

HISTORY OF ROCHESTER PUBLIC LIBRARY

Rochester, Minnesota

Early Days

In December 1865, library service began in Rochester, when interested citizens organized the Rochester Library Association. The sum of \$1,000 was raised by subscription for the purchase of books, which were housed in the store owned by W.W. Ireland on what was then known as the Haney Block.

A catalog of library holdings published in 1881 runs to 35 pages, and carries advertisements from such firms as Weber Drugs and C.F. Massey Dry Goods, Clothing and Carpets. An advertisement for Cook's Hotel noted that rates were \$2.00 per day and that livery and stabling were available in connection with the hotel.

In 1883, the Library Association was reorganized as the Free Library and Reading Room Association. Entertainments provided the source of income for the library until 1886, when the City Council voted an appropriation of \$200 annually for its support.

In 1895, the Rochester Public Library was officially established under a state statute providing for the organization of public libraries. Spearheaded by location attorney, Burt W. Eaton, the organization of a local library society was confirmed by the City Council appointment of the first Library Board on April 29, 1895. The population of Rochester in 1895 was 6,843.

The library was then located in the City Hall, on the northwest corner of the second floor; a librarian was employed at the monthly wage of \$15.00. The early days were turbulent ones. All of the books were still owned by the free library association that had preceded the public library. It was not until July 9, 1895, that a resolution was approved that turned over "all books, magazines, and other property" to the new public Library Board. This gift was accepted on July 13, 1895. This collection contained 3,318 volumes and an assortment of unbound periodicals. The first Annual Report indicates that circulation in that beginning year of operation was 10,744 volumes.

According to the By-Laws drawn up in 1895, the library was to be open Monday through Saturday from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. and from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Any person "of good deportment and habits" could use the reading room, and any Rochester resident over 12 years of age could "draw" books from the library after depositing a \$2.00 fee. Only one book could be drawn at a time, and the loan period was two weeks. Fines for late return were two cents a day.

At its August 3, 1895 meeting, the Library Board somewhat belatedly raised the question of funding library services and in September they requested a four-tenths mill levy by the City. In 1896, the City levied and assessed \$4,250 for public library operations.

By 1905, the librarian was offering local schools a special "class loan" plan whereby 12 books could be taken out by a teacher, for class use. By 1917, the library was providing small collections of books housed in the schools, since at this time there were no school libraries. In 1920, the wife of a Mayo Clinic fellow joined the staff as the "story lady." Service was extended to Olmsted County in 1911, upon payment of \$300 by the County Commissioners.

As early as 1946, a bookmobile was thought to be the solution to serving some residents of the rural

area. This idea was first publicly discussed in a speech to the Rochester Rotary Club on March 23, 1946, by librarian Lucille Gottry. Twenty years passed before the bookmobile finally became a reality on October 24, 1966, when the first vehicle costing \$22,418 went into service with a rotating collection of 5,000 volumes selected to appeal to both adults and children.

People

No discussion of library history in Rochester would be complete without talking about the people who were involved -- those in the early days as well as those who came later.

While dozen of citizens have served on the Library Board since 1895, the single most important name in local library history is Burt W. Eaton. Mr. Eaton was a Rochester attorney for more than sixty years. Among his community contributions were a term as Mayor and the founding of the Olmsted County Historical Society. He had become active in the later days of the volunteer library association and, when the Minnesota Legislature passed the enabling legislation, he was quick to respond with the organization of a new library association in February 1895. He served as the first president of the Board and continued to serve until he was elected Mayor in 1898.

Huber Bastion was an early Rochester artist who came to Rochester for his health in 1867. When he died on November 24, 1892, his will included a bequest of \$5,000 for the construction of a library building. There was no public library association to accept the money so the funds were held in the estate until the newly formed Library Board could accept it. This was done at its meeting on November 16, 1895. Since discussion of a library building was in its most infant stages, the \$5,000 was loaned out to increase its value: \$3,000 was loaned to the Leet and Knowlton Department Store at 5 percent and \$2,000 was loaned to the Rochester School District at 7 percent. While Mr. Bastion's bequest did not produce a building immediately, it was the nest egg that made it possible for the Library Board to seriously consider moving from increasingly crowded quarters to a new location designed and built for library use.

Walter Hurlbut was a local surveyor who was appointed to the first Library Board. When the time finally came to build a library, Mr. Hurlbut and Mr. Eaton sat on the corner of Broadway and Zumbro (now 2nd Street SW) and drew some preliminary plans in the dust and dirt. Mr. Hurlbut made a second, more lasting contribution when his wife Ella established a trust fund of \$15,000 for the purchase of books for the library collection. The income from this generous gift was responsible for an annual addition of books and later periodicals for the enjoyment of library users.

Another generous local citizen was the catalyst for the first difficult decision by the newly appointed Library Board. George W. Healy was a local merchant who, shortly after the formation of the first board, presented the City with a gift of \$5,000 for the purchase of books. His gift included some specific stipulations about what books should be purchased with a portion of the funds; the library was to exclude no book or literary work by reason of its religious teaching, doctrine, or views so long as the books were not immoral. Mr. Healy also specified that some of the gift was to be used to purchase the works of Thomas Paine and Robert G. Ingersoll, both highly controversial thinkers at that time. This

stipulation opened up considerable community controversy and the merits were discussed in the newspapers and from local church pulpits. The Library Board finally accepted the gift at its meeting on October 15, 1895, with a four to four tie vote broken by a "yes" vote from Board President Burt Eaton.

In the 100+ year history of public library service in Rochester, there have been only eleven people who have held the position of head librarian; ten of whom were women. For most of the years from 1895 to 1923, the position was held by Miss Edna Emerick, though three other women served short terms in the job in the years between 1904 and 1911. Even in those years, Miss Emerick was listed as the Assistant Librarian. She was hired by the first Library Board at \$15.00 a month and by the end of her tenure in 1923 that handsome wage had gone up to \$123.00 a month.

Miss Grace Stevens held the position of head librarian from 1930 to 1943. These were important years of change for the library. It completely outgrew the first building at the corner of Second Street and First Avenue SW and a new library was built on the southeast corner of Second Street and Third Avenue SW.

In 1943, Miss Lucille Gottry, a graduate of the University of Minnesota Library School, returned to Minnesota and became the Head Librarian here. Between her starting day in 1943 and her retirement in 1968, the library matured, developed, and expanded its service. The furnishing of the new building was completed, the art and music collections were started, the Olmsted County Historical Society moved from the basement of the library to its own building, and the Children's Room and Youth Collection were finally adequately housed. It was during her years of service that a major organized community volunteer effort added strength to staff efforts when The Friends of the Library started as the result of a sign-up opportunity at a library open house on November 16, 1948.

Following Miss Gottry's retirement, the only male to serve in the position, William Sannwald, was here for just over one year before he was replaced by Phillis Goedert (later Phillis Wilson) on January 1, 1970. It was during Mrs. Wilson's watch that the collection and services outgrew the beautiful 1937 building and activities were moved to the building at the northeast corner of Broadway and First Street SW which had been constructed in 1958 by the J.C. Penny Company. Mrs. Wilson and her staff continued to extend the services of the library, especially programs for children.

Judith Keller Taylor joined the library staff as Extension Librarian in 1971 and assumed the position of Library Director in 1982. Her years as Director saw dramatic change, particularly in technological aspects such as automated circulation terminals in April 1984 and the automated card catalog in April 1989. Mrs. Taylor also oversaw the planning and building of a new library. The new facility located at the corner of 2nd Street SE and Civic Center Drive opened to the public in October 1995.

Following Mrs. Taylor's retirement in May 1997, Connie Jo Ozinga was appointed Library Director. Connie Jo Ozinga left in March 2000. During her tenure, the Library started opening on Sundays. Audrey Betcher, Assistant Director since 1996, became Director in November 2000.

Buildings

Mr. Huber Bastian, a well-known local artist, left \$5,000 in his will for a library building. Mr. Eaton and Mr. Walter Hurlbut drew up plans, and retained Mr. Sedgewick of Minneapolis as architect. The building at Second Street and First Avenue SW, completely equipped, cost \$15,000, including the price of the lot. It was built of red stone with a tile roof. It included the library's first children's room, and opened in 1898.

The library building had become outmoded so in May 1936, excavation began for a building to have a capacity of 75,000 books, which was completed in 1937. The cost of this building was met by a combination of funds accumulated over the years by the Library Board and a federal Public Works Administration grant which made up 45% of the total. Land for this building was transferred from the Mayo Properties Association to the City of Rochester in a deed dated May 29, 1934, and recorded October 2, 1934. This gift was made "so long as the same shall be used for public library purposes...but if and when the major portion thereof shall cease to be used for such purposes, the entire property shall revert to the grantors, its successors, or assigns." The site was Lots 9, 10 and the west half of Lot 8, Block 17, Original Plat, City of Rochester.

By the late 1960's, it was clear that this library building was no longer large enough. Thanks to the efforts of Tom Wolf, Dave Bach, and Cliff Johnson, the former J.C. Penney building at 11 First Street S.E. was offered for sale to the City of Rochester. The Mayo Clinic reclaimed the Second Street building, and paid a generous sum towards the purchase and renovation of the Penney building, which was dedicated as a library on December 17, 1972.

Interior construction continued in the building during 1973 and 1974, having been planned in three phases. During 1975 and 1976, new furnishings were installed. By the end of 1975, circulation had attained a level nearly 100,000 higher than the circulation in the last full year of operation in the old building (1971).

The move to the J.C. Penney building had been made as an interim solution to space and accessibility needs, but the Library Board members were fully aware of its limitations. Planning for a structure especially built to be a library moved into high gear in 1987, when library needs were part of a space study undertaken by the City and County. A Library Building Program was written by consultant Bob Rohlf in cooperation with the library staff. The consultant, Library Board, Citizen Site Committee, and Common Council each in turn settled on the downtown Statuary Lot as the best compromise site for the new building. The only uncertainty was whether there would be enough parking for library users. The City's plans for a 600-space ramp to be built on the same block set these fears to rest, but the difficulties of reconciling these two structures on the same block imposed some limitations on the library's architects.

In the fall of 1990, Rochester voters approved a 1% sales tax re-issuance which would pay for a new library building, as well as a new fire hall and city hall. The required state legislative approval was not forthcoming until 1992, and was for ½%.

In fall 1992, The Leonard Parker Associates of Minneapolis were chosen as architects for the combined library, parking ramp, and skyway. They teamed with the local firm of Yaggy Colby Associates. The Building Program was revised with much staff participation, and the initial schematic design was based upon it.

Unfortunately, the amount of money approved in the referendum was estimated by the project manager, CPMI, to be inadequate to cover costs of the 92,000 gross square foot building recommended by the library consultant to serve through 2015. So the Building Program was again revised, cutting 10,000 square feet and with it the number of shelves and seating.

Groundbreaking was held on April 19, 1994. A local contractor, Alvin E. Benike, Inc. was chosen, and the project was overseen by CPMI, the project management firm chosen by the City to provide this service for all four structures being built during this period (the library, Civic Center Ramp, City Hall, and Firehall #1.)

The old building closed on September 5, 1995, and the new building opened on October 4, 1995, during Rochester Public Library's centennial year. The bookmobile continued to run while the library buildings were closed.

1970's and Beyond

During the 1970's, only small increases in the budget were won, but in 1980, the City Council authorized an 18% increase.

Between 1975 and 1980, the library met the increased workload by adding up to five Comprehensive Education and Training Act (CETA) workers. Authorized staff increases were limited to a ½ time equivalent in 1977 and 1/4 time equivalent in 1978.

CETA was phased out before automation was installed, so during the interim the library was severely understaffed. The situation worsened in 1982 when a state revenue shortfall reduced the budgets of all City departments. Hours and services were cut, but even so, the library fell behind in its work and little staff time was available for evaluation and planning.

In 1978, a new, larger Bookmobile replaced the original vehicle. It was paid for jointly by the City and the County, and continued its pattern of equal service to City and County. It was extensively overhauled in December 1989 and eventually replaced in December 1997.

1978 was a memorable year because of the flood that did much damage in the area. Waters backed up into the library's lower level and all the stacks were emptied to allow soaked carpet to be removed and new carpet installed. No materials sustained water damage.

Stewartville Public Library contracted for many services from the Rochester Public Library beginning in 1970. The contract was ended by joint agreement in 1984, as the Stewartville Library had been significantly strengthened and could receive some services from the regional library system.

In July 1989, a contract was signed between the City and County that established a formula for the county to provide ongoing funding for the library that reflected the pattern of service already established and officially allowed County representation on the Library Board. In 2010 the contract was renegotiated to modify the formula based on the county population and a per capita cost rather than based on usage.

In 1976, Director Phillis Wilson began to explore computerization as a means to augment staff efforts, and in late 1981 the City Council committed the library to automating with the SELCO regional system. During 1980-81, the library shared a cataloging terminal (OCLC) with Rochester Community College, getting its own in early 1982.

Conversion to automation began in 1983. The Capital Improvement budget for this purpose included temporary staff to assist in entering, or "converting," the paper record of each book and each cardholder into the computer record. The library began using the automated system in April 1984.

Thanks to the automation system, the library's collection records were much more accurate than in the past. The new figures underscored the number of items which had been lost or stolen. A theft detection system was installed in 1985 and succeeded in cutting down the rate of loss. In Fall 2005, the library was hit hard by a rash of DVD thefts, and the staff and Library Board acted swiftly and decisively to secure the collection. For several months, the DVD collection was locked in secure room and patrons had to reserve DVDs in order to check them out. "Lock-a-Shelf," the system which secures the collection and allows full access to physically browsing the collection, was unveiled in early 2006.

By 1985, the library was at a crisis point in its need for additional staff, so the Library Board and staff prepared a 1986 budget request which was 24% above the 1985 operating budget, and included 5-1/2 new authorized staff positions. The request also included a significant increase for books and materials; the library was below standard in collection size. The budget granted for 1986 was less than was needed to achieve the Board's goal of a growth rate which would bring the library up to 3 books per capita in eight years, but it did allow replacement of many worn out children's books and a slight growth in the collection as a whole.

Utilization of automation continued, with the 1990 installation of a Local Area Network (LAN) available for use in all divisions and the central office, dial-in catalog access added in 1992, and CD-Rom indexes and full-text programs made available in the adult reference/information services area early in 1993. Text-based Internet was added in August of 1995, and PC-based Internet was added in November, 1996. Remote access to the catalog via the web began in 1997.

The move to the new library in October 1995 opened up space for more online catalog terminals, as well as CD-Rom access both in adult and children's areas, reinstatement of listening stations for adults and children, and both text-only and graphics-capable Internet access.

In 2003, the library withdrew from the SELCO Automation System and purchased its own automation system from Sirsi (later SirsiDynix). This move enabled the library to save money each year in maintenance fees and gave it more flexibility in meeting the specific needs of RPL patrons, which was somewhat limited in a consortium environment. Use of automated services offered by software vendor Sirsi has been one of the library's major means of increasing staff efficiency so as to maintain and enhance public service.

Self-service options were also introduced. Three "self-check" stations where library users can check out their own books are in operation and have increased patron convenience and staff efficiency. Renewals are also possible via the web site. Patrons with home or office computers have remote access to the library's catalog and certain information databases at <http://www.rochesterpubliclibrary.org/>. Email notices are an option as well as an automated messaging service allowing patrons to call in to receive information about the materials they have checked out, and to reserve or renew items. Nicknamed "MORE", this automated service also calls out to inform patrons of items they have reserved that are now ready for pickup, and replaces the first of two mailed overdue notices by a telephoned message. As much as 65% of the check out/renewal load is self-service.

In 1997, the library mounted its first full scale home page on the world wide web, using staff expertise and the city of Rochester server and domain.

In 1999, the library replaced all dumb terminals with PCs and switched over to a Web access online catalog with many electronic databases. Internet management software and networked printing were also added in 1999. Staff switched to a graphics based e-mail system and a shared calendaring program.

The budget did not kept pace with the increased demands and potentials for service that came with the new building. To retain most of the staff increases made available in the 1995 budget but not covered in the 1996 budget, existing fees were increased and new fees were added in early 1996.

Sunday hours were finally added to the schedule in September 1997 after many years of discussion. During the remainder of 1997, hours were shorted to compensate for the unbudgeted Sunday hours. In 1998, Saturday hours returned to their previous level and Sunday hours of 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. remained in the schedule. In 1999, Sunday hours were increased to 1:30 pm to 5:30 pm.

Programming at the library increased in the late 1990s. Library sponsored book groups and adult programming saw their return to the library. In 2005, the library created book group kits with an Enhancement grant from the MN Library Association. The kits include 10 copies of the selected title,

a reading guide, including discussion questions, “read alike” book lists and tips on starting a book group.

In 2000, the library commissioned Himmel and Wilson to conduct a comprehensive organizational study, which resulted in the realignment of services in the different divisions. The library replaced the Assistant Director position with a Communications Manager. Library-wide functions such as volunteer coordination, Friends and Foundation liaison, and publicity were consolidated in the Communications Division. A Reader Services division was created that combined the Fiction, Music and Movies Desk, Readers Advisory, Selection and Young Adult functions from the Adult Services Division and the Bookmobile/Outreach Delivery functions.

In 2003, the library took the leadership role to begin a new "one book one community" reading program called "Rochester Reads". The library partners with Post Bulletin Company, Adult and Family Literacy Program, Barnes and Noble Booksellers, History Center of Olmsted County, Rochester Public Schools, Rochester Community and Technical College and the Diversity Council. The community votes for a title in the Fall and then partners and business sponsors present programs and events about the book (and related children's titles) in the Winter. To date, titles have included Nickel and Dimed - 2003, Once Upon a Town - 2004, the Giver- 2005, No Horizon is so Far - 2006, Lies Your Teacher Told - 2007, Three Cups of Tea – 2008, Candy Freak – 2009 and The Camel Bookmobile - 2010.

In 2004, the Library began creating and circulating Storytime kits. These kits are used by daycare providers to introduce young children to reading and learning. Seed money for this project was provided by the Library Foundation. Toddler/Two Storytime was revived in 2005. In 2006, the Library started Sit.Stay.Read! a one-on-one reading program to therapy dogs.

In 2005, the library began offering downloadable Audiobooks to patrons through a new online digital library service provided through Overdrive. Patrons can download titles from the library’s online Audiobook collection and listen to them on their home computers, burn them to a CD, or transfer them to any WMA compatible device 24 hours a day. In 2006, the library added downloadable video and music to its collection. In 2008, the library added downloadable audiobooks in MP3 format compatible with Ipods. In 2009, the library added downloadable ebooks.

In 2005, the library created a film in the Somali language entitled “Welcome to Your Library”. The goal of the film project was to reach out to local Somali residents and inform them of ways that the library could empower and help them to succeed in their new home. The film was funded by a Library Services and Technology Act federal grant and was produced by Bruce Alfred of Cobblestone Films. The Rochester Public Library partnered with the Minneapolis Public Library and the Owatonna Public Library.

In 2006, the library started Instant Messaging (IM) as part of its regular reference service. During regular library hours, a reference librarian is available to answer questions with users of AIM, Yahoo or MSN instant messaging services. In 2010, the library added reference services via text messaging.

In 2007, the library used retail marketing techniques to make the collection more accessible for those who browse. Gondolas were added and face out shelving was installed for all new fiction and non-fiction. The library's website was redesigned in 2007 as well.

In an effort to get materials back to the shelf in a more timely manner without increasing staff, the library invested in an automated materials handling system in 2008.

In 2008, the library added an online tutoring program using a service called Tutor.com. Students connect with age and subject appropriate assistance with tutors through the library's web site. In 2009 the library switched vendors to Brainfuse and expanded the hours of service.

In 2010, the library partnered with the Mayo Clinic to host the 5,000 square foot exhibit "RACE: Are We So Different?" The exhibit was housed on the second floor of the library from May 17 through September 11. Over 37,000 individuals went through the exhibit.

In 2012, RPL developed a new Strategic Plan by utilizing community input throughout. Thirty community members-- from businesses, schools, government, arts & recreation organizations as well as interested citizens and youth -- participated in the large planning committee which met twice. RPL staff also provided input through numerous opportunities, including involvement on committees and in special brainstorming sessions. Over a three month period, a smaller committee comprised of Library, Friends and Foundation Board members, RPL staff and three community members met to finalize the Strategic Plan with the following primary goals:

Goal 1: Grow Literacy and Ability to Use Library and Information Resources

Goal 2: Engage the Community

Goal 3: Build Infrastructure to Meet Community Needs

September 2012 saw the debut of the new RPL Bookmobile. The new, larger bookmobile features green technology: a hybrid drive train and generator, solar panels, LED lights and recycled rubber floors. The Bookmobile regularly carries more than 4,500 items, including adult and children's books, audiobooks, magazines and DVDs. It has the highest circulation of any bookmobile in the state of Minnesota. In addition to visiting neighborhoods and schools within the city limits, it also makes weekly stops in Byron, Oronoco and other locations in Olmsted County. The bookmobile is handicapped accessible and has a wheel chair lift.

Also in 2012, the Youth Services Division launched a redesign project inspired by the Backyard Wildlife mural. A stylized, colorful tree welcomes children to the area which they can enter over a wooden bridge. The updated carpet in vibrant, swirling colors creates a river and many other creative patterns throughout the area. Also included in the update was the self-directed Art Room where kids and their grown-ups are free to create and display art. The new fish aquariums include a tank for pumpkin seed sunfish, a native Minnesota fish. In early 2013, the Minnesota Children's Museum *Smart Play Spot* opened. This early literacy skill building area welcomes young children to explore a

garden, farmers' market stand, canoe, post office, tree puppet theater and even drive a mini-bookmobile!

In 2013, RPL implemented *Neighbors Read*--a program focused on building relationships between the Library and community members to promote early literacy. It aims to increase school readiness and reading proficiency with targeted outreach and increased access to free books in economically diverse neighborhoods. Through the program, RPL connects with families in the neighborhoods, brings them to the library for literacy events and installs mini-libraries in the yards of the families. Through *Neighbors Read* and other community programs, RPL now connects with over 100 mini-library owners in the community.

Between 2013 and 2014, RPL reconfigured existing space to meet new Strategic Plan Goals associated with innovation, creativity, and learning. On the second floor in Reference Services RPL transformed an underutilized room into a Computer Lab with 3D Printer for classes and drop-in sessions; and installed free standing walls to build a MakerSpace where community members create, teach and learn. The construction of a Wellness Corner, also on the second floor, provides a space to partner with area organizations and confidential information regarding physical and mental health issues, homeless resources, and workforce development. On the first floor, RPL downsized the Youth Services staff area to create a vibrant teen space, which includes comfortable seating, computers and teen collections. RPL also reconfigured public space in Readers Services to include comfortable furnishings with outlet connections for electronic device use and added a technology bar near the information desk. By reassessing the bookmobile collection rotation, RPL staff freed enough space to add a second large meeting room. This room was outfitted with streaming video technology so it could be used as an overflow space for community forums held in the auditorium.

In 2014, RPL collaborated with local partners to design and implement *Rochester Reading Champions*. This innovative program reduces financial, transportation, and other barriers by training volunteers to offer specialized, free, and targeted one-on-one services to underserved struggling readers at locations they frequent.

In 2015, RPL offered outreach services through the first BookBike in Minnesota. Through this award winning little mobile library, a customized trailer attached to a bicycle, RPL offered library books, library cards, program information, assistance with digital materials, bike trail maps, and fun incentives for kids. The BookBike allowed RPL to: collaborate with area organizations; participate in popular outdoor events; reach new library customers; increase awareness/access to services; build relationships; reduce access and transportation barriers; and promote bicycling as a means of transportation.