

@ Your Library

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“@ your library” is the American Library Association’s logo for its Campaign for American Libraries, a multiyear public education campaign designed to showcase the value of public, school, academic and special libraries and librarians in the twenty-first century. ALA also sponsors National Library Week each April, a time to celebrate the contributions of our nation’s libraries of all types... public school, academic and special.

The **Ellenville Public Library & Museum** might well be a model for “@ your library” in its demonstration of the many ways a local public library can enhance the quality of life in a small, rural community. It is most appropriate to devote this April column to the **Ellenville Public Library & Museum** in celebration of National Library Week.

The November 2, 1877, issue of the *Ellenville Journal* carried mention of “The Reading Room” which was actually two bright, cheerful rooms rented from Neafie, Terwilliger & Post, well stocked with books. The Reading Room was apparently “thronged” at its opening, but subsequent issues of the paper do not mention it again.

Sixteen years later, both local newspapers carried announcements of a meeting held at the *Academy* to establish a free public library for the use of the inhabitants of the Town of Wawarsing. To set the stage, visualize a bustling community on the **Delaware & Hudson Canal**, two newspapers, three banks, a variety of houses of worship, *Ulster Knife Company*, the electric company, a myriad group of community groups, including literary circles, and residents very interested in self-improvement.

At the meeting, Professor Woodward, Superintendent of Schools, explained the various ways in which a public library could be chartered under the laws of 1892, one of which was to ask the cooperation of the school. That was the method chosen, and at a subsequent meeting of the Board of Education, five trustees were appointed: Professor Woodward, Rev. Octavius Applegate, Jr., James W. Donaldson, William W. Lambert, and Frank B. Hoornebeck. They immediately busied themselves with the practical arrangements of finding a place, collecting funds (and books), employing a librarian, and related business.

They applied for a charter and, on June 21, 1893, the University of the State of New York granted a charter to the **Ellenville Public Library**. (photo below)



In August, the trustees interviewed three candidates for the position of librarian and engaged the services of the single male applicant, Michael Hogan, at the rate of \$100 per year.

Rules for using the Library were created: a Town of Wawarsing resident aged 12 years or more, if known personally by the librarian or introduced by a trustee or a school teacher, could be

issued a card which entitled that person to borrow one book at a time for two weeks. If the Library had owned the book for at least three months, it could be renewed once. Fines were set at 5 cents for the first day and 2 cents per day thereafter.

The **Ellenville Public Library** opened to the public in the East wing of the then *First National Bank* building (now headquarters of *Sprague & Killeen*) on October 3, 1893. The collection of about 1,000 books was listed in a small pamphlet called the Library Catalogue, which could be purchased for 10 cents. Patrons were requested to make their choices at home so as not to waste time in the library.

Even before the Library opened its doors, school district funds (\$200) were voted for the support of the Library. Unfortunately, a technicality invalidated the vote but double that amount was validly voted the following year, and gradually increasing amounts were voted at subsequent meetings.

In spite of the public money, funds were very tight for the new library. Donations were requested and fundraising events were held.

Michael Hogan, the male librarian, didn’t last more than six months, and Miss Retta Russell was appointed to replace him in March of 1894.

There are few pictures of the early Library, but the local history collection includes one of the shades created for the first library home. The *Ellenville Journal* in June 1894 reported that “Mr. Charles Geilhard has left an ornate design and lettering of the good ‘card’ for himself in the shades at the Public Library. The work is accurate and artistic, and Mr. Geilhard generously made it a gift to the Library.”

After four years, the Library moved to better quarters down **Canal Street**, to a building which no longer exists (179 *Canal Street*; photo at right and cover photo). At the time of Urban Renewal it was demolished in order to have space for the **Ann Street** extension. In 1912, the Library moved again, to the second floor of the *Ellenville Savings Bank* building, now **Town Hall**. The move provided more room, but the stairs to the second floor were troublesome.



The Library continued to be plagued by financial woes and lack of space. When the Women’s Christian Temperance Union talked with their architect about the proposed **Hunt Memorial Building**, they unilaterally planned library quarters in the new building, to be rented by the Library. Library minutes are not terribly specific, but it seems that the Library Board was not pleased with either the space allocated for their purposes or with the proposed rent. They declined the offer of the space. The WCTU had been so sure that the Library move was a “fait accompli” that they had the words PUBLIC LIBRARY inscribed above the **Canal Street** entrance (photo opposite page, top left).

The “library fight” went on for 10 years, and it was only in 1927 that the Library and the WCTU came to an agreement. Additional space was included and the space was deeded, not rented, so long as the space was used for “library purposes.” The Library moved in 1929.