

## Verdigre Public Library—A Bit of History

All are invited to help celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Verdigre Public Library during an Open House on Sunday, June 12, 2022 from 3:00-5:00 p.m. Following the Kolach Days parade, stop in for refreshments, air conditioning and reminiscing.

Through the initial efforts of the Federated Women's Club (also known as Verdigre Women's Club), in cooperation with the Town Board, the library opened its doors on June 2, 1952, in the old Bartak Harness Shop, a wooden building on Main Street located where Pinnacle Bank's south half now sits. Starting with 260 books the number rose to 850 by July, then to 1500 in August of 1954.

At first the Library Board had representatives from different clubs, including Mrs. George Thrapp and Mrs. V. Walstrom, the Women's Club; Mrs. L.J. Kocina, Verdigre PTA; Mrs. Paul Stoural, Catholic Ladies Guild; Mrs. O.P. Schreier, American Legion Auxiliary; Mrs. William Fosterman, Methodist Ladies Aid; Mrs. Ervin Sonder, Lutheran Ladies Aid; and Mrs. Lyle Mlady, Chit Chat Club. Some of the staffing was done by volunteers from these various clubs.

Eighty-nine registered readers were noted in March 1953. Marie Chocholousek wrote that she was an early librarian with a salary of \$.50/hour (1953-1957, 1963-?). Successive librarians were Helen Farnik (1957-1960), Margaret Mastalir (1960-1963) and Evelyn Fosterman (in the 1960s-70s).

In 1964 the library was moved to the council room, "the remodeled east wing" of the current firehouse on 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue.

In 1975, the library moved to the former post office building at the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and Main Street (now the Village Office). The purchase price of the building was \$9,200.00. (\$6,500 came from a bequest of Mae Schreier, \$2,000 from her sister Blanche Merritt and \$700 from the Village.) The Library Board in 1975 consisted of Dr. Jerome Rakov, Mable Bruce, Margaret Mastalir, Shirley Thompson and Lydia Vonasek with Elaine Smith as librarian (1970s) who was succeeded by Evelyn Marshall (formerly Fosterman, 1981-1990). Library assistants in those days included Lillie Miller and Helen Sonder.

A note from 1982 says the library had 9616 books, 232 registered readers and that telephone expenses and half the heating bills would be paid by the Village in exchange for allowing the town policeman to have his office in the upstairs of the library.

After several years of fundraising the current ADA-accessible library building was built by local contractors in 1995 with a grand opening held on February 24, 1996. The building was entirely funded through private donations, a Peter Kiewit grant and the Friends of the Library. At that time the librarians were Deb Kucera and Linda Bauer and the Board of Trustees were Ruth Frank, Lona Schreier, Margaret Mastalir, Fran Kucera and Mildred Krupicka. Pat McCarron and John Pavlik served as advisors for the building project and grant application.

On August 3, 2004, the Verdigre Library Foundation incorporated as a 501c3 non-profit. In 2007, the fundraising-body, Friends of the Library, dissolved and donated their treasury to the

Foundation. Informally, Friends of the Library resurrected in 2019 strictly as a supporting cast of library fans and potential volunteers.

Library directors the last three decades have been Deb Kucera (1990-1998), Linda Bauer (1998-2000), Lisa Ziegenbein (2000-2006), Mary Pavlik (2006-2010), Deb Hamilton (2010-2012), Jill Stark (2012-2015) and Katie Hollmann (2015-present). Assistant librarians have included Kathy Farnik, Marcella Forejt, Dylan Hamilton, Pat Holland, Barbara Salvatore and Rachel Pavelka. Many teens have worked as summer interns.

Through the years a phenomenal number of volunteers have served on both the Library Board of Trustees and Library Foundation Board. Plus, it would fill a whole issue of the *Eagle* to share how the library has served Verdigre through these seventy years—highlights might be programming for children and adults, technology services and, at the top of the list, meeting the needs of avid readers--all FREE for the public.

Verdigre had library services before 1952 in that the Verdigre Township Library existed from 1937 to 1942. This library was housed in the schoolhouse on the first floor and news of it was sometimes included with school news in *The Verdigre Eagle*. The library board in February 1937 consisted of five men: J.J. Van Hoff, Wencel Jankiewicz, Dr. L.F. Lovely, O.P. Schreier and George Steinhofel. Ione Sandoz was listed as chairman (possibly meaning librarian?). 4-H clubs helped procure book donations which could also be dropped off at Roubicek's Meat Market (the current N & B Gas building). In September 1937, Iola Somer was the librarian.

Under the umbrella of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), Verdigre's library was supported by the NYA (National Youth Administration). In May 1940, Miss Viola Tusha was appointed librarian. The Township Board filed an application for the library to become a WPA project and that approval was given in May 1941. While a WPA project with Mrs. V.J. Vakoc as librarian, the 2,000 volumes in the library were cleaned, repaired and catalogued in the Dewey Decimal System. Excluding librarian salary, costs were shared 29.8 cent locally to 70.2 cent federally.

Two final library notes were in the January 22, 1942 issue of *The Verdigre Eagle*. First, the library served as a collection point for the Victory Book Campaign, a drive that collected 10,000,000 books for U.S. military during World War II. Secondly, "the township library was delivered over to school district No. 83 by a vote of the electors" at the annual meeting of the Verdigre Township. In the words of Ron Dobry, "In 1942 all WPA projects were terminated and the Verdigre Township Library vanished from sight. Presumably its books were absorbed into the Verdigre Public School Library." (2-5-87, *Eagle*)

Andrew Carnegie called libraries "Palaces for the People" and to this day Verdigre's library serves as social infrastructure, a building and a welcome where all people—all ages, all ethnicities, all groups--can gather for free, open access to our shared culture and heritage.

Submitted by Katie Hollmann -- June 3, 2022