

# Settler Narratives: Colonial Genocide, Westward Expansion, the Gendering of Librarianship, and the Appointment of City Librarian

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**ABSTRACT:** The gendering of the library profession toward female dominance, occurring between 1876 and 1905, coincided with an influx of affluent, educated white settlers in California. The simultaneity of Westward expansion and gendering of librarianship laid the framework for white women settlers to find successful careers in libraries in California. The first City Librarian of the South Pasadena Public Library, located in South Pasadena, California, was a woman named Nellie Keith. Viewed through an intersectional lens, Keith's journey, from her birth on a New Hampshire farm to her appointment as a City Librarian in California, was paved by both her access to white privilege and her subjection to the sexism of nineteenth century male figureheads in the field of librarianship.

**Keywords:** librarianship, libraries, westward expansion, colonialism, settler colonial theory, Southern California, Nellie Keith



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## Introduction

Nellie Keith was appointed the first City Librarian of South Pasadena, California in 1895.<sup>1</sup> Keith's 1887<sup>2</sup> arrival in Southern California from New England, the establishment of the South Pasadena Public Library, and Keith's eventual appointment as the first City Librarian are the culmination of multiple social factors present in Southern California at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; including colonial genocide, Westward expansion, and the gendering of the professional field of librarianship. The genocide of the California Indigenous population began with establishment of the California Missions system, instituted by Franciscan priests and funded by the Spanish Empire. However, the termination of the Mission system did not, and still has not, ended the exploitation of the Indigenous tribes of Southern California, and specifically discussed here, the plight of the Gabrieliño people native to the San Gabriel Valley lands on which modern South Pasadena sits.<sup>3</sup>

Following the Mission system, the Mexican-American War, and the annexation of California by the United States government, white Euro-American settlers headed west to California en masse. As these settlers moved west, Indigenous populations, already ravaged and subjugated by Spanish Missions, saw the continued cultural and physical genocide of their communities. Patrick Wolfe argues that genocide is not simply an act of elimination, but one of cultural replacement.<sup>4</sup> Thus, an ongoing genocide of the Gabrieliño people in South Pasadena, facilitated by settler colonialism, created the social conditions necessary for white settlers to establish their own cultural values and governmental systems. A much-prided aspect of South Pasadena's local culture is the community's dedication to the public library.<sup>5</sup> The establishment of public library systems on Indigenous land is, in and of itself, an act of settler colonialism. Yet, that aside, public libraries in the United States have almost always served the "construction and maintenance of a white American citizenry".<sup>6</sup> And, within the hegemony of the public library system are the reinforced gender roles of library staff; critically, that the profession of librarianship is a position held by white women.

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<sup>1</sup>. Jane Apostol, *The South Pasadena Public Library: Its First Hundred Years 1895-1995* (United States: South Pasadena Public Library, 1995), 23.

<sup>2</sup>. "Truman D. Keith: Brother of J. L. Keith, of Ottawa, Passes Away in Pasadena, California," *Ottawa Herald* (Ottawa, KS), Feb. 27, 1896.

<sup>3</sup>. The Gabrieliño tribes of the Los Angeles Basin are currently associated with four separate organizations: the Gabrielino-Tongva Tribe, the Gabrielino/Tongva Tribe, the Gabrieliño Band of Mission Indians – Kizh Nation, and Gabrielino-Tongva San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians. Gabrieliño is used here as a collective, mediating term.

<sup>4</sup>. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388, accessed July 9, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>.

<sup>5</sup>. Jane Apostol, *The South Pasadena Public Library: Its First Hundred Years 1895-1995* (United States: South Pasadena Public Library, 1995), 17.

<sup>6</sup>. Todd Honma, "Trippin' Over the Color Line: The Invisibility of Race in Library and Information Studies," *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2005): 3, accessed July 9, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.5070/D412000540>.

The gendering of the library profession was in its infancy during the historical period of Westward expansion in the United States. Consequently, white female settlers in California began to find a burgeoning new avenue of employment as public librarians. While in South Pasadena the first iteration of the public librarian was a volunteer role for the local free reading room, wages were likely not a primary means of concern for the wealthy settler who took on this role.<sup>7</sup> The public library and librarianship did not exist to emphasize social equity, but social hierarchy. Having the community means to establish a free reading room, filled with books primarily reflecting white male literary tastes, is a form of social privilege and a reinforcement of Euro-American culture and white supremacy. Relatedly, white and female normativity of library professionals is not a standalone occurrence; it is a symptom of the settler colonial structuring of Gabrieliño land.<sup>8</sup> By understanding the role that settler colonialism has played in the establishment of our public libraries – and the continued influence settler colonialism has – we are more equipped to redress biases within these structures. Herein is an exploration of the structural and cultural context that led to the appointment of Nellie Keith as City Librarian for the City of South Pasadena.

## Colonization in Southern California

The land on which the City of South Pasadena now sits, like much of Southern California, is fraught with the history of Indigenous enslavement and subjugation. The Gabrieliño people, most often referenced within South Pasadena's borders, are not a singular tribe, but a collection of lineages sharing language, culture, religion, and lifestyle.<sup>9</sup> Prior to the invasion of the Spanish missionaries, the Gabrieliño people lived under a monarchical governmental structure, sustained a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, and practiced a complex system of beliefs anchored in the surrounding natural environment.<sup>10</sup> Today, Gabrieliño tribes still reside in the Los Angeles Basin. Though centuries of colonialism resulted in forced assimilation, the Gabrieliño tribes have maintained distinct cultural identities and are actively pursuing the reclamation of Indigenous land.<sup>11</sup> Land in modern South Pasadena has yet to be recovered, despite the fact that less than three miles from the South Pasadena border lies a mass grave of 6,000 Native Americans at the Mission San Gabriel Archángel.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>. Jane Apostol, *The South Pasadena Public Library: Its First Hundred Years 1895-1995* (United States: South Pasadena Public Library, 1995), 19.

<sup>8</sup>. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 402, accessed July 9, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>.

<sup>9</sup>. Claudia Jurmain and William McCrawley, *O, My Ancestors: Recognition and Renewal for the Gabrielino-Tongva People of the Los Angeles Area* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2009), xxii.

<sup>10</sup>. Friar Geronimo Boscana. *Chinigchinich: A Historical Account of the Origin, Customs, and Traditions of the Indians at the Missionary Establishment of St. Juan Capistrano, Alta-California* (United Kingdom: Dodo Press, 2009), 4-8, 20, 34.

<sup>11</sup>. Jonah Valdez, "After nearly 200 years, the Tongva community has land in Los Angeles County," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), Oct. 10, 2022.

<sup>12</sup>. Joe Mozingo, "In Search of the Lost Gabrielinos," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, *Journal of Radical Librarianship*, Vol. 10 (2024) pp. 162-177

Initially founded in 1771, the Mission San Gabriel Archángel was active on the land encompassing modern day South Pasadena from 1775<sup>13</sup> to 1834.<sup>14</sup> Franciscan and colonist accounts of the Mission San Gabriel often reflect a dismissal of indigenous humanity; with one colonist perspective referring to the Mission Indians as “quiet, inoffensive creatures”<sup>15</sup> and, in another account, as barefooted pagans.<sup>16</sup> In fact, one popular historical account by Fray Zephyrin Engelhardt shares an anecdotal claim that, during an expedition in 1770, Frays Angel Somera and Pedro Benito Cambón ran into a “great multitude of savages.”<sup>17</sup> To quell any potential violence, Fr. Somera and Fr. Cambón produced a canvas image of Our Lady of Sorrows. The Indigenous group was so overcome by the beauty of the image that they “threw down their bows and arrows” and expressed their desire to build and participate in the Mission system.<sup>18</sup> Despite stories of Indigenous pliability like the forementioned, life at Mission San Gabriel Archángel was notable for the Franciscans’ use of “coercion, violence, and intimidation” against Indigenous Mission laborers.<sup>19</sup>

Many Native American activists has disavowed the Mission system, outlining the enslavement and imprisonment of their elders and ancestors.<sup>20</sup> Often cited as a sign of Indigenous contempt for the Mission system is the 1785 uprising at Mission San Gabriel Archángel. Toypurina, an Indigenous shaman who had not converted to Christianity, and Nicolás José, an Indigenous Christian convert, were brought to trial for leading the uprising.<sup>21</sup> The joint resistance of a gentile and a neophyte shows a shared identity, one of Indigeneity and resistance to settler colonial subjugation. During her trial, when asked if Toypurina had been harmed by soldiers, priests, or other Christians, Toypurina replied that the harm caused was the theft of land by the Spanish.<sup>22</sup> Despite

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CA), July 16, 1999.

<sup>13</sup>. Maynard Geiger. “The Building of Mission San Gabriel: 1771-1828.” *Southern California Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (1968): 33–42, accessed February 14, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.2307/41170150>.

<sup>14</sup>. W. W. Robinson, “The Story of Rancho San Pasqual.” *The Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1955): 347–53, accessed February 14, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.2307/41168557>.

<sup>15</sup>. Laura Evertsen King, “Reminiscences of Mission San Gabriel,” *Annual Publication of the Historical Society of Southern California* 11, no. 3 (1920): 58–62, accessed Feb. 14, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.2307/41168783>.

<sup>16</sup>. Jane D. McCloskey, *6 Horses and 10 Head: Two Hundred Years on the Rancho San Pasqual 1770-1970* (Pasadena: The Boys’ Club of Pasadena, 1971), 15-17.

<sup>17</sup>. Zephyrin Engelhardt, *San Gabriel Mission and the Beginnings of Los Angeles* (San Gabriel: Mission San Gabriel, 1927), 4.

<sup>18</sup>. Engelhardt, 4.

<sup>19</sup>. Yvette J. Saavedra, *Pasadena Before the Roses: Race, Identity, and Land Use in Southern California, 1771–1890* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018), 26.

<sup>20</sup>. Rupert Costo and Jeanette H. Costo, *The Missions of California: A Legacy of Genocide* (Indian Historian Press, 1987).

<sup>21</sup>. Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M. Senkewicz, *Lands of Promise and Despair: Chronicles of Early California, 1535-1846* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2001), 247.

<sup>22</sup>. Beebe and Senkewicz, 247.

the attempt, this uprising, and the others like it, did not end Spanish attempts to convert and assimilate Native populations. The reign of white supremacy, directly resulting in the genocide of Indigenous populations in California, only continued to expand its reach throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Secularization of Mission land took place between 1834 and 1836, separating Indigenous laborers from the Mission system and Mission land.<sup>23</sup> For decades Spanish colonizers had promised to eventually return the land of California to the Indigenous communities from which it was usurped. Unsurprisingly, this was not the case. California Mission lands served as the point of origin for future civilian settlements.<sup>24</sup> Under Mexican rule, Mission land holdings were hastily distributed to settlers and land developers.<sup>25</sup> During the first half of the 19th century, known as the Rancho period, Mission San Gabriel Archángel changed hands several times and was the subject of multiple land claims. It was the northwest corner of Mission San Gabriel Archángel, known as El Rincon de San Pasqual (or Rancho San Pasqual), where South Pasadena and the South Pasadena Public Library rest today.<sup>26</sup>

Indigenous laborers continued to work the land now deemed Rancho San Pasqual. However, most written histories of the Rancho San Pasqual fail to mention the state-sponsored genocide of California Indians during the Rancho period, despite little effort to hide the atrocities committed by actors in the state and federal U.S. government.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps this lack of recognition is because the status quo often goes unacknowledged; genocide is simply an expected component of settler colonialism. While the exact number of Indigenous laborers on the Rancho San Pasqual is not known, we do know that from 1850 to 1870 the population of Indians in Los Angeles County dropped from 3,693 to 219.<sup>28</sup> No means of extermination was off limits during the Rancho period. Shootings, beheadings, and forced removal to reservations with little regard for sex or age were common.<sup>29</sup> After the declaration of California statehood and the dwindling of the California Indian population, manifest destiny became a widely embraced phrase in the white American vernacular. The term “manifest destiny” purports the Christian nationalist idea that the expansion of American democracy over the North American continent is ordained by God.<sup>30</sup> Though the Ranchos were now secularized from the oversight of the Catholic Church, California Indians once again faced the threat of religion; this time in the form of Protestantism.<sup>31</sup> While surviving

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<sup>23</sup>. McCloskey, *6 Horses and 10 Head*, 8.

<sup>24</sup>. Saavedra, *Pasadena Before the Roses*, 18.

<sup>25</sup>. McCloskey, *6 Horses and 10 Head*, 8.

<sup>26</sup>. McCloskey, *6 Horses and 10 Head*, 25.

<sup>27</sup>. Benjamin Madley, “Understanding Genocide in California under United States Rule, 1846-1873,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 47, 4 (2016): 455-456.

<sup>28</sup>. George Harwood Phillips, “Indians in Los Angeles, 1781-1875: Economic Integration, Social Disintegration,” *Pacific Historical Review* 49, no. 3 (1980): 448, accessed February 14, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3638564>.

<sup>29</sup>. Madley, “Understanding Genocide in California,” 453.

<sup>30</sup>. John D. Wisley, “‘Our Country Is Destined to be the Great Nation of Futurity’: John L. O’Sullivan’s Manifest Destiny and Christian Nationalism, 1837–1846,” *Religions* 8, no. 68 (2017): 45-61.

<sup>31</sup>. John D. Wisley, “‘Our Country Is Destined to be the Great Nation of

Gabrieliños took work on the California ranchos, settlers from the East pondered new lives in Southern California. Though the landscape would be new, settler adherence to institutionalized white supremacy would remain.

## Westward Expansion and the California Colony of Indiana

In 1873, a group of colonists from Indiana travelled to California as a means of escaping harsh midwestern winters.<sup>32</sup> Labelled the California Colony of Indiana, this cooperative group of Midwesterners set out to purchase land in California. Colony membership was initially limited to fifty and applications to join the Colony came from as far as Canada.<sup>33</sup> Colony membership was selective and only white applicants of means were chosen.<sup>34</sup> Once Colony membership and funding were secured, the California Colony of Indiana was renamed the “San Gabriel Orange Grove Association” and property on the Rancho San Pasqual was purchased. Upon sale and arrival of the San Gabriel Orange Grove Association, the Rancho land was subdivided, and the face of the pastoral landscape began to quickly evolve. The San Gabriel Orange Grove Association was just one of the many groups established that signified the success of the campaign of Indigenous genocide and colonial ownership in California between the establishment of California statehood in 1848 and the incorporation of the City of South Pasadena in 1888. During the 1870 federal census 14,720 white Americans were recorded as residents of Los Angeles County.<sup>35</sup> By 1880 the white population was 81,707.<sup>36</sup>

In *Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native*, Patrick Wolfe argues:

When invasion is recognized as a structure rather than an event, its history does not stop or, more to the point, become relatively trivial—when it moves on from the era of frontier homicide. Rather, narrating that history involves charting the continuities, discontinuities, adjustments, and departures whereby a logic that initially informed frontier killing transmutes into different modalities, discourse and institutional formations as it undergirds the historical development and complexification of settler society.<sup>37</sup>

In outlining the westward movement of colonists, it is essential to acknowledge their intent. This intent was not simply to remove Indigenous residents from their land, it was to replace Indigenous identity with Euro-American identity; a much longer and complex process. It is easy to summarize Westward expansion as an anomalous event with a clear beginning and ending date. Yet, as Wolfe surmises, settler colonialism is a structure, not an event. The structure, informed by the cultural remnants of the Mission system, is one of patriarchy, white supremacy, and Christian

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Futurity”, 7.

<sup>32</sup>. “San Gabriel Orange Grove Association,” *Los Angeles Herald* (Los Angeles, CA), Dec. 7, 1873.

<sup>33</sup>. McCloskey, *6 Horses and 10 Head*, 53.

<sup>34</sup>. McCloskey, *6 Horses and 10 Head*, 53.

<sup>35</sup>. Department of the Interior, “Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880),” (Federal Census, Washington, 1882), 382.

<sup>36</sup>. Department of the Interior, “Statistics of the Population of the United States”, 382.

<sup>37</sup>. Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” 402.



dominance. While the Mission system weakened Indigenous autonomy, Westward expansion delivered the final blow. The identity of Westward colonists is the foundation on which all modern infrastructure and government in Southern California has been built. And, to maintain dominance, this system must be continuously reinforced through oppression of Indigenous people. Among the ranks of Westward colonists was Nellie Keith.

## Nellie Keith and the South Pasadena Public Library

Nellie Woodard, daughter of Amos and Almacia Woodard,<sup>38</sup> was born in New London, New Hampshire on December 29, 1851.<sup>39</sup> Nellie and her family were ripe candidates for Westward expansion. The Woodards were a farming family of modest but respectable means and moving west meant the possibility of new land, a new life, and upward class mobility.<sup>40</sup> As a young adult, Nellie and her family moved to Rice Lake, Minnesota, where Nellie's first public service job was working as a schoolteacher.<sup>41</sup> While residing in Minnesota, Nellie married Truman D. Keith of Oswego County, New York on August 30, 1872.<sup>42</sup> The couple continued west and arrived in San Bernardino, California on January 1, 1887. They resided there for only eight months before settling in the area that would soon become South Pasadena, California.<sup>43</sup> South Pasadena was incorporated on March 2, 1888.

Nellie and Truman quickly became pillars of the community. Truman served as the Postmaster of South Pasadena<sup>44</sup> and local photographer, and his photographs are still a paramount part of archival records in South Pasadena and the surrounding area. Nellie was a charter member of both the South Pasadena Woman's Club and the Memorial Baptist Church.<sup>45</sup> Given the Keith's consistent community involvement and favorable social status, it is no surprise that the Keith name appears in the establishing history of the cherished public library. Because of the racial and economic selectivity of the San Gabriel Orange Grove Association, in its early years South Pasadena was a white, heavily segregated, affluent, and formally educated community. To this day, these demographics have changed little.

Two years before the incorporation of South Pasadena, settlers formed a literary society and

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<sup>38</sup>. "Died." *The Larimer County Independent* (Fort Collins, CO), Nov. 1, 1900.

<sup>39</sup>. "Death Comes to Librarian Emeritus Closing Long Life of Constructive Service," *South Pasadena Foothill Review* (South Pasadena, CA), June 7, 1935.

<sup>40</sup>. Department of the Interior, "Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census Under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior, By Joseph C.G. Kennedy, Superintendent of the Census," (Government Printing Office: Washington, 1864), 10.

<sup>41</sup>. "Death Comes to Librarian Emeritus Closing Long Life of Constructive Service."

<sup>42</sup>. "Minnesota Official Marriage System (MOMS)," Minnesota Association of County Officers (MACO), accessed February 17, 2024, <https://moms.mn.gov/>.

<sup>43</sup>. "Truman D. Keith: Brother of J. L. Keith, of Ottawa, Passes Away in Pasadena, California."

<sup>44</sup>. "Truman D. Keith: Brother of J. L. Keith, of Ottawa, Passes Away in Pasadena, California."

<sup>45</sup>. "Death Comes to Librarian Emeritus Closing Long Life of Constructive Service."

launched their own paper, the *South Pasadena Crescent*.<sup>46</sup> Of course, the desire for a literary society led to the desire for a reading room and on February 14, 1889, the South Pasadena Lyceum was founded. Notably, the first book added to the collection was John Charles Frémont's *Memoirs of My Life*,<sup>47</sup> Frémont being a United States senator, Westward expansionist, and the leader of the Klamath Lake massacre that resulted in the deaths of fourteen Native Americans. That Frémont's memoir should be the founding book in the library's collection is a profound example of the way in which South Pasadena's settlers weaponized literacy and education to reinforce dominance.

After less than six years in operation, the South Pasadena Lyceum proved to be an unsustainable model. Funding was based on private contributions from community members and, while the Lyceum was a popular community resource, enthusiasm from affluent community stakeholders dwindled after the first year of operations.<sup>48</sup> Luckily, City Attorney Don Carlos Porter proposed the maintenance of a city library through taxation. On September 10, 1895, the South Pasadena City Council adopted Resolution 48, establishing the South Pasadena Public Library. The City Council appointed five men as library trustees.<sup>49</sup> Unsurprisingly, all five trustees were landowning settlers. Among the ranks were a prominent Presbyterian pastor,<sup>50</sup> a prohibitionist,<sup>51</sup> a well-to-do philanthropist,<sup>52</sup> a city clerk,<sup>53</sup> and the local mayor.<sup>54</sup>

The recognition of privilege and whiteness present in the formation of a public institution is essential to understanding the role of that institution. From the outset, the South Pasadena Public Library was constructed on the biases held by a group of men that represented an ideal of United States hegemony: that of the landowning white Christian man. In *Trippin' Over the Color Line* Todd Honma discusses the beginnings of the Boston Public Library, the first major public library in the United States. The mission behind this Library was to create a "more informed citizenry"; that is, to create a citizenry more in line with the

common hegemonic U.S. rhetoric of white ethnic assimilation and meritocratic advancement, both of which have been critiqued extensively by scholars in the social sciences, particularly for their fallacious ideals of an egalitarian U.S. society that ignores ideological and material discriminations based on race.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>. Apostol, *The South Pasadena Public Library*, 17.

<sup>47</sup>. Apostol, *The South Pasadena Public Library*, 19.

<sup>48</sup>. Apostol, *The South Pasadena Public Library*, 19-21.

<sup>49</sup>. Apostol, *The South Pasadena Public Library*, 21.

<sup>50</sup>. "Rev. A. M. Merwin Dies," *The Weekly Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), Feb.03, 1905.

<sup>51</sup>. "Longleys Do Much in Line of Civic Duty," *South Pasadena Record* (South Pasadena, CA), Jan. 30, 1914.

<sup>52</sup>. "Wadsworth-Jones," *South Pasadena Record* (South Pasadena, CA), June 25, 1908.

<sup>53</sup>. "Untimely Death of Merton E. Keith," *South Pasadena Record* (South Pasadena, CA), Nov. 26, 1908.

<sup>54</sup>. Alvalee Arnold, "News & Views of South Pasadena," *South Pasadena Review* (South Pasadena, CA), Sept. 17, 1986.

<sup>55</sup>. Honma, "Trippin' Over the Color Line," 5.



Similarly, in an assessment of libraries in the Netherlands East Indies colony, Fitzpatrick notes how to creation of a comprehensive library system by settlers was not solely altruistic, but a means of perpetuating Western values through literacy.<sup>56</sup> The South Pasadena Public Library was a public service in which the settler colonial social structure could continue to flourish under the guise of egalitarian leisure and education. The month after the Board of Trustees was established, Nellie Keith was offered the position of City Librarian.<sup>57</sup>

Keith's appointment was not simply the result of being a well-regarded and trustworthy member of the community (and mother of a Board member). The need for a City Librarian came at a crucial time in library and California history: when the movement of white settlers to California overlapped with the gendering of the library profession. In 1876, F.B. Perkins of the Boston Public Library wrote in a special report titled *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition, and Management*, "Women should be employed as librarians and assistants as far as possible, as the nature of the duties is, to a great extent, and in many cases, suited to them."<sup>58</sup> Perkins' argument being that hiring women would lower the overhead costs of running a library. Similarly, Justin Winsor, first President of the American Library Association, in 1877 stated "In American libraries we set high value on women's work...for the money they cost – if we must gauge such labor by such rules – they are infinitely better than equivalent salaries will produce of the other sex."<sup>59</sup> Given the failure of the South Pasadena Lyceum to maintain financial viability it is reasonable to assume that the cost of hiring Nellie Keith versus a male librarian was taken into consideration during the decision-making process.

Dee Garrison's landmark article *The Tender Technicians: The Feminization of Public Librarianship, 1876-1905* talks extensively about the desire to hire women for librarian roles due to both the low cost associated with hiring women and a belief that the gentle and morally righteous nature of women made them uniquely suitable for the job.<sup>60</sup> However, what Garrison overlooks is the racial dynamics at play during the field's initial turn toward a female-dominant workforce. Keith's perceived virtue as an educated woman is unquestionably just as relevant as her perceived virtue as a white woman. The South Pasadena Public Library was established as a public institution intended to reinforce settler colonial values. The face of that institution should, of course, be white.

South Pasadena and the surrounding area are tangible signifiers of a nearly 250-year legacy of white supremacy of which the City of South Pasadena is still reckoning with, as exemplified by the 2022 passage of Resolution 7750 by the City Council, condemning the City's history as a

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<sup>56</sup>. Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, "The Public Library as Instrument of Colonialism: The Case of the Netherlands East Indies," *Information & Culture: A Journal of History Information & Culture* 43, no.3 (2008): 271.

<sup>57</sup>. Apostol, *The South Pasadena Public Library*, 23.

<sup>58</sup>. F.B. Perkins, "How to Make Town Libraries Successful," in *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition, and Management* (Washington: Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, 1876), 430.

<sup>59</sup>. Justin Winsor quoted in Dee Garrison, "The Tender Technicians: The Feminization of Public Librarianship, 1876-1905," *Journal of Social History* 6, no. 2 (1972-1973): 133.

<sup>60</sup>. Garrison, "The Tender Technicians," 134-135.

sundown town; that is, a town in which non-white visitors are expected to be gone by sunset.<sup>61</sup> From its founding, South Pasadenans took extensive measures to ensure that non-white Americans, while allowed to work in the City, were unable to successfully own property there.<sup>62</sup> At the time of Keith's appointment, the only landowners in South Pasadena were white settlers. Garrison's article notes Melvil Dewey's extensive advocacy for women in the library but fails to mention that his belief in the woman as a librarian did not extend to those that did not fit within the archetype of the white Anglo-Saxon protestant. Despite Dewey's well-documented racism and anti-Semitism,<sup>63</sup> he had a profound impact on the modern American library system and library education, establishing the first library school in 1887.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps further evidence of the field's proclivity toward such biases. An institution founded on such a mentality was bound to thrive in a city like South Pasadena.

Nellie Keith fit every ideal of Dewey's librarian. Keith had a disposition perfectly encapsulating the gentleness and morality suggested by Garrison; Lawrence Clark Powell once writing "I was a favored reader in the South Pasadena Public Library, whose librarian, dear Nellie Keith, never had 'no' in her vocabulary."<sup>65</sup> Keith was a beloved member of the South Pasadena community.<sup>66</sup> She was also an educated white woman, a dedicated Baptist, and, perhaps most importantly, willing to work for a salary of just \$12.50 per month.<sup>67</sup> For comparison, domestic servants in California around this time made between \$15 and \$25 per month.<sup>68</sup>

Providing the context under which Nellie Keith became the City Librarian of South Pasadena is not a means of undermining her work. Again, Keith was a beloved and revered member of the community, and her life and career were – and still are – considered aspirational by Euro-American culture. Under her tenure, the Library received funding from the Carnegie Corporation, two building expansions, and added thousands of books to the Library's collection. Keith guided the Library through the 1918 influenza epidemic and designated the Library's auditorium – used for

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<sup>61</sup>. Matt Hormann, "When South Pasadena Was For Whites Only," *Hometown Pasadena*, Sept. 15, 2014.

<sup>62</sup>. Matt Hormann, "When South Pasadena Was for Whites Only."

<sup>63</sup>. Wayne A. Weigand, "'Jew Attack': The Story behind Melvil Dewey's Resignation as New York State Librarian in 1905," *American Jewish History* 83, no. 3 (1995): 359, accessed February 14, 2024, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23885515>.

<sup>64</sup>. Wayne Wiegand, "Dewey Declassified: A Revelatory Look at the 'Irrepressible Reformer'" *American Libraries* 27, no.1 (1996): 54–60, accessed July 4, 2024, <https://pasadenacc.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=9601167504&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>65</sup>. Lawrence Clark Powell, "Great Land of Libraries," *ALA Bulletin* 59, no. 7 (1965): 645, accessed February 14, 2024, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25697244>.

<sup>66</sup>. "Lincoln Park Study Club Formed in 1905," *South Pasadena Review* (South Pasadena, CA), May 6, 1938; "Marengo Parent-Teacher Association to Meet," *Foothill Review* (South Pasadena, CA), March 8, 1929.

<sup>67</sup>. Apostol, *The South Pasadena Public Library*, 23.

<sup>68</sup>. California Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of California for the Years 1889-1900*, (Sacramento, CA: Office of State Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1884-1928), 41.

children's story hour – as a meeting place for the Red Cross during World War I. Upon her death in 1935, the Library closed its doors for four hours in her memory.<sup>69</sup> However, it is undeniable that the cultural context during which she lived directly led to her appointment. Settler colonialism in California, which created and enforced a centuries-long narrative of white supremacy, overlapping with the gendering of the library profession, created an environment in which Keith represented the perfect good Christian white woman first imagined by Dewey. Despite being the first City Librarian in South Pasadena, Keith's career is not a starting point, but rather a singular event in the ongoing process of settler colonialism; that is, cultural replacement. Where there once was the oral tradition of the Gabrieliño tribes, there is now the written tradition of Euro-Americans.

Keith's appointment came exactly at a moment in history when literate, affluent white settlers putting down roots in California coincided with the library profession being embraced as a suitable career for white women. Keith was not the only white female settler to find a career in the library profession at the time: Mary Foy, a descendant of Irish immigrants,<sup>70</sup> was appointed the first female chief librarian of the Los Angeles Public Library in 1879; Sarah E. Merritt, a pioneer from Boston,<sup>71</sup> was appointed the first librarian of the Pasadena Library in 1884; and Elfie A. Mosse, the daughter of midwestern settlers,<sup>72</sup> was appointed the first city librarian of the Santa Monica Public Library in 1890. Though librarianship is often lauded for the way in which the career offered financial independence and career work to women beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, we must acknowledge the racial disparities within the profession and how colonialism has established and influenced our current Library systems.

## Settler Colonialism and the Public Library

The movement to construct public libraries in the United States began in Nellie Keith's birth state of New Hampshire in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>73</sup> Though growth of the movement was initially slow, the construction of public libraries rapidly increased between 1875 and 1929<sup>74</sup>, with the incorporation of the city of South Pasadena sitting comfortably at 1888. The desire for public libraries during this period has been attributed to many different factors, including the establish-

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<sup>69</sup>. "Death Comes to Librarian Emeritus Closing Long Life of Constructive Service."

<sup>70</sup>. "Samuel C. Foy's Busy Life Ended," *Los Angeles Evening Post-Record* (Los Angeles, CA), April 25, 1901.

<sup>71</sup>. "Descendants of Pioneers Enjoy Reunion: City's First Librarian Paid Tribute at Luncheon," *Independent Star-News* (Pasadena, CA), Dec. 1, 1957.

<sup>72</sup>. Department of Commerce, "Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910," (Government Printing Office: Washington, 1913).

<sup>73</sup>. Kevane, Michael, and William A. Sundstrom. "The Development of Public Libraries in the United States, 1870-1930: A Quantitative Assessment." *Information & Culture* 49, no. 2 (2014): 117.

<sup>74</sup>. Kevane and Sundstrom. "The Development of Public Libraries in the United States, 1870-1930," 118.

ment of free public school, increased population wealth, and a cultural understanding that democracy is dependent on an educated public.<sup>75</sup> In fact, libraries are, to this day, lauded as democratized, egalitarian institutions. Yet, ultimately, democracy is reliant on a majority rule by the people. Given the genocide of Indigenous Californians and the influx of white settlers during the rise in the establishment of public libraries, it is fair to assume that the majority rule reflected by these institutions is that of white settlers.

The concepts of “democracy” and “egalitarianism” are at odds when a Native/settler binary exists. The Native/settler binary is “a zero-sum logic whereby settler societies, for all their internal complexities, uniformly require the elimination of Native alternatives.”<sup>76</sup> Though perhaps founded on an ideology of universal access to education, the library is fundamentally an institution founded by and serving the interests of settlers. Considering the Native/settler binary, the public library is a tool of settler colonialism and means of reinforcing settler identity while eliminating Native identity. The construction of the South Pasadena Public Library by Westward expansionists, the appointment of colonist Nellie Keith, and the legacy of white affluence in modern South Pasadena are all illustrations of settler colonialism and the ongoing erasure of the Native.

## Conclusion

The invasions of both Spanish mission leaders in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and Westward pioneers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were not singular events. Settler colonialism is an ongoing structural movement to dismantle Indigenous identity and, when possible, assimilate it to Euro-American society.<sup>77</sup> When the Spanish Missions first arrived in Southern California the explicit goal of the Spanish Empire was to create a system in which Indigenous people could systematically, either by choice or by force, be given new religious and cultural identities more palatable to their colonizers. Though the Spanish Missions were arguably unsuccessful in meeting their objective, they laid groundwork for a new racial hierarchy; one in which whiteness sat at the top and Indigeneity sat at the bottom.

Following the Spanish Mission system, Westward expansionists carried on the legacy of Indigenous subjection though genocide. Land was appropriated by colonists from the Eastern United States and landmarks of Euro-American culture, including libraries, were established. One element of Euro-American culture is the white racial normativity of the library profession.<sup>78</sup> This, followed the gendering of librarianship in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, created a settler colonial environment in which white women settlers acquired space in the establishment of the modern American library system. One of those white woman settlers was Nellie Keith, a premiere example of the ideal librarian as imagined by Melvil Dewey.

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<sup>75</sup>. Borden, Arnold K. “The Sociological Beginnings of the Library Movement.” *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 1, no. 3 (1931): 278–82.

<sup>76</sup>. Wolfe, Patrick. “Recuperating Binarism: A Heretical Introduction.” *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, no. 3-4 (2013): 257.

<sup>77</sup>. Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” 399–400.

<sup>78</sup>. Honma, “Trippin’ Over the Color Line,” 2.

Nellie Keith's appointment as the City Librarian of South Pasadena is emblematic of the multiple coinciding cultural shifts. First, that of the genocide of the Indigenous people of California; manifesting today as historical erasure and reinforcement of reverence for Euro-American cultural institutions, such as that of the public library. Second, the gendering of the library profession, by which white women found successful careers as librarians at a time when little career opportunity existed. These two cultural shifts conjointly created the modern American library system and the reinforcement of Euro-American normativity therein.

Comprehensive data providing a state-by-state breakdown of racial and gender demographics in public librarianship does not yet exist. However, in 2010 the American Library Association (ALA) released an updated 2009-2010 Diversity Counts report.<sup>79</sup> This is the most recent and most comprehensive report on librarian demographics in the United States. The report found that the percentage of credentialed librarians who identify as white to be 85.2%.<sup>80</sup> Well over one and a half centuries after the establishment of California statehood and the gendering of the library profession, the racial demographics of the field still reflect the settler colonialism on which many California public libraries were founded.

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<sup>79</sup>. "Diversity Counts 2009-2010 Update," American Library Association, 2012, <https://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/diversity/diversitycounts/2009-2010update>.

<sup>80</sup>. "Table Series A: 2009-2010 American Community Survey Estimates Applied to Institute for Museum and Library Services and National Center for Education Statistics Data," American Library Association, 2012, <https://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org/aboutala/files/content/diversity/diversitycounts/diversitycountstables2012.pdf>. Credentialed is defined as a FTE paid librarian with a masters' degree from an ALA-accredited library and information studies program.

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