

“Profound and heartbreakingly beautiful” —Toni Morrison



The Public Library

A PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY BY **Robert Dawson**



foreword by **Bill Moyers** afterword by **Ann Patchett**

with reflections by **Isaac Asimov · Barbara Kingsolver · Anne Lamott · Philip Levine ·
Dr. Seuss · Charles Simic · Amy Tan · E. B. White · and others**

CONTENTS

FOREWORD – *Bill Moyers* 6

—

Introduction – *Robert Dawson* 8

CHAPTER ONE

The American Public Library 12

The Library Spirit / *Stuart A. P. Murray* 31

CHAPTER TWO

Economics 34

A Country Without Libraries – *Charles Simic* 36

All Hail the Public Library – *David Morris* 57

CHAPTER THREE

Civic Memory and Identity 60

What the Library Means to Me – *Amy Tan* 75

Letters to the Children of Troy, Michigan –
Isaac Asimov, Dr. Seuss, and E. B. White 76

How Mr. Dewey Decimal Saved My Life –
Barbara Kingsolver 78

CHAPTER FOUR

Urban and Rural Libraries 82

The Northeast Nevada Regional Bookmobile –
Kelvin K. Selders 96

Practicing Seva – *Dorothy Lazard* 104

Spreading Enlightenment – *Luis Herrera* 106

CHAPTER FIVE

Art and Architecture 108

CHAPTER SIX

Evolving Libraries 134

Enriched by What We Share – *Chip Ward* 136

CHAPTER SEVEN

Literature and Learning 156

Library Days – *Philip Levine* 158

Steinbeck Country – *Anne Lamott* 164

Maps and Stats – *Walker Dawson* 179

AFTERWORD – *Ann Patchett* 182

—

Acknowledgments 185

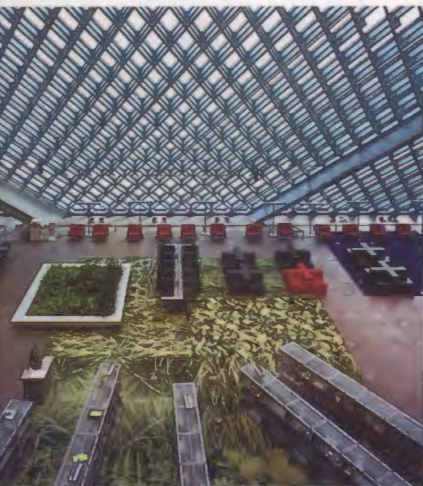
Contributors 187

Notes 190

Credits 191



Interior, Willard Library, Evansville,
Indiana, 2011



“This collection of photographs and texts of and about libraries—grand or dead, faded or sumptuous—make up a narrative that combines the public sphere with private memory. Robert Dawson’s work is an irrefutable argument for the preservation of public libraries. His book is profound and heartbreakingly beautiful.” —Toni Morrison

Over the last eighteen years, photographer Robert Dawson documented hundreds of public libraries throughout the United States. *The Public Library* presents an inspiring selection of his work—libraries monumental and modest, from the reading room at the New York Public Library to Allensworth, California’s one-room Tulare County Free Library, built by former slaves. Essays, letters, and poetry by distinguished writers and librarians complete this impassioned tribute to a vibrant but threatened American institution.

With a foreword by Bill Moyers and an afterword by Ann Patchett. Additional contributors include Isaac Asimov, Walker Dawson, Luis Herrera, Barbara Kingsolver, Anne Lamott, Dorothy Lazard, Philip Levine, David Morris, Stuart A. P. Murray, Kelvin K. Selders, Dr. Seuss, Charles Simic, Amy Tan, Chip Ward, and E. B. White.

ISBN 978-1-61689-217-3 US \$35.00 · UK £21.99



Princeton Architectural Press | www.papress.com