The first volume, edited by Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber, treats the period from the Middle Ages to 1640, tracing the transition from book collections to more formally organized and managed libraries. Prior to the advent of printing, book collecting was largely the domain of religious institutions, universities, and wealthy individuals. With the rise of printing and the Reformation, books became more accessible and libraries more distributed among parishes, schools, professional groups and individuals. By the mid-seventeenth century the foundations for national libraries had also been laid.

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The third volume, edited by Alistair Black and Peter Hoare, picks up with the adoption of the Public Libraries Act in 1850 and continues through the year 2000. In addition to the greater access to free libraries, the volume treats the increasing industrialization of libraries, where libraries of all varieties often sought to serve a mass market with efficiency. Interestingly, the authors’ treatment of this history shifts methodologically from the previous volumes, mirroring a shift in librarianship “from a scholarly craft to a scientific profession” (3:1).

The work is available only as a fairly pricey three-volume set. But each volume complements the others nicely, allowing for treatment of individual topics, such as public libraries or the idea of a national library, across a broad expanse of history. Like Histoire des bibliothèques françaises (Promodis-Éditions du Cercle de la Librairie, 1988–1992), this set offers a good comparative tool and contributes an important perspective to the “history of the book.” One hopes that The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland will inspire a comparably unifying and authoritative treatment of libraries in the United States.

The set is highly recommended both as a professional resource and a historical work, but its price will understandably impact its inclusion in many library collections.—Daniel F. Boomhower, Performing Arts Librarian, Kent State University


Given the extent of recent change in access to and delivery of information, the two thousand pages of The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland offer one a valuable opportunity to appreciate actions and circumstances impacting one group of libraries over a long period of time. Through comparison and extrapolation, these tomes add perspective on the role and functioning of American libraries today.

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A Day in the Life fills this gap with ninety-five chapters dedicated to as many different jobs. Shontz and Murray have gathered a diverse selection of career options available for those with an MLS, and each chapter is written by a person working in the position covered. Public, academic, school, and special librarianship are represented, as well as positions with consortia, library schools, vendors, publishers, associations and agencies, and other nontraditional arenas.