

Library History 1851-1912



There are few records of the library's activities for the middle years of the 19th century. It could be that the library was affected by the growth of the Sunday School movement with its attendant circulating libraries and the growth of Indiana University Libraries. The Civil War and the subsequent depressions of the reconstruction era could also have had impacts on the library. However, a report in the State Library's records confirms that Monroe County still maintained a public library in the courthouse during this era. By 1880 the collection had grown to 2,000 volumes. To accommodate the increase, a portion of the collection was moved into the Central School Building while some of it was given to the Indiana University Library. It would appear that at this point in the library's history, it ceased to serve the public at all, or in only a very limited manner.

In 1897, the Sorosis Club, a local women's organization, approached noted philanthropist Andrew Carnegie for a grant to build a public library in Bloomington. The Carnegie Corporation's contribution of \$15,000 was rejected by the City Council because municipal government was unable to raise an adequate maintenance fund, 10% of the contribution as mandated by the corporate donor.

In 1910, the Nineteenth Century Club raised funds for the maintenance of a new library to be housed once again in the courthouse. Consequently, a library with a small number of books (900 volumes) opened in the courthouse in 1912 under the supervision of librarian, Miss Helen Barbour. This collection included children's books donated by Indiana University professor Ashton Aley.

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