

6 AMAZING FACTS ABOUT LIBRARIES

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1. Benjamin Franklin started up a lending library in 1731. One of the oldest public libraries in the country in 1790 opened in Franklin, Massachusetts, where residents circulated books donated by Benjamin Franklin. The Founding Father once started his own lending library in 1731 in Philadelphia called the Library Company, but it required a subscription fee of 40 shillings.

2. Philanthropist Andrew Carnegie was a one-man library-funding machine. The wealthy industrialist donated \$55 million—or about \$1.6 billion in today’s dollars—between 1886 and 1919 to open an astonishing 2509 libraries worldwide, including 1679 in the United States.

3. Many early libraries were built with apartments on the top floor. Carnegie funded several New York City libraries, and those buildings were often constructed with apartments on the top floor. The idea was that the library’s custodians would have living quarters so that they could keep shoveling coal into furnaces at all hours of the day and night.

4. Librarians used to have to adopt a particular style of handwriting known as “librarian hand.” The practice was prevalent in the late 1800s, when library pioneer Melvil Dewey—of Dewey Decimal System fame—and other curators of early collections believed that legible handwriting was a must for card catalogs. The practice faded as typewriters grew in popularity.

5. The Library of Congress is the world’s largest library. The world’s biggest library in terms of catalog depth is the Library of Congress (LOC), which has more than 173 million items. That record is a rebound from a calamity in 1814, when the then-14-year-old collection of 3000 volumes was destroyed after British troops burned the Capitol building, in which it was located.

6. The Library of Congress pays to reproduce popular magazines, including *Playboy*, in Braille. The LOC is so devoted to making knowledge available to everyone that it pays to reproduce popular magazines in Braille. In 1985, an irate senator from Ohio named Chalmers Wylie lobbied to get them to stop publishing a Braille version of *Playboy*. It was reinstated after protests.