

Thirtieth Annual  
Report of the President of the Library Association  
Jan. 7<sup>th</sup> 1929

You have in Miss Bedford's report a concise statement of the activities of the past year.

A little old scrap book lies before me, its yellow pages and faded newspaper cuttings reminding one of the careful methods of a president of forty years ago or more, - Mrs. Rachel A. Price. Let me gather from it a few items of our library's history since the opening of this building.

It was on a stormy, sleety evening in February, 1888, just thirty years ago, that the new library was dedicated. In spite of the inclement weather the building was crowded, and after prayer by Dr. Caldwell, the speaker of the evening was introduced by Addison May, Esq., and Mr. Lincoln L. Eyre, a brilliant young lawyer of Philadelphia, delivered an eloquent address, deploring the growing tendency toward materialism, and looking toward the public library as an uplifting influence for the things of the spirit. He was followed by Mr. Frederick S. Dickson, who had been active in founding the library, and so felt great interest in its success. Then came James Monaghan, Esq., who read a poem written for the occasion by Sarah W. Peterson of Philadelphia. Brief remarks were made by Robert E. Monaghan, Esq., Dr. Thos. D. Dunn, and John J. Pinkerton, Esq., after which the audience was invited to the upper room, where a social and musical reception was enjoyed by all.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July of the same year, (1888) the first anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone was celebrated, with ceremonies appropriate to the day and the occasion. Mr. May again presided, but the feature of the meeting was an interesting paper read by Miss Sarah W. Starkweather, giving an account of the founding of the Association, and the history of the library's wanderings until it had at last found a permanent home in the beautiful building now occupied. The Revd Wm L. Bull of Whitford then followed, and in a few kind words wished peace and prosperity to the enterprise.

These good wishes were realized, and for five years, under the direction of Mrs. J. T. Rothrock, all went well, until a sudden storm burst from an apparently clear sky, threatening disaster.

The managers had decided that the rapid growth of the work demanded the services of a trained librarian and had accordingly engaged a suitable person to fill that position. The Borough Council, having granted an appropriation for the purpose of maintaining a free library, made strenuous objection to this change, taking the position that by granting this aid, they had acquired the right to control the appointment of its employees. The managers refused to accept this dictum, and for weeks the controversy raged furiously, the public generally taking a hand in the fray, while the columns of the "Local News" were blue with the smoke of battle. Chivalry and patriotism were arrayed against the ladies, who held to their right to follow their ideal of duty to the library's best interests, and when threatened with a summary loss of their appropriation, posted a notice that in the event of its

withdrawal, the library would close its doors to all except stockholders. One irate antagonist of the proposed change went to the home of one of the managers and invited her husband to step into the street and settle the matter by single combat. Happily, his invitation was civilly declined, and bloodshed was averted. But the quiet determination of the women won the day, a compromise was effected, and under Miss Bedford's gentle sway, peace reigned once more, and the benignant portraits of Hannah Darlington, (our first benefactor,) Ann Preston and Hannah Cox looked down from their heights on the upper wall, upon a scene of restored tranquility.

A bequest under the will of Mrs. John P. Logan gave the managers an opportunity to realize a long-cherished dream, by the erection of a children's room. With this sum as a nest egg, and with the assistance of many generous citizens, they were able to carry out their plan, and the children's room, a place of beauty, now rivals the main room in usefulness and popularity.

In spite of its prosperity, the task of keeping up the library has often been a strenuous one, and many difficulties have been met and many problems solved. When funds were low, it was often necessary to replenish the treasury by means of fairs, concerts and other devices. Who that saw and heard the charming operetta, "Pepita, the Gipsy [*sic*] Girl of Andalusia," given in the old Armory on West Gay Street, by the flower of West Chester's wit, beauty and legal promise, can ever forget that delightful entertainment, which ran with success and enthusiasm for several nights, and whose program was a roll of honored names?

Beside financial problems, other questions often arose to call forth the exercise of tact and judgment by the committee. When, for instance, some modest souls, blushing at the naked beauty of the cast of the Apollo Belvedere, offered their remonstrances, we chastely draped it in mosquito-netting and put it into a retired corner; and when books which seemed to us as innocent of harm as Comley's Speller were complained of as "improper", they were promptly consigned to the furnace.

And so, in spite of criticisms and complaints the library has gone, for the past three decades, upon its peaceful way, growing in usefulness and in the affections of our townspeople, and receiving generous support and encouragement from those to whom the welfare of the town has been entrusted. With a Board working in perfect harmony, with only one aim in view, we look backward with pride and thankfulness to the achievements of the past, and as "we lay the weary pen aside" we hope, for our cherished institution, a larger measure yet of efficiency and prosperity, and broader opportunities for those who come after us.

Margaret G. Townsend, President

*(transcribed from a handwritten document)*