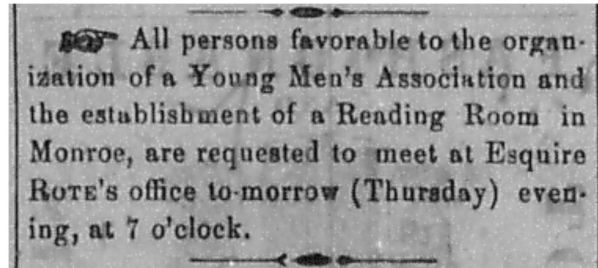


Starting to Form a Public Library in Monroe

I was “recently” asked where the first library in Monroe was located. It turns out that a simple answer is not possible because there were “a few smaller libraries” formed before the school district decided to take over the responsibility of maintaining a public library in the village. I’m going to tell you about the predecessors to the library in these three columns and, if my brain and body keep functioning all right, may give more detailed information about the more recent village/city library some day.

There was an announcement in the Monroe Sentinel on February 28, 1866 that anyone interested in “the organization of a Young Men’s Association and the establishment of a Reading Room” were requested to meet at Esquire Rhodes office the following evening. It was decided to “form a permanent association for the purpose of establishing a reading room, a library, and sustaining popular lectures.” Mr. A. Clark was appointed President and C. A. Booth, Secretary. A committee of three, T. G. Anderson, Rev. E. Conger and A. J. High, were appointed to draft a constitution and bylaws. Another committee of three, Alfred Clark, J. I. Weirich, and A. W. Potter, were appointed to solicit memberships and means. It was thought that the Good Templars Hall might be procured.



This article, which appeared in the Monroe Sentinel on February 28, 1866 is the first reference found in the Monroe newspapers that showed that people were thinking about forming a library in town.

The group learned at a meeting on March 9 that \$125.50 had already been given, “with a prospect of double the amount as soon as the organization was complete.” The Dramatic Amateurs planned to donate the profits of their entertainment to the YMA. The secretary was instructed to contact Frederick Douglass, at Chicago, to see if he could come speak.

The next meeting was set for March 20, where they adopted by-laws, received \$87 from the Dramatic Association, and set up a committee consisting of N. Churchill, T. G. Anderson, and Joseph Weirich to find a room for the association. All were asked to pay the Treasurer, W. P. Woodworth; anyone paying \$2.00 or more would become a member of the association by signing its constitution.

They appropriated \$100 to purchase “books, periodicals, and newspapers” at their meeting on May 22. Messrs. Bryant, Potter, and Conger “were appointed a committee to order the reading matter.”

Edwin E. Woodman, president, requested that young men attend a meeting on Friday evening, May 15, 1868 to discuss “enlarging and improving the library” and other actions. The next month they were “having their rooms whitewashed and otherwise generally refitted.”

It seems the name of this organization might have been changed to the Young Men’s Literary Association. At a meeting on June 1, 1866 General Bintliff proposed the plan “to raise \$1,000 for a Library.” He subscribed \$20; several others “signed \$10 each.”

Rules of the “reading room and library” were shared later in the month. It was open on Tuesday and Friday evenings only for members to access “its books, papers, and periodicals.” Members were to leave their name and the name and number of the book if they removed a book from the library. Each member was allowed to remove only one book at a time and was to return it within two weeks. Any member who violated the rules was fined \$.25 for each offense and would lose all privileges until the fine was paid.

At another meeting held on May 17, 1867 members were encouraged to solicit more books for the library. They were “instructed to visit our citizens and obtain as many books of historical, scientific, geological, theological, zoological, phrenological, agricultural, horticultural, educational, medical, and standard fictitious character as they can induce them to donate.” It was hoped that they would “raise from 500 to 800 good readable volumes” with the books already received. Charles A. Booth, Charles B. King, and Joseph Reitler were members who planned for the library to benefit “young men and women, youths and maidens, of this village.”

Several books were collected; they were listed in the July 10 Monroe Sentinel along with their donor. They had also earned \$66 through a strawberry festival, which had not been expended at the time. “The volumes have all been neatly covered with brown paper, and as soon as classified and numbered,

will be ready for readers. By consent of the Association, all persons donating one or more volumes are allowed the use of the library one year." W. W. Chadwick was the librarian.

The YMLA had rented the rooms that had been occupied by the Masonic Lodge, and planned to move their library and furniture as soon as the Masons moved into their new hall that September. They were "indebted to Miner & Dodge for lumber, James Norris for making, and Austin & Scovell for painting a handsome sign, which will be put up as soon as they move into the new rooms."

Another list of "fresh publications" was shared on May 27, 1868. President E. E. Woodman urged the citizens to become members so it may become an institution that "is [as] useful to the community as any other that can be named."

Unfortunately, I found only one more reference to this organization. On November 20, 1872 a very short article mentioned that "the Monroe literary club is to be revived and many a pleasant and profitable hour will be spent during the winter in discussing the perplexing questions of political and social reform." No more references were seen about this organization. It is unknown what happened to all of the books that were contained in the library in 1868.

How long would it be until Monroe got its permanent library?