

HISTORY OF THE COMSTOCK TOWNSHIP LIBRARY

BY

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Chairman, Comstock Township Library Board

October 1965

The rural circulation of books in Kalamazoo County was undertaken during the late 1930's through the organization of library branches. This county-wide library service was started as a state library service under the Works Progress Administration. Mrs. Irene Heeringa was appointed county library supervisor by the state. A representative committee consisting of Miss Mary Ensfield, County School Commissioner, Dr. W.M. Robinson and Dr. Ernest Burnham, Miss Anna French, Librarian, all of Western State Teachers College, K. R. Estes, Superintendent of Oakwood School, C. E. Leonard, Superintendent of Milwood School, Miss Esther Fletcher of Portage School and Miss Flora B. Roberts, Librarian of the Kalamazoo Public Library sponsored the movement.

The first library in the county to be organized under the system was the Comstock Branch Library. This library was started in August 1938 under the supervision of Mrs. Heeringa with Mrs. Ada McCloud as librarian. Five hundred books were picked up at Lansing for distribution to this and other libraries being organized. Prior to its opening a committee of women representing various churches and organizations in Comstock Township met to formulate plans. The first library board was: Mrs. Helen Shellman, president, Mrs. Letty Crissman, vice president, Mrs. Hazel Winterburn, secretary, and Mrs. Helen Petto, treasurer. In addition there were six directors. Space was offered by Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Smith who operated a grocery store on the east side of River Street, south of the river. The library was open to the public Tuesday through Friday from 10:30 in the morning until 5 in the afternoon. Books were furnished from the county unit as well as by gifts from interested persons. Tables, shelves and chairs were offered by citizens. Books from the county unit were exchanged for new books from other county units as they were read. Mrs. McCloud took requests for books not on the shelves and the supervisor filled them as they were available.

The library sponsored the organization of a book club as an auxiliary of the library. Meetings were held once a month and the programs consisted of reviews of current books. Each member purchased two new books each year and these were donated to the library after full benefit had been received by members of the individual's own family.

During the year 1939, 250 new books were added and space was obtained in a building on old U. S. 12 just west of River Street. This space, provided by the township, was formerly occupied by a barber shop. Mrs. Ada McCloud continued as librarian and the library was open on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 10 to 4:30. At this time the library contained more than 550 books, many of them for children, a limited number of Dutch books and some magazines. Children's story hours were inaugurated by Mrs. Heeringa during the summer of 1939.

In the minutes of the Comstock Township Board meeting of May 2, 1939, it was noted that \$150 voted at the annual meeting in April was turned over to the Comstock Library Association. At the end of the annual meeting of April 1, 1940, a letter was read from the Comstock Branch Library asking for an appropriation of \$200 for maintenance and expansion of the library. The request was granted.

In October of that year Mrs. Heeringa went before the county board of supervisors asking for the appointment of a county library board. Her request was referred to the law library committee and Prosecutor Paul M. Tedrow for a study of the law under which such a board could be established. Mrs. Heeringa stated that the law permits the board of supervisors to levy a half mill tax for a county library and the state to match the funds raised by the tax. Apparently the board of supervisors did not approve the setting up of a county system. Of the libraries which were organized under W.P.A. sponsorship only the Comstock and Fulton (Wakeshma Township) libraries survived.

The Comstock Township electors annually approved grants for support of the library at their annual meetings. From the \$200 requested in April 1940, the amount granted had risen to \$2000 by April 3, 1944. On April 2, 1945, a budget of \$1999.52 for the coming year was submitted by the library board. It is interesting to note in reading the minutes of the township board meetings that the requests for funds were voted without question at the annual meetings. Although the amounts seem small by present standards, support for the library by the citizens of the community has been continuous from the beginning. Mrs. Eric Peterson, wife of the then township clerk, played a very active part in securing this good will and also secured donations of books. Members of the library board were appointed by the township board.

Mrs. Ada McCloud resigned as librarian in 1941 and was replaced by Mrs. Isabel Weddon. The library moved into a small building which had once served as the office for a gasoline station on the corner of River Street and Old U. S. 12, a very central location. In August of 1945, an interested citizen of the township proposed to the township board that they appoint a committee to work out plans for a town hall, fire station and library.

The budget was presented at the annual meeting on April 2, 1947, totaled \$2821.40 of which \$1300 was for the librarian's salary and \$700 for books. In June of that year Mrs. Helen Shellman, secretary of the board, asked for an additional \$100 or \$125 for new shelves for the library as the board had leased space in a store building on Parcom Street and planned to move in July. At this time an assistant, Mrs. Mahala Inglis, was hired. The total number of books in the library on March 31, 1948, was 5,450.

At a joint meeting of the library board and the township board on January 4, 1951, Mrs. Grace Van Zandt of the library board asked if it would be possible for the township to build a library in the near future. Lots on Brookside Drive facing King Highway (the present site of the library) were suggested. She was told that the ability of the township to finance a building would depend on the amount of increase in sales tax diversion. A small amount of state aid was received during these years, which was turned over to the township treasurer and drawn from as was the money budgeted and voted by the township.

On April 13, 1951 there was a resolution of the township board relating to the operation of the library: Orders for books, etc. were to have the approval of a majority of the library board. Books and magazines were to be placed on the shelves as soon after receipt as possible. Members of the library board should not furnish books, magazines, etc. to the library as agents or for profit. The library board was asked to examine expenditures each month and compare with the amount remaining in the budget.

In June 1951, Mrs. Gladys Garrison, the present librarian, was hired as a substitute. Mrs. Inglis, the assistant librarian was sent to a workshop at Higgins Lake that summer with expenses paid by the library. State aid money was turned over to the township treasurer and drawn from as was the money

budgeted and voted by the township. State aid was used that year for purchase of reference books and workshop expense.

On November 19, 1951, the township supervisor was authorized to investigate the possibility of buying lots owned by Mr. and Mrs. J. Schensul on Brookside plat, as a site for the township library. A petition signed by 16 voters and freeholders of the township asking the board to call an election on the question was filed with the township board, since the lots were to be paid for from the general fund. A special meeting was set for this purpose on December 20, 1951. The votes were 18 in favor of the purchase and 13 against. Members of the library board and township board began planning for the new library.

The librarian and assistants were regularly sent to workshops during these years. State aid was \$420 during 1953. Mrs. Herlihy and Mrs. Dickenson of the board attended a library building conference in Lansing on June 5, 1953, to get information on library buildings. It was decided to train a few girls as library aides to help out as needed, to be paid 35 cents per hour while training, and 50 cents later. Mrs. Weddon resigned in August 1953 because of ill health. Mrs. Garrison was made acting librarian.

On March 30, 1954, the library board, librarians and a representative of the township board met with Mr. Billingham, an architect, to discuss library plans. At the annual meeting that year a preliminary plan for the library was presented. Miss Alberta Singelyn of the State Library was called in as consultant. A library study committee was appointed to study methods of bringing the library up to state specifications and make recommendations for support of the library and financing a new building.

In February 1955 Mr. Adrian Trimpe, Chairman of the Library Study Committee, made his report to the township board. In order to bring the library up to state specifications it would be necessary to purchase 1600 books per year for the next five years. A building of 2000 sq. ft. floor space would be required costing at least \$25,000. A budget, \$5000 above the present operating budget would be required. The committee recommended setting up a special assessment district including the whole township and levying a library tax.

At a township board meeting March 17, 1955, it was decided to submit a proposition to the voters setting up the library as a free public library and authorizing a tax of not to exceed 1 mill annually for its support provided 50 taxpayers signed a petition asking that such a proposition be put on the ballot. In addition 12 signers were required on a petition asking for a special meeting on the day of the election at 7:00 a.m. requesting a vote on a transfer of funds from the general township funds to a library building fund.

The proposal to set up a township free library and levy a tax of up to 1 mill for its support carried by a vote of 661 Yes, 428 No, at the election held on April 4, 1955. On May 2, the recessed annual meeting was held and the transfer of \$25,000 was authorized for erection of a library building. The successful outcome of the election was due to the hard work on the part of the library board who were: Mrs. Frank Herlihy, president, Mrs. Allyne Dickenson, vice-president, Mrs. Herman Rysenga, secretary, Mr. Carl Bacon, treasurer, Mrs. Harry Shellman, trustee, and Mr. Adrian Trimpe of the Study Committee, Mr. Nelson Ellwood and others on the township board.

The firm of Trend Associates, Inc. were chosen as architects to plan and supervise the building of the library. Bids were opened on July 19 and since all bids were in excess of \$30,000 it was felt that such items as painting, fixtures and floor covering could be listed as furnishings and paid for from the special

tax to maintain and operate the library. The firm of Marvin VanderVeen was chosen to build the library for the sum of \$32,000.

A new six member library board was appointed by the township board to serve until the next biennial election as required by law. The duties of the new board were to handle the money from the millage and determine through a budget what part of the mill allowed is needed each year. The elected library board has certain obligations but is not directly subject to the township board. By-laws were drawn up and approved at this time.

On January 28, 1956, the building was accepted. The library, 55 feet by 65 feet of tan brick construction with full basement and ample parking space at the rear was opened for public inspection on February 13, 1956. Acknowledgement was made of the valuable help in planning and furnishing given by the township board, interested citizens, Miss Alberta Singlyn of the State Library, Mr. William Chait of the Kalamazoo Public Library and Miss Katherine Stokes, Librarian, Western Michigan University. At the time of moving into the new building the library had approximately 6000 volumes. Mrs. Maris Owens, the present assistant librarian, was hired in March 1956. Mrs. Scarth Inglis resigned on October 14, 1956, to become librarian of the Galesburg Memorial Library. Mr. Frank Allen of Western Michigan University acted as consultant for a time, meeting with the librarians and board at regular intervals.

For a number of years the basement remained unfinished. Various organizations in the township urged that it be fitted up as a meeting place for civic clubs and groups. By 1960 it became apparent that more space was needed for the children's department and the basement was finished for that purpose. The cost was approximately \$6,500. The work was done by Hamilton Associates. This outfitting included building five display cases with sliding glass doors in one corner, for exhibit of projects by children, and material of general interest loaned by adults. A peg board wall at one side of the room lends itself for additional displays. The children's books were moved to the basement in September 1961 and this very attractive space is well used for reading, for reference, and for storytelling. A list of the displays in the cases is posted on the bulletin board in the upper hallway so that adults may also view the projects.

A committee of the board was appointed in 1961 to draw up a set of policies for guidance of the board and librarians. Inspiration for this task was obtained at the fall meeting of the Trustee Group of the Michigan Library Association in Detroit, attended by one of the board members. After many sessions and much rewriting the policies were completed and ready for distribution. At least one member of the board has attended annual meetings of the Michigan Library Association for the past several years. District meetings are attended by board members, the librarian and assistant librarian and one aide. The attendance of the aides is alternated from year to year.

The library board presents its annual report on the financial and operational standing of the library at the annual meeting in April. A tentative budget for the next fiscal year is also presented. A final budget requesting millage is submitted to the township board at its first meeting in September. For the past few years the receipt of penal fine money and increase of the tax base has made it possible to operate on .85 mill. The providing of subscriptions to magazines listed in the Abridged Readers Guide and the granting of federal funds has enabled the library to enlarge the reference tools. During this time, the fine money and proceeds from the sale of discarded books is being carried in a separate fund, looking forward to the time in the near future when an addition to the building becomes a necessity and

additional furnishings will be required. In 1963 the Comstock Junior Chamber of Commerce erected an attractive sign at the intersection of River Street and King Highway pointing to the library. In April and July of this year discarded book sales were conducted on the lawn in front of the library. This proved quite successful.

On March 1, 1965 there were 13,770 volumes in the library. Of these between 6000 and 7000 are in the juvenile department. Registered patrons totaled 3,953 of which 2,750 were juvenile. Comstock Township has a population of more than 8,700. The staff consists of the librarian, assistant librarian and three library aides. During the 1960 years, and a few years prior, the library was open from 11:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, and Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The children's room was open from 11:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on weekdays, and the same as the adult hours on Saturdays. At that time, story hour took place at 1:00 p.m. each Saturday, however time changes occur from time to time. A reading club for children and teenagers is conducted every summer. There is close cooperation between the library and the schools in the township. Classes from the schools are brought in by their teachers to find material on special topics. During Book Week, in the month of November, the library holds open house for all school children to come in and get acquainted with the library's facilities and to view the next books on display. Full use of the reference material is made by students in the evening during the school year. Books requested that are not in the library are obtained on loan from other libraries if possible. Consideration is being given to the purchase of records and other audio-visual material to enhance the collection.

CHAPTER TWO
BY
Maris L. Owens
Librarian, Comstock Township Library
October 1975

Comstock Township Library was growing.

Toward the end of the 60's, with the constant rise of circulation and services, there was a need for more staff. In 1968, the staff members included, Gladys Garrison, head librarian, Maris Owens, assistant librarian, Lotta Terpstra, Violet Clarke, and Mary Pacic, library assistants.

By 1969, the building was literally bursting at the seams, leaving no room for anything but expansion. After a study of the situation, with the helpful assistance of the librarian, it was agreed that an addition was necessary. As the north and west side of the structure was on the street side, and the south, the parking lot, the only course was to go east.

An adequate addition, 36' x 46', was constructed on the east end of the present building, next to the recently built Township Hall. The general contracting bid was awarded to Stanfield & Owen, who completed the addition in the fall of 1969. Carpeting was installed on the main floor. The public restrooms were enlarged and equipped with rails for the handicapped. A staff lounge was added to the main office and processing room.

At the completion of occupancy of the new stack room (National Book Week, November 16, 1969) an open house was held for public viewing, and refreshments were served. The library then boasted an inventory of 20, 210 volumes.

With the organization of Youth Opportunity Unlimited, a federally funded work program for teenage drop-outs, Comstock Library was asked to assist. The librarian was to provide work experience and guidance to one or more youths in the library. Several YOU members did work in the library during the next 2 years or so, however, it was not a practical situation, as the librarians were beginning to be too busy to train these people for only a six month period of time.

In September 1972, Mrs. Gladys Garrison, librarian for 21 years, retired. The board commended her for her many years of service and a retirement banquet in her honor, was attended by the library staff, board members, township officials, and friends. The library board appointed Mrs. Maris Owens to succeed Mrs. Garrison as head librarian, and Mrs. Lotta Terpstra as assistant librarian.

The circulation still continued to grow and patronage of the library increased. The service area now included the township residents and the school district as well. This decision made by the library board by vote.

By April 1, 1973, the annual circulation had increased to 59, 116 with an average increase of 350 new patrons each year.

With the ever increasing demands from local residents for service and materials, the staff was finding it very difficult to fulfill many requests. In spite of the interlibrary loan from Kalamazoo Public Library and Michigan State Library, there were always many problems. Materials and resources had to be mailed to and from lender to lendeer, which was discouraging because of the delay of the mail.

It was at about this time librarians of the Kalamazoo County area began contacting one another and their officials to discuss various ways in which library services could be improved. How special resources could be made available to all libraries, large and small alike. Committees were formed, with input from all library-served and unserved areas. Soon a county library board was formed, acting in conjunction with the Kalamazoo County Commission, who allocated funds for library services in unserved areas.

In July of 1973, the Kalamazoo Federated Library System was organized, through the efforts of Dr. Mark Krum, Director of the Kalamazoo Public Library. The Kalamazoo Area Library System, or KALS, as it became known, included libraries from Allegan, Comstock, Augusta, Galesburg, Parchment, Portage, Paw Paw, Hartford, Lawton, Plainwell, Vicksburg, and Kalamazoo. It was by vote of the board that Comstock Library become a member. The membership fee for each library was ten cents per capita for the population it served. The 1970 census for Comstock Township was 10,465; therefore, the fee for Comstock was \$1,465. Now the policy of membership fees went something like this. The fee monies were sent to the headquarters library and then within 30 days was returned to each member library as a grant. Thus, providing little or no hardship for the many extended services. For example, reference requests, photocopies, AV items including pictures (paper mounted, records, museum cases, and at last the most gratifying reward, was the much needed delivery service. Request items were picked up and delivered to members twice a week, Tuesdays and Fridays. With this kind of service at hand, many requests could be filled in the same day. Audio-Visual equipment was purchased by the headquarters library (with system funds). Now 16mm movie projectors, film strip and slide projectors, tape recorders, etc., were made available to the patrons of all member libraries.

With the increase of services, naturally the increase of patronage was climbing also. The demand for books and other materials was astonishing. With this trend in mind, the library board decided library services should be increased also.

Through the efforts of Mr. C. Dale Reed, board treasurer, wheelchairs, crutches, canes and walkers were placed in the library for emergency loan to the handicapped. A sewing center featuring patterns of all sizes and descriptions, sewing instruction books, pattern catalogs, etc., was another added attraction. The patterns were obtained through contributions from individuals and local department stores' discontinued items.

Not only were services and patrons increasing, now, it seemed like finances were looking up also. In 1973 legislation passed a bill allocating thirty cents per capita to libraries for state aid.

This was a considerable jump in state aid compared to the five cents received during the past ten years. Then the library was also the recipient of a portion of revenue sharing funds. The board elected to use the increase in state aid for salary increases and revenue for equipment. A 3M automatic copy machine, and an additional typewriter for public use, was purchased at that time. Photocopying for the public became very popular, averaging 500 to 700 copies a month. The small fee charged barely covered the cost of copy supplies, however, the board felt it was the service that counted, not the money. The following year, revenue sharing monies were used to install sidewalks across the front and sides of the library. By vote of the board, twenty-four framed reproductions of famous painters were purchased. These paintings were placed in a newly painted and carpeted room on the lower floor to display. Patrons could then select one or two pictures of their choice, hang them in their home for thirty days, return them and take another. Several paintings were also purchased from Walter Van Dyck, a

local artist, who lived on Harway Street in Comstock. A lovely portrait painting was donated to the library by Mrs. Sylvia DeVries, another local artist.

In January 1973, Mrs. Shirley Kasson, a student of librarianship at WMU, was added to the staff.

Juvenile services were also on the upswing. Early in 1973 the children's department was carpeted, making it a most colorful and cheerful place. Attractive displays and book come-ons were provided to enhance the interest of all ages. Summer programs such as handicraft classes, reading clubs and specialty groups, e.g. plays, puppetry, folklore, etc. Of course the regular 6 weeks story hour sessions were provided periodically. Nursery classes and preschoolers were regular visitors, enjoying music, games and animated stories. Then of course, during National Book Week in November, there were regular visits of the elementary students, who were bussed to the library for a scheduled one hour visit.

Students from our public schools are avid users of the periodicals. The library subscribes to over fifty magazines and eight newspapers. Back issues of periodicals for up to ten years in some cases, were stored systematically for easy access in the large magazine (morgue) room on the lower floor.

In July, 1974, Mrs. Mary Pacic, children's assistant, moved from the area, resigning from her position. Mrs. Elaine Gillis was hired as library aide, and Mrs. Shirley Kasson was put in charge of children's services.

Other improvements in the following months included enlarging the paperback section. By demand of the public, paperbacks were becoming increasingly popular. The small corner one stack section was soon increased to three racks with a continual build-up of the collection. Romances, mysteries, westerns, Gothics and the supplementary nonfiction were a constant turnover in paper s well as the regular hard cover publications.

In 1975, with the up-and-coming Bicentennial celebration, the librarian felt the need to acquire as much historical materials and data that was reasonably available concerning the local history. She spent much research, Comstock history, gathering information on individuals, schools, parks, institutions and the library, both local and of the state of Michigan in general.

A few months prior, a band of interested people formed a Comstock Historical Society. The prime intent was to share historical data with one another, collect pictures, documents, etc., and deposit them in the library. In the fall of 1975, several members of the society asked the library board to consider the possibility of finishing off a storage room on the west end of the lower floor. This room then to be used to house the historical materials, rate books, pictures, documents, furnishings, etc., concerning the area and the state. The library board was in accord with the idea, and instituted proceedings to panel, build shelves and cupboards, carpet, and overall complete the décor for local history and artifacts. New book stacks for the juvenile department were purchased, and educational self-help games for reading, spelling and arithmetic were made available to parents.

An opaque projector was acquired with equipment monies. This machine was beneficial in reproducing art work for library displays and was also used by local organizations at group meetings. Cassettes, records and animated stories became a delight to the younger patrons, and all resources in this area were used to the best advantage.

In the 1974-1975 annual report, Comstock Library served 19,361 patrons, there were 25,852 volumes in the library, with an annual circulation of 64,000.

Yes, Comstock Township Library was growing.

Only time can determine the extent of growth in services, patrons, building and resources, for as the community grows and goes forward, so the library will progress accordingly. Let us just say, that time, put to its advantage, has a way of making all things better.

HISTORY
OF THE
COMSTOCK TOWNSHIP LIBRARY

CHAPTER THREE

BY

SHIRLEY KASSON
LIBRARY DIRECTOR

June, 1998

In 1973, Shirley Kasson accepted a part time job at the Comstock Township Library as a Library Assistant, a clerical position, while attending Western Michigan University. In 1975, she was appointed Assistant Librarian/Children's Librarian and was in that position for two years, before the Head Librarian, Maris Owens, retired. The library board appointed Ms. Kasson the Director in 1977. She was the first librarian employed by the Comstock Township Library with a degree of Master of Library Science.

At that time, the library was a member of the Kalamazoo Library System. Shirley was active in that organization. When PA 89 passed, requiring libraries to form cooperatives, she served as Co-Chair of the Committee to Write Bylaws for the Southwest Michigan Library Cooperative. Later, she became president of that organization twice, vice president once, served on the executive board 4 terms for a total of 8 years and was chairperson and member of many of its committees.

The library had not asked for the full 1 mill voted in 1955 after the building of the library, but had requested only .35 mill from the taxpayers. In 1978, the library board requested 1 mill when presenting the library budget to the Township board. The Township board declined to place the 1 mill levy on the tax roll, and a request was made to the Attorney General to decide the matter. The Attorney General's opinion was that the library board was elected by the people and had full authority to ask for the 1 mill voted in 1955. The library board is the final judge of the amount that is to be raised for the maintenance of the Township library as long as that amount is within the one mill limitation imposed by Act 164. Attorney Schaeffer, Township attorney, stated further that in his opinion, the library board has exclusive control and authority over decisions pertaining to construction or improvement of the library building and location of it. Thereafter, the library requested 1 mill each year and began to set aside a reserve fund for building purposes.

Library usage was heavy in the Comstock community, but circulation was declining due to the poor quality of the collection. The library began to subscribe to magazines that were more in demand, and a systematic weeding and replacement process of the book collection began. Sandy Capp was hired as Library Assistant and revitalized the Vertical Files with current clippings and pamphlets. She also ordered all books selected by the Director. Barbara Patrick, Library Technician, was hired in 1978. She typed all the catalog card sets. Long time staff member, Violet Clarke, retired in May 1979 and was replaced by a librarian with a MLS degree, Susan McIntire, who was hired to be the cataloger. Formerly, the Director did all book orders and cataloging. Now, those jobs could be divided for more efficiency. Donna Odar was hired in 1983 as Library Assistant to help at the Circulation Desk. Bruce Mills, also with a MLS degree, was hired as Children's Librarian in 1983.

Shirley Kasson wrote a successful grant to obtain Dial-a-Story, which enabled children at home to dial a special number to hear a recorded story from the library. \$5,000 was also granted by the State Board of Education to fund services to seniors and Books by Mail to the homebound. In 1981, LSCA funds and \$500 from the local Lions Club were used to purchase Large Print books. In 1983, Polaroid Corporation donated three cameras for loan to the public, and the Richland Jaycee Auxiliary donated \$250 to purchase software. Children's programs remained popular each year. Preschool programs were held in

the spring and fall and Summer Reading Club was held in the summer. The annual book sale netted \$500 in 1983.

A comparison of circulation figures shows that in February 1979, 6,049 items were loaned. In February 1981, 11,030 items were loaned. It was becoming apparent that business at the library was increasing due to enhancement of the collection and the addition of more music records and art prints. The reference collection was also updated. More books were purchased and shelving was put up in all available areas. Soon, patrons had nowhere to sit, and the library board discussed the possibility of building another addition to the library.

In 1983, the library board interviewed architects from Prince Associates; Diekema/Hamann, Trend Associates; and Sarvis Associates. Norman Hamann, Diekema/Hamann Architects, was chosen to develop a plan to remodel the library and build an addition. After drafting three plans, the final one chosen joined the two buildings of Township Offices and the Township Library. Both staffs would share the necessary elevator, lobby, public restrooms, meeting room and staff lounge. The library had \$143,000 in its reserve fund and the Director requested grants from the Kalamazoo Foundation and the Library of Michigan. The Kalamazoo Foundation granted \$40,000 for a new building, and the Library of Michigan approved an LSCA grant of \$121,000 for the library remodeling.

The library board petitioned the Township board to put a bond issue for \$550,000 on the ballot in a special election, January 10, 1984, the money to be used to remodel and enlarge the library, joining it with the Township offices. The bond issue passed by a vote of the people, 518 to 387. Bids were requested for the construction, and Maxwell Construction Co. was chosen. Excavation and construction of the addition to the building began. The library remained open during the remodeling and staff removed their desks to accommodate the construction work. There was dust and noise, but the public could use the library. The remodeled Township Offices and Library building was finished in August and dedication was held in September of 1984. Comstock Township Library is now in the beautiful building you see on King Highway.

The library acquired several more grants. These grants enabled the library to begin a Books-by-Mail for the homebound, purchase a computer to begin converting all catalog records into a database, and obtain funding from the Cooperative to convert even more records into the Cooperative database. The computer was also used with an electronic ordering system to send book-ordering information directly via telephone transmission to a book jobber in Tennessee. When the books arrived, via UPS, card sets were automatically created for each book, and they were processed with the assistance of cataloging software. This eliminated the need to type each card set manually. The cards still needed to be filed manually in the card catalog drawers. The same computer was also used for the interloan, locating books in neighboring libraries through the use of the Southwest Michigan Library Cooperative database. Messages were then sent electronically to the libraries requesting the books.

In 1985, Maribeth Coonfare, a MLS librarian, was hired as Children's Librarian, and Bruce Mills advanced to Adult Services, with duties as a cataloger. Susan McIntire left to become Director of Parchment Library.

Videocassettes were added to the collection, with a \$1 per day charge. Videocassette player/recorders were purchased to loan to patrons, also for \$1 per day charge. In 1986, Dial-a-Story received 22,709 calls from children, 2,413 records and 1,829 cassette tapes were loaned, and the summer quilt show was a popular attraction in Comstock, drawing entries from other communities as well. In 1987, 1,395 videos were loaned, Dial-a-Story received 21,846 calls, and 1,962 records and 2,268 cassettes were loaned. Also, library staff answered 11,071 Reference/Information questions.

In 1988, Sandy Capp resigned to continue her education at Western Michigan University and become Director at Schoolcraft Library. Marti Clapp was hired as a Library Assistant, and Donna Odar took over Sandy's duties. Also, Amy Jastrzembki and Carol Reid were hired as Library Assistants.

The library board began planning for a Golden Anniversary celebration of the library to be held in 1989. Open forums were held in 1988 to bring public comment about library services. Comments showed much support for the library and for the Golden Anniversary plans. In May 1988, an agreement was made between the Comstock Township Library and the Township of Pavilion for library services to residents of Pavilion Township in return for 45% of the penal fines received by Pavilion Township. This arrangement continued until 1991 when the library canceled the agreement because the Township would not contribute more funds. In June 1988, one of the ceiling fans near the skylights fell through the atrium to the Youth Department. No one was injured and the defective fan was replaced. The Director began the first year of a 3-year sequential professional development program for librarians. This Leadership Academy was held for a full week once each year for three years. Also in 1988, a grant from the Library of Michigan helped to fund a series of programs by Larry Massie, entitled "Hands on the Past."

In May 1989, the library celebrated its 50th (Golden) Anniversary with a full day of celebration – music, stories, balloon launch and refreshments. It was a day to remember and hundreds of people turned out. Governor Blanchard wrote a congratulatory letter and a resolution was read by a representative from Congressman Howard Wolpe. Historic pictures of Comstock were enlarged from the C. Dale Reed collection and placed throughout the library. Photos of the event were placed in an album in the History Room.

The library purchased a computer for the Reference Desk with more grant funds from the Library of Michigan. In 1990, Bruce Mills resigned to begin duties with Kellogg Community College library. Librarian Connie Gempler was hired to take over his duties as cataloger. Marti Clapp resigned and moved to Wisconsin, and Mark Crum was hired in her place to work at the Reference Desk and maintain the Vertical Files and the History Room. The library joined MichCard, a program fostered by the Library of Michigan that allowed library members to borrow books from other libraries that were also MichCard members. Also, in 1990, the Director wrote a successful grant that provided \$60,000 in LSCA money

from the Library of Michigan for an automated catalog and circulation system. In 1991, the AARCS system, from NSC in Wisconsin, was in place and the public was using terminals to access the catalog. An IBM AS400 miniframe was the server for the system. In November of 1992, the library was closed so that staff and volunteers could place barcodes on every book. The system was totally online with circulation and catalog by September 1993.

In 1991, Carolyn Gaff, Library Assistant, and Amy Chase, Librarian and cataloger, joined the staff. Connie Gempler, who had been the cataloger, married and moved to Wisconsin with her husband. In 1992, Amy Chase resigned to be a full-time mother, and Kerry Fitzgerald, MLS Librarian, joined the staff to be head of Adult Services and cataloger. Amy Chase continued to assist by being a substitute at the Reference Desk.

Grants also enabled the library to purchase computers for the Youth Department for educational games. A second computer was placed at the Reference Desk for CD-ROMs. In 1993, the Library of Michigan also awarded the library an LSCA grant for \$9,177 to microfilm the minutes of the Comstock Township meetings and the Comstock Communicator (school newsletter). Part of the grant enabled the library to purchase a microfilm/microfiche reader/printer. The library accepted the Kalamazoo Valley Genealogical Society as a tenant in an extra room near the Youth Department for the nominal fee of \$1 per year.

The Youth Department continued to present many programs each year. Besides the preschool programs and reading club, there were Valentine programs, craft programs for children and adults, St. Patrick's Day, and Christmas programs. The Youth Department staff invited school groups during National Library Week and presented puppet shows. Elaine Gillis and Maribeth Coonfare also visited the schools each spring to create enthusiasm for the summer programs.

The library had operated on less than 1 mill since 1955, beginning to use the full mill in 1978. The GM tax settlement took much of the library's reserve funds. More revenue was needed and the public voted another ½ mill in August 1994. Services expanded further. All records were discarded and more music CDs were added, as well as videos, art prints, and a larger variety of periodicals. Kalamazoo Public Library offered reciprocal borrowing with Comstock patrons, and more people registered for library cards. The interloan service became very popular, and delivery of the requested items came three days a week through the Cooperative. An LSCA grant for a Statewide Internet Program was approved in 1994. The library received a computer, training and paid subscription to the Internet for one year. In 1994, 122 who viewed the 33 quilts on display attended the quilt show. The book sale in 1994 brought in \$2,089.

At the recommendation of the Director, a long-range planning process began in 1995. A committee consisting of the library board and interested staff composed the committee. This group determined a mission statement and then set goals and objectives for the future. These goals addressed the needs of staffing, collection, technology and building maintenance.

By 1996, it was apparent that the automated system was in need of upgrading. Storage and updated software would have to be purchased from IBM and would be quite expensive. The librarians began seeking information on another automated system for the library. Meanwhile, the technical staff area was outdated and required remodeling. This was finished in January to March of 1997. Then, in January 1997, the library board signed a contract with The Library Corporation to install a new, Windows NT based system. The computer system, using a LAN network, was christened HORACE – Highly Organized Rapid Access Catalog Entity. By October 1997, all records had been transferred to that system and the public began using HORACE, named after our famous Comstock citizen, Horace Comstock.

It was necessary to add more staff. Susan Kellogg was hired in 1996 as Library Assistant and Ed Brooks was hired in 1998 as a part time Reference Librarian. In 1998, the Director applied for funding from the Universal Service Fund. As soon as Congress released those funds, the library would be able to install ISDN lines so that each library computer would have access to the Internet. The plans also include installing a new telephone system. New carpets were installed throughout the library in the summer of 1998.

In 1973, library revenue was \$35,471, the library held 21,588 items and circulation was 56,847 that year. Today in 1998, library revenue is over ½ million dollars, the library has 65,866 items and circulation is 106,617. Twenty-five years produces a great many changes.

In the twenty years between 1977 and 1997, the library received \$256,903 in grants. This does not account for two computers which were received, one from the Library of Michigan and one from Western Michigan University. The Cooperative also granted funds for retroconversion of library shelf list cards.

The plaque placed in the lobby entranceway when the library was remodeled in 1984 has the ring of truth. It states “Here we grow.” The growth of this library – the updated collection of books and audiovisual collection, the two remodeling efforts and the advances in technology provided the means to give more effective and efficient service to the public. Comstock Township Library’s staff believes in public service, and the public responds to that by being very supportive. One of the most memorable events that occurred was the visit of a journalist from a Taiwan newspaper, The China News, who interviewed the Director.

Shirley Kasson
Library Director

1977 – 1998