

# Library in Antigo date back to community's earliest days

By **JOE HERMOLIN**  
President, Langlade  
County Historical  
Society

A visit to the Antigo Public Library today will find patrons engaged in a variety of activities; some will be at computers, children may be engaged in story time, some will be looking for a DVD or CD, some may be working on a jigsaw puzzle, a group may be holding a meeting, researchers will be looking at archives of Antigo newspapers on microfilm, at certain time of year some may be looking for tax forms, and some may even be checking out a book. In addition, library services extend beyond the city of Antigo to smaller communities in Langlade County and, through an interlibrary loan system, throughout northern Wisconsin. We often take these services for granted but it was not always so.

In the late 19th century Louis Mendlick established Antigo's first library that was open to the public. He operated a stationery store located in the 400 block of Superior Street and set aside space for a small rental library.

About that time a movement grew in Antigo, as in other parts of the USA, to establish a free lending library. In 1894 a group of women, the Women's Cristian Temperance Union (WCTU), attempted to establish a free lending library. The thought was that if people had access to books, they would be less likely to spend their time in bars. The Antigo WCTU statement of purpose read "in the intelligence of the people lies the safety of the nation, and that the free circulation of good books in

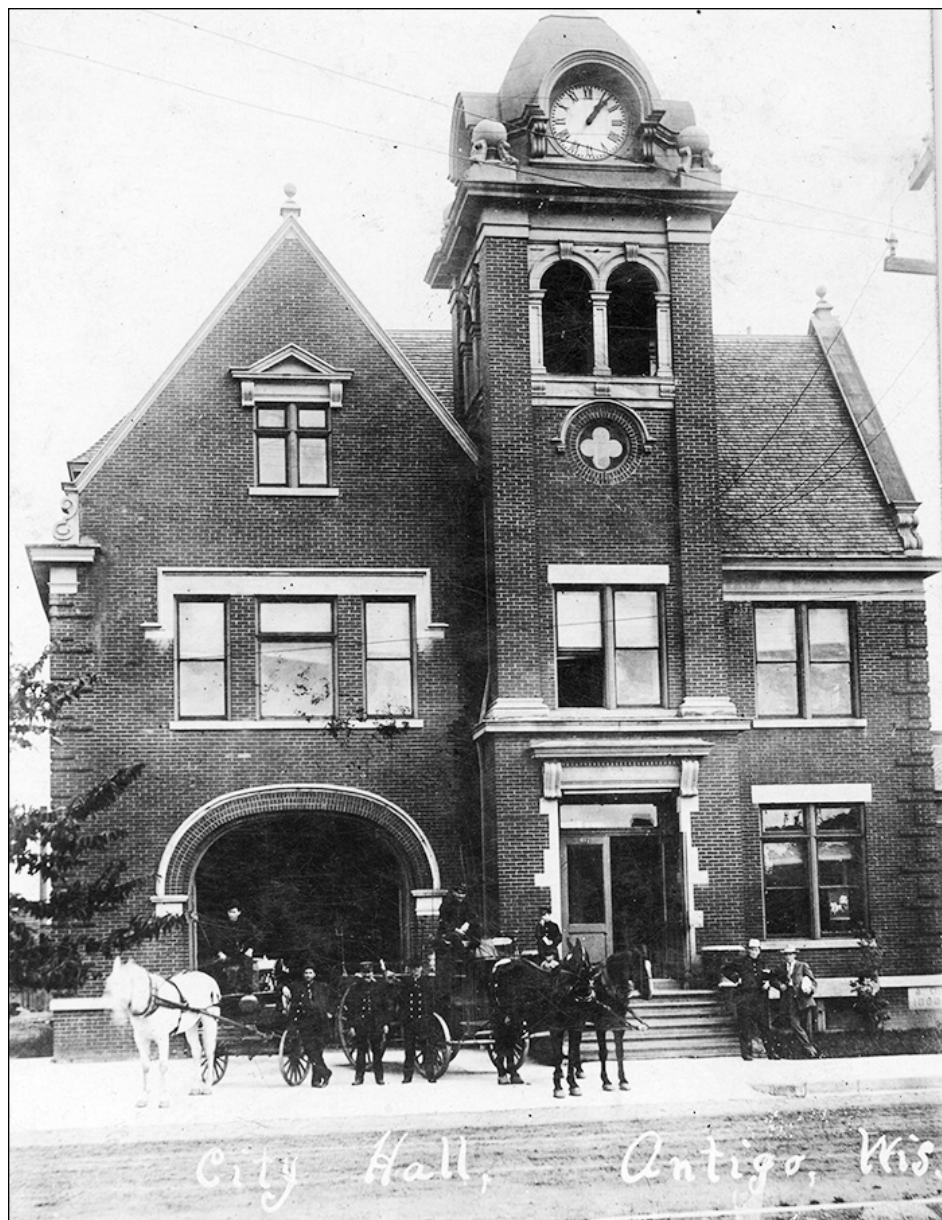
the community would be a counter-attraction to the saloon and its influences."

The initial attempt to establish a free library failed to raise sufficient funds but the WCTU was undeterred, trying again in 1895. Once again, the attempt was unsuccessful. A year later another group in Antigo formed a committee to look into the possibility of establishing a free library and reading room. They set themselves a goal of raising \$900 but only managed \$500. While the committee considered dropping the idea of a free library, the WCTU was encouraged to pick up the torch once more and in December of 1896 formally established a library committee. Initially it was only able to raise an additional \$75, the largest single contribution being \$25. But they continued their efforts through appeals for money as well as donations of books and magazines.

By April 17, 1897 they were able to open Antigo's first free lending library. It was located in the F. A. Millard building at 711 Fifth Ave. Six months later, at a meeting of the WCTU library board, they proudly announced that their book stock had grown from an initial 172 donated volumes to 360. The first book they owned was a donated copy of Ben Hur by Lew Wallace. (Over 100 years later that novel is still available through an interlibrary loan and a film version on DVD is in the Antigo Public Library. The WCTU likely could not have envisioned that.) The WCTU had issued 360 borrowers cards to patrons.

Millard offered the library space in his store free of charge but the popularity of the library soon exceeded the space available and the WCTU had to look elsewhere. John Ogden, publisher of the Antigo Republican newspaper offered a larger space in his office building also in the 700 block of Fifth Avenue and, also rent free. Volunteers staffed the library which was open two days a week, Tuesday and Saturday.

The collection grew to 450 volumes, some donated and some purchased using cash donations or collected overdue fines. However the library soon incurred the displeasure of Ogden who stated that the library adds to the staff time of the newspaper. In a written statement he said "Our good, worthy Christian streak adds one hour



FIRST LIBRARY—City Hall housed Antigo's first tax payer supported free library after several years of a free library run by volunteers and located in various businesses. Charles Dallman who constructed City Hall would also later build Antigo's Carnegie Library.

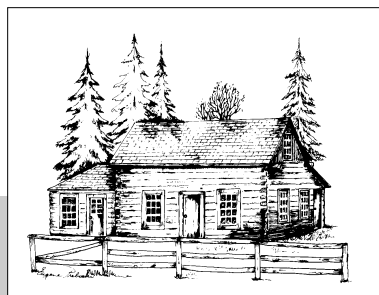
two nights a week to our regular work ...besides the usual annoyance of a raft of children two afternoons and evenings a week, who are not only satisfied to come in and exchange books, but must also handle all the loose goods they can get their hands on, necessitating a clerk's time in watching them." He continued "But bless the ladies and the library just the same."

After one year in John Ogden's newspaper office the library was again looking for a new home. The City Council granted the WCTU permission to use rooms that the Council had been using above Pardee's Grocery store on Fifth Avenue close to the Ogden building. The city agreed to pay for utilities, provide janitorial service, and promised to consider creating

a space in the new city hall being planned at the time. Volunteers worked at the library in the City Council space over Pardee's for the next two- and one-half years. By then it had a circulation of 100 books a day on the two days a week it was open.

During that time some tensions arose between the library committee of the WCTU and the City Council. The WCTU, along with the support of some prominent Antigo citizens, petitioned the city for financial aid to run the library but many Council members were reluctant to consider the proposal. The WCTU felt their petition was rudely dismissed and many agreed that the it should be given more serious consideration.

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Our History

Continued

## Our History

Encouraged by popular support the WCTU persisted and in September, 1900 went before the City Council again with a new petition, supported by City Attorney Max Hoffman and others. It requested that space for a library be set aside in the new city hall and that the city should take over the library, appropriating \$500 for library maintenance. The WCTU would donate its collection of 750 volumes to the new city library. The City Council appointed a committee to look into the matter and at the next City Council meeting, one month later, approved the proposal. Antigo finally got a free, taxpayer-funded, city administered library.

The concept of a free library, open to all, had advanced from being a volunteer organization run by the WCTU, struggling to find rent free space in local businesses into a more permanent space in a public building supported by taxpayers. But this was just the end of the first phase of the history of Antigo's Public Library and the start of the next steps to getting a library building of its own, staffed by professionals.

*(Note: The material in this story relating to the role of the WCTU was researched by Lorraine Oviatt and written up by Mrs. James Prosser, Dr. J.E. Boll, Shirley Barta, and Lorraine Oviatt for publication in Antigo/Langlade County Historical Monographs. This and other essays were prepared for Antigo's centennial in 1979. The eight volume set is available in the museum.)*

Continued

## Guelzow

not be substantially related to working as a teller at a bank, it may be substantially related to driving a school bus. In addition, WFEA prohibits an employer from taking into account an applicant's expunged convictions or prior arrests that did not result in conviction, even if they are substantially related to the open position.

Employers should also be weary of using sites such as Google and Facebook to search for background information. These sites may open the door to a discrimination lawsuit, especially if the background search is conducted by the same person who will decide who gets the job. For example, an employer may find out through Sam Banks' Facebook page that he is Hispanic.

The employer decides not to hire Sam Banks and he sues, alleging that he was discriminated against because he is Hispanic. Although his national origin was not the reason for the employer's decision, it could be difficult to prove that the employer did not take that information into account when making the hiring decision. One way to avoid this situation is to have

someone else other than the decision maker conduct the background checks so as to not expose the decision maker to potentially prejudicial information.

This is only a brief overview of background checking for employers and employees. Because the law is complex, there may be exceptions to the general statements given above.

## Upham card games continue

The winners of the Upham cribbage for the month of June and July include:

June 10 — Tony Bierdemann, first; Linda Metzfeld, second; boobie was split with Carol Brown and Judy Beecher.

June 17 — Dave Brandt, first and won the 24 hand pot; Tony Bierdemann, second; Kathy Horton, boobie.

June 24 — Tony Bierdemann, first; Karen Schuelke, second; Kathy Horton, boobie.

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July 1 — Kathy Horton, first; Dave Brandt, second; Charlotte Hatfield, boobie.

July 8 — Bob Herman, first;

Charlotte Hatfield, second; Carol Brown, boobie.

July 15 — Carol Brown, first; Tony Bierdemann, second; Linda Metzfeld, boobie.

July 29 — Judy Beecher, first; Tony Bierdemann, second; Charlotte Hatfield, boobie.

Aug. 5 — Tony Bierdemann, first; Karen Schuelke, second; Carol Brown, boobie and 24 hand.

Aug. 12 — Carol Brown, first; Kathy Simpson, second; Charlotte Hatfield, boobie.

Aug. 19 — Judy Beecher, first; Charlotte Hatfield, second; Kathy Simpson, boobie.

Aug. 26 — Tony Bierdemann, first; Charlotte Hatfield, second; La Vonna Bartlett, boobie.

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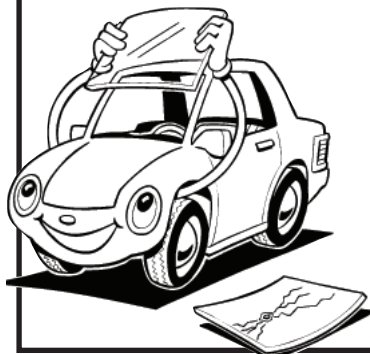
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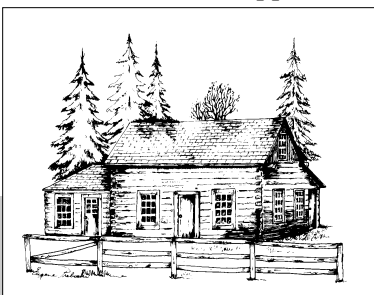
# Antigo Public Library gets a home of its own

By **JOE HERMOLIN**  
President, Langlade  
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Antigo's free public library was started and operated by the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), which declared in its mission statement that "in the intelligence of the people lies the safety of the nation, and that the free circulation of good books in the community would be a counter-attraction to the saloon and its influences." From 1896 to 1900 they volunteered to staff a library, arranged for rent-free space in various storefronts and raised money for books. They lobbied, successfully, to have the city take over and manage the library, which was housed in the new city hall.

With the city now in charge, Mayor I.D. Steffen appointed the first library board of nine men and women in October 1900. F.J. Finucane was named president. It did not take long before some controversy arose. Some board members and townspeople felt that former WCTU volunteers should be hired to manage the library. Finucane felt that a professionally trained staff was needed. He consulted with Frank A. Hutchins, secretary of the Wisconsin Free Library Commission who agreed, saying "without a good librarian you may have a good selection of books but it will not be a library". Finucane won his argument and June Ogilvie, a librarian from Madison, was hired along with May Mathis, a Milwaukee teacher who was to be trained as a librarian.

Several organizations and individuals contributed money for librarian salaries, supplies, and



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**Our History**



Construction of the Carnegie Library began in 1903 but was not completed until 1905, a year behind schedule.

building materials for shelves. The library took ownership of 633 volumes from the school library, excluding reference books. On Dec. 17, 1900 the city hall library opened to the public. A report filed six months later stated that there were 2,100 borrowers, 40 percent of Antigo's population. Book purchase selection was done by the board from a list of suggestions by the librarian. Volumes purchased included some in Bohemian, Polish, and German, reflecting the ethnic diversity of Langlade County's population.

Almost immediately there was talk that the Antigo Public Library needed a building of its own. Andrew Carnegie was funding library buildings around the country and F. A. Finucane, board president, thought Antigo might be eligible for funds. He again wrote Frank A. Hutchins, secretary of the Wisconsin Free Library Commission, who encouraged him to apply for funds, advising that Carnegie's secretary reads 650 letters a day regarding libraries and that "If you want your letter read keep it short. I doubt that you will

get more than \$12,500 but ask for \$15,000." In March, 1903 Antigo received word that they had been granted \$12,500 to build a library provided that the city procure a site and allocate a minimum of \$1,250 a year to run the library.

The library board and City Council carefully considered a site for the building, which they felt should be on a spacious lot to allow good lighting, centrally located, and close to schools. They chose the site in the 400 block of Superior Street. Then, after consulting with members of the Wisconsin Free Library Commission for advice on architecture and then approached Alan D. Conover.

Conover, a Madison native, was the first professor of civil engineering at the University of Wisconsin. In 1890 he left the university to establish an architectural firm, specializing in public buildings. (Science Hall and the Armory or Red Gym on the UW-Madison campus are two of his surviving buildings). Conover submitted his plans and specification to the board on May 28, 1903. The cost

estimate was greater than the \$12,599 of the Carnegie grant so Finucane wrote to the Carnegie Foundation requesting more money. The allocation was raised to \$15,000 and in the summer of 1903 construction began.

The Antigo construction company of Dallman and Peterson was awarded to contract to build the library. Charles Dallman was a pioneer settler in Antigo, moving from his home town of Winchester, with his family, in around 1882. At the time of his death in 1921 he was responsible for constructing more buildings in Antigo than anyone else, including City Hall, which was then housing the library.

Dallman's bid for construction was for \$12,934 leaving very little for cost overruns and extra fees out of the \$15,000 that Finucane had obtained. Nonetheless the building was completed in November 1905, a year later than estimated and formally opened on Nov. 7. The Antigo Journal, on Nov. 8, reported "The new Public Library ... was thrown open to the

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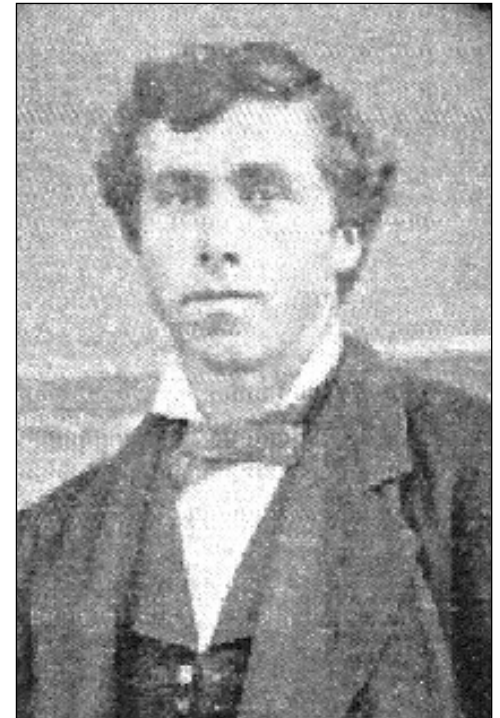
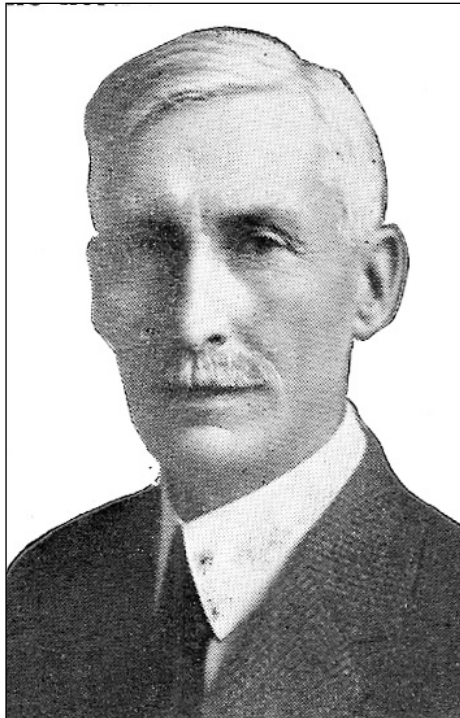
## Our History

public...and fully fifteen hundred people took the opportunity to look it over. It is an institution of which this city has reason to feel proud." The board had been criticized for the slow pace of construction but the Antigo Journal stated after touring the building "... it can be said that if the board did act somewhat slowly at times, they acted wisely at all times." The article continues "May the institution prove a blessing to this and future generations." The Carnegie Library had 3,156 volumes and 3,754 registered borrowers.

Civic groups had achieved their goal of establishing a public library in Antigo, open freely to all, supported by tax dollars, and in its own building. But they did not rest on those achievements and sought to broaden the reach of the library. In 1908 the county began contributing funds.

The library was a pioneer in Wisconsin in expanding services to county residents outside the city. Initially, prior to the county's involvement, the Antigo Women's Club had worked informally to bring books to rural schools. The number of "Travelling Libraries" grew and by 1935 there were four library stations in county communities, six in city schools, 49 in rural schools, and one in the Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Elcho.

In 1960 six counties (Florence, Forest, Langlade, Lincoln, Oneida, and Vilas) entered into a demonstration project and established a bookmobile service, headquartered in Antigo and serving those counties. In 1962 a wider, 10 county, Wisconsin Valley Library Reference system was established as a pioneer demonstration proj-



From left, F.J. Finucane was president of Antigo's first appointed library board. He argued for hiring professional librarians rather than relying on volunteers and approached the Carnegie Foundation for funds to build a library. Alan Conover was a Madison architect hired to design Antigo's library. Charles Dallman was an Antigo pioneer and prominent builder. He built the Carnegie Library and also the City Hall, which housed Antigo's initial city funded library.

ect. Initially it was locally funded but in 1971 the state took over and extended the service to beyond reference materials to all inter-library loans.

What started as a small free library located in parts of local businesses and, organized by the WCTU in an attempt to keep men out of saloons, had grown into a city and county supported library in a building of its own, arguably one of Antigo's most outstanding architectural landmarks. It also grew into an organization with state-wide reach in the services it provides.

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