

## CHAPTER IV

## PROGRESS IN THE NEW LOCATION

The new building was quite a change from the rooms formerly used. To begin information concerning the new building the mayor of Laurens in the Pocahontas County Sun of October 13, 1910, published a notice; "the public library steps are not a lofting place or a place to be littered and dirtied and those found there will have no one to blame but themselves if picked up by the marshal."

A notice that the library would be open of Saturday evenings, the librarian to receive the customary salary of fifty cents, appeared in the minutes of the trustees on November 14, 1910.

On June 10, 1911, a contract was let to H.L. Ryon to supply all materials and do all of the work in the completion and finishing of the basement of the library building, "in consideration whereof such board agrees to pay such contractor the sum of \$380.00 at once upon the final completion and acceptance of such work."<sup>28</sup> A certificate of finished work was given to H.L. Ryon after the completion of June 1, 1911, and signed by Mrs. C.S. Allon, Mrs. R.N. McCombs, J.C. Hinn, and H.L. Ryon.<sup>29</sup>

It was quoted previously in this paper that the Woman's Club had the welfare of children in mind. This became even more evident in 1911 when the club began its story hour for children.

An honor was extended in 1911 to public library when it was announced that "Laurens has the distinction of being the smallest town in the United States that Mr. Carnegie has helped with the library."<sup>30</sup>

The association between the Woman's Club and the library board was close, as indicated by items in the newspaper through the past years, such as the following quotation from the Pocahontas County Sun of June 1, 1911: “. . . at the close of the meeting dainty refreshments were served by the ladies of the library board.”

The first insurance on the Laurens Public Library building and its contents was with the German-American Insurance Company of New York, for a period of five years, with coverage on the building being \$3,200 and \$300 on the contents. Cost of the insurance for the five-year period was \$43.75.<sup>31</sup>

Two main items were considered at the meeting of the trustees on February 12, as reported in the minutes. The first item was concerned with deciding to join the Iowa Library Association for a year, a membership which continued uninterrupted until the present day. The other item was postponed until the July meeting, which involved an application for the position of librarian from Mrs. Blanche Bowen. The minutes of the trustees of August 13, 1912, stated that Mrs. Blanche Bowen wanted one hundred dollars per year as librarian, and Mrs. E.C. Strain's application for the job was also read.

It was decided at the meeting of the board on June 11, 1912, as reported in its minutes, to open the library Tuesday afternoons during the summer months.

Election of officers for the trustees on July 9, 1912, as reported in its minutes, resulted in the following office holders: Mrs. E.D. Anderson, Vice-President; Mrs. E.H. Southworth, President; Mrs. C.S. Allen, Secretary; and Mrs. R.N. McCombs was re-elected Treasurer.

The practice of allowing the basement of the library to be rented began in September of 1912, as recorded in the minutes of the board of September 6, 1912. The Board of Education of the Laurens Public School rented the basement for the school year as a room for the instruction of kindergarten children of the school district.

Mrs. E.C. Strain was selected as the librarian until July 1, 1913, by the trustees at their meeting on September 12, 1912, but no other information concerning the position was stated in these minutes.

The county auditor's annual report was published in the Pocahontas County Sun, and in the issue of April 1, 1913, it was indicated that the total disbursements for the fiscal year was \$244.08, and the balance on hand on April 1, 1913, was \$566.01.

On May 13, 1913, the by-laws of the Laurens board of trustees were amended stating the decision that "no books designated 'reference books' shall be taken from the library building."<sup>32</sup>

The three-mill tax levy imposed upon the taxpayers of the city of Laurens was changed by the library trustees to four mills, and was so recommended to the mayor and council.<sup>33</sup>

Mrs. E.C. Strain, as recorded in the minutes of the trustees, was again named librarian for one year and was allowed, for the first time, to hire Mrs. Edna Coffin when it was necessary. Mrs. Strain's salary was fifty cents per meeting, not to exceed three days each week, and she hired Mrs. Edna Coffin with her own wages.

The Laurens Board of Education rented the basement of the library for the second year for one hour each school day, paying twenty-five dollars and furnishing the coal used for heating the entire building.<sup>34</sup>

Library statistical reports were sent to the Iowa Library Commission and the reports from 1914 to 1935 showed that all library board members signed the annual report. In 1935, the reports began to be signed only by the secretary of the board of trustees.<sup>35</sup>

In May of 1914, according to an article in the Pocahontas County Sun on May 14, advice for the selection of books was asked of the patrons.



It was reported on July 14, 1914, in the minutes of the board, that a three and one-half mill tax was approved for the 1914-15 fiscal year. It was also reported that the librarian, Mrs. E.C. Strain, had retired and that Mrs. Edina Coffin was appointed as librarian. Another consideration for that meeting was election of officers. Mrs. E.H. Southworth remained President, Mrs. R. N. McCombs remained Treasurer, and Mrs. Mathers was elected Vice-President, with Mrs. Geo. T. Johnson filling the office of Secretary.

For the third year in succession, the Laurens Board of Education rented the basement. The rent was raised to forty dollars, with the school to pay for its own janitorial work and all fuel for the nine months.<sup>36</sup>

The Pocahontas County Sun, in the issue of November 12, 1914, announced that with the exception of Thanksgiving the library would be open on Thursday evenings until April 1, 1915.

The Women's Club did not enjoy the Status quo for long, and on April 12, 1915, Mrs. R.N. McCombs read a paper before the Woman's Club which was published in the Pocahontas County Sun on April 29, 1915. In her own words, she states an important aim:

We still have other aims whose fulfillment the Woman's Club are anxious to see completed, the great one is the purchase of the ground around the library building for a public park for the benefit not only of our time but for those who are to fill our places years hence.

Dates and hours when the library was to be open were announced in the Pocahontas County Sun of June 10, 1915, and indicated that the library was not to be open on Thursday evenings during the summer, would be open on Tuesday afternoons rather than Tuesday evenings, and would be open both in the afternoon and evening every Saturday.

At the meeting of the trustees on July 13, 1915, the minutes inform that the librarian, Mrs. Edna Coffin, moved that the council be asked for an increase in tax levy to fulfill the

requirements of Andrew Carnegie. As stated in this paper previously, the requirements no longer had any local significance as they had already been satisfied.

From the council proceedings of the first of September, the Laurens members of the council levied a tax of three and one-half mills of the ensuing year and certified it to the Pocahontas County Auditor.

Designation as an Iowa State Historical Society depository highlighted the month of December in 1915, as recorded in an article in the Pocahontas County Sun on December 23, 1915. All of the publications of the society from that date onward were received at the library. This helped enable the library to build an Iowa History section.

A city ordinance in March of 1916 established a park commission, was voted upon at the town election and passed on March 27, 1916. The Woman's Club and the library trustees had obtained the land and wanted to turn it over to a commission empowered to receive it.<sup>37</sup>

It was decided on December 14, 1918, as reported in the minutes of the board, that the basement of the library was to be used by the Laurens Young Girl's Club for meetings free of charge.

Evidence found in the minutes of the trustees on January 11, 1919, seemed to indicate that funds were being conserved for some purpose, as the monetary status of the treasury on December 31, 1918, was \$1,422.58.<sup>38</sup>

That the library trustees were considerate of library property was evident in a passed motion of the trustees as follows:

On account of the Boy Scouts violating their contract with the library board and misusing the library, a motion was made and carried that we ask the Boy Scouts and Master to vacate the building within ten days from date.<sup>39</sup>

As regarded the salary of the librarian, according to the ledger of the treasurer of the board of May 14, 1921, Mrs. Coffin was paid nineteen dollars for care of the library for March, and fourteen dollars for April.

The first of only husband and wife to serve on the library board at one time were appointed in January of 1922, according to the minutes of the board in January and both members were appointed for six-year terms.

The Laurens Sun, in an article on March 23, 1922, made an appeal to people of Laurens and the surrounding area to bring to the library any old pictures of the community that they might have. The collection, according to the article was to be exhibited at the library, and then placed in a permanent collection in the library. When the writer of this paper examined library holdings in June of 1964, these photography and clippings totaling about fifty were found in a cabinet.

That the balance in the Library Fund had grown, was indicated by a balance of \$1,981.87, according to the statistics given in the Laurens Sun on April 1, 1922.

The library trustees were in the habit of sending individual requests to the State Traveling Library, a practice which ended in 1922 when a request was received from Miss. Julia Robinson of the library, asking that all requests for book loans come directly from the public library; consequently, books were sent only to the public library to avoid duplication and to give the library credit for the circulation.<sup>40</sup>

The year of 1922 marked the origin of an organization which helped the library through gifts and work until the present day. "A large number of women met at the library to complete the organization of the Woman's Progressive Club."<sup>41</sup>

The library board decided at its meetings on August 18, 1932, according to the minutes, to open the library in September on Friday evenings, in addition to the other times.



Throughout the year of 1922 and future dates, according to notices in the social section of the Laurens Sun, different organizations, including the Thursday Study Club, the Woman's Progressive Club, used the library for meetings.

In 1923 the trustees, as revealed in the minutes of February 10, 1923, decided to furnish the basement. This was possible at the time because the balance in the Library Fund in 1923, decided to furnish the basement. This was possible at the time because the balance in the library Fund in 1923 was \$2,084.30.<sup>42</sup> In this same year a new furnace was installed in the basement with the contract given to Southworth Hardware Store from sealed bids presented to the library board.<sup>43</sup>

New furniture was added to the library in July of 1923. Two long reading tables, six chairs, and one rocking chair were added, according to an article in the Laurens Sun on July 19, 1923.

A gift in September of 1923 helped the library financially through the efforts of a man who was not a resident of Laurens.

When Harvey Ingham was here and delivered the address at Homecoming he made no charge for his services, but he told the committee to present something to the public library in his name if they felt so disposed. The committee in making their final settlement, turned over \$50.00 to the library board.

It was moved and carried at the meeting of the board on July 5, 1924, as stated in the minutes, to secure an assistant librarian to care for the reading room each week-day afternoon except Sunday. The minutes of September 13, 1924, indicate that the use of an assistant librarian was to be discontinued in October.

The first of a number of exhibits to be displayed at the library was announced by the Literature and Art Department of the Laurens Woman's Progressive Club in the issue of the Laurens Sun of April 2, 1925. According to the article, the exhibit for April 7, 8, and 9 was the Thistle Print Art Exhibit.

The acquisition of new books for six months in 1925 was announced in three issues of the Laurens Sun. The list on March 12 indicated that sixty-five volumes were acquired, fifty-five of them were Little Blue Books. On July 23, forty children's books were listed, and on October 22, 1925, twenty-six more children's books were listed.

Mrs. Edna G. Coffin attended the Iowa Library Association regional meeting in Sioux City in October of 1925, and later gave her report to the library trustees at the home of Mrs. R.N. McCombs.<sup>44</sup>

The library trustees lost one of their co-workers in October of 1926, when Mrs. R.N. McCombs passed away. She was the first person to be selected for the library board, and remained on the board until her death. In an obituary which appeared in the Laurens Sun on October 7, 1926, the following was said about her in regard to her correspondence with Andrew Carnegie.

Had it not been for the initiative and resourcefulness of Mrs. McCombs we may have been without it. To her must be given full and first praise that that Laurens was singled out by that great philanthropist to be the smallest town in Iowa that has a Carnegie library. Her name with that of Carnegie will be held in perpetuity by this benefaction.

Two days later, when the board held a meeting, Mrs. Frances Hakes and Mrs. Burt Forbes were appointed to the board and Mrs. Sara Allen was appointed to fill Mrs. R.N. McCombs' place, according to the minutes. New officers were noted in those same minutes.

Mrs. Burt Forbes began to write reviews about new books in the Laurens Public Library in the Laurens Sun on March 31, 1927.

The Laurens City Council placed a restriction on the budget for the 1927-1928 fiscal year. The council agreed to a budget of \$1,200 if \$500 of the money in the treasury at that time were spent for new books, and the board agreed to do so.<sup>45</sup> Two other decisions were also reached at that meeting. The board would send an application to the Iowa State Library



for the library to be cataloged by the Iowa State Library, and the fee for non-resident families was set at one dollar per year.

The library closed for three weeks in May and June of 1927 while the library collection was being cataloged as revealed in an article in the Laurens Sun on June 16, 1927, as follows:

The public library will again be open for the patrons on Friday, June 17. During the past three weeks the library has been completely cataloged and organized so that all reference material is as readily accessible as in any modern library in a large city.

New hours were also announced in the issue of the Laurens Sun of June 16, 1927, which were from three to five Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, from seven to nine on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday evenings, from two to five on Saturday afternoons, and from seven to nine-thirty on Saturday evenings. On December 22, 1927, the Laurens Sun announced that Saturday evening hours would be seven to nine, the only change in schedule.

The salary of the librarian was raised at the meeting of the trustees on August 13, 1927, as indicated in the minutes, to twenty-five dollars per month. New officers were also elected at that meeting.

An attempt to obtain a county library was instigated by sending the circulation statistics of the library to the Pocahontas County Board of Supervisors, as one incentive to have a county library system.<sup>46</sup>

Fire insurance was increased at the meeting of the board on February 11, 1928, with the minutes indicating that the amounts were raised to \$4,500 on the building, and \$5,300 on the contents.

The annual library report in the Laurens Sun of April 12, 1928, indicated that there were 2,290 volumes in the library with 8,460 books circulated from June 17, of 1927 to April

1, 1928. The statistics indicated that the library grew in volumes and circulation from past years, and indicated that forty magazines were regularly received at that time.

The Laurens City Council added two more member to the library board which placed eight women and one man on the board which had been dominated by women since its inception.<sup>47</sup>

The council stressed its desire to stock the library with new books in 1929. The council appropriated thirty-five dollars per month for a period of thirty months, with the funds taken from the Electric Light Fund.

Landscaping of the grounds through the use of shrubs was accomplished in April of 1930, the shrubs purchased from the Woodcock Floral Company of Spencer, Iowa.<sup>48</sup>

The first significant culling of books was accomplished in the fiscal year 1929-30 when the librarian reported that forty-two books were withdrawn, and 346 books added.<sup>49</sup>

The depression affected the library in 1931, when the town found itself short of funds; consequently, the library found itself with little money, and decided to operate the library at the lowest possible expense.<sup>50</sup> The financial statement of the town of Laurens, published in the Laurens Sun of April 21, 1932, indicated that the library balance was overdrawn \$263.28 up to April 1, 1931. It also indicated that the city levy brought \$927.70 to the treasury after April 1, 1932, and that the balance on hand in the Library Fund was \$88.94.

The International Mind alcove was started in the Laurens Public Library as a result of books donated at intervals by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. It was a collection which began in 1932, with the gift books dealing with the daily life, customs, and history of the various foreign nations.<sup>51</sup>

It was decided by the trustees, as recorded in the minutes of November 12, 1932, to keep the library open only two days per month. The bank in which the funds were deposited was closed, and this resulted in another lack of funds and was alluded to in two groups of minutes. The minutes for December 10, 1932, indicated that Mrs. Edna G. Coffin proposed to continue for one month without charge, and the minutes for January 14, 1933, revealed that Mrs. Coffin proposed to work for her wages alone, and not charge anything for her janitorial work. The balance on hand when the bank was closed was \$326.62 according to the clerk of the town, but the money was not immediately ready for usage.<sup>52</sup> Only eighty-one books were purchased during the fiscal year of 1932-33.<sup>53</sup>

The Laurens Sun of May 25, 1933, stated in a news article that a thief or thieves pried open a window of the Laurens Public Library on the evening of May 20, and took an amount estimated at between three and four dollars. Later checking disclosed that only the money was taken.

More freedom was given to the librarian in 1934, when she was allowed to use her own judgment about renewing magazines.<sup>54</sup>

When the Carnegie Corporation gave the library a reproduction of Andrew Carnegie to commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of his birth, appropriate exercises were held at the library, from information printed in the Laurens Sun on November 25, 1935, as follows:

A brief history of the library was read at the program and Mrs. Frances Hakes, in an address, told about the long service of the present members of the library board.

The present board consists of some who have served many years; Mr. McCombs for 30 years, Mrs. E.H. Southworth for 28 years, Mrs. G.T. Johnson appointed in 1924, Mrs. W.J. Allen since 1926, Mrs. L.B. Hakes appointed the same year, Mrs. Lowell Hakes since 1928, and Miss. Mattie Kreul since 1931.



Mrs. Frances Hakes also remarked about a boast made by the people of Laurens. She stated that at one time also we boasted that we lived in the smallest town in the U.S. having a Carnegie library. This fact was brought out at the recent Century of Progress in Chicago where a picture of this library was shown in the Iowa exhibit.

A bust of Abraham Lincoln was presented to the library in July of 1936, by Mrs. Florence Russell. It was a prized possession of her father, Dr. J.M. Carroll, a pioneer and professional man of Laurens, who desired that the bust be presented to the library.<sup>55</sup>

A list of 94 missing books was published in the Laurens Sun of November 12, 1936, with the following caption: "Will the housewives of this community kindly check their book shelves to see how many of the following list, belonging to the public library, may be found. If returned to the library this month no questions will be asked and no fines charged."

For a period of five years, from 1936 to 1941, routine duties occupied the library board and nothing of any consequence was accomplished except to publish lists of new books in the library and the annual librarian's report.

According to the minutes of the trustees of April 12, 1941, fire insurance was raised again to \$4,500 coverage of the building, with the \$4,500 coverage on the contents remaining the same as before.

In July of 1941, as recorded in the minutes of July 12, a painting and cleaning contract was let to Hovenden and Coal to work in the library.

All library cards for the card catalog were written previous to 1942, but this was changed when the library board purchased a rebuilt typewriter to use in the library.<sup>56</sup>

Mrs. Edna G. Coffin attended almost every Iowa Library Association district meeting in the 1940's, and her helpers sometimes attended with her.<sup>57</sup> Mrs. Blanche Edmundson helped her sometimes in 1942, and the library board, as reported in the minutes of the meeting in October 10, agreed to pay her thirty cents per hour, for working in the library. The board also directed her, along with Mrs. Edna Coffin, to attend the district meeting at

Spencer, Iowa, on October 16. Mrs. Coffin's salary was raised, according to the minutes of the board on October 14, 1942, to \$27.50 per month, a raise of ten percent.

A coin collection of the then late Mrs. B.L. Allen was given to the library in December of 1942 by Doris Kepler, according to the minutes of the board of December 12, 1942.

The Victory Books Campaign on 1943, which was sponsored by the American Red Cross, the United Services Organization, and the American Library Association, was conducted in Laurens by the library board and the library. An article in the Laurens Sun of June 3, 1943, explained that the books had been shipped to Des Moines for further distribution, and that the books were collected for the use of the men and women of the Armed Forces.

A scrapbook concerned with the patriotic activities of Laurens for 1942 was completed at the public library in June of 1943, and represented over fifty hours of work by Mrs. Blanche Edmundson and Mrs. Danah Mathers.<sup>58</sup>

A definite policy was resolved in 1943 with regard to charging for rent of the library. It was resolved to continue charging for rent if a fire had to be built in the furnace.<sup>59</sup>

National Book Week began to be celebrated in 1943 at the public library, and a list of new books was published with the book week announcement in the Laurens Sun of November 18, 1943.

In an article in the Laurens Sun of September 14, 1944, Mrs. Edna Coffin announced that the public library would begin having a shelf set apart from the rest of the collection for memorial books. She encouraged people to give books as memorials for a bereaved family, stated that a memorial book plate would be placed in each book, and told how books should be chosen for memorials.

Officers of the library board were re-elected according to the minutes of January 13, 1945. The minutes also stated terms of services for the nine-member board consisting of Frances Hakes, Elmer Larson, Lyle George, Pearl Taylor, Helen Winne, Agnes Hakes, Sally Allen, Mattie Kreul, and Helen Erickson. Board membership fluxuated at times from four to nine over the years, depending upon resignations, deaths and other reasons.



- <sup>28</sup>Contract between the Laurens Public Library board of Trustees and H.L. Ryon April 10, 1911.
- <sup>29</sup>Certification of Contract Completion, given to H.L. Ryon by the Laurens Library Board of Trustees, June 1, 1911.
- <sup>30</sup>Article in the Sunday Register and Leader Des Moines, Iowa June 28, 1911.
- <sup>31</sup>Minutes of the Laurens Public Library Board of Trustees, July 10, 1911.
- <sup>32</sup>Amendment One of the Constitutional By-laws of the Laurens Public Library Board of Trustees, May 13, 1913.
- <sup>33</sup>Minutes of the Laurens Public Library Board of Trustees, July 8, 1913.
- <sup>34</sup>Minutes of the Laurens Public library Board of Trustees, September 14, 1913.
- <sup>35</sup>Public Library Report sent to the Iowa Library Commission form the Laurens Public Library, 1914-1964.
- <sup>36</sup>Minutes of the Laurens Public Library Board of Trustees, September 8, 1914.
- <sup>37</sup>Article in the Pocahontas County Sun, April 1, 1916.
- <sup>38</sup>Article in the Pocahontas County Sun, April 8, 1920.
- <sup>39</sup>Minutes of the Laurens Public Library Board of Trustees, September 24, 1920.
- <sup>40</sup>Letter form Miss. Julia Robinson to the Laurens Public Library Board of Trustees, May 3, 1922.
- <sup>41</sup>Article in the Laurens Sun, June 29, 1922.
- <sup>42</sup>Article in the Laurens Sun, April 5, 1923.
- <sup>43</sup>Minutes of the Laurens Public Library Board of Trustees, July 14, 1923.
- <sup>44</sup>Personal interview with Mrs. Edna G. Coffin, June 9, 1964, with permission to quote.
- <sup>45</sup>Minutes of the Laurens Public Library Board of Trustees, April 9, 1927.
- <sup>46</sup>Minutes of the Laurens Public Library Board of Trustees, November 12, 1927.
- <sup>47</sup>Article in the Laurens Sun, July 5, 1928.
- <sup>48</sup>Minutes of the Laurens Public Library Board of Trustees, April 12, 1930.
- <sup>49</sup>Article in the Laurens Sun, may 15, 1930.

<sup>50</sup>Minutes of the Laurens Public Library Board of Trustees, April 20, 1931.

<sup>51</sup>Article in the Laurens Sun, July 28, 1932.

<sup>52</sup>Article in the Laurens Sun, April 12, 1934.

<sup>53</sup>Public Library Report sent to the Iowa Library Commission from the Laurens Public Library, April 1, 1933.

<sup>54</sup>Minutes of the Laurens Public Library Board of Trustees, June 9, 1934. <sup>55</sup>Article in the Laurens Sun, July 23, 1936.

<sup>56</sup>Minutes of the Laurens Public Library Board of Trustees, December 13, 1941.

<sup>57</sup>Personal interview with Mrs. Edna G. Coffin, June 9, 1964, with permission to quote.

<sup>58</sup>Article in the Laurens Sun, June 19, 1943.

<sup>59</sup>Minutes of the Laurens Public Library Board of Trustees, July 10, 1943.