

Marshall Public Library

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At the turn of the century, when other towns were establishing Carnegie Libraries, for some unknown reason, Marshall did not obtain one. Time went on until on January 4, 1915. At the regular meeting of the Walter Burdick Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, held in the home of Mrs. N.T. Booth, it was voted to "do something toward starting a library." Mrs. Jaycee B. Kerr and Miss Mary E. Miller were appointed as a committee to look for suitable quarters.

At the March meeting of the D.A.R. in 1915, it was decided to include the question of a public library in the April City election. Public opinion, according to Flozza D. Berner, president of Marshall Women's Club, was not completely favorable toward founding a library, chiefly because it was feared that taxes would be increased too greatly. Therefore, a publicity campaign was started in order to create favorable sentiment in the April election. When the election was held, the proposition carried and resulted in the levying of a tax of 1.2 mills for library purposes.



In January 1916, Mayor John W. Lewis appointed the first library board. The location selected for the library was the second floor of the Claypool building at the southwest corner of fifth and Archer (the main street building now known as the Corner Tavern), which was rented for \$3.00 per month. There was a long stairway on the outside of the building with the landing and door on the northeast side of the building. This was dangerous in the winter. Citizens donated furnishings and books. The first recorded number of cardholders in October, 1917, is listed as 1,307. The library remained in this location until October, 1929, when it was moved three blocks east on Main Street (now Archer Ave.) over the City Hall. No rent was required, which made it possible to purchase more books and better equipment. There was a long, steep stairway going up to the library, but it was an inside stairway protected from the weather. In the summer of 1963, the president of the Marshall Women's Club, Mrs. Juanita Blankenship, asked the members of what was then called the Civic and Welfare Committee to make a study among the citizens and find out their most wanted wishes and needs. In doing so, they listed four important needs:

1. A new theater
2. A youth center
3. A community house
4. To bring the city library down onto the ground floor.

More study and inquiry disclosed that number four was the most wanted and needed, especially by the senior citizens, of whom there were many. A report of this survey was made at a meeting of the Executive Committee on July 15, 1963.

On August 5, 1963 the Civic and Welfare Committee met with the Marshall Library Board and announced the project. The members of the Library Board were very polite, but emphatic in their remarks that the project would be impossible at that time. At the September general meeting of the Women's Club, a motion was made by Mrs. E.D. Morton that the Women's Club would begin a long-term project of moving the library down to street level. The club voted the motion almost unanimously.

Several meetings with the Library Board resulted in many obstacles coming to light, one of which was financial. In the meantime, the Women's Club went on trying to build up interest among the townspeople, some of whom were enthusiastic, others plain bored, and some actually hostile.

The committee met with the Library Board on November 4, 1963. At that time, the club presented a letter from Washington, D. C., stating that a bill, " The Library Services and Construction Act," had been approved. They were given the name of Mr. Miller Board, Chief of Library Services, Springfield, Illinois, to which they wrote to find out about the Illinois share in this. He wrote the club that the Illinois share for library expansion and improvement would be \$1,193,838, and the Illinois share for buildings would be \$955,070. He added that the state would be glad to send a library consultant to explain in detail how the community could apply for a library services project. Also at the November 4 meeting with the Library Board, Mr. Nash and Mr. Casteel said if the club could get a building which would meet the approval of the Library Board and finance it for a year, the Library Board could then levy enough taxes to take care of it. The Women's Club saw this as the first real interest of the board in the project. The board said they could move the library into an area provided for the purpose, but a new building would have to be voted by the people.

In 1964, the library owned more than 15,000 updated volumes, an adequate supply of modern encyclopedias, and several tables and chairs.

Mr. James Montidonio, library consultant from Springfield, Illinois, talked to the Women's Club on March 9, 1964. He said Marshall was getting only 1/3 of the taxes it should get, that the library was a public building, that it should be available to all the people, and it should be brought downstairs to a convenient location. He suggested that the Women's Club get all the town's organizations interested and ask their support for renting, buying or constructing a building. He also suggested that the club seek donations from individuals and conduct fundraising activities.

He told the group the standards of a public library. They are as follows:

1. Public supported.
2. Two types of library board
 - (a) Leaves everything to librarians
 - (b) Does everything themselves.

3. Services of a library:

- (a) Should be an intricate part of the community.
- (b) Should serve needs of the community.

4. Have at least

- (a) 10,000 Volumes
- (b) 20 to 50 Periodicals
- (c) 150 records (adding 50 yearly)
- (d) Two full-time workers (one with a college degree)
- (e) Should be easy to reach on a ground location.
- (f) Size-- not less than 2000 square feet.

On July 6, 1964, the Women's Club committee talked with Caslon Bennett, City Attorney, and he gave them this information and advice. He stated that the Mayor appoints members of the Library Board with two members going out every two years, and the Library Board appoints librarians. He said that a member of the board could serve as librarian. Of great interest was his statement that the City Council can levy more taxes if asked to do so by the Library Board. It would take a year to get these taxes, but the Library Board could borrow 75% of incoming tax through anticipation warrants. Bennett advised the club to take the issue up with city council, to find a location (possibly a house to buy), to raise money to get donations, and to go to all organizations for help and cooperation.

The Women's Club was mostly composed of elderly ladies, and the club indicated it would be impossible for them to undertake the buying of a house and financing it. They felt that should be the responsibility of the Library Board. On July 13, 1964, the committee had a meeting with the City Council asking for their help. They promised to assist. During the late summer and fall of 1964, Basil Moore, member of the Library Board, announced to the committee that the board was looking for a new location. At long last, the Library Board was going to go ahead. On November 20, 1964, the Women's Club notified the different organizations of Marshall of a meeting to be held at the library at 7:30 on November 27, 1964, to talk about forming a "Friends of the Library" group to work toward relocating the library downstairs.

When the evening came, the attendance was good. Besides the members of both the Library Board and the Community Achievement Committee, also in attendance were the librarian, president of the Women's Club and several members. Also attending were the president of the PTA and several members, president of the Lions Club, president of the Civic Club, president of the Legion Auxiliary and members, members of the Doctors Club, several Rotarians, Mrs.

Moore, director of a large and popular choir, Mr. Ferris, and the mayor. This meeting seemed to show that a new location had wide support.

Mr. Bennett now told the Women's Club to make a "Working Plan" and present it to the City Council. The Community Achievement Committee reported this to the Library Board Friday, March 12, 1965. James Davidson, member of the Library Board, reported to the Women's Club that the president of the Library Board at their regular meeting March 8, 1965, had appointed a committee composed of Library Board members, Mrs. Garver Frazier, Basil Moore, and James Davidson. Their purpose was to study the project of the Women's Club and to develop the "Working Plan" suggested by the City Council. The plans were delayed until after the city election in April.

The committee of the Library Board met and decided to advertise plans for the library and to ask for donations from the public to build a library and art center on this spot. The ground was to be sold on October 30, 1965. Donations came in slowly, and people were afraid the project was too large. When October 29 came, the library committee had \$11,648 with many promises of much more. The Women's Club pledged \$250.00. When sale time came on the morning of October 30, 1965, due to limited funds the Women's Club was outbid. Many were very disappointed. After this attempt, many members continued to pledge their money and held luncheons and bake sales. They hoped when spring approached that the relocation of the library would soon be a reality. The library had been upstairs over city hall since 1929, almost forty years. Members began looking for a new location more seriously.

In 1968, the library board purchased a building on Archer Avenue. Many members and area people would have liked a house in a residential district. Even so, they worked hard on the building, constructing shelves and carpeting the floors. On October 20, 1968, an open house was held for the community. This facility served the community for 25 years.



In 1993, the city of Marshall was advised that the library had to be made A.D.A accessible, but it was too small and cramped to do any major renovations. So in 1994, the city of Marshall purchased the adjacent commercial building, which provided



the much-needed space for an ADA accessible entrance, main library area, and public rest rooms accessible to disabled individuals. After repairs, the old building was converted to include a public meeting room, ADA accessible rest rooms, and a study area for all ages. Computers, videotapes, talking books, books, and multimedia are available. A beautiful reading and study area with a fireplace was dedicated to recognize the Jones-Pearce families. The children's area has a secret garden and a train car for children. Many donations were received for this project. Grant money totaled \$122,000, private donations \$65,000, and the city of Marshall \$25,000. This allowed for tuck pointing of exterior walls, repainting the facade of the original library, the addition of a canvas awning, and storm windows, new shelving, a new desk, plus other furnishings.

Many things were used from the old building. The original tin ceiling was preserved in the new building. The circulation desk was made locally. Antique pieces from the attic were refinished. Several contractors contributed time and materials for the library. They and local businesses have their names on plaques for donating the stain glass windows, which enhance the front of the building. It has taken a lot of help and time to finish the library in Marshall. The library is now three times as large, can be used by all, and is used often by many.