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Welcome to the Vespasian Warner Public Library District Podcast.

"You have such a beautiful library," is a compliment staff at the Vespasian Warner Library frequently hear from patrons and visitors. And we do have a beautiful library, one that the staff and patrons appreciate every day.

From the very beginnings of the library, to the construction of the original building, to the addition, and every change –big and small- along the way, the library has always been growing and changing with the times.

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The first attempt at a library in Clinton back in 1873 unfortunately didn't last very long. The private enterprise was started by J.D Rogers, who proposed to begin the library with no less than 200 volumes and acquire more titles as they were

published. The library was subscription based, with a fee of \$3.50 due yearly.

However, lack of interest or possibly mismanagement saw the venture fail. As a result, the books that had been acquired ended up in the possession of the Clinton Fire Dept., which proved to be fortuitous.

In 1895, a philanthropic and educational organization, Chapter B of the PEO. Formed in Clinton. The women involved soon began making plans to establish a library. To that end, the group began raising money through bake sales and by operating a country store a local street fair, as well as charging ladies ten cents to have their recipes published in their cookbook.

In 1900, the ladies retrieved the books from the first library attempt from the Clinton Fire Dept., with the men unanimously deciding to turn over the collection.

By February of 1901, the members of the PEO had acquired some 700 volumes for the Clinton Library Association. This

collection was first housed on Main Street just off the square in Rundle Hall, which was above W.B. Rundle's meat market. The library association had 227 members, and their dues were \$2.25 paid annually.

In August of that same year, the library association was turned over to the city. The city council passed an ordinance on August 29<sup>th</sup> to maintain the library and levied taxes to provide \$844.86 for its function.

The little library received a very big boost to their collection with the death of C.H. Moore in the spring of 1901. His will revealed that he'd left his entire collection of books, some 8,000 volumes, to the library association provided they would be properly housed. Otherwise they'd be given to the Library Association of Painesville, Ohio.

It was this stipulation that spurred the building of a new library.

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In 1902, the Clinton Library Association was moved from Rundle Hall off of the square to a space on the square, the rooms donated by Mrs. Eleanor Magill. However, this space wasn't considered adequate to house C.H. Moore's fine collection. What was really needed was a new building. The PEO and the city would need a lot more bakes sales to raise that money.

Vespasian Warner, C.H. Moore's son-in-law, didn't want to see the collection of books, considered one of the finest in Illinois, sent to Ohio. In February of 1906, Vespasian Warner offered to give the city a gift of a library and in March, the city accepted. In gratitude, the city declared that it would be named Vespasian Warner Library. Vespasian Warner donated a plot of land on Jefferson Street across from what at the time the high school, which would later become the junior high, and is now a greenspace. He also put up \$10,000 for the library's construction.

Bidding on the library project began on July 30, 1906. Charles W. Karr, a local carpenter and contractor who'd also done the Clinton high school as well as a large hotel and water works

project in Decatur and would later run for mayor of Clinton, won the bidding.

Construction began later that year with the building ready to be plastered by February of 1907. By November of 1907, newspapers were reporting that the building would soon be opening, however, the construction was far from completed. The contract for the steam fixtures, which T.B. Kraft won, wasn't awarded until December of 1907.

In April of 1908, Vespasian Warner officially handed the deed to the library over to the city. Over the next two months, the furniture was installed. In August, the library collection was officially moved to the building from the Magill Rooms. In September, the electric lights were installed.

The finished building cost about \$25,000, \$15,000 more than Vespasian Warner's initial investment. The two-story library was 62 feet by 42 ½ feet. The north entrance led to a delivery room that was 15 feet by 17 feet. On the west side of it was a 22 by 25 foot reading room; on the east side was a children's reading

room with the same dimensions. The librarian's room in the southeast corner was 12 feet by 14 feet. There was also a hall to the basement and the second floor.

The second floor featured a lecture room of 25 by 60 feet, which included a platform on the east side. In the southeast corner was a retiring room that was twelve by 14 feet.

The new library opened to public on October 19, 1908. A formal opening was held on November 12, 1908, in which W.H. Booth presented a formal history of the library beginning with the work of the PEO, and including Mrs. Magill's donation of the rooms, and of course, Vespasian Warner's generous gift to the city.

Other speakers, including Mayor Edmundson, Reverend Laing, Reverend Fulton, and the Honorable B.F. Staymates also lauded their efforts and generosity.

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The building didn't change much in the ensuing decades.

In 1942, the library secured a \$10,000 bond to install four floors of metal stacks and shelves to accommodate the growing collection.

In 1949, the library upgraded to fluorescent lighting, which cost a little over \$3,200. They also had some repairs done with the roof, relaying and replacing the broken tile, which cost almost \$3,000.

In 1953, a museum case was installed to be used for displaying rare books.

In 1958, they installed a new cork tile floor and a new circulation desk which was elevated and featured a sunken tray for library cards.

In 1964, a card charging machine joined their technology.

In 1967, the library established their first outdoor book drop to allow patrons to return books outside of library hours

And the early 1980s saw the addition of a copy machine and a microfilm reader.

But it was only a matter of time before the library itself would also have to expand.

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By the 1970s one thing became very clear about the lovely library building: it didn't have enough space.

The steel stacks that were installed in 1942 were painfully full by the late '70s. By the early '80s, acquiring an addition to the library building became a goal.

Head Librarian Malinda Evans used a revenue sharing grant to analyze the library's needs and incorporate them into an architect's drawings. This addition, which would be built on the library's south side on land that was part of the C.H. Moore estate, would include an expanded reference section, a 200-seat community room with small kitchen facilities, several meeting



or conference rooms, a workroom for library staff, and a staff breakroom, as well as an elevator and restrooms on every floor. The expanded space would also allow the children's room to be moved to the second floor.

But acquiring the funds for this endeavor would be difficult.

Malinda Evans and some library board members asked the city council to consider helping to finance the new addition. They were hoping to obtain a federal block grant for the proposed \$650,000 project with memorials and gifts possibly supplementing the grant.

Playing into the library's proposal was the recent requirement that public libraries become accessible. The library had been delaying the expensive renovations with the hope that funding for the addition would come through. The argument was that the ramp to the front entrance, which would have to begin at the sidewalk on the west side in order to be the proper grade, would become obsolete if the addition were built with the planned ground level west entrance.

In 1989, voters approved a new library district, meaning that the Vespasian Warner Library went from a city library to a district library, increasing the number of people the library served. This approval also included funding for the proposed addition.

An architectural firm in Chicago designed what the staff now call The New Building and ground for the addition was broken in 1991. It was completed and opened to the public in 1992.

The new building incorporated the old structure, not only in keeping with the outward and interior designs, including using similar colored brick and keeping the old furniture, but by also keeping the old building...literally. The north end of the addition connects directly to the outer wall of the old building, creating an atrium that goes from the second floor to the lower level. The roof of the old building can be seen from the second floor.

The adult collection moved onto the first floor of the new building with the second floor of the new building dedicated as the children's floor. The new lower level featured a reference

room which housed not only reference items but also the periodicals and audio/visual collections. On the opposite side was a large community room with a small kitchen dubbed The Revere Room, which could be used for anything from conferences to meetings to baby showers and birthday parties. The boardroom on the first floor and the activity room on the second floor could also be used by the community for meetings.

The first floor of the old building became the home of the DeWitt County Genealogical Society. The lecture hall on the second floor was converted into the museum room, which featured exhibits from local artists as well as special events. And the old librarian's room became the home of the Weinberg Library of Comparative Religion.

The added space the new building provided allowed for an expansion of not only the library's collections, but also of its services.

The library added computers for patrons as well as a fax machine.

The official open house to welcome patrons to the New Building in 1992 was well attended by the community and included an official ribbon cutting as well as speeches by Malinda Evans, board members, and others.

The shovel from the groundbreaking in 1991 hangs in the lobby of the library. There's also a plaque honoring the board members and Director Malinda Evans for their work in making the addition happen.

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Though the library hasn't added any building space since the 1992 edition, it has made the most of what space it has, which has resulted in some shifting around over the years.

Most notably, the Genealogy room is now located on the lower level across from the Revere Room where the reference room

once was. The reference room moved upstairs to where genealogy used to be on the first floor of the old building. However, with the expanding collection of DVDs, Blu-rays, video games, and the library of things, coupled with the dwindling need for magazines, and with the relocation of the music CDs, this section is now almost purely audio/visual with the magazines and newspapers moving next to the local history section, which is also a recent creation.

The Weinberg Collection has since been moved from its small room to the stacks.

What was once the boardroom for the community is now the tech room for the staff.

And the second floor of the old building, including the old reading room, houses the library's extensive archive collection.

Though space has not been added to the building, it has been added to the library grounds. In 2003, the library purchased a house on an adjacent lot and had it demolished. The result is a

greenspace that's used not only for library events and programs, but also to house vendors during the annual Apple and Pork Festival. Tables and benches were recently installed to create a nearby seating area. A pollinator garden was also planted near the library's shed.

Like the building, the library grounds are also viewed with the goal of making the most of the space offered in a most attractive way.

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Upon her retirement, Director Malinda Evans said, "We had a 100-year-old building and we built one for the next 100 years."

Between the old building and the new building, the library and its staff are able to accommodate patrons and the community with ample space, services, and a robust collection of materials. And we are very fortunate to work in such a lovely building that so perfectly combines history with the present and the future.

Thank you for joining us.

For more information about the Vespasian Warner Public Library District, please go to [vwarner.org](http://vwarner.org).

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