

Previously unpublished. A personal essay by Beulah Smith, written in 1973

THE BEGINNING OF WHAT NOW IS THE SELAH CITY LIBRARY

The Woman's Club of Selah Valley, of which I have been a member for 42 years, was organized in April 1919. This club was the instigator of the plan to start a library in Selah. The early minutes of the club state that feelers were put out as early as 1922, but the community was doubtless not ready for such a move. Mrs. L. F. Burgner (Margaret) would not let the idea die. Talk was kept alive. Then in 1932, when Mrs. E. D. Collins was elected president, they worked together to get the other organizations in Selah to get behind the club with donations, so that it could be financed aside from the city. In 1933, with the help of the Selah Valley Garden Club, the Pleasant Hill Good will Club, the newly formed Amity Club, Grange Auxiliaries and some church Women's organizations, a committee was formed with representatives from each group.

Then began some fancy foot work. The community was covered; the Optimist was a great help. Soon we were deluged with offers of "old books". Folks were wanting to get rid of their ancient, dog eared volumes of fiction, out dated sets of encyclopedias and fancy bound books of the Classics. We took them all and sorted them and rebound the better of them, and put the remainder in someone's basement. Food sales, rummage sales, doughnut sales up and down Main street, and anything the organization could think of began to be regular activity.

The Woman's Club had been, for years, in the habit of entertaining on Guest Days with little one act plays, generally written by one of the members, so it was a natural thing for us to think of "Dramas". So, as coach, I chose a regular length play, secured actors from the several organizations, sometimes with lots of begging, secured the High School Auditorium for the performance, and we were in business. Most of us had small children and mine as some of the smallest, many scenes were practiced in my home. Some of the sets didn't get together until dress rehearsal. We did three of these amazing performances, charging 50¢ for adults, 30¢ for children and students and we had pretty good audiences, considering the source.

Now, we had some money to buy books to begin with, but not enough for rent, for shelving or a desk or chairs. So, with book cases from our homes, a few battered chairs, a long table cast off from the Methodist church, and an old student's desk,

we set up shop in a store room in Mr. Gudmair's Hardware store that had a door to the street. That building is now gone. In the fall of 1934, with the women of the Woman's Club of Selah Valley taking turns playing librarian, the Selah Library opened. There were around 400 volumes of new, second-hand and loaned books on hand. There was a very simple but efficient method of classification of the books. There were no cards issued but each borrower signed his name in a note book. When it became too cold in the store room, we picked up our clasp trap furnishings and moved to the old Methodist church (Masonic Temple), in a class room on second floor. Magazine subscriptions were donated by Mrs. J. Ben Johnson, Pleasant Hill Good Will club put new drapes at the windows and the Woman's Club bought the calamine and Mr. Leo Tyrrell donated labor to put it on. A young man in town, Gaylord Johnson, an avid reader, became the first paid librarian. He offered to keep the library open all day for a mere pittance. Also June Brathovde, a student, helped under the National Youth Administration.

A Library Board was formed, consisting of representatives from the four clubs-- The Woman's Club of Selah Valley, the Selah Valley Garden Club, The Pleasant Hill Goodwill Club and the Amity. They handled the slim capital, bought the books, obtained some from the Carnegie Endowment Fund, and constantly sought help from the city. In May 1935, Margaret Burgner, 853 volumes, in November there were 960, in December, 1937, 1035.

Then we were made happy by the city of Selah deciding to build a new city Hall and providing a room therein to house the Library. Before the building was built, the Library was moved into the old Fire Hall where the Liquor Store now stands. By 1942 the Library was in its new home with new shelving, tables and chairs and nicely decorated. Mrs. Frances Noble, with no library training became the first librarian under the city's wing. Many students from the High School helped re-binding books and with many other duties. In 1946, the Library was doing nicely, Mrs. Genevieve Brownell (Jean) was librarian and 3000 volumes were reported in stock. Later, outgrowing the small room, an addition was made to the City Hall and a much larger room given over for the Library with an outside door to the street. Now, in 1973 with well trained librarian, it is a fixture in Selah. *Beulah Smith*