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## RELATES HISTORY OF WINNETKA'S LIBRARY

### Present Village Institution Found Its Forerunner in Reading and Social Club

BY WILLIAM A. HADLEY

In the early eighties there was an organization in Winnetka known as the Winnetka Reading and Social club. It was composed of a group of citizens who met for the purpose of combining the enjoyment of current literature and a social hour. Meetings were held at stated intervals at the homes of the members, where articles were read and discussed, and magazines exchanged.

The village at that time numbered about 840 inhabitants. The streets were unpaved and poorly lighted, and there were few sidewalks except stretches of board walk in front of

some of the residences. Only a few trains each way carried the people to and from the city. The school was held in the Academy building, since known as the Village hall. There were two churches, the chapel located on Sheridan road, and used intermittently by different denominations, later the home of the Episcopal church, and the Union church which was located at the corner of Maple and Cherry streets, and used by the Unitarians.

#### Hamlet in the Woods

The village was really a hamlet in the woods, for the great oak trees abounded on all the uncleared portions of land. Each house had its garden, well fenced to protect it from cows and pigs that wandered away from their enclosures.

The people were characterized by energy and culture. They preferred the home where each family could have an entire block to the crowded conditions in the city, and were willing

to overcome the weariness of the journey to and from the city to enjoy the rural environment.

It was in this situation that the Winnetka Reading and Social club was founded and flourished. The members of this club felt that its service to themselves and to the people of the village would be greatly increased, if there was a library and, accordingly they took the preliminary steps necessary to take advantage of the law, which had been recently enacted, by which public libraries could be established and maintained. The proposition to levy the necessary taxes was submitted for a referendum vote at the village election in April 1884 and was carried without a dissenting vote. Robert Moth being clerk and John Dale, President. The amount raised for the first year was approximately \$100 and this amount was supplemented by proceeds of a large lawn fete given by Gen. and Mrs. M. T. Simpson on their lawn at Sheridan road. In the election of the year 1885 the first board of library trustees was chosen in accordance with the terms of the law. They were: Rev. S. T. Kidder, R. S. Moth, S. S. Burr, Joseph Burnham, William Nethercott, Fred Jones. On April 30, 1885 the newly elected trustees met and chose S. S. Burr, president of the board, and R. S. Moth as secretary. The minutes show that a committee was appointed to draw up a set of by-laws for the management of the library, and that a room in the old school house at the corner of Elm and Walnut streets was selected as a suitable place for it. Miss Grace Sloate was employed as librarian at a salary of \$25 a year, paid quarterly, and a janitor also was employed.

The library was to be opened two hours each Saturday evening. Mr. Artemus Ward made a generous donation of books as a nucleus, and 202 volumes were circulated during the first year. The number of borrowers at that time was 145. The number of books purchased the first year was ninety-four and the total number in the library in March 1886 was 728. Bills for the year were \$140.67. Rules and regulations for loaning books, for fines, etc., were passed and the Winnetka Public library started on its career as a valuable municipal servant.

It is not clear just how long the library was housed in the old Elm street school house, but within a year or so it was given a room in the old "Dormitory building" at the corner of Cherry street and Ridge avenue.

The Misses Elinor and Virginia Dennehey, daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Dennehey of 1231 Tower road, are planning to leave for Europe sometime next month. They will spend about six months traveling and studying in Italy, France, and other European countries.

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