

HISTORY OF THE FOREST GROVE LIBRARY

Forest Grove, Oregon

By Margaret Gilbert

Evidence on how a library was started in Forest Grove is fragmentary. The first reference known to the writer is in the announcement in this newspaper that says: "Forest Grove Freethought Library and Reading Room is open every Thursday and Friday. Mrs. A.E. Barker, librarian." Since there is also another announcement of the Freethinkers Sunday service, led by Mrs. A.E. Barker, I wonder if this was a special "indoctrination" library.

Another reference to a "reading room" is given in the Davidson paper (1936). She states that the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) rented a small upstairs room where they ran a Reading Room. Mrs. L.M. Hollinger, representing the WCTU, collected \$25 each month in 25 cent subscriptions from members who used the Reading Room. This Mrs. Hollinger was later on the first Library Board appointed by the City Council in 1906.

Davidson suggests that the books were obtained from the State Traveling Library.

In September 1905, Miss Emma Penfield opened a book store and stationery store in one corner of a millinery store owned by Mr. and Mrs. Burdan. This store was presumably in a small building that had been built by C.H. Baldwin, on the NW corner of College Way and First Ave. North (now 21st Ave). The Burdans allowed Miss Penfield to use one corner

of their shop with the understanding that she would take care of the rest room in the back of their building. Miss Penfield kept some of her own books, and books brought in by other people, for people to borrow or buy.

The following information is quoted by Davidson from the minutes of the first Library Board meeting on Jan. 30, 1906:

"The members of the first Library Board appointed by the city council met in the free reading room. The Board members are: Prof. Joseph Marsh, Mr. Edwin Allen, Mrs. L.M. Hollinger, Mrs. G.O. Rogers, Rev. H.W. Boyd, Mrs. A.G. Hoffman. Miss Pennfield was consulted and upon her agreeing to accept the position of librarian was elected on motion of Prof. Marsh."

In Dec, 1908, the Library Board decided to ask the city council to vote a one mill tax for support of the library. The council accepted this proposal and levied the first library tax.

In 1909 (April 15, 1909) Mrs. Adeline Rogers, widow of Dr. G.O. Rogers went before Judge W.H. Hollis, Notary Public, and signed a contract with the City of Forest Grove, in which she "sold" to the City the land and building which became later the Rogers Free Library. The City paid Mrs. Rogers a warrant of \$4000, and promised:

"That it will perpetually maintain a FREE READING ROOM and REST ROOM and to that end will annually levy a sufficient tax to perpetuate and maintain said FREE READING

ROOM and REST ROOM in the said City of Forest Grove, and that the taxes so levied shall produce a sufficient amount of funds to keep said FREE READING ROOM and REST ROOM open for use of the public during all reasonable hours each day of the week except Sunday."

Moreover, the City Council promised that the taxes levied "would be sufficient to purchase such papers, periodicals and books as are usually purchased and kept in such places." Such taxes shall not be less than two hundred dollars per annum. If the city fails to levy such a tax, it becomes liable to Mrs. Rogers or her estate for \$4000. If the city should build a new library, this property should be transferred to an endowment fund for the express purpose of providing a FREE READING ROOM and REST ROOM in the new library.

In addition to this conditional gift to the city, Mrs. Rogers later left \$6000 to the library in her will, with the provision that \$200 should be spent annually for books. Mrs. Rogers died in 1922.

Mrs. Rogers' generosity and commitment to the library was described in 1923 by Mrs. John Bailey, wife of a local merchant and secretary of the Library Board for fifteen years (1908-1923).

News-Times, July 6, 1933:

"Our little library will ever be associated with the name of Mrs. Rogers who many years ago saw the need of a public place here where people, especially the people from

the country, could rest and read and meet their friends. She lived to realize that her dream had come true, for while the name "library" means book and their circulation, Rogers Library stands for a larger circulation of home spirit, comfort and good will: for the outstanding feature of this institution...is the rest room. We are told that ours is the only small library in the state that conducts a rest room in connection with a library..

"We have had letters from strangers, who had spend some time here, telling us that in all the towns they had visited they had never found such a place as our little library where there were so few rules to observe; no place where they were made to feel so at home..

"Perhaps our name is misleading. Community Center might be better name, for so many things of helpfulness go on there."

Mrs. Bailey illustrates this helpfulness by telling of a young woman with three children to support, coming to Forest Grove to work in the cannery. The mother worried about what her six year old daughter would do until her older children got out of school. Someone told her to talk with Mrs. Sanford, the librarian. The child then came to the library every day after her school let out, and looked at picture books until her mother came to pick her up.

Mrs. O.M. Sanford was the librarian form 1908 until 1928. Persons now living in Forest Grove, who went to the city library during those years, speak highly of Mrs. Sanford. She was a strict disciplinarian in that she demanded strict

silence in the reading room, which was the front part of the library. But with children who came often to read or get books, she was very warm, friendly and helpful. She would take them into the back room of the library, where she would talk with them about the books they had read, the ones they liked best, and would advise them on more book to take out. She helped them to find out things in the Books of Knowledge—an encyclopedia that many older people remember with affection. One afternoon each week, there was a story hour for young children, and sometimes Mrs. Sanford brought cookies for a treat.

Mrs. Sanford was helped in the library by Mr. Sanford, who also had a small store in town. They had the library open six days a week from 9-11 a.m.; 2-5 p.m. and 6:30-8 some nights of the week. Mrs. Sanford was paid \$25 a month, with no vacations. When she was not able to be there, she hired her own substitute. Mrs. Bailey ends her account of the early library with this paragraph:

“To Mrs. Sanford is due all the success we may have achieved in the Library or Rest Room. Her faithfulness and unflinching patience under all circumstance have accomplished much. Her fund of knowledge and her wonderful memory have been a boon to many young students as well as older ones seeking information. Mrs. Sanford’s life has been devoted to easing the burdens and perplexities of poor humanity.”

No records have been found that show how many books were bought, but men now in their seventies recall that the Library seemed to be filled with books, magazines and newspapers when they were young. One described the library

during the 1915-10 period as having a large number of magazines and newspapers in a 'front room' as one entered the library. He was impressed with the many magazines, and especially with the fact that two of the magazines came from England (one was Punch; the name of the other magazine is not recalled).

Many people would be seated at the tables in this front room, reading the newspapers, magazines and books. Some men came in regularly on the day when one of the newspapers arrived, and especially on the day when their favorite magazine arrived. Some men spent most of the day in the library, reading, sleeping, and in one known case talking aloud to himself constantly. The librarian told him he had to stop talking, but he never stopped. She reported it to the library board: no one now knows what they did about this problem.

No records have been found that tell how many books the library had before the 1919 fire.

Mrs. Bailey credits the librarians and faculty of the college with giving many books to the new city library. The college had owned a large library collection since 1855. In 1910, the town citizens agreed to support the college's application to Andrew Carnegie for a grant to build a library building, with the understanding that town people would then be free to use the college library.

But Mrs. Bailey and Esther Davidson both credit the Forest Grove Woman's Club with the major support for the book collection. In fact, the Woman's Club has given money and

books to the city library annually ever since its beginning. Some years the Woman's Club has paid for furniture, stacks, books and equipment for the children's section of the library. The Woman's Club especially helped to furnish the new library that was rebuilt after the fire of 1919.

The only specific information found about the library books is given by Mrs. Bailey: after the 1919 fire, the library had about 1200 books; and subscriptions to 24 magazines and two newspapers.

Mrs. Bailey also wrote that the library operated on less than \$900 a year. The librarian was paid \$300, the janitor \$100---leaving \$500 for books, magazines, newspapers, and the endless cords of wood to load the wood stoves that kept the library warm.

There was a wood-burning stove in the northwest corner of the Reading Room, and probably another stove in the Rest Room. One man remembers the large pile of wood that was always stacked against the back wall of the library building, wondering what they did with all that wood. A member of the Library Board remembers that much of the business they conducted was concerned with getting the cords of wood to keep the building warm.

The first library building (1905-1919) was a long, narrow building. The lot on which it stood is 100ft. x 25 ft., so the library was only 25 ft. in width. A 10 ft. alley was taken off the north end of the lot for access to adjacent buildings, so the library building was less than 90ft.

long. The entrance was from First Ave. North (the present 21st Ave.). One entered directly into the reading room, where newspapers and magazines were displayed along the walls. Two long tables ran the length of the room. This is where people sat to read.

North of the reading room was a second room where books were stored in bookcases along the walls. The librarian's desk stood along the east side of the room. Here books were charged out and in, and here the librarian conferred with people. A storage/workroom was north of the book room.

Opening out of the storage room was a door to the rest room, which also had an outside entrance off of College Way. In this rest room, a small cubicle at the west end contained a wash basin and toilet. A long table occupied the east end of the room. Here people who came into town from the country often ate their lunch, and college girls from Pacific also came here to eat their lunch.

In the early years, the library and rest room were open only six days a week. Before long the Woman's Club arranged to have both library and rest room open on Sunday afternoons, and they hired a college student to open and close both rooms. Reports are given that when rain fell on carnivals or family reunions that were held on campus, the people found shelter in the library.

The rules of the library were simple, and were printed on the pocket pasted in each book. Two books could be taken out for two weeks. If they were returned after the due

date, one penny was charged for each day that the book was overdue. Fines were used to purchase new books.

Now for the fire on July 20, 1919:

HOLOCAST OF FLAME SWEEPS CITY SUNDAY

Sixteen Buildings are Laid Waste By Destroying Element

LOST MAY REACH \$75,000

These were the headlines in the July 24, 1919 issue of the Washington County New-Times. The Fire apparently started in or near a store owned by Mr. Sanford, husband of the librarian. A First Avenue (21st Ave., now). The fire swept through each building standing on the north side of First Avenue North, burning every building at least in part. The library roof and part of the walls were destroyed but the time interval before the fire reached the library was long enough that college students and towns people were able to remove the books to the campus across College Way.

The First Congregational church, across the street from the library, was also burned but most of the contents were removed to the campus before the frame building was destroyed. The loss to the library was estimated to be \$5,000, with but \$500 in insurance on the building and \$600 on the contents. "The walls are intact and no doubt will be rebuilt," according to the newspaper report.

A clipping from the News-Times of Aug. 7, 1919 reads:

"A committee of Mrs. Charles Hines, Mrs. F.S. Whitehouse, Mrs. C.T. Richardson and Mrs. P.W. Schultz with Miss Margaret Hines as chaperon, representing the Woman's Club, appeared before the City Council and asked that steps be made towards rebuilding the Roger's City Library. The ladies inquired about the insurance carried by the city and offered their services in any matter which the city council might find for them to do."

On August, the New-Times reported:

"The contract for building the library was let to Mr. J.S. Loynes whose bid was \$2,337.00. The contract calls for concrete floors and a Willamette cream colored pressed brick front." Elsewhere it is stated that the city deliberately kept the front façade the same as it had been before the fire, rebuilding the storefront windows of the original building.

The books removed from the building before the fire reached the library were stored in people's homes while the new building was being built. When the books were returned to the new library, it was found that some of the books had been scorched in the fire. Service was restored in the new library by 1921.

Reports made by the librarian to the City Council show that in 1923 the library had 1,237 books, a circulation of 9,515 during the year, with a "membership" of 1,853. Five years later, in 1928, the library had more than doubled its book collection, to 2,882, with a circulation of 12,320. It no longer listed "memberships" but did claim 1,176 borrowers.

Mrs. Sanford died in 1928 after twenty years of devoted service to the children and adults who came to the library.

Mrs. May Holmes was the second librarian, holding the position from 1928 until 1937. Mrs. Holmes was assisted by her husband, Rev. O.H. Holmes, who had been pastor of the Congregational church from 1914-1916, had left Forest Grove for other churches, and had returned to Forest Grove in retirement. Mrs. Holmes was ill at various times, and her husband took her place.

By 1931, the number of books in the library had increased to 3,076 1,270 borrowers were reported. By 1936, the book collection stood at 3,766, borrowers at 1,411, and circulation at 12,818. Perhaps the most interesting statistic for these year is the statement that during 1931 the library was open 356 days of the year! Sixty percent of the population of Forest Grove was registered as borrowers, and 50 to 60 persons living outside of the city borrowed books after paying a yearly fee of one dollar or 5 cents per book borrowed.

In 1937 Mrs. Hazel Moore became city librarian, serving sixteen years until March, 1953. Again the librarian had help from her husband, Enoch Moore, who did repairing and rebinding of books.

Mrs. Moore spoke to the Rotary Club in 1938 about the needs of the library. She pointed out that the previous year the library received \$886.51 from the city' \$163 from investments (the Rogers money?) and \$179 from fines and rentals. At a cost of 54 cents per capita, she kept the

library open and operating, bought 141 new books, subscribed to 25 magazines. She told the Rotarians and faculties for children, especially during the summer. She asked for gifts of books or money to buy books. The Woman's Club took up the request by providing money for a children's corner—furniture, stacks and books in the library.

In 1941, in her annual report to the State Library, she has a Report of Progress: "The Board built a children's alcove with low shelving, tables and chairs—which is a real improvement."

Three annual reports contain the statement: have added another stack. In 1947-48, her report states that the library was completely renovated inside and the outside was painted. The old wood stoves were removed, and electric heat was installed. New chairs, tables, desk, and Venetian Blinds at the windows were added. The librarian's salary was increased to \$1,850 for the year, and Mrs. Nellie White was employed as an assistant. In 1953, the book list include 5,119 volumes for adults, 1,916 books for children, making a total of 7,035 books in the library.

From 1953 to 1961, Mary M. Turley was librarian. During the preceding decade, Mrs. Moore had worked at cataloging books in the collection, but without an assistant to take care of the circulation the task had not been completed. Mrs. Turley had an assistant to help in the library, and worked hard at cataloging 2,500 books during 1954, when a catalogue cabinet was installed.

In 1962, Jean Sleeth became librarian, followed by Mrs. Katherine Gardner in 1964, and then Mrs. Sleeth returned to the post. In 1966 she reported to the State Library that the library had been keeping some shut-ins supplied with books. In 1968, Thomas Bolling became librarian (the first with a Masters Degree in Library Science), followed in 1971 by William Gregory, and in 1974 by Michael Smith, the present librarian.

From 1906 through the present, the library has been supervised from the city through an appointed board of library trustees (until 1974) or commissioners. For about four decades, positions on the library board were for more or less unlimited terms. In about 1950, the Board passed a resolution that terms of office should be limited in extent. In 1974, the City Council passed an ordinance creating the City Library Commission to advise them on library policies and operations and the library became a city department.

In 1978, the library moved to the new building on Pacific Avenue. The structure was built and furnished entirely with a federal grant—there are no outstanding bonds. The name was changed to Forest Grove City Library but Mrs. Rogers is still remember in the Rogers Meeting Room, part of the new library. The old Rogers Library building is still owned by the city and proceeds from its rental go to the purchase of books for the library.

Sources:

1909 Mrs. Adeline Rogers indenture with the City of Forest Grove (copy)

1923 Paper by Mrs. John Bailey, member of Library Board, 1908-1922, giving early history of library. Forest Grove News Times, 7/6/33.

1936 Paper by Esther Davidson on library history. (copy)

Annual reports to City Council, 1923-1937 (few)

Annual reports to State Library: 1928-1968 not every year.

(The above are in box in the southeast corner of the 2nd floor storage room of present City Library.)

INTERVIEW: Mabel Jones, Harley Barber, George Hoar, Fern Reeher, Charlotte Smith, Florence Ruth Dixon, Edith Watrous, Leona Coon. May do Katherine Higby. Jones, Barber, Hoar interview on tapes. Do not use without the interviewee's permission.

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