

Part I. 1902 - 1943

"An Informal History of the (Guthrie Center) Town Library" (as composed by Luella Ely, 1960)

Sometime in 1902, the exact day and month is not quite clear, a small group of fifteen women met in the home of (Mrs. E.L.) Annette Bower and organized the **first Woman's Club of Guthrie Center**. The charter members were:

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|----------------|-----------------|----------------|------------------|
| Clara Grisell | Jessie Mitchell | Lyda Gillespie | Luella Applegate |
| Ida Motz | Clara Mahan | Bertie Miller | Dora Daugherty |
| Marian Hellyer | Edith Washburn | Abigail Biggs | Ida Ashton |
| Jennie Lyons | Jennie Weeks | Annette Bower | |

Also, three honorary members: Ellen Lyons, Emma Lyons and Nellie McLuen.

The evidence of the first library is found only by the old checks, receipts, bank books, etc. which made one feel like Perry Mason (the famous lawyer of Television stories and cases) in putting together these facts. The library, by the way, was then called "The Reading Room" and the Library Board was referred to as "The Management Board."

The library was organized in December, 1902. A list of names of prominent persons living in Guthrie Center at the time, and who contributed to a fund to start this library was found. These names were: Dr. E.L. Bower, J.H. Applegate, J.W. Foster, Dr. O. Fordyce, Dewey & Rogers, T.J. Foster, Dowds, who each gave \$10.00. Also E.C. Lane, J.D. Brown, T.A. Glowe each gave \$5.00; Mr. Mitchell \$3.00; D.P. Williams and H. Selby \$2.00 each; and A. Wheeler \$1.00. This added up to \$98.00. A bazaar was given which added \$45.87 to the fund and they had the Bidwell Entertainers that netted \$11.05, **SO....all together**, they had a **total of \$154.92** to start the library. With this money they bought a stove for \$25.12, lamps \$10.00, magazines \$15.00, books \$63.92, supplies \$15.75 and lumber for shelves \$5.55. These expenditures amounted to \$136.27, so they had only \$18.65 remaining when they opened.

The first rent checks were paid to C.G. Trent, whose store building was located at Fourth and State Street, where Maxine's Dress Shop is now (1960). The Library occupied an upstairs room in that building, which was reached by a rear stairway. The monthly rental was \$6.25 on this room and many times Mr. Trent's checks included additional amounts for such items as kerosene, kindling, coal, lamp wicks, etc. which he probably furnished from his store. The first two or three librarian's salary checks were paid to Roy and Francis Clippinger.

The records would seem to indicate that the library was open every day at this time. Reports show twenty-six to twenty-eight days per month, and the librarian was paid from \$14.00 to \$16.00 which would seem to indicate the salary was 50 cents per day.

After May 1903, Miss Nellie Young received the salary checks in the same amounts during the remainder of that year. Then M.A. Wheeler began serving as Librarian in January, 1904. He was a bachelor, who lived north of Guthrie Center, so we are told.

The library was housed in the Trent building until April, 1904, at which time it was moved into the J.W. Foster building. This building is the one on North Fifth Street where Taylor & Taylor now have their law offices (1960). The rent was double there - \$12.50, but no doubt it was felt that a ground floor room was desirable. The library was housed there only until October, 1905. It is not quite clear where the Wheeler building was, but it is thought to have been over either Dowds or over the store just west of Dowds.

In 1906, each member was assessed 25 cents for the library and from time to time during the next several years this assessment was repeated in varying amounts. A dray bill for \$1.50 dated July, 1908 and labeled "for moving library" shows that at this time the library was moved to a new location. A Mrs. Hoyt began as librarian at \$4. to \$6 per month, and the library was open only two days a week. The O.E. Gaffin building was a small building which stood well back toward the alley on the lot where Cowden's store is at the present time (1960) on State Street. Gaffin operated a cream station in the back of the store and the library occupied the front part.

In January, 1911, the records show that the Woman's Club began to investigate the idea of a women's rest room in connection with the library and voted a pledge of \$125.00 per year toward that end. However, it was decided to abandon the project by May of that year as it seemed no suitable room could be found.

In April, 1914, {the library} was moved to an upstairs room in the VanCleaf building at Third and State St. which is the building presently (1960) occupied by Miller's Shoe Store. Mrs. Hoyt continued as librarian there until October, 1915, when Mrs. Anna McLuen was hired for the position. The rent paid for that room was \$10.00 per month.

The library was housed in the VanCleaf Bldg. until the summer of 1917, when due to World War I being in progress, it was decided to close the Library for an indefinite period and to store the books. It was October before all arrangements for closing and storing the books were completed. In 1923 minutes there were indications that {the Woman's Club} was considering opening it again.

In December, 1925, the Club voted to appoint a committee to meet with The City Council about improving the City Hall. The City Hall was located at the site of the present library (1960). It was the old Methodist church which had been moved to that lot. The fire engine, coal pile and miscellaneous junk was in the front room of this building facing on State Street, but the City Hall room was reached by a sidewalk that led from State Street along the west side of the building to a door at the back with a small grass plot separating it from the building on the west of it.

On February 6th, this committee reported that they had met with the council and the council had agreed to improve the City Hall provided the Woman's Club would agree to place their books there. They voted at that meeting to do so, and Mrs. Harrison offered fifteen dollars that the N.E. Division* had earned above their share of fifty dollars, to pay for a new light fixture for the library room. (*Woman's Club had divided into 4 units to raise money in 1923.)

On March 6th a library furnishing committee was authorized to buy curtains, blinds, see about bookcases, etc. and the first library board was appointed. This Board consisted of Mrs. Ben Hill, Mrs. Toole, Mrs. Annette Bower, Mrs. Harrison, Mrs. C.I. Thomas and Mrs. Margie Stoy. For the first time since the Club had sponsored the Library they were receiving at least a little help from the city. During the years the library was housed in the old city hall, there was no rent, lights or heat to pay for, so the library funds were freed to buy more books, magazines, etc.

On September 18th, 1925, the first Club meeting was held in the town hall. It was voted that all luncheon money would be paid to the library, also the library was to receive a per capita tax of thirty-five cents. Mrs. Ina Bates was the first librarian after the re-opening and continued as such until February, 1927, when she moved to Des Moines. Mildred Bixby was appointed at that time to succeed her.

In January, 1926 the Farm Bureau was asked to assist in paying postage on the travelling library books, but no further mention was made that they ever did. Other organizations helped out from time to time. For instance, in January, 1926, the BY Chapter of the PEO gave fifty new books.

In the fall of 1929, a story hour for children of five to nine years of age was conducted and various persons took turns in making this possible. Mildred Bixby was librarian until December. She resigned and Fern Irvin was appointed, but she also resigned the following month. Mildred Bixby was persuaded to return in January, 1929, and she worked two or three months longer. Then Mary Spencer worked as librarian from March until July, when she asked to be relieved. At this time the library was open only two days a week, from two to five o'clock in the afternoon, and from seven to nine in the evening. The librarian was paid one dollar a day and in addition to librarian's duties she also performed the janitor services of the building: carrying coal, building fires, sweeping walks and floors and even scooping a path to the door in the winter. This perhaps contributed to the rather rapid turnover of librarians! [Helen Cook] started as librarian in August, 1929.

During the depression years in the thirties and the WPA [Works Progress Administration] era, we were offered the services of WPA workers to mend our books, so we took advantage of that and had our books put in good repair. Also, during these years many new books were being purchased. [Part of the WPA program President Franklin D. Roosevelt designed as he came into office in 1933] was to grant any community needing public assistance to make application for a grant, and Federal funds would be given to build in any community.

The American Legion made application for a grant to build a Legion Building, and about the same time the [City] Council made application for a grant to build a new city hall. When the Federal men came to survey the conditions, it was suggested that the Legion and City Council get together and work out a plan for one building. The Library was told that it was a certainty we would get a grant for a building and it would be placed on the lot where the old building was standing. Immediately the chairman of the Board had a conference with the mayor about

[combining all three entities] and working out a plan for one building. A Committee from the Woman's Club was invited to sit in on the next meeting with the Federal Men. Mrs. Luella Ely, as Chairman of Library Board, Mrs. Jessie Crabb and Mrs. Alta Larkin were chosen to attend this meeting. The outcome of this meeting was that the American Legion should have the basement complete for their Club rooms, except for the Rest rooms, which would be open for use by the general public. The Library should have the Main Floor for a Library except the room on the East side, which should house the Firemen's truck; and the Town Clerk and Public Hall and kitchen should be on the second floor. [The election was held on April 8, 1936 with a contract awarded to William Neilson for architectural services. Construction began around June, 1937.]

As the new building was to be built on the site of the old one, it was necessary for us to find temporary quarters while it was under construction. The Presbyterian Church very generously invited us to use a room in their basement during this period, so we moved our books and shelving there in the summer of 1936. We furnished our own coal and paid for our lights.

Our new building was completed so we could move into it in July, 1937. We were assisted in the moving by many of the children who were users of the library. They came with their little red wagons and the job was done by willing hands. Dedication of the New Town Hall was set for October 13, 1937. Cost of the building complete was \$23,000.

That was the grandest milestone in the history of the library up to that time! The incentive was greater than ever to grow and expand, and everyone exerted every effort to supply the service we had always dreamed of, but had been hampered by lack of sufficient funds. By this time we had increased the time the library was open for service to three afternoons and evenings a week, and were regularly adding good books each month. [Helen Cook] served as Librarian for fourteen years until November, 1943. Mrs. Laura Baker, Miss Kathryn O'Dair and Mrs. Mabel Hain served in the following years.

Part II. 1957 - 1988

In 1957 Mabel Hain had an illness which left her with an arthritic condition, which the Board had hoped would clear up. So substitute help and high school girls were hired to keep the library open as usual, but by the end of 1958 Mabel suggested that she would not be able to come back for duty, and suggested that (Mrs. Robert) Virginia Arrasmith, who had been helping during her absence, be offered the position. Mrs. Laura Luckey was hired as the assistant librarian. These two women have been very good in carrying on as the hosts and keepers of the books. They are making a very good team in the library work.

For 1960 it was decided to catalogue the library books, so a card file cabinet was purchased and several thousand cards. We were given two helpers from the State Travelling Library division to

teach the librarians how to do this work. These two stayed by us until all the reference books were indexed and cross referenced. Notice this total of books now in the library - 8,244.

The Woman's Club has continued their interest in the Library. Each year at least one book, sometimes several, are given in Memory of someone gone from this town or community. A subscription for "Today's Health" magazine is given each year.

New fixtures added [during 1966- 1970] include new shelving in the adult non-fiction area; cabinet for phonograph records; periodical racks and two new round tables and eight chairs for the reading room.

Mrs. Laura Luckey resigned as Assistant Librarian in September 1967 and Mrs. Carol Madsen was hired to replace her. Circulation continues to be high with 20,103 books, periodicals and records circulated during 1970. Mrs. Madsen resigned as assistant librarian August 1973 and Mrs. George Van Cleave was hired in her place.

In 1976 the library board asked the city council for the old fire station room to remodel into a children's room. Permission was granted and the project of raising the needed funds was a JAYCEE project for 1977. Contributions from citizens of the community raised \$4477 and the council and library budgeted the remaining \$4525. The room was finished and an Open House was held April 1978. Over 120 people visited. Circulation for the year of July 1977 to June 30, 1978 was 24,908. This includes books, periodicals, records, cassette tapes, art prints and puzzles.

Business as usual has continued at the Library for the past 10 years with a continued increase in use. Circulation for the year of July, 1987 to June 30, 1988 was 39,300. In keeping with the "New Age" of audio visual progress the library has added a microfilm reader, microfiche reader, electric typewriter, copy machine, four video disc players, two hundred video disc movies, video cassette player, TV, an IBM computer and printer, plus a camcorder and three Polaroid cameras.

Due to increased use of the library more employees were needed. In addition to a library director and assistant, a library aide was hired in 1983 - Mrs. Joline Rasmussen.

Virginia Arrasmith retired as Library Director July 1, 1988 and Maxine Van Cleave was hired as the new director, with Joline Rasmussen as Assistant and Mrs. Marsha (Gary) Richter as the new Library Aide. A retirement party for Mrs. Arrasmith was held Sunday, June 26, 1988.