

WHAT LIDA WANTS LIDA GETS
How Monroe Got Its Public Library

Excerpted from the forthcoming book,
Folks Round Here: A Midwest Chronicle
by John Evangelist Walsh

One of Monroe's classiest personalities at the turn of the century--not this one, the other one--was a woman with the lilt-
ing name of Alida Ludlow. A beauty, too, with a sort of a regal
touch to her face and manner. Smart, too, and educated, and
always on fire to raise the town's social and intellectual level.
If you lived here in say 1904, the date of this little tale, you
knew about Lida.

It didn't hurt that she was the daughter-in-law of our rich-
est man and leading citizen, Arabut Ludlow, wife of his son Henry.
The large, sturdy house they lived in, Lida and Henry, is still

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there, with its wide, sweeping porch, over on 22nd Avenue. I pass it when I go to gas the car. You can't miss it because it sits right next to a Monroe gem, the big, rambling old Chenoweth place, a true Victorian classic if there ever was one. The year before my wife and I got here in 1990 it was on the market. Went for \$112,000 that'll tell you how out of the way we are here. That same house in or near Madison, only an hour or so to the north, would go for three or four times as much. Near Chicago-- I can't imagine.

Lida being who and what she was, it didn't surprise anybody when they heard what she'd done about the new library, how she'd beaten out that billionaire Andrew Carnegie, the steel king, who gave free libraries to towns that needed them. Here in Monroe old Andrew's money wasn't good enough--and that's the only time he'd ever been turned down. By then he'd given, they say, about 2,800 libraries to small towns, without making a dent in his bank account. They say he didn't get over the shock he got in Monroe for a year.

This is farm country, which means hard work and outdoor living, so maybe you wouldn't think that folks around here do a lot of book reading. But we do, always have. We weren't a dozen years old after those first cabins were built, when there was talk about getting up a reading room. Pretty soon the Young Men's Literary Association filled a room in a building on the Square with any books they could find, buy, or borrow, and called it a library. After that, as we grew, our library jumped around to

bigger rooms with more and more books in some building or other. It was Lida Ludlow--she was Lida Conde, then, a single girl--just after the Civil War, who set up the first real good library in Monroe, housing it in the Universalist Church basement, a block north of the Square.

That's where she met and fell in love with, and married Henry Ludlow, so she always after that had a soft spot for books and libraries. Said a library was the life-blood of a town, showed that it believed it had a future.

It was forty years after that, after the Universalist Library opened for business, that she tangled with Carnegie--no, let's not put it that way, not tangled exactly, and it wasn't only libraries she had on her mind this time. Here's what happened.

In 1904, if your town had grown to a size where it was embarrassed about not having a regular public library with a nice building with piles of books, and a budget for staff and for getting more books each year, there was one place you could turn. By then everybody'd heard about Carnegie donating whole libraries to towns, including money for a building. He thought giving libraries to folks was the best way to spend his great wealth, and you know it really was a good idea. He was serious about it, too, taking a personal interest in who got what, and how it was used.

When Carnegie was young, a poor boy, libraries had meant a lot to him. Now he wanted to do the same for other boys, and for girls of course and just everybody. It was the one thing he did with his money that made him happiest, they say. Every re-

quest that reached him, and there were dozens each year, as you can guess, he looked at himself. Then he'd make the final decision yes or no, and he'd turn it over to one of his assistants.

In the summer of 1903, the Monroe City council decided we couldn't hold our head up any longer unless we had a spanking new library in town, with everything up to date. So the City appointed what they called "a library Board of Directors," and told them to see what they could do about old Andrew sitting there in his big office back east in Pittsburg. Collin Wright, the board's president, wrote the letter telling Carnegie how much we wanted and needed one of his libraries, and it must have been a good letter. Mr. Carnegie personally wrote back the OK that we could have one, under the usual terms, which we'd be hearing about from the assistant.

The sum to be provided, he explained, was \$12,500. What that'd be today I'm not sure, but back then you could put up a very nice building for that much. An ordinary, two-story house with a porch, for a comparison, wouldn't cost much more than a couple of thousand.

Pleased, Collins boasted that he'd "personally bought the first postage stamp used in the Carnegie correspondence," but that he'd bear the cost of the stamp himself and not bill the Council. Knowing him, some of the Board members weren't sure it was meant as a joke.

From there it looked like smooth sailing. The terms of the gift weren't hard to fulfill: The City must pass an ordinance providing money annually for the library staff and upkeep, and to

buy more books. Came to about a thousand dollars a year in total, which was easily done. Then a site in town must be provided for the building, and the exact design of the building settled. The whole package must be submitted to Carnegie for approval, but that was always more or less automatic.

Then the trouble started. For a whole month everybody was at the other man's throat over the question of the site, of all things, and over who'd get to run, to control, the library, the City or the school board. It got so bad that old friends were slanging away at each other. You wouldn't think that grown men could act like that. What it was about a library that set them off the way it did, I have no idea.

The old library, the one we'd had for years, wasn't much more than a couple of rooms in an old government building at the corner of Payne and Jackson, a ~~small~~ block off the Square. It was run by the School Board, and everybody agreed that that site would be a good one, the best. Tear down the old building and put up the Carnegie gift. Simple. But then the School Board got cute.

They'd donate use of the site, they offered, but would keep title to the property. And of course the school Board would continue to run the library, as they'd been doing for so many years.

Not on your life, responded some City Council members. A public library should be run by the city, not by the school as if it were meant only for kids. If they couldn't get the old site, well and good. The city'd buy a new site somewhere on or near

~~the Square.~~
the Square. Well, in about two shakes you had half a dozen places suggested or offered, which soon went down to three. All near the Square, these were the Nance corner, the Wells corner, and the Steiger corner. After a whole lot of wrangling at Council meetings, pretty nasty at times, the vote was taken, and the Steiger corner won, 4 to 3. Then the Council went right ahead and accepted Belle Steiger's offer of the property for \$3,800, which the Council asked for promptly, "so that the actual erection of such Library Building may be done before spring opens up."

That sounded final, all right, but it wasn't. The fight had only just begun. Now it was the Old Sifers, against the Steigers, splitting the town down the middle.

Led by the three Board members who'd voted no--Parker Treat, John Bolender, and Fred Schwartz--the Old Sifers all insisted that if the School Board wouldn't hand it over, then a legal way might be found to seize the old site property and deed it to the city for the new library. They also charged that the Steiger site had hidden defects, for one thing it was "low and subject to overflow with every thaw or rain." Also, hadn't it been on the market for more'n a year, maybe two? That made old Belle pretty mad, of course. She swore she'd lived there all her life and the cellar under her house had always been dry as a bone. Only when the water backed up along the sidewalk was there some little trouble about it, like lots of other streets. If the city put in new tiling to carry the excess across the street it'd be OK. And no, the property had not been on the market. She'd expected to end

her life there! She sold only when the Council came and asked her.

In their turn, the Steigers, now that they thought about it, were able to find a good deal wrong with the Old Site. For such a prominent and expensive building it was too far off the Square. It'd be lost, thrown away. Then too the location was "too near one extreme edge of town," a charge that left most folks more than a bit puzzled. And what about all those old complaints about the walks and pavements being bad and at places real dangerous? How much would all that cost to fix up?

It got personal, too, as each side began suspecting that the other had a hidden purpose. When the Evening Times reported what was being said, mostly in private, by opponents of the Steiger site, lots of folks just nodded. It put squarely on the spot the four Council members who'd voted yes:

...of course Messrs Bennett and Wright, members of the Committee, will be able to sit on the front porches of their homes and look over at the new building. The new library may be altogether too convenient for Mr. Twinning when he gets into his new Commercial and savings Bank [then being built on the Square]. And Mr. Ruegger may have some other interest by which he was influenced to favor the Steiger site, all of which has ^{not} been overlooked by the opposition, which is very free to charge that selfish motives entered into the matter of purchasing a site.

~~Numbered~~

With that, the Old Sifers sent their lawyers digging into the statute books to see if the Library Board actually had the authority to spend city money on buying property. Then the Steiger lawyers piled in, and soon you had a situation so tangled that folks began to worry that maybe Monroe would never get its library, that the warring town fathers'd make old Carnegie so disgusted that he'd give up on us.

Here's where Lida comes in, maneuvering her way in the background like some wily member of Congress.

By now, after thirty years of marriage to Henry, Lida was as much a Ludlow as any of them. For the family patriarch, old Arabut, in particular, she had a great admiration. The story of his rise from itinerant pedlar to the richest man in I don't know how many counties or states, fascinated her. His sturdy, generous character, she also like^d a lot, his easy, giving ways, his native shrewdness as to life in general. Those last few years before he died in 1896 she'd been especially close to him, looking in on him each day to talk and keep him company. Ever since then she'd been looking for a way to honor his memory, some public way to recognize his importance in the history of the region. A library for the town in his name was one of her ideas. Already standing only a block away from the library was the magnificent Hotel Ludlow, unusually grand for a small town, put up by old Arabut twenty years before. With the library and the hotel together as reminders, folks wouldn't soon forget their one-time itinerant pedlar! Then the city had taken her by surprise and beaten her out by applying to and getting one from Carnegie.

Now, with the whole library business up in the air again, she saw her chance and she moved fast.

Persuading her husband and his two brothers, Will and Ed, to put up the money for a memorial for their father wasn't hard. It had to match the Carnegie offer, of course, \$12,500, a very considerable sum then, but that didn't make them hesitate. It's like that old song, what Lida wants, Lida gets, whether it was a Ludlow family matter or not.

The first sign that something was going on came when the papers reported a rumor that "the Library Board had been approached and told in confidence that local parties were ready to advance the money for the library, if the Board would agree to place it on the old site." That was the other part of Lida's plan, to have the new library built right where the old one stood, which meant it'd be run by the School Board, not by the city.

The story in the paper was only a little off. Lida's offer, made in confidence through a spokesman, wasn't to the library Board. It was made directly to the Union School District, which controlled the old library. No conditions were attached to it, only that the new place'd be officially named the "Arabut Ludlow Memorial Library," that precise phrase to be cut in stone prominently over the front door. Also, the offer would take effect only after the Carnegie arrangement had been cancelled. Lida didn't want any rivals for the monument she erected to her revered father ^{-in-law.}

For a couple of weeks the city's Library Board fought back.

They got the state's attorney general to rule that since the Carnegie deal had been legally accepted, and because ordinances had been passed in support, it couldn't be canceled or declined, or repealed, whatever way you want to put it. The Carnegie library must be built as agreed, and on the Steiger corner as already planned and legally purchased. No way around it, firmly declared the attorney general (a friend of Twining and Ruegger, the Board members, Henry Ludlow pointed out).

Well, Lida of course just went and found herself a high-powered lawyer up in Madison--Burr Jones was his name--to say the opposite: Monroe certainly could abrogate its ^aagreement with Carnegie, stated Jones, and he backed it up with a sheaf of legal argument. That opinion made all the papers; just like the attorney general's position, so it looked like a big court battle was next.

It didn't happen. Once Burr Jones pointed out that the Carnegie money had not yet been received, and the Carnegie offer had been made by an assistant to the steel mogul, not in his own official hand, Colin Wright did the rest. It was Wright who'd begun the whole thing with Carnegie, and now he was fed up. Lacking an official offer in writing from Carnegie, ruled Wright, that left the way open for other interested parties. If the Ludlows cared to submit their offer in an official document, and without delay, that should do it. By that same afternoon a letter from the brothers was in the hands of the school district's secretary... It was



signed by the three Ludlow brothers. Very short, it named only three conditions: 1) the library be built "on lots 132 and 133 of LyBrand's Donation, City of Monroe, now occupied by the present library" 2) "That the Carnegie offer be not accepted;" 3) that the library "be called the 'Arabut^{Ludlow} Memorial Library,' with appropriate tablet at the main entrance."

That was that. When the news was sent to Carnegie that his money wasn't needed, but thanks anyway, a telegram came back from his assistant reading simply, "Mr. Carnegie is only too glad to give place to your and your brothers' offer, and he congratulates you on your benevolence." I guess by now old Andrew'd had enough of Monroe politics. On the same day as the telegram was sent, the papers reported that with his wife and daughter he'd sailed for a vacation in France.

On a May afternoon in 1905 the Arabut Ludlow Memorial Library

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opened for business. A large crowd piled in, resulting in a record check-out of books for a single day in Monroe, no fewer than 246, marveled the Times. "Most attractive and inviting," was the crowd's verdict on the interior arrangements. Chiseled in large letters on a big slab of granite spread atop the front door was old Arabut's name, and just inside the front entrance hung a huge head-and-shoulders photograph of the man himself looking young and friendly and with a scraggle of beard under his chin. Standing to admire it, a few of the older patrons smiled and said that Lida's portrait should be up there too.

1994 — Of course it didn't last forever. Almost a hundred years. Then in 20?? the library moved again, setting up nearer the Square in a big old building that used to be the Monroe Clinic. Has about five times as much space. The old Ludlow building is still there, still with old Arabut's name carved over the door, except that now it's the Chamber of Commerce. Even Lida couldn't have stopped that change. The old place had been spilling over for years.

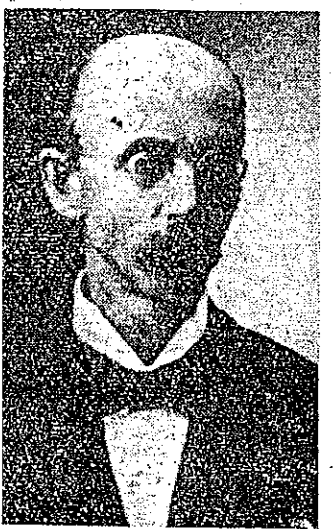
But she got her money's worth, you can say that much.

Ludlow Gift Ended Dispute on Library



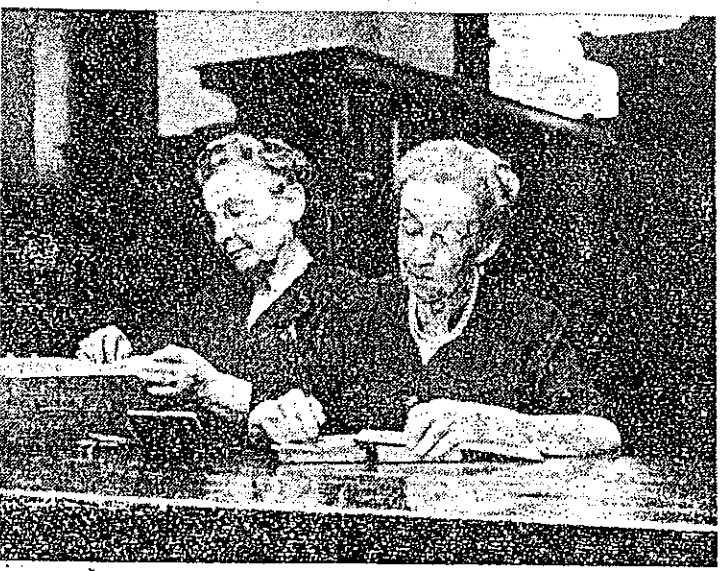
WILLIS LUDLOW
 Offered \$12,500 for Structure

HENRY LUDLOW
 Visualized New Library Here



EDWIN LUDLOW
 Planned Memorial for Father

ARABUT LUDLOW
 Honored by Sons' Memorial Gift



OPEN HOUSE HOSTESSES—Miss Jennie Gray (left), library assistant, and Mrs. Nellie W. Kohli, librarian here since 1919, will be among the hostesses at the Arabut Ludlow Memorial library's 50th anniversary open house here tomorrow. Mrs. Rose H. Johnson, children's librarian, also will be on hand for the event. (SumBrunnen photo)

Three men, who quietly settled the argument 50 years ago over acceptance of a Carnegie Foundation grant proposal by giving the city a new library, will be honored by the community and the Ludlow Memorial library staff at tomorrow's golden anniversary open house.

The open house, to be held from 2 to 5 p. m., will honor Willis, Edwin and Henry Ludlow who offered the library as a memorial to their father, Arabut Ludlow, and thereby gave Monroe a lasting institution.

Construction of the library by the Ludlows 50 years ago ended a debate about the Carnegie gift and the site where the library was to be built.

Townpeople had been talking about a city library for years, but nothing was done until the Carnegie foundation was approached for a grant. The chief argument came over the location picked by the city for new building (present location of Holland Manor).

Residents termed the site "a terrible place" and said the carriage works across the street and the pop factory behind the proposed structure would be too noisy.

City Council adopted Carnegie's \$12,500 offer, however, with the city obliged to buy the lot and provide upkeep money annually.

The Ludlows stepped in with their offer of the same sum, specifying the Linder property northwest of the square. City Council was puzzled then over the question whether an ordinance accepting the Carnegie grant was binding.

The controversy came to an end only when the Carnegie location was purchased by Dr. N. A. Loofbourn who announced plans for a public hospital. He paid \$3,800 for the property.

With the site gone, council saw its way clear to repeal the ordinance, despite direct negotiations being carried on by W. W. Churchill, a Monroe man who was in New York as an executive of Westinghouse. Churchill said Carnegie willingly stepped aside for the Ludlow brothers.

The location, with the front toward 9th street and across from North school, had housed county offices and was later occupied by the early library. An agreement with the United Telephone Co., as-

suring the building committee no structure would be built at the front of the adjoining lot has protected the pleasing appearance during the years.

The present library staff, which includes Mrs. Nellie W. Kohli, Mrs. Rose H. Johnson and Miss Jennie Gray, will be hostesses at tomorrow's open house.

Mrs. Kohli, librarian since 1919, has devoted most of her life to improving the facilities and systems. She took over from the city's first librarian, Miss Kathryn Smock.

Miss Gray came to the Arabut Ludlow Memorial library as library assistant Dec. 1, 1952, and brought with her a wealth of experience in community library work.

A native of Benton, Miss Gray came to Monroe from Platteville where she had been librarian two years. Prior to that Miss Gray was librarian at Benton for 15 years.

Mrs. Johnson took the position as children's librarian in 1943 and teaches library instruction to third, fourth, fifth and sixth graders during the school year and conducts the traditional "story hour" for children during the summer months.

Board of Education members at the end of the 1954 school year include Herbert T. Johnson, president; Mrs. Perle G. Guess, library committee chairman; Mrs. Arthur Wagner, Herman A. Stuessy, Rodney O. Kittelsen, Dr. Leslie G. Kindschi and Alvin H. Babler. E. O. Evans, superintendent of schools, is an ex-officio member.

Another phase of the anniversary, although not directly associated with the observance, is the Rock River Valley District meeting to be held in the library here next Wednesday.

Mrs. Guess will preside over the morning program scheduled to begin at 10 a. m. and Mrs. Johnson will preside over the afternoon event beginning at 2 p. m. Registration is planned for 9 a. m. and a luncheon will be held in the Universalist church at noon.

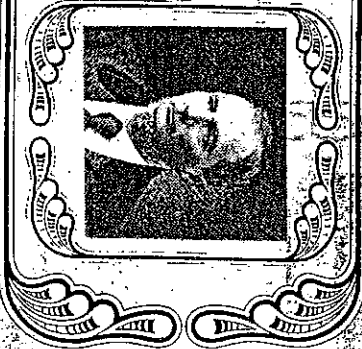
COFFEE PRICES DOWN
MILWAUKEE (AP)—The price per pound of nationally advertised coffee was cut 4 cents a pound—to about 95 cents—by a number of major markets today, and one chain store cut the price 6 cents.

MONROE PUBLIC LIBRARY
 925 16th Ave.
 Monroe, WI 53566

Arabut Ludlow gained his fame through hard work

Profile

The Monroe Evening Times
commemorative salute to
Monroe's memorable citizens



By PHIL TSCHUDY TIMES News Team

Throughout its history, Monroe has had many wealthy and influential businessmen. However, one of the more interesting of these persons was Arabut Ludlow.

Although his name is most widely associated today with the Arabut Ludlow Memorial Library located at 1505 9th St., Ludlow was better known as a farmer, merchant and banker.

Along with the financial backing of Judge John A. Bingham, the two operated the bank of Ludlow, Bingham & Co. in the late 1850s. The bank later became known as the First National Bank of Monroe.

In addition to banking, Ludlow was interested in land and farming. The census of 1877 showed that Ludlow owned 1,766 acres of farm land, which easily made him the largest single landowner in Green County.

There is no question that Ludlow was a very wealthy man. But he acquired that wealth not through inheritance but through hard work.

He was born in Burlington, Vt. June 21, 1818, the son of James and Rosana Ludlow. When he was seven, his mother died, and his father died seven years later. As a boy he work-

ed on his father's farm and later at the Waterman farm in Johnson, Vt. He also worked in a woolen mill owned by Waterman, and learned much about business from him.

After working several months as a mail carrier in Grand Rapids, Mich., Ludlow worked for his uncle for a year before moving to Chicago. There he was hired by a company to take goods to Green Bay in exchange for furs. After completing two round trips, he decided to go into business for himself.

His travels took him through Durand, Ill., Beloit, Monroe, Madison and then to Portage where he traded his goods for furs.

It was said that Ludlow was the first commercial traveler from Chicago to venture into southern Wisconsin. Ludlow's travels were often hampered by poor road conditions and inclement weather, but he continued with his business for six years, before moving to Monroe in 1846.

It was then that he married Caroline Sanderson of Winnebago County, Ill. During that year he opened a mercantile store in the old Lybrand building on the north side of the Square. As his business pro-

gressed, Ludlow built a three-story brick building and went into a partnership with Benjamin Chenoweth. The building was the first of its kind in Monroe.

In 1854, Ludlow bought 1,800 acres of land. According to biographical records, Ludlow owned over 2,100 acres of farm land in addition to property he owned in town. He built a large home north of Monroe which is now known as the Idle Hour Mansion restaurant.

When the Ludlow, Bingham & Company bank was reorganized as a state bank in 1856, Bingham was president, Ludlow, vice president and J. B. Galusha, cashier. In 1861, Ludlow and Asa Richardson took complete control of the bank. The bank became known as the First National Bank of Monroe in 1864, and Ludlow became president in 1875. He served until 1894 after which his son Henry took over.

Ludlow was very active in the Republican party. He served as a delegate in Philadelphia in 1872 when President Grant was nominated for a second term.

He was also one of the founders of the Green County Agricultural Society and served as its first treasurer. During the Civil War, Ludlow served as one of 15 citizens who investigated persons refusing to take the oath of loyalty to the Union.

Ludlow died April 5, 1896 at the age of 77. The Ludlows had seven children: Henry, Edwin, Irving, Willis, Addie, Nettie and Nellie.

After his death, the Monroe Sentinel paid tribute to him. "Mr. Ludlow's early life, like that of most successful men, was a struggle with adversity, manfully made and triumphantly crowned. . . . By intuition he grasped the probabilities of life and turned them into certainties."



The Arabut Ludlow Memorial Library

Written and drawn by Mark Wildman


A resource of knowledge and reading enjoyment, the Arabut Ludlow Memorial Library in Monroe is a historic facility enjoyed by all. Many of us can recall our introduction to the library system as a child. Almost beyond comprehension, our first thought might have been of the overwhelming thousands of books and millions of words contained by the facility. Though overwhelming, it was also exciting to speculate on the treasures of thoughts that we could explore and enjoy as will our decendents. A library is very definitely, the cornerstone of our educational system today.

The Arabut Ludlow Memorial Library was a gift offer to the school district, from Henry, Edwin and Willis Ludlow in March of 1904. The gift was in memory of their pioneer father, Arabut Ludlow. The library was meant for use by the entire community, and has certainly been enjoyed through the years. The building was completed in 1905.

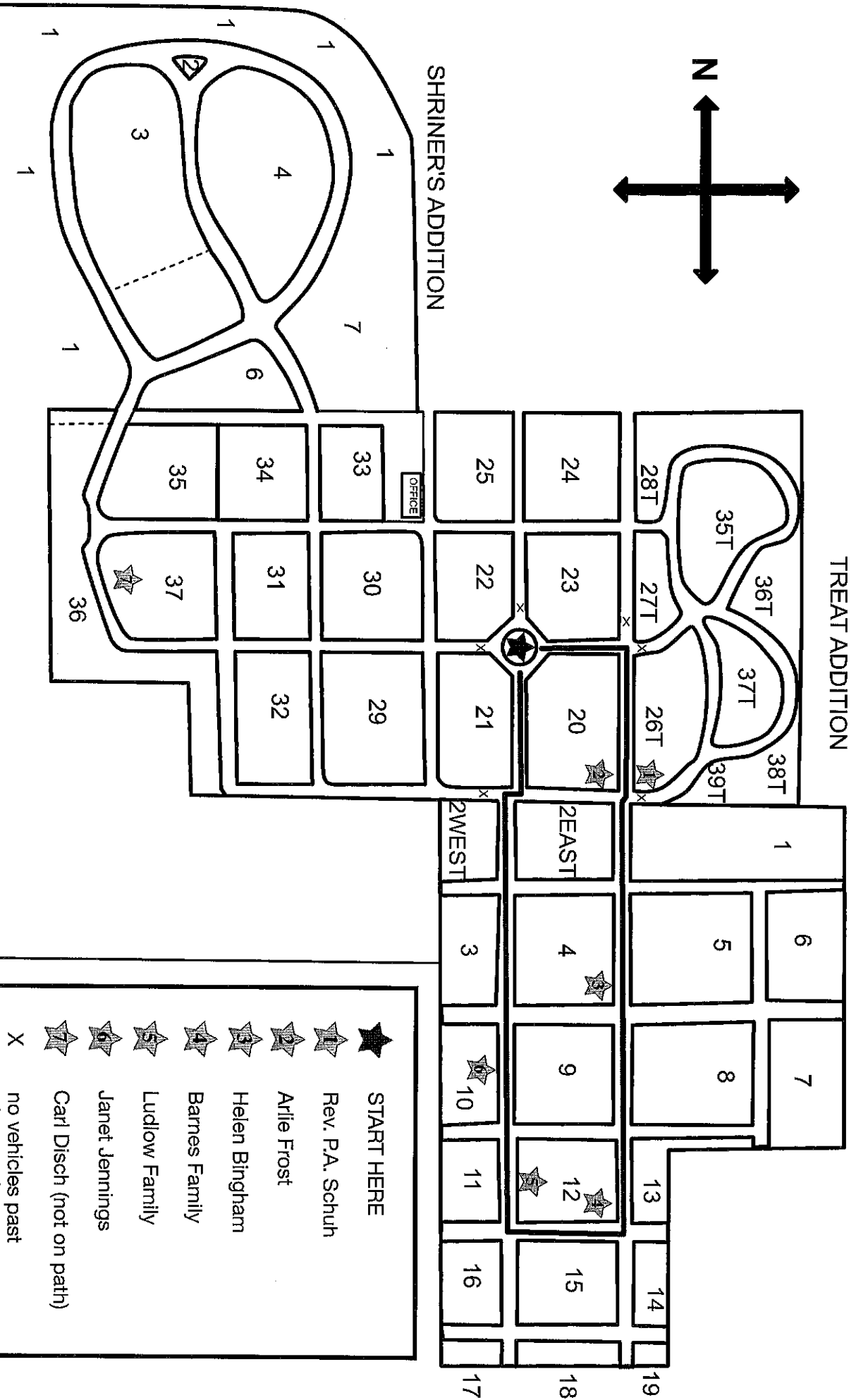
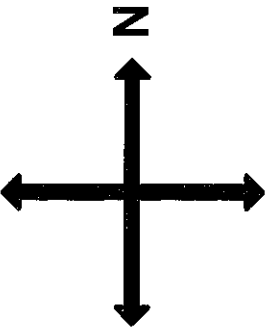
The building is described as being the purest example of "temple" Greek Revival style found anywhere in Monroe. It's majestic columns seem to exemplify the strength and significance of the library's place in our community.

A Madison architectural firm by the name of Claude & Starck had prepared the 1904 project plans. Similar structures of the same general plans were used in the construction of the Whitewater and De-lavan libraries.

Arabut Ludlow, for whom the library was built in memory of, was truly a significant contributor in the early development of Monroe. Though his name is most associated with the library today, Arabut Ludlow was much better known in his day as a farmer, merchant and banker. The 1877 census showed that he owned 1,766 acres of rural farm land and this very easily made Arabut Ludlow the single

largest Green County landowner. It is said that Arabut Ludlow was the very first commercial traveler from Chicago, venturing through Wisconsin's southern countryside prior to his settling in Monroe. Along with Judge John A. Bingham, the two men operated the Bank of Ludlow, Bingham & Co. during the late 1850's. The bank was known later as First National Bank of Monroe. 

GREENWOOD CEMETERY MONROE, WISCONSIN



HISTORY OF GREENWOOD CEMETERY

By:
Lillian DeNure and Debra Bailey Trail
Nov. 2002

The first village cemetery was platted in 1844 on West Payne St. (now 9th Street) in Monroe. This site was originally the Green County Teacher's College and is currently the Monroe Senior Center Building.

The first grounds were donated to Green County and consisted of Lot #12 in Russell's Donation. In late 1859, the Village purchased new, larger grounds and the deceased were removed to that location.

On July 27, 1920 the Greenwood Cemetery Association of Green County was formed. All the property and effects of Greenwood Cemetery as owned by the city of Monroe was turned over to the Association on Dec. 29, 1920, including the \$1200.00 in the city treasurer's office for the cemetery fund.

The first trustees were: N.E. McLaughlin, J.D. Dunwiddie, Miss M. Alice Treat, B.G. Treat, E.H. Gloege, W.F. Trukenbold, Mrs. C.S. Dodge, Louis Kohli, and Charles E. Shriner.

The first officers were: Charles E. Shriner, president; J.D. Dunwiddie, vice-president; B.G. Treat, secretary; and W.F. Trukenbrod, treasurer.

During the fall of 1920 the Treat lot was platted and available for sale on Dec. 29, 1920. And on April 19, 1922 the Association purchased 6 (out of 11 2/3 acres) from Charles E. Shriner for \$800 per acre with option to purchase the rest in the future for no more than \$800 per acre. These two new sections were named the Treat and Shriner additions.

The Cemetery's first superintendent was Samuel Bowden in 1878 along with his son-in-law, William Drake, as asst. sexton. In 1884 Mr. Drake became the Chief Sexton and remained as such for almost 50 years. It is estimated he dug at least 5000 graves in his time. (He also did the sexton work for The Calvary and Old Catholic Cemeteries.) Mr. Drake was interred in Greenwood Cemetery when he passed away on Sept. 14, 1936.

The next sexton/superintendent was Earl Summerli who was hired on Sept. 21, 1922. In 1928, Earl's son, Herbert T. Summerli was appointed sexton and held the position until 1978 when the current Superintendent/Secretary-Treasure, Greg Olson was appointed.

Bibliography:

1. "The History of Green County, Wisconsin" published by Union Publishing Co.; Springfield, IL., 1884.
2. "Form Cemetery Association", the *Monroe Sentinel*; July 28, 1920.
3. "William Drake, 90 years in City, Dies" the *Monroe Sentinel*; Sept. 14, 1936.
4. Green County Cemetery Association notes found at the cemetery.