A look into our past.

The early history of attempts to form the Elizabethtown Public Library is very sketchy. It is known from an article in the June 1881, Elizabethtown Chronicle, that an attempt was made to organize a public library at that early date. From the article we learn that "the first meeting for the purpose of establishing a free public library was held in the Horst's Hall (which was located on Center Square) in June of 1881. The meeting was attended by ladies and gentlemen, and from the character of the audience, it was felt the enterprise would be a decided success.

"The meeting was called to order, and on motion, Prof. E. Benjamin Bierman was unanimously elected chairman and S. R. Hackenberger secretary. The president made a few fitting remarks on the object of the meeting. He was followed by Rev. J. H. Pannebecker, pastor of the Reformed Church, with an able and well timed address. He said God has given us faculties and also given us means to improve them, and that idle minds as well as idle hands are generally found meddling in other people's business. That many are found willing but unable through pecuniary means to improve the mind, and for such as these a public library will be a blessing. Remarks were made by Rev. S. B. Howard, pastor of the Church of God, B. F. Baer, S. R. Hackenberger and William Wormley.

"The following committees were then appointed: On constitution and by-laws, Rev. J. H. Pannebecker, B.F. Baer, S. R. Hackenberger. As an executive committee, D.W. Balmer, Wm. Wormley, Rev. S. B. Howard, Annie L. Brubaker, Mary C. Eckstein, Mrs. S. Brubaker. On motion the meeting adjourned to meet at the same place on Tuesday evening, June 28, 1881. The public are cordially invited to attend."

What came of these efforts is unknown for by 1920 there was no public library in Elizabethtown. In 1986, Kathryn Nissley Herr provided the following history of the library.

In 1920, a group of young women interested in self-improvement bought a set of books entitled The Delphian Course and met in various homes to read and discuss them. These ladies became The Delphian Society.

The group soon conceived the idea of starting a public library, but met with discouragement. When one of them spoke to a prominent businessman about the project he said, "You'll never be able to start a library in this town." So the ladies allowed the idea to lie dormant until, in 1924, the following conversation was heard:

"My word, no library in Elizabethtown! I was shocked yesterday when I made that discovery."

It was the new member of The Delphian Society speaking.
“Yes,” said a younger member. “Why is it that we don’t have a library in our town?”

“Several attempts have been made to start one,” volunteered an older member. “But each time they’ve failed.”

“Well,” came with vehemence from another. “I think it’s about time we tried again.”

This time they succeeded. After months of work, under the leadership of Gladys Horner (Mrs. Galen), president of The Delphian Society, and the help of Helen B. Umbler of Lancaster, the great day arrived. On November 18, 1925, with due pomp and ceremony, the Library was born. It was a tiny room on the second floor of the I.O.O.F. building on South Market Street. Betty Ricker (Mrs. Paul) was the first librarian, assisted by members of the Society. Mrs. Ricker held her post for two and a half years when she was succeeded by Mary Alwine (Mrs. Frank).

During the next three years, the Delphians produced the following for the benefit of the library: A comic opera “Princess Bonnie” in 1926, a comedy, “Come Out of the Kitchen” in 1927, and “Peg O’My Heart” in January of 1928.

It was the intention of the Delphians to turn the Library over to the town as soon as it was running smoothly. With this purpose in mind, a Library Association was formed in November 1926. The townspeople, however, were not ready to assume the responsibility. It was decided therefore to disband the Association until a later date. The Delphian Society also disbanded and established a new organization, The Elizabeth Hughes Club, in April of 1928.

This group had as part of its activities a Library Department whose duty it was to conduct the affairs of the Library until it was deemed wise to reorganize a Library Association. In 1938, a board was elected, consisting of Mrs. Alwine, Mary W. Meckley, Ana Olweiler, (later Mrs. Thomas Needham), Ada Charleroi (Mrs. Louis), and Mabel Eshelman. Operating expenses and new books were made possible through annual door-to-door drives for funds planned by this board and conducted by the Elizabeth Hughes members and other cooperative townspeople. A portion of funds collected each year was set aside as a building fund.

After 15 years, the Library had 4,507 books. The circulation for 1954 was over 10,000 and 4,071 names were registered. There were 52 members in a book club and “Library Lines” appeared as a regular column in the Elizabethtown Chronicle. More space was needed, and in 1925 a second adjoining room was secured to accommodate the increasing number of books and library patrons.

Mrs. Alwine had served as Librarian from 1927 until 1953. She was followed by Myrtle Brown (Mrs. John), who served faithfully in crowded conditions until 1960.

In 1957 some Elizabeth Hughes members heard a rumor that a man in the town was trying “to take over the library,” and they were very much disturbed. The truth was that the Chairman of the Community Service Committee of the Rotary Club, Ira R. Herr, had suggested to Rotary the project of providing a building for the Library. Dr. J. Hoffman Garber, president of Rotary in 1958, appointed Mr. Herr chairman of a Library Committee. Other members were Attorney Jack B. Horner, W.H. Hornafius, Jr., Nevin W. Fisher and Harold S. Martin. Their first meeting was held January 21, 1959.
A week later there was a joint meeting held of the Library Board of the Elizabeth Hughes Society and the Rotary Committee. The Elizabeth Hughes Library Board members at that time were Mrs. Brown, Kathryn Herr (Mrs. Ira R.), Verna Kuntzelman (Mrs. H. D.), Esther Musser (Mrs. Henry), Anna Needham (Mrs. Thomas) and Betty Copenhaver (Mrs. John E.) who was then president of the Society. These two groups passed a resolution recommending a joint organization to be voted on by both clubs.

The following month the Rotary Club approved the resolution and the Elizabeth Hughes Society held a meeting at Mill Road School to consider the matter. It was at this meeting that Mr. Herr convinced the Elizabeth Hughes members that no one was trying to take the Library from them, but that the Rotary members wanted to help find a suitable building. The Society then approved the resolution. A non-profit corporation was formed and the Public Library had finally become a community project. The members of the corporation were considering locations for a new building when they learned that the Mount Calvary Church building on North Hanover and Oak Streets would be sold as soon as the congregation approved plans for a new building of their own.

Negotiations with church officials were begun in July. Two months later, in September 1959, papers were signed, transferring the property to the Public Library Association.

Architects, Coleman and Coleman, were employed to draw up plans for necessary remodeling. Final blueprints were studied at a Board meeting February 17, 1960. Warren Snyder was selected as General Contractor, with John Fullerton, Sr. in charge of lighting.

In April, plans were made for a fund raising campaign, with a goal of $75,000. There were still pessimists around, however, and one of them, this time a professional man, was heard to say, "You'll never be able to raise that amount in Elizabethtown." Nevertheless, the campaign, with K. Ezra Bucher as manager, was launched at a public dinner meeting May 9.

William Klein, of the Klein Chocolate Company, provided the challenge gift, when he pledged the cost of the building, $30,000, provided that the community give $60,000. In June, the campaign committee found themselves only $5,214.22 short of the new goal of $90,000.

The property was transferred on December 19, 1960. Remodeling was begun in January 1961 and completed April 18, when keys were turned over to the Library Board.

Events were now happening in rapid succession. April 22 was moving day. This is how Lois K. Herr described the events of that day in an article published in the Elizabethtown Chronicle on April 27, 1961.

"Over 8,000 books were taken from the town library Saturday, and none were signed out. This gigantic circulation did not indicate a sudden interest in reading, even though it was National Library Week, nor was anything illegal involved. What it does indicate, however, is that the Elizabethtown community had been successful in its drive for new and better library facilities.
Outgrown Church Becomes Elizabethtown Culture Center
Sunday May 14, 1961

A modern church outgrown by its congregation has a new existence next door.

The church's hall was to be used for the library.

Truly a community project, the big library move was accomplished with the aid of the Jaycees, the Explorer Scouts, members of DeMolay and members of the Library Board.

The dreams of 36 years had become reality. The cooperation of individuals in the Elizabethtown community had been magnificent. With $8,032.38 contributed by the Elizabeth Hughes Society building fund, and cash and pledges received in the campaign, the goal of $90,000 had been surpassed. More than $100,000 was finally received.

Alice Heilman, formerly librarian of Elizabethtown College, had been appointed Librarian in 1960, with Mrs. Brown as assistant. On moving day, Mrs. Brown and Miss Eshelman prepared the books for removal, and Mrs. Heilman assisted by Mrs. Joseph Llewellyn, Donegal School Librarian, placed them on shelves in the new building.

The 21st day of May 1961, an impressive program was held in the Elizabethtown Area High School Auditorium to dedicate the library.
In 1960, Ezra K. Bucher drove his truck and Larry Stauffer, a Boy Scout, helped move books to the new library.

her term of office, the library benefited greatly from the estates of Anne Keller, Effie L. Shenk, and Lee Barnes.

The income from these estates, wisely invested, has helped in the ever-rising costs of operation. The Elizabethtown Area School Board and the Borough Council have made significant contributions, too. State appropriations have been received through a very satisfactory affiliation with the Lancaster County Library. The County Commissioners have also been supportive. We must not forget the contributions of labor and materials given by several local businessmen when work was done on the building and grounds.

A group called the Friends of the Library has been active for several years, conducting book sales and assisting in other ways. Citizens of the community have responded well to annual requests for funds.

The staff changed through the years. Mrs. Heilman was succeeded by Emma Engle, Rhoda Tuck and Susan Bowser, our current librarian. Mrs. Brown, before her retirement, conducted yearly art shows which were very popular. She also assisted board member Clarence Enterline, who arranged Sunday afternoon programs, after which other board members served refreshments.

The 1986 Library staff consisted of one full-time librarian, Miss Bowser; Mary Karnes, who had been a capable assistant for 25 years; Kay Lynne Orth, children’s librarian; and Jo Holmgren. Former children’s librarians were Anne Becker, Anne Risser, Mary Kay Hornbeck, Linda Homa, and Elizabeth Kessler.

Also, there have been many faithful volunteers. In 1985, there were 50 volunteers (30 children, 20 adults). They were needed, for the library was a busy place. In addition to books and periodicals, records, filmstrips, films, and videotapes were circulated.

For children the staff conducts story hours, special programs such as Dinosaur Day, Friday the 13th, and Carnival Day, Tall Tale contest, summer reading programs, film series, and a Halloween parade for small children. There is also an adult reading program.

The Library had indeed grown, as shown by a few statistics:

- In 1925 there were 1,121 books. In 1986, there were 28,000 books plus 108 periodicals.
- The circulation in 1954 was 16,196. In 1985 it was 95,000.

The program was followed by an open house at the new library, where Mrs. Needham cut the ribbon and Mrs. Heilman formally opened the doors. People literally flocked in. Visiting librarians, other visitors and townspeople expressed surprise and pleasure upon seeing the new facilities. Four of the ladies who had worked so hard to establish a library in 1925 were present: Mrs. W. G. Hain, Mrs. Andrew Ricker, Mrs. Paul Ricker, and Mrs. Vere Treichler.

Then began the task of operating a larger library in its own home. Mr. Herr served as president of the board until 1967. He was followed by C. E. Disney, then by Mrs. Needham. During
The budget in 1977 was $38,835. In 1986, it was $74,000.

Yes, we have reason to celebrate our 25th anniversary at this location. "Once the home of the spoken word, the building now houses many of the great written works of the world which bring additional education, enjoyment, and culture to the people of Elizabethtown."
Good Place For Library

The children have a library of their own in the new Elizabethtown Public Library. Busyly previewing the volumes on hand above are Carol Newcomer, five at left, and Mary Alice Heilman, two and a half (May 14, 1961).