

resident's homes. The person manning the station was paid one cent for each book that was loaned.

In 1914, the Bluffton Library was one of several that participated in a series of five lectures (one per month) sponsored by the Public Library Commission. These scholarly talks were well received by the Bluffton citizenry.

A LIBRARY IS NOT A LUXURY BUT ONE OF THE NECESSITIES OF LIFE. Harriet Beecher Stowe

During World War I, the Library Board wanted to do its part in the war effort. The Library War Council was established to provide libraries for soldiers. The librarian, Board members, and interested citizens comprised this council whose goal was to raise money equal to five per cent of each township's population. It was recorded that \$519 had been raised for this purpose.

During the depression years, circulation decreased only slightly, even though there was an exodus from the county. Because many people were jobless, they had more time to use the Library.

The Depression necessitated many changes in the Library. The number of magazine subscriptions was reduced, which prompted Board members to donate their personal copies. The phone extension was removed and the staff rebound books thus saving the Library considerable expenses.

It was also necessary to reduce staff salaries by ten to fifteen percent in 1932 and again in 1935. The Library used the government assistance programs to alleviate the financial crunch. Civil Works Project workers repaired the floors and walls in the basement and inventoried the collection. The WPA also provided a mending and cleaning woman.

During this time the Librarian placed new books on a rental shelf and patrons paid a small fee to borrow them. When a book was paid for, it was placed on the open shelves.

Mrs. Julia Caylor and Miss Elizabeth Patton attended a Board meeting November 11, 1935, representing the Bay View, Foltz, and Delphic Circle literary clubs. Since these organizations

were concerned about the lack of funds for new books, they presented a plan of a canvass and a Tag Day among the local citizens for additional funds. The Board approved the venture, and the amount collected was \$275.

The possibility of a county library was discussed as early as July 1920, when a motion was made to take the necessary steps to set up a county library. This resolution was taken to the County Commissioners, but they took no action at this time. The Board's minutes note that in April 1924, Miss D. T. Northey of the Indiana Library Commission spent several days in the county evaluating the feasibility of a county system. She found the school principals, the county superintendent, and the county agent favorable to the proposal. During the twenty-fifth anniversary year, C. E. Sturgis was appointed by the Board to pursue the county library idea.

In 1936, the Board again discussed a county library, deciding that they would cooperate if arrangements could be made with the county-taxing units. The Board voted to file with the County Commissioners for the purpose of opening the library to all citizens of Wells County. The townships would pay a tax of five cents on each \$100 of taxable property. The Library would be open to the county when each township filed a petition in favor of this action. On March 4, 1937, it was reported in the minutes that all township petitions had been filed with the County Commissioners. Nothing more could be done until the county tax levy was assured.

PERHAPS NO PLACE IN ANY COMMUNITY IS SO TOTALLY DEMOCRATIC AS THE TOWN LIBRARY. THE ONLY ENTRANCE REQUIREMENT IS INTEREST.

Lady Bird Johnson

In November 1937, a two cents levy was approved for the townships, and the Library was opened to the county.

With the county system established, book collections were then provided to the county schools. The Library mailed books to patrons until locations for book stations were in operation. Applications for borrowers' cards were also made by mail. Stations were eventually opened at Uniondale, Ossian and McNatt, which were each open ten hours per week.

On June 1, 1939, the Board met to discuss the best way to meet the needs of the county. A “book wagon of the closed type” or book trailer was favored. Later that year a twenty-foot semi-trailer, pulled by a one-half ton pick-up truck, was purchased from Sylvan Tonner. The trailer featured three skylights and ventilators on the roof. It held approximately 2,000 books.



The book trailer was the pride of the community. It was displayed during Street Fair and was on exhibition at the American Rural Life Convention at Purdue. Articles and pictures about the book trailer appeared in “Library Journal” and “Wilson Library Bulletin”—two of the leading professional publications in the field of library science.

Circulation increased by fifty percent with the addition of the book trailer, since one-half of the cardholders resided outside of the Bluffton city limits. By 1951, seventy-seven percent of the total circulation figure was attributed to the county residents.

World War II brought no major changes in library practices or procedures. However, the Library had to apply for a “Certificate of War Necessity” from the Office of Defense Transportation to obtain the needed gas and tires for the book trailer.

The early 1950’s saw the library expanding its services. The record library was started through a donation by the Kiwanis Club of Bluffton; therefore, a listening room was established in the basement and the Pan Hellenic organization donated a record player.

The Library received films from the Britannica Corporation for circulation and later participated in the formation of the Indiana Film Circuit. The microfilming of the Bluffton newspapers was another project of the 1950’s. During the latter part of the decade, the Library offered a writing class, featuring Bluffton author, Peggy Goodin.

In the early 1960’s, the lack of stack and storage area became a major problem. The Library Board authorized a construction program, which consisted of a two-floor addition to the rear of the original Carnegie building that more than doubled the area of the Library. Wells County service clubs, sororities, Cub Scout packs, and PTA’s contributed money to allay part of the \$104,000 cost.

In 1965, the former residence of Dr. C. H. Mead, which adjoined the Library to the east, was purchased by the Library for future expansion. The Historical Society used the building as their museum until 1975, when they purchased their own building at 420 West Market Street. The newly formed Creative Arts Council obtained permission to use the former Mead building as their headquarters.

***I CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT BOOKS.* Thomas Jefferson**

In 1970, a self-contained bookmobile replaced the book trailer, which had been in operation for thirty-two years. It was twenty-nine feet long and featured air-conditioning. The new unit was a single unit vehicle like a school bus rather than the common truck rig style having a separate cab and chassis. The cost of the new unit was \$29,180 and it arrived in Bluffton on September 30, 1970, just in time to begin the busy school schedule.

Because of its many stops throughout the county and its stops at the schools, up to 40 percent of the library’s circulation was handled by the mobile unit. Head librarian at that time,

Elizabeth Mason, pointed out that the bookmobile with its three thousand five hundred books aboard served as a branch library to towns and schools throughout the county. It made regular stops at Craigville, Keystone, Kingsland, Liberty Center, McNatt, Mt. Zion, Murray, Ossian, Petroleum, Poneto, Tocsin, Uniondale, Vera Cruz, and Zanesville.

Large Print books—with letters nearly ¼” high—were added to the collection in 1970. *Kon-Tiki*, (Heyerdahl), *Travels with Charley* (Steinbeck), *My Brother Michael* (Stewart), *Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger), and the *Book of Psalms*, along with thirty other fiction and classic books, were purchased for the new collection.

Other improvements in the mid-1970’s included the installation of automated charging machines and the establishment of an Indiana Room for genealogical research.

Charles Joray, a Berne native, came to the library in 1975 to serve as the new Director, the first time a man had held that position in Wells County. Mr. Joray had previously been the Director at the Hartford City Public Library.

The library commemorated our country’s bicentennial in 1976 by offering a lecture series, “United States History Through Art,” presented by Mrs. Sandy (James) Fitzpatrick of Washington D. C. Her lecture featured representative art works from America’s two hundred years of existence and was presented to the county high school students and to the community.

The following year, 1977, the Library celebrated seventy-five years of continuous service to the community. The Fort Wayne Philharmonic’s Percussion Trio and Brass Quintet performed at all the county schools and at the library. Crystal Thrasher, Wells County author, conducted a writer’s workshop for all aspiring authors. There were receptions, tours, book reviews, special displays and giveaways. The birthday celebration continued from May 2 to May 6.



A new, sparkling white bookmobile with a colorful “Books” logo arrived at the library in January 1979. This third and final bookmobile, a converted recreational vehicle, was more spacious and serviceable than its predecessors. It served the residents of the county until 1991 before it was retired. Because of mounting repair costs, greater mobility of patrons, and vast improvements in school libraries, the bookmobile was no longer considered a viable or economically sound service.

In the summer of 1979, residents of the county benefited from a National Endowment for the Humanities Grant awarded to the library for a Summer Humanist in Residence. Dr. James Pictor from St. Francis College conducted a six-week course on American fiction. The enlightening and enjoyable sessions were well attended. In fact, due to popular demand, he reprised his role the following summer.

Before the decade ended, services were further extended when a branch library was opened in downtown Ossian. An Open House was held on December 8, 1979 to introduce the storefront facility to northern Wells county residents. Susan Dailey, who is the current Branch Librarian at Ossian, was also the first librarian at the Branch. (She worked in Children’s Services at the Main Library between her two stints as Branch Manager.)

HOW MANY A MAN HAS DATED A NEW ERA IN HIS LIFE FROM THE READING OF A BOOK. Henry David Thoreau

A new decade dawned and, along with it, new services premiered at the library.

The Art Print collection debuted in April 1981. Patrons were able to select from among 180 custom framed art reproductions. Several styles were represented: old masters, impressionistic, photo-realism, and abstract.

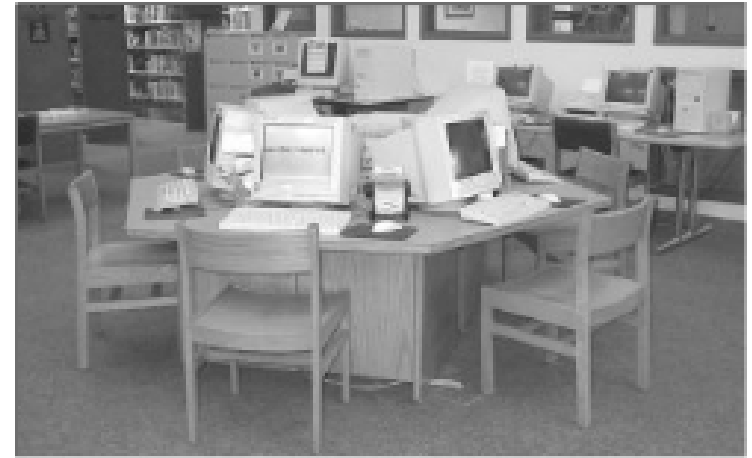
The following month, through a new Homebound Service, library employees began delivering materials to any county resident who was physically unable to use the library facility.

The decade of the 80's saw several installments of a popular "Wee Care" program. Professionals from a wide variety of backgrounds presented valuable information to new parents. Topics such as children's eye care, dentistry, health; kids and pets, and kids and loss were covered in separate sessions. While their parents were gathering helpful information, the children were entertained in Storytime sessions.

A new video format was just beginning to sweep the county—videocassette recorders. Since many homes did not yet own their own VCR, patrons were able to check out a machine from the library. Until the time when nearly everyone owned a VCR, this was a very popular service, with waiting times for a machine of up to one month. Although the library no longer lends machines, lending videos is still a very popular service. The collection has grown to include over 6000 educational and entertainment videos—this from an initial holding of thirty-six tapes.

TIME AND TIDE WAIT FOR NO MAN. William Bradford

In the mid 1980's, the library entered the computer age when it installed an automated circulation system. Service to the patrons and tracking of materials vastly improved. Since that time, the Wells County Public Library has either kept pace or it has been a step ahead of the library community when it comes to computer technology.



The card catalog is on-line and accessible through the Internet as is our Web page. We are connected to the schools through dedicated lines and wireless transmissions. Our work computers are networked. Our patrons have access to CD ROM databases and the Internet at the library. We have made a commitment to keep current with the technology of the day, providing our patrons with ever-expanding options.



Citizens of Zanesville in northwest Wells County petitioned the Library Board for a branch facility in their town. In May 1986, after enthusiastic volunteers dedicated many hours toward making their dream a reality, a new branch library was opened in Zanesville. (It subsequently closed in 1990 as demographics shifted.)