

THE WELLS COUNTY PUBLIC

LIBRARY

A CENTURY OF SERVICE

1902—2002

PUBLISHED TO COMMEMORATE

THE

ONE-HUNDRETH ANNIVERSARY

LIBRARY BOARD AS NOW CONSTITUTED

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Mr. Steve R. Gerber, Treasurer
Mrs. Jackie Chaney
Mrs. Kim Pace
Mrs. Shirley Thomas

MRS. STEPHANIE DAVIS, LIBRARY DIRECTOR

Edited and written by Amy G. Greiner

ANNIVERSARY DATE, MAY 15, 2002

PRELUDE TO OUR LIBRARY

WHAT IS MORE IMPORTANT IN A LIBRARY THAN ANYTHING ELSE—THAN EVERYTHING ELSE—IS THE FACT THAT IT EXISTS. Archibald MacLeish

The fact that a free public library exists is evidence that a society values democracy, knowledge and culture. If knowledge is power, as many believe, a library's presence in a community enables the citizenry to be productive and effective in their many endeavors.

The people of Bluffton and Wells County have been involved with libraries for one hundred sixty five years. In 1837—the year Wells County was founded—officials established a library fund derived from ten percent of the proceeds from the sale of lots in Bluffton. The county officials organized a library in 1853. During the next twenty-seven years, twelve Library Board meetings were recorded, with the county officials serving as the first board members. The County Recorder, W. M. Bulger, performed the duties of the librarian during the first year of the library's existence.

A year later, in 1854, Mr. Sebastian Keely became the first appointed librarian with a salary of \$20.00 per year to be paid quarterly. One of his responsibilities would have been to enforce the following fines as directed in the Bylaws:

For every dirt or grease spot one half inch in diameter, not less than two, nor more than five per cent of the price of the book; for every dirt or grease stain of one inch in diameter, not less than five nor more than ten per cent; for every leaf turned down, one per cent; for every word torn out or obliterated, not less than five nor more than ten per cent. In all fines assessed in this section there shall be allowed an appeal to the Board of Trustees at their annual meeting.

If this directive were still applicable in our present era of mega-bookstores and libraries with on-site cafes, one can only imagine

the manpower that would be required to apprehend all coffee cup drippers.

WHATEVER THE COST OF OUR LIBRARIES, THE PRICE IS CHEAP COMPARED TO THAT OF AN IGNORANT NATION.

Walter Cronkite

In 1855, Bluffton received an unexpected windfall from the estate of William Maclure of New Harmony, Indiana. Mr. Maclure, in addition to having a great fortune, also had a great desire to disseminate culture through the establishment of libraries. It is not known just how much of his fortune he devoted to this work before his death, but it was quite a large amount. In his will he left the sum of \$80,000 to be disseminated in \$500.00 blocks. His plan was to donate the money for the purchase of books to any club of organized workingmen with suitable room and facilities for using the books. In all, one hundred sixty-six libraries were established in this way. Of this number, one hundred forty-four were in the State of Indiana—in eighty-nine of the ninety-two counties. Thanks to Maclure's generosity, two hundred fourteen books were added to the Bluffton library collection.

IN THE CASE OF GOOD BOOKS, THE POINT IS NOT TO SEE HOW MANY OF THEM YOU CAN GET THROUGH, BUT RATHER HOW MANY CAN GET THROUGH TO YOU.

Mortimer Jerome Adler

During the school year of 1881-82, when P. A. Allen was superintendent of the Bluffton schools, the two hundred fourteen books from the Maclure collection were combined with the ninety-three books from the Bluffton High School Library.

The Bluffton School Library from the beginning was housed in one of the upper rooms of the old Central School building. When the high school building was completed in 1890 the books were transferred to a room specially planned for the library on the second floor of that building.

The collection grew steadily over the years, financed by entertainments and voluntary weekly dime collections from the

pupils who had a mind to give. Within five years, the statistics show that the collection was increased by five hundred books.

The raising of money by collections and entertainments became quite burdensome so a small library tax was authorized in 1892. The next year rules were adopted to allow the Library to be open to the public a few hours each week, even though it was maintained by the city schools.



PUBLIC LIBRARIES HAVE BEEN A MAINSTAY OF MY LIFE. THEY REPRESENT AN INDIVIDUAL'S RIGHT TO ACQUIRE KNOWLEDGE; THEY ARE THE SINEWS THAT BIND CIVILIZED SOCIETIES THE WORLD OVER. WITHOUT LIBRARIES, I WOULD BE A PAUPER, INTELLECTUALLY AND SPIRITUALLY.

James A. Michener

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

THERE IS NOT SUCH A CRADLE OF DEMOCRACY UPON THE EARTH AS THE FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY, THIS REPUBLIC OF LETTERS, WHERE NEITHER RANK, OFFICE, NOR WEALTH RECEIVES THE SLIGHTEST CONSIDERATION. Andrew Carnegie

The Bluffton Public Library had its beginning May 15, 1902, when a seven member Library Board met in the home of Mrs. James P. Hale for the purpose of organizing a public library. Mr. Charles C. Deam was selected as the first Library Board President. At the same meeting the Board set the tax levy at four-tenths of a mil on the dollar and employed Miss Bertha Craven as the librarian at a salary of \$240 per year.

The Library was first housed in the southeast basement room of the Court House; soon afterwards, it was moved to the northwest corner room. The early Library Board minutes contain the following account of one of the first Board meetings:

The Library Board met to put the room in order, do the inside janitor work, furnish the light trimmings, (and) care for the books belonging to the library.

Because the early twentieth century was the era of Andrew Carnegie's philanthropy to public libraries, the secretary of the Library Board was instructed to write to other cities in the state that had Carnegie Libraries to obtain information concerning the method of application for these funds.

After obtaining this information, the secretary and twenty or more other prominent citizens wrote to Mr. Carnegie to request money for a library. Mr. Carnegie's reply follows:

No. 2 East 91st St.
New York, New York
January 13, 1903

Mrs. Delia W. Hale, Sec'y,
Bluffton, Indiana

Madam: Responding to your communication in behalf of Bluffton:

If the city agrees by resolution of Council to maintain a Free Public Library at a cost of not less than One Thousand Dollars a year, and provide a suitable site for the building, Mr. Carnegie will be pleased to furnish Ten Thousand Dollars to erect a Free Public Library Building for Bluffton.

Respectfully yours,
James Bertram, Private Secretary

After the promise of money, the Board considered three locations for the proposed Library building. The Mary E. Stoddard property on West Washington Street was chosen as the best site and it was purchased for \$2,975.

In accordance with Mr. Carnegie's wishes, the Library trustees forwarded a certified copy of the ordinance passed by the Common Council of Bluffton guaranteeing \$1500 annually for the support and maintenance of the Library. This was sent to Mr. Carnegie on March 27, 1903.

The Board members' next action was to confer with architects about the plans and specifications for the erection of a library building. The Board spent an evening with each of the three architects who had submitted plans and after careful study, the members decided to use those submitted by Cuno Kibile.

The Library Board sent a copy of these plans and specifications to Mr. Carnegie with a request that he contribute \$2,000 more than he had first promised. He responded by increasing the amount of his gift from \$10,000 to \$13,000.

In addition to the Carnegie donation, the citizens of Bluffton gave \$5,909.20, the result of three subscription campaigns. The total amount received was \$18,909.20 with which the lot was purchased, the building erected, and the interior furnishings acquired.

COST OF THE LIBRARY BUILDING

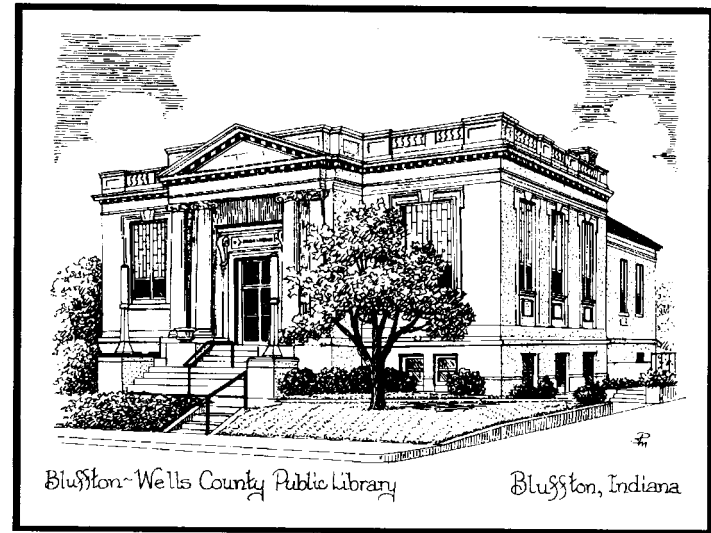
RECEIVED

From Andrew Carnegie -----	\$13,000.00
Subscriptions by citizens -----	5,909.20

EXPENDED

Purchase Price of lot -----	\$ 2,975.00
Fred Illingsworth & Co. Contract -----	12,962.00
Extras Allowed -----	101.20
Hardware furnished by Board -----	177.80
Architect fees -----	358.20
Decorating -----	350.00
Electric Light Fixtures -----	265.00
Heating Plant -----	810.00
Furniture -----	584.00
Metal Book Stacks -----	326.00
	<hr/>
	\$18,909.20

Five bids were received for the construction of the building. The lowest bidder, Fred Illingsworth and Company, was granted the contract. After two and one-half years of planning and construction, the Library was opened to the public on May 15, 1905. An art exhibit and open house were featured on that date.



During those early years the Library Board had an active role in the selection of books and magazines. The minutes for April 5, 1906, state that each Board member was asked to submit a list of 25 books that he thought should be included in the Library.

The basement of the new Library did not house books until 1940. Before that time it was used by a girls' gymnastics class, the Women's Guild from the Reformed Church, a cooking class, the Health and Holiness Club, and the Domestic Science Club. During one school year, Miss Gray's kindergarten class also used this room.

Library service was soon extended to people outside of the Bluffton City limits. In 1912, the Library Board granted permission to all students of the Bluffton High School to use the library whether they were residents of Bluffton or not. Harrison Township later levied a tax to support the library. Then, in 1914, Lancaster and Liberty Townships became part of the taxing district, thus enabling their residents to use the library. By 1924, library privileges had been extended to all county high school students.

The citizens in these townships benefited from book stations that were established in Poneto, Liberty Center, Murray, and Craigville. These stations were usually in a room of one of the