

Public library gets start in pump house

There is no one prouder of Lansing's beautiful public library on Indiana Avenue and School Street, than Winifred Edwards Gaetze.

In 1946, Gaetze was appointed librarian in Lansing's first library building, a renovated pump house on Chicago Avenue next to the lot where Fire Station 2 is now located.

"The little school kids on their way home from Lester Crawl or St. Ann's Schools would stop to rest or use the bathroom-some of them were really young and didn't quite make it", she said.

"I couldn't let them go out in the cold with wet pants so I had them take them off and I'd hang them on the oil stove until they were dry-one little girl didn't make it past my feet, so my shoe also had to dry on the stove," she laughed. "I loved the children-they were all good kids", she said.

The building finally got an automatic heating system in 1950, but on Saturday and Sunday nights during the winter, Gaetze had to go to the library and fill the oil tank so the pipes wouldn't freeze over the week-end.

The number of books in the little building jumped in 8 years from 2,000 to 8,000, and the circulation of books went from 10,000 to 36,000. "There were books stuck everywhere in that small building," she said.

"I scrubbed the floor, washed the windows, and made curtains for the windows and was paid \$75 a month", she said.

In 1956 the village approved construction of a new library building at the corner of Ridge Road and Chicago Avenue. The building was designed to hold 25,000 books. Gaetze served as librarian until 1966 in the new building.

By 1970 it was clear an even bigger library was needed for Lansing's growing population. When the old Indiana Avenue School was torn down, the library board became interested in the school site for a new, larger library.

Following referendum approval by voters for the purchase of the land and funding for the new \$1.5 million library, the new library became a reality in 1976.

The building is named the Lewis O. Flom Public Library, honoring a library board member who served on the board more than 30 years and supported the need for a larger library.

The present library has 150,000 volumes, a more than ample supply of periodicals, books on tape, CDs, 200 videos which include movies, non-fiction, and self help information.

The attractive atrium on the main floor offers a friendly atmosphere for reading and meeting friends; and the lower floor is a special youth services department geared for young people of all ages.

Gaetze is an ardent fan of the beautiful new library. "The library also gives me a social place to visit my friends but, I do wonder what happened to the 1,000 index cards I typed in the other building-now I need help with the computers in locating my book choices," she said.

"I will always love Lansing and I enjoy thinking back about the fun I had with the kids in the old days, and I'm so happy that Lansing hasn't lost that hometown feeling, I still think it's great," she says.

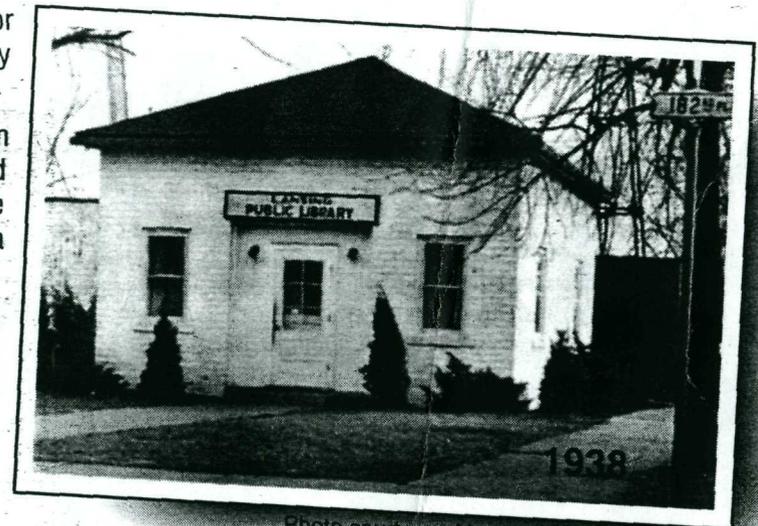


Photo courtesy of Lansing Historical Society

Lansing's first Public Library building on Chicago Avenue was a renovated pump-house that stands where Fire Station No. 2 now stands.

