

Library's Past Cited

Reading Room Began In 1889

By TOM HEUTERMAN

It took many years of planning and the efforts of many persons to build a new home for the Yakima Valley Regional Library, but many more years were required to organize a permanent library here at the turn of the century.

Today's Yakima library had its origin in 1889 when a public reading room was established on First Street by the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

Money Troubles

Encouraged initially, the Union hoped to build a building costing \$5,000 in which a library, reading room and lecture hall could be housed. The dreams became shattered and the WCTU was forced to put on a lawn social to even pay off the debt of the original reading room.

After this organization dropped out of the picture, a second start was made on March 28, 1891, when several women met at the Yakima Hotel to organize a circulating library association.

Teachers Helped

Calling itself the North Yakima Library Association the group elected Mrs. W. P. Sawyer president, Mrs. Susanna Steinweg vice president, Anna Mattson treasurer and Mattie Sawyer, secretary. Miss Matson and Miss Sawyer, two North Yakima school teachers, were primarily responsible for reviving interest in establishment of a library.

The association's books were housed in the office of County School Supt. J. G. Lawrence in the Syndicate building at the southeast corner of Second and E Streets. This was the same building which housed the WCTU reading room and, after 1905, The Yakima Daily Republic.

Book Total, 128

The initial purchase of books totaled 128 volumes and each Saturday a number of women took turns acting as librarians. A constitution was drawn up by the group at the organization meeting. By February, 1892, the association had 75 members and a book stock of 350 volumes.

"Somebody the city will take up this work and make it a community library . . . but in the meantime an association like we have formed comes the nearest to meeting the public want . . . Mrs. Steinweg who was then president, said.

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Galated Momentum

Slowly but steadily the association moved from a social organization into a serious library movement. On March 25, 1896, the executive board decided to incorporate the association. On April 10, the articles of incorporation were received from Olympia.

The group, by then known as the Yakima Library Association, had two classes of memberships: the non-paying members who paid 75 cents per quarter for dues, and the life members who paid an initiation fee of \$1 but who also had to have the approval of the president and the calling card. Receipt books containing the names of those holding \$1 memberships are a part of the library's historical material.

Became Public

As the new century opened, the association began a new and final evolutionary change, that of passing from the private to the truly public stage. A move was made in February, 1900, to a reading room next to the Yakima post office.

A year later it was reported that the room was open daily, both afternoons and evenings, and an average of 20 persons per day were using the room. (Now the regional library has an average of 20 persons per hour using the library during its 12-hour day.)

Nearly 1,800 volumes were on the shelves and Scientific American and the Etude had been added to the periodical list.

City Move Eved

At this time the association board said that "whenever the city authorities can guarantee its support, the Association will be glad to hand over the property and control of the library to the city."

The association hoped for \$25,000 from Andrew Carnegie for a library building, but hopes were premature. Through 1901, 1902 and 1903 Carnegie withheld support and the association continued as a private library organization.

In 1903 the association moved its library from the site next to the post office to the second floor of the Clogg Building at the corner of Yakima Avenue and 3rd Street and actively solicited funds to buy a building site.

Carnegie Help Offered

The library association president, the Rev. Hamilton W. Bartlett, received a letter in December of 1903 announcing that "if the city agrees by resolution of councils to maintain a free public library at cost of not less than \$1,000 a year and provide a suitable site for the building, Mr. Carnegie will be pleased to furnish \$10,000 to erect a free public library building for North Yakima."

It was not until June 20, 1904, that the city council got down to the business of actually introducing an ordinance for a free and public library financed from public tax moneys. The measure passed on July 5, 1904.

Lots Bought

On lots sold in 1905 by Maria R. Schell, Westfield, Mass., and Mr. and Mrs. Charles E. Hubbard, Middlesex County, Mass., and given to the city library board, the library was put up. The four lots cost \$3,500.

Bessie C. Hall later to become Mrs. Jasper G. Flannery was librarian of North Yakima's public library when the move was made to the new Carnegie building. At that time there were less than 3,000 volumes.

Soon Crowded

But by 1910 the library board was wondering where all the books were going to be put. The 1911 annual report said that there was no room for new books, no place to file back numbers of magazines, and no place for study and the small reference room was outgrown long ago.

In 1911 another attempt was made to get a donation from Mr. Carnegie to build an addition. Mr. Carnegie disregarded the petition.

In 1913 the city commission repaired the building, finishing a new room in the basement for children and installing new book stacks and electric light fixtures.

War Interfered

In 1919 it was reported that plans for the new building which had been deemed essential in 1913 had been temporarily abandoned on account of the war. The next year shelving was installed in the basement to relieve the congested condition.

In 1920 the city commission agreed to issue \$5,000 in bonds for addition to the buildings since cost of building a new structure would have been \$60.00 to \$70.00. Further relief came in 1938 when the Larsen Library Trust Fund provided for a new children's room.

County Unit OK'd

A new era in the Yakima library opened during World War II when the board of county commissioners established a rural county library district after a vote of 10,000 to 3,000 by Yakima County residents.

The rural district used only branches and bookmobiles in its operation. It rented part of the Grange headquarters on A Street for its use because of the crowded conditions in the Carnegie Building.

Not long after the rural district's formation, the rural library and the city library saw they could gain even more by consolidation.

Merger Approved

On Feb. 22, 1951, the merger was made. The city furnished 46,371 books to the regional library, one bookmobile and the Carnegie Building. The rural district had 55,410 books, two bookmobiles and the space it had rented from the Grange.

On June 28, 1951, trustees gave preliminary thought to a building program. Roughly outlined was a proposal for a headquarters and central library structure in Yakima plus such branch buildings as proved necessary in the west of Yakima and another in the Lower Valley was suggested.

Voters Favor Plan

These plans were altered, but on June 5, 1952, John Villavieja, Yakima architect, was chosen to design the library. On Aug. 27, Yakima city commissioners voted to put the \$400,000 library bond on a ballot on the Nov. 4 general election ballot. Voters in rural areas of Yakima County voted on a companion \$400,000 bond issue for the same purpose.

The day after the election, the votes showed the bond issue carried 62.2 per cent in the county, 62.1 per cent in the city. A margin of 60 per cent was required.

The temporary quarters for the library at 17 N. 1st Street was picked on May 1, 1957. The library closed at 6 p.m. for the last time in the Carnegie Building on June 28 and reopened in the temporary quarters on July 15.

On July 19 the bid for demolishing the old building was awarded and by the end of October contracts were awarded for foundation construction of the new building. Gilbert H. Moen Construction Co. was named general contractor and on Nov. 6, 1957, ground was broken for the new Yakima Valley Regional Library.

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Teachers Helped

Calling itself the Yakima Library Association the group elected Mrs. W. P. Sawyer president, Mrs. Susanna Steinweg vice president, Anna Menden treasurer and Hattie Sawyer, secretary. Miss Mattson and Miss Sawyer, two North Yakima school teachers, were primarily responsible for reviving interest in establishment of a library.

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Book Total, 128

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Gained Momentum

Slowly but steadily the association moved from a social organization into a serious library movement. On March 29, 1896, the executive board decided to incorporate the association. On April 10, the articles of incorporation were received from Olympia.

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Became Public

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A year later it was reported that the room was open daily, both afternoons and evenings, and an average of 20 persons per day were using the room. (Now the



LIBRARY AUDITORIUM—Two staff members take a break from work in the auditorium in the basement of the new library. This room will be used for staff meetings and group sessions.

regional library has an average of 20 persons per hour using the library during any 12-hour day.) Nearly 1,800 volumes were on the shelves and Scientific American and the Etude had been added to the periodical list.

City Move Eyed

At this time the association board said that "whenever the city authorities can guarantee its support, the Association will be glad to hand over the property and control of the library to the city."

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It was not until June 30, 1904, that the city council got down to the business of actually introducing an ordinance calling for a free and public library financed from public tax money. The measure passed on July 5, 1904.

Lots Bought

On lots sold in 1903 by Maria R. Schell, Westfield, Mass., and Mr. and Mrs. Charles E. Hubbard, Middlebury, Conn., Mass., and given to the city library board, the library was put up. The four lots cost \$3,350.

Jessie C. Hall (later to become

Mrs. Jasper G. Flannery) was librarian of North Yakima's public library when the move was made to the new Carnegie building. At that time there were less than 2,000 volumes.

Soon Crowded

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In 1911 another attempt was made to get a donation from Mr. Carnegie to build an addition. Mr. Carnegie disregarded the petition. In 1913 the city commission repaired the building, finishing a new room in the basement for children and installing new book stacks and electric light fixtures.

War Interrupted

In 1918 it was reported that plans for the new building which had been deemed essential in 1915 had been temporarily abandoned on account of the war. The next year shelving was installed in the basement to relieve the congested condition.

In 1920 the city commission agreed to issue \$5,000 in bonds for addition to the buildings since cost of building a new structure would have been \$60,000 to \$70,000. Further relief came in 1938 when the Larson Library Trust Fund provided for a new children's room.

County Unit OK'd

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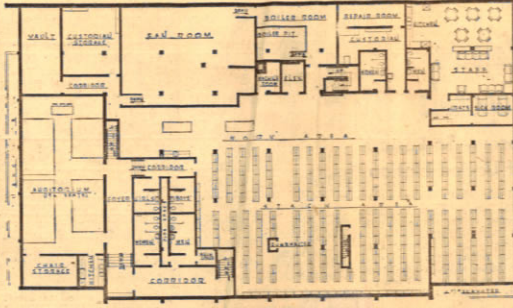
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Merger Approved

On Feb. 23, 1951, the merger was made. The city furnished 65,371 books to the regional library, one bookmobile and the Carnegie Building. The rural district had 55,410 books, two bookmobiles and the space it had rented from the Grange.

On June 26, 1955, trustees gave preliminary thought to a building program. Roughly outlined was a proposal for a headquarters and central library structure in



BASEMENT AREA—Main space in the library basement is taken by the shelves which hold the extension collection which is circulated through branch libraries and bookmobiles. Although this area is not open to the public, the auditorium at the left will be available for use by clubs and organizations. Other areas in the basement include a staff kitchen.

Yakima plus such branch buildings as proved necessary — one west of Yakima and another in the Lower Valley was suggested.

Voters Favor Plan

These plans were altered, but on June 9, 1956, John Villevik, Yakima architect, was chosen to design the library. On Aug. 27, Yakima city commissioners voted to put the \$400,000 library bond proposal on the Nov. 4 general election ballot. Voters in favor of the plan won 62.1 per cent in the city, a margin of 69 per cent was required.

The temporary site for the library at 17 N. 1st Street was picked on May 1, 1957. The library closed at 6 p.m. for the last time in the Carnegie building on June 28 and reopened in the temporary quarters on July 15.

On July 19 the bid for demolishing the old building was awarded and by the end of October contracts were awarded for \$624,079 for construction of the new building. Gilbert H. Moon Construction Co. was named general contractor and on Nov. 6, 1957, ground was broken for the new Yakima Valley Regional Library.

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