

Many Wheeling residents erroneously assume that the Wheeling Public Library, established in 1958, was the first "official" public library in the Village. Concerned citizens were interested in library service to the public as far back as 1930 and a community library was housed in the Wheeling Public School from 1939 until 1955. Because funds were limited, the quality of library service in Wheeling and Buffalo Grove until the early 1960's was dependent upon the kind and number of donations received and the willingness of residents to serve as unsalaried librarians and to voluntarily assist in any other capacity needed. Many individuals and organizations gave their time, money, and services freely for this purpose, and it is they who were responsible for library facilities in Wheeling and Buffalo Grove until tax money was available. Even after the Wheeling Public Library was put on the tax rolls, volunteers were indispensable.

The first public library in Wheeling was established in 1930 because the small school library in the Wheeling Public School was inadequate to meet the needs of the students. Members of the schools Achievement Club reported in the local newspaper: "It has been very difficult for us to carry out our Reading Project because we have no public library to help supply us with books." they said that the Chamber of Commerce had donated money to the library, and that the library extension department at Springfield had given them forty-six books. The next week it was announced that a "modest library" was available for Wheeling residents. In addition to the books from the state, residents donated ninety more. The school library was open to the public two evenings a week, for 1 hour each night. Due to the limited collection, each person was allowed two fiction books and one nonfiction book for a period of one week. Overdue fees were set at one cent per day.

There was also a library at Childerley, a home for widows and children, located about two miles northwest of Wheeling. Childerley, which means "children's meadow," was owned and operated by Frances Crane Lillie., daughter of a prominent Chicago iron master. Childerley had its own school and library for its residents, but Wheeling also benefited from Mrs. Lillie's generosity. In 1932, Childerley Community Center was opened up to the village (for a small fee) to serve as a meeting place for all kinds of activities. At this time the village had no such center of its own. Childerley was used often for PTA sponsored parties and meetings, square dances, plays, and meetings of the Mother's Study Club. Other uses included a Presbyterian Church Young Peoples' Club carnival, a Farmer's Institute, and the Wheeling Public School graduation. Those who visited Childerley on these other occasions may have had access to the library. Because of this close interaction between the Wheeling community and Childerley, it is not surprising that when Mrs. Lillie became ill and was forced to give up Childerley, she donated its library to the village for the purpose of starting a community library.

In the summer of 1937, a vacation time library was organized by the Presbyterian Church school and the Wheeling Public School P.T.A. Books were collected from the church, the school, and from Wheeling residents; the library was open one evening a week for two hours and for a short time on Sunday morning.

According to the local newspaper, the popularity of the library began to decrease in 1946 because there had been no regular librarian for a while. Mrs. Charles D. Balling wanted to increase the library's value to the community. She attended a one week school for librarians, sponsored by the state in August, 1948. The library hours were increased to once a week in the afternoon in addition to the weekly evening hours.

The library remained in operation for more than five more years, during this period it relied upon donations. During these final years of the Wheeling Public Library there was a growing concern about the shortage of books, especially for school children. Enrollment at the school had increased enormously in eight years, from 84 pupils in 1945 to about 375 in 1953, and there was no school library for their daytime use. When state officials inspected the school in January 1952, they criticized the library for not having enough children's books. Mrs. Douglas Cargill complained to the school board in November 1952 about the school using a set of encyclopedias that belonged to the library. It was not until 1953 that the children were allowed to use the library during the day. Ironically, many of the adults in the community did not know that the library was not meant only for the school children and that it was open to the public. "There is a library in our town," Mrs. Cargill reported to the newspaper. The need for funds and books continued, along with a growing desire to form a real school library as well as a tax-supported public library. In 1955 the community library closed and plans were discussed for two new libraries.