



The Delafield Public Library at 500 Genesee Street in downtown Delafield, 2010. JEFF LENDRUM PHOTOGRAPHY

Delafield Public Library History

Serving The Community Since 1907

by Jennifer Rude Klett of the Delafield Public Library (updated 2016)

In 1904, the Delafield Public Library unofficially began as a shelf of books in the Delafield Post Office at the northeastern corner of Milwaukee and Genesee Streets. It was completely funded by private fundraisers and donations, run by unpaid volunteers, and operated without any government monies.

In 1906, the town of Delafield (the city of Delafield was yet to incorporate) adopted a resolution to establish a “free library.” Then in 1907, the Delafield Public Library became official when an unpaid librarian was established along with a library board. Over the decades, the Delafield Public Library has moved around downtown Delafield, never more than a few blocks. It has since grown in every way, evolving to meet the needs of the greater Delafield community.



The original library building at the northeastern corner of Milwaukee & Genesee Streets in Delafield, date unknown. LAKE COUNTRY REPORTER

Once merely a shelf with books, the Delafield Public Library has now grown to nearly 80,000 items located in 11,000 square feet at 500 Genesee Street. The library has expanded its offerings beyond books to DVDs, music CDs, audio books, newspapers, magazines, and digital books. It also sponsors popular programs for children, teens, and adults.

In the 1990s, the library upgraded to a computerized "card" catalog, and provided public internet computers. Then, an online catalog with reference databases became available for patron use through its website.

While volunteers remain an important asset to the library, the staff itself is comprised of paid professionals. The library is now funded by tax dollars from the city of Delafield, the Bridges Library System, private donations, the Farber Trust Fund, and the Friends of the Delafield Public Library.



This building housed the Delafield town hall and library from 1923 to 1960 at 715 Genesee Street. DELAFIELD PUBLIC LIBRARY



Anne Townsend Whitney of Delafield.
FAMILY PHOTO COURTESY OF JORDAN WHITNEY WEI

Library History Highlights:

1904 - Library opens at the Delafield post office at Milwaukee & Genesee Streets. Postmistress Anne Townsend Whitney acts as librarian. After about one year, the library moves to a rent-free single-room cottage nearby as the area rented from the post office went to a higher-paying tenant. "Young men of the village" volunteered to move the 550 volumes.

1906 - Town of Delafield adopts resolution establishing a free public library.

1907- First (unpaid) librarian Miss Laura Lidiker is appointed. First library board is formed led by Dr. A. J.W. Nixon.

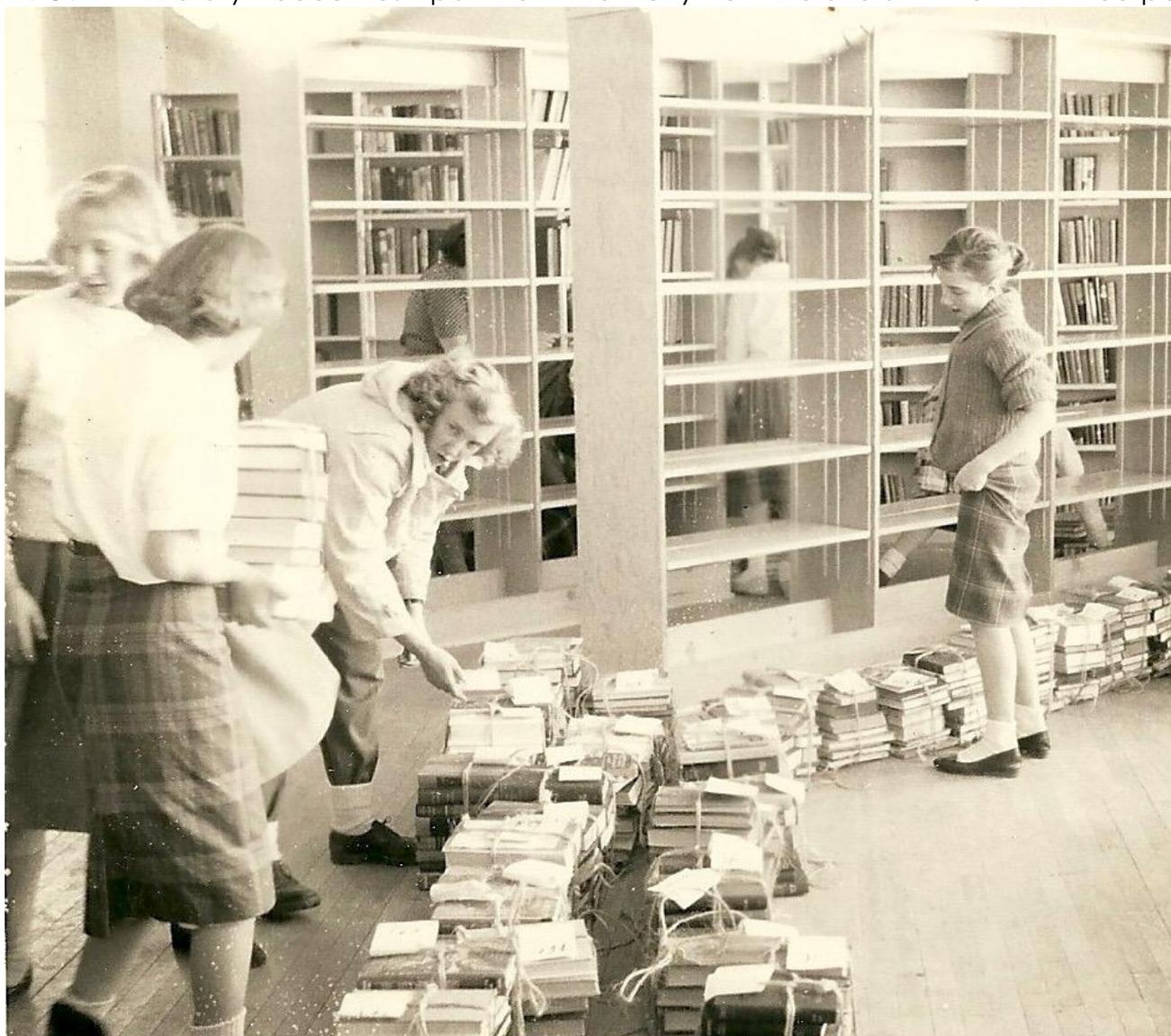
1918 - During World War I, the Delafield Library donates 38 books to help provide library services to our soldiers here and abroad. Town board allocates \$50 to library budget.

1923 - Library moves to the town hall on Genesee Street via wagon pulled by a white horse.

1925 - Town library budget increases to \$150. The library is open twice a week with nearly 3,000 volumes.

1939–1959 - During the Great Depression, the Works Progress Administration did some rebinding of books. Budget increases to \$175 with 4,130 volumes including books, magazines and periodicals. However during the next 14 years, including World War II, library use fluctuated with the library hours and the ability to get a librarian, who was now paid a salary.

1959 - Library becomes part of the City of Delafield when it incorporates.



Moving from the location at 715 Genesee Street c1960. DELAFIELD PUBLIC LIBRARY

1960 ~ Library moves to the former Cushing School site, 500 Genesee Street. With over

7,000 volumes, the library is open 18 1/2 hours per week by 1963. Thirty-one students from Mrs. Fern Wallner's sixth grade helped with the move.



OCONOMOWOC ENTERPRISE



OCONOMOWOC ENTERPRISE

1968 - Expanding library moves to former Christ the King Lutheran Church site on Wells Street (now part of Revere's Wells Street Tavern, 505 Wells Street), this time with the help of the Boy Scouts. Wisconsin Governor Warren Knowles spoke at the new library's dedication.



Wells Street library location c1968. DELAFIELD PUBLIC LIBRARY



Howard Haymaker, Gov. Knowles, librarian Hortense Langer at the library dedication on February 9, 1969. DELAFIELD PUBLIC LIBRARY



Librarian Hortense Langer at the circulation desk in the 1960s at 500 Genesee Street.
DELAFIELD PUBLIC LIBRARY

1978 - Delafield Public Library officially serves the city & town of Delafield, and villages of Chenequa & Oconomowoc Lake. Library is open 28 hours a week. First large print books are bought with a donation from the Lions Club.

1979 - Friends of the Delafield Public Library forms on May 22.



First Friends of the Delafield Public Library book sale on July 7 and 8, 1979. Librarian Hortense Langer is in the blue checked dress. DELAFIELD PUBLIC LIBRARY

1980 - County-wide library federation is created by the Waukesha County Board.

1981 - City of Delafield approves the Delafield Public Library to participate in the Waukesha County Federated Library System (WCFLS). An Apple II computer is issued for library loan systems. Immediate effects included an increase in patrons from Towns of Summit & Oconomowoc, and Villages of Nashotah & Dousman.

1982 - Delafield Public Library observes its 75th anniversary. State Senator Susan Engelieter appears to help commemorate.

1985 - Library moves back to Genesee Street after a two-story addition is built onto City Hall at 500 Genesee Street.

1986 - The library hours expand to 48 hours per week, open 11:00 to 8:00 weekdays and 10:00 to 1:00 on Saturdays during the school year. It is now open during lunch and dinner hours.



Delafield Public Library from 1985–2009 at 500 Genesee Street. DELAFIELD PUBLIC LIBRARY

2010 - Library moves into a new building that is part of a \$5.2 million building project (approved in a February 2008 building referendum which twice previously failed) for a new city hall and library built at its same location. During the 9 months of construction, the library moved to temporary quarters in the lower level of 440 Wells Street. The new library's open house attracted a huge turnout in September 2010, with usage dramatically increasing soon after opening in the new location. New programming began featuring Wii electronic game nights for middle school students.

2011 - Circulation greatly increases by 32% for the first year in the new library building. A winter reading programs begins in January & February with a Monopoly theme. A library newsletter is first published which is available through free email subscription.



Library staff at the new library building, summer 2010. Director Terry Zignego is second from the right. DELAFIELD PUBLIC LIBRARY



Interior of the new library in September, 2010. JEFF LENDRUM

2012 – A reading garden with performance stage is completed in the back of the library near the parking lot. Electronic readers become available for check out by patrons to sample digital books.

2014 – The popular program room and two study rooms in the library are frequently reserved to capacity by community members.

2015 – The library becomes a Memory Café site with the Lake Country Libraries Memory Project for those experiencing early state memory loss and their caregivers. Bridges Library System is formed when the Waukesha County Federated Library System joins with all of the Jefferson County Libraries. The Bridges Library System online catalog is shared and available to patrons. The library newsletter, now called *the News*, gets a graphic makeover with circulation of well over 1200 subscribers.



Sources: Jim Babcock, *Hawks Inn*; Margaret Zerwekh; Waukesha County Historical Society; City & Library records; *Lake Country Reporter*; *Oconomowoc Enterprise*; Waukesha Freeman; *Wisconsin Library Bulletin*, January 1906.