

~ Barrett Memorial Library History ~



The library in Williams Bay has a colorful history. It has had a few different names over the years: Williams Bay Public Library, Storrs B. Barrett Memorial Library, and the current name: Barrett Memorial Library. The library in Williams Bay has its beginning in about 1900 in the home of Edward and Marie Williams. Their home stood at the location of the fire station. Mrs. Williams had only a few books from the State library and books residents of the community shared with their friends and neighbors. Early in the 1900s arrangements were made to have books brought to the library through the State Traveling Library.

A Permanent Library

Originally a clubroom and private bowling alley at the estate of George Sturges on the southwest shore of Geneva Lake, the building was moved to Williams Bay in 1906. The Sturges family gave the building to the Village along with \$1,000 to help pay for moving it to its new location.

According to a newspaper article from 1956, "All plans were made to move the building across the frozen lake and to this day the legend exists that this

was done. The story goes like this: 'On a bitter February afternoon in 1906, a group of people stood on the shore peering anxiously through a swirling snowstorm to catch the first glimpse of the four teams of horses laboring across the ice, hauling the building that was to be the first real library in Williams Bay. The men driving the horses not only has to contend with the hazard of dodging the recently cut ice fields which supplied the ice storage houses of that time, but they also had to negotiate a seam in the ice which opened suddenly off Cedar Point. Only some expert maneuvering saved the library from having walleye pike as its first visitors. The transportation of the second section was no less a challenge. A sudden warm spell made it impossible to come by ice, so the building had to be hauled across land. Peter O. Peterson was awarded the contract to move and repair the building. However, it is now believed that the ice broke up early on the lake and the building was moved by land."

In 1963, Les Sawyer, a long-time Williams Bay resident, did some additional research. He did so because he was watching from the beach when the building came across the ice. Les was 15 years old at the time. During his research, he found that Art Anderson, a former mayor of the Village was also there, as was Mrs. Walter Jewell. It is likely the bowling alley portion of the building was moved over land to Williams Bay per the old story.

The exterior of the building was considered the "Mary Ann" style while the interior of the library was in the Queen Anne style which had the luxurious charm of days gone by. It was described as having a beautiful wood paneled interior with a large fireplace. The fireplace was decorated with tiles.

The bowling alley was converted to a community room that was used in a variety of ways: Official polling place, meeting room for the Garden Club, Civic League, Women's Club, Tuesday Study Club, a place of worship for the newly formed Williams Bay Lutheran church, and for war relief efforts during World War II.

In 1964, the Village built a new municipal building on the same site. It included a first floor library, village hall, police department, court room, and village board chambers. While the new building was being built the library was housed in a bookmobile borrowed from the state. A bomb shelter was included in the basement. A children's addition was added in 1995, the village offices moved to the new Village Hall and the library used the entire first floor. In 2011, the library was renovated to its current space.