

The Library Has Had Many Homes: History of the Mauston Public Library

The twentieth anniversary of Mauston's Hatch Public Library, 111 West State Street, is celebrated in 2020. But, the story of how the library arrived at its present location has many chapters.

In the summer of 1897, Mr. and Mrs. Gene Hitchcock started a magazine club in a room at 121 Division Street, in Mauston. The magazine club subscribed to seven or eight different magazines and slowly added books as membership dues accumulated. Members provided 25 cents a month for use of any library materials. Late in 1897, the library was moved to the upstairs of the Alsbacher Harness shop, which later became Fred Anglim's barbershop and, still later, the site of Kranz hardware store, and now is a vacant lot at 116 East State Street in the heart of downtown Mauston.

Ironically, in the spring of 1898, Mrs. Hitchcock's sister took charge of the collection and moved it to a room of the building where the old Galvin pharmacy was located. The former Galvin pharmacy is, in fact, part of the site of the current library, and until the late 1990's, was Dr. Peter Paquette's Dental Office.

A few years later, the library materials were stored in the office of a Mauston Justice of the Peace, Chester Lyons. (Mr. Lyons' wife was a renowned vocalist who, during her teenage years in her native Illinois, performed at one of the famous debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas, when Mr. Lincoln was running for the U.S. Senate).

Still later, the collection was moved to the Mauston High School where Principal C. W. McNowen and some of the teachers maintained the library collection.

In another small town irony, the library in 1916 was temporarily housed in the upstairs room of 133 East State Street in what was then the Juneau County Bank, later to become the U. S. Post Office in Mauston.

In a move unusual for the time, in 1919, the Mauston Common Council formally recognized the importance of the library by allocating city funds to assist in the maintenance of the library and its collection.

In 1932, the library was housed in a corner of Grote's Drugstore on the corner of State and Division Streets in Mauston, which later became Nelson's Hallmark Store, and until recently housed Treasured Words bookstore. The temporary housing was necessary while the former Presbyterian Church building was being moved from Maine Street to the corner of La Crosse and Division Streets and remodeled to house the Mauston Volunteer Fire Department equipment on one side and the library on the other. Behind the library was a room used for meetings of the Mauston Common Council, and, in the event of a particularly controversial Council issue, the library would be opened up to accommodate the overflow of citizens.

In the early 1950s, when a new City Hall was built on Mansion Street in Mauston, accommodations were made to house a public library in the building, and the collection remained there until 1969, when the old Juneau County Bank building at 133 East State Street (noted above) was vacated by the post office and was remodeled to be used exclusively as the public library. The remodeled building included the addition of a reading room, overlooking the Lemonweir River. The reading room was named for Florence Ely Loomis, a longtime supporter of the library, and the wife of Orlando S. Loomis, the only Mauston resident ever elected as Governor of the State of Wisconsin.

By 1980, the public's demand for library services caused the existing library to become terribly overcrowded. Many tables, chairs and carrels which had provided spacious accommodations in the first few years, were removed over the years to provide space for more bookshelves.

Throughout the 1980's, the Library Board of Trustees studied the options, visited other libraries, interviewed architects and other experts, and explored the possibility of an addition to the existing library. The Architect's report came back with the unhappy news that the expense involved in trying to add needed space to the existing library was not feasible on that particular site.

Thus, throughout the 1990's, the Board's attention turned to locating the right site for a new library. A New Library Steering Committee was formed, and for many years, the Library Board of Trustees buried themselves in community studies, research, details of architectural drawings and fundraising ideas. Early in the process, the City of Mauston made it clear that it had reached its bond limit and City finances would not be able to assist, in any way, with the building of a new library.

When a site was finally determined and a design was approved, the Library Board of Trustees knew what was needed, but realized a private fundraising effort had to be launched to pay for it. Then, an amazing kickoff gift in the sum of \$1 Million from Bill and Jean Hatch of Mauston, began to make the dream a reality. The Hatches wanted to make a truly significant investment in the community's future in memory of their granddaughter, Deena N. Hatch. Overnight, following the gift's announcement, the naysayers were silenced and other donors, large and small, found inspiration, permitting the entire building to be built with individual donations alone. From that enormous Hatch gift grew a facility that has made the entire community proud.

In 1998, well over \$2.3 million dollars was privately fundraised to build the new Mauston Public Library and was then renamed for lead donors Jean and Bill Hatch, Sr. Ground was broken on April 8, 1999. Almost one year to the date later the new library opened its doors to the public on April 10, 2000.