

A History of
the Laurens,
Iowa, Public
Library

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE PROBLEM, SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS	1
II. THE BEGINNINGS OF A LIBRARY MOVEMENT	2
III. WORKING FOR A PERMANENT BUILDING	8
IV. PROGRESS IN THE NEW LOCATION	19
V. CONTINUED PRGRESS AFTR WORLD WAR II	35
VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	52
BIBLIOGRAPHY	54
APPENDIX A. Members of Organizations	56
APPENDIX B. Library Dedication Program	59
APPENDIX C. Early Library Rules and Regulations	60

The limitations of this history can be grouped into categories including (1) the absence of all early and most of the later workers in the library movement; (2) heavy reliance upon newspaper clippings and newspaper articles; (3) the absence of some primary source material such as minutes, reports of the Iowa State Traveling Library, correspondence, and city directory; (4) the lack of some secondary sources such as "yearbooks," diaries, and histories; and (5) the inability of many persons interviewed to recall events that were of major importance or specific happenings over the years.

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM, SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THIS STUDY

The problem concerned in this research was the collection of necessary data to write a history of the Laurens Public Library, to test my idea that the library originated from the efforts of an interested organization, and that through the work of many people the library was able to reach its present status.

As no involved history of this library was written until this material was collected and organized, this history should serve to show the development of one individual library, and to add material for research of a more general nature.

This history attempts to cover what the author considers pertinent data which added to the rise and development of this library. This history is not intended to be a definitive work, but rather a survey of events which helped to make the library what it is today.

This history begins with the events which later produced a book collection, before it was called the Free Public Library, and ends with the tax levy approved by the Laurens City Council in December of 1963.

The limitations of this history can be grouped into categories including (1) the absence of all early, and most of the later, workers in the library movement; (2) heavy reliance upon minutes of meetings and newspaper articles; (3) the absence of some primary sources such as contracts, records of the Iowa State Traveling Library, correspondence, and early city buildings, (4) the lack of some secondary sources such as "mugbooks," diaries, local historians and area histories; and (5) the inability of many persons interviewed to recollect other than scanty information about policies or specific happenings over the years.

CHAPTER II

THE BEGINNINGS OF A LIBRARY MOVEMENT

Early rudiments of a library movement in the Laurens community found their origin in a group of women belonging to an organization known first as the "Mother's Club . . . to enlarge our interest in the welfare of all children and the laws governing their conditions,"¹ then as the "Laurens Woman's Club and Library Board Association" in early 1900, and eventually the "Laurens Woman's Club" in the same year.²

A special committee of this organization, appointed by the President of the "Woman's Club," met at the home of Mrs. L. W. Wheeler to confer concerning the acquisition of a reading room, according to the minutes taken for the committee meeting of February 11, 1901, and signed by H.C. Gilchrist. This committee, with Mrs. Wheeler as chairman, received some letters from Miss. Alice Tyler of Des Moines in which the latter proposed to come to the city and address the citizens concerning the workings of reading rooms in Iowa towns, and reveal possible usage of the Iowa State Traveling Library.³

According to the minutes of the committee meeting previously quoted, it was announced that a Mr. Moore expected to have a reading room under the Racket Store ready for April usage, which he would rent for twelve dollars per monthly. Mr. Moore would subscribe ten dollars towards defraying general expenses for the year. These same minutes also indicate that Mrs. W.E. Crowder was appointed as a committee, to choose her helper, to solicit subscriptions to pay expenses.

This committee later became the nucleus of the "Library Commission," as indicated in the succeeding, undated committee minutes. The members of this commission are listed in Appendix A of this paper.

The new name for this organization, "The Laurens Public Library and Reading Room Association," was derived for the Association meeting of June 4, 1901, as given in the

minutes. At this same meeting it was decided to meet on the first Tuesday of each month, with the meeting place not determined.

"In 1901 the ladies of the Mother's Club [Library Commission] secured the loan of 100 volumes from the State Library—50 for adults and 50 for young people."⁴ These groups of books which were loaned were called "libraries" and were numbered 57 and 88, were obtained in the middle of April, 1901, and returned on July 16 or 17, as reported in the Association minutes dated August 31, 1903. In the minutes just alluded to, more "libraries" came on July 20 and July 23 via railroad with the term "library" given to these groups of books, actually the number of the box of books so designated by the Iowa State Traveling Library.

Beginning on April 20th, the books were in the Stacy & Weaver Store where books were checked-out from 3 to 5 o'clock on Saturday afternoon.⁵ Later, concerning the boxes of books from the State Traveling Library, "it is found that the com. appointed to secure quarters for Nos. 57 and 88 place our little book-case in his implements building and give out books to readers on Sat. P.M.'s as formerly we have done from Messrs. W's and St'y's."⁶ The usage of this location was short-lived because the minutes from the Association's July 2, 1901, meeting indicate that the books were moved to a room above the First National Bank, rented from Dr. Hovenden for three dollars per month, with Dr. Hovendon subscribing one of the three dollars for the rent each month.

The first formidable attempt to encourage country residents to use the reading room was also discussed by the Association at its July 2, 1901, meeting according to the minutes.

A joint meeting of the Woman's Club and the Association was held on September 3, 1901, and according to the minutes of this meeting, it was decided to obtain Mrs. Flora McCaslin's services as a worker for the reading room at twenty-five cents per evening, and to

order \$13.65 magazines. The magazines were ordered, and according to the Treasurer's Report at the October meeting the cost was \$14.40.

Mrs. McCaslin was hired in October and lived in part of the living room. This not being the best arrangement, three rooms were secured over Brimm's Barber Shop, in the Lange building. According to an agreement, Mrs. McCaslin was to use the back two rooms, and pay one third of the rent as stated in the January 21, 1902, minutes. According to this arrangement, the reading room would be open six evenings each week.

Friction had obviously developed between the Association and Mrs. McCaslin, the first indication being that a bill for matting for the floor purchased by Mrs. McCaslin was not allowed in the minutes of the February 25, 1902, meeting. At that meeting, because of a diphtheria quarantine, it was decided to close the reading room for the summer at that time, rather than wait until May 1, 1902.

No meeting was held in March, the next meeting of the Association being held in April of 1902. The minutes of that meeting explain the friction between the Association and Mrs. McCaslin as follows:

President and Mrs. Crowder met with Mrs. McCaslin and was not altogether satisfactory. Errors reported by the Secretary in bills presented for services in reading room—Motion made and carried to have the auditing committee wait upon Mrs. McC. and inform her of the mistake, thus giving her the opportunity to refund if she thinks proper.⁷

Then, according to the minutes of the June 10, 1902, meeting, "Mrs. McCaslin will look over the bills to satisfy herself. She felt that the Assoc. had not paid her enough for her furniture used in the Hovenden room, etc." The minutes also contain the statement that Mrs. Crowder had returned from Des Moines and reported on a conversation with Miss. Tyler and Miss. Brown at the State Library concerning library matters. Likewise, Mrs. McCombs acted as librarian on Saturday, and Mrs. McCaslin's name is not mentioned in the documents checked from the time onward. From that date, members of the Association are listed as the librarians

for future dates. On January 6, 1903, a gift was given the Miss. Reda Erickson for caring for the library, as reported in the Secretary's minutes of that meeting.

Selection of books now became an aim of the Association as they wished to purchase books with the money at hand in the treasury, so each member of the Association was asked to bring lists of books to the meetings.

Officers were elected on September 2, 1902, at a regular Association meeting. As reported in the minutes for this meeting, Mrs. Anderson was named President; Mrs. R.N. McCombs, Vice-Presidents; Mrs. J.R. Hakes, Corresponding Secretary; Mrs. E. Strain, Recording Secretary; Mrs. L.W. Wheeler, Treasurer; and Mrs. O.M. Murphy, Librarian of Supply, and Finance.

In December of 1903, communication was received from Miss. Tyler, informing the Association that she would visit the reading room the latter part of March.

Careful attention was paid to the reading room during the closed summer months as indicated by the information in the minutes of the Association of June 3, 1903. The room was leased to Mrs. Cruso and Miss. Alcock for four months, as long as the room was used only for storing goods.

The Association had taken care of the reading room now for over two years, paying the expenses, buying books, and taking care of all matters. After Miss. Tyler's visit it was agreed that a tax levy for a public library was needed, and it was reported in the June 3, 1903, minutes of the Association that a petition was being circulated for a levy to be presented to the City Council. In that same year, two more moves of the reading room took place. Mention of the moves was made in the October 5th minutes, when it was decided to pay White and Harper for the use of their room, and when it was stated that Mr. Dean's music room was used.

As a final decision of the December 30, 1903, meeting, a motion was carried that the Association give some type of entertainment in order to raise money to purchase books for the reading room.

In January of 1904, the Association became publicity conscious and Mrs. Wheeler was appointed "to see that suitable facts concerning the library be published."⁸ As is indicated by the previous quotation, the terminology for "reading room" now became "library."

Now that the petition had been circulated, it was necessary to influence the voters to vote in favor of the "two-mill tax to be used in establishing a public library."⁹ In order to accomplish this, as recorded in the Association minutes of March 14, 1904, the Association was divided into committees to canvas the city in the hopes of securing votes in favor of their proposition.

The city election was held in March of 1904, and the Pocahontas County Sun of March 31, 1904, gave a synopsis of the voting as follows: ". . . on the proposition 'Shall a free public library be established?' 96 votes were cast, 57 voting for and 47 against. Fifty-seven women voted on this question, 54 voting for the library, 2 against it and one defective ballot." Some evidence to the contrary is given in 1915, by Mrs. R.N. McCombs; "paper before Women's Club April 12, 1915 . . . and later when we asked for a tax levy the men as ever generously voted it. True the women voted too, but the result showed that the result would have been in favor of the tax even though we had not voted."¹⁰ The thing to bear in mind however, is that the paper was later printed in the Pocahontas County Sun as an appeal to help the Woman's Club with some of the future goals, one of which was to see the ground around the library building purchased for a public park. Then too, the election had taken place eleven years before this address.

The minutes of the April 5, 1904, meeting indicated that Miss. Tyler sent her congratulations concerning the election, and asked in what way she had benefited the Association.

¹ Mrs. R. N. McCombs, "Some Aims of Our Club and Library" (paper read before the Laurens Woman's Club, Laurens, Iowa, April 12, 1915).

² Minutes of the Special Committee of the Woman's Club, February 11, 1901.

³ Article in the Pocahontas County Sun, September 17, 1931.

⁴ George Sanborn, Period of Growth and Development, 1883-1904 (Vol. III of Pioneer History of Pocahontas County, Iowa. 3 vols.; Fonda, Iowa: Times Print, 1904), p. 759.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Minutes of the Laurens Public Library and Reading Room Association, June 4, 1901.

⁷ Minutes of the Laurens Public Library and Reading Room Association, April 29, 1902.

⁸ Minutes of the Laurens Public Library and Reading Room Association, January 26, 1904.

⁹ Ibid., February 23, 1904. ¹⁰ McCombs, op. cit.

¹⁰ McCombs, op. cit.

CHAPTER III

WORKING FOR A PERMANENT BUILDING

Because the public had now levied a tax for a free public library, the jurisdiction of the existing library and future affairs were in the hands of the City Council. Marvin Loxterkamp, a Library Board member for a number of years, in a personal interview on June 3, 1964, stated that the jurisdiction of the library has been the same since 1904, when the first trustees were appointed. The Library Board of Trustees is appointed by the mayor with the approval of the city council, and is under their jurisdiction. He also stated that often the new members of the board of trustees were, and are, recommended to the mayor by the board of trustees.

As reported in the minutes of the Association of September 22, 1904, the Mayor had appointed the Trustees. The new guardians of the public library were called "Library Trustees, Library Board, Board of Trustees, or Library Board of Trustees," following appointment by the Mayor.

During the transitional period from September to December 1, the Association still controlled the library. In August of 1904, the Association decided to join the Iowa State Historical Society, and in November the publications of this society had begun to be received at the library. It was decided at the November 30, 1904, meeting of the Association, that the State Historical Society publications would be reserved for the use of the Woman's Club, excepting the number containing the redistricting of Iowa. Also appearing in the November 30, minutes, was a note that Mr. White had vacated the building occupied by the library, and that Miss. Stuer agreed to provide free room for the library.

The first officers elected for the Library Trustees were all members of the Association, and almost every person on the Board of Trustees was a member of the Association. A list of the first Library Trustees appears in Appendix A of this paper.

Trustees were in office for two-year, four-year, and six-year terms of service. The first Trustees "drew lots as to the time of service . . . and a committee was appointed to draw up the laws and constitution."¹¹

It was decided by the Trustees to adopt the by-laws of the Iowa Library Commission, as stated in the minutes of December 9, 1904, with two changes; the meeting date and time were changed, and the section pertaining to non-residents of the city was deleted. At that same meeting it was decided to adopt rules and regulations for borrowers, which are found in Appendix C of this paper, and which appeared in the Pocahontas County Sun in the March 23, 1905, issue.

Committees were slightly changed by the Trustee President and reports were now made in the future by three of them, the Book Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Buildings and Grounds committee.

The first Librarian, named as such, was Mrs. E. Strain when she was elected to the position by the Trustees at their January 9, 1905, meeting. She was to be paid the amount of fifty cents for each serving at the library.¹²

A reasonably permanent home for the library was not found until the Carnegie building was erected, and in January of 1905 the Trustees were again looking for new quarters for the library collection.

The Board of Trustees, it is evident from the minutes, were trying to be helpful to anyone wishing to avail himself of its services. On January 12, 1905, a notice appeared in the Pocahontas County Sun stating that a section of the Teacher's Library from the Iowa State Traveling Library had arrived, and for the teachers and others to come to the library to borrow the books.

The hours for the library were stated in the February 15, 1905, minutes, being from two to five Saturday afternoons, and seven to ten on Tuesday evenings. The time for Tuesday evenings was changed at the March meeting to seven to nine.

The transfer of Association property was formally accomplished in March, with the books and equipment listed in the Trustee minutes of March 20, 1905. Included in the listing are 171 books, a couch with a cover, a pillow, three cases for books, three lamps, one rocker and eight chairs.

The first indication that an Andrew Carnegie grant was desired came in the March 20, 1905, minutes of the Trustees in which it is recorded that the Chairman, Mr. L.W. Wheeler, requested that the Finance Committee correspond with Andrew Carnegie. Later, according to the April 10, 1905, minutes, a petition was sent, signed by members of the community and by a congressman, to Andrew Carnegie.

An increase in the usage of the local newspaper to publicize information originating from the Librarian or from the Board of Trustees now became apparent beginning in the latter part of March of 1905. The March 23 issue of the Pocahontas County Sun published the rules and regulations passed by the Trustees at their March 9, 1904, meeting. During the month of April, three notices appeared in the Pocahontas County Sun. On April 6, 1905, the Librarian made an appeal for all patrons to return the Traveling Library books as they had to be returned, and informing the patrons that fines under the new administration were two cents a day for over-time, rather than five cents per week as had been the custom. The issue of April 13, 1905, informed the people that more than twenty new books had been received at the library, including such titles as, "Robinson Crusoo, Life or Washington, The Crises, Idylls of the King, and Robert Browning's Poems."¹³ The list of books indicates that some energy that been expended in the selection of these titles. The final announcement of the month appeared in the April 20, 1905, issue which informed library patrons that Mr. Garrison

had to occupy his building on Saturday afternoon, thereby forcing the library to be closed in the afternoon. As in this situation and those which followed affecting the Saturday library hours, the library was open on those Saturday evenings from seven to nine o'clock. The April 20, 1905, issue also indicated that the Trustees tried to be helpful toward the country patrons by allowing them to leave books at the Southworth Harness Shop for the convenience of these borrowers.

A census report of the towns in the county was made by the Pocahontas County Auditor in May, which indicated that the population of Laurens in 1905 was 782.¹⁴

A tax levy of two mills was certified by the Trustees and presented to the Council for levying, according to the June 12, 1905, minutes of the Trustees. At this same meeting, the Chairman of the Board resigned, and her place was taken by Mrs. E.C. Strain. This is an interesting fact because Mrs. E.C. Strain was the Librarian at that time. At the December 11, 1905, meeting of the Trustees, it was reported in the minutes that the Librarian was authorized to use fine money at her own discretion.

According to the report of the Treasurer of Trustees, total expenditures from May 1, 1905, to December 11, 1905, amounted to \$126.64.¹⁵

Since the Pocahontas County Sun was listed as an official county newspaper, all legal proceedings were published in it, including library levies for the incorporated city of Laurens. In the January 11, 1906 issue of that newspaper, a valuation and taxes list indicated that \$241.02 was levied for the library.

Early circulation figures for the library up to 1914 were taken from the Secretary of the Trustees minutes.

At the March 12, 1906, meeting it was indicated that circulation was increasing, and that forty books were circulated on March 10, 1906.

Another move of the library books and equipment was made from the rooms over F.C. Gilchrist's office to Mr. N.H. White's office on June 1, 1905, the advantage of the new location being that it was on the ground floor and easier for patrons to use.¹⁶

Letters were written to both Mrs. Russell Sage of the Russell Sage Foundation and to Andrew Carnegie for the purpose of gaining a public library building, according to the December 10, 1906, Trustee meeting minutes. Copies of the letters to Andrew Carnegie are now located in a vault at the Laurens State Bank, of Laurens, Iowa. A letter to the Trustees early in February from Andrew Carnegie indicated that he would donate \$2,500.00 to the cause of erecting a free public library if two stipulations were fulfilled. Mr. Carnegie stated that the City Council would have to agree, by resolution, to give not less than \$250.00 a year to support the library, and to provide a suitable site.¹⁷

A new Librarian, Irene Mickel, was hired from January 26, 1907, for one year if her work was satisfactory, according to the Trustee minutes of February 11, 1907. She was paid one dollar per week for her work.

The Trustee minutes of the May 13, 1907, meeting indicate that the first magazine subscription gift, a one-year subscription to Collier's Magazine, was donated by Mrs. Reed. A motion was made and carried at that meeting, that books which had been in the presence of a contagious disease were not to be returned to the library, but kept by the borrowing person and paid for.

A Librarian's report each month was given to the Library Board since the Board's origin, giving the number of books borrowed and the amount of fine-money collected. The report given in the minutes of June 10, 1907, reported 134 books borrowed in the month of May.

A letter from Andrew Carnegie's Secretary to City Clerk, E.P. Lowry, dated June 22, asked Mr. Lowry to notify Mr. Carnegie just as soon as a site for the new library building

was selected. A mistake in the city levy for the library in 1906, which was less than \$250.00, had no effect upon the Carnegie offer because the stipulation was only for the Council to "resolve" to levy \$250.00 each year.¹⁸

Mrs. E.C. Strain proposed to the Trustees at the August 12, 1907, meeting to act as Librarian again and occupy the room as a living room, furnish heat and light, and charge one dollar per week for her services. Her proposition was carried, and no mention is again made concerning Irene Mickel.

The council during the past six months had worked to obtain a site for the public library and it was reported in December that "the Council has furnished four lots—one hundred feet—about half way between the N.W. Depot and Christian Church . . ."¹⁹

When it was assured that the public library would be a reality, the Library Trustees worked on two main considerations. The Pocahontas County Sun of March 5, 1908, revealed that the Trustees would like to include a rest room in the new building if the funds were available, and that the Library Trustees were in consultation with Township Trustees to help get support for the library. U.S. Vance, the editor of the Pocahontas County Sun, helped to support the new library when he, in that same issue of the newspaper, appealed to the township citizens to speak to the Township Trustees to help guide them toward a decision. The headlines for that article were "Boast for the Library," and "Everybody Boost for the Library."²⁰

The first librarian's report to the public, dealing with the progress of the library, was made in the March 5, 1908, issue of the Pocahontas County Sun. That first report gave information regarding circulation, the good behavior of the children while in the library, and the need for more new books.

A week later, U.S. Vance again editorialized concerning the library, touching in a sense, reading guidance and book selection:

Good books are the best companions and there should be enough books to supply the present demand and enough variety to increase the demand. In other words, there should be enough books of such character as to increase the number who read.²¹

A resolution reported in the April 13, 1908, Trustee minutes called for a tax levy of three mills to be levied in 1908, with this information gained from paragraph four, section 894, in the Iowa Code Supplement of 1907. That resolution continued from that time for a number of years.

The custom of closing the library for the summer months was continued in 1908 by renting the library room to two sisters named Crandall. They were under supervision of Mrs. E. C. Strain, for which they paid five dollars per month, and paid one half of the rent to Mrs. Strain and one half to the Library Board.²²

A communication from Andrew Carnegie was received by the Library Trustees on May 12, 1908, stating that he had decided to increase his offer by one thousand dollars, making his gift a total of thirty-five hundred dollars.²³ Another letter from Andrew Carnegie was received in June, stating that the money was available at any time, so the Trustees began to consult architects for plans with the work to commence after the plans were adopted and the contract let.²⁴ According to the July 21, 1908, minutes of the trustees, the Building Committee was authorized to close a contract with both the architect and a contractor with the plans approved.

An example of the tight reins held by the Trustees appears in the August 10, 1908, minutes of the Board, when the Librarian was authorized by the Board to destroy books brought back by a family who had diphtheria, and also authorized her to hold back books from that family until the destroyed books were paid for by the family.

It was decided at the February 8, 1908, meeting of the Trustees, as recorded in the minutes, to copy the original papers of the library and to place the original copies by the

corner stone of the new library building. At that same meeting, the Board of Trustees gave the head of the Book Committee twenty-five dollars with which to purchase new books for the library.

One of the early organizations to help the library was the Knights of Pythian Lodge. An announcement appeared in the Pocahontas County Sun on April 15, 1909, informing the citizens that "Rio Grande," a three-act drama, would be performed by the Knights of Pythian Lodge, for the benefit of the public library. It was reported in the May 6, 1909, issue of the same paper, that the Opera House was comfortably filled, indicating that the drama was a success. It was announced at the May 10, 1909, meeting of the Trustees, in the minutes, that the Knights of Pythian had pledged one-hundred dollars for furnishing equipment for the adult room of the new library.

At the July 12, 1909, meeting, officers of the Library Board were re-elected according to the minutes.

It was decided on February 14, 1910, to let the contract for the new building to W.J. Zitterell, General Contractor of Webster City, Iowa, with the designated cost of thirty-five hundred dollars.²⁵ One thousand dollars was paid to the contractor in June according to the minutes of the Trustee meeting of June 4, 1910.

On July 21, 1910, a report of the Library Board of Trustees was published in the Pocahontas County Sun. It contained a general synopsis of the movement to obtain a library building, reasons for building at the chosen location, and an appeal to the women of the area. The following are some quotations from that report:

. . . a laudable and we might say praise-worthy undertaking, something that is not alone for the present generation but for us, our children, and their posterity for the years to come . . .

More joined from time to time, some fell by the wayside, others were gathered to their eternal home, infusing as it were new blood, energy and that determination to succeed which all lovers of any movement should applaud that tends

to the uplifting, and enlightenment of the human family, high or low, rich or poor, for without knowledge we must pass into oblivion as all nations have done who have neglected to spread knowledge to the masses of the human family.

The main object in placing the library in its present location was to make it easy accessible to the school where they can procure data for their various exercises. 2nd., because the site was cheaper more land could be obtained for less money than any other place in town. 3rd., it will be less liable to fire consequently insurance rates much less.

We have asked the Trustees of the township to levy a small insignificant tax to meet the exigency, which they have a legal right to do, but have refused, men plan for dollars, mothers plan for homes, honorable and enlightened children who are to make the future nation defenders, officers and citizens, and we ask you the others living in the country to urgently plead with your husbands to donate what they or you feel they can conveniently spare

According to that same report, there was a deficit of five hundred dollars facing the Board to finish the basement, for grading, and for walks. In the social columns of that same issue of the newspaper was a comment that the library building was a beautiful one, and that the workmen had finished so far as there was money to contract.

At a special meeting held on August 5, 1910, the minutes inform us that there was a balance in the Carnegie Fund of \$2,377.50, with a balance due the Zetterell Company of \$2,400.00. The Council recommended that the Trustees should pay the Zitterell Company and draw \$22.50 from the City Treasury to take care of the deficit. According to the Pocahontas County Sun of August 11, 1910, the building was accepted by the Library Trustees, but it was decided to delay opening the building until the grounds were cleared of debris so that cinders would not be carried into the building on the patron's shoes. The Pocahontas County Sun of September 1, 1910, explained that when it became evident that the funds would not be sufficient to finish the job, an appeal was made to Andrew Carnegie for three hundred dollars more. The money was granted by Carnegie after the Council had increased the Maintenance Fund thirty dollars. More money still was needed, and the only references available to ascertain where the extra funds were obtained, were in a report to the

Carnegie Corporation in 1915, and the Treasurer's report of September 1915. The Carnegie report covered the years from 1907 to 1914, and a note at the bottom indicated that \$293.93, the amount needed to complete construction, was subscribed by the Knights of Pythiam Lodge. This report also indicated that the total cost of the construction was \$4,093.95, with the amount of 3,800.00 contributed by Andrew Carnegie, and \$293.95 contributed by other sources.²⁶

A special meeting of the Trustees took place on September 27, 1910, according to the minutes, and a contract was given to P.R. Mason and Sons of Mason City for a new furnace.

The dedication notice for the Laurens Public Library appeared in the Pocahontas County Sun on October 6, 1910. The dedication ceremonies were held in the Christian Church on October 8, 1910, with the program printed in the Pocahontas County Sun on October 13, 1910. That program is reproduced in Appendix B of this paper.

When commenting about the dedication program, U.S. Vance, the editor and publisher of the Pocahontas County Sun, gave some opinions concerning the selection of books for the library. These tonets are applied at the present day.

But the work is not done yet. That building must be stocked with books. Not that we can say we have so many thousand volumes when most of them may be of doubtful value, but we must have good books, books that will benefit the community. There must be books to which the farmer can go; books for the store keepers; books for the teacher; books for the children; books for the tired father and books for the overworked mother. There must be something more than fiction in this library: Every phase of life must be touched. The people should be instructed how to make use of these books and then the great value of the library will begin to be felt.²⁷

- ¹¹ Minutes of the Laurens Library Board of Trustees, December 1, 1904.
- ¹² Minutes of the Laurens Board of Trustees, January 9, 1905.
- ¹³ Article in the Pocahontas County Sun, April 20, 1905.
- ¹⁴ Census Report of the Pocahontas County Auditor, May 1, 1905.
- ¹⁵ Ledger of the Laurens Library Board of Trustees Treasurer, December 11, 1905.
- ¹⁶ Article in the Pocahontas County Sun, June 7, 1906.
- ¹⁷ Letter from Andrew Carnegie to the Laurens Library Board of Trustees, February 5, 1907.
- ¹⁸ Article in the Pocahontas County Sun, June 27, 1907.
- ¹⁹ Minutes of the Laurens Library Board of Trustees, December 9, 1907.
- ²⁰ Editorial in the Pocahontas County Sun, March 5, 1908.
- ²¹ Editorial in the Pocahontas County Sun, March 12, 1908.
- ²² Minutes of the Laurens Library Board of Trustees, May 11, 1908.
- ²³ Article in the Pocahontas County Sun, May 14, 1908.
- ²⁴ Article in the Pocahontas County Sun, May 25, 1908.
- ²⁵ Minutes of the Laurens Library Board of Trustees, February 14, 1910.
- ²⁶ Financial Report from the Laurens Public Library to the Carnegie corporation, July 15, 1915.
- ²⁷ Editorial in the Pocahontas County Sun, October 13, 1910.

CHAPTER IV

PROGRESS IN THE NEW LOCATION

The new building was quite a change from the rooms formerly used. To begin information concerning the new building the mayor of Laurens in the Pocahontas County Sun of October 13, 1910, published a notice; "the public library steps are not a lofting place or a place to be littered and dirtied and those found there will have no one to blame but themselves if picked up by the marshal."

A notice that the library would be open of Saturday evenings, the librarian to receive the customary salary of fifty cents, appeared in the minutes of the trustees on November 14, 1910.

On June 10, 1911, a contract was let to H.L. Ryon to supply all materials and do all of the work in the completion and finishing of the basement of the library building, "in consideration whereof such board agrees to pay such contractor the sum of \$380.00 at once upon the final completion and acceptance of such work."²⁸ A certificate of finished work was given to H.L. Ryon after the completion of June 1, 1911, and signed by Mrs. C.S. Allon, Mrs. R.N. McCombs, J.C. Hinn, and H.L. Ryon.²⁹

It was quoted previously in this paper that the Woman's Club had the welfare of children in mind. This became even more evident in 1911 when the club began its story hour for children.

An honor was extended in 1911 to public library when it was announced that "Laurens has the distinction of being the smallest town in the United States that Mr. Carnegie has helped with the library."³⁰

The association between the Woman's Club and the library board was close, as indicated by items in the newspaper through the past years, such as the following quotation from the Pocahontas County Sun of June 1, 1911: ". . . at the close of the meeting dainty refreshments were served by the ladies of the library board."

The first insurance on the Laurens Public Library building and its contents was with the German-American Insurance Company of New York, for a period of five years, with coverage on the building being \$3,200 and \$300 on the contents. Cost of the insurance for the five-year period was \$43.75.³¹

Two main items were considered at the meeting of the trustees on February 12, as reported in the minutes. The first item was concerned with deciding to join the Iowa Library Association for a year, a membership which continued uninterrupted until the present day. The other item was postponed until the July meeting, which involved an application for the position of librarian from Mrs. Blanche Bowen. The minutes of the trustees of August 13, 1912, stated that Mrs. Blanche Bowen wanted one hundred dollars per year as librarian, and Mrs. E.C. Strain's application for the job was also read.

It was decided at the meeting of the board on June 11, 1912, as reported in its minutes, to open the library Tuesday afternoons during the summer months.

Election of officers for the trustees on July 9, 1912, as reported in its minutes, resulted in the following office holders: Mrs. E.D. Anderson, Vice-President; Mrs. E.H. Southworth, President; Mrs. C.S. Allen, Secretary; and Mrs. R.N. McCombs was re-elected Treasurer.

The practice of allowing the basement of the library to be rented began in September of 1912, as recorded in the minutes of the board of September 6, 1912. The Board of Education of the Laurens Public School rented the basement for the school year as a room for the instruction of kindergarten children of the school district.

Mrs. E.C. Strain was selected as the librarian until July 1, 1913, by the trustees at their meeting on September 12, 1912, but no other information concerning the position was stated in these minutes.

The county auditor's annual report was published in the Pocahontas County Sun, and in the issue of April 1, 1913, it was indicated that the total disbursements for the fiscal year was \$244.08, and the balance on hand on April 1, 1913, was \$566.01.

On May 13, 1913, the by-laws of the Laurens board of trustees were amended stating the decision that "no books designated 'reference books' shall be taken from the library building."³²

The three-mill tax levy imposed upon the taxpayers of the city of Laurens was changed by the library trustees to four mills, and was so recommended to the mayor and council.³³

Mrs. E.C. Strain, as recorded in the minutes of the trustees, was again named librarian for one year and was allowed, for the first time, to hire Mrs. Edna Coffin when it was necessary. Mrs. Strain's salary was fifty cents per meeting, not to exceed three days each week, and she hired Mrs. Edna Coffin with her own wages.

The Laurens Board of Education rented the basement of the library for the second year for one hour each school day, paying twenty-five dollars and furnishing the coal used for heating the entire building.³⁴

Library statistical reports were sent to the Iowa Library Commission and the reports from 1914 to 1935 showed that all library board members signed the annual report. In 1935, the reports began to be signed the annual report. In 1935, the reports began to be signed only by the secretary of the board of trustees.³⁵

In May of 1914, according to an article in the Pocahontas County Sun on May 14, advice for the selection of books was asked of books was asked of the patrons.

It was reported on July 14, 1914, in the minutes of the board, that a three and one-half mill tax was approved for the 1914-15 fiscal year. It was also reported that the librarian, Mrs. E.C. Strain, had retired and that Mrs. Edina Coffin was appointed as librarian. Another consideration for that meeting was election of officers. Mrs. E.H. Southworth remained President, Mrs. R. N. McCombs remained Treasurer, and Mrs. Mathers was elected Vice-President, with Mrs. Geo. T. Johnson filling the office of Secretary.

For the third year in succession, the Laurens Board of Education rented the basement. The rent was raised to forty dollars, with the school to pay for its own janitorial work and all fuel for the nine months.³⁶

The Pocahontas County Sun, in the issue of November 12, 1914, announced that with the exception of Thanksgiving the library would be open on Thursday evenings until April 1, 1915.

The Women's Club did not enjoy the Status quo for long, and on April 12, 1915, Mrs. R.N. McCombs read a paper before the Woman's Club which was published in the Pocahontas County Sun on April 29, 1915. In her own words, she states an important aim:

We still have other aims whose fulfillment the Woman's Club are anxious to see completed, the great one is the purchase of the ground around the library building for a public park for the benefit not only of our time but for those who are to fill our places years hence.

Dates and hours when the library was to be open were announced in the Pocahontas County Sun of June 10, 1915, and indicated that the library was not to be open on Thursday evenings during the summer, would be open on Tuesday afternoons rather than Tuesday evenings, and would be open both in the afternoon and evening every Saturday.

At the meeting of the trustees on July 13, 1915, the minutes inform that the librarian, Mrs. Edna Coffin, moved that the council be asked for an increase in tax levy to fulfill the

requirements of Andrew Carnegie. As stated in this paper previously, the requirements no longer had any local significance as they had already been satisfied.

From the council proceedings of the first of September, the Laurens members of the council levied a tax of three and one-half mills of the ensuing year and certified it to the Pocahontas County Auditor.

Designation as an Iowa State Historical Society depository highlighted the month of December in 1915, as recorded in an article in the Pocahontas County Sun on December 23, 1915. All of the publications of the society from that date onward were received at the library. This helped enable the library to build an Iowa History section.

A city ordinance in March of 1916 established a park commission, was voted upon at the town election and passed on March 27, 1916. The Woman's Club and the library trustees had obtained the land and wanted to turn it over to a commission empowered to receive it.³⁷

It was decided on December 14, 1918, as reported in the minutes of the board, that the basement of the library was to be used by the Laurens Young Girl's Club for meetings free of charge.

Evidence found in the minutes of the trustees on January 11, 1919, seemed to indicate that funds were being conserved for some purpose, as the monetary status of the treasury on December 31, 1918, was \$1,422.58.³⁸

That the library trustees were considerate of library property was evident in a passed motion of the trustees as follows:

On account of the Boy Scouts violating their contract with the library board and misusing the library, a motion was made and carried that we ask the Boy Scouts and Master to vacate the building within ten days from date.³⁹

As regarded the salary of the librarian, according to the ledger of the treasurer of the board of May 14, 1921, Mrs. Coffin was paid nineteen dollars for care of the library for March, and fourteen dollars for April.

The first of only husband and wife to serve on the library board at one time were appointed in January of 1922, according to the minutes of the board in January and both members were appointed for six-year terms.

The Laurens Sun, in an article on March 23, 1922, made an appeal to people of Laurens and the surrounding area to bring to the library any old pictures of the community that they might have. The collection, according to the article was to be exhibited at the library, and then placed in a permanent collection in the library. When the writer of this paper examined library holdings in June of 1964, these photography and clippings totaling about fifty were found in a cabinet.

That the balance in the Library Fund had grown, was indicated by a balance of \$1,981.87, according to the statistics given in the Laurens Sun on April 1, 1922.

The library trustees were in the habit of sending individual requests to the State Traveling Library, a practice which ended in 1922 when a request was received from Miss. Julia Robinson of the library, asking that all requests for book loans come directly from the public library; consequently, books were sent only to the public library to avoid duplication and to give the library credit for the circulation.⁴⁰

The year of 1922 marked the origin of an organization which helped the library through gifts and work until the present day. "A large number of women met at the library to complete the organization of the Woman's Progressive Club."⁴¹

The library board decided at its meetings on August 18, 1932, according to the minutes, to open the library in September on Friday evenings, in addition to the other times.

Throughout the year of 1922 and future dates, according to notices in the social section of the Laurens Sun, different organizations, including the Thursday Study Club, the Woman's Progressive Club, used the library for meetings.

In 1923 the trustees, as revealed in the minutes of February 10, 1923, decided to furnish the basement. This was possible at the time because the balance in the Library Fund in 1923, decided to furnish the basement. This was possible at the time because the balance in the library Fund in 1923 was \$2,084.30.⁴² In this same year a new furnace was installed in the basement with the contract given to Southworth Hardware Store from sealed bids presented to the library board.⁴³

New furniture was added to the library in July of 1923. Two long reading tables, six chairs, and one rocking chair were added, according to an article in the Laurens Sun on July 19, 1923.

A gift in September of 1923 helped the library financially through the efforts of a man who was not a resident of Laurens.

When Harvey Ingham was here and delivered the address at Homecoming he made no charge for his services, but he told the committee to present something to the public library in his name if they felt so disposed. The committee in making their final settlement, turned over \$50.00 to the library board.

It was moved and carried at the meeting of the board on July 5, 1924, as stated in the minutes, to secure an assistant librarian to care for the reading room each week-day afternoon except Sunday. The minutes of September 13, 1924, indicate that the use of an assistant librarian was to be discontinued in October.

The first of a number of exhibits to be displayed at the library was announced by the Literature and Art Department of the Laurens Woman's Progressive Club in the issue of the Laurens Sun of April 2, 1925. According to the article, the exhibit for April 7, 8, and 9 was the Thistle Print Art Exhibit.

The acquisition of new books for six months in 1925 was announced in three issues of the Laurens Sun. The list on March 12 indicated that sixty-five volumes were acquired, fifty-five of them were Little Blue Books. On July 23, forty children's books were listed, and on October 22, 1925, twenty-six more children's books were listed.

Mrs. Edna G. Coffin attended the Iowa Library Association regional meeting in Sioux City in October of 1925, and later gave her report to the library trustees at the home of Mrs. R.N. McCombs.⁴⁴

The library trustees lost one of their co-workers in October of 1926, when Mrs. R.N. McCombs passed away. She was the first person to be selected for the library board, and remained on the board until her death. In an obituary which appeared in the Laurens Sun on October 7, 1926, the following was said about her in regard to her correspondence with Andrew Carnegie.

Had it not been for the initiative and resourcefulness of Mrs. McCombs we may have been without it. To her must be given full and first praise that that Laurens was singled out by that great philanthropist to be the smallest town in Iowa that has a Carnegie library. Her name with that of Carnegie will be held in perpetuity by this benefaction.

Two days later, when the board held a meeting, Mrs. Frances Hakes and Mrs. Burt Forbes were appointed to the board and Mrs. Sara Allen was appointed to fill Mrs. R.N. McCombs' place, according to the minutes. New officers were noted in those same minutes.

Mrs. Burt Forbes began to write reviews about new books in the Laurens Public Library in the Laurens Sun on March 31, 1927.

The Laurens City Council placed a restriction on the budget for the 1927-1928 fiscal year. The council agreed to a budget of \$1,200 if \$500 of the money in the treasury at that time were spent for new books, and the board agreed to do so.⁴⁵ Two other decisions were also reached at that meeting. The board would send an application to the Iowa State Library

for the library to be cataloged by the Iowa State Library, and the fee for non-resident families was set at one dollar per year.

The library closed for three weeks in May and June of 1927 while the library collection was being cataloged as revealed in an article in the Laurens Sun on June 16, 1927, as follows:

The public library will again be open for the patrons on Friday, June 17. During the past three weeks the library has been completely cataloged and organized so that all reference material is as readily accessible as in any modern library in a large city.

New hours were also announced in the issue of the Laurens Sun of June 16, 1927, which were from three to five Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, from seven to nine on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday evenings, from two to five on Saturday afternoons, and from seven to nine-thirty on Saturday evenings. On December 22, 1927, the Laurens Sun announced that Saturday evening hours would be seven to nine, the only change in schedule.

The salary of the librarian was raised at the meeting of the trustees on August 13, 1927, as indicated in the minutes, to twenty-five dollars per month. New officers were also elected at that meeting.

An attempt to obtain a county library was instigated by sending the circulation statistics of the library to the Pocahontas County Board of Supervisors, as one incentive to have a county library system.⁴⁶

Fire insurance was increased at the meeting of the board on February 11, 1928, with the minutes indicating that the amounts were raised to \$4,500 on the building, and \$5,300 on the contents.

The annual library report in the Laurens Sun of April 12, 1928, indicated that there were 2,290 volumes in the library with 8,460 books circulated from June 17, of 1927 to April

1, 1928. The statistics indicated that the library grew in volumes and circulation from past years, and indicated that forty magazines were regularly received at that time.

The Laurens City Council added two more member to the library board which placed eight women and one man on the board which had been dominated by women since its inception.⁴⁷

The council stressed its desire to stock the library with new books in 1929. The council appropriated thirty-five dollars per month for a period of thirty months, with the funds taken from the Electric Light Fund.

Landscaping of the grounds through the use of shrubs was accomplished in April of 1930, the shrubs purchased from the Woodcock Floral Company of Spencer, Iowa.⁴⁸

The first significant culling of books was accomplished in the fiscal year 1929-30 when the librarian reported that forty-two books were withdrawn, and 346 books added.⁴⁹

The depression affected the library in 1931, when the town found itself short of funds; consequently, the library found itself with little money, and decided to operate the library at the lowest possible expense.⁵⁰ The financial statement of the town of Laurens, published in the Laurens Sun of April 21, 1932, indicated that the library balance was overdrawn \$263.28 up to April 1, 1931. It also indicated that the city levy brought \$927.70 to the treasury after April 1, 1932, and that the balance on hand in the Library Fund was \$88.94.

The International Mind alcove was started in the Laurens Public Library as a result of books donated at intervals by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. It was a collection which began in 1932, with the gift books dealing with the daily life, customs, and history of the various foreign nations.⁵¹

It was decided by the trustees, as recorded in the minutes of November 12, 1932, to keep the library open only two days per month. The bank in which the funds were deposited was closed, and this resulted in another lack of funds and was alluded to in two groups of minutes. The minutes for December 10, 1932, indicated that Mrs. Edna G. Coffin proposed to continue for one month without charge, and the minutes for January 14, 1933, revealed that Mrs. Coffin proposed to work for her wages alone, and not charge anything for her janitorial work. The balance on hand when the bank was closed was \$326.62 according to the clerk of the town, but the money was not immediately ready for usage.⁵² Only eighty-one books were purchased during the fiscal year of 1932-33.⁵³

The Laurens Sun of May 25, 1933, stated in a news article that a thief or thieves pried open a window of the Laurens Public Library on the evening of May 20, and took an amount estimated at between three and four dollars. Later checking disclosed that only the money was taken.

More freedom was given to the librarian in 1934, when she was allowed to use her own judgment about renewing magazines.⁵⁴

When the Carnegie Corporation gave the library a reproduction of Andrew Carnegie to commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of his birth, appropriate exercises were held at the library, from information printed in the Laurens Sun on November 25, 1935, as follows:

A brief history of the library was read at the program and Mrs. Frances Hakes, in an address, told about the long service of the present members of the library board.

The present board consists of some who have served many years; Mr. McCombs for 30 years, Mrs. E.H. Southworth for 28 years, Mrs. G.T. Johnson appointed in 1924, Mrs. W.J. Allen since 1926, Mrs. L.B. Hakes appointed the same year, Mrs. Lowell Hakes since 1928, and Miss. Mattie Kreul since 1931.

Mrs. Frances Hakes also remarked about a boast made by the people of Laurens. She stated that at one time also we boasted that we lived in the smallest town in the U.S. having a Carnegie library. This fact was brought out at the recent Century of Progress in Chicago where a picture of this library was shown in the Iowa exhibit.

A bust of Abraham Lincoln was presented to the library in July of 1936, by Mrs. Florence Russell. It was a prized possession of her father, Dr. J.M. Carroll, a pioneer and professional man of Laurens, who desired that the bust be presented to the library.⁵⁵

A list of 94 missing books was published in the Laurens Sun of November 12, 1936, with the following caption: "Will the housewives of this community kindly check their book shelves to see how many of the following list, belonging to the public library, may be found. If returned to the library this month no questions will be asked and no fines charged."

For a period of five years, from 1936 to 1941, routine duties occupied the library board and nothing of any consequence was accomplished except to publish lists of new books in the library and the annual librarian's report.

According to the minutes of the trustees of April 12, 1941, fire insurance was raised again to \$4,500 coverage of the building, with the \$4,500 coverage on the contents remaining the same as before.

In July of 1941, as recorded in the minutes of July 12, a painting and cleaning contract was let to Hovenden and Coal to work in the library.

All library cards for the card catalog were written previous to 1942, but this was changed when the library board purchased a rebuilt typewriter to use in the library.⁵⁶

Mrs. Edna G. Coffin attended almost every Iowa Library Association district meeting in the 1940's, and her helpers sometimes attended with her.⁵⁷ Mrs. Blanche Edmundson helped her sometimes in 1942, and the library board, as reported in the minutes of the meeting in October 10, agreed to pay her thirty cents per hour, for working in the library. The board also directed her, along with Mrs. Edna Coffin, to attend the district meeting at

Spencer, Iowa, on October 16. Mrs. Coffin's salary was raised, according to the minutes of the board on October 14, 1942, to \$27.50 per month, a raise of ten percent.

A coin collection of the then late Mrs. B.L. Allen was given to the library in December of 1942 by Doris Kepler, according to the minutes of the board of December 12, 1942.

The Victory Books Campaign on 1943, which was sponsored by the American Red Cross, the United Services Organization, and the American Library Association, was conducted in Laurens by the library board and the library. An article in the Laurens Sun of June 3, 1943, explained that the books had been shipped to Des Moines for further distribution, and that the books were collected for the use of the men and women of the Armed Forces.

A scrapbook concerned with the patriotic activities of Laurens for 1942 was completed at the public library in June of 1943, and represented over fifty hours of work by Mrs. Blanche Edmundson and Mrs. Danah Mathers.⁵⁸

A definite policy was resolved in 1943 with regard to charging for rent of the library. It was resolved to continue charging for rent if a fire had to be built in the furnace.⁵⁹

National Book Week began to be celebrated in 1943 at the public library, and a list of new books was published with the book week announcement in the Laurens Sun of November 18, 1943.

In an article in the Laurens Sun of September 14, 1944, Mrs. Edna Coffin announced that the public library would begin having a shelf set apart from the rest of the collection for memorial books. She encouraged people to give books as memorials for a bereaved family, stated that a memorial book plate would be placed in each book, and told how books should be chosen for memorials.