

Lee Memorial Library moves forward to a second century of service

Virginia Hunt

In 1900, the population of Allendale was 694, but it was a popular summer resort with a number of boarding houses that welcomed guests for a respite from the heat of the cities. That explains why the Allendale Library, established in 1901, was only open during June, July and August. The total collection was about 600 books and was located in a room in the schoolhouse. Started by a resident, Mrs. Walter Spring and five friends, the library was staffed only by volunteers; the Library Committee of the Village Improvement Association was responsible for the administration and day to day operation of the library.

In 1919 the library moved to the Braun building on West Allendale Avenue. This building, erected in 1911, was also known as "Allendale's Flatiron Building" because of its triangular shape. Allendale was growing and the library was growing with it. Also in 1919, the Library Association was formed and The Allendale Players gave a performance for the benefit of the library. Through the years, The Players and many other organizations and individuals have continued to support the library.

Residents William C. Lee and his wife, Mary K. Lee, were major benefactors and their gifts were important in the continuation and growth of the facility. In 1921 Mrs. Lee was elected librarian by the association and Mr. Lee was vice president of the group. Two years later, the Library Association had enough money to purchase property at the southwest corner of Allendale Avenue and Franklin Turnpike, where Marcel's Awards is now located. A \$25 deposit secured the option to buy the land.

Now that the library had the property for a home of its own, residents and organizations gave generously to the building fund. Of the many donors, the Woman's Club of Allendale pledged \$500, a substantial sum in 1921, and raised their donation

through a series of many bazaars and card parties.

In April 1926, the contract for the new building was signed. John Ackerman offered 100 loads of fill at \$1 per load and the Garden Club volunteered to landscape the grounds. The record reads, "Both offers were unanimously accept-



ed." The building was dedicated on Dec. 1, 1926. Annual membership dues were \$1 plus two cents a week for books taken out. Gifts from the Woman's Club, Catholic Men's Club, Allendale Players, Mr. and Mrs. Lee and many others, were important to the continuation and growth of the library. Mrs. Lee continued to be the librarian for nearly 30 years and in 1941 the Lees financed an addition to the building that was named the Mary K. Lee Room. Their final gift was a trust fund set up for the benefit of their son, Schuyler Carteret Lee, who was born about 1896. When Schuyler Lee died, the trust passed to the library.

The year 1952 saw many changes. In September the Library Association began a discussion on municipalization of the library and in November a referendum was approved. In December the Allendale Library was renamed the Lee Memorial Library by the trustees, in honor of Mr. Lee who had died the previous July. On Jan. 5, 1953 the trustees turned the library and its assets over to Mayor John L. Tucker, acting for the borough. The following day, the Trustees of the Free Public Library of the Borough of Allendale met for the first time and adopted a resolution to appoint Mrs. Lee honorary advisor to the board for life. In February, 1953, Mrs. Austin Sprague became

the first paid librarian.

Today, Catherine Dodwell, library director, and a staff of nine full and part-time employees are the custodians of more than 55,460 items that include books, magazines, audio and video tapes, local and national newspapers, and a substantial large print collection for the visually impaired. The "new" catalog, a proud achievement in 1954, has been retired and information is now accessed by computer. The library moved to its present location at 500 West Crescent Avenue in 1979. It includes 7,783 square feet on the west end of the municipal building in the renovated Church of the Epiphany. The main room of the library retains the soaring ceiling of the former church and Ms. Dodwell's office was formerly the pastors study.

The Lee Memorial Library is a member of the Bergen County Cooperative Library System (BCCLS) with 70 member libraries in Bergen, Essex, Hudson and Passaic counties. Patrons of the Allendale library may access this huge storehouse of information and entertainment by computer. Materials are delivered to the local library and may be returned to the library in Allendale.

A highly successful children's summer reading program was held this year with 179 participating in the Allendale Summer Games, tied into the Olympics theme. Marilyn Tether, a retired professional artist, provides the graphics that decorate the children's room for this popular program. The new fall schedule for the adult book discussion group, focusing on contemporary writers, will soon be announced.

A new interactive CD-ROM work station, a gift of the Friends of the Library, has been installed in the children's room. Ms. Dodwell says that the Friends provide "absolutely invaluable support" and cites a long list of gifts that the group has provided, including funds for Magazine Express, a computer work station. The Friends also provide the new books in the

Special Rental Collection. Proceeds from this project help the Friends' provide gifts for the library. Ms. Dodwell pointed out the Friends of the Library are its main fund-raisers. They also hold an Annual Book Sale as well as an ongoing book sale in the library and conduct a fund-raising drive for direct donations to the library. She pointed out that their generosity is now more

important than ever because the library suffered a severe budget cut this year.

The history of the library in Allendale is one of generous support by the residents and organizations of the borough. As the library prepares to close the book on its first century of service to the community, gifts continue to be an important part of the present and future of the Lee Memorial Library.

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