

"It has been our privilege to hear many angles of our early history discussed and the telling of quite a few interesting anecdotes having to do with those formative years, and while we would not for one moment wish to pose as a historian, still at the earnest request of so many of our citizens, we respond to their urge to write something about Ramsey and its early days."....

VIA [Village Improvement Association] STARTED THE LIBRARY

"We noted in previous chapters some of the activities of the Village Improvement Association, but purposely omitted reference to the Public Library, which unquestionably, must be considered and chalked up as the outstanding project, of all the things which this body of enthusiastic women planned and carried through successfully in the early life of our borough. In fact, even before the borough came into being, in the year 1907, the VIA had laid the foundation for our Public Library.

At several meetings of the VIA the subject of a library was the one most frequently discussed, and finally developed to the point where a Library Committee was appointed. Anna Adele Vanderbeek Dater, the President, named as members of the committee: Mrs. Naughtright, Mrs. Charles. P. DeYoe and Miss Emily Carpenter. The President and several members already had plans to get the new project started, and once the committee was named, followed with a motion that the Library be established in the Morgan home on Darlington Avenue, Mrs. Robert Morgan serving as the first librarian. The Library was opened with more than 150 books, all contributed by local residents. Listed as donors, in those early years are: Miss Emily Carpenter, Mrs. John Y. Dater, Mrs. Kate Thompson, Mrs. Alex McGaffen, Mrs. Walter Frazer, Mrs. Naughtright, Miss Alice Lithgow, Rev. Luther DeYoe, John L. Edson, Dr. Charles P. DeYoe, Mrs. E. F. Carpenter, Mrs. E. C. Hayes, Mrs. Henry DeBaun, Mrs. W m. Weber, Miss Harriet Austin and E. F. Carpenter.

In 1911 the Association became a member of the New Jersey Circulating Library Commission, and thus was able to have use of a much larger number of books. Already the Library had out-grown the Morgan quarters, and by courtesy of the Board of Education, was able to house the Library in a room in the High School, on North Central Avenue. The Association gave a series of teas to raise funds to furnish this room. It was furnished with a desk, tables and chairs, and shelves were installed at a cost of \$70.

A meeting of the library board and the VIA was called by the President, at her home. This was a public meeting and a number of our townspeople attended. Miss Sarah Askew, of the State Library Commission, and Miss Pratt, both gave interesting talks and by their experience were able to offer suggestions. Dr. C. P. DeYoe, John J. Sullivan and other men joined with the ladies in the free discussion which followed the talks. All agreed that a real library spirit was developed. Other meetings followed and a series of teas helped the treasury greatly.

Progress was noted and in 1914, the work had expanded and members were added to the Library Committee. Mrs. Naughtright was still chairman and she selected Mrs. Dater and Mrs. Pulis to serve with her. Quarters in the school were becoming inadequate and the Library was moved to a room in the Journal building, which the owner had offered rent free. In this room the work was carried on for seven years, and then larger quarters in the same building were secured at a rental of \$6.00 per month, which included heat and light.

Funds were coming in slowly from the subscribers, which then had grown to the number of 389, but the committee felt the need of larger contributions, so that the work could be enlarged. Mrs. Anna Dater and Mrs. J. E. Pulis called at the home of Emerson McMillan, of Darlington, by appointment and sought to interest him in the work and obtain a generous contribution. At that time Mr. McMillan was the owner of the former Geo. Crocker estate, and a man of considerable wealth, but a hard-headed business man. The situation being explained to him, his summing up was that the people of Ramsey had not yet shown by their adequate support that they were really interested in a public library. However, he finally agreed to match every hundred dollars Ramsey people might raise, up to \$1,000. This gift started people giving more generously and within a short time the sum of \$500 was raised, and matched by Mr. McMillan.

About the year 1920 the Borough Council gave the Library some help by passing a resolution to give \$200 for the purchase of books. This sum was kept up for several years and later increased to \$600. In 1929 the Library committee saw the need for larger quarters and a store in the Plaza Building was rented. Mrs. John W. Zisgen attended to moving and fitting up the new quarters. In these well-equipped quarters the library was housed for several years. However, the need of more funds was always the unfinished order of business of nearly every meeting of the Trustees, or Library committee. New members were added to the committee and subscribers and users of the library increased, but even with this help and several donations from citizens, the library was handicapped and could not expand. Former Mayor F. Wm. Gertzen, Dominic Suraci, John Y. Dater, Mrs. Davidson and others were added to the board, and contributed liberally, so that the library functioned. Mrs. Zisgen continued as Librarian and was paid a small salary.

However, when the Borough officials started remodeling the former school building on North Central Avenue for a Municipal headquarters, it was again urged that the Library be taken over by the Borough as a Free Public Library, and appropriations made as provided by law. The question: "Shall a free public library be established within the Borough of Ramsey" was placed on the ballot at the November election, of 1939. It was carried by a vote of 586 to 184. At the December meeting of the Borough Council, Mayor Little, as the law demanded, appointed a board of seven trustees to administer the affairs of the library. In addition to Mayor Little and W. D. Tisdale, Supervising Principal, serving as the law prescribed, the board consisted of F. Wm. Gertzen, Fanny D. B. Pulis, Mrs. George Witt, former Mayor Sullivan and Mrs. J. Lloyd Lister. Lots were drawn by the five appointees, to determine their length of service. Former Mayor Gertzen declined to serve and Dominic Suraci was appointed in his place. On January 4, 1940, former Mayor John J. Sullivan was elected President; Mrs. Pulis, treasurer; Mrs. J. L. Lister, secretary. Mrs. John W. Zisgen was appointed Librarian, which post she held until her death in 1944.

The Ramsey Free Public Library was allotted two large rooms on the first floor of the remodeled Municipal Building. Book stacks were built, desks installed and other necessary furniture provided. The rooms are most cheerful and at one end provided reading facilities. "Unusual," is the word many people use when seeing the library for the first time. Mrs. Mary Lee Winters was appointed Librarian in 1944. Mrs. Winters is deeply interested in her work and her plans for assisting grade school students, in laying out a systematic course of reading have proven popular. The Librarian reports an approximate book stock of 10,000 volumes, a circulation of about 2,400 volumes a month among the 900 subscribers."*



The Ramsey Municipal Building, on North Central Avenue. This remodeled former school, houses all of the borough departments and in addition serves as a community center, furnishing quarters for the library, Red Cross, Northern Bergen Nursing Service, and many organizations of the borough.

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