

# Council Bluffs Free Public Library

**T**HE public library represents the spirit of the age. The time has arrived where a city's stage of advancement may be determined by its attitude toward the public library. It makes a city or town a far more desirable place of residence and thus attracts the best class of citizens. More than any other agency, it elevates the general standard of intelligence and brings the benefits of higher education to the masses whom neither the church nor the high schools are able to reach.

These were the words of Frederick M. Crunden of the St. Louis Public School library before the Iowa Library society's annual meeting several years ago. What was true then is equally true today. That a free public library was one of the chief factors in the upbuilding of a city has never been lost sight of by the citizens of Council Bluffs. The library movement in Council Bluffs, which received its first impetus when the city was emerging from what might be termed a frontier outfitting period, has passed through successive stages and many vicissitudes until within the near future Council Bluffs will be able to proudly point to a \$70,000 building, the permanent home of the city's free public library.

While this building, when erected, will stand as a monument to the munificence of Andrew Carnegie, it will also testify to the advancement of the city. The offer of Mr. Carnegie to donate \$70,000 for a library building in Council Bluffs was based on certain conditions. The principal condition was that the city pledge the levying annually of a sum not less than \$7,000 to maintain the library. Realizing the great advantage of the building to the community which they represented, the aldermen hesitated not a moment in enacting the proper legislation to bind the municipality to comply with this condition. Anticipating the willingness of Mr. Carnegie to donate a sum sufficient for a suitable library for the city, the library board with the acquiescence of the city council had taken the necessary steps for the acquisition of a site by the levying of sufficient tax to purchase the requisite property.

The library movement in Council Bluffs, which had its first start in 1866, has since that date passed through successive stages. The first effort toward a public library resulted in the organization of the Young Men's Library association in May, 1866, of which the late W. H. M. Pusey was the first president. The succeeding year the late Chancellor L. W. Ross was president. Frank M. Streamer was librarian and the library was located in what was then known as the Empire block, on Broadway. Several hundred books were collected by donation and purchase and the library was in a fair way of getting a start when disaster overtook it. On June 26, 1867, the Empire block was destroyed by fire and with it the library of the association. For four years Council Bluffs was without a public library. In 1870 Superintendent Allen Armstrong of the High school formed the nucleus for a library for the benefit of the pupils from funds obtained by the graduating exercises, and he succeeded in organizing the Council Bluffs High School Library association. This was in the latter part of 1870. The late Horace Everett, one of the leading spirits in the library movement, assisted the association by the donation of several hundred volumes from his private library.

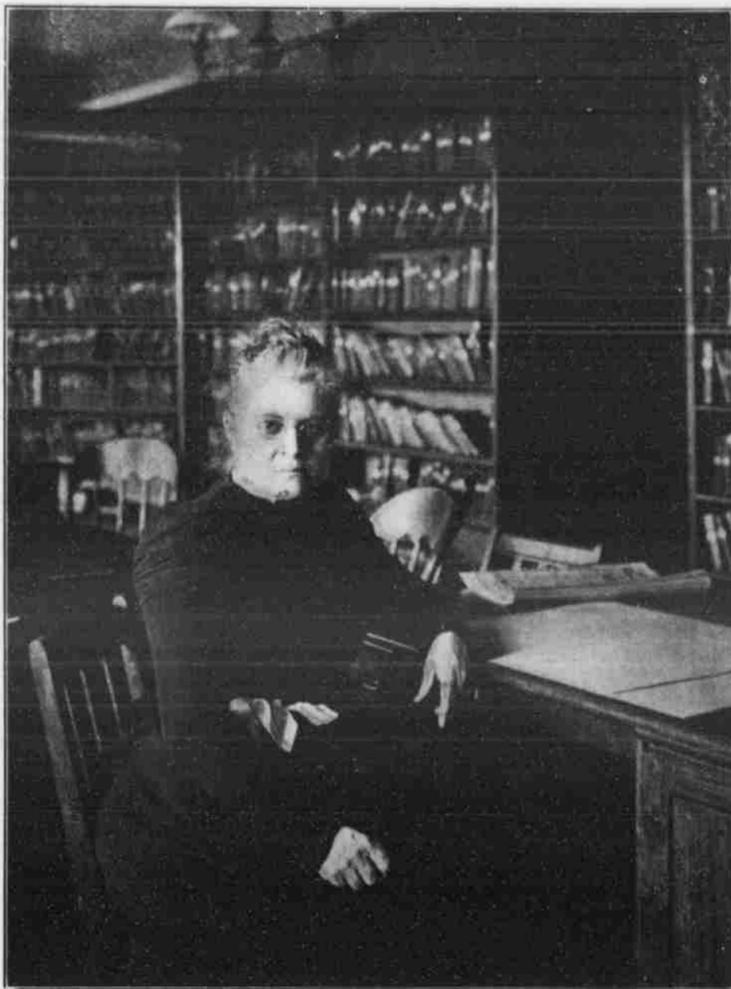
In May of the year following the scope of the library was enlarged by its incorpo-



D. C. BLOOMER, PRESIDENT LIBRARY BOARD FROM 1892 TO 1902.



W. S. BAIRD, TRUSTEE COUNCIL BLUFFS LIBRARY.



MRS. D. B. DAILEY, LIBRARIAN, COUNCIL BLUFFS PUBLIC LIBRARY—Photo by a Staff Artist.



HORACE EVERETT, ONE OF THE FOUNDERS OF THE COUNCIL BLUFFS LIBRARY.



M. F. ROHRER, PRESIDENT COUNCIL BLUFFS PUBLIC LIBRARY.

ration under the title of the Council Bluffs Public School library. The incorporators were Horace Everett, Allen Armstrong, George S. Massey, Anna Foos, Lucy Rider, Augustine Hart, D. C. Bloomer, D. B. Dailey and B. W. Hight. In 1873 an arrangement was made whereby the library was removed from the High school building to the rooms of the Young Men's Christian association in the Woodbury building on Pearl street. This arrangement was brought about mainly through the efforts of Horace Everett, who was anxious to see the building up of a free library in the city. Donations and subscriptions were solicited, the reading room was well supplied with papers and periodicals and additions were made to the library. William T. Robinson of the Young Men's Christian association gave his services as librarian. Later, at different intervals, the post of librarian was filled by Miss Fairman, Miss Bayliss and William D. Turner. This arrangement between the Public School library and the Young Men's Christian association continued with but slight change for a period of five years.

The next step was the organization, in March, 1878, of the Council Bluffs Library association. The incorporators were Horace

Everett, D. C. Bloomer, A. W. Street, D. B. Dailey, B. W. Hight, J. F. Evans, W. H. Hatch, C. W. Munger. Realizing the importance of having the assistance of the women, the incorporators at their first election of directors selected the following seven women to act on the board: Mrs. Horace Everett, who today is a member of the board of trustees of the free public library; Mrs. G. M. Dodge, Mrs. N. P. Dodge, Mrs. N. M. Pusey, Mrs. A. W. Street, Mrs. J. W. Chapman, Mrs. Henry Osborne. The first officers were: President, Mrs. Horace Everett; vice president, Mrs. G. M. Dodge; secretary, Mrs. N. M. Pusey; treasurer, A. W. Street; superintendent, D. C. Bloomer; librarian, Mrs. Maria F. Davenport. The library started out with about 1,500 volumes and the city council allowed \$15 a month for the rent of a room for the use of the library. Mr. Everett donated the use of a room on the condition that the allowance by the city council be devoted to the purchase of books.

The women went energetically to work, and by means of a series of entertainments swelled the treasury and thus enabled the purchase of a large number of books. The women, however, did not

stop here. In 1875 an effort had been made to levy a tax for the maintenance of the library, but had failed. In 1880 the women decided to make another appeal to establish the library on a permanent basis by having the city vote an annual tax for its maintenance, as provided by law. The proper ordinance was passed to submit the proposition to a public vote, but there came a hitch. The mayor, acting on the opinion of the city attorney, refused in his election proclamation to include the proposition. The directors had their tickets printed and the proposition carried by a handsome majority. The city council then refused to proclaim the result, and the courts were appealed to and a mandamus was issued ordering the city council to levy the tax, and the following year witnessed the establishment of the Council Bluffs Free Public library. The property of the Council Bluffs Library association was turned over to the city for the public library by the trustees and life members on condition that if the city should at any time fail to maintain the free public library the property so turned over should revert to the Council Bluffs Library association.

The ordinance to establish a Free Public library was passed November 28, 1881, and

a municipal tax of one-half mill was levied by the city council. The following nine trustees were appointed by the city council: Horace Everett, D. C. Bloomer, Thomas Officer, Jefferson P. Casady, Joseph R. Reed, John H. Keatley, Rev. Cyrus Hamlin, A. W. Street and W. R. Vaughan. Horace Everett was elected as the first president and Mrs. M. F. Davenport as librarian. The rate of taxation of one-half mill was continued in 1882, 1883 and 1884, and in 1885 was raised to 1 mill. Under the present law the board, by the consent of the city council, is empowered to levy not exceeding 2 mills for the maintenance of the library. The levy this year was only 1 1/2.

Horace Everett remained as president of the board of trustees from 1882 until 1890, when he was succeeded by Dr. Don Macrae, sr. In 1892 Hon. D. C. Bloomer succeeded Dr. Macrae as president and continued to act as such until his death, February 24, 1900, when ex-Mayor M. F. Rohrer was elected to the position. Mr. Rohrer was re-elected in 1900, 1901 and 1902, and is consequently now serving his third term as president of the board, which consists of Finley Burke, W. S. Baird, Father Pat-

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## Delegates to the Convention of the Nebraska Association of County Commissioners, from a Photo by a Staff Artist

