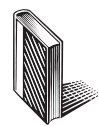


This limited-edition album presents fifty original 13" x 19" digital images printed by Dawson. The special post binding allows for the prints to be used for exhibition. The images in this album are part of an archive that was acquired by the Library of Congress in 2015. That purchase included over six hundred 8" x 10" prints and twenty-five 16" x 20" exhibition prints, as well as the promised gift of all negatives, field notes, and records from Dawson's eighteen-year Public Library Project. The book *The Public Library: A Photographic Essay* by Robert Dawson was published by Princeton Architectural Press in 2014 and is available at www.robertdawson.com.



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ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Photographer Robert Dawson is the recipient of a Fulbright Global Scholar Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Creative Work Fund grant, a Graham Foundation grant, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, and the Dorothea Lange–Paul Taylor Prize. His publications include *Photographing Shakespeare* (The Folger Shakespeare Library, 2018); *The Public Library: A Photographic Essay* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2014); *A Doubtful River* (University of Nevada Press, 2000); *Farewell, Promised Land: Waking from the California Dream* (University of California Press, 1999); *The Great Central Valley: California's Heartland* (University of California Press, 1993); and *Robert Dawson Photographs* (Min Gallery, 1988). He was founder and co-director with his wife, Ellen Manchester, of the Water in the West Project. They are currently collaborating on a long-term Global Library Project, supported in part by Dawson's recent Fulbright Global Scholar Fellowship. Dawson's photographs are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the National Museum of American Art (Smithsonian Institution). In 2014 the Library of Congress purchased his entire archive of 680 prints, negatives, journals, and related papers from the Public Library Project. He is retired from teaching at San Jose State University and Stanford University. He received a B.A. from the University of California at Santa Cruz and an M.A. from San Francisco State University.

Public Library: An American Commons Photographs by Robert Dawson



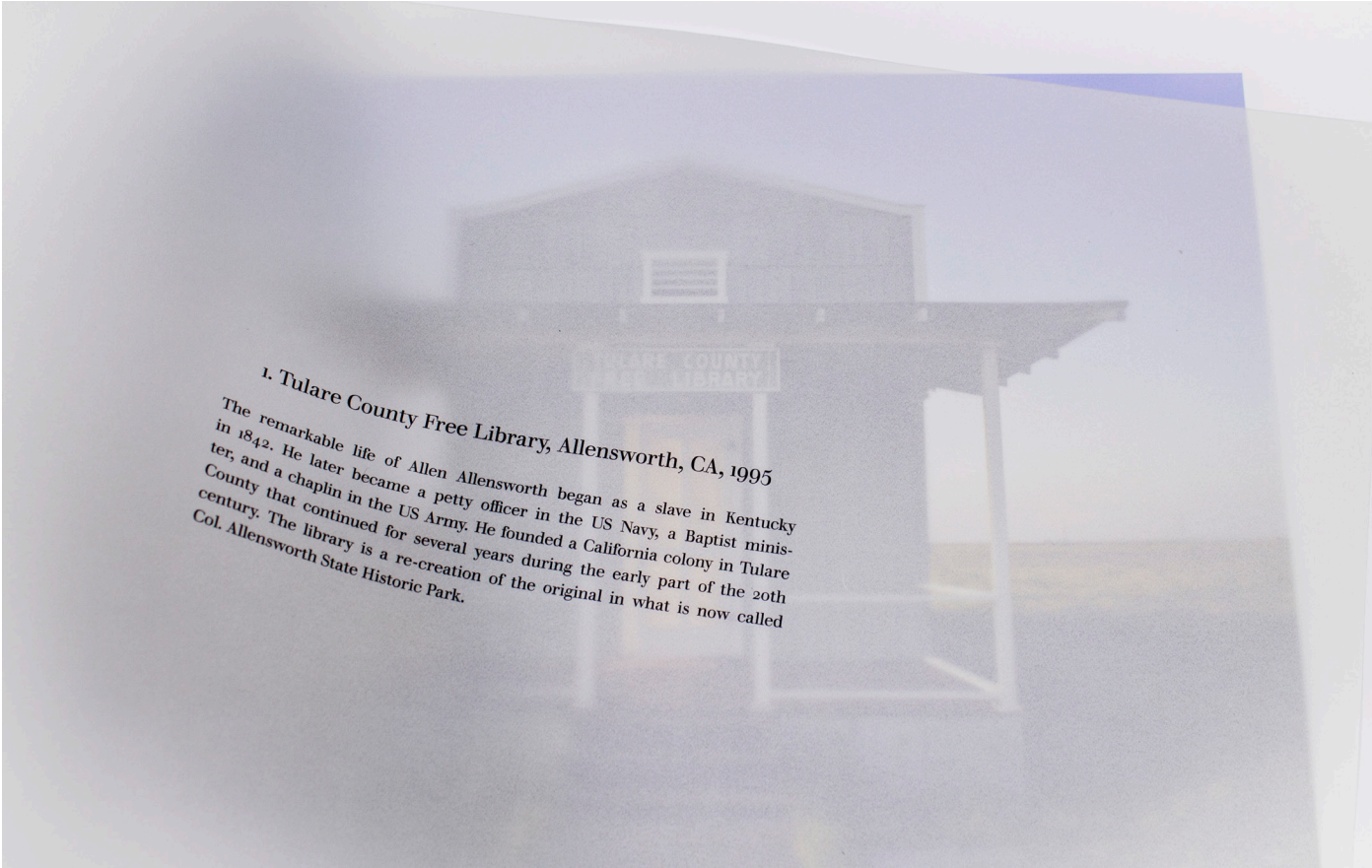
Public Library: An American Commons

Photographs by Robert Dawson

The public library is one of the few remaining non-commercial public spaces we have in the US today. A library can be a place to read, learn how to read, or be read to; to research, borrow a book, attend a community meeting, get on the internet, or get away from the screen; to escape the summer heat, get warm in the winter, or just hang out. There are approximately 17,000 public libraries in the country today, and Robert Dawson set out in 1994 to document a portion of them.

Dawson spent the next eighteen years traversing the country from California to Maine and from Alaska to Florida photographing America’s public libraries. With specific itineraries based on demographics, political history, geography, cultural diversity, local literary heroes, and architectural interest, Dawson would get on the road, shoot, edit and evaluate, and see where the photographs were leading him. What were these institutions—some modest and rural, some grand and urban—telling him about the library’s relationship to its community, to the history of a place, and to our national identity?

With a bow to Lee Friedlander and Timothy O’Sullivan, this album offers Dawson’s photographs as a partial survey—a slice of the vernacular landscape of contemporary America through the lens of libraries and the communities they serve. Greatly influenced by the landscape work of Ansel Adams and the work of the Farm Security Administration photographers such as Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans, Dawson sought to go beyond a predictable architectural study to provide a greater social, political, and cultural context to his photographs. The project grew out of his long-term commitment to photographing “what we share”: water, landscape, parks, infrastructure, the built environment—the commons. What we share, what we need to take responsibility for, and what binds us together as a culture. As Bill Moyers states “Dawson shows us . . . what is at stake—when the library is open, no matter its size or shape, democracy is open, too.”



1. Tulare County Free Library, Allensworth, CA, 1995

The remarkable life of Allen Allensworth began as a slave in Kentucky in 1842. He later became a petty officer in the US Navy, a Baptist minister, and a chaplain in the US Army. He founded a California colony in Tulare County that continued for several years during the early part of the 20th century. The library is a re-creation of the original in what is now called Col. Allensworth State Historic Park.

