

HISTORY OF THE OAK HARBOR PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Oak Harbor Public Library was organized and opened its doors in 1908, but its inception follows a tradition of free lending libraries in the Village that dates back to at least 1875. Apparently there were at least two prior public lending libraries available to the citizens of Oak Harbor before 1908.

Mr. George Thierwechter, in his book, A History of The Oak Harbor Public School and the Benton-Carroll-Salem Local School District, records that there was a public library in the old 1875 school building. It was thought to be located on either the main floor or second floor corridor at the rear of the building. Any student or their family members could take out books for home use. The limit was one volume at a time for no longer than two weeks. The library was open at least one hour each day of the week except Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday. The school board, in December, 1877, granted the German Dramatic Club free use of a room in the building with the stipulation that any public entertainment given by the club that resulted in funds being produced, less expenses, were to be given to the public library.

It is not known how long the library at the school was available to the public and other than its organizational rules, little is known about it. Perhaps it just never caught on with the general public. The school building itself was, in the late 1800's, on the southwest corner of Walnut and Church Streets, on the very north edge of town "out in the woods". This would have been a distance away from the downtown business area where most of the people congregated when coming to town, plus a special trip, especially for the farmers, would have to be made during the week when the library was open.



Oak Harbor High School - 1875



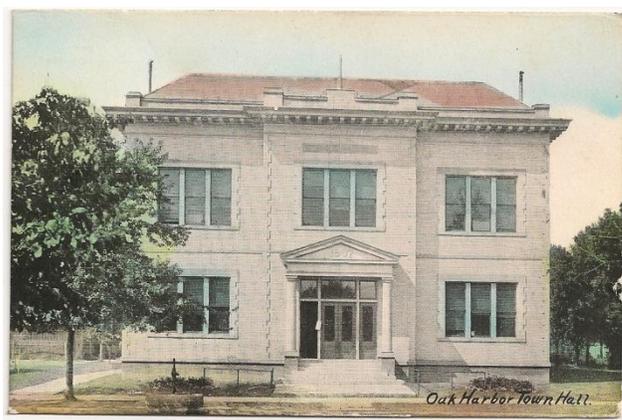
172 West Water Street - Lantz's Red X Store

Another early lending library was actually in a downtown store. The Oak Harbor Literary & Social Club records tell about their club making books accessible, as a library, in Lantz's Red X store. This would have been some time after 1902, when L.Z. Lantz started in business, and before the Oak Harbor Public Library came into being in 1908. Lantz's store was on the north side of Water Street, the second store front east of Church Street. No mention of how this library functioned is made in the club's records. One must assume that the small library was more readily used than the one at the school as it would have been accessible to anyone, any time the store was open.

By 1908, the ladies of the Oak Harbor Literary & Social Club saw the need for a larger, more permanent library. A Library Committee was formed, with an integral part of it being members of the Literary & Social Club, to create a public library for the Village. The Committee did its job well as on May 2, 1908 the first meeting of the Oak Harbor Public Library Board was held. First Board members were: President- F.A. Kilmer, Secretary Treasurer – Geo. A. Aschbacher, & Trustees - Mrs. Allen Conrad, Mrs. G.L. Wells, John Duff, and A.H. Suhrbier.

The idea of a public library was met by the citizens of Oak Harbor with enthusiasm. Subscriptions were sold, benefits staged, ball games played with all funds for a new library. Mr. Edw. Cairl of the “White Front Theater” gave one day’s afternoon & evening show proceeds, \$58.25, to the library. The Board moved rapidly and by May 20th, it had its plans in place to hire a librarian at \$8.50 per month, establish regular hours, and buy books, shelving, and chairs. Library rules, to be printed on each book card pocket, were adopted July 2nd. The library room itself, was planned to be in the new Oak Harbor Town Hall.

Tuesday, October 6, 1908 was an auspicious day for the Oak Harbor Public Library. The Library opened to the public. Located in the southwest corner of the main floor of the Town Hall, the Library room was accessed by a separate outside entry door facing the alley. The Street Commissioner attended the fires for the building and the room. Chloe Colloff, the librarian hired by the Board, would report that in the first year of operation the Library lent some 2,794 books to 382 patrons from the 677 volumes in the room.



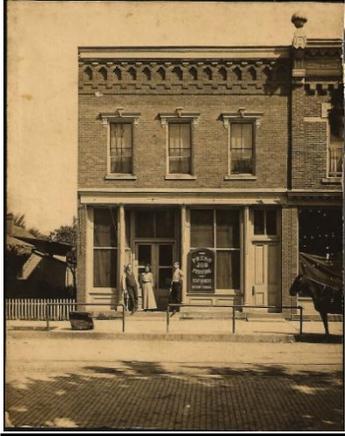
Oak Harbor Town Hall - 1907



Town Hall – Southwest Rear Corner – Door on Right

The Library would stay at this location until 1936. By then it had outgrown its room. The Library Board was approached by Mayor O.L. Teagarden with a proposal to assure future growth of the Library. He would, at his expense, lease the lower floor of the Alexander Building for two years, pay utilities, paper & paint, erect shelves, install linoleum, install lavatory facilities, and furnish a gas stove. He even would donate his entire first term mayor’s salary to the Library. In short he would make any necessary and reasonable improvements needed to transform the building into suitable library for the Village.

The Library Trustees accepted this generous offer and the Library moved to the Alexander Building, 218 West Water Street, in February, 1936. Once again the Oak Harbor Literary & Social Club would show its support for the Library. Installed in a place of prominence in the new Library was a large, wood circulation desk donated by the Club. It was an impressive addition to the Library.



218 West Water Street



1936 Circulation Desk – Currently in Library’s Local History & Museum Center

The Library was again on the main street of town, very much in the public view, and in a large modern room with space to expand. And expand it would, the Library would exceed the capacity of its building on Water Street in just 5 short years. By 1941, it was time to think about a permanent location for the Library. Through the auspices of O.L. Teagarden, the Library Board would buy a house at 147 West Main Street, owned by John O. Fought. The Library moved here in February, 1942 and would use the lower floor of the house for itself with the upper floor rented out as an apartment. This arrangement remained until March 24, 1944 when a fire broke out. Serious damage was done to the house with the upstairs completely burnt. Damage, of varying degrees, was done to over 8,000 books, effectively closing the Library.



147 West Main Street – Side View



240 West Water Street – Community Hall 2nd Floor

The Village of Oak Harbor came to the rescue and provided a temporary home for the Library in the Community Hall. This hall was on the second floor of the Fire Station, accessed by an alley door near the rear of the building. Opening within two weeks of the fire, it was ready for library patrons on April 7, 1944. During the subsequent year, the Library Board would oversee the construction of a new modern 32' x 55' one-story structure at the same 147 West Main Street location. Characterized by hot water heat, plaster walls, a sleek tile floor, generous built-in shelving, and a large open room, the new Library would open on April 1, 1945, just a little over a year after the fire.



147 West Main Street



(Left) 1987 Library – (Right) 1945 Library with 1955 Addition

The Oak Harbor Public Library was once again a modern, functioning service for the Village. By 1949 it served some 500 patrons, circulating over 10,000 volumes from its 9,000 volume collection. And yet again it needed to expand. In 1955, a 500 square feet addition was added onto the rear of the building. In a separate room, away from the busy main room, it would serve the more serious reader and researcher. Housing magazines, non-fiction books, and reference material, it saw many a school student over the years completing their homework.

Over the next number of years, circulation would continue to rise and the Library collection would expand. Always looking ahead to the future, the Library Board purchased property, between its existing building and the alley to the east. The house on the property would be torn down in 1971, but future growth of the Library would not be contemplated for another 15 years.

Not until 1986 would the Library Board start to consider expansion. In June of that year, they would look at using the property they owned, just east of their present building, for a new 75' x 75' brick building. The old white wood frame building would stay in use until the new building was ready for use and then it would be torn down for a parking lot.

Construction started Thursday, September 25, 1986 with a formal ground breaking on October 20th. By December the basement walls had been poured. By January, 1987 the brick had been laid, steel for the roof in place and windows installed. By May, some 8 months after construction started, the new building was ready for the books to be transferred. The Library, which had been able to stay open to serve its patrons during construction, was closed from May 18th to June 1st for the move. Close to 24,000 volumes, plus book shelves, tables & chairs were moved into the new building within the first few days.

With the completion of the move, an auction was held on May 22nd to sell off anything remaining in the old building. The building itself was torn down on June 4th & 5th with the parking lot finished by July. A formal Open House Celebration for the new building was conducted on August 30, 1987.

Even this large building proved to be too small. In March, 2000 the Library started construction of a 3,500 square feet addition on the west side of the building. It would be built on the parking lot that was created in 1987 by the tearing down of the old white wood frame Library building. Comprising of a large librarian work room, a meeting room, a children's area, and an elevator to the uncompleted basement, it would be formally dedicated on May 20, 2001.

While not a growth in the actual building size, yet another expansion would take place in 2007/2008. The unfinished basement under the 1987 portion of the building was completed. A meeting room, local history room, and restrooms were installed in the basement as well as a main floor rear entrance to the Library's off street parking lot. An Open House, hosted by the Oak Harbor Literary & Social Club*, was held on October 19, 2008 to introduce the public to the newest part of the Library. As a part of the Open House, the Library celebrated its 100th years of serving the citizens of the Oak Harbor area.

From a small room in 1908, to the large building of 2012, the Oak Harbor Public Library has become a vibrant, modern Library. Circulating yearly over 110,000 items to over 6,000 patrons from a collection of over 40,000 pieces, it serves the always varying and demanding needs of its 21st Century patrons. Besides books and magazines, the Library offers Story Hours, Reading Clubs, CD's, DVD's, Computers, Internet Access, and Meeting Rooms, as well as numerous Community Services including Home Delivery to the residents of the Riverview Senior Care Campus and anyone unable to come to the Library.



2012 - Oak Harbor Public Library

Library Staff – Throughout the years there have been many persons that have worked at the Oak Harbor Public Library. Some were only for a short time and some for a longer period of time. Their efforts have made the Library what it is today. They are, to the Library patron, what is the essence of the Library. They are the face of the Library. To list them all individually would be the proper thing to do. To miss someone would be a disgrace. To thank all, is the best way.

Library Volunteers – There is no way that a Library, whether private or public, can function without a large group of volunteers. To give of their time to something that they have passion for is one of the best reasons to volunteer. To the many, most lost in the passage of time, who have assisted the Librarians in so many small mundane tasks, a large and heartfelt thank you is in order. The Library could not function without them.

*Since the inception of the Library, at least one member of the Oak Harbor Literary & Social Club has been on the Library Board of Trustees.

Library Board of Trustees – A group of people who are largely unseen and unknown is the Board of Trustees. Many persons, both in the business sector and the private sector, have given freely of themselves and their expertise to guide the Library, both in good and bad times. To them, goes the highest of all accolades. Without them there would be no Library. They are the ones who have guided, steered, and propelled this Library to what it is today.

Head Librarians:

Chloe Colloff	1908 – 1913
Minnie Brokate	1913 - ?
Julia Jordon Sperling	?
Emma Bitters	? (5-6 years)
Mrs. George Smith	1921 – 1922
Mrs. Bulter	1922
Mrs. Jacob Mock	1926 – 1935
Mabel Alexander	1935 ? (Few months)
Francis Kramb	1935 – 1947
Elsie Meyer	1947 – 1957
Ruth Bredehoft	1957 – 1965
Kathryn Slates	1965 – 1975
Sally Burmeister	1975 – 1995
Barbara McNamee	1995 – 1996
Pam Hoesman	1996 – 2009
Lina Hall	2009 – Present

Resources consulted for this History:

Pam Hoesman – 2008 – The 100th Year Celebration of the Oak Harbor Public Library

John Krueger – Ottawa County Exponent Articles – May 6, 1949 & June 10, 1949

George Thierwechter – A History of the Oak Harbor Public School and the Benton-Carroll-Salem Local School District