

THE COONSKIN LIBRARY.

BY SARAH J. CUTLER, MARIETTA.

Among the hills of southern Ohio in that portion now included in the county of Athens the sound of the woodman's axe broke oftentimes the forest quiet during the winter of 1797-98. A vigorous pioneer was making a clearing upon a few acres of ground and building a log cabin to which to bring his family. For miles around the unbroken forest stretched away. Huge sycamores traced the courses of the streams, while beech, oak, maple, hickory and walnut covered the lowlands and hillsides with their vigorous growth. To make the preliminary

clearing was no light task. The sturdy arm of Lieutenant George Ewing, the wielder of the axe, needed to use all its strength against the giant hard-woods of this primeval forest. Under this luxuriant growth, the quick eye of a young New Englander had seen a year before the fertile properties of the soil. From a little settlement on the Muskingum River twenty miles to the northeast he had cut a bridle path through the woods to this place where he owned a large tract of land. This vigorous man of thirty-two years, Ephraim Cutler by name eldest son of Dr. Manasseh Cutler of Hamilton, Mass., had come to the western country in 1795, and now determined to make a permanent settlement on this spot which he found "exceedingly fertile and well watered."

The lands were in the Ohio Company's purchase in that section which is now Ames Township of Athens County. They lay along the course of a tributary of the Hockhocking River which having thirteen branches received from early explorers, so runs tradition, the name of Federal Creek, suggestive of the thirteen colonies now united in one nation. Ephraim Cutler had engaged in his scheme of settlement Lieutenant George Ewing and Capt. Benjamin Brown, and as we have seen, Lieut. Ewing built his cabin and moved his family there in March, 1798.

The next year in May, Ephraim Cutler and Capt. Brown, having cleared their little plots of ground and prepared temporary shelter, brought thither too their wives and children. From spring rains the waters of the creeks had been raised sufficiently to solve some problems of transportation. Goods and furniture were loaded on to pirogues and sent to the new home by way of the Muskingum to the Ohio, downward on this river to the mouth of the Hockhocking River, from thence up this stream and Federal Creek to within two miles of the new clearing. The distance traversed by this circuitous route was eighty miles and the time consumed in the journey six or seven days.

The families were brought across country from Waterford twenty miles by a newly cut path through the wilderness, a path which led across creeks swollen in freshet and involved the little party in perilous experiences. Neighbors, these three families of Brown, Ewing and Cutler called themselves, though from one to two miles apart. But paths were soon cut through the woods to the different homes and in the kindly helpfulness of pioneer life they were closely united.

To the new settlement thus started there came frequent additions until two years later there were in the township, by that time incorporated under the name of Ames, one hundred and sixty-one persons, and steady increase came in the years following. This growing population consisted not alone of men and women, for in the scattered cabins boys and girls were growing up with that

vigor of physical development which healthy labor and free range of woods and hills gave in remarkable degree.

Many an anxious thought, however, did parents give to the mental training of their children. They secured, whenever possible, the services of a teacher, and as early as 1801 a school was taught by Moses Everett, a young graduate of Harvard, in a room of Ephraim Cutler's house. The subsequent terms of school no doubt were irregular, but one term we know closed on April 13, 1803, for then a quaint little testimonial was drawn up by the pupils, giving to their teacher, Charles Cutler, another Harvard alumnus and a brother of Ephraim Cutler, their "tribute of thanks", speaking with innocent pride of "the progress we have made under the disadvantages which both you and we have had to encounter", attributing this progress to their teacher's "uncommon skill and unwearied diligence", and concluding with the assurance that "while the vital spark continues to warm our hearts the name of Mr. Cutler shall be had in grateful remembrance by us".

The little group of twenty signed it, the oldest a young man over twenty, but the most of them doubtless lads and lasses of the early teens and the names they subscribed were these: Geo. Ewing, Jr., Abigail Ewing, Sally Ewing, Rachel Ewing, Hannah H. Ewing, Thomas Ewing, John Brown, Richard Lenox, Samuel Brown, Aphia Brown, Patience Brown, Anna Steine, John Boyles, Eleanor Lenox, Joseph Brown, Martin Boyles, Jane H. Ewing, Abraham Lenox, John Lenox, James Lenox.

Some of these no doubt had learned to read during the term just passed, but scanty opportunity would they have to exercise their newly acquired accomplishment.

It is true that Ephraim Cutler took the United States Gazette published in Philadelphia, but that "except by fortunate accident did not arrive much oftener than once in three months," and being by no means even a sixteen page issue, the numbers hardly sufficed for the intellectual food of the settlement though it was loaned far and wide with the liberality of pioneer custom. Not many books could be brought in the toilsome journey over the mountains and down the rivers to this wilderness. The Bible doubtless was to be found in the scattered cabins, where no other book was owned. Young Thomas Ewing read until he knew almost by heart Watts' Psalms and Hymns and the Vicar of Wakefield; but with all his eagerness to read he could find little else to interest him.

A few spelling books and arithmetics would be a necessity in the school room, though uniformity was not rigidly enforced and a pioneer teacher must perforce use flexibility in the matter of school room equipment that would horrify a modern educational precision.

Recalling her early experiences as a country school teacher in the early decades of the last century, an old lady long after used to tell with quiet amusement of a little boy who was sent to school with a theological treatise on predestination as the book from which he was to be initiated into the mysteries of reading and spelling. "And did you do it?" was the astonished query. "Yes", she answered with a little satisfied nod of the head and the ring of triumph in her voice. "Yes, I did it. I taught him to read."

The intellectual need of their growing community was prominent in the thoughts of these busy pioneers. This became evident at a public meeting in the autumn of 1802 called primarily to devise means to improve their roads. This important matter was enough to engross their undivided attention. Their nearest outlet to the older settlement was twenty miles away at the mills on Wolf Creek near its entrance into the beautiful Muskingum. The way thither was as yet but little more than a pack horse trail. Some eight miles west a little settlement was springing up on the banks of Sunday Creek, a tributary of the Hockhocking River, and with these friends and neighbors they particularly desired communication.

The difficulties to be overcome in perfecting these high- ways and the measure of their own resources therefore needed to be thoroughly canvassed, but nevertheless, their discussions took a wider range. They had brought with them from their eastern homes those ideas embodied in the famous clause of the Ordinance of 1787. "Religion, morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged."

Schools they were indeed ready to sustain whenever practicable, but something more they desired, and to secure for themselves and their children the more liberal culture coming from acquaintance with literature, the suggestion was made that a public library be founded. It may seem to us now a simple enough proposition, but recalling in imagination the setting given by circumstances we may more justly term it an audacious project. The sturdy men of this group with bronzed faces and toil-worn hands, toughened in sinew by wielding the axe and saw, had come to this meeting doubtless wearing their every day homespun and buckskin garments. There was about them no atmosphere of the cloister or study. The log cabin where they met, even though it was the acme of pioneer splendor, a hewn log house, would suggest little connection with art or literature. The forest edge could not be even yet far removed from the house, and happy would be that settler from whose few acres of clearing the giant stumps were all removed.

The nearest neighbors doubtless came on foot, the paltry two or three miles from their homes, but the horses of the more distant travelers from seven or eight miles away would be tethered here and there to the nearby saplings. Incongruities indeed there were between the facts of outward circumstance and this scheme of a public library.

One might suppose, too, that pioneer life would leave little leisure for the use of books if they could be obtained. These pioneers were busy toilers. They had to wrestle against the luxuriance as well as the contrarieties of nature. The wild beast of the forest must be subdued, and guard kept against the depredations of Indian hunters. Their wants must be supplied by domestic manufacture, the emergencies of their new life met by their own ingenious contrivances. In spite of all this, however, they would find time to read because they hungered for it, the parents because of what they remembered in their eastern homes, the children because of what they had heard from their elders. They knew that the long winter evenings always came in course when, though many hands must be kept busy with household work, the younger ones could exercise their accomplishments and read aloud to the busy fireside group. And into those cabin kitchens, if candles perchance were lacking, pine knots from the forest could be brought for their lighting.

The greatest practical difficulty was to get any money with which to buy books. It is hard for us to realize the scarcity of money among these pioneers. Their personal wants were supplied by the products of the forests and the cleared acres. There was but little surplus, and for that little there was no market. All the small settlements about them were in the same condition. Whatever money they obtained must be used for taxes or applied on payments for their land for which many were still in debt.

A lad of the settlement, A. G. Brown, said in later years: "So scarce was money that I can hardly remember ever seeing a piece of coin till I was a well-grown boy. It was with difficulty we obtained enough to pay our taxes and buy tea for Mother. As for clothes and other things, we either depended on the forests for them, or bartered for them or did without." The commercial transactions of the settlers were carried on by exchange. It was a notable business venture when a young man raised a little crop of hemp and took it by canoe a distance of some sixty miles on a circuitous route by Federal Creek into the Hockhocking River, down this stream to the Ohio, then up its current to Marietta, where the first colony in the Northwest Territory had been planted some twelve years before. No doubt the small sum of money received therefore seemed to him and his companions a little fortune.

So the financial side of the library project was a very serious matter. Among the plans to solve this problem one proposal met with peculiar favor, especially with the younger men. This suggestion came from Mr. Josiah True of the Sunday Creek settlement. He proposed that they catch coons and send their skins to Boston for sale by Samuel Brown who expected to go East in a wagon before many seasons. The plan was feasible. The skins of bears, raccoons and other animals would find a ready sale for cash. The young men were skillful hunters and wild animals still haunted the adjacent forests in sufficient abundance for their purpose. Indeed the country adjoining the settlement on the north and west was visited by hunting parties of Indians for ten years after this.

So, with hopeful plans to busy their thoughts, the little company separated to seek their scattered homes and no doubt the project was one much discussed during the coming months. Thought and speech resulted in vigorous action. The suggested fur-hunts were carried out and by the time Esquire Samuel Brown was ready for his trip eastward in his wagon, there was some money collected to be put into his hands, and a quantity of peltry to be disposed of for the benefit of the library fund. Thomas Ewing, a lad of fifteen, told in after years that he contributed all his available wealth - "ten coon skins."

So far in this sketch the facts stated are based upon the testimony, recorded in after years, of some of the founders of the library; the local color is in accordance with portrayals of pioneer times given by early settlers. The facts are reliable for accuracy, but very naturally there is a slight confusion as to dates. That meeting of settlers beginning with a road's project and ending in a library discussion is attributed by different authorities to three dates, viz.: the fall of 1801, of 1802, and of 1803. Whichever date is correct it is certain that the careful savings, the venturesome efforts involved in securing money and furs could not hastily be carried through. At this point however we begin to have the evidence of original documents in the history of this library, and a record of dates which is unimpeachable. A battered, timeworn record book with less

than a score of yellowed leaves has survived this more than a hundred years and keeps guard yet over its ancient companions on the library shelves. The front page is adorned with a pen drawing where the name of the association and date are given, embellished with scrolls, with trailing vines of rosebuds and leaves and a pile of books in careful perspective. This was drawn by the clerkly pen of Moses Everett, a young graduate of Harvard University and cousin of Ephraim Cutler. With his neat penmanship, too, the laws and regulations are inscribed on the succeeding pages.

Minutes of business transacted at various times are recorded in this book until 1820. After that the stubs of cut out leaves furnish us only with curiosity as to what was recorded thereon, and regret for the ruthless shears. A second blank book takes up the records in 1824 and continues them as long as the library had a public existence. Turning these yellow leaves we find the history of this intellectual venture spread out before us.

The preamble to the laws of the association appears in the following words:

"Considering the many beneficial effects which social libraries are calculated to produce in societies where they are established both as a source of rational entertainment and instruction; we, the subscribers wishing to participate in these blessings agree to form ourselves into a society for this purpose under the title of the Western Library Association in the Town of Ames."

The formal title of the library, The Western Library Association, is here given, but in Ohio it is at present better known by the sobriquet of "The Coonskin Library." It is not known when this title was first bestowed upon it in popular speech. It is, of course, unofficial. Some interested in the library have resented the term, but it is not in the least derogatory. Rather does it give in suggestive phrase a swift vision of that condition of "high thinking with plain living" which was the glory of the early days of our republic. The library was not purchased wholly with coonskins it is true, but the picturesque epithet conveys a truer idea of the peculiarities of its origin than the sedateness of its official title could give us.

It seems by the entries in this record book, that at a meeting held at the house of Christopher Harrold on February 2d, 1804, twenty-five articles were adopted as the rules and regulations of the society. Very full and precise are these regulations. The value of the shares is placed at \$2.50. An executive committee of three, one of whom was to be the librarian was to be elected annually. The manner in which future members shall be received is carefully specified.

Subscribers are entitled to draw books to the value of two-thirds of their share or shares, the price of each volume being marked upon it. The books are to be drawn out quarterly from the first day of May to the last day of October and monthly thereafter to the last day of April, thus recognizing the busy time of the pioneer and the greater opportunity for reading in the long winter evenings.

Vol. XXVI-5

To keep up the funds an annual tax of twenty-five cents was laid on the members. The adjusting of fines and penalties make the subject of many of the articles. The regulations seem rather drastic. For instance, a member who shall lend a book to a non-subscriber shall

be fined fifty cents for the first offense, suspended from the privilege of drawing books, for the second, and for the third offense shall forfeit his share. Burns, grease spots, and torn places are rigidly fined according to their dimensions. Thumb marks and ordinary soiling, turned down leaves and fire cracks were given due penalty. A refusal to pay these fines at the annual meeting of the Association would subject the offender to the loss of his privileges until all arrearages were made up, and if he failed to do this within one year he would forfeit his share.

Failure to return books exactly at the appointed time brings the unhappy delinquent under the fine of fifty cents, no small sum in those days, but probably with a just appreciation of the difficulties of backwoods traveling and the knowledge that with his best efforts the shareholder from seven or eight miles away might be delayed by swollen creeks, fallen trees or bottomless mud holes the provision is made that shall a member "feel himself aggrieved by the decision of the committee he may appeal to the meeting which shall consider of his excuse and may remit the fine." Each member is allowed as many votes as he holds shares and it is also permitted that votes may be given by proxy in all cases" - another side light on the difficulty anticipated in getting to the place of meeting. The money earned by such strenuous efforts to pay for shares was not to be lightly regarded, but held as an investment, so article six provided for the orderly transfer of shares, if desired, to any other resident of the township.

On the whole a more business like and methodical set of regulations could hardly have been drawn. One wonders how rigidly they were afterwards enforced, whether every tear and grease spot was duly measured, and one suspects that with the departure soon after of zealous young college-bred Moses Everett much of the rigor of the rules fell into abeyance. The records show however that sometimes penalties were duly imposed and fines paid. Judging from the condition of the original books which have come down through these many decades the books were handled with due respect and care by their readers.

On the second day of February, 1804, these articles were adopted. On April first five persons paid for their shares, viz.: Ephraim Cutler, four shares; Jason Rice, two shares; Sylvanus Ames, two shares; Benj. L. Brown, one share; David Boils (or Boyles), one share. These payments therefore amounted to twenty-five dollars. The rest of the subscribers, apparently, expected to pay for their shares by the sales of furs made for them by Samuel Brown in his proposed trip eastward, for we do not find any receipt of further money until December 17th, 1804, when a long list appears.

Before the middle of August, Samuel Brown was in Boston and its vicinity and had delivered his letters of introduction to the Rev. Thaddeus Harris and the Rev. Manasseh Cutler. These men, well fitted for their task, made selection of the books for the new library. According to the record the purchase was made August 15th, 1804. The number of volumes purchased was fifty-one, the money paid, including some incidental expenses, amounted to \$73.50.

Having finished his business in Boston, Mr. Brown started on his return journey to the Ohio, bearing with him the books so eagerly awaited in the scattered cabins on Federal Creek. As Mr. Brown brought other articles than the books with him, it is likely that he was still using his light wagon as he passed through New Jersey and Pennsylvania. It is possible, however, that on

reaching the Ohio he transferred his luggage to a flat boat for transport down the river to Marietta, whence he might go with horses the rest of his homeward way. At any rate, in the recollection of Thomas Ewing years later he recalled the event, the books finally reached the Ames settlement in a sack on a pack horse. "I was present," he says, "at the untying of the sack and the pouring out of the treasure." The date of the arrival of the books is not recorded, but at a regular meeting of the Association held at the house of Sylvanus Ames on November 17th, 1804, it was formally voted, "to accept fifty-one books purchased by Samuel Brown as common property of the Association."

At this meeting twelve men are credited with paying for their shares, four paying for two shares each. That so many subscriptions could be paid up at this time is probably due to the settlement which Samuel Brown doubtless made on his return with those who had sent furs by him to the eastern market. The number taking shares the first year was twenty-four. The following names compose this list to which are added, seven who paid for shares a month later. Daniel Withers [Weethee], Josiah True, Timothy Wilkins, William Green, Martin Boils, Benj. A. Brown, Samuel Brown, Esqr., Samuel Brown, Jr., George Ewing, George Ewing, Jr., Simon Converse, Christopher Harrold, Edna Dorr, Geo. Ewing, Sr., George Wolfe, Nat. Woodbury, Ezra Green and Ames Linscott.

That some of those whose names appear in this list were mighty hunters is well established by trustworthy tradition. A story related in Walker's History of Athens County of Josiah True, the young man who first proposed the sale of skins as a means to raise money for the library, is typical of that pioneer life. "Josiah True and another young man chased a bear into a cave where they succeeded in shooting the animal in a narrow passage, and having fastened a hickory withe to his nose, were about to drag it to the open air. Mr. True entered the cave and got behind the dead bear to assist Tuttle in shoving it out when another bear hitherto unobserved came rushing from the rear end of the cave directly on and over True's back, crushing him down on his face with great violence, and so made its escape out of the cave."

At the meeting of the Association December 17th, 1804, votes were cast for librarian, and to Ephraim Cutler fell the honor of being elected the first incumbent of that office. It must have been a moment of exceeding interest, when, according to vote, the members drew for the order of choice of the books. Who it was who felt the thrill of exultation in drawing first choice, or what he chose, can never be known. The entries giving such information were on the pages long ago cut out from the record book.

On Jan. 7th, 1805, the first annual meeting in due course was held at the house of Ephraim Cutler, the new librarian. His short tenure of office was lengthened to extend through the year, and Daniel Weethee and Benj. Brown were elected to share with him the duties of the standing committee, whose members by the constitution had entire charge of the library during their tenure of office.

After this orderly beginning the records are given year by year, with but two or three omissions of stated meetings of the Association. Modifications of their original regulations were found necessary more than once, such modifications arising often, it is apparent, from

the difficulty of getting about in a country still heavily timbered, with its newly cut roads almost impassable from mud in the winter season. That taxes and fines were not always promptly paid is quite evident, and resolutions concerning the collection of arrearages not uncommonly appear in the reports of the action of the directors, while lists of delinquents occupy considerable space from time to time in the records. In 1813 at the January meeting it was resolved: "that the shares of all delinquent shareholders failing to settle their arrearages within six months shall be sold at auction," and the order is given for the notification to the shareholders concerned. In course of time it came about that arrearages of several dollars were settled by notes given to the directors.

Honorable and worthy names make up these lists of delinquents and in due time, no doubt, the good folk bearing them paid their just debts, but time was short and hill roads were long, harvest days were busy and winter daylight brief in span while the lure, too, of an ever westering frontier caused removals even from the midst of so young a settlement as

Ames. So it is that appreciation of the intelligent interest in the library manifested by the records is more just than criticism of certain failures, and no students of the records now whose ancestors were shareholders, do well to cherish a pharisaic contempt toward these delinquents, for the chances are exceedingly strong that in these lists will be found the names of these same ancestors. The price of shares first fixed at \$2.50 was raised to \$4.00 in 1819, then to \$5.00 in 1842.

By the time of the annual meeting in 1807 the need for a bookcase was recognized and it was voted to provide one from the funds of the society. At a much later date, in 1853, a vote is recorded to buy a new case, but no record can be found that the resolution was carried out, so it is uncertain whether the case now containing the books was purchased under the first resolution or the last. In its plain severity of outline it might belong to either period.

The record of four years is missing as stated before, but in the fifty-three years of which record is preserved, the librarians appear as follows: Ephraim Cutler, John Brown, Benj. Brown, Ezra Walker, Geo. Walker, Nathaniel Shepard, Sabinus Rice, Henry Brawley, Jason Rice, Geo. Walker, Jr., J. T. Glazier. Three directors and a treasurer each year were elected and sworn in. Different members of a family frequently served, and the same name often appears. The list viz.: Cutler, Brown, Weethee, Green, Hamilton, Beaumont, Fuller, Ames, Ewing, Walker, True, Boyles, Boarman, Rice, Glazier, Wolf, Henry, Dean, Dickey, Fulton, M'Dougal, Brawley, Howe, Wyatt, Carter, represents in most cases, many, many re-elections and years of faithful service. An occasional fine for non-attendance is charged against an officer, but the meetings were regularly held the first of each year as long as the library had public existence, as attested by the records.

No doubt the zeal of its first days abated somewhat, for there is no evidence that the rigorous article 9 of the constitution requiring the committee to meet on the first Monday of May and August and from November to May, the first Monday in each month precisely at nine o'clock A. M. to examine books, lay fines and do other business of the society and prepare for the draft which shall begin precisely at one o'clock P. M. was for long obeyed. It was

voted in January, 1808, to allow to librarians "such compensation as they think proper", but no further entry is made on this subject, and it is not known whether this was done.

At the annual meeting in 1808 the directors elected are instructed to take such measures as they see fit to have the library incorporated. Among the archives is found a copy of the "Act to incorporate the Western Library Association." This is dated February 19th, 1810, and duly constitutes the library in the depths of the Ohio forests, "a body politic and corporate in law," capable of suing and being sued, pleading and being impleaded in any court in this state." And the names of Edward Tiffin, speaker of the House and Duncan M'Arthur, speaker of the Senate, give official sanction to the document.

Some years after the founding of the library, changing conditions led to a swarm from the original literary hive.

Some eight to ten miles west of the lands on Federal Creek first cleared in 1798, a creek known as Sunday Creek found its way between forested hills to the Hockhocking the "bottle river" of Indian nomenclature, and thither as early as 1799 two hardy young men, Daniel Weethee and Josiah True found their way through the woods guided by their compasses, began to clear the ground and build their log cabins. These young men and their brides whom after three years of lonely life they had persuaded to share their remote homes, took an active interest in the formation of the library, and their names still stand in the faded list of original proprietors.

These westward settlements on Sunday Creek grew and in 1811 the district was organized as a separate township to which was given the name of Dover. Other proprietors of the library had come hither. The difficulties of the trail back to Federal Creek were hardly at all decreased and it is not surprising to find an entry appearing in the records of 1816, directing that one of the directors should be chosen from among the shareholders resident in Dover and that "provided the number of shareholders reached twelve, a certain proportion of books should be kept in his care for their use with provision for changing the set of books every six months.

This plan was presumably carried out but its disadvantages were many, and fourteen years later at the annual business meeting, it was resolved: "That the shareholders of this society living in Dover be allowed, on forming a new library Society to withdraw their equal share of the books and other funds of the society." Arrangements were made also to call in all the books of the Association and to make an equitable division thereof. So it came about that the Dover Library Association was formed and incorporated. Daniel Weethee, Alanson Hibbard, Azariah Pratt, Josiah True, John B. Johnson, William Hyde and John Pugsley became the incorporators.

The first librarian of the Dover Library Association was E. Hibbard, and following him Azariah Pratt, D. Hibbard, John True and Josiah True. When the last named died in 1855, the books were at his house and continued under the custody of his son Austin True for many years. There had been additions to the 104 volumes sent over to Dover in 1830, some as late as the time of Dickens' publications, but the bulk of the books bore an ancient look indeed when in the fifties young Hiram True, grandson of Josiah True, sought books to read in the time-honored collection. Within recent years, this Hiram True, an honored physician Mc Connelsville, Ohio, has recorded his impression of the substantial leather bound volumes. Frayed

edges and loosened covers gave evidence of use in times gone by. The thick, porous, coffee-colored paper with the clear type, the long "s" and the lower corner catch word all spoke of past fashions in printing and book making.

When the Centennial Exposition of 1876 turned attention in unusual degree to the relics of pioneer days east and west some of the books of the Dover Library Association were taken by Gen. Thos. Ewing (son of Hon. Thos. Ewing) to the Exposition at Philadelphia and there placed in a suitable department for exhibition. Returned in due time

to Gen. Ewing at his home in Yonkers, N. Y., the box of books was there when the house was destroyed by fire. Though rescued, the volumes when the box was opened, were found so scorched and water soaked as to be almost ruined. Those in the best condition were taken out by Mrs. E. S. Martin, granddaughter of Hon. Thos. Ewing, and have since been preserved by her in her home at New Straitsville, Ohio. The portion of the library remaining in Dover township was finally given into the custody of the Athens County Pioneer Association and is kept in the library of the Ohio University at Athens.

Energy, ingenuity, method and carefulness certainly were displayed in the inception and subsequent management of this pioneer library, but what, we may ask, were the books for which so much effort was expended? Some analysis of the first purchase and subsequent additions must hold interest for us. This original purchase was selected, be it remembered, by two clergymen of Boston or vicinity, Rev. Dr. Cutler and Rev. Thaddeus M. Harris, men fitted by general information and education to make wise choice. Dr. Cutler, too, knew well the character of the future readers. As an agent for the Ohio Company he had not only been instrumental in making purchase of the lands and securing for colonists of the northwest territory an ordinance for their government, of exceptional merit, but his personal acquaintance among the pioneers was intimate and extended. Not only books but readers would be considered by these men selected to make the purchase.

It is with some interest that No. I in the original catalogue is inspected after the lapse of more than a century since the numbering was made. It is a small, leather bound volume of somewhat less than two hundred pages bearing the title:

The History of America
Books IX and X
Containing
The History of Virginia
To the Year 1688
And of New England
To the Year 1652
By William Robertson, D.D.

At the bottom of the title page is the statement:
Walpole, New Hampshire
Printed for Thomas & Thomas
By David Carlisle
1800.

History thus led the way in the Coonskin Library and works of an historical nature formed always a large part of the book list. Ten volumes among the fifty-one of the first purchase bear the name of Goldsmith, still thirty years after

his death a popular author. Among them would be found his poetry, as well as his histories, and his "Animated Nature". Ramsey's History of the American Revolution would be eagerly read by the old soldiers who had come in such numbers to retrieve their fallen fortunes in the new country. Playfair's "History of Jacobinism" had the interest of current events in those times so near the French Revolution, while short biographies of Columbus, Cortez and Pizarro would appeal readily to these new American pathfinders.

Some half dozen volumes contained sermons and religious reflections and Burgh's "Dignity of Human Nature" was a good example of the moral essays read and assimilated by our forefathers with patient thought and sturdy comprehension. As the leaves of this latter volume are turned today, the question will intrude, whether many readers of the present would as faithfully peruse its pages. The book shows signs of use. Indeed the investigation into condition provided for by the article nine of the constitution seems in this case to have been duly performed, for on a blank leaf are written varying statements by which one learns, for instance, that on page 81 is a "grease spot" that page 236 is "torn 1/2 inch in the side margin" that page 283 was marked by "two spots" with more items following which show that the "Dignity of Human Nature" created interest enough among the dwellers in scattered farmhouses to leave suggestive tokens of perusal on the tough yellow pages.

For the inquisitive seeker of facts there was ready Harris' "Minor Encyclopedia" in four volumes while Morse's Geography and his Gazetteer with their maps supplied any student with a vast amount of information concerning the world as then known to travelers. The same shelves that bore the sedate histories and sober philosophies, displayed also a few works of fiction, only one of which perhaps is known even by name to the present generation. Miss Burney, however, and her novel "Evelina" will be recognized by any student of English literature as marking a certain stage in the history of fiction, and it will be acknowledged that among the stories of the day it was a good selection.

True, one can hardly avoid thinking of the contrast between the robust, alert pioneer maiden, accustomed to the labors of kitchen and spinning wheel and loom, perchance of field and garden, who knew the howl of wolves, the track of the bear and the signs of Indian hunters, and the helpless languishing beauty of London drawing rooms and Bath promenades. Doubtless the maiden of the backwoods could not realize that the clear vigor of her common sense, her readiness to act wisely in emergencies was far and away more picturesque and admirable than poor Evelina's propensity to get herself into awful scrapes from which the least glimmering of common sense might have saved her.

An early purchase by the committee was a selection most natural to former revolutionary soldiers-the "Life of Washington" by Chief Justice Marshall. Later addition brought such old time standard works as the "Spectator" where readers could grow familiar with the limpid purity of Addison's English; as Bacon's Essays and Pope's poetry, and Plutarch's sketches of Greek and Roman heroes.

Mr. Charles Shipman, merchant of Athens in 1825, purchased for the library in Philadelphia books, the bill for which amounted to \$61.771/2. Among these books were the works of Hume, Bollin, Gillies, Robertson, the poet Thomson and Samuel Johnson. These authors are

rarely read now it is true, but they were in the front rank ninety years ago when they were first laid on the library shelves.

It is the tradition that the forty-four volumes of the Waverly Novels, were the gift to the library before 1830 of one man, Mr. William Walker. Here, too, we must needs put ourselves back in imagination to the literary world of that day to understand the great impression made by such an acquisition. The Wizard of the North threw his witching spell over the dwellers in the farm houses of Ames township as surely as over fashionable readers in London or Edinburgh.

The year 1826 seems to have been a good reading year, and the record of books drawn out stands at four hundred

sixty-two. Daniel Weethee leads the way in this list with thirty-six, but Polly Green is not far behind with thirty-three.

It will perhaps be noticed that nothing has been said as to a place of priority for this old library. There are other claimants for that distinction. The circumstances surrounding the origin of the Western Library Association are sufficiently interesting in themselves to claim our attention and to inspire respect for its sturdy founders. Certainly their methods had enough originality to give the impression of force and initiative. Let it be remembered too, that plans for the library were started only four years after the first blow was struck in the forest to make a clearing for settlement. Those familiar with the family history of Athens County bear strong testimony to the beneficent influence of this library upon the community where it was established. Walker's "History of Athens County" affords interesting reading in this connection. The young people growing up when the library was in its prime were intelligent, progressive, anxious for education.

The Hon. Thomas Ewing has been quoted. His eager mind fed upon these books and going from that backwoods settlement, he earned money for a college course and became in due time, the first graduate of Ohio University at Athens, indeed the first to receive a diploma within the bounds of the state of Ohio.

So far as the records show the high tide of interest in the Western Library came within the first thirty-five years of its existence. By the close of that period rivals had come into every home in the shape of newspapers and magazines. Perhaps, too, the necessity was not recognized of keeping up the library by adding books by high class modern authors. Certainly the later purchases are of inferior value. In the last twenty years recorded it is evident that but few cared to draw books. In 1861 the directors sold the library to three men of the community, E. H. Brawley, A. W. Glazier and J. T. Glazier.

Reduced by an auction sale of old and defaced books and doubtless by some losses the volumes at this time numbered 208. In 1862 these three purchasers sold the library to William P. Cutler for \$73.50 and it was sent from Athens county to the Cutler homestead which Ephraim Cutler had built on the banks of the Ohio river when he removed in 1806 from Amesville to the new location six miles below Marietta. Both as historical relic and family heirloom the old black walnut case with its leather bound volumes has been cherished in that household ever since. Throughout a wider circle however it is believed that interest will be felt in these annals of an enterprise mingling so picturesquely the adventures of daring hunters, the glow of the old cabin fire-

sides and the hardships of pioneer life valiantly met, with the refinements of historical and literary studies. Of such elements was woven the romance of "The Old Coonskin Library."