

History of the libraries of Mason County

LUDINGTON LIBRARY

In April of 1872, interested residents of Ludington met to discuss the possibility of forming a public library. In June of that year, the library was started with a collection of used books and a donation of \$100.00 from James Ludington. The library was housed in a building that the Pere Marquette Lumber Company donated for that purpose. In the spring of 1874, the collection had grown to almost 400 volumes. In 1881 the library was located in Temperence Hall. This was the year that two-thirds of Ludington was destroyed by fire and the entire library collection was lost. After the fire, there was a collection of books available to the public in Longfellow school. This collection was owned by the school board.

In 1905, the Pere Marquette Literary Club sponsored the construction of the new library. A grant for \$15,000 was secured from the Carnegie Institution for construction. The grant required a match of the same amount. The city council gave the library matching funds and made a commitment for \$1,500.00 annually for upkeep of the building. The building site was secured for \$2,500 and John Anderson was engaged to erect the building at a cost of \$10,366. Construction was completed on December 30, 1905. On March 1, 1906 the library opened to serve the residents of Ludington. The library collection was 3,800 volumes. Miss Kate Hutchins, a teacher in the Ludington schools, was hired as the first librarian. The second floor of the library was an assembly and lecture hall. The first meeting there, on September 10, 1906 was the organizational meeting of the Mason County Hospital Association. In the 1930's, the assembly hall was remodeled for a children's room. During the 1940's library branches were located in Lakeview and Pere Marquette schools and were open 2 days a week for 1 hour.

In 1973, the Ludington library board undertook a study to remodel and enlarge the library. Plans called for an expansion from 3,200 sq. ft. to over 11,000 sq. ft. In 1975, Federal revenue sharing funds from the City of Ludington and Mason County were secured and voters passed a millage for construction. Total cost of the new portion was \$300,000.

SCOTTVILLE LIBRARY

In 1899, retired banker Mr. Charles Blain donated a lot on South Main Street in Scottville for a library. Money to build a building and purchase books was raised by subscription and by holding socials. The first library was known as the Blain Reading Association and was located at 113 S. Main St. Parts of the library were leased for various purposes, Mr. Virgil Fitch had his justice of the peace office in the library and acted as the librarian. It was also the site for Mrs. Iowa Tracy's millinery shop and Mrs. Mark Smith's beauty shop. In 1940, this first building was sold and removed and a new building was erected. At first the library was located on the second floor with the offices of the Michigan Public Service Company on the first floor. In the early 50's, the Michigan Public Service Company moved and the library expanded, with the children's room on the top floor, adult books on the first floor and magazines in the basement.

MASON COUNTY LIBRARY

In 1941, the County Board of Supervisors established the County Library. At its inception and until 1953, the county library was housed in the basement of the Ludington library and served 53 rural schools and 10 communities through the bookmobile. In 1952, the Scottville Library board and the County Library board agreed to merge. The Scottville Library sold the building on South Main Street and turned the proceeds over to the county for the construction of a new building in Scottville. On October 4, 1952 the new county library on East State Street was opened with books from both the Scottville and county libraries. A need for more space was met in 1958 with the addition of a children's room and workroom.

DISTRICT LIBRARY

Beginning in 1992, the boards of the Ludington library and the county library engaged in negotiations to merge the libraries into a single library district. The merger was formalized and a conditional district library was created on April 1, 1994. The continuation of the library was dependent on a successful millage election which was held on August 4, 1994. With a 57% yes vote for the establishment of the library as well as its operating millage, the Mason County District Library became a permanent institution.