

Making A Library Beginning

**How a Library May Be
Started in a Small Town**



**IOWA LIBRARY COMMISSION
DES MOINES
LEAFLET No. 11**

IOWA LIBRARY COMMISSION

PURPOSE: *To advance the library interests of the State of Iowa.*

OFFICE: STATE HISTORICAL BUILDING, Des Moines, Iowa.

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The Iowa Library Commission was created by an act of the Twenty-eighth General Assembly of the State of Iowa, March 20, 1900, and this law was amended very materially by the Twenty-ninth General Assembly, in the transfer of the Free Traveling Library of Iowa to the Commission.

The purpose for which the Iowa Library Commission was created is to promote the establishment and efficiency of public libraries in Iowa, and to encourage the circulation and reading of good books.

Can it serve your community by co-operating with any local movement in these directions?

First Steps Toward Starting a Library.

A library beginning is possible in a very small town if plans are carefully considered. Hopefulness and earnestness are especially needed, in order to counteract the indifference and pessimism of those who say, "It can't be done," or "What's the use of trying." It is necessary to recognize at the outset that the library will be small and unpretentious; but if a courageous effort is made to secure a small fund for the first purchase of books and all who are interested will work together, the result will be surprising. A few carefully selected, timely, readable books should be made accessible as promptly as possible; \$25.00 or \$50.00 wisely expended will provide a nucleus for the library with the addition of such standard books as are donated. Urge the importance of the books that are donated being standard if it shall be deemed desirable to solicit gifts of books.

A "home talent" entertainment, or a "book shower" or book sociable where refreshments are sold, or some public gathering may serve as the starting point for a library fund. Often the initiative is taken by a study club or other organization, or a joint committee with representatives from various organizations is called for a confer-

ence as to a plan of procedure and this frequently results in a federation of these organizations for library purposes or the organization of a library association.

United effort is the essential thing. A public collection of books is an evolution. It usually has a small beginning, but we should not "despise the day of small things." Talk "library" and create public sentiment in its favor. Enlist the ministers, the editors, the Superintendent of Schools, the business men, in the matter. Voluntary financial support either by individual subscription or by organized effort is absolutely necessary, until the town is large enough, or it is deemed expedient, to vote a municipal tax for library support as provided by the state law.

To provide a collection of books to loan for home reading is the first essential. Once a week, usually on Saturday, the books could be exchanged and as many other days each week as seem practicable. A locked book case in a central location (a store, bank, postoffice or shop) with a dependable librarian on hand at the stated time to attend to receiving and lending books, makes the library a reality. These books would be such as have been purchased and donated, with an additional collection of State Traveling Library books, sent from the Library Commission, Des Moines, to augment the

local collection. Frequently the beginning is made with the Traveling Library of fifty volumes until books can be bought. These are available for a period of three months, with no further cost than freight from Des Moines and return.

It is not usually practicable to undertake the opening of a reading room at the first, because of the expense necessary to rent a centrally located room and to keep it open under proper supervision, heated and lighted, in addition to the subscriptions to a fair number of magazines.

Voluntary service will probably have to be depended upon for the librarian in the beginning; and members of the association may, in turn, under the direction of one member, who is librarian in charge, serve in this capacity. This plan has been successful in several towns where books are issued once or twice a week.

A majority of the thriving free public libraries in Iowa had their beginning in the modest but determined efforts of a few people in some such manner as is suggested above.

The Library Commission, State Historical Building, Des Moines, will, through its Secretary, co-operate with any individual or group of people, who desire to make a library beginning, no matter how small the town may be. A Library Association, com-

posed of all in the community, men and women, boys and girls, who are willing to forward such a movement, affords the simplest and most practical basis for systematic work. Such an association should have a small annual membership fee and adopt a constitution and by-laws under which to carry on the work; in this leaflet is given a constitution which has been used in several Iowa towns in starting a library, with modifications to suit local needs.

When the time comes for the more advanced step of voting a municipal tax, other methods are necessary and the Secretary of the Library Commission is available for co-operation in providing printed matter and in personal visits to aid in such a movement.

Library Association.

SUGGESTED FORM OF CONSTITUTION.

Article 1. This organization shall be called..... Library Association and shall consist of all persons who have subscribed themselves to the membership roll and paid the annual membership fee.

Art. 2. The object of this association shall be to establish and maintain a public library and reading room in.....

Art. 3. The affairs of this association shall be conducted by a Board of Trustees which shall consist of nine persons from

among the members of the association, three of whom shall be elected at each annual meeting. Of those elected at the time of organization, three shall hold office for one year, three for two years, and three for three years, casting lots for their respective terms at the first meeting after election. This board at its first meeting and immediately after the regular annual meeting of the association as hereinafter provided, shall elect the officers from among its members by ballot. The officers shall be: President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer. The duties of the officers of the board shall be those usually devolving upon such officers.

Art. 4. A librarian shall be elected by the Board of Trustees, who shall be responsible for the care and management of the books and the loaning of the same; shall see that the library is open at stated hours; see that it is kept clean, properly lighted and heated; have general supervision of the library, and make monthly reports to the board.

Art. 5. The Board of Trustees shall formulate such rules and regulations regarding the care, use and government of the library as may seem proper and necessary; and shall fully report the year's business of the board and the condition of the library to each annual meeting of the association.

Art. 6. The President shall appoint three

standing committees of three members each, viz.: Book committee, finance committee, and committee on rooms or building. The appointment of the book committee shall be subject to the approval of the board of trustees and the chairman of each committee shall be appointed from the board of trustees.

Art. 7. (1) It shall be the duty of the book committee to select, purchase and otherwise procure books, magazines, and other literature to the extent permitted by the funds in the treasury and other resources.

(2) It shall be the duty of the finance committee to devise ways and means for obtaining funds for the purchase of books and other necessary literature and for the general support of the library.

(3) It shall be the duty of the committee on rooms or building to procure suitable rooms or a suitable building for library purposes, and to provide for the furnishing, heating, lighting and care of the same.

(4) It shall be the further duty of each committee, through its chairman, to report its work for approval at the regular meetings of the Board of Trustees.

Art. 8. A regular annual meeting of the association shall be held the first Monday of in each year.

Art. 9. Special meetings may be held at

the call of the President or at the request of any ten members of the association by giving ten days' public notice in some newspaper, published in....., in which notice the object of the meeting must be stated.

Art. 10. Twenty members of the association shall constitute a quorum.

Art. 11. Amendments to this constitution may be made at any regular or special meeting properly constituted by a two-thirds vote of all members present.

BY-LAWS.

1. The membership fee shall be one dollar a year, payable to the Treasurer.

2. It shall be the privilege of all members to attend the annual and special meetings of the association and take part in the transaction of all business under consideration.

3. The Board of Trustees shall meet in regular monthly meetings at the time and place designated by the President.

4. Vacancies on the Board of Trustees shall be filled by the board until the next annual meeting.

5. Six members of the Board of Trustees shall constitute a quorum.

6. The President shall appoint a nominating committee of five members, none of whom shall be a member of the Board of

Trustees, at least one month before the annual meeting, for the purpose of making nominations to fill vacancies on the Board of Trustees at the annual meeting.

7. These by-laws may be amended at any regular or special meeting properly constituted by a two-thirds vote of all the members present.

Library Organization for a Small Town.

Revised from paper read before the League of Library Commissions, Narragansett Pier, July 2, 1906.

BY ALICE S. TYLER

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The awakening of one or two individuals to the possibilities for good afforded by a public collection of books marks the beginning of the library movement in that town. These men or women may have formerly lived in a town having a flourishing library, and recalling the pleasure and benefit derived from it begin to wonder why such privileges may not be provided in the new home. Or some one who has grown up in the community hears of the work being done by the library in a neighboring town and asks why Pleasantville cannot do the same; or, as frequently happens, a woman's

club has been organized in the town, a representative goes to the meeting of the State Federation, hears of the interest other club women have had in the founding of a local library, and, feeling the need of books for club study and knowing the dearth of good literature for her boys and girls who are growing up, joins with others in the effort to provide a collection of books for general use. Whatever may be the cause of the interest which marks the beginning, the little seed has been sown and begins to grow.

In considering the topic assigned me, "What form of library organization is most desirable for the small town," it is, of course, necessary first of all to agree upon the meaning of the words "small town." In Iowa a community having a population of two thousand inhabitants or less is termed a town, and for *small* town I will assume that we agree upon interpreting it to mean a population of one thousand or less. With this group of people, having the ordinary advantages of school and church, what is the best method by which both young and old may be provided with the books that may inspire and cheer, inform and uplift both individual and community life? It does not seem necessary in this company to discuss the important function this library should fulfill in the life of the people; the

mission of the book has been set forth so ably and so frequently in all library meetings that it would be indeed "carrying coals to Newcastle" to attempt it here. It is, however, well for us to remember that, while there is a surfeit of cheap literature that seems to have reached the smallest hamlets and villages, the need is as great as it ever was for the best books to be made accessible to those who do not yet know the "books of all time."

This group of people in the small town desiring to provide a public collection of books will probably follow the "line of least resistance" in making the beginning. Considering the prejudices, church affiliation, rivalries, etc., that exist in almost every town, what is likely to be the basis of the movement for a library? It will probably take one of the following forms:

1. Enlargement of the meager school library.
2. A church reading room.
3. Woman's club or town federation library.
4. Library association or subscription library.
5. Free public library, supported by taxation.
6. Traveling library center or station.

There may be and probably will be combinations of two or more of these into one

plan, and if there is a state or county system of traveling libraries there would be in any of the plans suggested, the probability of the use of the traveling libraries.

Considering the forms in the order mentioned: First, the enlargement of the meager school library—this has been occasionally resorted to because the few books serve as a nucleus, they in some instances having been found to be of little service in the schoolroom, while for the general public they might be of value. Poorly selected, ill adapted to the uses for which they were intended, with no one especially concerned as to their care and use, locked up and of no use to any one during the three months' vacation, they are indeed serving a good purpose if some of these dusty, neglected books in the school collections are made the nucleus of a public collection for the entire town. This, however, is rarely done.

The second plan—a church reading room—is one which is usually suggested by some enthusiastic pastor who is genuinely concerned regarding the young people of his church and town, and is generous enough to open a room in his church for this purpose. My observation has been that this is an unwise and undesirable method, as it is likely to be immediately combatted, either secretly or openly, by denominational opposition or jealousy on the part of other

churches, and will not be likely to attract into the circle of its influence those who may not be identified with orthodox churches, or the unformed boys and young men who might be reluctant to use freely a library thus located.

The third—a movement on the part of a woman's club or a federation of all the clubs in the town to found a library—is a method that has been tried in several towns in our state. The organizations being already in existence, active, and committed to altruistic and civic work, find in the public library a cause that appeals to its members strongly and to which they are willing to give enthusiastic labor. After close and sympathetic observation of this method of making a library beginning, I believe that it is not the best plan, because of the fact that it confines the movement to a limited group of workers. Sometimes, too, it encounters a spirit of jealousy and criticism on the part of those outside the club that is not conducive to the forwarding of a large public movement such as a library should be—to include all ranks and conditions, regardless of age, sex, or social standing.

The fourth plan—a library association or subscription library—is a popular method of making a beginning when properly understood. The few who see the need of a

library and plan to accomplish its organization, believing that it should be for *all* the people, call a meeting for the express purpose of discussing ways and means of providing a public library for the town. Notices of this meeting are sent to all churches, schools, clubs, lodges, etc., where people congregate, and are printed in the local newspaper so that all are given the opportunity of having a part in it. At this meeting, after addresses and discussion, it is voted that a library association shall be formed for establishing and maintaining a public library. Committees are appointed to recommend a basis of organization and on providing a book fund, and the movement takes form in a few weeks or months with a fund for the purchase of books and a specified annual membership fee which shall provide (probably very meagerly) for running expenses. With many variations, with discouragements and struggles, it is nevertheless an oft-tried and satisfactory method of making a beginning, the association affording an organization through which to work toward a tax-supported library.

But in each of the four plans mentioned by which a beginning may be made there is always and persistently and depressingly the question, "How are libraries begun in this manner to have sufficient funds even to barely exist, much more to grow?"

And this is the fundamental matter after

all—money. Whence shall the funds come? The church plan, the club plan, the school plan, the association plan—all are dependent on the spasmodic and irregular support that results from the labors of a soliciting committee using persuasive arguments with business men and others. There are certain expenses that are absolutely essential—books first and most, a room for which, probably, rent must be paid (though some generous citizens may give the use of it), periodicals to be subscribed for, heat, light, table, chairs, etc., besides the most important feature of the whole scheme—the librarian.

Shall the use of the books be free? or, in this period of beginning, shall each person pay an annual fee or a rental for the use of the books? If an attempt is made to make the library absolutely free, on the basis of any one of the four plans suggested, there must be back of the movement a very active and probably much worried finance committee struggling with entertainments, suppers, lecture courses, subscription lists, etc., to provide the “ways and means.”

The fifth form of organization is the tax-supported free public library. Is it desirable that the small town shall in its beginning in library matters attempt at once to secure a municipal tax to found and maintain a free public library under the state

law? There are those who believe this is the *only* way to make a beginning. I am confident that I voice the sentiment of commission workers when I say that we are all agreed that eventually, if not in the beginning, the free public library on a rate or tax-supported basis is our endeavor. The point whereon there may be a difference of opinion is whether the movement might first be started as an association and by means of this association public sentiment created which shall provide for the municipal support. There is no doubt but that the amount from the tax levy provided by law for the maintenance of the library in most states would be so small in a town of one thousand inhabitants or less, that it would be necessary for a movement to be inaugurated to provide a book fund by some other means—in other words, the plant must be installed, and this requires money. Afterward the running expenses may be met by the tax levy. It is certainly true that the life of a library is precarious and uncertain until an annual revenue is assured by a municipal tax, but it would seem to be simply a question of policy as to whether this shall be the *first* step or not. In studying this question at first hand it has been observed that the first impulse seems naturally to be to solicit subscriptions for a book fund, and this seems a necessity whether

there is a maintenance tax or not. A library association standing back of this solicitation for a book fund and back of the entire movement seems very desirable and, though temporary, has usually proven to be successful.

Now, what, we may ask, is the relation of the state library commission to this community? What has it to do with this small town desiring to make a library beginning? First, its advisory relations with the community should be such that it will aid that town in avoiding the mistakes made elsewhere in the form of organization and in methods of work. Surely the observations and experience of commission workers, who are provided by the state, should be at the service of every community in the state if desired. One of the points, however, that is always perplexing to the earnest commission worker is, how to help effectively. The cry of paternalism is not heard so much as formerly, but it is certainly a fine point as to how far the state shall go in aiding the local movement, and surely there must first be a desire on the part of the community.

But if it is the desire of but *one*, that is sufficient to bring the commission worker to the aid of that *one* in arousing interest. I would suggest that the effect of the commission worker's co-operation with the local movement is much greater if she comes

on the invitation of the local leaders, and there is always a way to secure such an invitation. This puts the commission worker on a basis where she can serve much more effectively.

It may save the club and the library movement from much tribulation if we can tell them of the disaster that came to one town because of the zeal of the woman's club to have the honor of founding the library, or of another town where a certain secret organization aroused the opposition of all other societies in town by starting a library and collecting over one thousand volumes for public use, or of another town where a "generous citizen" gave a large sum for a new church building on condition that it should have a library room included for the use of the town (which the members of other churches in town seldom enter). On the other hand, they may be told of the enthusiastic organization of a library association, the raising of a book fund of \$2,000, and the favorable sentiment immediately created for a municipal tax which resulted in a free public library upon that basis within one year. Such information and the details gained from experience as to just how the work may best be accomplished constitute a part of the preliminary work the commission may do.

Second, to aid in the selection of books.

Certainly this function of the library commission should not need to be emphasized. The utter helplessness with which a new library board or book committee undertakes the task of providing books for the new library makes it absolutely imperative that selected lists should be available that can be placed in their hands. The "Buying List of Books" issued by New York State Library, published by the League of Library Commissions is especially suited for this sort of work, also reliable lists of children's books, such as Miss Moore's "List of books for a children's library," published by the Iowa Library Commission; the "Suggestive list of children's books for a small library," compiled by Helen T. Kennedy, and others. The *A. L. A. Booklist* is ably supplying this definite need of the small library for a reliable list of the best recent books, and this is furnished free (monthly) by most library commissions.

Third, to install a simple loan system and such other records as are absolutely essential to the orderly conduct of the library. This includes classification and shelf list, but not necessarily a card catalog.

Fourth, to provide the traveling library that shall augment the very meager collection of books belonging to the local collection.

This method of "state aid" is especially

suited to the wants of the small town in making a beginning, but it also has the entire state for its field of activity, sending books to the remotest corners—the country neighborhood, the rural schools, the clubs, also loaning books on special subjects of study to the larger libraries. This fresh supply of books coming from this state center at intervals throughout the year may enable the local library to use some of the funds for a reading room as a feature of the work as well as the lending of books. In fact, I am inclined to say that if a suitable person is available for the position of librarian, the reading room can be made a more powerful influence for good in the small town than the lending of books for home reading. The absolute lack of provision for wholesome diversion and entertainment for young people in the small town, the inclination of the boys to loaf and lounge about the postoffice, the railway station, the tobacco store, etc., because there is nowhere else to go; these conditions make it extremely important that a movement to establish a library in a small town should include the reading room, where the open doors, bright lights, attractive periodicals and interesting books invite and attract those who would not otherwise come under the influence of the printed page.

But the problem of the reading room in

the small town is one of maintaining order, without repelling, of cheer, welcome, helpfulness; so that the librarian's personal qualities are put to the test in such a position out of all proportion to the apparent interests involved. Over and over again do we see unselfish, cultured, devoted women, fired with the altruistic spirit, giving themselves to such service "without money and without price," and so we have the volunteer librarian—without salary—as one of the most important factors in many of the small towns making a beginning, and but for whom probably there would be no beginning.

Certainly all the interests mentioned in the opening of this paper—the schools, the churches, the clubs—should be concerned in providing the public collection of books for the town, but these should rise above the particular organization or interest which chiefly concerns each. Obliterating all lines of separation they may unite in service for the public good, working unitedly either for the library association or the municipal library as the first step. Without the support of these interests the work would be well-nigh impossible.

