



# The Education of Alice M. Jordan: Navigating a Career in Children's Librarianship

*Gale Eaton*

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A biography of Alice M. Jordan, who headed children's work at the Boston Public Library (BPL) from 1902 to 1940, is long overdue. Daughter of a Maine sea captain and a Massachusetts schoolteacher, she was one of the pioneering generation of children's librarians, women who entered the field when salaries were low, progressive ideals high, academic credentials spotty, and the drive to professionalization was revolutionizing librarianship and education. Modest and unassuming, high-school graduate Jordan worked effectively to improve educational opportunities for children and their librarians alike. She taught at the Simmons Library School, helped create the BPL Training School, founded the New England Round Table of Children's Librarians (NERTCL), and mentored Bertha Mahony Miller, founder of *The Horn Book Magazine*. She had a national reputation among children's book editors and librarians for her critical acumen, clear writing, and astute advice. Locally, she networked tirelessly with Boston educators, negotiated the placement of qualified children's librarians in all BPL branches, and trained a generation of gifted youth workers—all from a desk in the middle of a busy children's room. She left a legacy of high standards for children's reading, storytelling, and reference services.

This biography draws on archival materials including Jordan's correspondence with poet Louise Imogen Guiney and *Horn Book* editor Miller; BPL memos and reports; and 1979 interviews with Jordan trainees. It has shown her life and achievement in the context of social history, from late nineteenth-century women's economic opportunities to early twentieth-century developments in librarianship, especially at the BPL. Each chapter has a brief list of milestones in Jordan and U.S. history.

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