

W. Water Street 432 Businesses

1981 Library

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Forty-eight years ago the Princeton Women's Club – volunteers all – founded the city library. The first staff consisted of female volunteers who gave freely of their time. The American Legion donated space in its room above what was then Nickodem's store. Over the years volunteerism has been the foundation on which the free public reading program has been built in Princeton. Donations of books, cash, even the building in which the present library is housed have been freely given by generous citizens.

Government involvement has been minimal. Currently, city taxpayers charge themselves \$8,000 a year for the library. The growing population of the Town of Princeton uses the library but pays nothing directly to the city, neither does the rest of the county. When it comes to the library generosity is a long-standing tradition in Princeton. Therefore, it's not surprising the latest library project depends solely on private generosity and volunteerism.

The present library building, donated by Mrs. Emma Stern in 1948, always did provide cramped library quarters. In these days, when a library is far-more than just a public bookshelf, those quarters are more crowded. Even more basic, however, is the fact that the Stern building is showing its age. Walls are settling, the foundation is cracking, it's obvious the time has come for a replacement. Library boosters intend to obtain that replacement in the fine Princeton tradition.

"We're going to try to do it on our own." Says Morris Swed, chairman of the City Library Board. Doing it on their own means the Princeton volunteers will be organizing bake sales, book sales, auctions and asking for donations of any amount from a dime to \$100,000. Fund raising began in just this way two years ago when a group of city gradeschoolers raised \$14.37 at a lemonade and popcorn stand and donated it to the library. That original \$14.37 has grown to \$10,000, all earmarked for a new library building. Recently a coalition of community organizations has decided to make the construction of a new library a common community project.

Coordinating the work is a Steering Committee headed by Princeton realtor, Reid Mevis, who says the group's goal is still a bit sketch. \$100,000 is the tentative figure to work for, "with a three year timetable, as sort of a rule of thumb." Construction probably could begin, Mevis conjectures, "if we can collect half of our money with pledges," with the other half already in the bank.

As with any public proposal, there are more than a few ideas about what to do about a new library. Morris Swed suggests that a small building could be constructed somewhere in \$40,000 - \$50,000 price range. Such a building would not be much larger than the present facilities.

Librarian Lorraine Cederholm says, "You only build a library once in a lifetime. It will grow, it has." She goes on to report that library system requests – inter-library loans – have increased from 400 to 600 in the past year. In addition Cederholm points out that a library is and can become more than just a place to obtain books. "The schools use the library. Teachers and businessmen make inquiries. Older people ask for big print books. Nursing home people pay a visit to the library as a way of getting out someplace. We have art prints for loan, video tapes and music cassettes and records. One man wanted to repair an organ. He came to the library for a book on how to do it" she explains.

Cederholm hopes that any new library building will have a meeting room for "children's activities, art classes....we have some boys using one of our rooms upstairs for a clubhouse....I hope we can have something like a community room...So many people in this town have so much talent we'd like to have a place they can bring their talents out on their own." Is there a more fitting place for that than the library?

Other proposals include the demolition of the Stern building and reconstruction on the same site; or construction of a new building on land currently occupied by the city parking lot at the east end of the business district. There has been talk of purchasing a different building downtown, or moving to totally new premises elsewhere. However, most downtown buildings are either occupied, too small, or too rundown to be useful. However, a downtown location is most suitable for a library because downtown is much easier to reach than other parts of town, especially for older folks who can't drive and children who only drive bicycles.

Support for the library is deep in Princeton. "The city's been very good at picking up expenses," says Morris Swed. Reid Mevis reports, "We have a good base of support ... people who are 80 years-old work with people who are 20 years-old. It's wonderful to see it.

The Princeton tradition of volunteerism runs hand in hand with the current trend towards relying less on government. "Too long," long says Mevis, "we've been saying that's what I pay taxes for," and walking away from responsibility. The Princeton volunteers aren't shirking any responsibility when it comes to the library. However, at the same time it must be pointed out that the \$8,000 city taxpayers pay for the library is a generous amount for a city the size of Princeton. In addition Green Lake County taxpayers pay \$19,000 in library system membership fees for all the libraries in the county.

System membership fees pay for inter-library loans, a basic of small library services. A library inn Princeton whether old or new, will never be able to match the facilities of a library in Oshkosh, Madison, or Milwaukee – nor should it. But it can be a waystation, so to speak, on the rout to those bigger libraries. For example, any Princeton library cardholder can request the latest best seller, an obscure scientific tome, a movie, or record album. Given enough time

the library system will find it and send it to Princeton. That's anything from *The History of Toads* to Disney's *Dumbo*, to *Miss Piggy's Last Solo*. If it's in a Wisconsin library, eventually it will become available to everyone. That's the point of a free library system, supported by every taxpayer.

Libraries are so valuable they've always attracted a lot of volunteer support in addition to taxes. A few years ago a generous donor built a new library in Westfield with one large gift. Green Lake recently received a similar donation. Perhaps Princeton will be the recipient of such a present. But if not, it really won't matter. The Princeton Library began in 1933 with a few books and an abundance of generosity from many different people who gave what they could. A few children gave what they could two years ago to start the current building fund. Now the community at large has been summoned to join in. Perhaps, by the time the library celebrates its 50th anniversary in 1983 the sum of all that individual generosity will result in a brand new building to hold the party in and to house the library for fifty years more.

As part of the current fund-raising effort to build a new library in Princeton, volunteers will be canvassing the greater Princeton area beginning this week to seek donations for the building fund.

Townspeople will be asking for donations of money and/or items to be sold at a public auction to be held Sunday, August 23 at 1 p.m. at the Community Auction Building in the City Park. All proceeds from the auction will go to the library building fund. Princeton auctioneer Davey Henschel will run the auction.

Everyone is urged to help in any way they can to make this community-wide effort a grand success.

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