

Possible library merger 'hot' topic

By LOU McDERMOTT

Two of the last three Yakima County communities with their own public libraries are putting out feelers about joining the Yakima Valley Regional Library system.

"And at a time when there is no money to bring in these community libraries," has been the official lament at the last two monthly board meetings of the Regional Library trustees.

Special government grants to pay for such library mergers, as with the Wapato Library two years ago, have been cut from federal budgets.

The inquiries about affiliation are from Selah and Toppensish. Grandview is the third city going its own way — happy with its "down the Valley" library.

The welcome mat, since the founding of the 20-year regional system, always has been out to all county communities.

Spelah citizens are hotly debating the pros and cons of it. A petition favoring merger was filed with the City Council and prompted scheduling of a "feasibility study meeting" at 7:30 p.m., March 16, with representatives of the regional system.

A counter petition, opposing any change in Selah's 25-year-

old public library, is being circulated.

Toppensish, at this time, is a little cooler about the issue. Only a scattering of proaffiliation forces has been heard to date.

Each independent city library basically fears losing its memorial and reference books under a regional system; losing its special identity, which its own public library affords; and, perhaps, being curtailed in hours the library is open and in staff members.

Experience in the past with affiliation, according to persons benefiting by the regional

system, shows that none of these things has happened.

"Each contract with an affiliate library is negotiated separately and according to a community's circumstances and wishes," said Mrs. June Thurston, regional librarian. "Affiliation of each library is for mutual benefit."

In each case, the reduction of tax millage for community library services has been noted. All an affiliate community pays for is a building and its maintenance, which in most cases amounts to a saving on a community's total library bill, said Charles Countryman,

Yakima, chairman of the Regional Library trustees.

He pointed out that Selah's current three-mill tax bill would be reduced to two mills for library services, including all books, library personnel, professional services and benefits. He estimated less than a mill for the Selah library building and maintenance.

The Wapato Public Library, two years ago, also feared the loss of its memorials, its reference books, and hour curtailment. Instead, the Wapato population of library users today sings out happily about how well the new system has worked. Library patrons lost nothing, according to James Daley. Wapato banker on the regional board of trustees, and they gained new books monthly and more efficiency in the library operation.

The Selah meeting March 16 will seek only information, said Edward Sparks, city supervisor. No action can be taken until the pros and cons are hashed out, said Mrs. Thurston, who with Sparks said no affiliations can be made for at least a year or two. There is no money in any budget to pay for it.

The "undercurrent of grumblings" began when the Selah library board sought more money. It operates under a \$10,912 annual budget. The board talked of raising library card fees, especially to glean more money from Selah's rural population. Sparks estimated the rural population at Selah is 50 per cent of the total.

Under the present system, rural residents pay \$2.50 for a Selah Library card or \$5 for a Yakima Valley Regional Library card — and they are exempt from the tax millage charged Selah city residents for the 17,800-volume Selah Library.

This board effort prompted a letter to the editor, in the Selah Valley Optimist, from Mrs. Richard (Midge) Lucas, Selah rural resident who will become acting consultant for community libraries in the regional system on March 1.

"I simply tried to present some facts," said Mrs. Lucas.

Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Larson of Selah "took it upon themselves to circulate a petition seeking regional affiliation," said Mrs.

Dempster Brownell, Selah librarian since 1948.

"Their petition was all signed, sealed and delivered to the City Council before we even knew what had happened," said Jess Mathis, Selah businessman whose wife is a former Library Board member.

Mathis is circulating a petition opposing any change in the present Selah Library.

"Three people who had signed the other petition regretted signing when we presented the opposing view," said Mathis.

Selah Supervisor Sparks said he has in city files only the proaffiliation petition with some 100 signatures.

Selah is represented on the Regional Library board by Mrs. William (Margaret) Baker, who succeeded Mrs. Ernest Carpenter, also of Selah.

"I long have wanted Selah in the regional system," said Mrs. Baker. "I personally feel we have already lost many years of golden opportunity by staying out."

Mrs. Thurston regretted that the regional system cannot now rise with interest to meet the high affiliation interest in Selah. She recalled that a \$20,000 government grant enabled the Regional Library to reprocess all volumes and set up the Wapato Library as an affiliate two years ago.

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