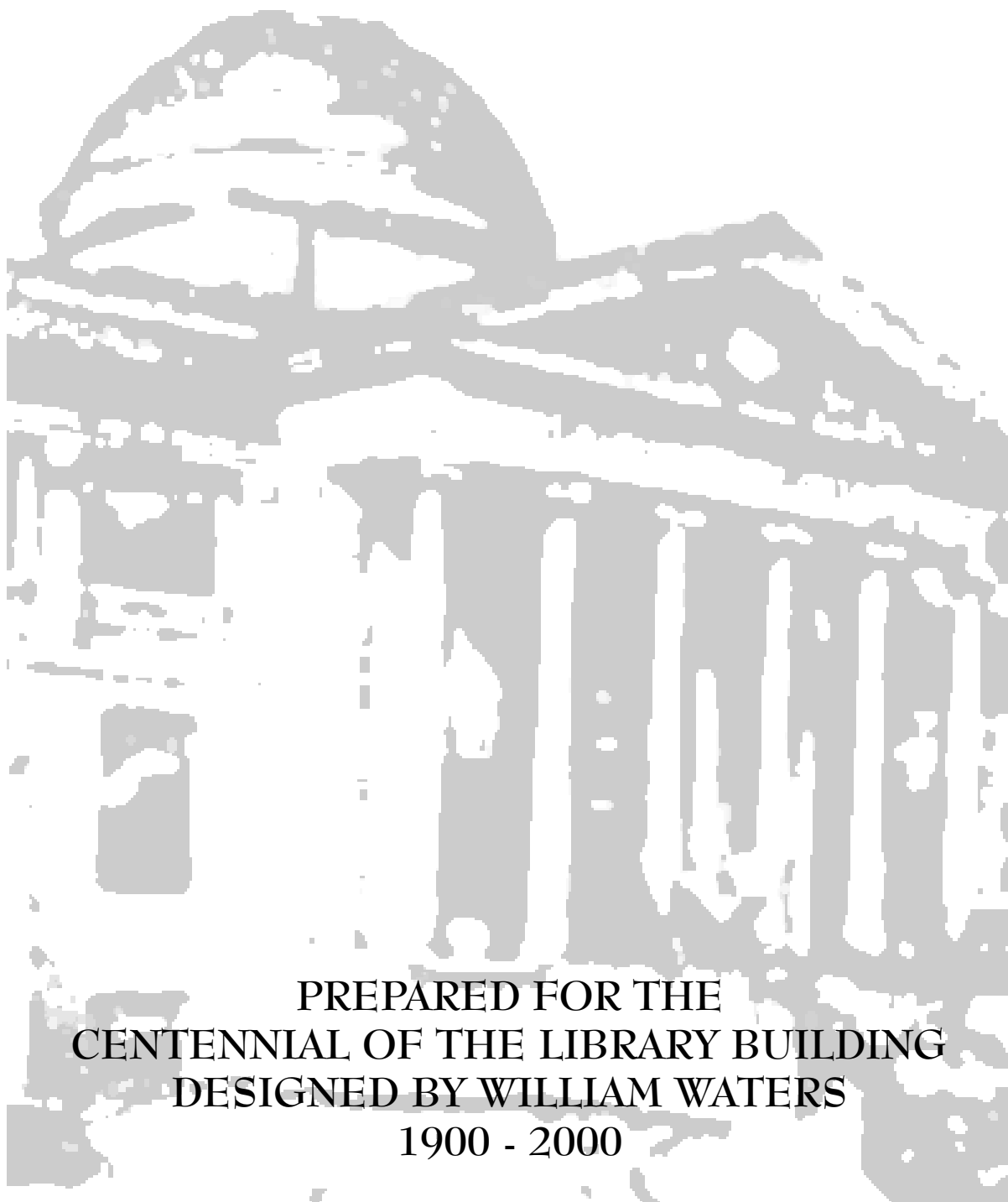


# ARCHITECTURE AND ART OF THE OSHKOSH PUBLIC LIBRARY

## A HISTORY AND GUIDE



PREPARED FOR THE  
CENTENNIAL OF THE LIBRARY BUILDING  
DESIGNED BY WILLIAM WATERS  
1900 - 2000

# A CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

## The Founding

A free public library for Oshkosh was approved by a referendum on May 29, 1895 and opened in a room in City Hall on April 1, 1896. A permanent and fitting home was to be built with a combination of private and public funds.

The estate of Mr. and Mrs. Marshall Harris provided the major gift of \$75,000. Marshall Harris was a prominent Oshkosh lumberman who died in 1890. His widow, Abbie Danforth Harris, who died June 24, 1895, used her will to create a trust fund for library construction and operation. Its conditions required the community to match the bequest within three years of her death. While private fund-raising efforts elicited the promise of a \$25,000 gift from former U.S. Senator Philetus Sawyer, sufficient funds were not forthcoming. The women of the Twentieth Century Club were strong supporters of the effort to obtain political support for a city bond issue. On May 31, 1898, the Oshkosh City Council voted to bond for \$50,000 to secure the \$75,000 bequest. With the proceeds from the sale of the bonds and the contribution from Senator Sawyer, the city met the requirements on June 22, 1898.

After six months of debate over the merits of plans submitted by three Oshkosh architects, the City Council finally approved the recommendation of the library's board of trustees and its own library committee on December 20, 1898. Well-known local architect William Waters was the choice.

William Waters was born in Franklin County, New York in 1843. He studied for a time at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, NY before moving to Oshkosh in 1867. Oshkosh was experiencing a building boom due to a series of major fires and the prosperity of the lumber industry. Waters design work began with the Oshkosh Normal School (UW-Oshkosh) in 1869. He designed houses, schools, churches, banks, courthouses, stores and public buildings in Oshkosh, the Fox River Valley and Wisconsin.

In 1893 he won the commission for the Wisconsin building at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. He continued his architectural practice in Oshkosh for many years. Waters died December 14, 1917.

## William Waters' Library

Ground-breaking occurred in the spring of 1899 and the cornerstone was laid in May of 1899. The building opened on Labor Day, September 3, 1900. The opening of the library was extensively covered in the *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*.

The building is in the Neo-classical style. It features a raised main floor with broad steps from Washington Avenue to a portico with six Ionic columns. The central interior room, originally known as the delivery room, is surmounted by a dome forty-six feet above the floor. It is flanked by reading rooms, alcoves and offices that served various functions over the years. The west room was set aside for children by early in 1901. The special multi-level bookstack that initially held 30,000 volumes had an ultimate capacity of 100,000 volumes.

Initially the second floor was not used for library purposes, being reserved for a lecture room, a museum and future expansion of library services. A museum was opened in second floor space in 1905. It separated from the library in 1924 and moved to the Edgar Sawyer mansion on Algoma Boulevard, the building it still occupies. The Children's Room was moved to the second floor in 1923.

A major change in 1951 was flooring across the rotunda gallery opening and adding a ceiling that closed off the dome. This provided space for a meeting room that could be used for children's programs adjacent to the second floor Children's Room.

## 1967 Addition

By the 1960s the crowding of public and staff and growth of the collection made an addition necessary. The firm of Irion and Reinke designed the contemporary addition to the constraints of site and money available. An L-shaped public space was added to the west and north sides of the Waters building. Only the short south and long west frontage were visible from the street. A stone cladding was chosen for the walls to blend with the original structure. A mezzanine level was matched to that of the main floor of the original structure. A separate section was built on the east side to house a bookmobile and van garage, outreach services and a boiler room. This part was completed in 1967. By the fall of 1968 conversion of the old main floor to a children's department entered from stairs in the new southwest corner lobby was completed along with other changes.

Because of a federal grant under the Library Services and Construction Act, the Wisconsin Library Commission became involved in the project and required that space be provided for support of a future multi-county library system. The required space was provided in a basement under the addition. The Winnefox Library System serving Green Lake, Marquette, Waushara and Winnebago Counties came into being in 1977. Fond du Lac County joined in 2000.

By 1989 space for collections and public seating was again clearly inadequate. After study of alternatives, the library board decided to expand on the existing site. A referendum to do so at a cost of \$8.4 million failed in November of 1990.

## 1993 Expansion and Renovation

To secure the expansion of the library, representatives of an anonymous donor approached William Frueh, the city manager, in the spring of 1992 to offer a financial contribution. The conditions eventually set for the gift echoed those of the Harris bequest in 1895. The City could claim up to \$5.5 million by matching the gift through bonding action of the City Council. The preliminary design budget estimate of \$11 million was cut by the Council to \$10 million, forfeiting \$500,000 of the offered gift. Another anonymous donor provided \$200,000 to offset some of the loss. Through careful management of the gifts and bond proceeds, and deferral of the acquisition of property for parking lot development, the full building envisioned in the preliminary design was built. Final project cost, including the parking, came to \$10.9 million.

The entire library operation was moved to a city-owned warehouse at 40 Wisconsin St. in February 1993. The former Radford Company facility was used as the library until September 1994. That building was demolished in 2000.

The firm of Howard, Needles, Tammen and Bergendoff of Milwaukee, Wisconsin was selected as the project architect. They associated with Frye Gillan Molinaro Architects of Chicago, Illinois, a firm known for sensitive additions to historic library structures. Project manager for HNTB was George Owen, AIA. G. Charles Bruscato, AIA, was the project architect. Design architect was Lonny Frye, AIA, of FGMA and Barbara Arendt of FGMA was the design associate. C.R. Meyer was the construction management firm.

The design is a U-shaped structure embracing the 1900 Waters building. In the spring of 1993 the roof, walls, and mezzanine level of the 1967 addition were removed, revealing the Waters building which was to become one of the focal points of the new design. It incorporates the basement and ground floor of the 1967 addition, most visibly on the lower level where the “KidSpace” section for younger children uses the north half of the basement.

The entire second floor was new construction in 1993, structural columns having been sunk into the 1967 foundation and the overall footprint of the building increased to the north. The new structure is backed off from the Waters building, providing the view of its stone north exterior wall on the first and second floors. The second floor skylight, a signature of Lonny Frye’s work, is centered on the dome of the Waters building. The new and restored library opened in October 1994.

After her death in 1996, it was learned that Alberta Kimball, co-founder and retired head of the Miles Kimball Company, had provided the \$5 million gift. The information was revealed with the consent of her daughter Mrs. Mary Anhaltzer and her business associate Ted Leyhe who had an active role in arranging her donation.

# THE GUIDE TO THE BUILDING

## Entrance

The building is entered from the pedestrian plaza on the north side of the building. The north facade is symmetrical and centered on the axis of the old Washington Avenue entrance and the dome. The excavated and terraced gardens flanking the entrance provide daylight to the lower level, a story garden for the Children's Room, and an emergency exit from the lower level.

The stone-panel exterior walls came from Winona, Minnesota. The cantilevered window bays add visual interest to the exterior and provide needed space at the second level. The lettering is Roman, an alphabet that did not use "U", and matches that on the classical south façade.

## Lobby

Stenciled decoration of the lobby ceiling is drawn from motifs taken from the bookstack stair railing of the Waters building. The major railing element was recast and used for the new rotunda railings.

All levels of the building are served by elevators and the rest rooms on each floor are handicapped accessible.

The Circulation Desk on the left is the entry to the library operations areas concentrated on this level. These areas are not open to the public. The east side includes the circulation work space, bookmobile and van garage, service entrance and freight elevator, mail room, technical processing and cataloging. The basement of the 1900 building, at the same level as the new first floor, houses computer operations and printing services.

Administrative offices for Oshkosh Public Library and the Winnefox Library System are located in the southwest corner with public entry from the A-V shelving area.

## First Floor Public Services

Moving forward from the lobby into the public space, one's eye is caught by the bench and cap of a light well that provides a preview of KidSpace on the lower level. To the right are the popular materials collections of the library: new books, videos, audiocassettes, CDs, paperbacks, fiction and newly developed collections. To the left are the large print books, photocopier, and Friends Store.

## Magazine and Newspaper Reading Room

The reading room for current newspapers and magazines is straight ahead. This three-story space was occupied by the cast-iron structure of the original three-level bookstack, removed in the 1993 renovation. This room is at the basement level of the 1900 building. The small balcony is at the location of the entrance from the historic main floor. The cast iron brackets that attached wooden shelves to the structure have been used to create small bookshelves and other souvenirs sold by the Friends of the Library in their store adjacent to the Circulation Desk.

The tables in this room, the local history and genealogy areas and Great Hall were part of the furnishings of the 1900 library. The original tops were replaced by ones covered with battleship linoleum. The tables were used in staff and storage areas until they were identified in photographs examined for the restoration project. The oak veneer tops and the Mission-style chairs were crafted by the Buckstaff Company of Oshkosh to a design by Lonn Frye. The tables and chairs throughout the 1993 building are by Buckstaff, as are the service desks with the decorative design by Frye.

The photographs on the walls in this room are of the statues and monuments in Oshkosh funded or partially funded by John Hicks and the trust fund he left to continue his interest in public sculpture. A list of the monuments is available on the counter to the far left.

John Hicks was publisher of the *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, United States Minister to Peru from 1889-1892 and ambassador to Chile in 1905, as well as a public benefactor, and long-time member of the library board. He was one of the subscribers to the fund that commissioned busts of Marshall Harris and Philetus Sawyer for new library in 1899. These are found in the Great Hall.

Hicks donated marble busts of George Washington and Benjamin Franklin by Preston Powers to the library in 1902. The Washington bust is in the window of this room. The original Franklin bust is at the Oshkosh Public Museum, transferred there when the museum separated from the library in 1924. The Franklin bust now on display was formerly at the *Oshkosh Northwestern* offices and given to the library when the paper was sold out of the family of Oliver Hardy, Hicks' partner, in 1998. The antique small bronze Chinese lions were acquired by Hicks in Hong Kong in 1911 and were also given to the library in 1998.

The bronze bust of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was given to Longfellow School by Hicks in 1915. It was given to the library when the school was demolished.

The bust of Oshkosh, a chief of the Menominee for whom the city is named, is a more recent piece, the gift of an anonymous donor in 1997. It is cast of hydrocal from a sculpture by Bernard P. Barwick of Madison, Wisconsin. It was put on display in 1998.

# FIRST FLOOR ART

## West Wall

### DARLENE OELRICH MEMORIAL

"READ" Poster featuring Elvis Presley  
American Library Association poster series  
Given by friends and co-workers at the Buckstaff  
Company in 1995.

Darlene Oelrich, who was killed in 1994, had worked  
on the Oshkosh Public Library contract at the  
Buckstaff Company.

### SUNDAY MORNING

By Carlton Kusche  
1873-1943  
Oshkosh, Wisconsin  
Oil on canvas  
Given by Mrs. Nile J. Behncke in 1967

Kusche worked as a postal carrier in Oshkosh. He  
had studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and with  
the noted American artist William Merritt Chase. Af-  
ter his death many of his paintings went to his friend  
Nile Behncke and it is one of those which was given  
to the library.

## North Wall

### JOYFUL SPRING

By Nile Jurgen Behncke  
1892-1954  
Oshkosh, Wisconsin  
Watercolor  
Given by Mrs. Nile J. Behncke in 1968

Nile Behncke was director of the Oshkosh Public Mu-  
seum from 1926 until his death in 1954. He was a  
well-known artist who exhibited throughout the United  
States. His work was concentrated in watercolor. Mrs.  
Behncke was chairman of the art department at Wis-  
consin State University - Oshkosh until her retirement  
in 1963. At her death she left a bequest of \$131,000  
to the Oshkosh Public Library as well as amounts to  
the museum and her church.

Three other Nile Behncke original watercolors given  
by his widow are in the collection of the Oshkosh  
Public Library and hang in the Administrative Offices:

- ♦ *The Red Sail*  
(*Ephraim Wisconsin Regatta*)
- ♦ *Three Cans*  
The rear passage of the former Wisconsin Public  
Service Building in downtown Oshkosh.

### ♦ *Through the Archway*

A view of the Public Service Building and the  
former Oshkosh National Bank.

Mrs. Behncke also provided an oil on canvas by her  
father-in-law Gustav Behncke, 1852-1937, entitled  
*Speaking at Sea* which also hangs in the Administrative  
Offices. It depicts two ocean-going packets, the  
Dreadnaught and the Daniel Webster. The paintings  
can be viewed upon request during normal office  
hours.

## East Wall

### COSMOS

By Karen Gibbs  
Oshkosh, Wisconsin

Given in memory of Margaret Clark by Oshkosh Fine  
Arts Association in 1994.

### MARK E. GRUENWALD MEMORIAL

Poster featuring Marvel Comic characters created or  
edited by Mark Gruenwald.  
Printed with ink containing Mark's ashes.  
1996

Mark Gruenwald was a native of Oshkosh who be-  
came Chief Executive Editor of Marvel Comics. He  
was born June 18, 1953, the son of Myron and Norma  
Gorges Gruenwald. He died August 12, 1996. The  
poster was the gift of his widow Catherine. His estate  
provided a bound collection of his work for Marvel  
Comics.

## Behind Information Desk

### BLACK MANED LION

By John Ruthven, Columbus, Ohio  
Limited edition print from his Safari Series.

Given in memory of Leo Duren, 1898-1974, library  
staff member, by his wife Hazel, daughter Alice and  
son Robert in 1975.

Over the years the Friends of the Library purchased  
reproductions of famous paintings and some original  
works and prints by local artists for a circulating col-  
lection. Circulation was discontinued in 1997 and  
the reproductions sold. The library retained the works  
of local artists and any other originals in the collec-  
tion. Some of these may be displayed in the library at  
any given time.

## SECOND FLOOR

The new building is best appreciated from the area at the top of the stairs. The symmetry of the 1993 addition and its alignment on the axis of the Waters building is most apparent here. The outside north wall of the Waters building is revealed to establish the relationship with the historic structure. The soaring space of the contemporary center with its tubular steel frame and translucent skylight with the view of the dome through the clear south window lifts the spirit.

The bookstack to the west houses the circulating nonfiction collection. To the east are the reference and local history collections with early Winnebago County plat maps hanging on the walls.

### **The Waters Building Great Hall, Rotunda and Dome**

Access to the restored area is from stairs on left by the pamphlet files or from the elevator on the right in the nonfiction area. The floor is designated 2W (Waters) and the elevator door opens on the opposite side into an alcove. The balcony and old front stairway are open only on special occasions and escorted tours for security reasons.

The Waters building was restored to approximately to its original state. The marble floor was uncovered after carpeting used for the Children's Department in 1967 was removed. The marble wainscoting and the original woodwork were stripped of paint and refinished. Missing window frames on the east and west walls and other elements recreated to the same dimension and design.

The space houses the Genealogy Collection funded primarily by the Mabel Rasmussen Trust Fund and the Stephen Zellmer Trust Fund. The Great Hall, under the dome, is used for special events and can seat up to one hundred people.

The dome rises 46 feet above the marble floor. The dome was reopened after a floor constructed across the second floor opening in 1951 was removed. Removal of a ceiling revealed flaking decorative stenciling which was traced and repainted after plasterwork was completed. Fire safety systems were also installed.

The filament light ring recreates an original feature of the building. The reproduction chandeliers and sconces are used to recreate a sense of the originals that worked off both gas and electricity.

### **Main Stairwell**

#### **MOUNT OF THE HOLY CROSS**

1881

By Mark Robert Harrison

Died Dec. 6, 1894

Oshkosh and Fond du Lac Wisconsin

Given by Moses Hooper in 1900.

Harrison was born in England, moved to the U. S. at an early age, and lived in New York and Virginia before moving to Oshkosh in 1849. After an unsuccessful business venture, he moved to Fond du Lac in 1852 and concentrated on his painting. His work was well-known in the Midwest. "Mount of the Holy Cross" is a painting of a mountain of the same name in Colorado.

### **East Stair Alcove**

This room contains portraits of some of the founders of the Oshkosh Public Library.

#### **MARY L. OLCOTT**

1837-1924

Oil on canvas by L. Merton Gruenhagen, 1907

Mary Olcott was born in New York. She came to the Oshkosh area as a young girl and attended one of the early schools in the community. She placed a high value on education and learning and continued her association with her schoolmates through the Old School Girls Club who commissioned her portrait.

Miss Olcott was librarian of the Oshkosh Library Association, which operated a membership library and reading room, from 1872 until it closed in 1891. She was an early advocate of a public library, open freely to all, for Oshkosh. This became a reality with a successful referendum in 1895. She became its librarian when it opened in a room in City Hall on April 1, 1896. She continued in that post until 1900 when Miss Emily Turner, a graduate of the library school of the Pratt Institute, was named chief librarian. Miss Olcott became the reference librarian, a position she held until her official retirement in 1918 at the age of 81.



### **PORTRAIT OF MARSHALL HARRIS**

From a photograph

Harris was born in New Hampshire in 1826 and moved to Wisconsin in 1856. He came to make his fortune in the Wisconsin lumber industry, eventually building a mill on the south side of the Fox River in Oshkosh. Harris was a member of the Oshkosh Library Association. He was an active participant in the drive for a free public library. He died in September 1890, leaving his entire estate to his wife after a referendum to establish a public library failed earlier in the year. It had been expected that he would make a gift toward the public library.

### **PORTRAIT OF PHILETUS SAWYER**

From a photograph

Sawyer was born in Rutland County, Vermont in 1816, moving to New York State as a child. He came to Wisconsin in 1847 with some cash and the ability to operate a sawmill. In 1849 he entered the lumber business in Oshkosh in which he made a fortune. He successfully speculated in timberland in northern Wisconsin. He expanded his interests to include investments in banking and railroads. Beginning in local politics, Sawyer served as an U.S. Representative from 1865-1875 and as an U.S. Senator from 1881-1893. He made substantial donations to area institutions, including \$25,000 toward the Oshkosh Public Library to claim the Harris gift. Sawyer died March 29, 1900.

## **Great Hall and Rotunda**

### **BUST OF MARSHALL HARRIS**

White marble

Commissioned for the Oshkosh Public Library from Preston Powers, Florence Italy. Funded by subscription. Placed in the library in the fall of 1900.

### **BUST OF PHILETUS SAWYER**

White marble

Commissioned for the Oshkosh Public Library from Preston Powers, Florence Italy. Funded by subscription. Placed in the library in the fall of 1900.

### **BUST OF JOHN HICKS**

White marble

Sculpted by Gaetano Trentanove, 1858-1937  
Donated by Trentanove, 1912.

### **PORTRAIT OF ABBIE HARRIS**

By L. Merton Gruenhagen, Oshkosh, Wisconsin

Oil on canvas

1907

Commissioned for the Oshkosh Public Library and funded by subscription.

Abbie (or Abby) Danforth was born in Maine in 1822. She married Marshall Harris and they had one child, a daughter, Nellie, who died in 1880. Mr. Harris died in 1890. His widow continued to live in their home until her death on June 24, 1895. Her will created a trust fund, finally valued at \$75,000 including the home at Washington and Jefferson Sts., for a public library to be built and maintained on that site.

### **PORTRAIT OF ALBERTA KIMBALL**

From a photograph

Oil on canvas

1998

By Benjamin Donald McCready

Whitewater, Wisconsin

Commissioned by the Oshkosh Public Library and funded by subscription.

After her death in 1996, it was learned that Alberta Kimball, co-founder and retired head of the Miles Kimball Company, had provided the \$5 million gift for the 1993 expansion and renovation of the Oshkosh Public Library. The information was revealed with the consent of her daughter Mrs. Mary Anhaltzer and her business partner Ted Leyhe who had an active role in arranging her donation to the library. The portrait was hung in 1999 in appreciation of her generous gift to the people of Oshkosh.

Alberta Soger was born in Nuremberg, Germany in 1906 and emigrated to Milwaukee, Wisconsin with her family in 1913. She married Miles Kimball in 1926. They moved to Oshkosh in 1930 and co-founded one of the nation's first mail order firms offering personalized Christmas cards and gifts in 1934. Miles Kimball died in 1949 and Alberta Kimball became president of the company. She held that position until the company was sold in 1980 and served as chairman until 1990. Her business interests included radio and newspaper operations, Park Plaza Mall, and other real estate and industrial operations. She made significant charitable and civic contributions during her lifetime in the Oshkosh area through the Miles Kimball Foundation and the Alberta S. Kimball Charitable Foundation. She died October 27, 1996.

## **CLOCK**

Tobey & Co., Chicago  
Clock case of mahogany.  
Works by Elliott of London.  
Westminster and Whittington chimes

Donated in 1901 with \$500 raised from a dancing party given in support of efforts to raise the match for the Harris Bequest. Organizers were Mrs. J. W. Greenwood, Mrs. E. M. Crane, Mrs. M. H. Eaton, Mrs. D. M. Campbell, and Mrs. M. E. Rounds.

## **COSTAL SCENE OF NORTH WALES**

by G. A. (George Augustus) Williams  
British artist, active 1841-1885

Given in honor of Leonard Archer, Director of the Oshkosh Public Library from 1958-1978 by the Friends of the Library at the time of his retirement in 1978.

## **Dome Gallery**

### **FOREST VIEW IN THE HIMALAYAS DARJEELING**

1892  
By Ludwig Hans Fischer  
1848-1915

Given in memory of Thomas Daly, banker, member of the Oshkosh Public Library Board from 1899 to 1920 and Board President from 1910 to 1920, by his nieces Mrs. Robert McMahon and Mrs. Katherine Hawley in 1933.

Ludwig Hans Fischer was an Austrian artist. The painting was owned by Thomas Daly who purchased it at the Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893. It was one of the paintings that received honorable mention in the art display there according to the *Daily Northwestern* article of October 13, 1933, the day it was first hung in the library. The painting was restored in 1991.

## **West Elevator Alcove**

### **THE PIONEERS**

By Gustav Behncke  
1852-1937

Oil on canvas  
Oshkosh, Wisconsin

Given by the Behncke family in 1946.

Gustav Behncke was born in Hamburg, Germany October 2, 1852 and came to Oshkosh in the 1870s. He had traveled extensively and was a member of an early party that went into the Black Hills in 1874 in search of gold. By profession he was an artist and painter/decorator. Behncke was one of the early church decorators in Wisconsin. His paintings were found in many Oshkosh homes and public buildings. He died January 21, 1937.

### **LEANDER CHOATE**

1834-1909  
From a photograph of 1909

### **MRS. LEANDER CHOATE**

1838-1931  
Portrait from a photograph.  
Oil on board  
February 1942  
By Clarence Eugene Secor,  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin  
1886 (?) - May 22, 1944  
Done under the WPA Art Program

Leander Choate was born in Bridgetown, Maine in 1834. He came to Oshkosh in 1857, working as a wood chopper, before making his fortune in lumber. Choate became a prominent Wisconsin businessman with interests in lumber, banking, and steamships in the state and in the West. He retired at age 55 to travel the world with his wife. He was a member of the Oshkosh Public Library Board from 1902 to 1909. Leander Choate died October 18, 1909.

His widow, Adeline, died in 1931 at the age of 92 years. They had been married in 1860 in Oshkosh. Her maiden name was also Choate and she was born in Lynn, Massachusetts, where she returned some time after her husband's death. Their five children preceded them in death. The library received a bequest in his memory from her estate. The fund amounted to \$25,000, the interest of which was to be applied to the budget to buy reference books and books of general subjects. When the city's financial constraints hit during the Depression, the library was able to sustain book purchases due to the legacy. The Leander Choate Memorial Fund continues to provide almost \$2,000 per year for the library.

## LOWER LEVEL

This two-level space houses the Children's Room and meeting rooms in public space as well as storage and mechanical rooms.

The fiber optic lighting, banners, and special seating in KidSpace, the area for young children, were provided by a gift from the Oshkosh B'Gosh Foundation and the Friends of the Library. A toy fund was provided in memory of Susan Hardy Heaney.

The elaborate clock on the lower level was given in memory of Shirley Plummer, 1928-1992, a former president of the Friends of the Library, by her family and friends. It performs the same function as the grandfather clock in the Great Hall performed when the Children's Room was in the Waters Building - summoning children to story times. The clock was crafted by Wes Glewwe of West St. Paul, Minnesota, who was 82 years old at the time he built it.

The Children's Room is designed for rotating collections of student art projects, summer library program and seasonal decorations. Among the art works from the permanent collection that may be on view here are *Lion Sleeping* by Trish Peterson, given by Geraldine Jay in 1988, and *Study for Children's Room Mural* by Robert Lautenschlager (1920-1975). The mural, unfortunately painted directly on the plaster in the Waters building, was photographed before it was destroyed in the 1993 renovation.

## LIBRARY LIONS

The tour concludes with a walk around the exterior of the building to the Washington Ave. facade. There, proudly perched, are the bronze lions that have symbolized the Oshkosh Public Library since 1912.

According to his contemporaries, the architect William Waters envisioned decorative sculpture for the imposing entrance to the building. Initial efforts to include acquisition of sculpted lions in the project budget were not successful, nor was a subsequent effort to have stone lions done.

After a number of other gifts of sculpture to the City and the library, John Hicks commissioned a pair of life-size bronze lions from Gaetano Trentanove and presented them to the Oshkosh Public Library. They were put in position on October 7, 1912 and were publicly unveiled Wednesday afternoon, October 9, 1912.

The lions are full-sized, standing, and in a majestic pose. They are nearly mirror images of one another. Affectionately known as "Sawyer" and "Harris", they officially received the names in a contest held in 1977. The names appear carved in the stone above the windows behind them, not for the lions, but in honor of the founding donors of the building.

The sculptor Gaetano Trentanove was born on February 21, 1858 in Florence, Italy, the son of a goldsmith. He studied at Florence and Rome and became a member of the fine arts academies of Florence and Parma. According to the *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern* of July 8, 1907, it was through friendships made in Paris that Trentanove came to open a studio in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He became an American citizen and spent much of his life in Milwaukee while spending part of every year at the studio he maintained in Florence. In 1897 Trentanove was created a knight of the Crown of Italy. He retired to Italy where he died on March 13, 1937.

In 1998 a conservation project to restore the lions was undertaken by Venus Bronze Works, Inc. of Detroit, Michigan, which had done similar work for the Wisconsin State Capitol and in many cities in the Mid-West. The \$29,000 project was funded by the Hicks Trust Fund, and gifts from the Samuel W. and Susan Hardy Heaney Memorial Fund, the Friends of the Oshkosh Public Library and other private donors. The lions were reinstalled on August 11, 1998.

The Board and staff hope you have enjoyed your tour of the Oshkosh Public Library. If you have questions about library services, please ask a staff member.

Written by  
Joan Mueller  
Assistant Director  
c 2000



Oshkosh Public Library