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FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY
HANNIBAL MO

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HANNIBAL LIBRARY HISTORY

Compiled by
Byrne E. Bigger

Hannibal has never had much given to it by the state; but its citizenship has been willing to do the things necessary for its progress and welfare. This loyalty and generosity of its citizens has made the city what it is today.

This attitude is well illustrated in the story of its Free Public Library, the first free, tax-supported library in the State of Missouri.

The story of the library in Hannibal begins back in the early days of the city. The city was incorporated February 24, 1845. Some time in 1844 there was organized the Hannibal Library Institute which was incorporated by the legislature March 19, 1845. This is the library which John M. Clemens assisted in organizing, according to Mr. Floyd C. Shoemaker, Secretary of the State Historical Society. It was located on the second floor of the building at the northeast corner of Bird and Main Street. How long it continued we do not know; but it was in existence in 1860, with Edward C. McDonald as president and David S. Eby as secretary.

The next venture with a library came in December 1870 when the Mercantile Library Association of Hannibal was incorporated under the general law. The capital stock was \$20,000.00,

divided into one thousand shares. The formal inauguration took place February 25, 1871. Its first president was C. O. Godfrey; Martha W. Green was the librarian. It was located at 110 North Fourth Street, supported and sustained by fees paid by the members and not for public use. The Mercantile Library continued for some years, but just when it ceased to function is not definitely known. However, there is evidence that it was in existence in August, 1878. What then happened or what became of the books is unknown at this writing.

The third venture in the library field came with the incorporation, on October 7, 1881, of the Hannibal Library Association, which was organized under a decree of the Hannibal Court of Common Pleas. The incorporators were W. C. Foreman, George A. Mahan, A. R. Levering, T. S. Howell, Benton Coontz, J. T. Barber, A. W. Lamb, Jr., F. B. Duback and R. E. Anderson. W. C. Foreman was the president and George A. Mahan, secretary and A. R. Levering, treasurer. This association was based on memberships and was not open to the public in the sense that we now understand it. Just how this library became merged into the present library is not clear from the information at hand; but it is evidently the same organization that was taken over in some manner by Mr. Robert Elliott.

However, in April 1885 the Legislature passed the law providing that any city could vote five mills tax on each dollar

valuation for library purposes. Evidently the library that existed at that time was having financial troubles. Also, somehow Mr. Robert Elliott became the guiding genius of the library that then existed. Mr. Elliott at the time was president of the school board and Mr. H. K. Warren was superintendent of schools in Hannibal. Mr. Elliott, on records we have, must be considered the father of our Free Public Library. Just how he came to be trustee for the library we had we do not know, but evidently was. In addition, he must have been a liberal contributor to it. To Mr. Elliott must be given credit for having originated the idea of a free public library, for on November 7, 1887, over his name, the idea was born. The following is a copy of the circular he published. (An original copy is in possession of the library.)

(Please consider this circular
as not intended for publication.)

Dear Sir:

The Public Library comes to you with its second year's special appeal. Most of us are agreed that Hannibal should possess such an institution. In the absence of support by public taxation private maintenance must be invoked to sustain the burden. Personally, you may not need access to its shelves, or you may not care to do so. Unfortunately for them, there are very many desirous of so doing whose pecuniary circumstances prevent their procuring a membership. For Hannibal and them we now plead. We solicit from you a bonus outright, or we will furnish to you orders for memberships at One Dollar each, in unlimited quantities.

The expense of maintaining the library--aside from the purchase of books--approximates Five Hundred Dollars per year. The main items forming this aggregate are labor, stationery, repairs, rent, fuel and light.

The trustee requests your assistance in this matter with the greatest freedom because he gives his own services and fifty dollars per year and this, because he deems the object a worthy one; moreover, one that Hannibal should sustain, one that reflects some slight credit upon the city now, one that will prove of larger value the longer it lives, one whose influence will be widened in proportion as means are furnished therefor. Kindly favor your own family with memberships, and the outside needy so far as your inclination may prompt. By returning the enclosed postal, properly filled out, you will be furnished the desired number of orders. Should you care to cover the amount by returning your check in the enclosed envelope, you would receive the orders by return of mail and save the trustee the trouble of a personal visitation.

Should the present way of sustaining the project fail to meet your approval, please to consider the propriety of our taking advantage of the state law which now permits cities to tax themselves five (5) mills per annum, on each dollar of assessed valuation for the opening and maintenance of a free public library.

To Missouri's discredit it may be stated that there is not such an institution within her limits; to Hannibal's credit, it should be stated that she has the nearest approach to such in this great state.

Very truly yours,

Robert Elliott, Trustee

Hannibal, Missouri, November 7, 1887

What response he had we do not know, but it must not have been enough to have been encouraging, because the story now shifts to the official records of the city council.

On April 1, 1889 the following appears in the proceedings of the city council:

"The Petition of Robert Elliott and others for a special election to levy a five mill tax for public library purposes was presented. McVeigh moved that former action be recinded and the prayer of petition granted, "carried".

The city election occurred on May 7, 1889. Hon. J. B. Brown was mayor at this time. The new mayor, Hon. C. Albertson, in his inaugural address on June 3, 1889, referred to the fact that the library matter carried by an overwhelming majority and would demand their attention at a future date.

On July 1, 1889, the mayor appointed the following directors whose appointments were approved by the city council:

Stephen Thorne	J. L. RoBards
Rev. M. B. Chapman	Rev. D. T. Denman
F. B. Dubach	T. H. Bacon
H. K. Warren	Robert Elliott
Rev. <u>John</u> Davis	

The final step came with the passage of the following ordinance:

"AN ORDINANCE
FIXING THE RATE OF TAXATION FOR THE YEAR 1889"

Be it ordained by the city council of the City of Hannibal:

Section 1. There is hereby levied for general purposes and the payment of the current expenses of the City of Hannibal for the fiscal year ending May 31, 1890, ... a general tax upon all real estate and personal property within the limits of said city; subject to taxation, of fifty-two (52) cents on the one hundred dollars valuation, of which said sum five cents on the one hundred dollars valuation is set aside and appropriated to the use of the Free Public Library of Hannibal, Missouri.

Section 2.

Section 3.

Section 4.

(Seal)

Approved August 6, 1889
C. Albertson, Mayor

Attest: George C. Moore, City Clerk

(Published in the Journal, August 7, 1889)

H. K. Warren was the first Superintendent of Schools in Hannibal; he resigned that position to take charge of a college in Nebraska. Early in September, 1889, Livingston McCartney arrived in Hannibal to take his place, so we find in the first catalogue of books issued in that year the following officers: Robert Elliott, President; J. L. RoBards, Vice President; L. McCartney, Secretary; Mrs. Frances Bellard, Librarian; and Miss Anna Duffield, Assistant.

Livingston McCartney succeeded Warren on the Library Board in due time.

The library opened on December 11, 1889, on the second floor of the old Park Theatre, now the Masonic Temple, Fifth and Center Streets.

The Board of Directors makes annual reports to the City Council; and in the first report, made June 7, 1890, for the year ending April 30, 1889, it is shown that \$1,199.60 in taxes was collected and revenue from other sources amounted to \$272.66, making the total receipts of \$1,472.26. The expenditures were \$1,444.77.

There were 3,820 books, of which 3,181 are shown to have been given by "Public Library", evidently the old Mercantile Library, or possibly another library that Robert Elliott had organized. The library remained in the Park Opera House Building until it moved to the church building standing on the present property.

The story about the site of the library is an interesting one: On January 3, 1846, the west half of Lot Five, Block Twenty-six of the City of Hannibal was deeded by Thomas S. Miller to James Wily, Jr., John Fry, Thomas Van Swearingier, Daniel Houck, William Stevens, Moses M. Fuqua, John Campbell, John Nelson, David B. Dowing, Trustees, old School Presbyterian Church, known as the Second Presbyterian Church and a church building was erected thereon. On December 9, 1873, the church sold the lot to Hannibal College, founded in 1869. The college gave a deed of trust and this was foreclosed December 10, 1879, and conveyed to William R. Gannaway, Charles T. Clayton, Daniel Dulany and Jesse H. McVeigh, Elder of the Church of Christ, now known as First Christian Church. Fifty years ago the present lot was taken over for the Free Public Library.

By deed dated November 3, 1890, acknowledged on November 10, 1890, before William E. Foreman, Daniel M. Dulany, Sr., Jesse H. McVeigh, Thomas M. Hixson, William E. Euston and F. L. Scholfield, as Elders of "Church of Christ" conveyed this present site to Spencer M. Carter, Cornelius Voorhis, Richard H. Stillwell, John H. RoBards, W. F. Chamberlain, Robert Elliott, W. A. Latimer, Daniel M. Dulany, Sr., George W. Dulany, C. Albertson, John J. Cruikshank, Jr. and Aaron R. Levering.

This deed was filed for record in the office of the recorder of deeds on December 2, 1890.

Judge Thomas H. Bacon was president of the library board for many years and the following is his account of how the library acquired its present location:

The consideration for the deed recorded December 2, 1890, was \$2,500.00. It was estimated that \$1,000.00 was needed for repairs and to adapt the building for library purposes. As the library had no funds, the deed was personally made to some of those who furnished the money. Spencer M. Carter, Daniel M. Dulany, Sr., George W. Dulany, John J. Cruikshank, Jr., Aaron R. Levering and Cyrus Albertson each paid \$291.66. Richard H. Stillwell paid \$150.00 and the Standard Printing Company contributed \$100.00 in cash as an absolute gift. A note for \$1,625.00 was signed by W. A. Latimer, John L. Robards, W. F. Chamberlain, Robert Elliott and Milton Strong. Cornelius Voorhis for five years bore with said makers an equal share in paying interest on this note. The library, having reduced the note to \$1,000.00, on September 29, 1897, borrowed \$1,000.00 from Mt. Olivet Cemetery Association and secured the same by a deed of trust on its interest in the property. On March 28, 1898, Cyrus Albertson conveyed his interest to the library for \$266.67, donating the sum of \$25.00. On May 10, 1898, John L. Robards, W. T. Chamberlain, Cornelius Voorhis, W. S. Latimer and Katherine R. Elliott (who had acquired the interest of her father) conveyed their interests to the library. Richard H. Stillwell joined in the deed but made a gift of his purchase money. All parties forebore any charge of interest.

George W. Dulany, John J. Cruikshank, Aaron R. Levering and the estate of Daniel M. Dulany made a clear present of their payments.

Early in 1901 Mrs. Helen K. Garth and her daughter, Mrs. Anna H. Goodlett donated \$25,000.00 to the erection and furnishing of the present building, now known as The John H. Garth Memorial Building.

While the old church building was being torn down and the present building was being erected, the library was moved to 302 Broadway. The beautiful new building was dedicated by appropriate ceremonies and the library moved February 15, 1902.

Mr. George A. Mahan, for many years a member of the Board of Directors, was always interested in extending to the county such assistance as could be legally done and was the proponent of the plan permitted of the laws of the state. So on December 18, 1916, there was presented to the County Court of Marion County, two petitions according to the records of the County Clerk, "signed by George D. Clayton and more than ninety-nine others in the City of Hannibal" and "signed by J. T. Hansbrough and more than ninety-nine others in the county."

Thereupon, the County Court decided to "appropriate from the County Revenue" money to cover certain circulation in the county. From January 1, 1917, to the present time this policy has been continued; and, in certain county centers and most

of the rural schools of Marion County, books from the library have been loaned---so that the usefulness of the library has been county-wide and much use has been made of this service.

The library, like all similar institutions, has had its financial problems. The taxes, at times, have not been sufficient to do all that the people have asked. And its functions would have been further curtailed were it not for the generosity of the people of Hannibal. In the fifty years of its existence there have been legacies by Daniel M. Dulany, Robert Elliott, Aaron R. Levering, Helen K. Garth, George A. Mahan and Mary E. A. McCooey. Most of these have been trust funds--and only the interest could be used. But this interest has been of great assistance. Gifts have been made of rare and valuable books, papers, pictures and magazines--all of which have been invaluable in furnishing the necessary information required by its patrons.

This is the story of the Free Public Library of Hannibal. It is a story of loyalty, devotion and generosity of many Hannibal citizens.

For fifty years, by reason of this devotion to public duty and public welfare, the Library has brought instruction and happiness to the citizens of our city and surrounding territory.

The present Board of Directors solicits the continued support and goodwill of our citizens and quote with approval and hope for the future, the closing words of the first report fifty

years ago: "We confidently look for the increasing usefulness of this institution."

The present members of the Board and Staff are:

W. H. Blackshaw, President
Rev. C. J. Armstrong, Vice President
E. T. Miller, Secretary
Dr. H. L. Banks, Treasurer
W. C. Averill
Byrne E. Bigger
Ben Ely
Frank T. Hodgdon
Dulany Mahan, Jr.
Miss Helen Birch, Librarian
Miss Dorothy Atkins, Ass't. Librarian
Miss Francis Johnson, Assistant
Miss Bertha Hammond, Assistant
Mr. Tom Kinney, Custodian

Note:

This historical account of the Free Public Library and its predecessor libraries in Hannibal was prepared by Judge Byrne E. Bigger in connection with the Golden Anniversary of the Free Public Library.

This anniversary was celebrated Tuesday, December 3, 1940, with an appropriate program. The principal address was made by Judge Berryman Henwood. Open House was held at the library from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Librarian