

# A Short History of the Indian Trails Public Library District Wheeling, Illinois

By Muriel Lischett

1955-1962

The Village of Wheeling was experiencing an explosion of population and affordable housing developments.. Most of the new residents came from cities or suburbs with established public libraries and embraced wholeheartedly the idea of public library service in Wheeling. Since 1939 there had been a collection of books in the local elementary school (now Walt Whitman) maintained by residents of the area and available to the public as well as to the students but usage and funds for appropriate reading materials was, at best, minimal.

A nucleus of mainly newcomers to the area, including the school superintendent, members of the Junior Woman's Club and the Junior Chamber of Commerce (Jaycees) formed a committee to investigate the mechanics of establishing a tax supported public library. With advice from the Assistant State Librarian it was decided to create a demonstration library for the public, with the intent to run an official referendum soon after.

On June 28, 1958 enthusiastic volunteers (and their conscripted families) held a "Book and a Buck" drive, collecting more than 2,000 books and approximately \$450 in donations. Advice and help with recording and cataloging the books was generously provided by Prospect Heights library staff and the Woman's Club of Prospect Heights.

Prospect Heights had very recently established their own library district and their experience with forming a publicly supported library district was greatly appreciated. Every book title was recorded in a ledger and given an accession number and the spines hand lettered by classification according to the Dewey decimal system. .

An unused frame building, about 15'x30', located in the rear parking lot of the historic Union Hotel on Milwaukee Avenue two blocks south of Dundee Road, was rented from the hotel owners for \$75.00 a month. Willing hands painted the building, laid tile, made curtains and built bookshelves and an Open House, with refreshments, was held on October 4th to acquaint residents with the project. Official opening day was October 13, 1958 with approximately 6,000 books available for circulation. The State Library had commended the volunteers for their hard work and donated about 3,000 books to swell the collection. Within a few weeks 265 cards had been issued and 309 books checked out. The library was open 16 hours a week and staffed mainly with members of the Junior Woman's Club and financed by a steady influx of contributions from several service organizations in the area.

It had always been the goal to create a self-governing "library district" not under the jurisdiction of any other governing body and a petition was filed in the Cook County Court for this purpose; a hearing was held before Judge Otto Kerner in Feb., 1959 and authorization was granted to proceed with the plan. The boundary lines of the district to be served were, with minor variations, the Wheeling Township line on the east, Lake-Cook county line on the north, Arlington Heights Road south to Hintz, east to Wolf Road, south on Wolf to Palatine Road and east to the township line. The then smaller village of Buffalo Grove and a small portion of Prospect Heights were included in the plan in order to create a larger tax base. The combined population of the areas was only about 8,000 at that time.

A special referendum to place the Library District on the tax rolls was held on March 28, 1959 and a concerted effort was made to bring out the vote, which resulted in an overwhelming victory, with 458 votes in favor and 62 against.

The first library board of seven trustees was elected on May 23, 1959. Volunteers continued to staff the library and operate with donated funds until tax monies should become available in the following year, 1960. Services were expanded, with special emphasis on attracting young readers, such as Story Hour and a Summer Reading Program for all. The paid staff consisted of two women from the dedicated volunteer pool and also members of the library board, there being a dearth of suitable applicants for the job.

#### 1963-1976

Expansion of library services became possible with the availability of a vacant single store-front (formerly Welflin's Variety Store), closer to Dundee Road but still on Milwaukee Avenue. (Most of the fledgling libraries in the suburbs at that time occupied similar quarters). Genuine library shelving and furniture were purchased with the accumulated rent money, donated back to the library by the Union Hotel owners, and the entire collection was moved to new quarters by volunteers of all ages with carts borrowed from the local grocery store.

Library hours were increased to 67 hours a week by 1964. The yearly budget was \$21,200 and there were 12,725 books in the collection. In 1970 the first (MLS) librarian, Raymond Deutsch, was hired, bringing much appreciated professional direction to all procedures and relief to the beleaguered staff. Subsequently a vacated flower shop next door became available and the size of the library premises doubled, adding a separate children's section and with an extra bonus of a miniscule basement area for storage. The purchase of a copy machine for staff and patron use was a major acquisition.

In 1966 a consortium of north suburban libraries was formed. Its purpose was to initiate and facilitate a system of cooperation and interlibrary loan of materials between a number of libraries in the north suburban area. It was called North

Suburban Library System (formerly Illinois Library District #5) and its administration building was permanently located in Wheeling, in the geographical center its area of operation.. Wheeling Public Library was the third library to join the NSLS.

With burgeoning increases in services and acquisitions at the Wheeling Public Library, and the advisability of locating more centrally in the service area became a critical issue, a referendum was held in April, 1970 for the purpose of acquiring an empty church building on Jenkins Court, near Elmhurst and Dundee Roads. The referendum passed and the religious structure was "de-sanctified"; remodeling was begun, completed in June, 1971, and the entire collection and furnishings were painstakingly boxed and labeled and moved to the new location. Library offices, Technical Services, Adult Services and Circulation were located on the first floor and the Children's Department was on the lower level.. A dumb-waiter was installed to move book-carts between floors. (Instant dismissal was threatened to anyone hoping to use the dumb-waiter as a human elevator.)

The first Head Librarian resigned in 1972, and Kenneth Swanson was promoted to the position. He had been employed previously as Head of the Reference Department.

In January, 1974 Wheeling Public Library District joined together with five other libraries to form a computer cooperative to initiate electronic circulation procedures and bibliographic control of the collection, maintaining a computerized record of the entire stock of books and materials owned.

Also, in 1974, a portion of Buffalo Grove situated in Lake County was annexed to the library district by means of a referendum.

Although a supplementary trailer to accommodate Technical Services was installed next to the library building and connected by a passageway, growth in both area population and library usage demanded a larger facility. A referendum to accomplish this by constructing a new and much larger building on recently acquired property on Schoenbeck Road was held in October, 1977 but did not pass. The failure of the referendum was attributed partly to the anticipated raise in taxes and partly to the dissatisfaction of some Buffalo Grove residents who had, numerous times, attempted to establish their own library or at least persuade the Wheeling Public Library District to either locate the main library or establish a permanent branch library within their village. (Attempts at branch libraries were made, proved impractical to maintain, and the facilities eventually closed.)\* Some time during this period a contest was held to rename the library district and it was officially changed to a more generic form, Indian Trails Public Library District, not specifically naming any one of the three municipalities involved.

Determined to build a new and more adequate facility the library board exercised the option to utilize a "Back Door" clause in Illinois Library law, allowing the board to independently finance the project. On November 11, 1977 a groundbreaking ceremony was held and, in 1980, the original portion of the existing structure was finished, furnished, and occupied.

1995

With continued growth more space again became an urgent necessity. In 1995, a successful referendum was held to approve a 3.8 million bond issue for expansion purposes and the library building was enlarged to its current size of approximately 40,00 sq. ft. and reconfigured to accommodate more and more traditional and added services, with many enhanced electronic communication capabilities. Individual offices were built for department heads and individual cubicles were provided for support staff, the work and administration areas being completely separated from the public service areas.

Kenneth Swanson retired from the library in October, 1996 and Tamiye Meehan was selected to fill the position of Library Director, assuming the major task of overseeing the renovation and expansion. A Grand Opening of the newly enlarged library building was held on November 11, 1998.

2006

A new garage was built at the rear of the building to accommodate the large Bookmobile acquired in 1979, replacing a small van which had been used for many years to bring book borrowing privileges to residents of outlying areas of the library district. The Bookmobile also serves the elderly and the homebound.

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\*See Library Development in Wheeling and Buffalo Grove, Illinois: 1930-78, written by Vivian Finkelstein, for a complete description of the efforts made over time by Buffalo Grove officials and concerned residents to establish either the central library or a permanent library in their village.

\*\*An ordinance allowable under Illinois Library Laws whereby a Library District can enter into an installment contract to pay for new construction within a period of ten years by including the payments in the annual tax levy.

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