

# Elmhurst Public Library

Remembering the past and  
preparing for the future . . .

A brief library history 1912–2003



First Librarian  
Katharine Breitenbach

## Beginnings

In 1912, the Elmhurst City Council passed an ordinance that established a public library and an annual tax levy to support the library. The mayor appointed the first nine-member Library Board. Over the next few years the Board wrote bylaws and looked for a suitable place to open the library.

On March 22, 1916, despite a snow storm, the Elmhurst Public Library opened to a crowd of 100 in a small room in the rear of the old Glos Building at York and Park Avenue. The room was rented for \$15 per month. Katharine Breitenbach, the first librarian, was paid a salary of \$15 per month, and \$5 a month was paid for janitor services. The Board spent \$400 to buy books and magazines. The Elmhurst Woman's Club donated \$75 for the purchase of children's books.

The library began with 830 books and was open only ten hours a week, on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 2–5 p.m. and 7–9 p.m. The library's equipment included a new typewriter.

In the first annual report published in the *Elmhurst Press* in 1917, the library's collection had grown to 1,507 volumes, 12 magazine subscriptions and 643 registered borrowers. That first year library books circulated 10,400 times.

A volunteer from the community offered all children in third and fourth grades a story hour on Saturday afternoons during the summer vacation.

During World War I, the library distributed food pamphlets, government bulletins and collected, with the help of school children, over 1,000 books for soldiers' camps.

## Moving to Wilder Mansion

In 1919, the Library Board appointed a committee to look for land suitable for a public library building. In 1922 the library moved to the first floor of the former Wilder home which was purchased along with an acre of land from the Park District for \$14,000.

The house was built in 1868 by Seth Wadhams and was called "White Birch." Later, the Henry W. King family used the house as a summer home. In 1905, Thomas E. Wilder bought the house and called it "Lancaster Lodge."

The library was now open to the public on Mondays, and story hours were given throughout the year. According to a

report in the *Elmhurst Press*, during the 1923–24 school year over 1,200 children from first to sixth grade attended storytimes. Folk and fairy tales were told to the younger children while older kids heard the stories of



In 1868 Seth Wadhams built his home, which would later become the Elmhurst Public Library building.

such operas as *The Flying Dutchman* and *Hansel and Gretel*.

In 1923, the second floor of the library was opened for community groups, such as the Elmhurst Woman's Club and the Girl Scouts, to meet at a fee of \$10 a month. At this time many of the library books were purchased from Marshall Field and Company.

1926 was a watershed year for the new library. Ten years after the library opened, a new head librarian, Miss Grace Murray was hired, and the library extended its hours to all day Monday through Saturday, except at lunch and dinner time. That same year the library purchased a telephone, and residents were encouraged to call "Elmhurst 1245" for information about books and library services.

Also in 1926, the first summer reading program began. In the "vacation reading" program, children entering fifth grade had their name displayed in the library for reading 10 books.

According to the annual report of 1927, over 2,100 people were registered borrowers and the library held 6,431 volumes. The new hours caused the library's circulation to jump to 50,019 that year. During the 1926–27 school year 1,668 books were sent to Elmhurst classrooms.

## Remodeling

In 1930 fire damaged the library. The building was rewired and redecorated, and for the first time part of the second floor was used for an adult fiction collection. The original drawing room of the home, now the Wilder Room, was used as a children's room. The adult nonfiction collection was kept on the first floor. An extension phone was installed to talk between floors.

The budget submitted for 1930–31 fiscal year included \$5,300 for staff salaries which included the librarian, assistant librarian, other assistants and a janitor. The Library Board budgeted \$3,000 for books and \$100 for newspapers and magazines.

In 1930, to meet increasing space needs, the Library Board established a building fund. By 1931, the collection had grown to 10,500 volumes and 5,200 people had library cards.

In June 1936, as part of Elmhurst's Centennial celebrations, the cornerstone of a library addition was laid. At the time of the ceremony, the library had over 17,000 volumes. Library books circulated 122,000 times. The remodeling project took 8 months to complete and temporary quarters on East First Street were set up for a few months. On January 31, 1937, about 1,000 people attended a special open house to see the renovations.

The outside porches were removed. Pillars and a south wing for a new children's room were added increasing the size of the building to 10,750 square feet at a cost of \$36,000. A fireplace near the entrance was removed to make room for a check-out desk. On February 1, 1937, when the library reopened for regular business, 954 books were checked out that day alone.

More than 8,000 people, over half the population, now had library cards and the library was open every day except Sundays including the meal hours.



*Pillars and a south wing were added to the building in 1937.*



*Head Librarian Grace Murray (l) on the porch with Assistant Librarian Ruth Strand in 1931.*



*After the remodeling, residents checked out books in what is now the audiobook area outside the Wilder Room.*



*During the 1958 Homer Price Summer Reading Program kids who read 5 books over the summer had a paper doughnut with their name and school displayed in the library.*

## Gaining some Friends

On March 23, 1941, in celebration of the library's 25th anniversary, the Friends of the Elmhurst Public Library was formed. In April 1947, the Friends helped the library start a circulating record collection by contributing 380 classical records.

During World War II, the Elmhurst Public Library, with the help of the Friends, joined the Elmhurst College and York High School libraries in the nation-wide Victory Book Drive. Elmhurst citizens collected thousands of books for soldiers at USO centers, military camps and training stations.

During the 1940s a Great Books lecture series began. 1952 marked the first year that the Garden Club began holiday decorations at the library.

On May 20, 1955, during the annual meeting of the Friends, the Alice Seton Berens room on the lower level of the library was opened in honor of Mrs. Berens' 35 years of service on the Library Board.

## Expanding

In 1960 the Library Board commissioned a building study which concluded that a substantial amount of additional space was needed for library services. A new building was preferred, but building an addition was another option. In 1963, the citizens of Elmhurst voted to approve a \$500,000 bond issue to build an addition to the library. At the time of the referendum the library served over 19,000 library cardholders and owned over 40,000 volumes.



*The addition was completed in 1965. The new building offered spacious reading areas, a new Xerox machine and a music and art room.*



*Immaculate Conception High School students studied in the Wilder Room in 1959.*

The addition increased the size of the building to 42,750 square feet. A dedication ceremony was held on October 17, 1965. The collection grew that year to 51,200 volumes. From 1965–75, before moving to the Glos Mansion, the Elmhurst Historical Museum was located on the top floor of the library, where the Periodicals Room is now.

The new children's room was named after Librarian Ruth Strand who had worked at the library since the 1920s, first as a page and then as Assistant Librarian and Head Librarian.



## Growing with changing technology

In 1970 volunteers began delivering library material to homebound residents. In January 1972 the Elmhurst Public Library joined the Suburban Library System which gave residents access to materials from over 50 other libraries in the system. In the early 1970s a paperback book collection was begun. In 1975 the library installed an automated circulation system which computerized patron records

and library holdings. Beginning in 1976 the library was open to the public on Sundays during the fall and winter months.

By 1979 the library was hosting Lyric Opera lectures. In March 1986 Elmhurst voters approved a referendum to raise the library's tax levy. The first Stories in the Park Storytelling Festival was held in Wilder Park in 1986. In 1989 the statue *Once Upon a Time* was unveiled in the library's west garden, the first piece of public sculpture in Elmhurst.

The library continued to keep up with changing technology. Beginning in the late 1970s, cassettes, videos, audiobooks, CDs, DVDs, computers and Internet access were added. In 1994, the card catalog was replaced with computer catalogs. Online databases now provide up-to-the-second information on a wide range of topics. The library's Web site offers access to the catalog, reading suggestions, online databases and more.



*With online databases, thousands of magazine and newspaper articles are just a click away.*

In 2000 library books numbered over 240,000 in a building intended for a maximum of 120,000 volumes. The library was busier than ever. Circulation skyrocketed to over 794,000. Over 4,000 children and hundreds of teens and adults joined the Summer Reading Program each year. A building study on the space needs of the library completed in 2000 recommended building a new library.

In June 2000 the Park District Board, Library Board and City Council signed a land exchange agreement giving the library land in the north end of Wilder Park on which to construct a new building. In April 2001 Elmhurst residents approved an \$18.7 million bond issue to build a new 80,000 square foot library. The new building, which will open October 4, 2003, will offer more space for books, more public computers, meeting rooms, quiet and group study rooms, a computer training lab, wireless Internet access and more.



*The card catalog was replaced with computer catalogs in 1994.*

# Elmhurst Public Library Annual Report *Fiscal Year 2002-2003*

## Library Holdings

Books .....	223,727
Paperbacks .....	11,247
Magazine/Newspaper	
Subscriptions .....	667
Audiocassettes .....	7,530
Adult Music .....	1,597
Adult Books-on-Tape ....	4,031
Young People's .....	1,902
Compact Discs .....	9,013
Adult Music .....	7,056
Adult Books-on-CD .....	654
Adult Books-on-MP3 .....	49
Young People's .....	1,254
Videocassettes .....	9,040
DVDs .....	1,099
CD-ROMs .....	1,043
Computer Software .....	27

## Popular as ever!

–27,242 people have Elmhurst Public Library cards.  
–Last year, you checked out items **947,774** times, a 4% increase from last year!  
–June and July 2002 were the first months in library history that circulation surpassed 90,000 items in a single month!  
–Last year we answered 59,780 questions.

## Library Board

Susan P. Sadowski, *President*  
James M. Wall, *Vice President*  
Frank G. Vanek, *Secretary*  
David J. Dyer  
Wallace H. Hastings  
Philip L. Hupfer  
Margaret Mary Los  
Mike Silverstein  
Rose Walsh

## In memory . . .

We honor Board member John Carroll, who died August 31, 2002, for his 24 years of service on the Library Board.

Marilyn Boria, *Library Director*  
Sarah Caltvedt, *Assistant Director*

## Budget

### Revenue

–The library received \$4,041,295 in property taxes (about 90% of the budget) which includes money to repay bonds for the new library.  
–Remaining library income came from grants, gifts, interest, fines, fees and miscellaneous revenue bringing the total to \$4,494,250.

### Expenditures

Budget Item	Amount
Books .....	\$540,633
CDs, Cassettes, CD-ROMs, Videos, DVDs .....	\$70,680
Magazines/ Newspapers .....	\$60,932
Salaries/Benefits	\$2,393,393
Other general operating expenses including utilities, supplies, equipment, repairs, program fees .....	\$534,941

(Budget figures are unaudited.)

## School support

–Staff made 67 visits to 13 schools to encourage students to join the Summer Reading Program.  
–605 first graders were congratulated on learning to read at 21 parties at the library.  
–4,894 books and materials were sent to local schools in 162 “classroom collections.”

## What's new?

–The library broke ground on the new building on May 10, 2002. The new library will open on October 4, 2003.  
–The library's first teen summer reading club ended with a rock concert in the park. More than 130 people attended.  
–Books-on-MP3 were added to the collection.  
–You can renew items yourself from the online catalog.

## Special thanks

–Middle school children volunteered over 1,775 hours and adults volunteered over 1,280 hours last year on projects including the Summer Reading Program and a visitor count.  
–More than \$31,000 has been donated this year as commemorative dedications in the new library. This money will go towards construction costs.  
–The Friends of the Library donated over \$7,825 last year.  
–Local businesses, organizations and individuals donated coupons, raffle prizes and over \$2,000 to last year's Summer Reading Program.  
–The Elmhurst Garden Club celebrated their 50th anniversary of decorating the library for the holidays.

## Programs

–Over 17,000 kids enjoyed storytimes, puppetry workshops and other programs last year.  
–775 adults enjoyed Internet and Catalog Training classes, Lyric Opera Lectures and other programs.  
–More than 4,000 children, 180 teens and 840 adults joined the “Reading Rocks” Summer Reading Program.  
–About 150 people attended the Stories in the Park Storytelling Festival.  
–Over 600 kids and 350 adults joined Winter Reading Clubs.  
–EPL joined the community-wide “We Art the World Fine Arts Festival” with children's multicultural programs.

## Online resources

Every month our online databases receive thousands of hits. The library's Web site continues to be popular with tens of thousands of hits last year. You can search the library's catalog and several online databases, renew items online, e-mail questions, see which books you have checked out, get great reading suggestions and more from [www.elmhurstpubliclibrary.org](http://www.elmhurstpubliclibrary.org).



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211 South Prospect Avenue • Elmhurst, Illinois 60126 • 630-279-8696 • [www.elmhurstpubliclibrary.org](http://www.elmhurstpubliclibrary.org)  
Library hours: Monday–Friday 9 a.m.–9 p.m.; Saturday 9 a.m.–5 p.m.; Sunday 1–5 p.m.