

Biography of Caroline M. Hewins,
Children's Librarian and Hartford's "First Lady of the Library"

Caroline Maria Hewins was born on October 10, 1846 in Roxbury, Massachusetts (Lindquist, 1950). She was the oldest of nine children and precocious; she began reading at the age of four (Hartford History Center, n.d.). She loved reading, both to herself and her family. She chronicled her childhood love of reading in her autobiography published in 1926, *A Mid-Century Child and Her Books* (ibid). Her love of reading continued strong into her adulthood and she strived to share this love with all those she came in contact with.

In 1875, Hewins was hired as a librarian by the Hartford Young Men's Institute, a predecessor to the Hartford Public Library (Hartford History Center, 2010). She worked at this position for the next 50 years until her death in 1926 (Hartford History Center, 2010 & n.d.). Upon her arrival to the Young Men's Institute in 1875, Hewins realized that the selection of books aimed at children was miniscule. She quickly began purchasing children's books for the collection. Three years after her arrival, she began to include children's book lists in the library's news bulletin (Lindquist, 1950). She published a children's book list and guide, *Books for the Young*, in 1882 (Hartford History Center, n.d.). She was very passionate about children's literature and organized children's story hours and children's book talks (University of North Carolina, 2002). She also persuaded local schools to pay the subscription fee to the Institute so that she could bring books to children right in their classrooms (Lindquist, 1950). At a time when there were few libraries with children's rooms and many libraries did not allow patrons under 12, Hewins was an advocate for children's services and children's rooms (Rathbone, 1949).

Hewins was very involved with the American Library Association. She served as a councilor from 1885-1888 and again from 1893-1902. She served as the vice president of the ALA for 1891 (University of North Carolina, 2002). Hewins also formed the first Connecticut State Library Association in 1891 (Bush, 1996).

After many name changes, the Hartford Young Men's Institute became the Hartford Public Library in 1893 (University of North Carolina, 2002). In 1895, she founded a branch of the Hartford Public Library at the North Street Social Settlement House. She was so committed to the work she was doing there, she lived there for several years. She was actively involved with the local children; she followed their school activities, met with their teachers, read their essays, and visited their homes (Hartford History Center, n.d., Lindquist, 1950). During these years, she also worked out of the downtown location of the Hartford Public Library, providing tea and consultation once a week to parents, teachers, and club workers (Hartford History Center, n.d.). Out of this work, she formed the Education Club, a precursor to the Parent Teacher Association. She also formed a nature club, which ran weekend nature walks and nature story times (ibid).

In 1904, thanks to Hewins persistence, the Hartford Public Library became one of the first libraries in the country to have a separate children's library, located on the first floor of the Wadsworth House behind the Atheneum (Hartford History Center, n.d.). In 1911, Hewins was awarded an honorary Masters of Arts degree from Trinity College. She was the first woman to receive a degree from Trinity College (Lindquist, 1950).

Hewins was very committed to her work and the children she served were never far from her mind. When she began traveling internationally in 1913, she wrote long letters detailing her adventures for the patrons of the children's library. These letters were compiled into a book and published in 1923 as *A Traveler's Letters to Boys and Girls* (Hartford History Center, n.d.).

Following her death in 1926 at the age of 80, Hewins' collection of over 1,000 children's books was bequeathed to the Connecticut Historical Society (ibid). In 1951, at the ALA's 75th anniversary, Hewins was named to the Library Hall of Fame. She was also named to the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame in 1995 (ibid).

Caroline M. Hewins was a pioneer in library science and children's library service. She was also an example to be envious of, as she demonstrated in her ability to connect and network with people from all walks in life.

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