

Private Libraries

The earliest mention of a library in Ellsworth was in the summer of 1877. Led by Eugene Case, the literary Hesperian Society of Ellsworth developed a collection of 50 books for the use of its members. Membership was \$1 per year and the books were held in the Pierce County Herald office. Other Ellsworth organizations, such as the Freemasons and various churches, likely loaned reading materials to members, though no documentation of such has been found.

Public Libraries

It was not until 1912 that a traveling library came to Ellsworth as part of the Wisconsin Free Library Commission's program. One of the Commission's missions was to bring books to rural Americans who did not have easy access to the public libraries in cities and larger communities. Because rural school districts were poor, their libraries were typically inadequate, and the students lacked appropriate reading materials. The traveling library was conceived and implemented first in Dunn County by J.H. Stout in 1896 and then spread across Wisconsin. The East Ellsworth Library Association was formed in order to comply with the requirements of qualifying for a case of books and magazine copies from which anyone in the Ellsworth Community could borrow. Once the program was in place, new book collections could be obtained on an annual basis.

Ellsworth Public Library

In May 1924, Ada Garland, Jennie Swahn, and Nance Beddall were canvassing the community for support for a local library. A book collection was established in the Dr. Deo C. Munger home, but it was soon transferred to the Opera Hall, sharing the same room as the bowling alley. Officers of the first library board were Ada Garland, President; Emma Munger, vice president; Chris O. Foss, treasurer; Mary Young, secretary; Hattie Close, historian; and Genevieve Clapp; custodian. The library was moved to the Combacker building the following year and held its grand opening on March 2, 1925, with Grayce Bittner as the first librarian. The first director was Mary Gilbert, wife of Albert Gilbert, pastor of the local Methodist Church.

The library's first annual report showed 416 patrons borrowing over 2,407 books from March to October 1925. Children's story hour began in the summer of 1926. When the village board built a community hall at 312 W. Main Street in 1932, the library moved into its basement. Circulation was 1,179 books to 1,386 patrons in January 1933. In July 1948, the library was moved across the hall to larger quarters. By 1963, it was in an 18 x 30-foot room with over 2,000 books piled in every available space. It was expanded by 16 feet in length and new lights were furnished by the Ellsworth Lions Club. The library moved upstairs in 1975, after the theater had been closed for five years. An open house was held on October 23. Circulation in 1987 was 21,878 books. By 2010, it had increase to 87,353 with 2,270 registered borrowers. A \$145,383 renovation to the library was completed in March 1995 expanding the facility to the entire top floor of the now historic community hall building.

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