

---

# The History of Webster Groves Public Library

---



Written by the Library Staff  
2013 - 2014



*To generations of Webster Groves Public Library users, whose appreciation  
of the work we do has always made that work worthwhile.*



## Acknowledgements

Webster Groves Public Library has an unusually long and interesting history, one that entails the involvement of several different institutions in town. We could not have completed this history without the help of representatives of many of these institutions. Thanks go to Kay Roush, archivist at First Congregational Church; Peg Chulick, archivist at The Monday Club of Webster Groves; Webster Groves City Clerk Katie Nakazono; Patricia Voss, President of the Alumni Association at Webster Groves High School; Sandra Coblitz, Head Librarian at Webster Groves High School; Deborah B. Ladd, President of the Friends of Webster Groves Public Library; Erin Chapman, Manager, Mid-County (Clayton) Branch, St. Louis County Library; Terrence Donnelly, Director of Maplewood Public Library; Kelley Sallade, Director of Rock Hill Public Library; Jon Furst, Bob Moody, Jack Pirozzi, Jane Romines, Elise Fortman, Michelle Haffer, Pat Linehan, and every other staff member, board member, Friends board member, and long-time library user whose collective memories we plumbed for details and clarifications. All of these people provided us with valuable information, but we claim any mistakes in the text as our own.



## Librarians and Directors

Mildred King Allen—1911-1918  
Jean Morrison—1918-1928  
Eleanor B. Manning—1928-1939  
Sofia Jackson, *acting director*—1939-1940  
Sofia Jackson—1940-1946  
Helen Mardorf, *acting director*—1946-1949  
Marguerite Norville—1949-1964  
Alice G. Morris—1964-1966  
Helen Mardorf—1966-1976  
Anne Horton—1976-1986  
Bill Erbes—1986-1987  
Barbara Rosenkoetter, *acting director*—1987-1988  
Sue Ann Schlosser—1988-1989  
Mary ‘Sissy’ Grashoff, *acting director*—1989-1990  
Marylou Pierce Fox—1990-1994  
Mary ‘Sissy’ Grashoff—1994-2004  
Elise Fortman & Michelle Haffer, *acting co-directors*—2004-2005  
Tom Cooper—2005-present

## Presidents of the Board of Trustees

George W. Stephens—1927–1940  
Etta B. Kenamore—1940–1953  
John A. Arnold—1953–1957  
Harold E. Knight, Jr.—1957–1959  
John A. Arnold—1959–1960  
Richard Hallahan—1960–1964  
Donald E. Pratt—1964–1965  
Jean Wildermuth—1965–1967  
Henry J. Meier—1967–1972  
Mary F. Goodloe—1972–1973  
John Heard—1973–1974  
Richard Snyder—1974–1976  
Julie Jahn—1976–1978  
Jack Myers—1978–1981  
Margaret Forsyth—1981–1984  
Mary F. Goodloe—1984–1987  
Karen Halla—1987–1988  
Ronald Hoenninger—1988–1995  
Colleen Thayer—1995–1997  
Catherine Haar Barnes—1997–2001  
Edward Smith—2001–2004  
Jon Furst—2004–2008  
Tom Reedy—2008–2013  
Nancy Marshall—2013–2020  
Justin Hauke—2020–2021

Bethany Curtis—2021–2022  
Tess Thompson—2022–present

## Presidents of the Friends of the Library

Nancy Forsyth—1976–1977  
Gwen Myers—1977–1978  
Karen Halla—1978–1980  
Jan Hall—1980–1981  
Pat Senseney—1982–1983  
Shirley Flatley—1983–1984  
Bernyce Christiansen—1984–1986  
Gay Moppert—1986–1987  
Jane Romines—1987–1988  
Barb Kemery—1988–1989  
Nancy Hiatt—1989–1990  
Debbie Zerbe—1990–1992  
Nancy Elliot—1992–1993  
Janice Ault—1993–1995  
Jane Romines—1995–1997  
Louise McNeive—1997–1998  
Debbie Ladd—1998–2001  
Nancy Hiatt—2001–2004  
Debbie Ladd—2004–2014  
Laura Wehrenberg—2014–2017  
Marsha Coplon—2017–2020  
Laura Wehrenberg—2020–present



## Part I

### Early Years—First Congregational Church and the Monday Club

**F**ounded in 1866, First Congregational Church of Webster Groves occupied a significant place along Lockwood Avenue well before the City of Webster Groves incorporated. It was the first church founded in Webster Groves, though not by much—three other churches came into



First Congregational Church

being that same year. Congregational Church records indicate that in 1884 a library and reading room was opened in S. A. Moody's Real Estate Company building at the northeast corner of Church Street and Lockwood Avenue (Church Street was later renamed North Gore). A church history prepared by Mrs. C. D. Moody in 1906 records that the Congregational Church Reading Room Association was started by the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor, 'under the direction of Mr. Sutherland.'<sup>1</sup> John W. Sutherland was a retired Methodist minister who was an active member of the church. The purpose of the reading room was to provide working men a place to find an evening's activity, without recourse to saloons. The reading room was stocked primarily with donations.

The way it is described in the lore of the Monday Club of Webster Groves, James and Sarah Allen had a 'spinster' daughter named Mildred. Mr. Allen decided, without consulting Mrs. Allen, to build a house for Mildred. The house, built on the same lot as the Allens' existing Plant Avenue home, was so situated as to prevent entrance to their home via the front door. This was all very frustrating to Sarah Allen. Even in the 1880s, when this story takes place, a woman should have had more input into family matters as important as this. So she resolved to start a club for women, one where women could have a voice. She wanted it to be a 'sober-minded, serious body whose members tackled the most difficult problems in the realms of

---

<sup>1</sup> Moody, Mrs. C. D., *A Brief History of First Congregational Church of Webster Groves*. Paper presented at the Church's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1906.

science and art.’<sup>2</sup> The club, established in 1887, met monthly in members’ homes, and at each meeting a few members were charged with reporting on various subjects in the arts, literature, politics and science. (In 2013, the Allens’ home, 29 Plant Avenue, was rotated by the present owners so that the front door now faces Plant Avenue.)

Given this focus of the Monday Club, as time went on the membership felt the lack of literary resources. Railroad lines were available to the City of St. Louis, with its developing library system; but the trip was time-consuming, and the 20-cent fee was, for the time, expensive. So Monday Club members were early users and supporters of the reading room at Lockwood and Gore, which their internal histories describe as an ‘old, dilapidated shack.’ Other Webster Groves histories speak of S. A. Moody’s Real Estate Company as being in a frame building. It was also the building in which the city’s founders met to discuss incorporation of Webster Groves, which occurred in 1896. Moody served as the first city clerk, and the city’s first offices were in his building. It was eventually razed and the Gorelock Realty Building was built in its place. Monday Club histories often note that the reading room was started by the Monday Club, and stocked by collecting books and periodicals from its friends. While this version of the story places the founding of the reading room in the 1890s, based on church records it appears 1884 is the correct date.

In 1889, Rev. Sutherland became the pastor at First

---

<sup>2</sup> *The Monday Club of Webster Groves*: Informational brochure published by the Club.

Congregational, implementing an aggressive building plan that resulted in a new sanctuary which was dedicated in 1893. That large new area provided space for, among other things, a library and reading room. The makeshift reading room at Gore and Lockwood was moved to this new space. An outside door led to the reading room/library and to the pastor’s office. Since he was in his office in the mornings, no other library attendant was required, but in the afternoons it was staffed by volunteers, including most prominently Miss Mildred Allen. She is the aforementioned ‘spinster’ daughter of Sarah Allen, founder of the Monday Club, and this is where the personalities involved in the evolution of the library begin to overlap: the Allens were active members of First Congregational. How long Mildred remained as librarian is an interesting question, because an 1898 report on the library was presented by Miss Hattie Austin, who was then the librarian.

In 1895 the church’s Reading Room Committee reported that members of the congregation were asked ‘to place on file your own magazine or paper after you had had it in your home five days.’<sup>3</sup> There was such a good response to this appeal that all the leading magazines were provided to the library without any expense. The church then held two ‘book receptions’ at which attendees donated books: nearly 500 volumes were donated. The report boasted an average daily circulation of 40 volumes, and ‘a suite of rooms open every evening, better lighted, heated and ventilated than any public

---

<sup>3</sup> First Congregational Church of Webster Groves, *Annual Directory*, 1895. p. 20

place of resort in Webster Groves.’<sup>4</sup> The library was open every evening until 10 p.m.—later than most public libraries today.

The 1898 report of the Committee provides encouraging statistics about both public support and usage of the library. There were over a thousand books in the collection, both purchased and donated, and a 30% increase in circulation over the previous year. There is also the interesting observation that the library is used ‘not only in Webster Groves proper, but also in Tuxedo Park, Old Orchard and Selma.’<sup>5</sup> There follows this important resolution, which was unanimously passed on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1898:

Resolved: That this Church, having founded and supported a Public Library, now located in its reading rooms, does hereby put itself on record by this resolution, to the effect that it shall be its future policy to turn this library over to the City of Webster, or the School Board of Webster, for the use of the public of Webster Groves, at such time as the City or School Board is in shape to provide a suitable building and funds for the maintenance and support of this library.

But for several years thereafter, there was little forward movement in this endeavor, and care of the library was still very much in the hands of the church. A 1903 brochure published

by the Reading Room Committee solicits donations from ‘friends of the library.’ It assures donors that funds will be used only to purchase and care for books and magazines, since all other expenses of operating the library are carried by the church. It also notes that ‘The ladies of the various clubs are earnestly at work accumulating a Library Fund, and are arousing great interest in this most commendable enterprise.’<sup>6</sup>

Whatever other ‘various ladies clubs’ were meant, it is clear that the Monday Club led the way. As early as 1902, Monday Club annual reports list a ‘Library Committee’ among its standing committees. The Club’s by-laws made clear that the Library Committee’s main purpose was to oversee a library fund, which was to be added to the building fund when it was required. In the meantime, interest from that fund was to be added to the principal.

The 1906 report of the church’s Reading Room Committee again claims that ‘the library is flourishing and becoming an instrument of much good.’<sup>7</sup> This seems to be consistent with its stated goal of keeping local men out of saloons, and with the early sense of libraries as places where people improved themselves. Andrew Carnegie thought so, and spent most of his fortune in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century building public libraries. Theodore Roosevelt, who was president at the time, thought that the church, the school and the public library were the greatest forces for good in American

---

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21

<sup>5</sup> First Congregational Church of Webster Groves, *Annual Directory*, 1898. p. 22

---

<sup>6</sup> First Congregational Church of Webster Groves, *The Webster Groves Public Library and Reading Room*, 1903. Brochure.

<sup>7</sup> First Congregational Church of Webster Groves, *Year Book*, 1906. p. 27

life.

In 1907 the church's Reading Room Committee published a catalog of the library's holdings—a good selection of adult fiction and non-fiction, as well as several pages of children's books. All of Louisa May Alcott's books were in the collection, along with classics like Carlo Collodi's *Adventures of Pinocchio* and Grimm's *Popular Tales*. A note 'To Our Patrons' on the back of the catalogue read:

This library is maintained solely by the contributions of the generous public. Its rooms are open every week day and evening. All are welcome to the use of the books. Donations for its support will be gratefully received by the Committee.

This claim about the generosity of the public notwithstanding, the catalogue is replete with paid advertising from many area businesses: Apothecary Ambrose Mueller, Hunkins-Willis Lime & Cement Company, and Henry Schulz Feed Company are among them. The only extant business in the booklet is William A. Straub & Co. Grocers, located in the Bristol Building. It's reassuring to know that the strained lengths to which advertisers will go to make their products and services appealing to consumers has not changed over the years. An advertisement in the library catalogue claims that '... a deposit of one dollar or more in the Savings Department of the Webster Groves Trust Co. will yield more profit and give as much

pleasure as the reading of any book shown in this catalogue.' Indeed.

But somewhere along the line, First Congregational Church experienced a change of heart. At a distance, it's hard to tell if it was internal factors, or a general frustration with the City for not taking more positive steps towards establishing a true municipal library. The 1909 Year Book records that in April 1908, Mr. E. S. Hart resigned as Chairman of the Library Committee. The report goes on to insist that the library is not fulfilling its original purpose—that of providing a public library and reading room for the citizens of Webster Groves. The people who use the library are people who are liable to have their own home libraries, or who have access to the resources in St. Louis, while those whose lives it was meant to improve seemed 'prejudiced against a library located in and conducted by a church.'<sup>8</sup> (Presumably this would be the male population who would rather hang out in saloons than at a church library.) This made it increasingly hard to secure the funds to operate the library. To prove the point, the Committee had collected usage statistics for the month of May 1908, and reported them according to how many people visited more than once, what percentage were of various Christian faiths, and more. Based on analysis of these numbers, they had decided to disband the Library Committee, and to temporarily close the library as of July 1, 1908. They then approached the School District about taking over the Library, but were turned down. So they closed

---

<sup>8</sup> First Congregational Church of Webster Groves, *Year Book*, 1909. p. 23

the library on September 6 of that year, until such time as either the Church would order it open, or that the City of Webster Groves was ready to open and maintain it. They further organized a citizens' committee to investigate what it would take to open and maintain a more permanent public library for the city, though the work of that committee is nowhere documented.

A history of the library, published in the *Webster News-Times* in 1928 states that at this juncture, the Monday Club stepped in and ran the library, though other documentation of this situation was not found. This is not to say that the Monday Club's involvement or interest ever dimmed: by 1910, the Library Fund at the Club was valued at \$1863.42, a good start, but not enough to pay for a library building. Mrs. William C. (Jennie) Jager was chairman of the Club's Library Committee that year. She and her husband, a broker by trade, were also active at First Congregational Church: he had been superintendent of the Sunday School and served on various committees. Given this level of involvement with both institutions responsible for the library, it is perhaps no surprise that in 1911 the Jagers<sup>9</sup> donated a lot at the corner of Maple and West Cedar Avenues for a Monday Club building, making it a condition of the gift that the building should have enough room to house a public library. The one-story building was designed by Lawrence Ewald, and cost \$6,000.

---

<sup>9</sup> The name Jager is spelled several different ways in various histories of the period: Jager, Jaeger, Yager, and Yeager. We are using the version found in the histories at the Congregational Church, which seems most reliable.

Monday Club records indicate that the building was dedicated on October 9, 1911, at 2:30 p.m., with the opening of the Public Library following at 8 p.m. At the time of its opening there was a mortgage of \$3,500. Money raised through rentals of the building, holding cotillions, and member donations paid that mortgage in full by 1917.

The Missouri State Library Commission reported on the library in its early years, as one of the few public libraries in the state at the time. Reports show that Mildred Allen was the librarian, receiving a salary of \$20 per month. She was assisted by five volunteers. In 1912 the library, which the Commission's reports alternately referred to as Webster Groves Public Library and as The Monday Club Library, had 4,790 books, 566 cardholders, and a circulation of 21,019 books. Sources indicate strong community support for the library in the form of donations: a June 4, 1915 article in the *Webster News-Times* lists ten groups and individuals who donated books, including the Mary Baker Eddy Fund. The July 16, 1915 *Webster News-Times* records that a 'story hour party' held at the library that week had '259 mothers and children present.' In 1916 the library circulated 24,369 books.

In 1918 Mildred Allen became the librarian at Webster Groves High School, serving in that capacity until 1947. She was replaced at the public library by Jean Morrison, with Allen's role thereafter being defined as 'library counselor.' Whoever was in charge, the library was run with strict professional oversight, including orderly bookkeeping. The Monday Club treasurer's report for 1926-27 shows library expenses as:

New Books, Magazines & Rebinds:	\$307.05
Librarian's Salary:	300.00
Equipment:	109.00
Supplies & Sundry Expenses:	54.84
Clerk:	<u>30.00</u>
TOTAL:	\$800.89

Monday Club members continued to take a hands-on role in the library, even beyond fundraising and soliciting donations: according to Club annual reports, a book mending group met once a month. The only problem was that the library always had limited hours: it was open free for loan and reference two afternoons and one morning per week, since the library hours were set to work around the meetings and other business of the Monday Club. Also, the trend in public libraries at the time was to make them official public services, supported by dedicated tax levies—setting the stage for the next major change for the library.

## Part II

### High School

Charles H. Compton was a librarian at St. Louis Public Library, and eventually served as its director. He was also President of the American Library Association from 1934-1935. He and his family made their home in Webster Groves during much of his tenure at St. Louis Public Library. In his 1954 memoir *Memories of a Librarian*, he writes about raising a family in Webster Groves during the 1920s and 1930s. He also speaks of working with others in town to pass the first library tax levy in 1927.

The Webster Groves Library Association was formed to promote passage of the tax. Gilbert C. Goodlett was president of the group, and it was endorsed by a long list of signatories, including Sarah Allen, Mildred Allen, and William Jager. Others involved in the campaign were Dr. George W. Stephens, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Washington University, who would become the first President of the Library Board and serve in that capacity until his death of a heart attack at age 61 in 1940; City Councilmember L. F. Booth, who had been a member of the Congregational Church's citizens' committee in 1908; E. H. Tenney, President of the Webster Groves Board of Education; and Jane A. Stribling, President of the Monday Club. A letter from the Webster Groves Library Association,

which was addressed 'To the Voters of Webster Groves' noted somewhat significantly that 'Kirkwood recently voted a library tax of 5 cents on \$100 by a large majority.'

It was not until 1931 that the Constitution of the State of Missouri was amended to provide for a municipal public library's tax base to be separate from the general revenue taxes collected by its city, much the same as school district taxes were, so the tax promoted by this group was an addition to the City's existing tax levy: its adoption was supported by the City. On April 5, 1927 the citizens of Webster Groves voted 2,887 to 551 in favor of a 4-cent property tax to fund a public library.<sup>10</sup>

Monday Club records tell the story of that institution preparing to hand over control of the library they had nurtured for years. In 1927, By-law XIII reads, 'In fulfillment of its promise to the citizens of Webster Groves . . . the Monday Club agrees to house and maintain the public library . . . until the city shall make other provisions for it.' The annual report for 1927-28 shows the Library Committee increased to 8 members, with 3 ex-officio members, including Mildred Allen, Jean Morrison, and Jane Stribling. By 1929 there is no longer a Library Committee listed in the Club's standing committees, nor is there any by-law dealing specifically with the public library.

The Board of Trustees of Webster Groves Public Library

---

<sup>10</sup> Missouri Statutes limit funding for public libraries to levies on property—personal property, real estate, commercial real estate, agricultural land and railroad easements. In 2012 a few Missouri counties successfully lobbied for legislation to allow them to add a sales tax component to their funding, but they are, and will likely remain, very much the exceptions in the state.

began meeting on Wednesday, June 15, 1927. The board, appointed by Mayor John B. Chipman, included Dr. Stephens and Charles Compton, along with J. F. Cook, F. D. Beardslee, J. P. Casey, Gilbert C. Goodlett, Elma N. Dawson, Louise K. Rumsey<sup>11</sup> and Jane A. Stribling. Their first orders of business were to create by-laws for governance of the library, to elect officers, and to approve the first year's operating budget of \$6,000.

They also needed to hire a librarian. At Compton's suggestion, Eleanor B. Manning, who had been working in the Children's Department at St. Louis Public Library, became the



Eleanor B. Manning

first candidate for the position. Board meetings were being held at the library within the Monday Club, where Jean Morrison was still employed as librarian. When the vote was held at the meeting on November 20, 1927, Mr. Goodlett voted against employing Manning. From his next motion at the same

meeting, which was to continue employing Morrison for the same number of hours and at the same salary, it is apparent that

his opposition to Manning was based on his desire to treat the incumbent librarian fairly. Morrison was retained as a library assistant. Manning, who began work on April 1, 1928 at a salary of \$1800, would be the Head Librarian for the next decade, taking the library through a period of rapid growth. Charles Compton wrote in *Memories of a Librarian*, 'The best thing I did for the Library was in recommending Mrs. Eleanor B. Manning as its first Librarian. She served with rare competence from 1928 to 1939.'<sup>12</sup> Manning also served as president of the Missouri Library Association from 1938-39.

As for Compton himself, he resigned from the Library Board when his family moved to St. Louis in the summer of 1931. It was largely due to this connection and to the fact that other libraries in St. Louis County, such as Kirkwood, Ferguson and Maplewood, were just coming into their own, that Webster Groves Public Library maintained close ties to St. Louis Public for a long time. Whenever Board members needed advice on library matters, they were likely to turn to Compton and to Louis Nourse, who was Head Librarian from 1950 to 1966. When Compton became Head Librarian in 1938, the Webster Groves Library Board sent him a congratulatory letter, and followed up a few months later with flowers on his first day on the job.

In 1927 the Webster Groves School Board was building a new high school (known at the time as Frank Hamsher High School, after a previous superintendent), and offered to include

---

<sup>11</sup> Most of the sources used in compiling this history use the archaic method of referring to women by their husband's names: e.g. Mrs. J. C. Dawson, Mrs. W. C. Rumsey, etc. We have used what sources we can to find these women's real names and referred to them by those.

---

<sup>12</sup> Compton, Charles, *Memories of a Librarian*. St. Louis, Missouri: St. Louis Public Library, 1954. P. 93



space for the library in it. By April 1928 Library Board meetings moved from the Monday Club to the high school, and talks were ongoing about floor coverings, furniture and more for a new library building. The cost of construction and furnishing was paid for largely by the School Board, though some came from the growing library fund. The building was dedicated on October 17, 1928. The high school band played. Dr. Stephens was the keynote speaker.



The Public Library Reading Room at Webster Groves High School

One of the speeches delivered at the dedication (the original manuscript of which is on file at the library) gave a capsule history of Webster Groves Public Library up to that point. This is the first time that we find the description of the first reading room as being in an ‘old, dilapidated shack’ at the corner of Lockwood and Gore, a phrase that will be repeated

often in subsequent histories. There was thorough news coverage of the dedication, not only in local papers such as the *Webster News Times*, but in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and *Globe-Democrat*. Every article made one point clear: Webster Groves Public Library was acknowledged as the first public library building in St. Louis County.

The new library had 5,000 books, with capacity to house 7,000. It was open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day except Sunday. The minutes for February 1929 record an offer by the Monday Club of a painting to hang over the fireplace mantle in the new library. This painting, *The Buccaneers’ Retreat* by Fred Green Carpenter, is the first of a series of donations of significant works by regional artists which would over time form the library’s art collection. Legend has it that the painting, which depicts shirtless pirates smoking, drinking, and gambling while buxom wenches look on, garnered endless complaints about the inappropriateness of its subject matter in a library frequented by young people. It is still in the library’s collection, as is a charcoal study for *The Buccaneers’ Retreat*, which Mrs. Carpenter donated in 1977. In a statement she wrote about the paintings, Mildred Carpenter said, ‘Incidentally, I posed for that young gal standing up—not the one sitting down—but when I posed my blouse was closed, when he decided to paint it, it was open, so I said, “Change the face.” You know, Webster Groves is Webster Groves, or it was Webster Groves in those days.’ During the library’s first year of operation over 65,000 items were circulated.

The original rules for use of the library make for

interesting reading, especially as concerns signing for cards. A child was required to take the application home for a parent or guardian to sign, and 'he must at least be able to print his own first name.' The section on the parent's signature becomes troubling: 'Either parent may sign, but if a mother who is not employed signs, she should fill in her husband's occupation and business address, rather than putting just housewife or nothing at all.' Nor were women allowed to register for their own cards under their own names: 'If a woman signs as Mary Smith, write in her husband's first name.'

Webster Groves High School was racially segregated at the time. At the September 1928 board meeting, a month before the library opened, Dr. Stephens 'presented the use of the library by negroes,' according to the minutes. They further record that, 'It was suggested that the Librarian present a set of customs and regulations for the Library and that no definite reference need be made to the question of the negroes.' Later sources note that African Americans were only allowed to use the public library one afternoon per week.

By 1931 a second library, for African Americans, was established in North Webster with the help of Douglass High School principal Howell Goins. The Library Board approved establishing a 'station' at Douglass School, voting funds for a desk and a collection of books. The Library Board minutes, annual reports, and other sources are silent on exactly how frequently, if at all, African American citizens availed themselves of the 'one afternoon per week' privilege at the main library, though later records indicate the Douglass School Library was

well-used. In 1938 WPA funds were provided to hire a helper to extend the hours into the evening.

Eleanor Manning shepherded Webster Groves Public Library through the difficult years of the Great Depression. In 1932, realizing a significant drop in revenues, the Board approved an overall budget decrease of 7%. In 1933, to further cut costs, a special meeting was held during which the Board not only discharged Jean Morrison, thanking her for her many years of service, but also cut the salaries of all other staff members. Manning received an 8% pay cut. Also in 1933, in response to noted losses of library books, the Board asked for and got a City ordinance making the theft of library materials a misdemeanor.

A perpetual theme of the Board minutes, which builds to a crescendo in the 1940s, is the need for ever more space. By 1932, 47% of the city's population was using the library, and usage increased throughout the 1930s due to out of work men using the library's resources to seek jobs, improve themselves, or just to fill in the idle hours once spent working. In 1935 the board resolved to send a letter to Congressman James Claiborne (Missouri's 12<sup>th</sup> District, 1933-1936) asking for his help in securing federal funds to expand the library building; but if the letter was ever sent, nothing seems to have come of the request. In February 1938 the Board again discussed the need to expand the library. By July of that year a committee headed by Hugo K. Graf presented a plan to the Mayor and City Council for expansion of the library. Their response, which did not come until September, was to propose that the School Board apply for federal money to fund such a project, but again, the result of

this effort, if undertaken, was never mentioned. Finally, in October 1938 the Library Board called a special meeting to discuss a tax levy increase to pay not only for expansion of the library but for more materials and better salaries. However, this effort led to nothing, largely because the School Board opposed it. In 1940, Webster Groves Public Library was reported as having the highest circulation of any public library in St. Louis County: it was eighth highest in Missouri.

In August, 1941, School Board President Dr. Frank Wright assured the library that although extra space was not available within school property, the library may use the space currently occupied 'as long as desired.' This was apparently no longer the case by 1944. The library, making one more plea for more space within the school building, asked if a little-used 'book room' might be available. The School Board's response was that the library could have the room on the conditions that a) this would be the last such request, and b) they begin to seek a place to move, outside of school property, preferably within five years. The student population in Webster Groves was expanding, and all available space would be needed for educational programs.

This cannot have come as a complete surprise to the Library's board or administration. As early as March 1943 Board minutes record discussions about the best place to put a new, free-standing library building. The thought was that it should be on Lockwood Avenue, close to City Hall so as to form the core of a civic center. This thought was further defined as 'no further east than Bompert, no further west than Plant.' There was a

momentary distraction from this line of thinking when it was learned that the Bell Telephone building at the northwest corner of Elm and Lockwood would be for sale after the war, a building the Library Board might acquire for a reasonable price. But it didn't take long for Board members to note the many ways that the building was ill-suited for library service, particularly in its lack of large windows to provide natural light.

Still there was some frustration within the Library Board. Though the Library District is, in its legal structure, a separately governed taxing district, it had for so long been viewed as a sort of partner to the School Board that striking out on their own may have seemed unrealistic to Board trustees. Each time they considered a vote for a tax levy increase or other important administrative changes, they convened meetings with the School Board, with the Mayor and City Council, and pretty much did as they were told. This instance was no exception: in May 1944 they called for a meeting between the Library Board, School Board and City Council to discuss the proposed move. There were Library trustees who believed that if the School Board was insisting that they move, they should provide a parcel of land for the new building (apparently, in anticipation of future growth, the School Board owned a number of lots in prime locations). Some trustees insisted that the Library had been placed in the high school building as the result of a vote of the citizens and moving it ought to be voted on too. But all of this had the sense of postponing the inevitable: the City Council, while sympathetic, showed little willingness to intervene in the matter, and the meeting, as reported in Library

Board minutes, came to few definite conclusions.

In February 1944 Etta Kenamore, then President of the Board, was made Chair of a Special Committee to investigate likely sites for a new library building.

## Part III

301 E. Lockwood Avenue

In what may have seemed like a bit of postwar ebullience, the City of Webster Groves ran and easily passed a bond issue campaign in 1945 to fund eight separate municipal projects, ranging from street improvements to new public parks. The issue included \$150,000 for a new library building.



The new building at 301 E. Lockwood Avenue, 1951

At the time the Library Board had been discussing the location of a new library building for many months running. There were several different theories about where such a library should be placed, and each theory had its vocal advocate. One

thought was that it should be close to the high school, since it had always been part of the high school. Another line of thinking insisted that it should be placed as close as possible to the main shopping district—centered around Gore and Lockwood—because studies showed that a large percentage of library users combined their library visits with shopping trips. Others insisted it should be within what was being envisioned as a central civic center, to include City Hall and other municipal buildings. Finally there were those who insisted that the size, shape and overall suitability of the lot itself was of paramount importance.

Board trustee Hugo K. Graf was the chief spokesman for this latter theory, and thus an early advocate for the lot at the corner of Lockwood and Orchard Avenues, which was spacious, level, and obviously, a corner lot. It stood within, though at the southern boundary of, the Webster Park neighborhood, which was known for its large and expensive homes. Graf was an architect of considerable renown, having designed the Webster Groves City Hall, and was called upon a few times to create preliminary sketches of the proposed building. He fell back with some frequency on reminding the other trustees that he was also Chairman of the City's Planning Committee, and that his thoughts should thereby carry additional weight. The Lockwood and Orchard lot seemed like the best overall compromise solution, since it was fairly close to City Hall and to the High School, and Graf insisted that commerce in the City was showing a trend to move east, creating two shopping districts—a prediction which was exactly correct—thus putting the proposed

library almost equidistant between them. But the debate went on.

Some trustees still believed that the Bell Telephone building presented a wonderful opportunity, until it was learned, late in 1945, that it would not be available for another five years. An A & P grocery store stood on a good lot on the northeast corner of Lockwood and Elm, and there was talk of taking it by eminent domain. Even as late as June 1945 there were still those who would not abandon the idea of the School Board providing a lot: they had their eyes on the corner of Lockwood and Selma, where the Webster Groves School District Administration Building was eventually built.

It was not until November 1945 that a motion was made and seconded to ask John P. Larson, owner of the Lockwood and Orchard lot, to present a proposal for its sale to the Library Board. This is an interesting point in this history, perhaps an interesting point in the history of municipal library governance. John P. Larson, who wanted to sell the lot to the Library Board, was at that time *a member of the Library Board*. The Board seems to have provided itself at least a semblance of ethical cover by insisting that the lot would be appraised by independent professionals, and Larson would be paid no more than the appraised cost.<sup>13</sup>

There was another problem with the lot. A Mr. O'Halloran, referred to as Secretary of the Webster Park

Association, had recently confided to Board members his belief that no city or public buildings were allowed within Webster Park, and trustees had already discussed the likelihood that a legal opinion would have to be rendered on the matter before plans could proceed. This concern was mitigated significantly by Larson's promise that he would not hold the Board financially liable should it turn out that the lot could not be built upon.



Looking north at Lockwood and Orchard Avenues, this is a 1948 view of the lot which would eventually become home to the new library.

Delay was piled on delay. While most trustees, even those expressing preference for different sites, said they would go with the majority, there seemed to be little will to call for a vote and have it done with. At the December meeting two trustees were absent, so there were objections when a vote on the matter was called for: it was too important a question to decide without all trustees getting a vote. Two of the present

---

<sup>13</sup> This sort of behavior is why these days most public library board by-laws carry some statement to the effect that no board member may realize any sort of profit or monetary benefit from the position.

trustees made motions to hold a special meeting in early January 1946 to hold the vote, and both motions failed to find seconds. After a discussion, however, one of the motions moved forward. There was a sense among the board members that they were taking too long, and there was a discussion about that as well. Other projects called for in the bond issue had already broken ground. But trustee Raymond McCallister pointed out that 'the other projects did not have the problem of buying a lot to contend with.'

At the January meeting, trustee John Casey moved 'that we select the Lockwood and Orchard lot as our first choice for a library building site, subject to appraisal, and if the Webster Park restrictions can be adjusted.' Graf seconded and the vote was unanimous among those present: Wayne Brown had mailed in his dissenting vote. However, once appraisals were done, and the lot was estimated to be worth \$8,000, Larson said it was too low. He claimed to have heard estimates 'fifteen years ago' closer to \$16,000 or \$17,000. In March 1946 he withdrew his offer to sell.

The Board went into another round of searching for lots. A new consideration was part of the lot at the southwest corner of Lockwood and Elm where First Congregational Church stood. But the portion being offered would only be large enough if the residential lot beside it was also included, and that owner was not interested in selling. Lots at Lockwood and Joy and Lockwood and Glen were ruled out.

In October 1946 Librarian Sofia Jackson suddenly tendered her resignation. Having been Librarian since

Eleanor Manning's retirement in 1939, there is good cause to suppose she left in frustration over the ongoing Board inaction, but there is no record to indicate her reasons. She was replaced temporarily by Helen Mardorf, who had been employed as the Children's Librarian.

Frustrated in its search, in March 1947 the Board applied to the City Council to have the lot at Lockwood and Orchard condemned. They believed this would do two things: remove any Webster Park Association restrictions, and set a definite price. But the Council was uninterested in becoming a party to the maneuver. Their opinion was that the best site for a new public library would be the already ruled-out A&P lot, and sweetened the deal by offering up to \$58,000 in additional funds if it were built there.

The Board re-investigated the option and found that the grocer had decided to renew the lease on that lot for another five years. Just the same they had an appraisal done of the lot, which cited a cost of \$75,000. The owner, a Mr. Godwin, claimed quite vehemently that he would never sell for that little, noting that he was realizing 4% per year on the land: he would not take a penny under \$100,000 for it.

In April 1947, John Larson resigned from the Library Board, which may have been a tactic to clear the way for selling his lot to the Library. As long as he was a trustee, the Board was constrained to offer no more than what professional appraisers had said the lot was worth. Once he was, at least ostensibly, an independent seller, they were freer to negotiate—meaning pay a price closer to what he was asking.

By summer of 1947, attorney Cottrell Fox had joined the Library Board. He was interested in moving the selection of a lot forward, and he had new perspectives on such questions as the Webster Park Association restrictions on the uses of the lot. His acquaintance with City Attorney John Nolan is mentioned in meeting minutes, and this connection was expected to help clear the way to purchasing and building a library on the lot at Lockwood and Orchard. In a special meeting on December 22, 1947, the Board finally voted to purchase the land for \$17,500. A letter of the same date from John Nolan spells out the deed restrictions on properties within Webster Park. Item #2 of those restrictions reads, in part: 'But one dwelling house shall be erected on any one lot . . .' Another letter from Nolan on the same date carries his opinion that these restrictions will not prevent the erection of the library on this lot, 'if the decree of the Court removes the limitation of the use of the property for residential purposes.'

That seems to be a big if, but Fox had already filed a suit with St. Louis County Circuit Court for a declaratory judgment favorable to the Library Board's plans. The hearing in the matter was not held until May 13, 1948, and the final decision, by Circuit Judge Fred Mueller, did not come until September, when Fox reported to the Library Board a declaratory judgment that a library can be built on this site.

During this almost three-year long process of looking for a lot, nothing had stood still. The library continued to be busy, and meeting minutes record expenses for painting and plastering, for a second card catalogue, for new lampshades and

other furnishings. In March of 1947 Librarian Helen Mardorf reported to the Board on frequent patron requests to start a record collection, which St. Louis Public Library had already done. While sympathetic to the need, the Board felt this service should be added in the new building.

The Douglass School Library was also busy. There seemed to be a problem with keeping a librarian there and frequent mention is made of applications, interviews, and resignations. This may be related to poor salaries offered to the librarians there. Because it was within a school, there was some expectation that the position would offer a teacher's salary: the librarian doubled at public library work and class work. The School Board and the Library Board split the salary, but the Library Board couldn't afford the higher salaries typical of the School Board, and this kept the pay lower. At one point, Douglass School Librarian Brinette Liston sent a letter to the Library Board, explaining that the work she was asked to do required more hours per week than anticipated. She expressed most clearly her desire to provide a good, well-organized catalogue of the library's holdings and perform other crucial services, and asked for a salary increase. Despite her cogent and polite letter, the Board not only denied the request but instructed Helen Mardorf to send her a 'letter of protest.' This situation only worsened after 1942, when the WPA funds which had paid for an evening worker ceased. There is also evidence of some skimping on the location in general. In September 1945 lumber was purchased to build a much-needed charging desk. But rather than contract for its construction, the plan was to



have the students in Manual Training Class take on the project. When it turned out that there were not enough students for the work, the class instructor was asked to do it by himself, and the Board expressed frustration when he didn't complete the job quickly enough.

For whatever reason, by 1949 circulation was decreasing at Douglass School Library. In her annual report for the year, acting director Mardorf wrote:

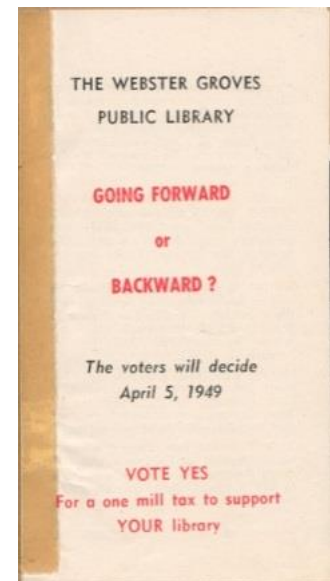
Perhaps we could better serve the entire population of Webster Groves by concentrating on just one library, leaving to the Douglass School Library the function of providing for the needs of the school children, and expecting the adults of North Webster to come to the Public Library, where they can avail themselves of the greater selection of books.

Mardorf's words held more than a little wishful thinking. She may have thought it proper that people from North Webster should use the Webster Groves Public Library, but it was not until 1956, following the *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, that Webster Groves School District integrated. By that time the public library in the high school had closed and moved into its new location at 301 E. Lockwood Avenue, so it appears that use of this library was never fully integrated.

Something else which had not stood still while the Library Board was seeking a lot to build on was the price of

construction. A post-war building boom, accompanied by a shortage of materials, meant that building costs were rapidly increasing. As early as December 1946 it was suggested in Library Board minutes that the money originally allotted for a new building would not be enough. In October 1948 came the first mention that another tax increase would be needed. Another factor that necessitated an enhanced tax base was the loss of state aid. Administered by the Missouri State Library, state aid was available to any public library which collected at least one mill per hundred dollars of assessed valuation: the library's tax at the time was only two-fifths of a mill. In January 1949 Board members met with Mayor Appel, who agreed that the library should ask for a tax increase by ballot in April: he further said that 'if the voters did not approve an increased tax in April, the City would see to it that the library did not end the year with a deficit.' Exactly what he meant by that—if the deficit could be made up by City tax revenues—is not clear.

Elizabeth Gribble chaired the committee to promote the tax increase. Her committee did quick work in getting out promotional pieces, including a pamphlet with black and red lettering which asked *Going Forward or Backward? The voters will decide . . .* On April 5, 1949 the levy passed by a margin of 2 ½ to 1.



The selection of architects began immediately after the vote. Mr. McCallister was in charge of the committee, which made several attempts to seek out architects who specialized in libraries, but the effort was fruitless. At one point they were told by the ALA that 'architects are very loath to be so labelled.' In April, three local architects were interviewed: Kenneth Wischmeyer, P. John Hoener, and Charles Gray. It appears there was some dissatisfaction with these candidates, because the board went on to meet with Charles Compton and Louis Nourse of St. Louis Public Library to solicit their advice on library building design and designers. In September they interviewed Marcel Boulicault, who had designed the Clayton Public Library and the Brentwood Public Library. Despite these detours, in September 1949 they signed a contract with P. John Hoener, a condition of the contract being that he had to produce a sketch of the new library within 30 days.

Throughout this period Helen Mardorf was serving as Acting Librarian: that changed in September 1949 when Marguerite Norville was appointed as Librarian. This was something of a homecoming for Norville, who had been previously employed by Webster Groves Public, but had spent the last fifteen years as Librarian for Richmond Heights Public Library.

Hoener eventually produced three proposed designs for the library, including one two-story concept and one decidedly modern-looking building in addition to the design that was finally approved. At its December meeting the Board voted to accept the two-story design; but that is not the one that was

built. It is frustrating that the minutes do not record the reason for the change, or when the decision was made.

Bids for construction were solicited, and when, on April 18, 1950, the nine bids were opened, it turned out that the lowest bid—at \$154,000—was too high for the available budget. The decision was quickly made to ask for a bond issue of \$80,000. On June 6 the issue passed, with 831 yes votes to 124 no votes. (At 955 total votes, City Clerk N. E. Blaske noted that this was the smallest voter turnout he could recall.) Even then, the Board was concerned about staying within budget. There was serious consideration of whether or not to build the meeting room portion of the plan, but in the end, based largely on a recommendation from Nourse and Compton at St. Louis Public Library, it was decided the library would not be complete without it. The job was given to the low bidder, Couzens Construction Company. A groundbreaking ceremony took place on June 14, 1950, with Marguerite Norville, P. John Hoener, the full Library Board, Mayor Appel and the City Council. By August a bid for furnishings was accepted from Remington Rand, a major supplier of library furniture and fixtures.

Construction was met by some delays, mostly having to do with the aforementioned material shortages. The Bedford limestone which faced the whole base of the building was particularly difficult to acquire. At one point the Board asked Hoener if he would consider not using the stone, but he insisted that the design required it. Reports in the January 11, 1951 *Webster News-Times* said that with delays, the building should be complete by June.

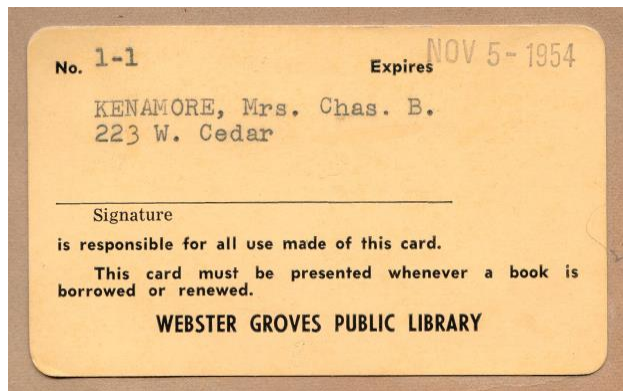
Also in January 1951 the first chapter was written in a saga that would continue for quite a while. A January 18 article in the *Webster News-Times* is titled 'City Fights for Library Freedom.' At the time, State Librarian Paxton Price was urging municipal libraries, such as Webster Groves Public, to merge with county library systems. He was citing a 1939 Missouri Statute which authorized the State Library to offer a 40-cent *per capita* grant to any city library within a county that would join a larger unit. The grant offer would expire in June 1951. Trustees at Webster Groves did not see this as a good deal for their institution. Founded in 1947, St. Louis County Library was very new, especially compared to Webster Groves Public Library, which had already existed in one form or another for over 50 years. Moreover, it was created to serve the largely rural and unincorporated areas of the county, and its collections were relatively small. Etta Kenamore, President of the Webster Groves Public Library Board, thought that the merger 'would benefit only rural libraries with limited staff and book stocks.' The move was apparently perceived more widely throughout the library community as a power grab by St. Louis County Library. A group known as the Municipal Library League of St. Louis County had been started by an attorney named Royal L. Coburn, and 10 municipal libraries in the county—including Webster Groves—had joined. It was a stated goal of the group to fight for fairness: if there were state funds available for libraries, those libraries ought to be able to receive them without surrendering their independence.

By March, the projected completion date for the library

had been pushed to mid-summer. By early April the brickwork was nearing completion and the building was under roof. On April 12, 1951, the cornerstone was laid. Etta Kenamore and other board members, along with Mayor Appel and P. John Hoener, met to place an airtight copper box, which contained documents pertaining to library and city history, beneath the cornerstone. In May the Board asked Hoener to press the contractor to complete the building as quickly as possible. At the June meeting he reported a tentative completion date of July 25.

In an age when grown women were universally referred to by their husbands' names, and not allowed to sign for library cards without reference to their male spouse's place of employment, it must have seemed a little strange for a woman to be so conspicuously heading up a major municipal building project. A May 18, 1951 article in the *Webster News-Times* (written by Clarissa Start) was titled 'She's Bossing \$230,000 Building Job.' It was a profile of Etta Kenamore (but only referred to her as Mrs. Charles Kenamore), and her work on a number of municipal building projects. She had served on the postwar planning committee whose efforts had resulted in the swimming pool, tennis courts, baseball diamonds and other recreational facilities, as well as the purchase of Blackburn Park. Having been president of the women's association of the Congregational Church and of the Monday Club, her progression to president of the Library Board seemed natural. She was a 'house-flipper' long before the idea was fashionable, and the article detailed her mania for purchasing, renovating

and selling homes: she had lived in fourteen houses in Webster Groves. Kenamore is quoted describing the many delays the library project had faced: 'First we couldn't get stone and then we had trouble over marble being processed, and for weeks not a wheel turned. Then came the steel strike and we couldn't get the roof on.' When the library finally opened, the first library card was issued to her. That card is kept in a scrapbook at the library. It is numbered 1-1, and reads, 'KENAMORE, Mrs. Chas. B., 223 W. Cedar.'



The grand opening of the Webster Groves Public Library building was held on November 5, 1951, with Mrs. Kenamore and Mayor Clarence Appel officiating. The high school library had been closed on October 22 to facilitate the move of 25,000 books. The removal of the library from the high school brought about some important system changes. Previously the library's service area had been contiguous with the Webster Groves School District, since the School Board was helping to finance library operations. The School District, to this day, covers an

area larger than the City of Webster Groves. From this point forward free library service was extended only to residents of Webster Groves, who paid the library tax. All others paid a non-resident fee, though the library has always offered a reduced rate for non-resident students of Webster Groves schools.

The area traditionally known as North Webster, where Douglass School with its public library 'station' was situated, was not annexed to the City of Webster Groves until 1960. Thus there was no longer a need for the Webster Groves Public Library to concern itself with this largely African-American population—and it is never mentioned in the minutes for many years to come.



Etta Kenamore and Mayor Clarence Appel at the grand opening

## Part IV

### The Traditional with the Modern

**T**he *Pioneer* was a magazine published from the 1930s to the 1950s by the Library Services Division of Remington Rand Corporation. Each month it featured articles about libraries across the country which had recently been built, or refurnished, or redecorated—mostly, one assumes, using furnishings purchased from Remington Rand. Its March 1952 edition features Webster Groves Public Library on the cover, under the headline ‘Webster Groves Library Blends Modern and Traditional Styles’. The article goes on to describe how nicely the two had been blended—the most up to date furnishings and interior appointments in a building whose exterior was in a visually traditional Williamsburg style.



Marguerite Norville

Marguerite Norville was a well-published librarian, offering articles to such trade publications as *Library Journal*. In a December 1952 article titled ‘Georgian Grace and Dignity’ she states that ‘The Board felt that an extremely modern building would be inappropriate. A one-story plan was finally chosen and the old problem of fitting the library’s

needs to the style of architecture reared its ugly head.’ Her descriptions of the interiors are startling, considering the changes in tastes that have taken place between then and now.

The main rooms have soft green side walls, with the end walls a rich blue green. The floors are white and green asphalt tile with a red strip leading from the front door to the charging counter. The walls of the work room and the librarian’s office are creamy yellow and Indian red, while the assembly room has three cocoa colored walls and one dark brown.

In a section called ‘Second Thoughts’ she details some of the things they could have done better, or at least differently. The Young Adult section was too close to the Children’s



The Reading Room, showing a mix of modern and traditional elements

Room, and teens wouldn’t use it. The circulation desk (usually called a charging desk in those days) was wholly inadequate to

the library's needs. And the aforementioned blue-green paint looked gray beneath the fluorescent lights.

In another article in March 1954, Norville expounds on some of the modern enhancements to library service that they had been trying, with varying degrees of success. By this time the library had begun its collection of phonographs records, and had 254 of them. They also owned a high fidelity record player, and held a 'concert for listening' on Saturday afternoons. These were sparsely attended, while the circulation of phonograph records for home use was 'astonishing.' The record project necessitated the addition of another assistant to process them, 'a serious item in any budget.' This would foreshadow the addition of multiple media over the next several decades, from cassette tapes to videotapes to Blu-ray discs, both in their popularity and the expense of adding them to the collection.

The library purchased a slide projector and a film projector, and began showing educational films for children on Saturday mornings. Attendance was so good that they had to do two showings to accommodate everyone. But film showings for adults were not nearly so successful. In fact, Norville describes the poor attendance as 'puzzling and humiliating,' despite attempts to cater the films shown to specific groups, changing the days and times of showings, and active publicity of the programs. 'Perhaps,' she concluded, 'John Doe would just as soon stay home and read a book.'

An interesting incident occurred soon after the library was opened. In spring of 1953, local attorney John H. Cassidy challenged incumbent Clarence Appel in the mayoral election.

He made some political hay out of showing that the library fund which, according to state law, is supposed to be maintained separately from the city's general fund, was being rolled into the city's fund. In an April 1, 1953 article in the *Webster News-Times*, he even sought to distance himself from some of the more egregious accusations that had grown out of the charge: it seems people in town were talking about money making its way into private pockets, and of fur coats being purchased with it. Still, he insisted in the article, this is not just a technicality, but a real problem that could lead to the diversion of money meant for one service into something else. However well this issue resonated with voters, Cassidy beat Appel in the election. An April 29 article in the *News-Times* notes that Mayor Cassidy had just held a meeting with the Library Board and the City Council, and that library funds would henceforth be held separately from City funds.

An innovation which was 'modern' at the time, but which would continue to be a problem for the library, was its parking lot. Several articles which described the new building and its amenities noted that it had its own parking lot around back. The library was situated more or less within a residential neighborhood, which was both good and bad for various reasons. Many users could walk to the library, but those who needed to drive also needed to park, and the presence of a parking lot, which can be unsightly and something of a disturbance, was not welcome to many residents. There were problems for the first few years concerning children's use of the library parking lot as a playground. A Mr. and Mrs. Judell visited

the June 1953 Board meeting to complain about the frequent disturbances which were 'not in accordance with the original intent of the parking space.' In May 1954 Librarian Marguerite Norville sent a sternly worded letter to *The Observer* newspaper, admonishing parents to take charge of their children. 'It should not be the duty of the library staff to assume responsibility for the safety of your trespassing children,' she wrote, in a tone which a modern library administrator would never get away with, adding, 'For the safety of your child you will impress on him the seriousness of playing or otherwise trespassing on a public parking lot. It is your responsibility.'

As libraries in general added new services, Webster Groves kept pace. In 1964 the library got its first photocopier. In 1966 it began carrying framed art prints for people to check out, which were very popular for a number of years at public libraries. Throughout these years, there were frequent displays at the library, and they attracted enough attention that local newspapers printed articles, often with photographs, about them. Whether it was a display of oil lamps, antique bottles, shoes, ikebana floral design, or hand-painted Christmas ornaments, you could read about it in the *Post-Dispatch*, *Globe-Democrat* or *Webster News-Times*.

In 1965 the Library Board adopted the American Library Association's Freedom to Read statement as part of library policy. The statement, first promulgated by the ALA in 1953, is a broad-ranging defense of every American's right to read whatever is available, without censorship, condemnation, or the labeling of any category of information as subversive or

inappropriate. The sense of the document is best summed up in this excerpt from the statement:

It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians, as guardians of the people's freedom to read, to contest encroachments upon that freedom by individuals or groups seeking to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large; and by the government whenever it seeks to reduce or deny public access to public information.

It could be coincidence that the Board adopted this policy at this time, but the 1960s did see a rush of both fiction and non-fiction works to which library patrons (and 'concerned citizens') took exception. Board minutes record complaints about *Portnoy's Complaint*, *The Naked Ape*, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* and several other books. None was removed from the collection. An interesting exception to their stance against censorship was when Librarian Helen Mardorf reported there had been patron requests for 'Dr. Masters' book'—by which one supposes *Human Sexual Response* (1966) was meant. It was the opinion of the board that such patrons could 'go to a medical library.'

For whatever reason, the early- to mid-1960s seem to have been one of the worst times in the Library's history for bad discipline. From 1962 an off-duty police officer was employed in the late afternoons and evenings to keep an eye on things. Board minutes record vandalism of the bathroom, a break-in in which



an intercom system was stolen, and an odd incident in which 'brown sugar and Karo syrup were poured all over the columns and front steps.' Other stolen items were a fire extinguisher, which the Webster Groves Police eventually recovered, and enough reference books that an insurance claim was filed to make up the loss. Board members discussed the discipline problem frequently at their meetings. In spring 1964 letters concerning behavior at the Library were sent to 'PTA groups and Mothers clubs.' A young man described as a 'Washington University senior'—and, one supposes, something of a bruiser—was employed as a monitor. By 1967, mentions of these discipline problems taper off and disappear.

Local news articles indicate that on Tuesday, February 8, 1966 the library closed an hour early, at 8 p.m. rather than the usual 9 p.m. This one time early closing was so that staff members could be home in time to see *16 in Webster Groves*, the infamous CBS News special. Later that year Library Board member Jean Wildermuth was attending the Governor's Library Conference in Jefferson City. The keynote speaker was CBS newsman Harry Reasoner, from whom Wildermuth elicited a promise to forward a copy of the show to the Library. Whether Reasoner, or anyone else at CBS News ever made good on the promise is nowhere recorded. The Library did eventually secure a videocassette copy of the show, which circulated well among Webster Groves residents, and is still in the collection today.

In January 1967 Helen Mardorf was named Head Librarian. This was the culmination of the career of a woman who would become the library's longest-serving librarian. A

graduate of Washington University and the School of Library Science at Western Reserve University, Mardorf had worked at libraries in Cleveland and at the Carpenter Branch of St. Louis



Helen Mardorf

Public Library before coming to Webster Groves as Children's Librarian in 1939. In 1946, when Sofia Jackson resigned, Mardorf served as acting librarian until Marguerite Norville was hired. After Norville's retirement in 1964, the Library Board approached Mardorf about taking over, but the minutes from June 15 record that 'she is not desirous of relinquishing

the Children's Department and her rewarding work with young people.' Alice Morris was hired as Head Librarian, but served less than two years. Upon Morris' retirement Mardorf was again made acting librarian 'until she either decided to stay in said position permanently or to relinquish it to a new Head Librarian, when and if employed.' She served as Head Librarian until 1976, when she asked to return to her duties as Children's Librarian. She worked a schedule alternating between full and part time for eight more years, eventually retiring in 1984, when the Reference Room at Webster Groves Public Library was named in her honor.



Also in January 1967, the Board voted to change the day and time of its meetings, which had always been on Monday nights, to the third Wednesday of each month; it has remained on that day ever since. The Board minutes for February of that year record the first instance of a City Council liaison—Councilman William Copeland—attending a Library Board Meeting. But his reason for being there causes some concern. At that meeting he pressed Helen Mardorf for answers about withdrawn books, claiming that the City Council needed to know. She explained the standard procedure and the criteria for withdrawing books, but Councilman Copeland wanted to have a list of the books which had recently been withdrawn. There is no list, Mardorf told him, though the withdrawn cataloguing cards for each item were still around. Could they be worked up into a list? At this point, Board Member Jean Wildermuth interceded, insisting that this sort of intrusion into what is surely an administrative function was well beyond reasonable oversight by the Council. This discussion went on for a few more months, though there is nothing recorded to explain exactly what it was that had gotten the City Council so exercised about withdrawn library books.

In April 1968 the library asked for and the voters of Webster Groves approved an increase in its tax levy to sixteen cents on 100 dollars of assessed valuation. Part of this increase was in response to dire need; but part of it was due to the fact that the Missouri State Library had increased its threshold for providing state funds. Libraries which did not collect at least 2 mills were ineligible for state aid. The Board had also engaged

Robert H. Rohlf Associates, a library consulting firm, to study the library's space needs. Their March 1968 report noted that 'The present library building, although only eighteen years old, has already become inadequate for efficient public library service to Webster Groves.' It also stressed that 'the present building should . . . in effect, be twice as large as it actually is. It must be pointed out that this projection is based on minimum space standards, not on unrealistic ideals.' The report noted that the Library had an unusually large collection of phonograph records, exceeding the minimum standards for a library twice its size. This is interesting: we have already seen that Helen Mardorf began advocating for a phonograph record collection well before the move to 301 E. Lockwood. Once the collection was added, Marguerite Norville wrote about it in a *Library Journal* article, stating that circulation of records was 'astonishing.' There is a tendency of librarians to take on a favorite collection—whether it is a certain medium, like phonograph records, or a subject area, such as books on antiquing or gardening, and overemphasize them in the collection. It appears the librarians at Webster Groves may have fallen victim to this problem. At any rate, the Rohlf report recommended 'stabilizing' this collection.

But the main conclusion of the report was that the library needed to be twice the size it was. The author heavily emphasized his preference for building a completely new building somewhere else, since the current lot presented so few possibilities for either building expansion or improving parking, which it called 'extremely inadequate.' The only way the existing

building could be expanded is if the two residential lots to the east were purchased, an unlikely scenario.

The report suggested some interior changes that might help alleviate problems of overcrowding, stressing that these were wholly temporary measures meant to buy time until a real plan for expansion could be put into place. These suggestions involved eliminating the auditorium as a meeting space and turning it into either an art room to house all of the library's art and music collections, or turning it into the Children's Room. The 'Rohlf Report' was to become the template for much of what happened in the library for the next few decades.

In June 1970 one of the homes east of the Library, at 5 Mason Avenue, was offered for sale. The Library Board, being interested in the possibilities this property presented for expanding their building, sent a proposal to Mayor John Cooper and the City Council soliciting their advice in the matter. The response was reported at length in the Board minutes from August 1970. Mayor Cooper stated that while the Council in general was strongly supportive of the Library and its Board as an independently governed entity, and supportive of the idea of expanding the library when the need exists, it did not support the proposed purchase of this property. He also suggested that the City would 'provide temporary relief of funding shortages to cover operating expenses of the library should such need develop'—the second time a mayor is recorded making such an offer. In a separate telephone call with City Attorney Al Michenfelder, he had added these key points:

1. The board should proceed cautiously to commit mill tax funds for property purchased at the expense of operating revenue . . .
2. The Board should consider the loss of interest income and cost of maintenance versus possible escalation of property value. The #5 Mason lot is not an attractive residential property in light of existing adjoining lot usage along Lockwood Avenue.

With these thoughts in mind the Library Board voted unanimously to cease consideration of the purchase.

As mentioned previously, there was not a St. Louis County Library until 1947. In the meantime, a number of other municipalities had started their own libraries, including Kirkwood (1926)<sup>14</sup>, Ferguson (1930), Clayton (1934), Maplewood (1935), University City (1938), Richmond Heights (1938), Brentwood (1938), Rock Hill (1943), and Valley Park (1943). In July 1966 local newspapers carried news of the founding of a cooperative arrangement between seven of these libraries, called the Municipal Library Cooperative (MLC). It was considered a demonstration project by administrators at Missouri State Library, and was thus eligible for federal funds of \$37,000. The money was used to pay the salary of Stephen Whitney, a former branch manager for St. Louis Public Library

---

<sup>14</sup> Though Kirkwood passed a library tax one year before Webster Groves, it was universally acknowledged in 1928 that Webster Groves had the first public library in St. Louis County, since its building was built and opened twelve years before Kirkwood's.

who was hired as coordinator for the MLC, and to purchase books which were shared by all the libraries. The MLC offices were in the Kirkwood Public Library building. John Hamilton, a board trustee at University City Public Library, was the first president of the group. Within the arrangement, a patron of any one of the participating libraries could request and check out materials from the other libraries; though in these years before computer systems, this sharing was much slower. Requests were checked against a printed 'union catalog' of all the libraries' holdings, and books were sent in the mail.

In October 1967 the MLC announced a cooperative agreement with the libraries of the St. Louis Junior College District. In 1968, Clayton Public Library joined the MLC, and in 1969, Richmond Heights Public Library came on board, raising membership in the MCL to its all-time high of nine libraries (though by 1972, Clayton PL was no longer a member). Also in 1969 the MLC founded its own telephone reference department, headed by librarian June Riekhof, who worked out of rented space at St. Louis Public Library's Central Library.

In 1971 the library had its first significant remodeling done. Working from recommendations in 1968's Rohlf Report, the Meeting Room was redone as the Fine Arts Room, holding the library's collections of circulating framed artworks, its music collection, and all of its books on various art-related subjects. The staff workroom, which had been behind the Circulation Desk, was moved to the previous Music Room, and the empty room turned into a new Reference Room. Articles appearing in newspapers at the time indicated reasons for the remodel—the

Meeting Room was not air conditioned, for instance, and not suited for group meetings. But it had always been a busy gathering place for clubs and organizations in town, regardless of air conditioning. And wouldn't having air conditioning installed have been more cost effective? The real reason for the change is suggested in Helen Mardorf's introduction for the Annual Report, 1968-1969, in which she writes, 'there has been no progress towards meeting the space problem by conversion of the auditorium.' The library's book collection had grown to over 56,000 items, and using the auditorium as at least a partial solution to this conundrum took on ever-increasing importance.

Board minutes from December 1971 record a proposal from St. Louis Public Library director Paxton Price to institute reciprocal lending for all libraries in St. Louis City and County, but by April 1972 St. Louis County had rejected the idea. Later that year the MLC libraries signed a sharing agreement with St. Louis Public Library, leaving St. Louis County Library as the only non-cooperating library in the area.

As the years went on and new media gained popularity, Webster Groves Public Library added them to its collections, adding additional pressure to the available space. Cassette tapes, for music as well as recorded books, followed phonograph records, and were followed by compact discs. Videocassettes came along in the 1980s, to be replaced eventually by DVDs. Each of these collections created new space problems for the library, often requiring special cabinets, shelves, or other fixtures to house and present them for browsing. Adding to the problem was the fact that the rapidity with which a new medium found

popularity was seldom matched by the rapidity with which its predecessor lost popularity: so for years the library housed phonograph records *and* compact discs, videocassettes *and* DVDs.

In the Board minutes for February 1975 we find the first mention of a Friends of the Library group. In that meeting trustee Mary Goodloe suggested that holding a book sale would be a good way to



Friends of the Library ready for the Fourth of July Parade

launch a friends group. It seems to be a mid-stream sort of thought, and one supposes this had been an ongoing discussion, but this is our first documentation. Over the next several months the idea evolved: by May the new group had met twice and selected Nancy Forsyth as temporary chairperson, and by July the book sale was being planned. Attorney Cottrell Fox, who had served on the Library Board in the late 1940s to early 1950s, drafted the original incorporation papers for the group. Recruitment took place rapidly, with 143 members listed by October.

In 1976, local writer Clarissa Start wrote her history *Webster Groves*, and introduced it during a reception at Webster Groves Public Library. The photograph accompanying a January 21 article in the *West County Journal* shows a large crowd on hand to purchase copies and have them signed by Start. Over 600 copies were sold that day, and the first press run of the book was quickly sold out. The Friends of the Library also used the event to recruit more members. Things were going so well that by March 1976, the Friends offered their first gift to the library—new carpeting for the juvenile area.

The origins of the Friends group coincided with a campaign by the Board of Trustees to ask for a tax levy increase in April 1976. Friends volunteers stepped up to collect the signatures needed on a ballot petition. The tax increase passed by a margin of nearly 2 to 1. By August of that year, a grateful library Board and administration were able to afford a service enhancement they'd been considering for a while: Sunday hours were added. Patrons accepted the Sunday hours quickly, and attendance grew steadily in the first few months, though some citizens were adamantly opposed to the change. Board minutes report that one woman withdrew her support of the Friends group over the matter. Library staff members were also displeased enough about the change to ask, in October 1976, for staff representation at future board meetings. Staff members were also upset that there was no 'evidence of the tax increase,' and it had to be explained that an increase in August is not going to yield income until January of the following year. Both of these issues were chalked up to bad communication with the

staff.

In December, Helen Mardorf wrote a letter to the Board resigning her position as Head Librarian. Diane Alexander, who had been the Children's Librarian for a short period, had recently left, and Mardorf said she wanted to finish her career as she started it, in the Children's Room. One wonders if issues such as the previously mentioned employee dissatisfaction and its attribution to bad communication contributed to her decision to resign the Head Librarian position at this time, but there is no documentation of this. Mardorf recommended Anne Horton as her replacement. Horton had been with the library since 1960, but even aside from this experience she seemed well situated to lead the library at this time for one other conspicuous reason.

In 1970 we find the first occurrence of Webster Groves Public Library paying someone's tuition to take a work-related class: Anne Horton took a course called Introduction to Computers in Libraries at Washington University. There are further notes and reports of Horton attending workshops and seminars dealing with the various technologies that were soon to make their way into common usage in libraries. By 1974 a telex system was used to send interlibrary loan requests throughout the county. In December of that year there were reports that St. Louis Public Library was adding an automated circulation system. In January 1975 we hear the first mention of OCLC—the Ohio College Library Center<sup>15</sup>—which would become the

---

<sup>15</sup> The name was later changed to the Online Computer Library Center.



Anne Horton

ground zero center for automated library cataloging across the United States. In March 1976 Board minutes reported that Webster Groves Public Library and University City Public Library were in talks to share a Gaylord circulation control system, but it wasn't until 1979 that University City got such a system, without any sharing arrangement with Webster

Groves. By July of that year, incoming Board President Jack Myers stated in a meeting that the acquisition of a computerized circulation system was the number one priority for the library. Two months later Board Treasurer Karl Blumenhorst offered the news that the library simply did not have the money for such a system, and by September the trustees agreed to table discussion of the matter 'for a time.' This is the first in a series of delays that would prove frustrating to trustees and library staff alike, perhaps contributing to the sudden resignations of more than one Head Librarian.

By 1980, Kirkwood Public Library became the second of the MLC libraries to add an automated circulation system, and soon Brentwood and Ferguson worked out contracts to share the same system via a computer linkup. Throughout the early 1980s the Friends of the Library were making annual deposits to

fund the purchase of an automated system for Webster Groves. But things began to get complicated. An inventory revealed that Webster Groves Public Library had a serious theft problem, with way too many books missing. Implementing a computerized circulation system became tied up with the planning and installation of a security system. James Michael, a consultant hired to look at the building, declared that the circulation desk needed to be moved, entrances rearranged, and other significant changes made to begin to make the building more secure. This planning and work went on into late 1984, when the Board finally voted to get a 3M security system and to join contractually with Kirkwood Public Library in using its CLSI circulation system.

But in early 1985 a new trustee joined the Board, a Mr. Vasileff. He seemed to know more about automation and computers than the other trustees, and immediately his opinions took on importance. Unfortunately, his opinions also indicated a complete change in direction. He did not think sharing a system with Kirkwood was a good idea or a good deal for Webster Groves. He believed there were better products available, and for the next several months trustees and library staff were given demonstrations of some of them. Board minutes record the occasional troubled suggestion by a trustee that there was already a contract with Kirkwood, but the Board pressed on considering alternatives.

A security system was finally installed. The main funding for it came from a \$10,000 donation by the Friends. Just the same, Jeff Sutin, a *Post-Dispatch* reporter, decided to see

something questionable in the purchase, averring in an article that the library had been somehow coerced to buy this expensive system.

Amid this drawn out process, two things happened: in spring 1986 it was reported in Board minutes that the Friends of the Library were lacking in leadership and needed some help. But rather than Library Board action, it was a member of the group, Gay Moppert, who stepped in. She recruited her friend Jane Romines, and the two of them became the new President and Vice-president of the Friends. As a matter of fact, all four officers changed in 1986, as well as 7 out of 8 committee chairmen. The change was beneficial, and the Friends continued to hold successful fundraisers and recruit new members. In May, Head Librarian Anne Horton resigned. After ten years in the position, it may have just been time, but her sudden resignation amid a long and painful process of trying to implement an automation system is reminiscent of Sofia Jackson's sudden resignation in 1946, during the Board's multi-year quest to find a lot for the new library building. By September 1986 Bill Erbes was hired as Head Librarian.

Another ongoing frustration was with the substandard salaries offered at Webster Groves Public Library. There was a lot of coming and going among the staff in the 1980s, particularly in the professional grades, with new employees soon finding better paying jobs at other libraries and library systems. At one point, even the student shelveers asked permission to present a plan to the Board that would use fewer working hours, in hopes that those hours could be better paid.

Bill Erbes spent his entire tenure as Head Librarian fighting what seems like a battle to implement an automation system. By this time the Library had decided on an INLEX automation system, foregoing the previous agreement with Kirkwood Public Library. But during its installation and first few months of operation, Erbes noted significant portions of the system that had either been omitted in the contract or which nobody had thought about. He worked to coordinate between the vendor and the Board those parts of the deal that would make the system fully operable. It was not easy going. Whether the trustees were not yet comfortable with him as an administrator, or Erbes actually was overeager in his desire to add all the 'bells and whistles,' Board meeting minutes record several instances when Erbes seemed close to completing a transaction, only to have it turned down by the Board. By June 1987, the INLEX library automation system was finally up and running. In August, Bill Erbes resigned.

Barbara Rosenkoetter, who had been the library's secretary and bookkeeper, was made acting director, and served through the end of the year, when Sue Ann Schlosser was hired. It was during her tenure that the library first went online, allowing patrons to search for materials via computer and even see the current status of a given item. She began work in January 1988 and resigned in May 1989. At this point long-time employee Mary 'Sissy' Grashoff became acting director, a position she filled until February 1990, when Marylou Pierce Fox took over as Director.

Fox's years are a time largely of building maintenance

and improvement, with the Board undertaking projects to paint and tuck point the exterior, plaster and paint the interior, update the air conditioning, repave the parking lot, and change the carpeting in most of the building. The Friends of the Library figure heavily in much of this improvement, as they paid a large portion of the cost of the carpeting, purchased many pieces of new furniture, and made other significant donations. There was also a wholesale update and improvement of the landscaping around the building, led by Chairman of the Board's Building and Grounds Committee Jack Pirozzi.

Fox also had a focus on employee training, rarely missing a chance to send someone to a workshop or seminar, particularly those dedicated to technology subjects. She established a department head structure for organizing the library staff and worked with the Board to update many employee policies: some more popular than others. All in all, the Board minutes from this period seem to indicate a sense of forward momentum, with the building looking in great shape and circulation statistics going up. Even the Friends group reported over 400 members, and their 1990 book fair brought in \$7,000. In early 1994, talks began between the MLC Libraries, St. Louis Public Library and St. Louis County Library to finally start a reciprocal borrowing arrangement that would encompass all three of the major library systems in the area. Despite these positive notes, in April 1994 Fox suddenly resigned. At this point, likely reeling from one too many director resignations, the Board quickly hired Sissy Grashoff as director, a position she would fill for ten years.

These were years during which three themes dominate: the changing structure of the Municipal Library Cooperative and reciprocal circulation arrangements with other libraries; the increasing use of technology in the library, particularly the expansion of the Internet; and the need to expand the library building. Given these challenges, this was a time which called for a stronger than usual administration, so it was unfortunate that it came close on the heels of so many dislocations at the top.

By March 1995, talks about reciprocal borrowing had expanded to include St. Charles City/County Library. These talks, however, would not produce results for nearly five more years. In the meantime, the libraries of the Municipal Library Cooperative began to discuss a significant alteration of their group. Up to this time the libraries had shared their materials through inter-library loan arrangements. The thought was that now, since many libraries were either online or going online, it would be best if the MLC libraries shared one online circulation system, complete with a shared catalog. Everyone's materials could be listed together and patrons could put in requests for those materials from that central catalog. This move was of further importance, given that St. Louis County and St. Louis Public Library had more or less cited it as being necessary before a reciprocal lending arrangement could be implemented. It is interesting to note that the Board meeting minutes always included a report from Sissy Grashoff detailing what had been discussed at the monthly meeting of the MLC directors. But beginning in early 1996 she fell silent about the activities of the

MLC—if the meetings were mentioned at all it was to report a passed budget or other *pro forma* activities. This is the time period during which the MLC was planning the most significant structural change since its inception in the 1970s, so Grashoff's silence on the matter is troubling. The Board minutes record no mention of the fact that this change was being discussed until April 1996, when the Board voted not to join the newly reconfigured Municipal Library Consortium.

The Board seems to have been heavily influenced by Richard Patton, who was Chair of the Automation Committee at the time. He had been investigating and reporting on other library automation systems, in hopes of updating the library's aging INLEX system. In fact he had already ruled out the Dynix system—the same one the MLC was planning to implement—as not being suited to the needs of Webster Groves Public Library. This was a tempestuous time for the library. The decision to quit the MLC did not necessitate removal of reciprocal library privileges between Webster Groves Public Library and the other MLC libraries, but that is what happened for the most part, with only Richmond Heights Memorial Library, Maplewood Public Library, Valley Park Community Library, and Rock Hill Public Library still extending borrowing privileges to residents of Webster Groves. As it quickly dawned on Webster Groves residents that a service they had taken for granted was being taken away, the library began to receive complaints. Many of these were in the form of letters which are still on file at the library. There was even one petition drive undertaken by residents to force a reconsideration of the decision.



An article in the May 3-9, 1996 edition of the *Webster-Kirkwood Times* stirred up the most controversy, and highlighted the very reasons that the Board had decided not to join. There were two basic arguments against joining the MLC. First was that it would cost too much, and an undue portion of the financial burden was being placed on Webster Groves. Kirkwood Public Library Director Wicky Sleight was quoted in the Times article as saying that the cost to Webster Groves would be around \$50,000. But the Board noted that this was only for the necessary Dynix hardware: to implement the updates they had been considering, along with joining the MLC, would cost closer to \$93,000. Being only the third largest partner in the group, it seemed unfair to pay more than University City or Kirkwood—the first and second largest members. This price differential was largely due to the fact that the Dynix automation system being implemented was the system that University City already had at the time, so the change for them was minimal. And this got at the second main concern within the Webster Groves Board and staff: the loss of autonomy. It seemed they were being railroaded into accepting a pricey system that their own research had already ruled out. As the Library's Reference Librarian Christopher Johnson put it in a published response to the Times article, Webster Groves was not leaving the MLC so much as being forced out. The Board cited other decisions being made over their heads that seemed to undermine their autonomy, though this was an interesting argument coming after the Library had been a member of the Cooperative for nearly 30 years without recognizable inroads on

its independence; why this largely technological change was suddenly such a threat is something to ponder.

The Board responded by sending letters to the *Webster-Kirkwood Times* and publishing a fact sheet that they mailed to residents. But the contentious discourse continued for quite a while. There was a belief among the Webster Groves Library Board that the Kirkwood and University City Libraries had co-opted the news media and were getting their own disinformation out to the detriment of Webster Groves. Arguments and counter-arguments flew back and forth; figures, timelines and more were disputed. But the bottom line was that many Webster Groves residents felt they were left out in the cold, an island surrounded by cooperating libraries. The old Municipal Library Cooperative was officially dissolved on June 30, 1997.

Late in 1997 there was an attempt by the Board to negotiate a reciprocal lending arrangement with the Board at Kirkwood Public Library, but their board would not respond to letters. In January 1998 members of the Webster Groves Board attended the Kirkwood Board meeting to make their case, but they were turned down flat.

The library moved forward on its own. The Board negotiated an update to the aging INLEX system. Their budgetary focus became investment in a network and the terminals necessary to institute public Internet access. In November 1997 the first four public Internet terminals went live, set up in carrels donated by the Friends. More computers were being purchased for staff members. But new services taxed

the already limited space within the library. The Internet carrels were in the middle of the Reading Room. The old Meeting Room, which had been transformed into a Fine Arts Room, had later become the Children's Library. But this still left no dedicated space for library programming.

Board minutes in July 1998 show the Board going into closed session to discuss a real estate matter—one of the few reasons a public board may close a public meeting. Several months later, in March 1999, the Board purchased the residence at 227 E. Lockwood Avenue, across Orchard Avenue. Almost simultaneously they applied to the City Planning Commission for a conditional use permit to subdivide the rather large lot this house sat on and build a parking lot. This move occasioned significant outcry from nearby neighbors, who did not want to see a parking lot there. The need for the lot was questioned. Library staff members were asked not to use the existing parking lot, to make sure as much space as possible was available for public parking. But there had never realistically been enough parking spaces, a fact noted by every consultant who had been asked to look at the building—particularly in the 1968 Rohlf Report—and the plan for a new lot progressed, though it was not completed until September 2000.

Perceiving the need for more programming and public information, the Board voted to create the position of Special Events Coordinator. The position was filled by Jane Romines, a former President of the Friends. She published a monthly newsletter and planned events such as poetry readings, art exhibits and more. More than anything, these events highlighted

the space problem in the library. Since there was not a meeting room, most events took place in the main Reading Room or the Reference Room, and there were complaints about how that disrupted the library environment. The library also sought to increase its presence in the community: they staffed a booth at the Community Days festival one year, and in 1999 a team led by Adult Services Librarian Pat Linehan created a float for the Community Days Parade, winning an honorable mention.

When it came time to sell the residence at 227 E. Lockwood, the Friends of the Library, led at the time by President Deborah Ladd, arranged one of their most ambitious projects to date: a Designer Showcase. Local designers were asked to choose a room in the house and decorate it in some literary style. There was a Hemingway Room, done in African safari motifs, and a Tuscan room, which played on the popularity of Frances Mayes' 1998 memoir *Under the Tuscan Sun*. The third floor of the rather large residence held an art exhibit, which was arranged by local artist Colin Jarrette. Admission was charged over the week the house was open, and hundreds of people visited the house. In the end the Friends cleared \$15,000. Not only that, but one of the featured designers was so taken with the house that her family bought it.

In September 1998 the Board had begun to speak with architects about expansion of the building, their attention focusing mainly on adding a second story above the existing stacks area. Several firms presented proposals for a feasibility study, and Langton Associates was chosen. In December 1998, Seth Langton presented three proposed designs to the Board.

Working off of these plans, they began talks to put a bond issue measure on the ballot in April 1999. But talks of this happening just fall silent as 1999 rolls around.

In June 2000, the MLC libraries signed a reciprocal lending agreement with St. Louis Public Library and St. Louis County Library, improving their service to patrons and further highlighting Webster Groves Public Library's isolation. While St. Louis Public Library signed a side agreement with Webster Groves, no other libraries seemed inclined to do so.

In April 2003 Friends Board members Jane Romines and Cindy Easterling completed a pet project they had worked on for a long time. The City of Webster Groves, while pursuing a thorough renovation of City Hall, discarded many boxes of old records. Among these were the historical building permits and residential tax records, which Romines and Easterling retrieved. Working with the Friends of the Library, they had these records transferred to microfilm. The Friends then purchased a microfilm reader/printer for the library, and these records have been available to browse at the Library ever since.

In April 2003, the house at 5 Mason Avenue again went on sale. This is the same residence which the Board had looked at in 1970, but had decided not to pursue, based on advice from then Mayor John Cooper and City Attorney Al Michenfelder. The Board again discussed purchasing it, but it was believed that the sellers were dead set against selling the house to the Library. It was agreed that Board President Edward Smith would visit them and inquire about that. In May 2003 Smith announced at the beginning of the Board meeting that the library had

purchased the house. The purchase used up all of the library's reserve capital at the time, and in June 2003 the Board applied to Cass Commercial Bank for a line of credit loan to cover what they called 'a temporary shortfall' in revenues.

The next several months were spent brainstorming about possible uses of the house, and in working to get it to pass municipal inspections. It was quickly noted that any public use of the house, such as children's programming, book discussion groups, or author events would require bringing the building up to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a very expensive proposition. The most workable ideas were to use the house for Board meetings, Friends group meetings and other such special events. The Friends suggested storing the books for their annual book fair there, but City inspectors said they could only be stored in the garage—the house itself was not strong enough to support the great weight of books. Architect Seth Langton was again brought in. His thoughts were that while the aforementioned uses were workable as a temporary measure, in the long run the only reasonable thing to do would be to knock the house down to build a library addition. Despite this opinion, nobody on the Library Board had envisioned a scenario in which the house would be razed.

In January 2004 the Library's Business Manager Elise Fortman visited the Board meeting to speak about a few pressing issues. One was the fact that the library's old INLEX automation system was nearing its end of life. Its parent company, Sirsi, had announced that support of the old system would end within the year. Selecting, installing and training staff to use a new system

was, at best, a four- to five-month process, so quick action was required. It was also expensive, with prices in the \$50,000 to \$100,000 range not uncommon.

Fortman also informed the Board that the current line of credit with Cass Commercial Bank would have to be extended, and likely increased, through the following fiscal year. The 'temporary shortfall' was becoming more or less a permanent thing.

Members of the Board's Advance Planning Committee, headed by trustee Jon Furst, researched the products available to replace its automation system. They also researched a different alternative—joining the Municipal Library Consortium. With time, most of the reasons for not joining the MLC had diminished. For one, since the library was looking at replacing its automation system, joining the MLC was likely the most cost effective choice. Further, the MLC had been functioning for nearly eight years without making notable inroads on anyone's autonomy. All of the member libraries still developed their own collections, planned their own programming, and had their own hours of operation, circulation policies and fine structures. They were autonomously functioning community libraries that shared a huge collection of materials—really the best of both worlds.

In April 2004 the Advanced Planning Committee recommended to the Board that Webster Groves Public Library become a member of the MLC. The vote was unanimous in favor of the move. In June 2004, Sissy Grashoff resigned. For the next year Elise Fortman and Children's Librarian Michelle

Haffer served as acting co-directors. Together they, with the help of several key staff members, shepherded the library through one of the most complicated transitions in its history—joining the Municipal Library Consortium. Public reaction to the change was overwhelmingly positive.

## Part V

### Renovation & Expansion

In August 2005 Tom Cooper was hired as Library Director. Cooper had long experience in area public libraries, having held various positions at St. Louis County Library, St. Louis Public Library, and most recently as Adult Services Librarian at the Richmond Heights Memorial Library. He came into a situation dominated by certain pressing facts.

First, the library was in financial straits. Its tax revenues were insufficient to cover the fiscal year, and the line of credit with Cass Commercial Bank had been increased to \$500,000, whether or not it was all used within any given year. But borrowing money at commercial rates and repaying it once real estate and property tax receipts began to flow in December and January only worsened the library's financial picture.

Second, there was still no defined need or use for the house at 5 Mason Avenue. While there were many library users who believed that this was an important step for the library, many people in town disliked the idea of the library owning a residence, especially given the likelihood that it would have to be torn down to make any long term use of the space. This was only made worse by the fact that the house was within Webster Park. Though the house itself was not a 'century house,' many of the residences in Webster Park were, and the district was soon

to gain acceptance to the National Register of Historic Places. The idea of razing a home within Webster Park to build a library addition would be a hard sell at best.

The good news was that there was a great Board of Trustees in place, almost unanimously dedicated to the idea of moving the institution forward. Jon Furst, who had helped move the library toward joining the MLC while on the Advance Planning Committee, was now President, and Christine Krueger, a professional fundraiser and grant writer whose skills lay in organization and community outreach, now chaired the Advance Planning Committee. They had worked for months to lay the groundwork of a campaign for a tax levy increase, and this was presented to Cooper as soon as he came on board. It also helped that Jeanne Kirkton was the City Council liaison to the Library Board. Over the years attendance by these liaisons had been spotty, with some attending more regularly than others. Kirkton was one of the first councilmembers to make a point of rarely missing a meeting. Her help was invaluable in keeping the Mayor and Council informed of what was happening at the library, and ensuring the City's support in their plans.

In autumn of 2005 the library held a community engagement session in which a number of stakeholders were invited to offer input on the library's direction. Facilitating the meeting were political consultant Dr. Terry Jones from the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and Lee Falk, an experienced campaign consultant who came heavily recommended by Webster Groves Mayor Gerry Welch. Though not apparent to

the library's leadership at the time, the meeting did not go well. A few days later Falk requested a meeting with Cooper, Furst and Krueger, in which she stated that she would not work further with the library on its campaign. She had perceived a lack of direction, of message, and of strategic planning, and did not choose to be affiliated with what she could only predict was a losing battle.

Library leaders were angered and upset by what they thought was a defection, and talked about moving forward despite Falk's opinion. But the next day Mayor Welch phoned Cooper and stated basically that she trusted Falk's instincts. If Lee Falk thought the campaign was a no-go, it would not be wise to ignore her.

It took a few months to regroup. In the meantime Cooper studied the process for strategic planning in public libraries as laid out by the Missouri State Library. While it was a lengthy process, it seemed to be the only way forward. In summer 2006 the library convened a Strategic Planning Committee made up of library staff, library users, and board members. At the same time they ordered a telephone survey to be undertaken by Dr. Terry Jones. The survey polled a sampling of Webster Groves residents (not just library users) on their usage patterns (or lack thereof), what library services they thought important, what library services they'd like to see, and more. Analysis of the survey results formed a large part of what the Strategic Planning Committee undertook, and eventually they came up with three service goals:

- Provide better services to children
- Maintain and improve services to seniors
- Improve technology services

Some of these goals could be started on with current resources. Staffing in the Children's Room was strengthened by creating two new full-time positions, including a Teen Librarian. There were more story hours and other activities for children. Children's staff members increased their visits and cooperation with local schools, preschools, and summer camps.

For years the library had made regular visits to all of the retirement centers in town. A new full-time position of Outreach Coordinator was created to ensure the continuity of this service. The library also started homebound outreach, taking library materials to people in Webster Groves who, due to age, illness, or injury, could not come to the library. It helped that for a long time, the Friends of the Library had given thousands of dollars each year to purchase large print books—which are hugely popular with seniors—and Webster Groves Public Library had an excellent collection of them.

The Library got a grant from the State Library to purchase all new public access computers. Since the grant only paid half of the cost, the Friends absorbed the other half. When the building was wired to provide Wi-Fi access, the library was well on its way to an overall improvement in technology service.

But there were still major improvements that could only come by having a larger building. No matter how good children's programming was, it had to take place in a small

room which was easily overwhelmed by ten or twelve families. The library started book discussion groups which had to meet in the director's office, since there was no meeting room. Every week brought telephone calls from local clubs and organizations, asking if the library had a room they could book. Though almost all public libraries in the area had such a room, people were always surprised and disappointed to hear that Webster Groves Public Library did not.

The next step was to have a space study done. This was undertaken by Hoener Associates, the same architecture firm that had designed the library building, though there were no longer any Hoeners working there. Dennis Walker, the architect assigned to the project, presented a design that provided a larger Children's Room, returned the Meeting Room space to its originally intended use, and made a number of other improvements. But his plan also specified demolishing the house at 5 Mason Avenue to build a parking lot. In fairness to Walker, he had been charged with presenting a plan that made the best possible use of the house. At one point, looking at how the lot for the house was situated against the library's lot, he said to Cooper, 'There's not much I can make of that space, unless you need a bowling alley.' Tearing the house down to build a parking lot *was* probably the best possible solution, so it's not Walker's fault that the plan was met with stricken horror by most people who saw it.

Back to the drawing board. The library next conducted public engagement meetings in which community members were asked what they most wanted in a larger library. These

meetings were productive, even though they were attended by some people who opposed *any* change in the library. Though few in number, they were vociferous, and dominated the proceedings. While they expressed themselves in general terms—there was no need for a larger library, there was no need to provide services like children's craft times—it was clear that their main concern was with the future of the house next door. One thing was clear: the house was not good for much as far as plans went, and it was a political liability of immense proportion.

These public engagement meetings were conducted by the architecture firm of Bond Wolfe. Using the input gathered, they presented a different plan, one which also provided most of the space of the previous plan, but did not include use of the Mason house. The library decided to move forward with a campaign to raise the revenue needed for this plan, and to sell the house. A citizen's committee for the passage of Proposition L was assembled, co-chaired by Lucyann Boston and Barbara Russell. Lee Falk, whose reservations about the library's planning and preparation had been laid to rest, was hired as campaign consultant: her fees, and all of the campaign costs that weren't paid by individual donations, were paid by the Friends of the Library.

An election was scheduled for February 2009. This was a special election, and there was nothing else on the ballot, a fact that some critics found suspicious. But in scanning the election calendar for the rest of the year, there were no votes of any importance coming up in April, July, August or November, so waiting for any of these later dates was not likely to yield higher

voter turnouts. The library needed to move forward, so they picked the first possible date. The tax levy increase to build a new building and enhance operating revenues passed with 63% of the vote.

The day before the election, library director Tom Cooper received a phone call from Elliott Davis, a reporter for the local Fox affiliate television station who was known for his 'You Paid for It' investigations. In these reports, Davis interviewed government officials and public administrators responsible for the expenditure or investment of tax dollars, focusing on real or perceived misuse of those dollars. Someone had asked Davis to look into the library's purchase of the house on Mason Avenue. This was not the first time the question had come up. Davis had visited the previous year and interviewed board president Jon Furst about the house; but the segment never aired. Despite calling the day before the election, Davis did not get around to asking for an interview with Cooper until several weeks later. The story Davis wanted to tell was that the library had purchased the house without any plan for its use, though Cooper tried to highlight the good intentions and the sound reasoning of the board members who had purchased it. Davis generally glossed over the fact that Cooper did not come to work for the library until two years after the purchase. 'You Paid for It' stories always end with Davis presenting the telephone number of the person he has selected as most responsible for the waste he is highlighting, and in this instance he asked listeners to call Cooper at the library. Cooper showed up the next morning not knowing what sort of reaction the story

would get; he was surprised to receive not a single call, but several supportive e-mails.

Soon after the vote, a Building Committee made up of citizens, board members and staff members was convened to oversee the selection of an architect. The Building Committee assembled and issued a request for qualifications. The Great Recession had set in, and given the lack of work there was at the time, no fewer than twenty-seven architectural firms submitted proposals. It was clear from the proposals that the twenty-seven firms represented a wide range of styles, from the very traditional to the contemporary and everything in between. From the beginning, some of the architects on the Committee focused on the proposal from Powers Bowersox Associates (PBA). A very small firm with an office in downtown St. Louis, Powers Bowersox was known for forward thinking design: definitely not the architects you would go to if you were looking for traditional design. Five firms were selected for interviews. Most of them represented themselves well, but Powers Bowersox Associates nearly overwhelmed the Committee by producing an almost complete design concept. One Committee member described their presentation as 'poetic.' At its next meeting, the Building Committee voted to negotiate for design services with PBA.

Their eventual design for the renovated and expanded building met with some consternation and some anger from nearby neighbors, because it was a very contemporary addition to the traditional old library building. The three-floor addition to the library was largely steel and glass construction—not



traditional at all—but it did afford the most efficient and effective use of natural light in the library’s interior. The design was praised highly by the people sitting on the city’s Architectural Review Board. They asked for only minor revisions before approving it. Some neighbors attended a Library Board meeting to voice their concerns, and even asked for a second hearing before the Architectural Review Board. Trustee Bently Green, who was Chair of the Building Committee, expressed his concern at a Board meeting, saying that a certain percentage of citizen complaint would likely mean we’d have to ask for some revisions to the plans; as that percentage grew, so would our required revisions. But the people who expressed displeasure, though they were insistent, were never many. A special meeting was arranged with the public invited to preview the plans, which were presented by Powers Bowersox. Most people in attendance reacted very positively to the plans, with some of the only negative feedback coming from a citizen who was still upset by the ‘special election.’



The completed addition

After this meeting, Cooper found on his desk a letter from Webster Groves resident Glenn Detrick, offering a large donation in exchange for dedicating a portion of the new Children’s Reading Room to his daughter Chelsea. Chelsea Detrick was a former student employee of the library, much loved and warmly remembered by the staff members who had worked with her. She died from cancer in April 2009.

The plan moved ahead as originally drawn. Bids for construction were taken in early autumn 2010. The estimated cost of construction was \$4.6 million. But again, with so little work being done, the bids that came in were very competitive, averaging more than 30% below that estimate. The general contractor selected to work on the building was Frederick Construction, Inc., who began work in November 2010. During construction, the library moved to a temporary location at 3232 S. Brentwood Boulevard. This was the building which had for many years housed Seiler Instrument Company, a fabricator of fine optics. Working with Powers Bowersox and the people from the Seiler Company, a workable library was created inside this old factory and office space. All of the library’s materials were moved, and most services were available.

Work on the building seemed to proceed normally through the winter and spring of 2011. But by summer the library began receiving phone calls and other communications from subcontractors working on the job, asking why they were not being paid for their work. This was a mystery to Cooper and to library Business Manager Elise Fortman, since their payments were always up to date. Frederick Construction was

unresponsive to requests for explanations. Finally the library sent a letter to the general contractor stating that they would pay no more bills without lien waivers—verification that all subcontractors had been paid. A week later, Frederick Construction quietly packed up and walked off the job. Through legal channels and in the media, Frederick Construction tried to paint a picture of a process gone bad, to the point that they had no recourse but to walk off. What eventually came to light was that the company was involved in legal and financial difficulties arising from previous jobs, and these were severely affecting their ability to administer the library's job.

Travelers Insurance was the surety company for Frederick Construction. They first came onto the jobsite in mid-October 2011. After a quick assessment their agents said it would take 6 to 8 weeks to select a new general contractor and get the job started again. It in fact took most of 6 months. In the end, Travelers paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to the subcontractors on the job. They also paid \$349,000 to the library, to cover the difference between finishing the construction in April 2012 and finishing it in November 2012. Details of this settlement dragged out even after the new building was opened. By this time Tom Reedy was President of the Board of Trustees. Reedy was an insurance company executive, and his expertise was hugely helpful in the process. During this period the library continued to operate in the Seiler building, but library users' patience was wearing thin. There were a few letters to the *Webster-Kirkwood Times*; the term 'fiasco'

was used to describe the project.

Another problem that was developing for the library was reciprocal borrowing with St. Louis County Library. During the years when the Webster Groves Public Library was not a member of the MLC, when it was largely an isolated library, many citizens of Webster Groves had chosen to become members of St. Louis County Library, paying yearly membership fees. For residents on the south side of town, County's Oak Bend Branch could be reached almost as quickly as Webster Groves Public, and its collections offered a better selection. Administrators at Webster Groves had envisioned that joining the MLC—with its collection of over 700,000 items—would put an end to this 'drift.' But joining the MLC meant that Webster Groves now took part in the reciprocal arrangement that the other MLC libraries enjoyed with County Library—an arrangement that allowed each library's patrons to freely use the other, while costs were handled by the libraries behind the scenes. So while circulation at Webster Groves Public Library began to increase, use of the County Library system, and the fees that Webster Groves paid for it, did not decrease. In fact, during the many months that the library spent in its temporary quarters in the old Seiler building, usage of County Library increased to its highest numbers ever. Fees paid to County Library grew to more than \$25,000 a year.

During construction of the new building, the Library sold the house at 5 Mason Avenue. The Board had expressed a desire to wait until the real estate market improved sufficiently that they could sell the house most advantageously, but the

market remained stubbornly in the doldrums. When the house finally sold in summer 2011, the library did not recoup what it had spent to purchase it. Again, Elliott Davis came calling. He asked for a second interview with Cooper, which aired to little attention a few days later.

Travelers Insurance eventually selected a new general contractor, Demien Construction, who had presented the second lowest bid originally. Demien also met with some delays, but these were due to actual problems with the construction rather than internal problems. For instance, it was discovered that the entire ceiling of the old building was coated with an asbestos-containing material, and that part of the project needed to be shut down while it was removed.

In preparation for the opening of the new building, the Friends of the Library started a project to weed out and discard worn copies of classic literature, books like *Moby-Dick*, *Great Expectations*, *Jane Eyre* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and replace them with brand new copies. They also funded the purchase of computer-based early literacy stations for the Children's Room.

The building was finally ready to open in early December 2012—more than two years after construction had begun. It includes nearly double the space of the old building. The upper floor of the addition is a Children's Library, with nearly three times the space of the old Children's Room. The lower level contains the Reference Room and the public access computers. And the Meeting Room, complete with cutting edge audio/visual equipment, was heavily booked even before the library's doors were opened.

A grand opening celebration was held on Saturday, December 8. Library Director Tom Cooper spoke and cut the ribbon. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jonathan Franzen, who grew up in Webster Groves, wrote an essay describing his childhood and adolescent experiences using Webster Groves Public Library. The essay was printed and framed to hang in the library. In recognition of their essential role in the early days of Webster Groves Public Library, the officers and several members of the Monday Club were on hand to raise the first flag over the new building and lead those in attendance in the Pledge of Allegiance.



Ribbon cutting ceremony

Pictured: Friends President Debbie Ladd, City Council Member Debi Salberg, Trustee Christine Krueger, Trustee Jackie Brenne, Board President Tom Reedy, Trustee Joan Esserman, Library Director Tom Cooper, Trustee Nancy Marshall, Trustee Stacy Deleste, Trustee Bob Herdler, Trustee Bill Kuc.

## Resources

*Aside from the sources cited below, we also accessed many articles from the Webster News-Times, Webster-Kirkwood Times, St. Louis Post-Dispatch and St. Louis Globe-Democrat. Most of these articles are archived in scrapbooks at the library, if anyone is interested to see them. This history could not have been completed without the input from many people we spoke with who were there at the time and remembered important details.*

Anonymous, *The Congregational Yearbook*, 1905. New York: Bibliofile, 2010, c1905.

Baker, James F., *King Trolley and the Suburban Queens*. Kirkwood, MO: Meramec Highlands Books, 2005.

Compton, Charles, *Memories of a Librarian*. St. Louis: St. Louis Public Library, 1954.

Corrigan, Don, *Monday Club in Webster Groves Marks Century Milestone*. Webster-Kirkwood Times, April 22, 2011.

First Congregational Church of Webster Groves: History. [http://www.firstchurchwg.org/?page\\_id=13](http://www.firstchurchwg.org/?page_id=13). Accessed May 14, 2013.

Hemphill, Carol, *Webster Groves Centennial: 1896–1996: The First One Hundred Years*. Webster Groves, MO: Webster-Kirkwood Times, 1995.

An Historic Survey of the Gore-Lockwood District in Webster Groves. Jefferson City: Missouri Department of Natural Resources, date unknown.

Missouri State Library Commission, *Reports*, v. 1-10. Accessed March 22, 2013.

Monday Club of Webster Groves, *Annual Reports*: 1898–1930.

Morris, Ann and Henrietta Ambrose, *North Webster: A Photographic History of a Black Community*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.

Norville, Marguerite, Georgian Grace and Dignity. *Library Journal*, vol. 77, no. 22, December 15, 1952. Pp. 2132–2134.

Phillips, Minnie Bell and Patricia Voss, *100 Selma . . . 100 Years*. St. Louis, MO: Reedy Press, 2007.

Webster Groves Public Library Board, *Meeting Minutes*, 1928-2012.