

Marengo Public Library



Past to Present



Marengo Public Library



The Marengo Republican of January 1890 carries a report that “the Epworth League of the Methodist Church is sponsoring a free reading room and library for all citizens. They are renting the upstairs of Henry Gode’s store. Donations are being accepted; several generous donations of \$25 have been received.” Clearly a need was felt for a public library which prompted M.A. Raney to contact Andrew Carnegie.

M.A. Raney, editor of the *Marengo Republican*, met Andrew Carnegie in Washington, D.C. in 1903. Mr. Carnegie was induced to offer the city of Marengo \$10,000 for the purpose of erecting a free public library, providing the city would furnish one-tenth of this amount each year to maintain the library.

The offer was received in a letter dated March 27, 1903. On May 4, 1903, an election was held by the city to determine whether the offer should be accepted and the tax provided for by law be voted upon. The proposition was carried by an overwhelming majority. The vote was 549 for and 71 against. Women were allowed to vote in this election on the library question, although women could not vote nationally until almost 20 years later. The women voted for the library, 273 to 8 and men favored the idea 266 to 63.

Early in June 1903 the mayor, Arthur Vette, appointed the nine trustees: Mrs. M.W. Stover, Mrs. A.M. Henderson, Mrs. Frank Cook, M.A. Raney, Henry Gode, Dr. W.C. Schultz, J.J. Glenn, C.H. Carson and J.B. Murphy. On June 15, 1903, the mayor called the members of the board to meet at city hall for an organizational meeting. M.A. Raney was elected president, Henry Gode as vice president and C.H. Carson as secretary. Bylaws were adopted, lots drawn for different terms of office and various committees were appointed. On December 7, 1903, the board accepted a proposition whereby the corner lot on Marengo Avenue and Hilton Street, known as the Mrs. Mary Nelson property, was selected as a site for the library building. A few weeks later, a deed was executed to the city for the property for the sum of \$1,200.

On July 6, 1904, the contract for the building was awarded to Courtney and Bolt of Perry for \$9,000. Other items not in the general contract, and the architect's fee brought the total cost of the building and furnishings to \$10,683.39. The cornerstone for the library was laid Sept.30, 1904. It was expected that the building would be ready for dedication and use by January 1905.

The Library was not dedicated until Aug. 4, 1905. Dedication services were held in the Presbyterian Church. On the program were talks by the secretary of state library commissions. Alice S. Taylor and the state librarian, Johnson Brigham. Newspaper editor Raney noted, **“Marengo is the smallest town in the country to receive an offer of \$10,000 for a library from Andrew Carnegie.”**

In 1905 the library board spent \$1,226 for books and \$42 for periodicals. They had 1,463 books on the shelves and a total circulation of 6,668 books. There were 637 borrowers. The librarian's salary was \$212.50 for the first year.

At the end of the fiscal year on June 30, 2008, the library board spent \$11,765 on books and \$1,300 on periodicals. The library has a total of 20,436 books on its shelves with a total circulation of 24,799. There are 2,520 registered borrowers. The librarian's salary is \$37,400.

On July 14, 1956, almost a year late due to remodeling problems, a 50th anniversary celebration was held. Plans for remodeling had begun in 1955. The board had considered what it would cost the city of Marengo to replace the Carnegie Library with a comparable new building, and decided to begin remodeling with the front entrance, as the front steps were hazardous.

Special funds were used to begin the entrance in April 1961. The upper and lower halls had to be included also. New stairs and railings, light fixtures, wall coverings, paint and vertical blinds inside, together with a new door and window and the new stone approach outside at ground level were included. This modernized the building and invited patrons to come in. The total cost of the project was \$5,502.86.

In September 1963 there was enough money in the special fund to start the renovation of the main library, including new wiring through the building and new fixtures in the main room, the meeting room and the rest rooms in the basement. The ceiling was lowered and covered with acoustical tile. The old windows were replaced with Pella windows, including storms and screens. New shelving was added. The old checkout desk was turned around and placed in front of the office. All shelving was completely refinished.

Painting, attractive window shades and carpeting concluded the project. Refurbishing small pieces of equipment, picture frames and statues became necessary. In the basement, an electric water heater, new fixtures in the two rest rooms, new wall coverings, paint, curtains and accessories were improvements. All improvements were completed in September 1965 at a total cost of \$15,038.80.

During the time of remodeling, the house and lot next door were available for only \$300 more than the cost of the original lot 60 years earlier. The board decided to purchase it before any improvements made it too costly to buy at a later date when the library might need it.

The Marengo Public Library Board of Trustees had a needs assessment done in the late 1990s, in the hope of being able to provide a more adequate handicapped-accessible building. It was decided to work with the current Carnegie building because of its excellent location and historical value. After speaking with several architects and visiting their finished projects, they chose to work with OPN Architects. Once there was professional assurance the building was still sound, drawings were made, discussed and eventually approved.

The Marengo City Council officially recognized the formation of the Friends of the Library on February 14, 2000. The Friends were made up of a group of volunteers from the community who were interested in seeing the library improved. They worked with the community through fund-raisers and other activities to promote the library. They organized by writing bylaws and a mission statement in order to become a formal group. They needed recognition in order to take the next step in their plan to eventually add on to and renovate the existing library. The long-term goal of the group was to remodel the library to make it handicapped accessible. Officers elected at the March 21, 2000, meeting were Joanne Slockett, president; Irene Schindler, vice president; Candi Schmieder, secretary, and Bonnie J. Lindenmayer, treasurer.

In August 2000, in response to a need for more space, more functions and full handicapped accessibility, the library board initiated a project that would update and quadruple the size of the library to 12,570 square feet at a projected cost of \$2.4 million. Bradd Brown of OPN Architects Inc. in Cedar Rapids explained the goal was to create a state-of-the-art, easy-to-use facility, while retaining the design elements, character and look of the original building. An open house was held Sunday, Aug. 20, 2000, at Marengo's American Legion Hall, to unveil a scale model of the proposed expansion and renovation to the community. Floor plans with elevation drawings were also displayed.

Needed funds were raised in five years from various sources in both large and small amounts. A bequest of \$100,000 from the Dorothy McCune estate was the initial gift. Pledges and gifts from individuals who live or had lived in the area were received. The City of Marengo and the Iowa County Supervisors pledged funds. Local and nearby businesses made pledges and gifts. The Friends were able to secure a Vision Iowa Grant of \$400,000, after much preparatory work. They also received a large grant from the Carver Foundation. A bond issue for \$800,000 was approved by local voters. Many kinds of fund-raisers were held to raise money for the project, and also for the expenses involved in raising funds.

On March 25, 2006, a ground-breaking ceremony for the library renovation/expansion project was held. About 100 guests attend the historic event. The ceremony marked the beginning of the work for the \$2.4 million project. Library Friends had worked on fund-raising and planning for six years. The expansion/renovation included making the library handicapped accessible, increasing space, adding and updating technology, adding a community meeting room, expanding the children's area and restoring the original fireplace and stained glass dome.

During the construction, the Marengo Public Library was housed in the former Masonic Temple building across from the Iowa County Courthouse. The building space was provided by Lance Olson, who owned the building.

After over a year in the Masonic Temple, the move to the much anticipated newly renovated facility began. In late April 2007 the Fairview Zippers 4-H Club, Friends of the Library, Library Board and Staff members began the move. On April 27, 2007, students from the Iowa Valley Elementary School helped move children's books the two blocks from the temporary building to the renovated library. The morning preschool through third-graders formed an assembly line down Hilton Street and passed 200 bags of children's books to each other. The fourth-sixth graders did the same in the afternoon. In all, the elementary students moved over 1,000 books in less than 90 minutes.

The newly renovated facility officially opened May 7, 2007. Sunday June 10, 2007 the Grand Opening Ceremony was held. Over 250 patrons listened to speakers, enjoyed refreshments and toured the newly remodeled library. The event began with remarks from Carl Schumacher, Marengo city administrator. Members of the Iowa Valley High School Choir sang an arrangement of "The Star Spangled Banner" by choir director Neal Schwarting.

Honorary chairs Beth Brown, long time library board president and instigator in forming the Friends of the Library, and Erma Langlas were recognized by Carol Samuelson, secretary of the Friends of the Library. Other speakers included Bradd Brown of OPN Architects, Congressman Leonard Boswell, Representative Dawn Pettengill, Friends President Joanne Slockett, Library Board President Lori Foster and Library Director Peggy Walton.

Since opening the new facility, the library a busy place. Circulation and library visitors continue to increase. Computer use has gone up greatly. The community room is used by various community groups. Programs have included The Red Chamber Music Concert, A Harry Potter Party, Halloween Parties, Holiday Craft Fair, Early-out story and crafts, Family movie nights, Toddler Story times, Summer Reading Programs, knitting classes and more.

The library is currently open 46 hours per week. Hours are Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Marengo Public Library Librarians 1903-2017

Mrs. Frank Cook

Miss Pearl Hamilton

Miss Bess Keil

Miss Anna Patterson

Miss Nellie Burmeister

Miss Hattie Crenshaw

Miss Lillian Freiderichsen

Miss Sarah Van Boskirk Carr

Mrs. M.A. Raney

Miss Esther Rewards

Miss Ruth Beem

Miss Helen Ludwig

Mrs. Bess Keil Olson

Mrs. Margaret Shelley

Miss J. May Hostetter

Miss Edna Shenton

Mrs. Alice Hedges

Mrs. Helen Patterson

Mrs. Bess Keil Olson

Mrs. Alice Hedges

Mrs. Helen Hibbs

Mrs. Charlotte Dugan

Mrs. Julie Naberhaus

Mrs. Peggy Walton

Miss Tina Hootman

Mrs. Jackie Jordan