

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE PALMER PUBLIC LIBRARY (1935-1985)

In the mid-1930s, the first public library in the Mat-Su valley consisted of a few books in a colony tent. When the tent city was replaced by more permanent quarters, the books were moved to the United Protestant Church's manse, the home of the Rev. Bert and Mabel Bingle. By 1945 the old barber shop (a small 12 ft. x 12 ft. room) in the "Rec. Hall" of the Matanuska Maid Co-op was offered as space for the library. Labor and material were donated for the new library and shelving was built. By October, 1945, the first meeting of the Palmer Library Association was held. A constitution was adopted and Articles of Incorporation as a non-profit organization were filed and accepted by Territorial auditor, Frank A. Boyle. The following officers were elected:

President—Harold Thuma
V-President—Lloyd C. Olson
Treasurer- -Edward Emery
Secretary—Mrs. (Zola) Marian Fineman
Trustee—Rev. Victor I. Alfsen
Trustee—Stanley Balloun
Trustee—Dr. Zola Fineman

The territorial government offered \$150.00 to be matched by the local community and many civic groups and individuals made donations. Books were donated too; more than the shelves made by Clyde King could hold. A schedule of hours when the library would be open was made and published in the local paper, the Valley Pioneer. A Story Hour for the pre-schoolers was started in March 1947, and the story teller was Mrs. Neil Miller, whose great-grandsons, William, Joseph, and Adam Bacon, sons of Guy and Jody Bacon attend the story hour in the present library. Mrs. George (Betty) Crowther was a storyteller later on in the red Chicken Coop and the addition to city hall.

In November 1948, the books were moved to Al King's heated garage on South Alaska street. (Allen & Petersen occupy the building in 1984). This move was necessary because the Matanuska Maid Co-Op decided to charge \$40.00 per month rent for the space the library occupied in the Rec. Hall. Judy Lesh recalls working in that garage in dim light but books were still checked out. There was a fire in the building. The books were not damaged but had to be moved again to another garage, that of Earl and Judy Graves I.

In May of 1949, the ARRC donated land west of Koslosky's store at the corner of West Dahlia and South Bailey streets for a library. Many bake sales were held to raise money to put a building on this lot. In January 1950, the association officers which were elected were:

President— Mrs. Earl (Judy) Graves
V.-President — Mrs. George Geiwitz
Secretary— Mrs. Don (Halene) Ingalls
Treasurer— Mrs. Foster (Izola) Sims
Trustee — Miss Louise Kellogg

At this meeting also \$86.25 was reported raised for the new building. By January 1951 the new red chicken coop was opened for checking out books. Almost all of the building materials were donated — from the architectural plans by Ed Crittenden of Anchorage to the large, handmade south window by Lloyd Severns. The building served the needs of the community well. As the years passed, it became full to overflowing.

The oil heater became temperamental and often blew up, leaving soot everywhere. There was no running water in the library and this presented problems, especially for children who were not prepared for an hour of stories and had to use the willow bushes out back or wait till they got elsewhere for there was no bathroom. With the cooperation of city officials and board members federal and city funding was obtained for a larger more modern building. In 1967 the library moved to an addition to the then City Hall and fire station on Cobb Street. In all these years, volunteers ran the library. One that must be

mentioned is Duane (Doodles) Mohan, Mrs. Richard Mohan. She did everything from ordering books, cataloguing them when they came and scheduling volunteers. CETA funds helped to train and pay others to keep the library functioning. In the Spring of 1979 Doodles died. It became apparent that a professional librarian was needed. Sally Attwood Gwin accepted that position in the Fall 1979. Borough and City tax money plus grants now support the library. 1985 found the Palmer Public Library in a new building costing over a million dollars, with funding coming from the state legislature. The building is located on the corner of Dahlia and Colony Way across the railroad tracks from the present library. The collection of 18,000 books will only begin to fill the attractive building designed by Don Wycoff.

Many valley residents still volunteer their time and talents to further the library's programs. Every week hardcover and paperback books are donated. The Friends of the Palmer Public Library also have been generous. They solicited with the energetic leadership of Verna Euwer the legislative appropriation for the new building, purchased an 8-mm projector for patrons to use, bought tables for the reading room, and purchased an IBM selectric typewriter for the office equipment that the staff-uses. So many have given their time, money, and talents to make the Palmer Public Library what it is today that it is impossible to list them all and to list some that stand out would only make the omission of others more apparent.

Helen H. Brundage, January 1985

Editor's Note: This pamphlet is based from a summary that Helen Brundage compiled and other historical sources available at the Palmer Public Library. These were gathered for the grand opening of the Palmer Public Library in 1985. Many other historical sources are available at the Palmer Public Library including the following as listed in the original history:

Mrs. Don (Halene) Ingalls and Mrs. 'Richard (Ann) Deming reminisced about those days in the "Rec Hall" and Halene's memories are on a tape that will accompany the paper. Also, Mrs. Earl (Judy) Graves, now Mrs. Sumner Lesh, will recall some of her memories on the same tape. Betty Crowther was storyteller for 18 years and adds some of her memories to the accompanying tape.