

# THE HISTORY OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY IN FRANKFORT, MICHIGAN



comings was a public dedicated to the concept of good library service; a caring, talented, creative staff; determined, innovative, proactive library board members; a core of dedicated volunteers, and a shared goal of public service. The Friends of the Library was formed in 1990 and took charge of library enhancement. Services that were needed that could not be covered by the library budget were provided by the Friends.

The new library was opened in 1994 and a district library providing stable funding in perpetuity was formed in 1995. Both had an impact on library services, but the most profound impact has been the introduction and development of technology. Computers and the internet have totally changed the library world. Technology has become a cornerstone of good library service.

The decision by the library board and staff to recognize the importance of children and children's services has had a far-reaching positive impact on our library and our community. We love having children in the library. To promote early literacy the Friends have instituted a program of giving a book to each newborn child.

It has been and continues to be a great joy to work at the library. When I wake up in the morning, even after 20 years, I can't wait to get to work. Every day is full of good people, surprises, information, books, knowledge, challenges, and fun, fun, fun. Every day I learn something new. Every day I get to talk about books and ideas. Every day I get to see a child's delight in finding a new book.

This library history shows how special the library is, but it is every person who walks through the door who makes it truly special. So, finally, I thank all of you.

**Cathy Carter**  
**Library Director**  
July, 2011

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By the Friends of the Benzie Shores District Library

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For the past several years, the Benzie Shores District Library has been ranked as one of the top libraries in the State of Michigan by Hennen's American Public Library Ratings.

2011 Benzie Shores District Library was awarded the QSAC Essential and Enhanced Library Services Certificate from Library of Michigan

## **LETTER FROM THE LIBRARIAN**

As with any group effort, there is never enough space to thank all of the people who should be thanked.

For making the library history project a reality, I would like to thank Teresa Mensching. Teresa researched and wrote most of the history of the library. The research involved basements and a lot of dust. Kay Hommel deserves a big thank you for creating this book. She has also been responsible for editing and computer layout for the Friends of the Library Newsletter since its very first issue. The Friend's support for this project made this lovely publication possible.

Extraordinarily gifted, long time employees and new ones, long serving board members and new ones, Friends members who have worked on the Friends projects for 20 years and recent members, and, of course, our volunteers who encompass a variety of ages and talents...I thank you for your hard work, dedication to the library and the gift of friendship that is a true blessing.

The library patrons and the library community have been supportive of this wonderful library in every way imaginable. A big thank you for making this library a shining star.

When I started as library director in 1990, the library was housed in a very crowded 1400 square foot building. There were no public computers, no children's programming, and the funding was very poor. However, what the library had that made up for in its short-

# **THE HISTORY OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY IN FRANKFORT 1870—1898**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Individuals in the Frankfort area have been devoted to creating and sustaining a library for public use since the earliest days of shipping and logging. Since 1871, when members of the Frankfort Literary Association began collecting books for a library in a rented building, Frankfort has maintained a library in one form or another to the present day.

## **MISSION OF THE BENZIE SHORES DISTRICT LIBRARY**

Our mission is to provide educational, informational, intellectual and recreational library resources to our communities and visitors.

## **MISSION OF THE FRIENDS OF THE BENZIE SHORES DISTRICT LIBRARY**

It is the mission of "The Friends of the Benzie Shores District Library" to support the library, its services and programs through advocacy, fundraising and volunteers. The "Friends" are dedicated to the goal of making our library the very best through community awareness and involvement.

## **FRANKFORT LITERARY ASSOCIATION LIBRARY**

A library was first organized in Frankfort as the Frankfort Literary Association in November 1871. It was located in a building rented by the Association at the southwest corner of Fourth Street and Forest Avenue.

The library was supported financially by membership fees and a separate subscription fee. Members who paid a subscription were able to borrow books from the library. There were at least 14 original Association members, including A. Fletcher, A.G. Butler, N.A. Parker (attorney), Frederick Kern, A. Jenkins, Alonzo Carrier, John Collins (pharmacist), A. Wheeler, Isaac Voorheis, F. Harvey, and J. Delbridge.

Residents of Frankfort and the vicinity, who were not already members, could pay \$1.00 per year or 25 cents quarterly to borrow books. The library was open on Monday and Thursday evenings from 7 to 9 p.m.

Some of the earliest information about the library in Frankfort was documented in a letter by Frankfort Literary Association member, Mr. N.A. Parker, in April 1892. In his response to a United States Bureau of Education survey on local libraries, Mr. Parker described the size of the library collection, (346 bound volumes and 200 pamphlets) and noted that although this was not a public library (a membership fee was required) that public school students, regardless of membership, did have access to the library.

It is of interest to note that this library was established before the invention of the Dewey Decimal System in 1876, which revolutionized how library books were stored and accessed in libraries.

- 2002 (March) Crystal Lake Township voters approved a millage and library services contract for 5 more years
- 2005 (September) The Village of Elberta and Gilmore Township entered into a library services agreement through 2009
- 2006 (April) Crystal Lake Township joined the Benzie Shores District Library (millage in perpetuity and Board representation)
- 2007 (November) Gilmore Township (encompassing the Village of Elberta) voters approved a millage of .75 for a library services contract 2009-2012
- 2010 Renovation of the Benzie Shores District Library
- 2011 The portion of Lake Township in the Frankfort/Elberta School District joined the Benzie Shores District Library (millage in perpetuity and Board representation).

### **RECOGNITION**

During the last ten years the library and the library staff have been recognized with many awards:

- 1992 Frankfort City Library recognized by Library Journal and Gale Research...as one of the five finalists in the first Library of the Year Award
- 1993 Cathy Carter awarded the Rotary Vocational Achievement Award
- 1994 Cathy Carter awarded the Michigan Rural Librarian of the Year
- 2001 Cathy Carter awarded the Rotary Four-Way Test Award
- 2004 Library was ranked as the number one library in Michigan by the HAPLAR Rankings

# SIGNIFICANT DATES IN THE HISTORY OF THE LIBRARY IN FRANKFORT, MICHIGAN

- 1871 Frankfort Literary Association established
- 1877 Crystal Lake Township Library Fund established
- 1898 Frankfort Public School Library formed by merger of the collections of the Frankfort Literary Society (Association) and the Crystal Lake Township Library
- 1930's Frankfort Public School Library is moved to the County Normal Building
- 1950 Frankfort City Library established and located in City Hall
- 1961 Frankfort's first free-standing library is built on Main Street
- 1963 Memorial Trust Fund is established
- 1990 Friends of the Library group established
- 1993 Friends of the Library established an Endowment Fund
- 1994 New library building opened April 1994
- 1995 Blaine Township joined Frankfort in forming the District Library
- 1997 Crystal Lake Township joined the District Library on a five-year contract
- 2001 Library Board established an Endowment Fund

## CRYSTAL LAKE TOWNSHIP LIBRARY/ LIBRARY FUND

A Library Fund began in 1877 for a library in Crystal Lake Township. One document from this library exists. It opens with a statement by Amos B. Perrin recording a balance of \$165.22 on December 19, 1877. Donations were made by H.B. Balch, I.S. Marion, and the Chase brothers.

This document includes a *Catalogue of the Books* of the Crystal Lake Library which were acquired beginning in 1878. The library eventually grew to 719 volumes. The collection offered a blend of fiction and non-fiction titles, including most of the novels written by Charles Dickens, a copy of *The Koran*, a multi-volume set of a history of the United States, Goethe's *Faust*, the works of Confucius, a *History of the Books of the Bible*, a 10 volume set of *Rollo's Tour in Europe*, a *Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction*, and W.W. Fowler's *Twenty Years of Insider's Life in Wall Street*. Although the bulk of the collection was comprised of English language books, there were over 30 books in German and at least 40 in various Scandinavian languages reflecting countries of origin of some of the early settlers.

# HISTORY OF LIBRARIES IN FRANKFORT 1899—1989

## FRANKFORT PUBLIC SCHOOL LIBRARY

In September, 1898, the Crystal Lake Township Library and the Frankfort Literary Society (previously known as the Frankfort Literary Association) combined their collections to form the Frankfort Public School Library on Leelanau Avenue. An arrangement was agreed upon between the school district and the Literary Association to allow use of the library by the general public as well as the school's students. This library was located on Leelanau Avenue where the current Frankfort Elementary School stands today. As of October 28, 1899, the library was comprised of 880 books and 40 magazines and pamphlets.

The librarian reported on a quarterly basis to the Trustees of School District No. 1, Crystal Lake Township. The quarterly reports included:

- The statistics on the number of books and periodicals on hand
- New materials added, books not returned
- Fines assessed and paid (or un-paid)
- The number of materials in need of repair
- The number of days that the library was open to the public

The librarians often requested additional funding every quarter for books. Ada Lewis, the librarian from 1920-30, was especially persistent in asking for more money to purchase new books. Very often, the only new books at the library were donated by library patrons.

## SERVICES

The library focuses on providing the best possible service to its patrons and community. Library services include programs for children and adults, current adult fiction and non-fiction collections, up-to-date technology including WiFi and computer programs, an extensive large print collection, audio books, downloadables, dvds, a variety of magazines, gaming, and much more. Over the years the library hours have been greatly expanded to meet the increasing needs of the community.

## FUNDING

Funding for the library has evolved. In the early 1990's the library depended on donations and some funding from the City of Frankfort. Many grants were written and awarded that allowed the library to expand services. When the district library was formed, a millage was voted to support library operations. At the same time, the Friends of the Library started an Endowment Fund. The Library Board started an Endowment Fund in 2001.

## VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are the backbone of library service. The library board, the Friends of the Library, the Reflections by the Bay committee, desk workers, shelvees, book sale workers, all work hard to keep the library functioning as smoothly as possible. The library could not open its doors without the volunteers' commitment to the library and the community.

## RENOVATION PROJECT

When the results of an extensive 2008 library services survey conducted by the library board were analyzed, it became evident that the interior of the library needed to be renovated to accommodate evolving services and patron's expectations. However, due to national, state and local economic issues the timing was not right for a library renovation project. In August 2009, the library board made the commitment to renovate the library and began a fundraising effort. From January 2010 to March 2010, the construction took place. Once again, the staff, with the help of professional movers this time, moved to a temporary location at 421 Main Street, Frankfort. Library services continued at the temporary library with books, magazines, computers and wireless internet available. Renovation was completed on budget and on schedule. The library reopened April 6, 2010

# LIBRARY HISTORY SINCE 1990

Since 1990 the library has seen extraordinary changes

## A NEW BUILDING

In 1993 construction on the new library began. The doors of the new library opened in April 1994. The construction phase included moving everything to the old Sears Store at 736 Main Street. Every book and every shelf was moved. The shelving was emptied in the old library, books packed up with the boxes numbered, then the shelves were moved and the boxes unpacked. It seemed as though every able bodied person in town helped. When construction was complete, the books were moved back into the new building. Seventeen pickup trucks and every sports team from Frankfort High School helped move into the new library.

## DISTRICT LIBRARY

In 1995, after many years of working on the formation of a district library, the Frankfort City Library was disbanded and Blaine township and the City of Frankfort formed a district library. Subsequently, Crystal Lake Township had a library services contract and in 2006 joined the library district. Gilmore Township and the Village of Elberta have had a library services contract since 2005. There have been many attempts to form a countywide district library but, so far, none have succeeded.

## TECHNOLOGY

Computers! Computers! Computers! In 1990 the library switched from the “old fashioned” way of checking out books to an automated system. What a shock for many patrons to actually be issued a library card! It seems as though the years since then have had one technological innovation or surprise after another. In 1995 the Benzie Shores District Library was one of the first libraries in Michigan to offer the Internet. Public access to the Internet, a library website, Michigan Electronic Databases, wireless Internet access, downloadable books and other innovative technologies were made available. Local newspapers are now digitized and indexed.

In the late 1930's, the school library was moved to the County Normal Building which was located at the west end of the current elementary school on Leelanau Avenue. It was moved because it was displaced by the construction of a new gym. This building had served first as the Union School (1868-1894), as the Courthouse and Jail (1894-1908) and as the County Normal School (1909-1949). The County Normal School was housed on one end, the library was in the middle, and the other end was used for youth activities and organizations such as Boy Scouts. It is important to note that although the library was physically located in a school building, it was officially serving the local public as well as the school children.

During the forties, the school received funding from outside sources specifically for the support of the library. For example, in 1948, the school received State of Michigan state library tax funds (\$130.26), library penal fines (\$347.66), and “city aid for library” (\$500).

Librarians who served the Frankfort Public School Library included:

Jessie Slyfield 1899-1904  
Mate Wickham 1900-1903  
Gladys Wannamaker Stone 1907-1917?  
Mary Constance Kern Palmer 1909-1910  
Ella Linkletter 1910-1920  
Ada Lewis 1920-1930  
Emeline L. Kinne 1930-1938?  
Mrs. William Storr 1930's  
Dorothy Doane 1938?-1950

# FRANKFORT CITY LIBRARY

In the late 1940's, the Frankfort School Board decided to build a new elementary school on the Leelanau Avenue site of the County Normal Building. This meant that the County Normal building would have to be closed and razed. The School Board consulted with the University of Michigan Library Director, Dr. Warren Rice, about whether the school library should continue to have a dual function as a school and public library. It appears that he recommended that Frankfort should operate a public library separate from the school.

On March 20, 1950, the School Board passed a resolution to work with the Frankfort City Council to divide the library collection between the school library and a new public library. All books deemed necessary for the local children's education were to remain the property of the school while the rest of the collection would form the new Frankfort City Library. The resolution ended with the following statement. "That a continuous working agreement between the School and City libraries be maintained relative to loan of books and other areas of cooperation."

The new Frankfort City Library was established in May, 1950 with 4,957 volumes and was located in City Hall on Main Street until 1961. Inez Beidler was appointed librarian and reported to the Library Board. The Board was comprised of five individuals appointed by the mayor with varying lengths of terms. In 1952, the Board members included Walter Pope (President), Dr. Fred Thacker (Vice President), Mrs. Zaph (Secretary and Treasurer), Mrs. Ethel Campbell (County Normal School teacher) and Mrs. Ellen Brewer.

In 1950, the Frankfort City Library served a population of 1,600 within an area of about one and one-half square miles. Use of the library was free to city residents. Non-residents paid a fee of \$1.00 per year for borrowing privileges. The library was open for 21 hours per week for 304 days in the year.

The new building, which was built through a federal grant, monies from the Seabury Foundation, and generous donations, opened in April 1994.

## LIBRARY BOARD PRESIDENTS

Paul Pate	1950-1990
Pete Sandman	1990-1995
Jon Armstrong	1995-present

## FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY PRESIDENTS

Jim Boomer	1990-1992
Bev Popp	1992-1993
Joe Hommel	1993-present

## **LIBRARIANS AT THE FRANKFORT CITY LIBRARY & BENZIE SHORES DISTRICT LIBRARY**

Inez Beidler	1950-1951
Linda Potts	1951-1963
Elsie Gilbert	1952-1963 (substitute for Mrs. Potts) 1964-1989 librarian
Clara Harwood	1968 assistant
Marion Holmes	1985 assistant
Sarah Dawson	1989
Lou Wichert	1989-1990
Cathy Carter	1990-present

## **RECENT HISTORY OF THE LIBRARY**

The library has been very dynamic and lively since 1990 when both Cathy Carter (1990-present), and Cindy Collier (1990-present), were hired. Julie Morris, who was a volunteer at that time, became the children's librarian in 1993 to present. Glenn Mensching worked at the library in 2001-2002, Becky Noffsinger 2007-2008, Hilary Turner 2007-present, Katie Larsen 2008-2009, and Stacy Pasche 2009-present.

The Frankfort City Library was funded through donations and a small budget from the City of Frankfort. There was no millage and essentially no monetary support from area townships. The 1960 building was 1500 square feet, which was inadequate for the high usage. The Library Board decided to form a district library, which would allow them to ask voters for a millage in perpetuity and to build a new building through grants and donations. By 1995 both of these goals had been accomplished.

The City of Frankfort's Library Board established an initial budget of \$2,000.00. The State of Michigan provided State Aid in the amount of \$200 from the General Library Fund Grant. Other sources of funding for the Frankfort City Library included \$1.00 non-resident fees, penal fines, and proceeds from the rental collection.

Detailed annual reports have been prepared by the librarians since 1951 and provide us with invaluable information including details regarding the library's finances, number of card holders, and circulation. By the end of the first fiscal year of the new Frankfort City Library, 1950-1951, the following expenses were reported: Librarian \$1,200; Assistant Librarian \$36.50; books and periodicals \$387.54; repairs and binding \$16.00; telephone \$54.03; and miscellaneous \$94.54; for a grand total of \$1,788.61.

By 1952, there were 849 library card holders, of whom 65 were non-residents. The library was open on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday from 2:00 p.m. until 5:30 p.m.. Wednesdays it was open from 11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m. and 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.. It is interesting to note that the library has been open Wednesday evenings ever since this time! The circulation of children's books (51.8%) only slightly edged out that of books for adults (48.2%) from a total of 7,597 volumes circulated.

Although it is often difficult to assess true quality of service from annual reports, the Frankfort City Library was adequately serving the resident population, particularly in terms of staff qualifications and hours available to the public. By the mid-1950's, this library exceeded the minimum standards for service as noted in the Michigan State Library "Minimum Standards for Public Libraries" as published in 1954. For a library serving a population of 1,800, the Standards required only one staff worker holding a "certificate of library experience" to keep the library open at least 10 hours per week. The Frankfort City Library employed a librarian with two years' college education, Linda Potts, and the library was open 21 hours per week.

## FUNDING THE LIBRARY

The libraries in Frankfort have been funded in a variety of ways since the Frankfort Literary Association opened its doors to members in 1871. The Literary Association and the Crystal Lake Township Library were funded privately. When the libraries combined in 1898 to form the Frankfort School Library, funding was largely from school funds. Individuals would sometimes donate books directly to the library. By the late 1940's, in addition to local tax funds, the State of Michigan state library tax funds provided some support as did penal fines, and the city of Frankfort.

In 1950, the city provided most of the support for the Frankfort City Library. In addition, Michigan State Aid from the Library Fund Grant was included in the budget. Penal fines also contributed to the support of the library.

Additional funding through a Memorial Trust Fund began in 1962 with a gift of \$400.00 from Mr. & Mrs. Charles Ward Seabury in memory of their parents. The library was instructed to use the interest from this Fund to purchase books for the library. In 1963, Board members began to actively solicit donations to the Fund from summer residents. This account continued to grow and by 1988, the value of the certificates of deposit reached nearly \$196,000, providing a significant portion of the library's annual budget.

The Friends of the Library group was founded on October 6, 1990. Since that time the Friends have established an Endowment Fund, and been advocates for the district library. The Friends organize an annual book sale, provide funding for the library's technology, support children's programs including the Summer Reading Program, present the Reflections by the Bay lecture series, fund the purchase of business reference sources and special projects such as landscaping and the irrigation system. They also provide funding for the newsletter and other requests for physical improvements to the facilities. The Friends average approximately 200 supportive members. Joe Hommel has been the president since October 1993-present.



In September, 1898, the Crystal Lake Township Library and the Frankfort Literary Society combined their collections to form the Frankfort Public School Library, which was located within the school on Leelanau Avenue.



In the late 1930s this long building with three doors housed (from left to right) Benzie County Normal, the Frankfort Library, and a meeting room for community activities. (c.1909)

## PLANNING A LIBRARY BUILDING

Discussion of building a new library, physically separate from the City Hall, began as early as September 1951 at a Library Board meeting. Ideas for a library and possibly a combination of a community center and library were discussed throughout the 1950's. Various sites were considered including a lot in Rotary Park and a lot next to the Legion Hall. A city-owned lot was ultimately chosen for the library site in 1960.

Construction on a new, free-standing library building was begun in 1960 at 630 Main Street in Mineral Springs Park by Jack Clement. The project was funded by a very serious donation from Mr. and Mrs. Charles Ward (Louise Lovett) Seabury. Members of the Library Board held a grand opening on July 23, 1961.

## ELSIE GILBERT

Elsie Gilbert was the longest serving librarian in the history of libraries in Frankfort, working as librarian from 1963 to 1989. She began work at the Frankfort City Library as an assistant to Linda Potts in 1952, and took over the top position after Mrs. Potts' resignation in 1963. Procedures and rules stayed the same throughout these years. The State of Michigan donated a computer to the library which remained unused during her tenure. In addition to her position as librarian, Elsie was perhaps known just as well as Frankfort's biggest sports fan ever. Elsie loved football so much that every fall she closed the library for the state football finals! Elsie worked until the day she died at the age of 84 in March 1989.



The newly constructed, free standing library building in Mineral Springs Park, Frankfort. The grand opening celebration was held on July 23, 1961.



View of the library showing the final addition which was constructed in 1994 (northwest corner from Main Street).



Teen and media area reconfigured for enhanced study/reading space.



Patrons entering the library are now greeted by a warmly refurbished circulation desk, workroom, cupboards and shelving units.



New children's area located in the southwest corner of the library with a lovely view of the bay.



Spacious new study area with its lighted tables and ever changing view of Betsie Bay.