November 18, 2008

Exhibit Hours:

Monday through Friday
8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

The Indiana State Library Presents:

HISTORY OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN INDIANA

The History of Public Libraries in Indiana exhibit guides visitors through the development of Indiana's public library system from its humble 19th Century beginnings, to the public library building boom of the Carnegie era, to the high-tech, multi-purpose modern libraries of the 21st Century.

Features of the History of Public Libraries in Indiana exhibit include:

- *Timeline of Historic Library Legislation*—Indiana's libraries were first established with the creation of the Indiana State Library in 1825. In 1881, an act was passed to establish public libraries in cities with 10,000 or more inhabitants; this was later expanded in 1883 to include all cities and towns.

- *History of the Librarian Profession in Indiana*—The librarian profession has evolved more than most over the past century. This part of the exhibit compares the 21st-Century Hoosier librarian to their counterparts throughout history.

- *Indiana's Carnegie Libraries*—The State of Indiana benefited greatly from Andrew Carnegie's philanthropy. Indiana constructed 164 Carnegie libraries in 155 communities, more than any other state.

- *Bookmobiles: Indiana's Mobile Public Libraries*—Indiana has a long history of using bookmobiles to reach out to rural Hoosiers. In fact, in 1916, the Plainfield Public Library commissioned the state's first bookmobile and only the second in the nation.

- *Historical Public Library Reports and Publications*—Throughout the history of our State, the Indiana State Library has collected hundreds of reports, publications, promotional materials and correspondence from all 238 Indiana public library systems.

In the Beginning: Evolution of the Public Library in Indiana

When Indiana entered the Union in 1816, its geographic location placed it astride several of the major routes of the Great Migration, which reached flood proportions in the years following the War of 1812. In a bit more than four decades the state's population was 20 times its 1816 size. This population explosion not surprisingly gave force to the establishment of all varieties of libraries in Indiana in the nineteenth century.

In a report drawn up during the winter of 1892-1893, Jacob P. Dunn, the Indiana State Librarian, described five "distinct library movements in progress in Indiana" at that time.

They included:

The *religious movement* – chiefly the Sunday School and Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) libraries, a movement which was "still fairly important but [had] lost the aggressive character it had originally";

the *school movement* – a "product of the necessity for a certain supply of reference works in school work";

the *reading circle movement* – which included about 8,000 teachers in the Indiana Teachers' Reading Circle;

the *college movement* – born of the "realization by men in higher education that the college's interests will be promoted in every way by its library"; and

the *public library movement* – represented by town and city libraries, which Dunn called "the only genuine public libraries…which are assured of permanence and are usually conducted on an approved library basis."

There was further diversity in library development in the earlier nineteenth century beyond what the State Librarian describes, such as the Vincennes Library Company and William Maclure's "workingmen's" libraries.

In 1806, the exclusive Vincennes Library Company was chartered by the territorial legislature and formally organized. With the passage of time, its membership was expanded to include farmers, carpenters, blacksmiths, hat makers, tailor, masons, and a wide variety of members of other trades and crafts.

The first of Indiana's 146 "workingmen's" libraries was established in 1855 through the generosity of resident William Maclure. His trust provided five hundred dollars to any institute, club or society "wishing to establish a reading and lecture room with a library of at least one hundred volumes," with the stipulation that membership in such "societies" be restricted to "the working classes, who labor with their hands and earn their living by the sweat of their brow… ."

The early nineteenth century also saw the establishment of county libraries in Indiana. From the state's first constitution in 1816 came the incorporation of "county" libraries, whose source of support was the revenue from the sale of lots. By 1850, the weak financial position of these first county libraries, combined with such circumstances as the limited leisure time of the population, the condition of the roads, and the distances to the county "seat" resulted in their being either closed finally through neglect, or merged in later years with more prosperous organizations.

Libraries of the Early Twentieth Century

At the time of the State Librarian's aforementioned 1892-1893 report, a controversy was raging in the state between supporters of "township libraries" and advocates of "school district libraries." Several years after the report, the 1899 General Assembly passed an act which permitted the voters in each township to establish a "free public library," which was to be funded by a levy of "one-fifth of a mill on each dollar of taxable property." This act marked a revival of township libraries. With the creation of the Public Library Commission that same year, the stage was set for the twentieth century public library system.

One of the main purposes of the Public Library Commission was to organize the public libraries in all sections of the state; therefore, the members of the Commission worked diligently to secure the needed legislation for the establishment of public libraries. In 1901, 1903, and 1905, laws were passed under which cities that met a state standardized population threshold could organize libraries under city control.

Encouraged by state law and by the mass building of Andrew Carnegie-funded libraries (157 in Indiana – more than any other state), the public library system of Indiana entered upon an era of dramatic expansion. Just five years following the passage of the act of 1901, Jacob P. Dunn noted the dimensions of the expansion which had already taken place: *"the number of libraries has doubled; the number of library buildings has increased ten fold; and the number of librarians with library training has increased one hundredfold."*

Meanwhile, as library service expanded in the state, a county versus township system debate had begun. The 1917 session of the General Assembly saw the passage of a County Library Law, thereby beginning a long series of campaigns out of which 20 county systems were to be created by World War II.

The Great Depression and the World Wars of the twentieth century presented Indiana's librarians with new challenges and pressures. The decline of state and local tax revenue during the Depression forced many public libraries to cut corners and library hours while patrons crowded their reading rooms as never before. Shortly after the nation's entry into World War I, Indiana librarians joined the war effort through a broad program involving the collection of books for camp libraries, publicizing of government programs, and preservation of information related to each local community's part in the war.

The economic impact of the Depression and World War II on public libraries can be seen in the completion of South Bend's Spiro Public Library in 1959. The library marked the first construction of a large main public library building in nearly thirty years in the state of Indiana. The Library Services Act of 1956 sought to provide federal aid for the nation's struggling local libraries but caused a general political controversy in Indiana due to a concern that federal funding would reduce "local control." However, in 1961, Indiana joined the rest of the states in the nation and accepted the funding.

Libraries in the Information Age

Since the 1960s, and perhaps before, advances in library automation and information technology have changed the public library landscape at a steady pace. The June 1967 *ALA Bulletin* was almost entirely devoted to the "new technology," including its feature article "Library Automation: Tomorrow Becomes Today." Prior to 1967, there was scant mention of the word "computer" in library literature.

Over the past ten years, libraries have changed more than anyone could have anticipated, so fast that even librarians sometimes have difficulty keeping pace. In 1996, 44 percent of libraries offered Internet access to the public; in September 1998, that number had risen to 73 percent. Today 98 percent of Indiana's public libraries offer Internet service. Concurrently, the question of "What belongs in a library?" is being revisited. The addition of video game consoles, coffee shops, and wireless Internet access are transforming public libraries into the cultural and community centers of the their districts.

The question of "Where is the library?" is also raised. Between downloadable audio books and online catalogs, the library as a "place" is changing. Search engines like Google allow people to search billions of sources of information in an instant from the comforts of home. State programs such as INSPIRE, Indiana Memory, and the VINE among others, bring a wealth of academic and historical information from the physical library onto the personal computer.

In this Information Age, what will distinguish the public library from the rest of the knowledge industry? What is certain is that the public library in Indiana is thriving in today's academic and social environments. Patron visits, circulation, and program and activity participation are at an all-time high in Indiana's public libraries. History has shown Indiana's public libraries are highly valued institutions. With its resilience in changing times and adaptability to evolving information needs, the Indiana public library is destined to be a mainstay and pillar for all Hoosier communities.