

# FOUNDED BY TRIO

## NEW YORK CITY'S PUBLIC LIBRARY AS IT IS TODAY.

Constructed Around the Gifts of John Jacob Astor, James Lenox and Samuel J. Tilden—Original Foundation Inspired by Washington Irving.

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Do you know Washington Irving? God bless him! He is a genius, and he has a heart. I wish I could know him. Sir, how many such men are there in America? God doesn't send many such spirits into this world."—Byron.

The New York Public Library as it is today is made up of three great foundations: the Astor, founded in 1848, the Lenox, in 1870, and the Tilden, in 1893. The March "Booklover," in an interesting article on Libraries, gives a detailed description of this great monumental building, architecturally considered. This article will speak of the sources of the three foundations. The name of Washington Irving is so intimately associated with the founding and fostering of the Astor Library as the names of Ticknor and Parker and Everett are bound up with the early history of the Boston Library. He had accomplished most of his most important literary work abroad, finding in the Old World libraries material necessary for his work, and in the riper culture of England, a congenial atmosphere.

At the age of 64 he decided to remain at home and work on his "Life of Washington." This he found to be impossible, without a reference library. This led him to thinking of the needs of the new country. He is said as a writer, to have lacked imagination, but he at least possessed insight and foresight and as a practical, public-spirited citizen, persuaded his intimate friend, John Jacob Astor, to endow a library. Mr.

Astor, being a man of breadth of vision and great sagacity, was easily appealed to in behalf of the education of the people whose greatness he foresaw. So he was induced to leave \$400,000 to found and maintain the free reference library which bore his name. This will is an interesting documentary evidence of the greatness of Mr. Astor's business mind and his prophetic vision. He made it a condition that Washington Irving should be president of the Library Board. He was also one of the executors of Mr. Astor's will and chief adviser of his son, who gave large amounts himself to the library. With what the son and grandson added to the endowment the round sum of two millions was reached.

The Lenox Library was established in 1870 by Mr. James Lenox. He was a scholar and a philanthropist who had the pleasure of accumulating a large and valuable collection of books and then of presenting them to the city of New York. In addition to the books, he gave a million and a quarter dollars for the building and endowment. The library, though it does not rank high in point of numbers, is exceedingly rich in Americana, in Bibles, in Shakespeariana, and in Elizabethan poetry.

His was the enviable pleasure of living to see his library giving food and light to his fellowmen. In this he displayed great wisdom as well as public spirit, for had he deferred the gift till his death it might have been at the risk of that thwarting of intention through legal complications, so often happening, and notably in the case of the Tilden bequest to New York City.

The Hon. Samuel J. Tilden, scholar, lawyer and statesman, dying in 1886, left a will, dated a few years before, leaving the bulk of an immense estate, estimated at eight millions of dollars, to trustees, for the purpose of founding a free public library. At the suit of a nephew, an heir-at-law, this provision of the will was defeated in the courts, being finally declared invalid, by the Supreme Court of Appeals of New York.

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