

## Has Lived on Job Throughout Her 50 Years as Librarian

By Katharine Toll

How many towns are there in the six New England States? Many hundred. How many public libraries? Almost as many. How many of these towns and libraries, however, have a librarian of 50 years' service? Or a librarian who for 50 years has lived in the library building? Probably only North Easton, Mass.

The boast of the Ames Memorial Library is Miss Mary Lamprey. For half a century she has kept up to the minute in library matters and given the fruit of her learning to the members of the community.

For half a century she has lived in one of the most interesting residences in New England, the high-ceilinged apartment that H.H. Richardson, the famous old Boston architect, built right over the main reading room. When Miss Mary Lamprey puts down her cup of coffee to go to work of a morning, she opens the front door, walks down a winding tower stairs, and arrives in the library front hall. During library hours her two cairns, Cinderella and Nancy, white and black, respectively, lie under the central typewriter desk and snooze.

### *On Her Own*

Fifty years ago this fall the president of the board of trustees came to her father and said, "Mr. Lamprey, we need a new librarian, we want a North Easton girl, and preferably one with some college training. Do you think your daughter would consider it?"



Miss Mary M. Lamprey of North Easton, Mass., who is celebrating her 50th anniversary as head librarian of the Ames Memorial Library this month.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Mr. Lamprey. Ask her yourself. She's got one more year at B.U., but she'll be home this week-end."

Not only did she consider the position, she accepted it at once, and forthwith moved into the new apartment. Bringing her family with her; her father, superintendent of the North Easton Schools; her mother, and her younger brother, Charley.

She had never examined a library catalog before in her life, but then, neither had many other librarians at that time. Library schools were a thing of the future. Her predecessor, Charles C. Ballard, who had had the library for the first nine years of its life, stayed on for a month to point out this and that, and after that she was on her

own, completely and with no one else who knew more about the business than she did.

There were not many children's books to sort away then, she recalls. What volumes there were, were solemn little treatises bound in dark cloth with morals printed in italics at the end of every chapter. Today, of course, the library has a whole wing devoted to children's books, added 10 years ago as a memorial to William Hadwen Ames, and the picture books in the small children's corner, the "Easy Alcove," wear out faster than any other books in the building.

### *Help From the Seventh Grade*

There were few good American works on science 50 years ago. The truly scholarly works were

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published in German, or, possibly, French or Italian, and they were not translated. Now the library has a sound and solid little core of American science books, all in English.

“Sometimes people have to go away from North Easton for a little while just to appreciate what we have here,” says Miss Lamprey, when the high school children graduate and go away to normal school, or business school or college, they’re so enthusiastic when they get back. ‘Why!’ they say, ‘We had no idea how much there was here till we tried to get hold of it somewhere else!’”

Fifty years ago there was no cataloging system like the Dewey Decimal; Miss Lamprey followed the methods of the lady who put the first books on the bare shelves, which was first used in the Boston Athenaeum. Eighteen years ago she decided she was going to reorganize. Water had been flowing under the bridge; North Easton was not going to be unprogressive. And that reorganization is still one of the important events in the history of the institution, second only to the laying of the corner stone or the acquisition of the new wing.

“Where am I going to get enough help, though?” moaned Miss Lamprey, “There’s so many, many books to lift off the shelves and sort and put back!”

“Ask the seventh grade children,” advised her brother. “Call for volunteers. Seventh grade children are too young to have

engagements, but they’re old enough for tremendous capabilities for work.”

Her brother, by the way, is now Professor Charles M. Lamprey, head of the Martin and Farragut schools, and teacher of the theory of education at Boston Teachers College, so his advice was sound.

### *Her Children’s Librarian*

During the course of the next two months more than 70 school children spent afternoons and holidays in the stacks, helping bring new order out of the old.

It was at that time that Miss Lamprey met Dorothy, the present children’s librarian. Although, to be sure, she is rather ahead of the story. First she met her sister, Nellie. Nellie was a seventh-grader, and Dorothy even younger. But the older little girl took to the work like a duck to water, and followed through so faithfully for several years that Miss Lamprey persuaded her to make it her life work. She went to Simmons, secured a position in the children’s room in the public library in St. Louis, married a fellow librarian, and, now, by an intriguing coincidence of geography, is living in “Easton,” Pennsylvania.

Dorothy came along later, and today, although she is no longer “Miss Jermolovich,” but ‘Mrs. Sullivan,’ she continues to be Miss Lamprey’s one and only assistant. On fair days she works with her in the garden.

“I think my garden has started more gardens than any other in town,” says Miss Lamprey with some satisfaction. (She organized the North Easton Garden Club and served as its first president.)

“Those phlox, I don’t know how many friends I’ve given roots to! And those poppies, full of seed pods every year!” Miss Lamprey does not consider herself a club woman, though she’s active in the Red Cross, the Unitarian Church, and a library current affairs club. (She’s launched four different current affairs clubs at different times in her career.)

### *At Their Best*

First and Foremost she is a librarian. “In a library,” she said at a recent banquet in the library, celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her arrival – and whenever she says ‘Library’ she capitalizes the L” – “In a Library you deal with the stuff out of which eternity is made, the garnered best that mortal men have thought and hoped, all preserved in words – and in words of force and beauty.

“When you encourage the reading of good books, you pass along the torch of aspiration and achievement, lighted by other hands.

“In a Library, also,” (still capitalizing the “L”) “you are meeting not only the best books, but also the best in people. There is no profession in which the human element is more interesting, for here you deal with people on their higher levels, looking for

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The second floor of this building is an apartment for the librarian. The Ames Memorial Library in North Easton, Mass., built by the Boston architect, H. H. Richardson

something to satisfy the best that is in them.

“ ‘Think of me always at my best,’ said Steerforth.

“That is the happy privilege of the librarian – to think of people at their best, both those who go in and out of our doors and those who live in the books on our shelves.”

Feeling that way about it as she does, is it any wonder that the feeling and sentiment of the people of the town overflowed in a spontaneous celebration of her “50th October 1?”

The board of trustees, among them Mrs. Louis H. Frothingham, gave a banquet in the new wing, with 29 faces smiling above the yellow chrysanthemums and asters, the gilded squashes and huckleberry leaves. There was a gold bracelet and two gold leaf vases waiting for her, a handsome box of stationary, and a pocketbook of the finest petit

point needlework, which can probably be seen regularly this winter at the Tuesday matinees of the Boston Symphony. And in the bag was a check. Then after the banquet there was a reception at the Frothingham Memorial for all the North Easton men and women who had drawn out books under her guidance, both as children and as voting citizens. Six hundred and fifty of them. And more presentations, a silver bowl, simple and heavy, and a second check.

### *Wrote a Letter*

One friend was so moved he went home and sat right down and wrote a letter.

“I got to thinking of your fifty years; 50 years of devotion to one cause, 50 years of faith to one institution, 50 years of loyalty to one trust.

“Fifty years, as our organism goes, is a long time. There are few people who are able to give their

vigor to one enterprise for so long, and there are fewer who are also able to give it their heart.”

“Hello! Miss Lamprey!” Two or three days later the telephone was ringing wildly, “This is the grade school.” The children wanted their own party, 350 strong, and in the library, with ice cream, cookies, and a lollypop a piece.

“Hello! Miss Lamprey!” The telephone again. It was the high school superintendent. “The high school students want to celebrate, too. Will you come and talk to them in assembly? They can congratulate you afterwards. No, any time at all. Choose any day that’s convenient.”

Like all rushed and busy people, Miss Lamprey nevertheless finds time on the side for her hobbies.

She likes dogs. She’s had six, all of them cairns but the first, and he was a Skye named “Chum” who disliked everybody.

She likes gardens. In back of the library, of course, there’s the masterpiece with the apple tree and the little red wheel barrel and the planting pots, but in Groton, N. H., above Newfound Lake, she owns A farm, Old Fields, 120 acres. The family used to summer nearby when she was a child. Every Sunday morning during the summer she drives up with a friend, Miss Marjorie Young of Swampscott, then down again Monday.

They have a sizeable vegetable garden, “And you can keep a big

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garden going yourself with one day's work a week if you know how," they maintain. This year, for instance, they took in 16 bushels of potatoes alone.

Nor is this all. Close by lies their aromatic walled, herb garden, and along the damp wooded brook the wild flower garden, with the emphasis on ferns, lilies and native orchids.

### *Fun at Auctions*

Also, she likes auctions and fairs. "Mary Lamprey can go to a white elephant sale when everybody else has been all through everything

and there's nothing left, and pick up the one really choice pieces of the afternoon!" One of her friends once declared in disgust. And Miss Lamprey is rather inclined to agree. She once bought a fine flowered lamp stand of Meissen porcelain for \$3. She's been able to furnish her whole Groton farm with harmonious period pieces, and at North Easton keeps a picture of the fireplace, with the little old chair with the woven rush seat and the Gothic clock.

She likes to read.

It's an old saw that literary critics write their reviews from reading

the flaps, and that advertising copy-writers in the publishing houses write the flaps from the first and last pages, but Miss Lamprey is one librarian who reads the rest of the book.

Poetry is her private dissipation.

She favors the modern's chief among them, perhaps, David Morton.

Not long ago she went to hear him give a talk, and afterwards took up a book of sonnets for him to autograph.

### *Just for Her*

"I'm delighted to meet you," he greeted her at once, shaking her warmly by the hand. "Every talk I give I pick out one person to try to keep interested, and this afternoon I gave my whole talk just for you!"

Then another of her favorites is Jan Struthers. Jan Struthers came to her aid in a tight spot not long ago. At the reception after the banquet, Miss Lamprey was called upon to make a speech.

"Thank you for this evening," she said, standing up but a little dismayed at the unexpected call. "All I can say is thank you." Still it seemed inadequate. Quickly she bethought her of six lines from the "Glass Blower" to recite:

*"One day my life will end, and lest  
Some whim should prompt you to review it,  
Let her who knows the subject best  
Tell you the shortest way to do it,  
Then say, 'Here lies one doubly blest.'  
Say she was happy' Say she knew it."*



*The librarian's apartment is located on the second and third floors - above the front entrance.*