

# The Belleville Public Library



An Historical Sketch

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## The German Library Society of St. Clair County

**B**ELLEVILLE has the rare distinction of having the oldest library in the State of Illinois. We think of community consciousness as a comparatively new thing, yet it was abroad in the land and raising its head in the form of library spirit in this community a century ago. The Belleville Public Library was conceived on June 26, 1838. It has the honor of antedating the Illinois State Library, which was founded in 1839, by three years.

In the years 1832 and 1833, during the period of rapid German immigration to the Middle West, a number of German families left their homes in the old world and chose lovely Shiloh Valley, still the garden spot of St. Clair County, for their home in this new land. This group of German immigrants, all men of wide culture and high ideals, were graduates and professors of German universities and they became known to history as "Die Latetner" or "The Latin farmers." They had become weary of political conditions and oppression in Germany, and America offered them a haven.

Brilliant reports had reached these men in Germany of the possibilities of scientific farming in this great fertile area of Illinois; and this was their incentive for taking up agriculture. However in their translation from German scholars into American farmers, they held fast to their love of learning and culture, and their

interest in things political and cultural remained of first importance. In this new land they found intense satisfaction in the opportunity for free speech and liberal thinking and the utter absence of political oppression; so it was only natural that they should often meet for discussion and exchange of ideas on the political, literary and social questions of the day. Their meetings were held regularly in the homes of various members of the group on Sunday afternoons and at picnics during the summer months.

At one of these gatherings on June 26, 1836, held at the home of Dr. Anton Schott, one of the most erudite of these scholars, he read a paper setting forth the advantages to be gained from the organization of a circulating library. These new Americans were intensely patriotic and extremely anxious to keep up with the march of events of their adopted country. Just about this time there was published "The Life of George Washington," by Jarr<sup>o</sup> Sparks, which was expensive and almost prohibitive for individual purchase. To make it available to a number of readers, Dr. Schott conceived the idea of buying the work and making it the nucleus of a library. He also showed that each member of this group owned a considerable number of books which if collected at a centrally located place might be made more useful by circulation among the members of an association formed for that purpose.

Dr. Schott invited these gentlemen to attend an organization meeting at his farm on July 17, 1836. Fifteen men responded to his invitation and on this date occurred the first meeting at which the "German Library Society of St. Clair County" was organized.

Technically its exact name was "Deutsche Bibliotheksgesellschaft von St. Clair Co." The following sixteen gentlemen were the charter members and each subscribed an initiatory fee of \$3.00 toward the consummation of this plan: Edouard Hilgard, Fritz A. Wolf, Fritz Hilgard, Fr. Theo. Engelmann, Theodor Hilgard, Jr., Julius Scheve, Gustav Koerner, Dr. Anton Schott, Herman Wolf, George Bunsen, Wilhelm Decker, Joseph Ledergerber, Dr. Adolph Reuss, Otto Hilgard, Dr. Adolph Bercheimann, J. C. Hildenbrandt. A provisional board consisting of Messrs. Schott, Koerner and Bunsen was appointed to draft a Constitution and by-laws to be submitted at a meeting to be held August 14, 1836. Dr. Schott, Doctor of Theology and Philosophy, was unanimously chosen Librarian and the library was kept in his home. Messrs. Bunsen, Theo. Hilgard and Schott were the first Board of Directors; Mr. Bunsen was elected the first president and Mr. Hilgard was the first treasurer.

At the first meeting, after an existence of four weeks, the library numbered 93 volumes, all donated, and at the end of the first year it had grown to 346 volumes. The book numbered 1 was the first volume of Sparks' "Life of Washington"; this work of twelve volumes is still in excellent condition on the shelves of the Public Library as well as a great many of these first books. These books were chiefly the Greek and Roman classics, works on theology, horticulture, history, mathematics and travel, all in the original languages. The excellence of these books reveal the character of the founders of the library and a glance at the expense records, kept most meticulously by these gentlemen, indicates the fine, scholarly discrimination that was used in the selec-

tion of their first books. Some of the early book purchases were:

1836—Spark's Life of Washington (initial vols.)..	\$21.00
1837—Map of Illinois; by John Mason Peck.....	4.00
1838—A set of Goethe and Schiller.....	40.00
1838—A set of Bulwer-Lytton's works.....	12.00
1838—A set of Washington Irving's works.....	8.00
1838—Works of Captain Marryatt.....	10.00
1839—Another set of Goethe's works.....	28.00
1840—State papers of James Madison.....	10.00
1842—Thiers' French Revolution.....	7.00
1843—The Adams Letters.....	4.00
1844—Charles Dickens' Martin Chuzzlewit Christmas Carol, American notes.....	5.00
1845—Prescott's Ferdinand and Isabella.....	7.00
1846—Ranke's History of the Popes.....	14.00
1847—Seaisfield's works.....	3.00
1847—Prescott's History of Peru.....	4.50
1848—D'Aubigne's History of the Reformation.....	1.75
1850—Humboldt's Kosmos.....	3.00
1851—Bancroft's History of the United States.....	6.75

These were supplemented by purchases from members for various amounts, although the individual titles were not itemized.

These pioneers were also periodical minded, proving their awareness of the value and stimulation to be had from reading periodical literature. All through the records from 1836 on, are listed among the expenses, the annual subscriptions to the Congressional Globe,

**Democratic Review, Knickerbocker Review, Boston Quarterly, etc.** Another considerable amount of the expenses was spent for subscriptions to the current newspapers among them the **Belleville Advocate, Anzeiger des Westens, Illinois State Register, Bellevisser Zeitung, Illinois Republican, Morgenblatt, and St. Clair Banner.** Nearly all of these files are in an almost perfect state of preservation at the present time.

The principal growth of the library was by donation and as the library became better known, Senators and Congressmen from Illinois took great pride in sending to it the Congressional Documents. These were especially welcomed because these men were, above all else, interested in the political development of the United States.

The membership up to 1890 never exceeded fifty; yet the creation of a sinking fund of 20% of all receipts toward the erection of a building (April, 1890) bears testimony of the foresight of these men. The finances were strictly guarded and the annual budget, receipts and expenditures, was laid before the general meeting and not adopted until it was minutely scrutinized. The income for the first year was \$72.00 and the expenditures were \$26.50, leaving a balance for the first year of \$46.50. It might be interesting to know who the charter members were and who paid the first initiatory fees of \$3.00: Otto Hilgard, Fritz Hilgard, Anton Schott, Herman Wolf, Fritz Wolf, Julius Scheve, Herman Haxthausen, E. Chr. Serini, T. C. Hildenbrandt, Joseph Ledergerber, Theodor Hilgard, Jr., George Bunsen, Adolph Berchelmann, Edouard Hilgard, Ad. Hildenbrandt, Adolph Reuss, Franz Koehler, Gustav Koerner, Frau Charlotte Frays, Wilhelm Decker, Theo. Engel-

mann, Carl Koehler, Theo. Krafft, Friederich Engelmann. During the next few years are noted the following names added to the membership: Carl Runkwitz, Carl Schubert, G. Helmberger, Ed. Joerg, A. Kunradi, Dr. A. Trapp, John Schell, Dr. Wislizenus, N. Lippert, Fr. Bauman, H. Hasel, H. Friedlander, Fr. Seydel, and E. von Massow.

The Library was incorporated under a charter granted by the General Assembly on February 22, 1839 and was signed by

**THEO. CARLIN, Governor**

**A. P. FIELD, Secretary of State**

**W. D. D. EWING, Speaker of the House of Representatives**

**WM. H. DAVIDSON, Speaker of the Senate.**

One of the striking paragraphs of the Charter is SECTION 4, which says: "And further provided, that female members of this society shall not be permitted to vote in said elections, nor in any other cases".

Under this Charter the Library continued until its union with the Belleville Saengerbund. It was kept in the home of Dr. Schott until it was no longer expedient for the members, many of whom lived in Belleville, to go six miles for the loan and exchange of books. The collection which had grown to 1908 volumes was moved to Belleville March 13, 1853. A room was provided, gratuitously, by the Belleville Literary Society in what was afterwards known as the Odd Fellows Hall, now the Lincoln Hotel, Dr. Schott could no longer act as Librarian and Mr. Carl Rau was chosen for that office. His salary was \$20.00 for six months, working one hour

a day. When the Odd Fellows Hall came to be used as a school building, the Library was removed to the store of Messrs. Goedeiking and Kircher, and Mr. Joseph Kircher was appointed Librarian, with no salary.

## **Belleville Saengerbund and Library Society**

Meanwhile the Belleville Saengerbund, as the name implies, an organization for the culture of vocal music, had acquired a collection of books. In order to increase the usefulness of the old Library, the members of the Library Association made overtures to the Saengerbund for a consolidation, in 1890. This was effected by a charter obtained from the General Assembly in 1891. Under this charter Dr. Anton Schott was elected President, Gustav Kellermann, Librarian, Fred Reiss, Treasurer and Bernhard Wick and Jacob Weingaertner, Directors. The Library was then established in the room of the new Association and called "The Belleville Saengerbund and Library Society", in the Eimer Building, at the northeast corner of Main and First streets. Gustav Kellermann having resigned, Mr. Henry Raab, later State Superintendent of Public Instruction, was appointed Librarian and held that office until 1894. Mr. Raab's salary was \$25.00 and later \$50.00 a year, and from the minutes it would seem that he always donated this sum to the Association to be spent for books. His son, the late Dr. E. P. Raab and later President of the Board, was his assistant. It was during the regime of Mr. Henry Raab that a rule was made admitting children to the Library. They were permitted to exchange books on Sunday mornings from 10 to 11 o'clock. An-

other noteworthy feature of this period was that ladies were admitted to full membership in the society in 1873.

The Library functioned thus for twenty-two years and under this management considerable sums were expended annually for the purchase of books and these were most carefully selected by the Library Committee, so that when the city acquired the collection it numbered 8875 volumes.

## **Belleville Public Library**

Early in the year 1883 the Belleville Saengerbund was about to dissolve and offered its collection of books to the City of Belleville as a donation on condition that it be made and kept forever a Free Public Library, and that its debt of \$1000.00 be assumed by the City. This offer was accepted by the City Council and the Belleville Public Library was established February 5, 1883, by an ordinance in accordance with the laws of Illinois. The Mayor, Benjamin J. West, Jr., appointed the following citizens to constitute the first Board of Trustees: Gustav Koerner, Dr. George Loelkes, Dr. Washington West, Mr. Curt Heinsfelden, Sr., Alonso A. Wilderman, F. G. Kenower, Theodore J. Krafft, Hugh H. Harrison, Chas P. Knispel.

Only two of the founders of the library lived to see it transferred to the city in 1883—Messrs. Gustav Koerner and Theodore J. Krafft. They also became members of the Board of Trustees in 1883.

The Board was organized by electing Gustav Koerner, President and F. G. Kenower, Secretary. Shortly thereafter Mr. Kenower resigned and was succeeded by Mr. Lucius Don Turner both as Trustee and Secretary of the

**Board. Mr. F. J. Staufenbiehl was appointed the first librarian. At this time the Library was located in the Engine House, corner of North Illinois and B streets. The new Librarian, Mr. Staufenbiehl, was ordered to make a catalogue of the books in the Library and after the completion of this work the Library was removed to the Union Engine House on South Jackson street. On March 10, 1884, the Belleville Public Library was opened for the free use of the public.**

**The Library continued in this home until March 5, 1892, when the Board resolved to erect a Library Building. It petitioned the City Council for its approval to erect a building which might be used both for library purposes and a City Hall. Under the able leadership of Mayor Herman G. Weber, the City Council approved this petition. The plans and specifications were made by Mr. L. Kledus, architect of St. Louis, under whose superintendence the building was erected at a cost of \$55,700. The Library was opened in the new building, the ~~present City Hall on South~~ Illinois street, on October 9, 1893; the first floor was used as the City Hall and the second floor as the Library and Reading Room. Here it prospered with a marked increase in cooperation with the work of the Public Schools as its most pronounced feature of growth and development. A steady advance was made; obsolete methods of administration were discarded and new ones adopted to facilitate progress with increasing circulation.**

**On December 9, 1903, Mr. F. J. Staufenbiehl, who had served as Librarian since 1884, passed away after almost twenty years of devoted service. He was succeeded by Mr. A. M. Wolleson, who resigned in 1909 to**

be succeeded by Miss M. Ethel Huff. Mr. Wolleson again served as librarian from 1915 until 1918. During the librarianship of Mr. Wolleson, the most outstanding development was the opening of a children's room, with an attendant in charge, in 1906.

## **New Carnegie Building**

By 1912, the Library Building was again found inadequate to carry on the work effectively, and efforts were made by Mr. Curt H. G. Heinfeiden, then President of the Board, to interest the Carnegie Corporation in donating a new Library Building to the City of Belleville. After many months of patient and persistent effort on the part of Mr. Heinfeiden, he received an affirmative answer from the Corporation on August 11, 1913. In substance, it said that if the City Council would provide a site and pledge itself to maintain the library at a cost of not less than \$4500 a year, the Corporation was ready to give \$45,000 to erect a building for Belleville.

The City Council promptly passed an ordinance fixing the future minimum annual appropriation for the maintenance of the Library at \$4500. After investigating various locations, the property of Otto and Hugo Heinemann, located at the corner of Washington and Jackson streets was selected. After many months of special meetings and conferences of the Board, the preliminary work was finished. The construction was begun on March 1, 1915, and on March 22, 1915, the cornerstone was laid without ceremonies, other than the presence of the Trustees. The work proceeded rapidly for a time, but soon a series of strikes and other annoying occurrences retarded the completion of the build-

ing, until January, 1916. The task of moving the books into the new building was done so systematically under the supervision of Mr. Wolleson, that it was not necessary to close the library even for a single day.

On January 20, 1916, the Library was dedicated with proper ceremonies; a splendidly attended program was presented in the afternoon and at night a public reception was held. This was no doubt the most important milestone in the history of the library. Since then has been noted the period of greatest activity, the public since this time has made greater use of its library than ever before. Steady and normal progress has been made, just as soon as new innovations in library service have developed, they have been adopted and every effort has been made to keep in step with the times. Among the more important innovations have been: Re-cataloguing of book collection; Inauguration of a new registration and charging system; Moving the Children's Room to the ground floor; Opening of a Junior Adult Room. Establishing of the West Side Branch; Introduction of classroom collections in the schools; Preparation of a mounted picture collection; Increasing the number of persons on the staff from three to six; Introduction of Hospital Library Service.

That the library has been a good investment for the taxpayer is due to a composite effort; not only that of the persons directly responsible for its administration, but the splendid response of the community itself, by its spirit of appreciation of what a power for good, books and book service can be in the community.

The following table of statistics, by decades, will perhaps show in a more concrete way the progress that

has been made since the City took over the library in 1884:

Year	Circulation	New Cards Issued	City Appropriation	Fines Collected	Expenses
1884	8411	345	\$ 2000	\$ 69 05	\$ 1146 75
1884	25525	323	2500	77 06	2546 43
1904	23619	283	2500	83 45	2700.27
1914	39786	434	4500	135 13	3500 61
1924	94172	1043	10000	450 19	10665.19
1934	229724	1440	18000	978.27	16566.06

Thus a century has been completed and our heritage from the past is enormous. The challenge that has been passed down from those pioneers in mind and spirit of 1836, is one to be received with great reverence and humility; the Public Library will always progress if they are kept in mind. Today when the implications are so much greater, when the Public Library is reaching more and more into the complexities of life, it is well to remember that the challenge for us today is to lay ~~the proper foundation for the next hundred years.~~

## Presidents of the Board of Trustees 1884-1936

Gustav Koerner—1884-1896

Marshall W. Weir—1896-1903

Charles W. Thomas—1903-1906

Dr. Chas. H. Starkel—1906-1908

Curt H. G. Heinfeldt—1908-1913

Dr. E. P. Raab—1913-1914

Jacob L. Aull—1914-1917

Wm. A. Hough—1917-1929

Max Eckhardt—1929-to date

## Librarians—1836-1936

Dr. Anton Schott—1836-1852

Carl Rau—1852-1854

Joseph Kircher—1854-1859

Gustav Kellermann—1859-1862

Henry Raab—1862-1883

F. J. Staufenblehl—1883-1903

A. M. Wolleson—1903-1909

M. Ethel Huff—1909-1915

A. M. Wolleson—1915-1918

Bella Steuernagel—1918-to date

## Persons Who Served on the Board of Trustees, 1884-1936

Jacob L. Aull

Albert J. Becker

Henry Baumgarten

William Bender, Jr.

John A. Bedel

Fred J. Boettcher

C. G. Brechnitz

Fred Bressler

Henry W. Brua

Edmund Burke

George H. Busiek

John S. Carson

Leslie Cole

Dr. George Loelkes

Joseph Martin

Jacob Mueller

Otto G. Neuhaus

Ludwig R. Osterhaus

Dr. E. P. Raab

Henry Raab

Henry L. Rentchler

Anna D. Reiss

Ed. P. Rogers

Otto W. Rubach

Joseph Saenger

Aloys Schoenenberger

# Persons Who Served on the Board of Trustees, 1884-1936 (Continued.)

Max Eckhardt	Henry E. Schrader
Fred E. Evans	H. C. G. Schrader
Chas. A. Grossart	C. W. Schuchardt
J. J. Gummershelmer	Hans Schwarz, Sr.
Hugh Harrison	Carl Siegel
Curt Heinfelden, Sr.	Dr. Julian Smith
Curt H. G. Heinfelden	Judge W. H. Snyder
Jos. L. Hermann	Stanley Sprague
Dr. George E. Hilgard	Dr. Chas. H. Starkel
Alfred Hoerner	Robert Steiner
William A. Hough	A. J. Stoeckel
Robert F. Imbs	Fred Sunkel
P. K. Johnson	Charles W. Thomas
Chas. A. Karch	Lucius Don Turner
Adam Karr	John Wamser
George F. Kenower	E. E. Wangellin
William Kloess	Oscar F. Weber
Chas. P. Knispel	Waldemar R. Weber
Gustav A. Koerner	Marshal W. Weir
Henry Kolb	Dr. Washington West
Fred Kuni, Sr.	Alonso A. Wilderman
T. J. Krafft	Arthur J. Wright
E. P. Leuschner	George E. Wuller
	H. F. Zerweck.