

CHAPTER III

WORKING FOR A PERMANENT BUILDING

Because the public had now levied a tax for a free public library, the jurisdiction of the existing library and future affairs were in the hands of the City Council. Marvin Loxterkamp, a Library Board member for a number of years, in a personal interview on June 3, 1964, stated that the jurisdiction of the library has been the same since 1904, when the first trustees were appointed. The Library Board of Trustees is appointed by the mayor with the approval of the city council, and is under their jurisdiction. He also stated that often the new members of the board of trustees were, and are, recommended to the mayor by the board of trustees.

As reported in the minutes of the Association of September 22, 1904, the Mayor had appointed the Trustees. The new guardians of the public library were called "Library Trustees, Library Board, Board of Trustees, or Library Board of Trustees," following appointment by the Mayor.

During the transitional period from September to December 1, the Association still controlled the library. In August of 1904, the Association decided to join the Iowa State Historical Society, and in November the publications of this society had begun to be received at the library. It was decided at the November 30, 1904, meeting of the Association, that the State Historical Society publications would be reserved for the use of the Woman's Club, excepting the number containing the redistricting of Iowa. Also appearing in the November 30, minutes, was a note that Mr. White had vacated the building occupied by the library, and that Miss. Stuer agreed to provide free room for the library.

The first officers elected for the Library Trustees were all members of the Association, and almost every person on the Board of Trustees was a member of the Association. A list of the first Library Trustees appears in Appendix A of this paper.

Trustees were in office for two-year, four-year, and six-year terms of service. The first Trustees “drew lots as to the time of service . . . and a committee was appointed to draw up the laws and constitution.”¹¹

It was decided by the Trustees to adopt the by-laws of the Iowa Library Commission, as stated in the minutes of December 9, 1904, with two changes; the meeting date and time were changed, and the section pertaining to non-residents of the city was deleted. At that same meeting it was decided to adopt rules and regulations for borrowers, which are found in Appendix C of this paper, and which appeared in the Pocahontas County Sun in the March 23, 1905, issue.

Committees were slightly changed by the Trustee President and reports were now made in the future by three of them, the Book Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Buildings and Grounds committee.

The first Librarian, named as such, was Mrs. E. Strain when she was elected to the position by the Trustees at their January 9, 1905, meeting. She was to be paid the amount of fifty cents for each serving at the library.¹²

A reasonably permanent home for the library was not found until the Carnegie building was erected, and in January of 1905 the Trustees were again looking for new quarters for the library collection.

The Board of Trustees, it is evident from the minutes, were trying to be helpful to anyone wishing to avail himself of its services. On January 12, 1905, a notice appeared in the Pocahontas County Sun stating that a section of the Teacher’s Library from the Iowa State Traveling Library had arrived, and for the teachers and others to come to the library to borrow the books.

The hours for the library were stated in the February 15, 1905, minutes, being from two to five Saturday afternoons, and seven to ten on Tuesday evenings. The time for Tuesday evenings was changed at the March meeting to seven to nine.

The transfer of Association property was formally accomplished in March, with the books and equipment listed in the Trustee minutes of March 20, 1905. Included in the listing are 171 books, a couch with a cover, a pillow, three cases for books, three lamps, one rocker and eight chairs.

The first indication that an Andrew Carnegie grant was desired came in the March 20, 1905, minutes of the Trustees in which it is recorded that the Chairman, Mr. L.W. Wheeler, requested that the Finance Committee correspond with Andrew Carnegie. Later, according to the April 10, 1905, minutes, a petition was sent, signed by members of the community and by a congressman, to Andrew Carnegie.

An increase in the usage of the local newspaper to publicize information originating from the Librarian or from the Board of Trustees now became apparent beginning in the latter part of March of 1905. The March 23 issue of the Pocahontas County Sun published the rules and regulations passed by the Trustees at their March 9, 1904, meeting. During the month of April, three notices appeared in the Pocahontas County Sun. On April 6, 1905, the Librarian made an appeal for all patrons to return the Traveling Library books as they had to be returned, and informing the patrons that fines under the new administration were two cents a day for over-time, rather than five cents per week as had been the custom. The issue of April 13, 1905, informed the people that more than twenty new books had been received at the library, including such titles as, "Robinson Crusoo, Life or Washington, The Crises, Idylls of the King, and Robert Browning's Poems."¹³ The list of books indicates that some energy that been expended in the selection of these titles. The final announcement of the month appeared in the April 20, 1905, issue which informed library patrons that Mr. Garrison

had to occupy his building on Saturday afternoon, thereby forcing the library to be closed in the afternoon. As in this situation and those which followed affecting the Saturday library hours, the library was open on those Saturday evenings from seven to nine o'clock. The April 20, 1905, issue also indicated that the Trustees tried to be helpful toward the country patrons by allowing them to leave books at the Southworth Harness Shop for the convenience of these borrowers.

A census report of the towns in the county was made by the Pocahontas County Auditor in May, which indicated that the population of Laurens in 1905 was 782.¹⁴

A tax levy of two mills was certified by the Trustees and presented to the Council for levying, according to the June 12, 1905, minutes of the Trustees. At this same meeting, the Chairman of the Board resigned, and her place was taken by Mrs. E.C. Strain. This is an interesting fact because Mrs. E.C. Strain was the Librarian at that time. At the December 11, 1905, meeting of the Trustees, it was reported in the minutes that the Librarian was authorized to use fine money at her own discretion.

According to the report of the Treasurer of Trustees, total expenditures from May 1, 1905, to December 11, 1905, amounted to \$126.64.¹⁵

Since the Pocahontas County Sun was listed as an official county newspaper, all legal proceedings were published in it, including library levies for the incorporated city of Laurens. In the January 11, 1906 issue of that newspaper, a valuation and taxes list indicated that \$241.02 was levied for the library.

Early circulation figures for the library up to 1914 were taken from the Secretary of the Trustees minutes.

At the March 12, 1906, meeting it was indicated that circulation was increasing, and that forty books were circulated on March 10, 1906.

Another move of the library books and equipment was made from the rooms over F.C. Gilchrist's office to Mr. N.H. White's office on June 1, 1905, the advantage of the new location being that it was on the ground floor and easier for patrons to use.¹⁶

Letters were written to both Mrs. Russell Sage of the Russell Sage Foundation and to Andrew Carnegie for the purpose of gaining a public library building, according to the December 10, 1906, Trustee meeting minutes. Copies of the letters to Andrew Carnegie are now located in a vault at the Laurens State Bank, of Laurens, Iowa. A letter to the Trustees early in February from Andrew Carnegie indicated that he would donate \$2,500.00 to the cause of erecting a free public library if two stipulations were fulfilled. Mr. Carnegie stated that the City Council would have to agree, by resolution, to give not less than \$250.00 a year to support the library, and to provide a suitable site.¹⁷

A new Librarian, Irene Mickel, was hired from January 26, 1907, for one year if her work was satisfactory, according to the Trustee minutes of February 11, 1907. She was paid one dollar per week for her work.

The Trustee minutes of the May 13, 1907, meeting indicate that the first magazine subscription gift, a one-year subscription to Collier's Magazine, was donated by Mrs. Reed. A motion was made and carried at that meeting, that books which had been in the presence of a contagious disease were not to be returned to the library, but kept by the borrowing person and paid for.

A Librarian's report each month was given to the Library Board since the Board's origin, giving the number of books borrowed and the amount of fine-money collected. The report given in the minutes of June 10, 1907, reported 134 books borrowed in the month of May.

A letter from Andrew Carnegie's Secretary to City Clerk, E.P. Lowry, dated June 22, asked Mr. Lowry to notify Mr. Carnegie just as soon as a site for the new library building

was selected. A mistake in the city levy for the library in 1906, which was less than \$250.00, had no effect upon the Carnegie offer because the stipulation was only for the Council to “resolve” to levy \$250.00 each year.¹⁸

Mrs. E.C. Strain proposed to the Trustees at the August 12, 1907, meeting to act as Librarian again and occupy the room as a living room, furnish heat and light, and charge one dollar per week for her services. Her proposition was carried, and no mention is again made concerning Irene Mickel.

The council during the past six months had worked to obtain a site for the public library and it was reported in December that “the Council has furnished four lots—one hundred feet—about half way between the N.W. Depot and Christian Church”¹⁹

When it was assured that the public library would be a reality, the Library Trustees worked on two main considerations. The Pocahontas County Sun of March 5, 1908, revealed that the Trustees would like to include a rest room in the new building if the funds were available, and that the Library Trustees were in consultation with Township Trustees to help get support for the library. U.S. Vance, the editor of the Pocahontas County Sun, helped to support the new library when he, in that same issue of the newspaper, appealed to the township citizens to speak to the Township Trustees to help guide them toward a decision. The headlines for that article were “Boast for the Library,” and “Everybody Boost for the Library.”²⁰

The first librarian’s report to the public, dealing with the progress of the library, was made in the March 5, 1908, issue of the Pocahontas County Sun. That first report gave information regarding circulation, the good behavior of the children while in the library, and the need for more new books.

A week later, U.S. Vance again editorialized concerning the library, touching in a sense, reading guidance and book selection:

Good books are the best companions and there should be enough books to supply the present demand and enough variety to increase the demand. In other words, there should be enough books of such character as to increase the number who read.²¹

A resolution reported in the April 13, 1908, Trustee minutes called for a tax levy of three mills to be levied in 1908, with this information gained from paragraph four, section 894, in the Iowa Code Supplement of 1907. That resolution continued from that time for a number of years.

The custom of closing the library for the summer months was continued in 1908 by renting the library room to two sisters named Crandall. They were under supervision of Mrs. E. C. Strain, for which they paid five dollars per month, and paid one half of the rent to Mrs. Strain and one half to the Library Board.²²

A communication from Andrew Carnegie was received by the Library Trustees on May 12, 1908, stating that he had decided to increase his offer by one thousand dollars, making his gift a total of thirty-five hundred dollars.²³ Another letter from Andrew Carnegie was received in June, stating that the money was available at any time, so the Trustees began to consult architects for plans with the work to commence after the plans were adopted and the contract let.²⁴ According to the July 21, 1908, minutes of the trustees, the Building Committee was authorized to close a contract with both the architect and a contractor with the plans approved.

An example of the tight reins held by the Trustees appears in the August 10, 1908, minutes of the Board, when the Librarian was authorized by the Board to destroy books brought back by a family who had diphtheria, and also authorized her to hold back books from that family until the destroyed books were paid for by the family.

It was decided at the February 8, 1908, meeting of the Trustees, as recorded in the minutes, to copy the original papers of the library and to place the original copies by the

corner stone of the new library building. At that same meeting, the Board of Trustees gave the head of the Book Committee twenty-five dollars with which to purchase new books for the library.

One of the early organizations to help the library was the Knights of Pythian Lodge. An announcement appeared in the Pocahontas County Sun on April 15, 1909, informing the citizens that "Rio Grande," a three-act drama, would be performed by the Knights of Pythian Lodge, for the benefit of the public library. It was reported in the May 6, 1909, issue of the same paper, that the Opera House was comfortably filled, indicating that the drama was a success. It was announced at the May 10, 1909, meeting of the Trustees, in the minutes, that the Knights of Pythian had pledged one-hundred dollars for furnishing equipment for the adult room of the new library.

At the July 12, 1909, meeting, officers of the Library Board were re-elected according to the minutes.

It was decided on February 14, 1910, to let the contract for the new building to W.J. Zitterell, General Contractor of Webster City, Iowa, with the designated cost of thirty-five hundred dollars.²⁵ One thousand dollars was paid to the contractor in June according to the minutes of the Trustee meeting of June 4, 1910.

On July 21, 1910, a report of the Library Board of Trustees was published in the Pocahontas County Sun. It contained a general synopsis of the movement to obtain a library building, reasons for building at the chosen location, and an appeal to the women of the area. The following are some quotations from that report:

. . . a laudable and we might say praise-worthy undertaking, something that is not alone for the present generation but for us, our children, and their posterity for the years to come . . .

More joined from time to time, some fell by the wayside, others were gathered to their eternal home, infusing as it were new blood, energy and that determination to succeed which all lovers of any movement should applaud that tends

to the uplifting, and enlightenment of the human family, high or low, rich or poor, for without knowledge we must pass into oblivion as all nations have done who have neglected to spread knowledge to the masses of the human family.

The main object in placing the library in its present location was to make it easy accessible to the school where they can procure data for their various exercises. 2nd., because the site was cheaper more land could be obtained for less money than any other place in town. 3rd., it will be less liable to fire consequently insurance rates much less.

We have asked the Trustees of the township to levy a small insignificant tax to meet the exigency, which they have a legal right to do, but have refused, men plan for dollars, mothers plan for homes, honorable and enlightened children who are to make the future nation defenders, officers and citizens, and we ask you the others living in the country to urgently plead with your husbands to donate what they or you feel they can conveniently spare

According to that same report, there was a deficit of five hundred dollars facing the Board to finish the basement, for grading, and for walks. In the social columns of that same issue of the newspaper was a comment that the library building was a beautiful one, and that the workmen had finished so far as there was money to contract.

At a special meeting held on August 5, 1910, the minutes inform us that there was a balance in the Carnegie Fund of \$2,377.50, with a balance due the Zetterell Company of \$2,400.00. The Council recommended that the Trustees should pay the Zitterell Company and draw \$22.50 from the City Treasury to take care of the deficit. According to the Pocahontas County Sun of August 11, 1910, the building was accepted by the Library Trustees, but it was decided to delay opening the building until the grounds were cleared of debris so that cinders would not be carried into the building on the patron's shoes. The Pocahontas County Sun of September 1, 1910, explained that when it became evident that the funds would not be sufficient to finish the job, an appeal was made to Andrew Carnegie for three hundred dollars more. The money was granted by Carnegie after the Council had increased the Maintenance Fund thirty dollars. More money still was needed, and the only references available to ascertain where the extra funds were obtained, were in a report to the

Carnegie Corporation in 1915, and the Treasurer's report of September 1915. The Carnegie report covered the years from 1907 to 1914, and a note at the bottom indicated that \$293.93, the amount needed to complete construction, was subscribed by the Knights of Pythiam Lodge. This report also indicated that the total cost of the construction was \$4,093.95, with the amount of 3,800.00 contributed by Andrew Carnegie, and \$293.95 contributed by other sources.²⁶

A special meeting of the Trustees took place on September 27, 1910, according to the minutes, and a contract was given to P.R. Mason and Sons of Mason City for a new furnace.

The dedication notice for the Laurens Public Library appeared in the Pocahontas County Sun on October 6, 1910. The dedication ceremonies were held in the Christian Church on October 8, 1910, with the program printed in the Pocahontas County Sun on October 13, 1910. That program is reproduced in Appendix B of this paper.

When commenting about the dedication program, U.S. Vance, the editor and publisher of the Pocahontas County Sun, gave some opinions concerning the selection of books for the library. These tonets are applied at the present day.

But the work is not done yet. That building must be stocked with books. Not that we can say we have so many thousand volumes when most of them may be of doubtful value, but we must have good books, books that will benefit the community. There must be books to which the farmer can go; books for the store keepers; books for the teacher; books for the children; books for the tired father and books for the overworked mother. There must be something more than fiction in this library: Every phase of life must be touched. The people should be instructed how to make use of these books and then the great value of the library will begin to be felt.²⁷

- ¹¹ Minutes of the Laurens Library Board of Trustees, December 1, 1904.
- ¹² Minutes of the Laurens Board of Trustees, January 9, 1905.
- ¹³ Article in the Pocahontas County Sun, April 20, 1905.
- ¹⁴ Census Report of the Pocahontas County Auditor, May 1, 1905.
- ¹⁵ Ledger of the Laurens Library Board of Trustees Treasurer, December 11, 1905.
- ¹⁶ Article in the Pocahontas County Sun, June 7, 1906.
- ¹⁷ Letter from Andrew Carnegie to the Laurens Library Board of Trustees, February 5, 1907.
- ¹⁸ Article in the Pocahontas County Sun, June 27, 1907.
- ¹⁹ Minutes of the Laurens Library Board of Trustees, December 9, 1907.
- ²⁰ Editorial in the Pocahontas County Sun, March 5, 1908.
- ²¹ Editorial in the Pocahontas County Sun, March 12, 1908.
- ²² Minutes of the Laurens Library Board of Trustees, May 11, 1908.
- ²³ Article in the Pocahontas County Sun, May 14, 1908.
- ²⁴ Article in the Pocahontas County Sun, May 25, 1908.
- ²⁵ Minutes of the Laurens Library Board of Trustees, February 14, 1910.
- ²⁶ Financial Report from the Laurens Public Library to the Carnegie corporation, July 15, 1915.
- ²⁷ Editorial in the Pocahontas County Sun, October 13, 1910.