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Nonprofit Cultural Heritage Institutions Fill a Societal Gap at the Dawn of the Age of Artificial Intelligence (AI): The Citizenry is Reassessing the Cultural Value of Taxpayer-funded Public Institutions Known as Libraries, Archives, and Museums (LAMs)

By James R. Ahern

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We, humans, are witnessing the dawn of the [age of Artificial Intelligence \(AI\)](#), and the “[Great Divergence](#)” driven by [nascent AI technologies](#) and cloud-based platforms is a result of it. This is a [tremendous paradigm shift](#) in a world with approximately [8.3 billion people](#) [the [population of the United States](#) is 348.9 million], and the population is [projected](#) to reach [8.9 billion in 2036](#).¹ This [economic, educational, governmental, scientific, and institutional transformation](#) is broader in [civilizational scope](#) and [cultural depth](#) than the Age of Enlightenment, the first Industrial Revolution, and the impetus for space exploration within our universe.² Indeed, the very [meaning of Western Civilization](#) is being [reconsidered](#) as Western Europe, the United States, the UK, and the Commonwealth of Nations attempt to secure a geopolitical position of strength on a planet with [limited natural resources](#) and finite energy supplies available to [humans living on Earth](#).

The erudite Ohio academic librarian and [information-science educator](#), [Dr. Jesse H. Shera \(1903 - 1982\)](#), wrote poignantly about libraries serving axiomatically as a “social

¹ Amrith Ramkumar, Katherine Blunt, and Lindsay Ellis, “The American Rebellion Against AI is Gaining Steam,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 22, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/tech/ai/the-american-rebellion-against-ai-is-gaining-steam-94b72529>; see also News from Penn, Penn Today, Social Sciences, *Many Americans Pessimistic about AI's Impact—and Want More Regulation* (Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2026), <https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/many-americans-pessimistic-about-ais-impact-and-want-more-regulation>

² Exec. Order 14179, 90 Fed. Reg. 8741 (January 31, 2025), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/01/31/2025-02172/removing-barriers-to-american-leadership-in-artificial-intelligence>.

instrumentality,” with society writ large being the “library’s trustee.”³ He passionately described how libraries in Western Civilization have an imbued societal “function” that relies upon the “cohesive force” of the citizenry of a respective society, holding the fabric of the polity [organized government] and the “*social milieu*” [the people and their environment] together.⁴ Significantly, he explained that it is “culture” [derived from the German word, “*Kultur*”], which he ascertained means the circumscription of “the inventions, the arts, and the totality of ideas and beliefs that are characteristic of human behavior and that differentiate man from the other animals.”⁵ Today, at the dawn of the [age of artificial intelligence \(AI\)](#), it would be fair to say that Dean Shera would probably become perplexed while attempting to reconcile the role of librarians in public and academic libraries with the [vicissitudinous demand signals](#) from North American society about the [importance of libraries](#) and [archival institutions](#) of all types, in the minds of a typical adult citizen of the [U.S.](#) or [Canada](#) who are aware of the roots of their “[citizenship](#).” and the [necessity of teaching history in public schools](#) ⁶

Recent efforts by the [federal government](#) and the [Ohio legislature](#) to cut [public library budgets](#), resulting in a \$25 million [drop in the Public Library Fund](#), have sparked deep concern among the [Ohio Library Council \(OLC\)](#) about the direct, [real-world impact on Northeast Ohio citizens](#). By shifting to flat line-item appropriations, state lawmakers have restricted funding growth, forcing governmental information centers and [publicly funded libraries](#) to consider reducing operating hours, trimming staff, capping digital resources, and scaling back vital literacy programs. In response to the [projected cuts](#), the [Cleveland Public Library](#) announced that state-level budget reductions [\$2 million over two years] for public libraries will negatively impact its ability to provide library services to the citizenry of Cuyahoga County and beyond the metropolitan area. What is more, the [Akron-Summit County Public Library](#) system faces [a nearly \\$1 million revenue deficit](#). To cope with these losses, the system has already [eliminated its mailed customer newsletter](#) and faces tougher decisions ahead regarding essential services.

³ Jesse. H .Shera, *Introduction to Library Science* (Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1976), 42; see also Curtis Wright. “Jesse Sherea, Librarianship, and Information Science,” in *School of Library and Information Sciences, Occasional Research Paper*, no. 5, 1–125, (Brigham Young University, 1988); cf. Margaret Anderson, “Review of Jesse Shera, Librarianship and Information Science,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 41 (April 1990), 211–212; see also Lionel Casson, *Libraries in the Ancient World* (Yale University Press, 2002), 136–146; Stuart A.P. Murray, *The Library: An Illustrated History* (ALA Editions, 2012), 135–214.

⁴ Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, *The Ideas That Made America: A Brief History* (Oxford University Press, 2019), chap. 2, “The Enlightened Eye and Its Blind Spots;” see also Samuel P. Huntington, *Who are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity* (Simon & Schuster, 2004).

⁵ Shera, *Introduction to Library Science*, 42–43, see also Russel Blaine Nye, *The Cultural Life of the New Nation* (Harper Torchbooks, 1963), 3–28, 99–170; Russel Blaine Nye, *Society and Culture in America, 1830–1860* (Harper & Row, 1974), 1–70, 321–356; David Hackett Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America’s Founding Ideas* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 119–246.

⁶ David McCullough, *The American Spirit: Who We are and What We Stand For* (Simon & Schuster, 2017), 70–78; see also McCullough, “David McCullough on Teaching Citizenship,” interview by Bruce Cole, *Sagamore Institute*, 2002. <https://sagamoreinstitute.org/david-mccullough-on-teaching-citizenship/>; see also Bruce Cole, “The Danger of Historical Amnesia: A Conversation with David McCullough,” *Humanities* [Nation Endowment for the Humanities publication] 23:4 (July/August 2003), <https://www.neh.gov/about/awards/jefferson-lecture/david-mccullough-biography>

Unfortunately, in [mid-sized](#) and [small public libraries](#), one of the easiest internal targets for addressing fiscal constraints is the local history/genealogy room, which often serves as a mini-museum, archival repository, and public reading room for significant regional and local historical materials, as well as the manuscripts of prominent families.⁷ These types of information services within Western society are known as [Libraries, Archives, & Museums \(LAMs\)](#).⁸ The term “weeding,” employed by professional public librarians (i.e., individuals holding a Master of Library and Information Science [MLIS] or equivalent qualification) to denote the intentional diminution of a library’s physical collection of books and other materials, signifies a deliberate reduction in the size of a library’s physical collection of books and other materials.⁹

For instance, the organizationally planned and executed weeding of the Barberton Public Library’s local history room from autumn 2023 through the winter of 2024 resulted in a drastic reduction of important texts about the history of [lands in Northeast Ohio](#), especially [New Connecticut](#) and [culturally significant materials](#), especially those pertaining to the [earliest pioneer settlers from New England](#), New York, and Pennsylvania, and to the founding of New Portage village and Johnson’s Corners hamlet in the southwestern portion of then-Portage County.¹⁰ Patrons of the Barberton Public Library should be aware that it is a contracted member

⁷ As per [Ohio Revised Code, Title 33 “Education-Libraries,” Chapter 3375 “Libraries”](#) does not require taxpayer-funded public libraries to have and maintain a local history/genealogy room; administratively, this decision is usually made by the Board of Trustees of the independent, municipal, county, or regional consortium of a particular library system. However, the public library system is mandated to generate reports, maintain official administrative & governmental records, and to provide public access to such current documents and archival materials, as per the [Ohio Public Records Act \[Ohio Revised Code, Title 1 “State Government,” Chapter 149\]](#); This legal stricture binds the respective Board of Trustees and the directors of public library systems to comply with the promulgated law. This mentioned, within the state of Ohio, the [government officially designated the “Ohio History Connection”](#) [formerly the Ohio Historical Society], as per ORC, Title 1 “Public functions of Ohio history connection,” the functional responsibility to collect, organize, preserve, summarize, and provide access to the citizenry the historical materials and artifacts it compiles and maintains within its center and various repositories.

⁸ Peter Botticelli, et al., *Libraries, Archives, and Museums Today* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), see also Jeannette A. Bastian, et al., *Archives in Libraries: What Librarians and Archivists Need to Know to Work Together* (ALA Editions, 2018); Suzanne M. Stauffer, “Introduction;” Cicilia Salvatore, “Libraries, Archives, and Museums in the Twenty-First Century,” in *Libraries, Archives, and Museums: An Introduction to Cultural Heritage Institutions Through the Ages*, ed. Suzanne M. Stauffer (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021); James H. Billington, “Preface;” Winston Tabb, “Introduction;” Nancy M. Cline, “Stewardship: The Janus Factor,” in *To Preserve and to Protect: The Strategic Stewardship of Cultural Resources* (Library of Congress, 2002); Michèle Valerie Cloonan, ed., *Preserving Our Heritage: Perspectives from Antiquity to the Digital Age* (Neal-Schuman, 2015).

⁹ Richard E. Rubin, *Foundations of Library and Information Science*, 3rd ed. (Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., 2010), 98–100; Mary K. Bolin, *Refocusing Academic Libraries Through Learning and Discourse: The Idea of the Library* (Elsevier Ltd., 2023), 77, 80.

¹⁰ Several of the invaluable primary- and secondary-source bibliographic references pertaining to the history, societal framework, cultural institutions, and intellectual sources that sparked ideas see the following: Henry Leavitt Ellsworth, “A Tour to New Connecticut in 1811: The Narrative of Henry Leavitt Ellsworth,” ed. Phillip R. Shriver, in vol. 1, of the *Western Reserve History Studies Series* (The Western Reserve Historical Society, 1985); John Mason Peck, *New Guide for Emigrants to the West, Containing Sketches of Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas, with the Territory of Wisconsin, and the Adjacent Parts*, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Gould, Kendall & Lincoln, 1837); William Stowell Mills, *The Story of the Western Reserve of Connecticut* (Brown & Wilson Press, 1900); Peter P. Cherry, *The Portage Path* (The Western Reserve Historical Society, 1911), 305–308; Peter P. Cherry, *The Western Reserve and Early Ohio* (R.L. Fouse, 1921); Robert E. Chaddock, *Ohio before 1850: A Study of the Early Influence of Pennsylvania and Southern Populations in Ohio* (New York: Columbia University, Ph.D. diss., 1908; repr. AMS Press, Inc., 1967); Beverly W. Bond, Jr., *The Civilization of the Old Northwest: A Study of Political, Social, and*

of the Cleveland Public Library's online CLEVNET catalog consortium. Notably, the tiny but appreciated Norton and Portage Lakes (Coventry Township) branch libraries of the Akron-Summit County Public Library system simply do not have the physical space to provide patrons with a local history/genealogy room, which is a genuine shame, given that New Portage village--without any doubt--once encompassed Ranges 11 and 12 of the Connecticut Western Reserve (CWR) spanning Norton and Coventry Townships seventy-five years before Barberton village was a conceptual gleam in Ohio Columbus (O.C.) Barber's keen, industrious eyes.¹¹ Moreover, in 2025, the Wadsworth Public Library [an independent library system] closed its local history room to patrons, intending to move it to a smaller shared reading space, coinciding with a downsizing of its collection. Curious patrons who enter the library with questions about Wadsworth's significant impact on the settlement of the CWR and its contributions to the regional economy [i.e., mining and agriculture] during the early Nineteenth Century are quickly

Economic Development, 1788–1812 (The Macmillan Co., 1934); cf. Harlan Hatcher, *The Western Reserve of Connecticut: The Story of New Connecticut in Ohio* (Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1949); see also Ricky Clark, "Quilt in the Western Reserve," *Western Reserve Studies Symposium* 204, <https://commons.case.edu/wrs-symposium/204/>; cf. Ricky Clark, George Knepper, and Ellice Ronsheim, *Quilts in Community: Ohio's Traditions* (Rutledge Hill Press, 1991); see also George W. Knepper, *The Official Ohio Lands Book* (Ohio Auditor of State, 2002 [PDF version]), 23–25, <https://ohioauditor.gov/publications/docs/OhioLandsBook.pdf>; cf. Knepper, *Akron: City at the Summit*, 3rd ed., (The Summit County Historical Society, 1994), 38, 102–103; cf. Lynn Metzger and Peg Bobel, eds., *Canal Fever: The Ohio & Erie Canal, from Waterway to Canalway* (Kent State University Press, 2009), 20, 29–30, 33, 49, 53–55, 66–67; cf. William I. Barnholth, *The Cuyahoga–Tuscarawas Portage: A Documentary History* (The Summit County Historical Society, 1954); cf. Llyn Conrad, *New Portage, Ohio* (Akron, OH: Akron-Summit County Public Library, Independent Study, 1978); cf. Harry F. Lupold and Gladys Haddad, eds., *Ohio's Western Reserve: A Regional Reader* (The Kent State University Press, 1988); cf. Joseph S. Wood, *The New England Village* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); cf. McCullough, *The Pioneers: The Heroic Story of the Settlers Who Brought the American Ideal West* (Simon & Schuster, 2019), 1–31. See also Donna L. Preston, ed. and comp., *The Pioneer Settlers: Unsung Heroes of Our Past in First-Hand and Early Writings* (Self-Published, 2020), Apple Books, chap. 16, "The Northwest Territory," chap. 18, "Westward the Course of Empire," chap. 19, "The War of 1812."

¹¹ Martha Parmelee-Rose, *The Western Reserve of Ohio and Some of Its Pioneers, Places, and Women's Clubs* (Press of Euclid Printing Co., 1914); see also William F. Fleming, "Ohio Columbus Barber, 1841–1920: An American Industrialist" (PhD diss., Case-Western Reserve University, 1977); Geographically, the [Connecticut Western Reserve \(CWR\)](#) range grid (i.e., latitudinal and longitudinal survey lines) are situated in Northeast Ohio bounded by Lake Erie, the border with Pennsylvania, the 41st latitude parallel line, and a north-south line that splices modern-day Erie and Huron Counties and portions of Ashland and Ottawa Counties and an approximate 120-mile east-west distance from the border with Pennsylvania. The vertical range lines are numbered sequentially west of the Pennsylvania state line, while township tiers are numbered north of the 41st parallel base line. The CWR ranges were surveyed vertically, resulting in their appearance as strips or belts on cartographic charts or topographic maps. For example, [Poland](#) has the cartographic distinction of being Township 1, Range 1 of the CWR, which was surveyed by agents of the [Connecticut Land Company](#) in 1796. Ranges 11 and 12 encompass portions of contemporary Ashtabula, Geauga, Lake, Portage, and Summit counties. Range 11 extends approximately 50 to 55 miles west of the Pennsylvania border. Range 12 directly west of Range 11 spans approximately 55 to 60 miles west of the border. Township Numbers: Within these ranges, townships are enumerated sequentially from the base line (e.g., T8 R11, T9 R12). Originally, there were [200 CWR surveyed townships](#); curiously, the [size of the townships](#) in the especially designated "Fire Lands" [The state government of Connecticut, after coordination with Northwest Territorial government, designated 30 plots of land in the [western portion of the CWR](#) for disadvantaged citizens who had [suffered from property damages](#) during the Revolutionary War against Great Britain] are of different size (5-miles square laid over 5 surveyed ranges) than the 170 townships to the east of the Fire Lands, which were 25 square miles; for an in-depth narratives about the ownership of early Ohio lands, the formation of Ohio county boundaries, and the place names of Ohio counties, townships, and village/towns, see Albion Morris Dyer, *First Ownership of Ohio Lands* (New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1911); cf. Randolph C. Downes, *Evolution of Ohio County Boundaries* (The Ohio Historical Society, 1927); cf. David Lindsey, *Ohio's Western Reserve: The Story of Its Place Names* (The Press of the Western Reserve University, 1955).

referred to the Wadsworth Area Historical Society. This tendency may be due to ongoing digitization efforts, digital humanities and civic-education programs, and digital curation initiatives with allocated budgets. A contemporary example of a high-quality digitization program using OCLC's CONTENTdm is the Summit Memory collaborative digitization effort by the Akron-Summit County Public Library's Special Collections Division (ASCPL). Citizens who supplement the ASCPL's Past Pursuits newsletter with the Summit Memory website can get a sense of historical direction or a geographic compass heading before beginning serious research.

However, Generation Z's digital-world natives will be the first postsecondary cohort to seamlessly use AI search tools to draft an outline and rough sketches of a research path. Professional librarians (public and academic) must [adapt rapidly](#) or risk being labeled anachronistic.¹² To be sure, more and more professional librarians, through the outreach and instructional efforts of the [Association of College and Research Libraries \(ACRL\)](#) and the [Association of Research Libraries \(ARL\)](#), are learning to use AI tools ethically, much like attorneys. Soon, if not already, librarians who do not use AI tools to assist patrons could be described as Luddites for their persistent [aversion](#) to emerging [AI-driven](#) technologies.¹³ On this point, patrons, staff, and trustees of LAMs should not conflate the ongoing contentious public discourse about the necessities of data centers and the national electrical power grid with cloud-based information and media platforms enabled with AI features, such as Google's Gemini or Microsoft's 365 Copilot.

Furthermore, the [Canfield Public Library](#) maintains a minuscule collection on its circulation shelves; indeed, patrons who inquire about Canfield's pivotal role during the crucial pioneer-settler era of the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries are promptly referred to the main library of the [Youngstown & Mahoning County public library system](#). Canfield's role as a geographically important logistical hub and transportation crossroads during the pioneer-settler period of the CWR, the War of 1812, and the formative years of the Ohio & Erie Canal is attested to by primary-source archival materials and secondary-source books from several cultural heritage institutions.¹⁴ In a nutshell, this is [a sad situation](#), as it points to a [decline in the](#)

¹² Allison Pohle and Roshan Fernandez, "The First Class of AI Natives is Graduating. Offices are Getting Ready," *The Wall Street Journal*, Business, May 25, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/tech/ai/ai-natives-graduates-job-cuts-6bab8ac9>; Lindsay Ellis, "'A' Grades are Suddenly Everywhere Since the Arrival of ChatGPT," *The Wall Street Journal*, Education, May 13, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/us-news/education/a-grades-are-suddenly-everywhere-since-the-arrival-of-chatgpt-845baae7>

¹³ Amanda Makula, Meredith Farkas, and Heather Sardis, "Slowing Down or Speeding Up? AI & Slow Librarianship in Academic Libraries," (Slideshow Presentation, San Diego University, CA, Copley Library, April 2, 2026), https://digital.sandiego.edu/library_facpub/43/; see also Dessy Harisanty et al., "Librarian Behaviour Towards AI: An Explorative Study of How Librarians Use AI Through the Lens of the Diffusion of Innovations Theory," *The Electronic Library* 43, no. 4 (2025): 578–599, <https://doi.org/10.1108/EL-10-2024-0341>

¹⁴ Emily Foster, ed., *The Ohio Frontier: An Anthology of Early Writings* (The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 103–104; see also Edward Brown, ed., "Historical Sketch of Norton Township [originally known as Wolf Creek, circa 1811–1832: Henry VanHyning, reminiscences of the start of the War of 1812 in Ohio (transcribed oral historical record)]," in *Wadsworth Memorial: An Account of the Proceedings of the Celebration of the Sixtieth Anniversary of the First Settlement of the Township of Wadsworth, Ohio with the Addresses, Historical Papers, and Poems* (Wadsworth, OH: Steam Printing House, 1875), 148–150; Brown, ed., "Historical Sketch of Norton Township," [mentions of Ambrose Palmer and the founding of New Portage as a village along the Tuscarawas River and Wolf Creek, 1815–1816], 147–150, 214; see also William Henry Perrin, ed., *History of Summit County, Ohio* (Chicago, IL: Baskin & Battley, 1881), 963–980; cf. The Summit County Historical Society, *A Centennial History*

[citizenry's interest in reading about the origins of America's democratic republic](#) after the Revolutionary War and the subsequent phased westward expansion.¹⁵

Alternatively, inspired by the ongoing federal [America 250](#) (Semiquincentennial) and state-level [Connecticut](#) and [Ohio](#) 250th Anniversary civic-education campaigns, the reading public may be skipping a physical or virtual visit to their local public library in favor of satisfying their thirst for historical trivia and heritage stories by posing their questions or keyword search to their favorite online search engine or AI chatbot.

Ostensibly, there is a clear understanding in America of the [value of public libraries](#) among ordinary citizens. Given the exponential rise of generative — and now, agentic — artificial intelligence ([AI](#)) tools and cloud-based information platforms, we are, at the very least, at a [cultural inflection point](#), or, at worst, on the precipice of public and perhaps [academic librarianship](#) becoming [anachronistic](#), along with a diminution of a broad swath of so-called “[knowledge professions](#).”¹⁶ Considering a [PEW Research Center report, “How Americans Value Public Libraries in Their Communities,”](#) published in 2013, and the reflexive mentality of Americans’ beliefs about knowledge acquisition and the necessity of public [libraries](#) [*bibliothèque*] within Western society, it should not be a shock to informed citizens that [generative AI](#) robots or [AI agents](#) serving as [agentic-AI librarians are emerging](#).¹⁷ Intriguingly, in a [2025 report](#), the American Association of University Professors (AAUP)’s ad hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence and Academic Professions raises serious concerns from educators about the pejorative impact of “ed-tech” and the rapid infusion of [generative AI-enabled](#) tools for [pedagogical](#) functional tasks, such as curriculum development and [academic library services](#).¹⁸

of Akron, 1825–1925 (Beacon Journal Co., 1925), 141–185; cf. Karl Hiram Grismer, *Akron and Summit County* (Summit County Historical Society, 1952), 72–74, 571–574; cf. June Herman VanHyning, ed., *VanHyning Family History: Descendants of Henry Van Hyning (1737–1839)*; cf. Conrad, *New Portage, Ohio*, 1978.

¹⁵ John Ferling, *Shots Heard Round the World: America, Britain and Europe in the Revolutionary War* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2025); see also Buley, R. Carlyle, *The Old Northwest Pioneer Period, 1815–1840*, vols. 1 and 2 (Indiana University Press, 1978); cf. Paxson, Frederic L., *History of the American Frontier, 1763–1893* (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924), Gildan Media, LLC (digitized 2024); cf. Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (Henry Holt & Co., 1920; repr., Dover Publications, Inc., 2010); cf. Cameron Shriver, “Situating Settlement in Ohio: The Eighteenth Century from Local and Atlantic Perspectives” in *Settling Ohio: First Peoples and Beyond*, eds. Timothy G. Anderson and Brian Schoen (Ohio University Press, 2023);” see also Jessica Choppin Roney, “Ohio, the Northwest Ordinance, and the Constitutional Founding of the United States” in *Settling Ohio* (Ohio University Press, 2023); cf. R. Douglas Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest, 1720–1830* (Indiana University Press, 1996); cf. Virginia E. McCormick, *New Englanders on the Ohio Frontier: The Migration and Settlement of Worthington, Ohio* (The Kent State University Press, 1998); cf. David Hackett Fischer and James C. Kelly, *Bound Away: Virginian and the Westward Movement* (University Press of Virginia; 2000).

¹⁶Suliman Hawamdeh, Jeonghyun Kim; and Xin Wang, *Foundations of the Information and Knowledge Professions* (University of North Texas, 2023), <https://openbooks.library.unt.edu/information-knowledge-professions/>; cf. Greg Ip, “Will AI Choke Off the Supply of Knowledge,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 27, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/tech/ai/will-ai-choke-off-the-supply-of-knowledge-8a71cbcd>

¹⁷ Michael Hanegan and Chris Rosser, *Generative AI and Libraries: Claiming Our Place in the Center of a Shared Future* (ALA Editions, 2025).

¹⁸ American Association of University Professors, *Artificial Intelligence and Academic Professions* (AAUP, July 2025), <https://www.aaup.org/reports-publications/aaup-policies-reports/topical-reports/artificial-intelligence-and-academic>; see also Lucas Scriptor, “Is Artificial Intelligence a Threat to Meaningful Work and Living? Technological Unemployment and the Existential Challenges of a Transitional Era,” *AI & Society* 41 (forthcoming issue, April 15, 2026): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-026-02941-x>; see also Nancy Falciani-White, “Communities of Scholarship, Communities of Faith: The Academic Library as Place [Essay 9], in *The Faithful*

However, more likely than not, professional librarians in America and those serving in the [UK Commonwealth Nations](#) should [expect to see a metamorphosis or amalgamation of functional librarianship](#) tasks supported by [AI tools](#) and enabled by cloud-based information-retrieval platforms built on [AI infrastructure](#). As [some public library systems begin to fail](#) due to citizens voting against transparent tax levies on real estate property owners to support highly progressive library programs, we may see a consolidation of LAM functional tasks for budget efficiency, or smaller public libraries having their [government-information functions rolled into a larger information-services office or governmental agency](#).¹⁹ Indeed, OCLC’s research indicates that [collaboration among LAMs](#), whether directed by a government authority or through memoranda of agreement, can result in mutually beneficial outcomes.²⁰

For the moment, [most Ohioans](#)—despite the turmoil over federal and state-level budgets and millages for public libraries and funding for public universities—according to the Chair of the Ohio Library Council, Stacey Russell, “libraries are one of the most important pieces of social and educational infrastructure we have.”²¹ Conversely, Russell does not specifically address the potential for agentic AI to disrupt the functionality and services of public libraries, a topic that is gaining attention as [Google’s Gemini Spark](#), which is a “personal AI agent,” prepares to offer its subscription customers a [personalized AI experience](#) with built-in tutoring and information-seeking services.²² Without a doubt, the eager children Russell poignantly writes about, who benefit from the “educational outcomes” of summer reading programs organized by public librarians with taxpayer monies, are growing up as digital and AI natives.²³ The current discombobulated situation in the U.S. indicates that the profession of librarianship urgently needs mentally agile [librarians who are tech-savvy and AI-smart](#) (in both generative and agentic services).²⁴ It appears that the [library and information science \(LIS\)](#) or [iSchools](#) are purposefully adapting to the age of AI, yet prospective graduate students may be wary of

Librarian: Essays on Christianity in the Profession, ed. G.B. Trott (McFarland & Co., Inc., 2019), 138–153; cf. Nicole Murph, “Beyond Information Literacy: Exploring AI’s Impact on Labor in Academic Libraries,” *Library Trends* 73, no. 4 (2025), 609–627,

https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1179&context=librarian_pubs

¹⁹ Kaitlin Durbin, “Cuyahoga County merging archives departments to expand access to public records - but it will cost requesters more,” *Cleveland.com*, News, March 11, 2026.

²⁰ Günter Waibel, “Library, Archive and Museum Collaboration,” OCLC, Research, accessed May 27, 2026,

<https://www.oclc.org/research/activities/lamsurvey.html>

²¹ Stacey Russell, “Ohio Libraries aren’t Luxuries or Just Buildings for Books,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, Opinion, May 27, 2026. <https://www.dispatch.com/story/opinion/columns/guest/2026/05/27/ohio-libraries-fill-summer-learning-void-for-children/90252152007/>; cf. Samuel J. Adams, “If Libraries are about Finding the Truth, Let’s be Honest about Their Decline,” American Enterprise Institute, January 5, 2022, <https://www.aei.org/politics-and-public-opinion/if-libraries-are-about-finding-the-truth-lets-be-honest-about-their-decline/>;

Rim Bajarin, “Class of 2026 Faces a Hard Truth: AI Isn’t the Threat—Ignoring It is,” *Forbes*, Innovation, Consumer Tech, May 20, 2026, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/timbajarin/2026/05/20/class-of-2026-faces-a-hard-truth-ai-isnt-the-threat-ignoring-it-is/>

²² Megan Cerullo, “Why Google’s Gemini Spark AI Agent Could be a Game Changer,” *CBS News*, MoneyWatch, May 21, 2026. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/google-gemini-spark-ai-agent/>; see also David Lumb, “Google’s Spark Uses Gemini AI to Help Plan Your Life,” *CNET*, Tech, Services & Software, AI, May 19, 2026.

<https://www.cnet.com/tech/services-and-software/google-spark-uses-gemini-ai-to-help-plan-your-life/>

²³ Russell, “Ohio Libraries . . . Buildings for Books,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, Opinion, May 27, 2026.

²⁴ Hallie Rich, “The AI Revolution is Here: A New Year and a new information landscape,” *School Library Journal*, Editor’s Note, January 21, 2026, <https://www.slj.com/story/jan-editorsnote-2026>

entering the profession if a [convergence of knowledge professions](#) is on the horizon, and they may be displaying signs of anxiety regarding, at the very least, the oversaturation of job advertisements with the terms data curation and digital humanities. Tersely, from the vantage point of a Gen Z person, the title “librarian” in the age of AI seems stodgy.

All things considered, the demise of professional librarianship is not on the near-term horizon, but the cogent refocusing of traditional academic and public library service models that Dean Shera, if he were alive today, would recognize will continue at a rapid pace in the age of the AI-driven economy. That said, we are experiencing a decline in American reading habits, especially among adult men, who are reading less serious nonfiction. Instead, Americans interested in history, science, and the environment are gravitating toward digital audiobooks and podcasts. As of 2021, a quarter of American adults do not make reading a book a routine part of their lives. This is indicative of a paradigm shift in American society.

It is essential to remember that the first American public libraries, supported by taxpayers, appeared in New England. The Puritans and their descendants had a very high literacy rate because they were serious readers of religious texts; as such, they placed public education at the forefront of village- and township-level governmental functions [polity]. In contrast to Benjamin Franklin’s lending library in Philadelphia, established in 1731, the town-based free libraries of New England, most significantly the Franklin (originally known as Exeter) Public Library in Franklin, Massachusetts, were truly public, though some were subscription-based. By analyzing and contextualizing the extant historical record of the CWR, the OPCHI-CWR intends to serve as a conduit for civic education for interested citizens and as a reliable source of information for other cultural heritage organizations, especially as the future funding of public and academic libraries and museums in North America during the age of AI remains uncertain. Given that most of the citizenry, as of 2013, believes that knowledge and cultural heritage institutions transform and enrich lives in a positive way, librarians, archivists, historians, and practitioners of the humanities working in LAMs will continue to perform vital roles as a societal function in the humanistic tradition, exemplified by Dean Shera and his generation and many other leaders in the epistemological knowledge and historical preservation professions.²⁵

As we attend solemn memorial events during this remarkable Semiquincentennial (America’s 250th anniversary), with the sacrifices of our forebears who fought for liberty, freedom from monarchical oppression, and the promise of constitutional government on our minds, the OPCHI-CWR strives to fill a widening lacuna in North American society by collecting primary- and secondary-source research materials on Ohio’s pioneers and early

²⁵ John Masko, “AI Won’t Replace Historians,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Opinion, August 17, 2025, <https://www.wsj.com/opinion/ai-wont-replace-historians-3b68751c>; see also Tomas A. Lipinski, ed., *Libraries, Archives, and Museums: Legal Issues and Ethical Challenges in the New Information Era* (Scarecrow Press, 2002); cf. Richard J. Cox, *Archives & Archivists in the Information Age* (Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., 2005); cf. *Archives: Principles and Practices*, 2nd ed. (Neal-Schuman, 2017); cf. Ross Harvey and Martha R. Mahard, *The Preservation Management Handbook: A 21st Century Guide for Libraries, Archives, and Museums*, 2nd ed. Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); S. Victor Fleischer (The University of Akron, Bierce Libraries, Head of Archives) in face-to-face consultative session with the author, May 26, 2026); see also Barbara McIntyre, “Summit County’s WWI Soldiers Depicted in ‘Lost Voices,’” *Akron Beacon Journal*, Book Talk, May 24, 2026; cf. Casper Hvenegaard Rasmussen and Birger Hjørland, “Libraries, Archives, and Museums (LAMs): Conceptual Issues with Focus on Their Convergence,” *Knowledge Organization* 49, no. 8 (2022): 577–621.

settlers, many of whom emigrated from New England due to land changes that affected farming and industry, or had direct governmental, family, religious, or business ties to that former province of the Kingdom of Great Britain, which became a crucible of revolutionary activity leading up to the Revolutionary War.



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