

History of the Parkersburg & Wood County Public Library

Library service in Parkersburg was started in 1891 through the efforts of Mrs. C. M. Shrewsbury “considered an intellectual by her peers,” and a board of directors (Mrs. R. H. Thomas, Mrs. T. B. Camden, Miss Kate Harris, Miss Bessie Murdoch and W. W. VanWinkle), through door-to-door solicitation of 1,500 residents. Through their efforts they signed up between 75 and 100 members at \$5 each. The original collection numbered 1,000 and was housed in a room over the Moss Bookstore (where Huntington Bank now stands on Market Street). Members of the Board served as librarian, and a borrowing ticket was \$1 for members and \$2 for non-members.

When the bookstore moved, the Library relocated in the City Building. The city provided maintenance and janitorial services as well as \$500 a year for operating expenses. Carrie Shrewsbury was the first paid Librarian, receiving \$2 a week for working a few hours every other day and Saturday evenings.

In 1899, the Parkersburg High School and Public Library was established by the Board of Education of Parkersburg and the Library collection was moved again to Parkersburg High School (located where the Uptowner Inn is at 7th and Green Streets).



Groundbreaking of Carnegie Library

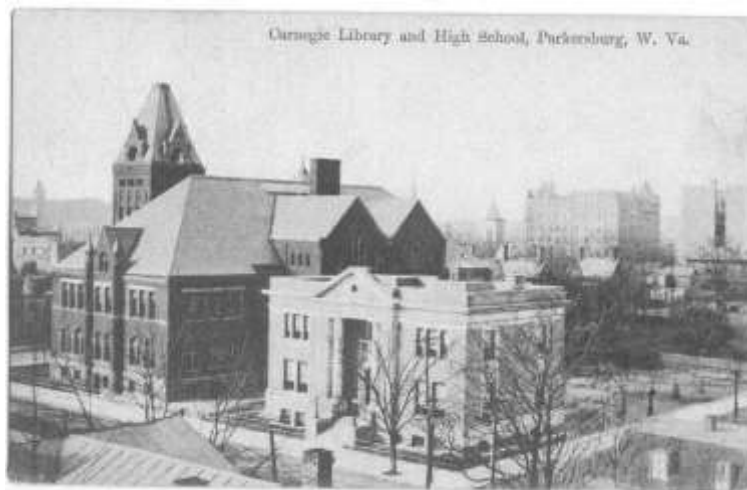
In 1904, both the City of Parkersburg and the Board of Education began negotiations with Andrew Carnegie for funds for a library building. The Board of Education was the recipient of \$34,000 because it had an available site and could guarantee the required ten percent minimum for annual operation. Completed in 1905, the Carnegie Public Library housed the combined collections of the Public and School. At this time, George D. Heaton, Secretary of the Board of Education, acted as the Librarian, with Miss Anna Taylor and Miss Ida M. Peters as assistants. The two ladies were later named joint Librarians when Heaton resigned.

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New Library

In 1917, Parkersburg High School moved (along with the School Library collection) to Dudley Avenue and Miss Peters became Librarian there. Miss Taylor remained as Librarian at Carnegie Public Library until her retirement in 1951. Lois Hiebel had been appointed assistant Librarian in 1928 and became head Librarian in 1951.



Picture of Carnegie Library showing dome.

On July 27th, 1943, the Library had its first disaster when lightning struck the dome and fire spread through the Library. As Miss Taylor reported, "It was a very disastrous fire so far as damage to the building was concerned but through the efforts of the firemen [lead by Chief Archie Cook] not a book was damaged by fire or water." The Library was closed for extensive repairs from July 27th through October 4th.

The Board of Education continued to be the sole support of the Carnegie Library and retained offices in the Library until its move to 13th and Plum Streets in 1958. The annual budget was prepared by the Board of Education and bills were submitted by the Librarian to the Board for payment.

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During the decade of the 1950's, the Junior League of Parkersburg began to scrutinize the public library, collected a wealth of data, and asked Helen Miller, a professional Librarian with the West Virginia Library Commission, to evaluate the data and suggest improvements. This report documented the inadequacies of the Carnegie Library and provided the impetus for action.

A Friends of the Library group was formed in 1957, in an endeavor to obtain tax support from the city and county but this attempt was unsuccessful. After the publication of Miller's report, the Friends reorganized in 1961 to aid in the planning, promotion, support, and development of library service. At this point, another organization, the League of Women Voters, became involved in the library movement, sponsoring a public workshop for discussion of plans to establish a regional library. The Friends of the Library then presented the proposal of a regional library for Wood County to the Wood County Court. Although the proposal was turned down, efforts to improve the library service continued.

In 1967, the Board of Education, the Wood County Court, and the City of Parkersburg entered into an agreement to establish, equip, maintain, and support a public library. In accordance with Chapter 10, Article 1 of the West Virginia Code, a Board of Directors was created to conduct the affairs of the Library. The first Board members appointed were Joel Stern, Don Northrup, Mrs. Randall Murrill, Joseph M. Handlan and Jack Poe.

In 1968, the Library Board of Directors appointed Mrs. Dorothy S. Muse as Director, the first professional Librarian in the history of the Library. At this time there was also a massive weeding and discard project of the book stock along with expansion of services.



By 1972, it became obvious that structural improvements and building expansion would be necessary to provide adequate library service for Wood County. The Board (aided by the Junior League of Parkersburg) undertook the planning and construction of a new facility. Local funding from personal and corporate contributions was matched with federal and state dollars and on February 15, 1976, the new \$2.5 million dollar Parkersburg and Wood County Public Library opened at 3100

Emerson Avenue.

Many "big" events came over the next three decades; the biggest was the passage of a state law in 1987 providing a fixed levy rate on funds from the Board of Education, the County Commission, and the Parkersburg City Council. After several years of heavy reductions, the people of Wood County and Parkersburg got the permanent funding that the Library needed.



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Today, the Library has grown from a single building on 8th and Green Streets to a Main Library (4th largest Public Library in the state), a bookmobile (3rd one for the Library), and two branches in South Parkersburg, and Williamstown. The original collection of 1,000 books has grown to a collection of more than 167,000 books, audiobooks, movies, and other materials along with access to thousands of eBooks and downloadable audiobooks.

The Library has come a long way and continues to look to embracing the future for Parkersburg and Wood County.

Brief Time Line:

1905 - The Carnegie Public Library was completed with a \$34,000 grant award from Andrew Carnegie to the Wood County Board of Education. The original Library was funded by the Board of Education, which also had its offices in the Library until they moved to the current building at 13th and Plum Streets.

1943 - Dome of Library struck by lightning. Fire was contained, but severe damage to the building.

1951 - Director Anna Taylor retires.

1967 - The Library became a separate nonprofit agency with a Board of five representatives appointed by the Board of Education, Parkersburg City Council, and the County Commission. The Board now had full authority over the Library, and funds would be provided by the three appointing entities. The first Board of Directors was Joel Stern, Don Northrup, Mrs. Randall Murrill, Joseph M. Handlan and Jack Poe.

1968 - Director Mrs. Lois Heibel retires.

1970 - 1st Bookmobile donated by the WV Library Commission.

1973 - New South Branch Library Dedicated.

1974 - New Bookmobile. Old one goes to Williamstown to be a branch Library.

1976 - Main Library moved to 3100 Emerson Ave. The new Library was funded through local giving (spearheaded by the Junior League of Parkersburg), Federal and State funds.

1977 - Williamstown Library dedicated.

1984 - Library automation begins - say goodbye to card catalog.

1987 - State law passes making funding of Library by Board of Ed, County Commission and City Council mandatory.

1988 - Director Dorothy Chittum retires.

1993 - Waverly branch dedicated.

1997 - New Bookmobile (3rd one)

1999 - Main Library expands parking, new paint and furniture.

2001 - Arboretum created.

2001 - Genealogy room expanded.

2002 - Director Ann Lorentz retires.

2004 - Join Mountain Library Network consortia for library automation.

2005 - Wireless internet available in Library.

2006 – Downloadable Audiobooks.

2008 – Passed Library revenue on BOE Excess Levy (moved from regular levy) for first time (renewed in 2013 and 2022).

2011 – E-Book Service through WV-READS.

2012 – Passed Excess Levy with County Commission to build and operate South Parkersburg Library in November (renewed 2016 primary, and 2022)



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2016 – Opened New South Parkersburg Library January 30, 2016

2018 – Renovated main floor of Emerson (Main) Library.

2018 – Started painting mural and wood carvings for Young Reader’s Room entrance at Emerson Library.

2019 – Renovated Young Adult Area on lower level of Emerson Library.

2020 – Updated flooring and wall painting on Emerson Library Lower Level.

2021 – Closed Waverly Library with the closing of Waverly School.

List of Library Directors

- Miss Carrie Shrewsbury
- Miss Kate Harris
- Mrs. Sara Wilcox
- Miss Winifred Cox
- George Heaton, 1905
- Miss Ida Peters, 1906-1917
- Miss Anna Taylor, 1906-1951
- Mrs. Lois Hiebel, 1951-1968
- Mrs. Dorothy Chittum, 1968-1988
- Ms. Ann R. Lorentz, 1988-2002
- Mr. Brian E. Raitz, 2002-

Board Members

- Joel Stern - 1967-1972
- Jeanne Murrill - 1967-1969
- Joseph Handlan - 1967-1987
- Don Northrup - 1967-1976
- Jack Poe - 1967-1979
- Mrs. Richard Abels - 1969-1970
- Barbara Johnson - 1970-1975
- Ned Walters – 1971-1972
- Marcia Ogilvie - 1972-1983
- Sue Tewksbury - 1975-1990
- Donald Heyel - 1976-1983
- Douglas Cochran - 1979-1986
- Keith Burdette - 1983-1988
- David Schuchts - 1984-1991
- Timothy Northrup - 1987-1997
- Rena Ellison - 1987-1988
- Daniel Ruley, Jr. - 1988-1998

Board Members continued

- Penelope Bailey - 1990-2005
- Charlotte Corbitt - 1991-2011
- John Blomberg - 1997-2007
- Michael Matheny - 1997-2004
- Ronald Leach - 1998-2008
- Ann Fowler - 2004-2009
- Marc DeCicco - 2005-2010
- Elizabeth Lutz – 2007-2012
- Terry Cauthorn – 2008-2018
- John Halbert – 2009-2015
- Roger Lewis – 2010-2016
- Scott Ramsay – 2011-2021
- Kim Stone – 2012-2017
- Paul E. Miller – 2015-
- Brenda Brum – 2016-2020
- Kaitlyn McKittrick – 2017-2020
- John Jackson – 2018-2023
- Cynthia Lockney – 2020-
- Jennifer Carpenter – 2020-
- June Rhodes – 2021-