

## IX History of the Petersburg Library

In the early 1830's (November 1831 according to some records) the Petersburg Public Library came into being under the auspices of the American Legion Auxiliary. The American Legion had leased an old school building (across from the Elks) from the territorial government to use as a meeting hall. When the ladies of the Auxiliary discovered many old books, they decided to solicit the donation of other books and start a library.

Mrs. Laura Johnson did much of the book-buying to supplement donated books. Mr. and Mrs. Bert Cornelius and Miss Myrtle Cornelius did much of the cataloging. Mrs. Della Sarff was called in to help order new books since she regularly received the New York Times and was familiar with its book review section.

Memberships were offered at \$1.00 a card. However, there was no record of people being turned away if they did not have the \$1.00 fee. There was a limit to the number of books to be taken out, so some people took out membership cards in the name of new babies so they could check out more books. Della Sarff recalls.

When the library began, there were schools at Point Agassiz, at Scow Bay and across the Narrows. There were people at Level Island, at nithas on Woonowidit Island, and at nithk and fox farms across the Narrows. All these folks borrowed books from the library.

In the old days the territorial government matched funds with the city to support the library and purchase books. The book orders would be made out and an invoice sent to the state. At the end of the year the territorial government would send them \$150.

In 1835 the Petersburg Library Board of Directors consisted of Carrol Clausen (president), George V. Beck, Robert Allen, Dr. Joseph Rude, Miss Myrtle Cornelius, Mrs. Ellen Hedstruck, Mrs. L. L. Raskin, and Harold F. Davies. The library had moved into the Swanson building on Main Street next to the old telephone office. The library was receiving municipal support in the form of a rental payment of \$300 a year and a librarian's salary of \$300 a year. The library board joined the American Library Association.

In 1837 board members of the Petersburg Library Association were: Ellen Hedstruck, Jessie Anderson, Laura Johnson, Magdahl Leo, Lester Wingard, Carrol Clausen, Harold Davies, and H. W. Brough. That year 64 members borrowed 2,020 books and 54 juveniles borrowed 2,178 books. In 1940 the city of Petersburg released its library support from \$600 to \$780 a year.

Lester Wingard, high school principal at the time, was president of the library board.

In 1833-34 there was a reorganization of the Petersburg Public Library. The governor's office explained that in order to receive state funds, Petersburg must have an elected library board. Previously American Legion Auxiliary members had been appointed. Many had served faithfully for ten years or more. Carrol Clausen had been handling financial matters. The board had been bonded in order to receive state funds.

In 1854, board members were Alice Longworth, Calleen Nicholson, Angie Holstad, Veng Tain, Sybil Locken, Lorraine Rude Thompson, Mary Ried, Carrol Engle, and Jane Hentze. The librarian was making \$600 a year. The town gave \$1,322 to the library budget. There were 138 members of the Petersburg Library Association in 1857.

Back when Alaska became a state in 1859, all Petersburg invoices, letters, and reports were sent directly to the governor or executive assistant to the governor. They took care of such major purchases as Book-of-the-Month Club selections for our local library.

In August 1860, our Petersburg Public Library moved into its present location on the second floor in the municipal building. The library area was part of the original plan for the building. Erna Hugen was the mayor of Petersburg then. Petersburg Library received a grant of \$1500 to help furnish the new library. They had to submit detailed plans and spend money just for furnishings. Petersburg received matching state and federal funds two years in succession.

As far as anyone can remember, Clara Hermann was Petersburg's faithful librarian from 1837-1857. Clara was mother of Mrs. Dick Miller (Verna). Della Sarff served as librarian from 1857-1863 when ill health forced her to resign.

Our present library staff consists of Librarian Christine Fryer, who has served since 1963, and her assistant, Emma Gifford. The library is open fourteen hours a week. No registration fees are charged. There are 15,000 titles. The city budget support is \$6100.00. The present library board consists of Jeanne Hammer (president), Merrily Jones, Michaels Ladden, D. J. Rountree, Beth Hagerman, Vera Wright, Frieda Merish, Ruth Sandvik, and Elizabeth Wood, acting member of the board.

—Bert Watson and Ruth Sandvik.