

Public Library Mt Pleasant, Iowa.
Petition

To the Honorable Mayor and City Council of the City of
Mt Pleasant, Iowa:-

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(4)

We, the undersigned, residents of Mt Pleasant, Iowa, would respectfully represent to your Honorable Body that our City is in need of a free public Library open at all reasonable times to the public; that the influence of such an institution would be beneficial in every way; and that such an institution would be the best safeguard of the youth of our City. We are of the conviction that such an institution would broaden the intellectual life of Mt Pleasant and elevate the moral standard of the community.

We would also represent that the members of the Ladies Library Association of Mt Pleasant have expressed a willingness to make their Library a part of a free public Library, if a free public Library is established upon a proper basis and along proper lines. We therefore feel that this suggestion from the Ladies Library Association is an opportunity, which the citizens of Mt Pleasant cannot afford to neglect. Other Cities less able than Mt Pleasant have taken this step, and no City having a free public Library would now willingly surrender the same. We feel that the importance of this matter cannot be overestimated, and that it will meet the approval of all lovers of education and of all who feel that the general intelligence of the community should be promoted.

We therefore petition your Honorable Body to submit to the electors of Mt Pleasant, at the next general election of the City the question, whether the City of Mt Pleasant shall provide, form and maintain, a free public Library.

PROPERTY OF HENRY COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
NO.

Feb. 1 - 1901

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HISTORY OF THE MT. PLEASANT PUBLIC LIBRARY

by-Mrs. Miles Mallama

Various attempts were made in early times to start a public library in Mt. Pleasant. In July, 1848 a Dr. W. B. Chamberlain donated a large collection of books to the Universalist Society, which were passed around to other Sunday Schools in the county as a traveling library. This collection of 800 books was the nucleus for a library in the community and a start towards a public library. This unincorporated library association of 1848 held their meetings in the old courthouse.

In 1858 articles of incorporation were drawn up for the Iowa General Library Association, but was not recorded until 1868. In 1867 the books of the library were locked up in the Journal office doing no one any good. After the Civil War the Young Mens Association was organized for the purpose of reopening the library. On February 14, 1868, the Mt. Pleasant General Library was open to the public in the office of Dr. Marsh.

In 1870, when the panic of the seventies was foreshadowed, the young men divided the books they had purchased among themselves, again boxed the books of the Iowa General Library, and turned their attention to making a living.

In spite of the hard time of the seventies, the Ladies Reading Circle formed in 1872 organized a Lecture Association to continue the lectures that had been so stimulating and helpful. It was also hoped through these lectures, to make money for the public library which a few of the women knew they must revive, support, and maintain in the town. They almost immediately found the need for a public library.

Dr. Chamberlain's books, given before the Civil War, were housed in different offices. Now these were presented to the ladies. The young men's lecture course had ceased, so their books and money were given to the cause.

In 1872 the Ladies Reading Circle and Lecture Association merged under the name of Ladies Library Association. In 1875 they incorporated under that name. They incorporated for the purpose "of establishing in Mt. Pleasant a Public Library comprising a Museum, and Works of Art". The following ladies signed the Articles of Incorporation: Miss Nellie Ambler, Mrs. A.S. Marsh, Mrs. C. T. Cole, Mrs. Alice L. Taylor, Mrs. M.W. Ramsey, Mrs. Belle Mansfield, Mrs. Calli S. Marsh, Mrs. A.C. Woolson, Miss Racheal Carney, Miss Emma Swenker, and Mrs. Charles Marsh.

Mrs. Charles L. Marsh was the first president of the executive board consisting of these eleven leaders.

Plans were made for a library and it was decided not to open one until they had \$5,000.00 pledged, but they only had \$230.00. The library was located in the Ambler building on the second floor, east side of the square (the building that preceeded the present Louisa building), furniture purchased, and 870 books ordered. There were 800 volumes of the Chamberlain library. Judge Gillis had given 300 congressional records and other early documents. Dr. M. Ranney gave the Apple-tous Encyclopedias, the first reference books. Magazines were subscribed for and a number of periodicals and papers donated. Altogether there were 2200 books. The library first opened for the circulation of books, April 8, 1876. For several years, it remained open every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon and Saturday evenings. The sum of three dollars per annum or one dollar per quarter was the price fixed for all who desired to take books from the room.

The library remained here until March, 1882, when it moved to the third floor of the Hoaglin Building on North Jefferson St., then owned by John W. Cole and Mrs. William Saunders, who donated two years rent, and let the ladies arrange and redecorate the rooms themselves. They now had 5,000 volumes.

Senator James Harlan gave a large collection of petrified wood and

minerals collected by his son in Colorado. A collection of rare shells and coral was purchased by several men of the city and presented to the ladies.

The ladies really worked in making this a desirable library. After the lectures ceased to pay, the women turned to dramatics to earn money. They constructed scenery, made costumes, and coached players for at least fifteen plays. The hardest thing they did to earn money was to serve hot meals under the grandstand at the Henry County Fair. From the proceeds they were able to keep their library open and warm. They had sewn their own rags for rugs and brought chairs and tables. If people did not want to read they could play chess, checkers or dominoes. All were welcome to spend their leisure time.

The broad stairway, from the street to the third floor, led to the one large room which made a wonderful library. There were two stoves with long stove pipes. The wood was piled under a type of stage at the west end of the hall. There were long tables, round tables, a librarians desk, many chairs and many bookcases. There were pictures on the walls, carpet on the floor, and two heroic statues made of plaster. For the benefit of those interested in arts and sciences there was a huge stuffed buffalo, cases of sea shells, rocks, and fossils. There were skulls and bones, arrowheads of flint and hammers of granite, taken from Indian burial grounds along Skunk River by Professor Mansfield.

The librarians, of course, were volunteers. For thirteen years they had to pay only one librarian for one years work. All the rest were volunteers.

In June, 1882, just three or four months after they opened the room, the tornado rolled up the roof like a scroll, and the women had to start all over again. After a short time the library was open for business even though it had looked like a complete ruin. The librarians gave a month's free service. Now the library tickets were \$2.50 yearly, \$1.50 for six months, and \$1.00 quart erly. The money to support the library

came from tickets, dues, donations, supplies, and various entertainments, lectures and concerts. The rooms were open three afternoons and evenings per week.

In 1889 the library moved to the basement of the former Baptist Church. Another pleasant room, but darker because of the stained glass windows, characterized the new quarters. The arrangement of book stacks was the same. The boys reading room was added, and the library fell heir to their books and furniture. Book cases screened the furnace and room was maintained by volunteer librarians.

Three times the ladies had tried to get the city interested in taking over the library and maintaining it by levying a small tax. The last try in 1902 when the town did agree to take it over carried by only four votes. It was decided to have a free public library, a tax to be levied and none trustees to be appointed by the mayor. W.F. Kopp persuaded Andrew Carnegie that Mt. Pleasant was worthy of an endowment to build a public library.

Accordingly the Ladies Library Association deeded to the city their 7500 books, furniture, etc. with the agreement that four of the trustees should be from the Ladies Library Association. The ladies also gave \$1,000.00 in cash on the price of the lot which was raised both by work and donation. Carnegie gave \$12,500 for a building, later making it \$15,000.00. The building was erected and occupied February 22, 1905 and was called the Carnegie-Public Library.

The addition was completed March, 1927 with the formal opening June 21, 1927. The addition contains the Worthington Memorial Room, one of the most valuable collection of books in the Middlewest. Many of these books are priceless, many old prints, and rare volumes.

The Ladies Library Association supported and maintained the public library for a period of thirty years and then gave all to the city for the present library.