

Mentor Public Library @ 200

A commemorative ornament is now on sale marking the bicentennial of Lake County's earliest library association originally known as the Mentor Library Company. Now a hundred of anything is noteworthy. Houses become Centennial or Heritage Homes at that juncture. Two hundred years is even harder to attain. Well, the Mentor Library Company will shortly reach this milestone and we should be proud of this achievement. County residents who have availed themselves to the services of this institution are innumerable. Let's examine our ongoing library history.



Chapter one began on February 22, 1819 a full 21 years before our current county was even formed. Six shareholders paid \$2.50 each and a collection of 79 books was in place. Books were loaned out one at a time for a period of three months. A series of fines were levied for dog-earring books or being late in returns. In time the collection grew to 194 copies.

Change occurred in 1875 with a renaming. The Mentor Library Association now had membership fees and books could be checked out for a week. 1890 proved to be a pivotal year as James R.,

Garfield, son of President James A. Garfield reorganized the association and remained at the helm thru 1927. Articles of Incorporation were sought, a donation secured for a building and construction of the first Mentor library by the renowned architect firm Van Dyke and Johnson at Mentor Avenue and Center Street. The building pictured above shows the library at its relocated spot on Center Street and Nowlen.

Garfield and Miss Francis Cleveland, first appointed librarian (1906) continued to pioneer many of the current day library practices including lending and cataloging. A state legal issue was remedied in 1926 when the Mentor Schools took over the operation of the library system. This practice remains in effect today. From 1950-1991 as Mentor merged, realigned and grew exponentially. Physical changes and additions were made. New branches appeared, and other properties were acquired. By 1998 Mentor-on-the-Lake had a new building, the main branch was upgraded and 'The Read House' was purchased in 2009.

From humble beginnings, the vision of a few shareholders paved the way to a public library system that combines the best of print, digital and social media needs to everyone. From the dust jackets of our county's past to the fabric of today's generation a library remains the one constant in the ever-changing quilt that is Lake County history. The Epilogue remains to be written!



Source: Jason Lea -Mentor Public Library, Local Lore by Max

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