

History of the Council Grove Public Library

The first Morris County library was suggested by Miss Mamie Miller in 1876, and the first meeting of the proposed Library Society was held at the home of John Maloy. Mr. Maloy presided at the first meeting and Miss Miller, then twelve years old, was elected secretary. Each person in attendance, donated a book for the small library which was established in the home of W. A. McCollum, first minister of the Congregational Church. The Library came into the possession of the Ancient Order of United Workmen lodge in 1881 where it remained until it was destroyed by a fire in 1886. A Library Association was formed by several women, one of whom was Mary Rebecca Miller, wife of future Congressman James Monroe Miller, who called for a meeting in 1897, and a stock company was formed for a library.

Over a dinner, Mrs. Miller informed Andrew Carnegie about the history of Council Grove and its unique place in Kansas history as a point along the Santa Fe Trail. She told Carnegie of the fire that destroyed half the town, including the library, and Carnegie inquired if the town had started another library. Mrs. Miller explained that the library had started again, but was currently lacking a building. The Congressman's nephew, William A. Miller, later explained in a letter to A. H. Strieby, "He [Carnegie] immediately turned in his chair and beckoned to his secretary who sat at another table. He told the secretary to write out an order for a library building for Council Grove." Carnegie Corporation papers state that \$10,000 was offered for a library building on March 27, 1903.

Between 1886 and 1921 Carnegie funds assisted in the construction of 1,681 city and 108 college libraries in the United States. In 1910, Carnegie's personal secretary James Bertram developed specifications and floorplans for the proposed libraries entitling his work Notes on Library Buildings:

"Small libraries should be planned (*sic*) so that one librarian can oversee the entire library from a central position.... The building (*sic*) should be devoted exclusively to: (main floor) house of books and their issue for home use; comfortable accommodations for reading them by adults and children; (basement) lecture room; necessary accommodation for heating plant; also all conveniences for the library patrons and staff. Experience seem to show (*sic*) that the best results for a small general library are obtained by adopting the one-story and basement rectangular type of building (*sic*), with a small vestibule entering into one large room sub-divided as required by means of bookcases.... The rear and side windows may be kept about six feet from the floor, to give (*sic*) continuous wall space for shelving. A rear wing can be added for stack-room (when future need demands it) at a minimum expense, and without seriously interfering with library service (*sic*) during its construction. The site chosen should be such as to admit light (*sic*) on all sides, and be large enough (*sic*) to allow extension, if ever such should become necessary."

The thirty-six Carnegie Libraries built in Kansas after 1910, including Council Grove's, reflect Bertram's precedents.

The Council Grove Guard featured a front page article on April 3, 1914, the author of which is unknown, titled "The Library Proposition."

It was then that voters went to the polls to vote on two library propositions; the first, to decide whether the city should take over the old library and support it; the second, whether they wished the commissioners to petition Andrew Carnegie for a public library building. At the bottom of page 8 of the Council Grove Republican for April 3, 1914 there was the following message in caps and in two different columns: "VOTE FOR THE LIBRARY PROPOSITION

AND KEEP A LIBRARY IN YOUR TOWN". The vote passed on both measures, and on July 14, 1914, the board formally applied to the Carnegie Corporation, and the offer of \$10,000.00 was renewed in October of that year.

It was at the city election of April 7, 1914 that the Library Proposition passed 466 to 230, with a tie vote in the First Ward. On the April 30, 1914, the first Library Board was organized to carry out this mandate. It was composed of Mayor James Sharp, Mrs. A. J. Pullins, Mrs. A. J. Kenwell, Mrs. M.E. Harris, Mrs. J. M. Miller, Mr. W. L. Young, Mr. C. M. Loy, Mr. M. F. Amrine and Supt. E. W. Wells.

In late April or early May of 1914, the Mayor, Mr. James Sharpe, appointed nine directors who made up the first Library Board. The following is an excerpt from the newspaper article on May 1, 1914:

"The First Ward appointments are Judge M. B. Nicholson, Mrs. M. E. Harris and Will Young. Second Ward Mrs. A. J. Pullins, Mrs. J. M. Miller, Supt. E. W. Wells and Mayor Sharpe, the latter being by law as Mayor a member of the board. The Third Ward directors are Mrs. A. J. Kenwell and M. F. Amrine. This week Judge Nicholson resigned and C. M. Loy was appointed in his place."

In August of 1916, it was announced construction on the new library would begin immediately. Contractor Joe Axe was given the general contract, and S. L. Hinton was hired for the plumbing and heating work. The planning committee included Mayor W. F. Shamleffer, Mrs. J. M. Miller, Mrs. A. J. Kenwell, Mrs. A. J. Pullins, Mrs. C. H. White, Mrs. A. R. Kinkle, J. J. Rhodes, and Supt. E. W. Wells.

The excavation began September 4, 1916 and the cornerstone was laid on December 8, 1916 at 3:00 pm. Several historical documents were to be placed in the stone for future use, should the building be razed. These included the history of the Council Grove Townsite Company. History of the library organizations of the city, history of the Santa Fe Trail, copies of the Council Grove Daily Guard and The Council Grove Republican for 7 & 8 December 1916, a list of the postmasters since the establishment of the town's post office, and other papers of interest.

The Weekly Guard published the following article on December 15, 1916:

"Last Friday afternoon the corner stone of the Carnegie Library for Council Grove and Morris county was laid with appropriate ceremonies. The Council Grove Concert Band furnished the music for the afternoon. It was assisted at different times by the crowd singing "Star Spangled Banner," "America," and "Suwanee River." Mayor W. F. Shamleffer read his declaration of installation and deposited the documents in the little tin box which will hold the secrets of the foundation of the library in Council Grove for many years."

The Council Grove Carnegie Library is built on Block 19 occupying lots 1, 2, and 3.

The Board hired Kate Behring on a six-month contract at \$35.00 per month starting April 15, 1916 as a librarian to catalog books and ready the library for opening. \$35.00 a month in 1916 would be the same as \$809.14 in 2018. Based on a 40 hour work week, that would be equal to \$6.74 an hour before taxes are taken out. (CPI Inflation Calculator officialdata.org.)

Finally, on the evening of September 6, 1918, at 8:00 pm there was an informal opening of the new library in the Carnegie building. The Council Grove Public Library remained there for 84 years, until the expanded collection and new ADA regulations forced the staff to find a larger location. "Carnegie Library Opens: The informal opening of the new Carnegie Library was held

Friday night. A large number of people attended the new building and inspected the latest advancement of Council Grove.” (The Weekly Guard - September 13, 1918)

Sometime in 1919, Winifred Nicholson took over as Director of the Library. She was succeeded in 1930 by Kate Behring who returned to the Library until 1936, when Myrtle Loomis assumed the post until 1957. During 1957, the Library saw two more directors: Genevieve Allen, who left within the same year; and Melba Clary, who stayed with the Library until 1960. The Carnegie Library then saw Gladys Bolton from 1960-1964; Frances Darrington in 1965; Mary McAtee from 1965-1966; Virginia Smith during 1967-1968; and Sharon Stone from 1968-1988.

In November of 1984, a group of ladies met and decided to draw up a set of By-Laws for a Friends of the Library group. Within their first year, they gathered sixty-one members by providing multiple membership options. Memberships were available at the book sale, the library, and from any members. Membership dues were: Life - \$50; Contributing Member - \$6 to \$48; Family - \$5; and Individual - \$3. Today, in 2018, the Friends Memberships are the following: Individual/Family - \$10.00; Contributing Member – \$20.00; and Life - \$100.00. They currently have one book sale a year, sponsor the Summer Reading Program, and host the TALK Programs every fall.

The Council Grove Carnegie Library was listed in the National and State Registers of Historic Places on June 25, 1987. The only modification at the time of the application was “the steel and glass paned canopy which projected above the door was replaced in 1978 with a three-sided plastic shelter” (United State Department of the Interior National Register for Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form). The nomination for Council Grove’s Carnegie to be added to the National Register for Historic Places was written and filed by Martha Gray Hagedorn, Architectural Historian for the Kansas Historical Society.

It was during 1988, that Sharon Stone stepped down as Director to move to her husband’s new military posting, and Anne Teghtmeyer became the new Director. It was during her time as director that new and big changes began to occur for the small Carnegie Library.

On January 22, 2002, Gail Daugherty, the President of the Board of Trustees, attended a City Council meeting to address some of the concerns regarding the Carnegie building. In the meeting she stated that the Board had received several complaints about the Library not being handicap accessible and that injuries had occurred while people were climbing the stairs into the Library and climbing the stairs between floors. Since the city of Council Grove owned the building, Daugherty requested that Council members come to meet with the board and staff and tour the building to see the concerning areas first-hand. It was at this time that Wayne Criser said that he would like to see an elevator added to the Library, but Jan White mentioned that any changes would have to be approved by the Kansas Historical Society, since the Carnegie was listed as a historical site, and meet ADA requirements, which would make improvements very expensive.

A month later on February 5, 2002, Gail Daugherty appeared before the City Council again and stated that the former Russell Stover Customer Service Center was available, met ADA requirements, was set up with central heating and air-conditioning, had a basement, and a large parking area for patrons. Jan White announced that she had spoken with the owner of the building and the original asking price of \$250,000 would be lowered to \$125,000 for the city to purchase the building as a library. The city voted to purchase the building, and the Library moved west to its current location on Main Street.

Seven years after the move, Anne Teghtmeyer retired from the Director position and Lee Dobratz assumed the job. It was during 2011 that the Library underwent its first round of

renovations at the new building. The Friends of the Library had a small 12' x 8' addition added onto the Library to house books and donations for their annual book sales. This small room is still in use today and is usually filled with hundreds of books ready for the next round of sales. Exterior insulations with Drivit compound and large front windows were also added in 2011. The total cost of the renovations was \$34,800 with \$21,000 supplied by a federal grant. Lee Dobratz remained with the Library until 2014 and was succeeded by Shannon Reid-Wheat who oversaw the next big change for the Library.

The Council Grove Public Library was closed from Thursday, January 14, 2015 -- Monday, February 2, 2015 for renovations. During these renovations, the Library staff painted the walls, installed new carpet, new linoleum in the bathrooms, several pieces of new furniture, wall art from Alexander Artworks, enlarged the Children's and YA areas for young readers, purchased a new countertop for the circulation desk, new chairs for the computer tables, and changed the layout. The Library had a formal ribbon-cutting on February 16, 2015 at 5:30 pm which was attended by several people including the staff and the Library Board of Trustees. A year later, in September of 2016, the Story Time and Meeting Room was repainted to make it brighter and more appealing to the Story Time families. A few months later, the Library selected our logo by having a contest among the Council Grove High School art students. They submitted five designs, which our patrons voted on, and Elizabeth Mayer's design was selected to represent the Library.

Another upgrade came in March 2017 when the library, with the help of the Friends, purchased new furniture for our back sitting area. The brown and green chairs and couches and round table give the area a more homey, but modern look. Our staff frequently sees youth and adults enjoying the sitting area with friends or with a book. Since then, the staff of the Council Grove Public Library has striven to make small changes and improvements to make the Library more user friendly and a fun atmosphere for all who utilize it.

While our library has not returned to the Carnegie building for almost twenty years, we will never forget its place in our history. Our simple, yet beautiful Carnegie promoted over forty years of Summer Reading Programs, numerous Story Time sessions, housed thousands of books, and encouraged hundreds of patrons to read. We do not know how long our library will call this building home, but the Council Grove Public Library will continue to provide our community with a haven that advocates reading.

Andrew Carnegie's date of birth: November 25, 1835

- 100 years celebration on September 17, 2018 from 5:00-8:00 pm. Several kids and adults attended. Board members: Cathy Eads, Jan Dungan, Jason Booker, Mary Ann Wendel. Staff: Shannon Reid-Wheat, Michelle Waymire, Aimee Roberts, and Abbie Schroeder. Speakers: Shannon Reid-Wheat, Sharon Beyer, Michelle Gibson (nee Waymire), and Ralph Braun for a few minutes about being library card number 97 and checking out his first book in 1941 at the Carnegie Library.
- Summer of 2019: Two of the chairs in the front sitting area were re-upholstered by Barb Bowman of Bowman Interiors.