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The Library as a Social Agency  
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The Development and Growth of the Lakewood  
Public Library

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## The Development and Growth of the Lakewood Public Library

Philo Taylor and his family were Lakewood's first settlers, although they did not stay long enough to be classed as permanent settlers. They arrived in Cleveland from New York in 1808 and then came by boat to the mouth of Rocky River, cleared some land on the east bank and built a log cabin where Clifton Park is today. At this time there were no roads (Detroit Avenue was a narrow Indian path), no organized government, no schools, no library, no industry. There was just a wide expanse of wilderness. Although there were fifty-seven people in Cleveland in 1810, not many settlers were enticed to the West Side. By 1819, with approximately eighteen families in the township, the settlers decided that their community should have a name. Until this time it had been known as Township 7, Range 14. They petitioned for the designation "Rockport," an appropriate name because of the high rocky embankment on the lake front and on both sides of the Rocky River. The area to be called Rockport included all of the present Lakewood and all of Rocky River as far west as Clague Road and the area south as far as Brook Park Road. The request of the petitioners was granted February 24, 1819.

In the early 1800's, James Nicholson of Rockport, later to become Lakewood, Ohio, possessed a fine library of the works of the "colossal genius," Emanuel Swedenborg. These books had been purchased from an itinerant book merchant,

These merchants often carried cheap editions of poor literature, but occasionally they had some good books.

The beginnings of the Lakewood Public Library, however, were not made until the school year 1913-14, when the Lakewood Board of Education began to explore the possibility of securing a grant from the Carnegie Corporation for a library building. The members of the Board were able to secure a grant of \$46,000 for a new building. The original building cost \$48,901. The site at Arthur and Detroit Avenues was purchased by the city of Lakewood for \$9,728. About one third of the cost of the site was donated by citizens of Arthur Avenue and the immediate vicinity. Charles W. Hopkinson, architect for the Board of Education, drew up the plans for the library building.

Miss Roena A. Ingham, a Hiram College graduate, was appointed librarian in 1915. She had been head of Carnegie West Library in Cleveland. She spent a year in an empty bakery building selecting, purchasing, and cataloging the original book collection. When the library building was opened on May 19, 1916, there were 10,000 volumes ready. The initial cost of the books was \$7,300. The organization of branches of the Lakewood Library began in January, 1919, when the Lakewood High School Library was opened under a co-operative plan between the Trustees of the Library and the Board of Education. This Branch was later separated

from the Public Library. In Lakewood High School and in each of the three junior high schools a library room was part of the original plan. On January 31, 1922, an agreement of work arrangement between the Library Board and the Board of Education covering the control of the libraries in the junior high schools was made. The libraries in the junior high schools were to be administered as branches of the Lakewood Public Library. The definite needs of the junior high schools were to be the first consideration. Work with other grades and with the adult public was to be undertaken only with the approval of the Board of Education when in the opinion of the principal of the school and the public librarian such demands could be met without curtailing the work actually in hand. By 1924 branches were also operating in a number of public and parochial elementary schools.

During the first five years of its existence, the Library was governed by the Board of Education, which acted through its Library Committee. It was supported out of school tax income, and school officials kept the books. In 1920 the General Assembly of the State of Ohio enacted a law which made it practicable for boards of education to divest themselves of library administration. In September, 1921, the Board of Library Trustees of the City of Lakewood met for the purpose of effecting an

organization and transacting business. The transfer of library property and the assignment of the lease from the Board of Education to the Library Board took place. This first Board of Trustees was composed of Mrs. Howard A. Byrns, Mrs. L. A. Corlett, Mrs. A. N. Dawson, Mr. Charles C. Dibble, Mr. H. E. Hackenberg, Mr. David G. Jaeger, and Judge Willis Vickery. Mr. Dibble was elected president, Mrs. Dawson vice-president, and George W. Grill, who as clerk-treasurer of the Board of Education had been carrying on the business activities of the Library, was appointed secretary-treasurer. The next president was Mr. I. S. Metcalf.

It is interesting to note some circulation figures for the period from September, 1920, to September, 1921. The Library circulated 197,334 copies, the schools 12,589 copies, and the high school 19,296 copies. This made a total of 229,219 copies, an increase of 37,562 over the previous year. During the first five years the Library at Detroit and Arthur Avenues was open, some 16,500 citizens were registered as book borrowers.

About this time the Library trustees were told that the Public Library faced a crisis in service ability, as quarters and equipment were outgrown. The increased use of the Library had kept pace with the rapid growth of the city. In November, 1922, the citizens of Lakewood

passed a bond issue for \$150,000 for the enlargement of the building. In 1923 work began to increase the building to twice the original size with the addition of the mezzanine floors and adequate basement space for work rooms and storage. However there was no appearance of a remodeled structure.

On June 3, 1924, the building opened again to the public. The capacity was more than three times that of the original building. The large use which was made of the auditorium and the club rooms demonstrated that the Library was, as it is today, a community center. The Library as an art center has been demonstrated through co-operation with the Cleveland Art Museum, which loans exhibits for showcases. Work of Cleveland and Lakewood artists is exhibited from time to time, and there are often demonstrations of the art work of the Lakewood schools.

Many of Lakewood's outstanding organizations held their early meetings in the Library. In the early twenties, under the direction of Mrs. Maude C. Waitt (later state senator), the Women's Civic League sponsored classes in citizenship. This organization eventually became the Lakewood Women's Club. Through the years, many women's clubs, the Borrowed Time Club, discussion groups, and summer forums have met at the Library. The active Great Books discussion groups are sponsored by

the Library. The Library has participated in many nationwide activities such as surveys and has been represented on state and national committees. In 1934 Miss Ingham was elected president of the Ohio Library Association. As a pioneer in photographic charging, Lakewood Library has received inquiries from all over the country.

Miss Florence Cottrell was appointed librarian in the Madison Branch Library, which was first housed in 1919 in rented quarters in the southeast section of Lakewood. When land in Madison Park was donated by the city, the Branch had its first permanent home. The new building cost \$47,000 and is one of the few buildings in the county built without a bond issue. This Branch, which was opened in June, 1924, was planned to shelve 10,000 volumes. In addition to the general library quarters, there was a children's room and a basement club room. In 1932 a fire in this Madison Branch destroyed 2000 books and damaged 1000. The building was quickly repaired and was re-opened a month later.

By the tenth full year of service for the Lakewood Public Library, Lakewood had doubled in population, and the books sent out for home use increased 75%. Population increased from 35,000 to 60,000, and the library book circulation increased from 153,596 in 1917 to 416,378 in 1926. By this time, arrangements had been made for

housing the Lakewood Medical Reference Library in the Lakewood Public Library. In 1936 and 1937, special service for young people and for shut-ins was started. Later, library service was extended to nine public elementary schools with trained personnel in charge.

Support for libraries was changed by the Ohio legislature in 1934 from the tax on real estate to the tax on intangibles, and they are now entirely supported from the classified property tax fund.

In 1936 the Lakewood Public Library had 70,000 volumes. During the first twenty years of its existence it had issued 7,576,936 volumes to Lakewood residents. The largest year in the history of the Library was 1932, when 610,661 volumes were loaned.

There have been only a few head librarians in Lakewood since 1915. Miss Ingham remained until her death in 1938. One of the largest gifts ever made to the Library is the Roena A. Ingham Garden Collection presented by her friends and associates in her memory. Other outstanding gifts to the Library are the Lynch Memorial Collection of books on religious education in memory of Dr. Charles P. Lynch and the two ceiling projectors and filmed books for bed-ridden people, the gift in 1947 of the South Lakewood Women's Club. Many other groups and individuals have given books and money to the Library.



Dr. Mary P. Parsons succeeded Miss Ingham as librarian. She remained until September, 1943, when she obtained leave to take a position with the Office of War Information. During Miss Parsons' regime, the work of the Library was more definitely departmentalized, and photographic charging of books was instituted. During the war, safety measures to protect records of Lakewood's early history were taken. Photostatic copies of pictures and manuscripts in the Library's historical collection and in the City Hall were made to assure their preservation. Original copies were kept in Lakewood; photostatic copies were filed in another city for the duration of the war. In 1945 Dr. George W. Grill, who had been secretary-treasurer of the Board for twenty-five years, returned from military service and became the third librarian. He resigned in 1948 because of ill health and was succeeded by Mrs. Mary Beeman Bloom.

A bond issue of \$800,000 was approved by Lakewood citizens in November, 1953. This sum provided for extensive remodeling and expansion of the overcrowded Lakewood Public Library. Presentation of the bond issue at this time and the amount of the issue were the result of long preparation by the Library trustees. Mr. Ralph Nelveling, head of the Detroit Public Library and a specialist in library buildings, was engaged to make a survey of this community's needs. He drew tentative plans to meet

the library needs of Lakewood for the next twenty or twenty-five years.

According to this plan, actual floor space was to be increased approximately 50%. It permitted a flexible arrangement adaptable to the changing needs of various departments. It made provision for future expansion of the book collection. The architectural firm of Garfield, Harris, Robinson, and Schafer, who had planned the University Heights Branch of the Cleveland Heights Public Library, the Law Library at Western Reserve University, and the new wing at the East Cleveland Public Library, was engaged to draw plans and to secure estimates of cost. The Board of Library Trustees had waited for this building program until the Board of Education and the Lakewood Hospital programs were completed and some of their bonds were retired. The following October saw the actual beginning of the \$800,000 wing of the Library by the Sam W. Emerson Company, contractors. For nearly eighteen months after the plans were approved and the building was begun, Library staff members and patrons mingled with steel workers, masons, and carpenters. During the most hectic period, the Library was closed for five weeks.

The exterior of the wing is of stone much like that of the original structure. The interior is equipped

with modern lighting, heating, and air conditioning. There are new reading and meeting rooms and greatly increased space for books, which now number 125,000. The floor space has been increased by 70%. In spite of the difficult conditions in 1955, there was a circulation of more than 425,000 books, with 22,000 registered borrowers.

Some fifty-five individuals are employed in the Lakewood Public Library System. This number includes the staff at the Madison Branch, in the schools, and in the Main Library. The Lakewood System received a tax allocation of \$215,000 in 1954.

The formal dedication and open house of the remodeled, refurnished, and enlarged Library took place during a celebration which started January 16, 1956. Work has just been completed in the Madison Branch. Additional space and refurnishing have been provided. The dedication of this remodeled Branch is scheduled for May, 1956.

The present Trustees -- Mr. Isaac Stickney, Mrs. Wallace Teare, Mr. Fred Asbeck, Dr. Peter Warren, Mrs. G. Nelson, Mrs. R. Cheheyl, Mr. Anthony Poss, and Mrs. R. Angell (secretary-clerk) -- have announced that with the additions and remodeling, the Lakewood Public Library is equipped to serve the community adequately for another twenty or thirty years.

Bibliography

1. Butler, Margaret Manor. The Lakewood Story, Stratford House, New York, 1949, pp. 194-198.
2. Clippings from The Suburban News and Herald, Lakewood Post, and Cleveland Plain Dealer.
3. Lindstrom, E. George. Story of Lakewood, Ohio, published by the author, no date, pp. 104-106.
4. Official Proceedings of the Board of Library Trustees, Lakewood, Ohio, September 20, 1921 - July 14, 1925.

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I have not documented this paper, as much of my information is from original sources -- from conferences with staff members and the secretary-clerk of the Library, from the minutes of meetings, and from newspapers.

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