adults in Public Libraries" (Gottschalk).

1999 impact of School Library Media Centers on Academic Achievement by Keith Curry Lance, Lynda Wellborn, and Christen Hamilton Pennell published (Ramsey).

1999 Revised edition of Directions for Library Service to Young Adults published by YALSA (Gottschalk).

1999 Bare Bones: Young Adult Services Tips for Public Library Generalists published by the Public Library Association (PLA) and YALSA (Chelton).

1999 Excellence in Library Services to Young Adults project to recognize outstanding YA library programs is begun by ALA President Hardy Franklin (Chelton).

1999 Mike Printz wins Grolier Award (ALA Web site).

2000 First Lady Laura Bush hosts White House Conference on school libraries (Ramsey).

2000 YALSA's quarterly electronic newsletter YAttitudes begins with Fall 2001 issue.

2000 First Lady Laura Bush hosts White House Conference on school libraries (Ramsey).

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. Chelton, 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 service is Adolescence and Young Adult Librarianship: The Context Library. She is the editor of three editions of Excellence in Library Services for Young Adults for the Young Adult Libraries Services Association of ALA. Among her many articles is The Problem Patron that Public Libraries Created: The Normal Adolescent. The Reference Librarian, nos. 73/76, June, 2002, 23-33.

Christine A. Jenkins, an associate professor in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, 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-Books: The Story Goes On... June 2004, 73-82.

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