

Raymond A. Whitwer

Tilden Public Library

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

In April of 1999, Raymond A. Whitwer, a 1938 graduate of Tilden High School, who has been a general building contractor in California for 50 years, offered to build a new library building for Tilden, Nebraska, if the city would provide the site. His offer was accepted.

Mr. Whitwer picked the site location for the new building and The Tilden Library Foundation used funds, which they had set aside for a new microfilm reader, for the down payment on the property. By July 17th, less than 2 months after the offer, enough money had been raised through grants and the efforts of the Friends of the Library group enabling the Foundation to pay the remaining \$32,500 for the site. Mr. Whitwer provided the building, bookcases, cabinets and circulation desk while the Foundation provided the other furnishings and equipment.

The site funds were raised by the first week in August and additional land was donated. Groundbreaking for the new building was held on October 17, 1999. Mr. Whitwer helped design the building and acted as general contractor. As the project continued, Mr. Whitwer included an office for the City Clerk, which has since been relocated to another area of the City, and decided to include an upper room for storage. There is also an 800 square foot basement that contains the 7-unit gas heating plant. The grand opening of the library took place on October 21, 2001. Scrap books and documentation featuring the building process and history are available in the library. A large display cabinet with a glass top in the center of the library exhibits artifacts and historical items belonging to Raymond Whitwer and the Whitwer family legacy.

POINTS OF INTEREST

Foyer: There are 358 engraved bricks in the foyer. As a fundraiser, they were sold for \$125 apiece, many as memorials. Bricks sold after the completion of the foyer are displayed in the outside garden area.

Bronze Plaque: The large bronze plaque on the right of the front entrance acknowledges the other major donors to the project and the various boards and individuals involved with the new building. Donor amounts ranged from \$500 to \$80,000. An additional wood carved donor plaque has been added to acknowledge others who help support the library.

Children's Area: \$80,000 for the Harvey A. Oppliger Children's Area was donated by Marian Oppliger in honor of her husband, Harvey, a former Tilden resident whose picture hangs in the area. Mrs. Oppliger lived in Florida, but was able to attend the grand opening of the library. This gift includes funds for the Stained Glass Window, three computers for children's use, programming equipment including a large TV/VCR. This generous gift also allowed us to increase our children's collection and use our regular funding for adult materials.

Stained glass window: The Elkhorn Valley seventh grade art class of 2000 submitted designs for the window, and Kyle Hasebroock's spiral design was selected. Local stained glass artist Pam Ashburn took the design and created the window around it. She used cut agates to decorate the glass and included two viewers that make a kaleidoscope of the window when you view it through them.

Artwork: The artwork was selected and donated by Deborah Seaburg Crites, Interior Designer for the building. Raymond Knaub is an internationally renowned artist whose work has appeared in *Southwest Art*, *Colorado Homes and Lifestyles*, *Western Art Digest*, *Art Talk*, *Art of the West*, and *Who's Who in American Art*. His work is collected by museums, private collectors and corporations throughout the world. In 2010, three pieces artwork by Paul Maxwell were donated by Raymond A. Whitwer from his private collection. Two pieces hand behind the circulation desk and another is in the Directors office.

Furniture: The original furniture consisting of curved bookcases, mission style tables, circulation desk, magazine rack-storage and office furniture were made by Cornhusker Industries of Lincoln, NE (the state prison system). The wood is Ash with a cherry stain. The pillars were constructed and stained on site by Rick Volk and Duane Ritter. Additional shelving and furniture have been since added in the library.

Fireplace area: The Rumsford Fireplace is gas and is 14 feet across. The leather furniture was donated as memorials by various people. A plaque with their names is on the fireplace mantel.

Ceiling: The ceiling is not connected to the beams. It is called a ‘floating ceiling’. This allows heat to go up around the edges and protect the sprinkler system from freezing. You will notice the different heights created by the roof and the massive glu-lam beams, which are at least 3 feet in depth at the peak of the ceiling. There are two clear skylight windows. The position of these windows allow light from the Southern sun to warm the building in winter, and keep the Northern sun in the summer from shining through.

Lighting: Most of the lighting in the building is indirect or reflected light. The 50 hanging lights in the main part of the library were re-fitted in 2014 by Model Electric in Norfolk to accommodate LED lighting through a program sponsored by Nebraska Public Power.

Computer Lab: The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation originally donated 10 computers and software for use by patrons in the computer lab, along with a server and other equipment. In 2010 the Gates Foundation partnered with the Federal Government donating funds to further equip and upgrade libraries across the Nation as the places best suited to provide internet access to everyone. Once again, we received 10 new computers equipped with software for the computer lab, along with additional equipment. Due to the discontinuation of Windows 7, we have since replaced and upgraded all of our computer and technical equipment, and continue to do so as technology advances.

Ritchie Ashburn Cabinet: On permanent loan to the library by local resident Arlene Hofmann is a collection of artifacts and memorabilia dedicated to Philadelphia Philly’s baseball player, Richie Ashburn. Richie, who was born and raised in Tilden, was inducted into the Nat’l Baseball Hall of Fame in 1995. The cabinet which houses the collection was funded in part by the Philadelphia Phillies organization and the Tilden Library Foundation, and was built by Cornhusker Industries of Lincoln.

Director’s Office, Work Room & Kitchen: The Library Director’s office is located behind circulation desk. Next door to the left is the staff work room. The kitchen connects the library to the auditorium with access to the upstairs attic storage area. A meeting room, located in the hallway across from the restrooms, is available for use by the public.

Lied Auditorium: When the library was built the Lied Foundation out of Las Vegas donated \$36,000 toward furnishing the 2,000 square foot auditorium. Inside is a storage closet which houses 12 round tables 12 rectangular tables and 200 chairs. Sound/tack board panels cover the walls and contribute to the wonderful acoustics in the room. Display items and décor can be tacked to these. A projection screen pulls down from the ceiling at the front of the room. The auditorium is available for community use and can be rented for private functions and events, as well as library usage.

Grand Piano: The Yamaha grand piano is located in the Lied Auditorium and was donated by Louise Prevo as a memorial. It is a Grand piano and was purchased new. Her cost was \$24,000. The piano sets atop a specially designed dolly so it can be moved and relocated. It is kept locked and covered when not in use.

Restrooms: While many places would not boast about their restroom facilities, Raymond wanted the library’s restrooms to include a special feature so he had them tiled with imported Italian Crystal.

Bas-Relief: The Bas Relief on the outside South wall of the building was carved by Sten Eisentrager of Lincoln. The work was done in a studio at the Endicott Brick Factory in Southeast Nebraska. The unfired bricks were used (with spacers to represent mortar) to construct the curved wall at the studio. The carving was completed and each brick was taken down, placed on a pallet and fired. The relief was then reconstructed at the studio to make sure everything was all right. Each brick was marked for row and column and packed for shipment to the site. Rick Volk and Raymond laid the bricks onto the building at this location. The work was commissioned by the Whitwer children in honor of their parents, Marjorie and Raymond Whitwer. The scenes on the relief represent Raymond’s, and Nebraska’s heritage.

Landscaping and Garden: Virginia “Ginny” Werkmeister of Tilden completed the landscaping for the building, and designed the terrace garden. Newer engraved bricks have been embedded into the patio and benches allow for a quiet seating area. Ginny passed away in 2015 but the legacy of her green-thumb is still with us.

Many other items of interest have been added and are on display in the library including: our scenic model train set (ask any staff member and we will be happy to run this for you); Several Indonesian artifacts which sit atop the Whitwer cabinet, along with an ancient Valley Phase “Long Pot” discovered buried on a local farm; Our display cabinet of featured collectables; A 1930’s slot machine confiscated from the Tilden Legion Hall in 1974; The Harold A. Ritter Genealogy & Research Area which includes digitized archived Tilden & Meadow Grove newspapers dating as far back as 1898; Twenty plus Historical scrapbooks donated throughout the years; A variety of pieces portraying the History of Tilden, and the collections continue to grow.