



The New York Public Library New York Public Library Archives

Guide to the

Central Circulation Branch records

1911-1970

Summary

Creator: New York Public Library. Central Circulation Branch.

Title: Central Circulation Branch records

Date: 1911-1970

Size: .5 linear feet (2 boxes)

Source: Transferred from Office of Branch Libraries.

Abstract: Records include office forms, pamphlets, administrative files and a scrapbook documenting operations of the Central Circulation Branch of The New York Public Library.

Preferred citation: Central Circulation Branch Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Compiled Jim Moske; machine readable finding aid created by FAKER.

Creator History

The Central Circulation Branch of The New York Public Library opened on May 24, 1911 in Room 80 of The Library's Central Building at 42nd Street and 5th Avenue. The book collection for Central Circulation was selected by The Library's first director, John Shaw Billings, and was focused on current biography, travel, popular science and other non-fiction. 1800 reader applications were received in the first two days of operation. During its first full year of operation new readers averaged 36 per day and overall attendance averaged 505 per day. From its inception, Central Circulation was used not only as a lending library, but also as a reading room. By 1945 reference and information service uses exceeded circulation use.

Central Circulation served a diverse and colorful group of patrons. Proximity to Broadway ensured the frequent presence of authors, actors, playwrights, producers, publishers and journalists. Business men and women and office workers created a strong demand for books related to business, merchandising and advertising. Esther Johnston, supervising librarian for Central Circulation from 1924-1941, reported

that members of the Byrd polar expedition borrowed volumes relating to polar exploration during 1929. Central Circulation played a role in publishing ventures for paperback editions of classics. The editor of Pocket Books, Robert de Graff, used the Central Circulation shelf list to compile his list of selections.

The Great Depression year of 1932 was the busiest year in branch history. Dramatic increases were noted in circulation for books on social sciences, travel, economics and politics. Central Circulation was extremely valuable to recent immigrants. One librarian suggested that "Their applications are sometimes made on the day of leaving the ship, as soon as living accommodations are found." Beginning in the late 1940s, staff shortages and space limitations hampered the operations of Central Circulation. In 1962 NYPL began to plan for a new central library facility to provide reference and circulating books in the area.

Central Circulation was closed in 1970, and its collections became an integral part of the new Mid-Manhattan Library at 5th Avenue and 40th Street.

Scope and Content Note

Records include office forms, pamphlets, administrative files and a scrapbook documenting operations of the Central Circulation Branch of The New York Public Library. Scrapbook includes thank-you letters and borrowers card applications from such prominent figures as Ford Madox Ford, Harry Houdini, Edna Ferber, Norman Hapgood, John Steinbeck, and Virgil Thompson. Scrapbooks also contains photographs of Room 80, as well as images of staff parties.

Key Terms

Names

New York Public Library. Central Circulation Branch.

Container List

Central Circulation Branch Records 1911-1970

- b. 1 f. 1 Book Transaction Cards 1957
- b. 1 f. 2 Central Circulation Forms 1914-1918
- b. 1 f. 3 Closing - Official NYPL Memo 1970
- b. 1 f. 4 Holiday Hours 1955-1967
- b. 1 f. 5 Information For Borrowers - Pamphlets 1929, 1932
- b. 1 f. 6 Into Green Pastures - Book List 1941
- b. 1 f. 7 Renovations 1953
- b. 2-3 Scrapbook 1911-1965