

History of the Seymour Public Library

The roots of the Seymour Public Library originated when a small group of civic-minded ladies met on March 29, 1929, and organized a “study club for cultural purposes.” This club would be named the Sorosis Club. The membership was limited to twelve, but very soon was increased to fifteen.

The following January (1930) the club began planning for a library, and at their meeting on April 4, 1930, a small private library was started with each member contributing one or more books to be circulated among the members.

The twelve charter members of the club were Ethel Beers, Birdie Kindrick, Yvonne McMahan, Doris McMahan, Hattie McMahan, Myles Rhodes, Forrest Rhodes, Ruby Rodocker, Opal Schmidtke, Stella Trimble, Ida Williams and Emily Williams. When the membership was increased to fifteen, the names of Effie Carrick, Astrid Runge and Valley Tate were added.

In June of that year (1930) the club saw the need for a public library in Seymour and decided to make their small private library available to the public. This was the beginning of the “Seymour Community Library,” the name they chose for the new library.

A location was needed and Mr. Frank Davis, editor of the town’s newspaper “The Seymour Citizen” located at that time on the east side of the square, generously offered the use of some shelves in their office. The offer was gratefully accepted, and the library was successful from the beginning.

They issued a general call to the public for donated books and later made a house-to-house canvas for additional books. In October (1930) they had 190 volumes with 59 borrowers, and more were being contributed all the time. The club members took turns keeping the library open on Saturday afternoons of each week.

The library continued to grow until the shelves were overflowing. A move was necessary, and exact records are not available as to the date and location of the move. “Old timers” remember it being moved a few doors south near the Presbyterian Church.

The library operated with volunteer help from the Sorosis Club members until September of 1936, when the library committee reported it might be possible to raise funds for a paid librarian.

On November 6, 1936, club minutes report a motion was approved to ask Miss Addie Clark to serve as librarian, and a committee was appointed to assist in getting the library repaired and re-opened. Club funds were to be used for repair and the librarian’s salary.

A news item in the Seymour Citizen, reporting a Sorosis Club meeting on February 19, 1937, reads in part “The Library Committee reported that \$8.00 had been spent for repairs to put it (the library) in good shape, and acknowledges with thanks the offering the City Council gave for upkeep, as well as the individual offerings from members of the Sorosis Club. Miss Addie

Clark is the librarian, and it is open each Saturday afternoon for the benefit of the Seymour Community.”

The library expenses from December 1936, to April 1937 were reported to the club as follows: supplies - \$6.75, Librarian’s salary: November-December - \$2.00, January - \$2.50, February - \$2.00, March - \$1.50.

The Sorosis Club continued to be the sole support for the library, which they accomplished with Rook and Bridge card parties, bake sales, individual contributions and other fund-raising activities.

Another move was made about 1940-41 to the upstairs of the brick building on the east side of the northwest corner of the square. The librarian at this time was Miss Lora James, who was probably paid a very small salary. The upstairs location was a handicap for both the librarian and library patrons, so in 1946 the Sorosis Club decided to try to raise funds to purchase an old rock building just off the northwest corner of the square known as the “Rock Castle.” The building was badly in need of repair and the owner agreed to sell for \$2000. It was estimated by the library committee that an additional \$2000 to \$2500 would be needed for remodeling.

The library now had a total of 14,804 volumes. Turnover in 1946 was 19.66 volumes per capita, one of the best in the state of Missouri.

In late 1946, a committee from the Sorosis Club met with the City Council to seek financial help from the city to support and upgrade the library, also for help in purchasing the old rock building. Mayor E.F. Gorman and the Council decided a small tax levy should be presented to the townspeople for a vote. This was done and approved. This same small tax levy still supports the library at the present time.

At the same time, a city library board consisting of nine members was appointed by Mayor Gorman and approved by the Council. Members were to be persons interested in the library and were to serve a term of three years. Each year three new members would be appointed by the mayor to fill the terms expiring. The board of directors was to supervise and regulate all activities of the library, such as providing a building, buying books, hiring librarians, and making a yearly report to the City Council on all money used from the library fund.

Members of that first library board were: Effie Carrick, Lena Riggle, Florence Pyatt, Yvonne McMahan, Hattie McMahan, Rev. W.A. Wilson, Frank Hart, Raymond Carrick, and Bryan Berti. All the ladies on the board were members of the Sorosis Club.

In February of 1947, the library board met with the City Council to discuss purchasing the old Rock Castle as a combination public library and city hall. The matter was investigated, the City Council approved, and a fund-raising drive was started by the library board and the Sorosis Club.

One of the largest contributions came from Mrs. Ada Trimble when she presented the library with a new set of bookshelves, a set of Encyclopaedia Britannica, plus a donation of \$500

to the fund-raising drive. Contributions were generous, ranging from this \$500 down to \$0.10 from an anonymous donor.

The fund-raising drive was successful, the building was purchased, and in early 1948, a crew of men was put to work on remodeling, repairing, and re-roofing the run-down old structure. The crew of works consisted of Roy Wiggington, Lawrence Hume and Willie Peters. The work was supervised by Raymond Carrick, a member of the library board who volunteered his services. The inside was remodeled for use as a library and city offices.

Over the years the library continued to grow and needed more space, as did the city offices. The problem was solved in 1962, when the present city hall was constructed, and the library was able to have use of the whole building.

In 1993, a Seymour Alumni member, Mr. Blaine Childress, who had grown up in this community, attending elementary and high school here, very generously offered a donation of \$300,000 to construct a new library building, if it could be matched by another \$300,000 from the community. Ground was broken in October 1997 and the new building was completed and open for business in August, 1998.

Many people throughout the years have volunteered many hours of service to the library. Especially in the early years of getting the library established, much credit must be given to Effie Carrick and Yvonne McMahan, among many others. Raymond Carrick and others donated many hours of labor. Many board members have contributed from their own resources to furnish the library. Claddie Nichols provided the children's reading table, and Verbena Swerengin paid the last payment on the carpet. Blinds and curtains were also given by these ladies. Were it not for these dedicated people knowing how much a library can mean to a town, we would not have our library as it is today, and what we hope to have in the future.

Following is a list of librarians beginning in 1936. Dates and years of service were not available.

Addie Clark
Lora James
Chloe Kennemer
Joan Yeakey
Bertie Morris
Mae Whitted
Kate Barnes
Delores Matney
Sue Crandall
Maxine Ledgerwood
Bonnie Harrison
Delores Turner
Teri Myers
Joyce Simmons