



PARMLY BILLINGS LIBRARY: THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS

by Jim Curry

Technical assistance by Lynne Puckett

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Published by Parmly Billings Library
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Table of Contents

The Beginnings – prior to 1901	page 1
Early Years 1901-1923	page 5
Years of Quiet Growth 1923-1944	page 10
Years of Innovation and Turmoil 1944-1969	page 14
Years of New Challenges 1969-2001	page 22
Appendix A 1901 Board of Trustees	page 36
Appendix B 2001 Library Board	page 37
Appendix C Library Directors 1901-2001	page 38
Appendix D 1901 Library Staff	page 39
Appendix E 2001 Library Staff	page 40

THE BEGINNINGS



Parmly Billings

The story of the public library in Billings begins with the tragic death of a young man.

It was nearly inevitable that the thriving new settlement on the Yellowstone River would have a public library. The city's founding in 1882 coincided with the creation of tax-supported libraries across the nation. Even in the raw wild land of Montana public libraries appeared—in Helena in 1886, in Butte in 1893, in Great Falls in 1896, to name only the largest communities.

But the public library in Billings would not bear the name it has, or have come into being in the way it did, if twenty-five year old Parmly Billings had not died a lonely death in Chicago in 1888. He was the eldest son of

Frederick Billings, former president of the

Northern Pacific railroad, the pioneering railroad magnate and businessman for whom the city of Billings was named. Parmly was one of the pioneer citizens of Billings, a founder of the Yellowstone National Bank, and a partner of E.G. Bailey and I.D. O'Donnell in cattle and horse raising.

Parmly was born in San Francisco in 1863, eldest child of Frederick Billings and his wife Julia Parmly Billings. He grew up in Woodstock, Vermont, where he went to school. He entered Amherst College in 1881, and graduated in 1884. After graduation, he came to Montana and began his business career. He lived in Billings for three years, during which time he was part owner of a ranch, a bank, and was a member of the school board.

On a trip east by train in 1888 to visit his family in Vermont, Parmly fell ill, probably with pneumonia, and died in Chicago at the age of 25. Such deaths were common in that era, but the impact on the Billings family was devastating. Parmly's grief-stricken father died within months.

The survivors, especially his younger brother Frederick Billings, Jr. and sister Elizabeth Billings, were determined to create a memorial to their lost kinsman in the Montana city that had been his home. The Billings family had a tradition of philanthropy, as did many wealthy people in that much-maligned Gilded Age, and were willing to provide the seed money for an institution that the town of Billings needed and wanted—a public library.

Support for the creation of a library already existed in Billings in the form of a "library club". A short manuscript written in 1945 on the history of the library by then library director Ann Whitmack says that the constitution of the club actu-

ally specified that its purpose was to "keep men—young and old—off the streets."



In 1895, a petition was submitted to the Billings City Council, requesting it to pass an ordinance providing for "the establishment of a FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY in the city of Billings, and levying a tax for the support and maintenance thereof." The ordinance would be submitted to a vote of the electors. The list of petitioners included the names of such persons as A.L. Babcock, James and Charles Chapple, Charles Spear and I.D O'Donnell, all of whom ranked among the most prominent and powerful leaders in Billings. The ordinance, not surprisingly, was passed. It supplied the legal foundation for the library and a source of revenue.

There still remained the need for a site for the library as well as a building. These were to be supplied by the generosity of the

Billings family. In March 1898, S.E. Kilner, trustee of the estate of the late Frederick Billings, suggested to Frederick Billings, Jr. that he present the city of Billings with a library building in memory of Parmly Billings and named in Parmly's honor. The Billings family had previously donated money to the city for schools and church buildings, so there was a precedent to follow. Frederick (or "Fritz," as he was called) offered to cover the cost of the building, donating a total of \$22,000. The Northern Pacific Railroad also offered to share the construction costs. Frederick declined this offer, but accepted a site for the library from the railroad—a choice location at 2822 Montana Avenue, right in the hub of Billings. The site remained legally the property of the Northern Pacific, but was to be free to the library for 99 years.

The actual construction of the library was overseen by a local committee of library supporters which included A.L. Babcock, and I.D. O'Donnell. The building was designed by architect Charles S. Haire of Helena. It was built of locally quarried stone in a Romanesque style then popular for public buildings. The Billings family had an influence on the building design. It much resembled the Frederick Billings Library at the University of Vermont, which had been do-



Julia Parmly Billings

nated to the campus by that generous family.

Construction began in the spring of 1901, and by October was completed. The dedication took place on October 1, 1901, at the Billings Opera House. It was a gala occasion for the young city, attended by Frederick and other members of the Billings family as well as such city officials as Mayor W.B. George, who formally accepted the deed of gift from Frederick Billings. The library building now existed. But it also required a governing authority, a staff, and, of course, a collection of books.

The first Board of Directors of the Parmly Billings Memorial Library consisted of Chairman J.D. Matheson, A L. Babcock, J.R. Goss, Rev. W.D. Clark, Rev. Francis Van Clarenback, and I.D. O'Donnell. All these men had been involved in the creation of the library, and now oversaw its operation. O'Donnell was especially important;

he would remain on the board for the next four decades.

The staff of the new library was headed by Miss Mabel Collins. A Montana native, she had received professional training at the University of Wisconsin's Library School and had two years experience at the public library in Helena. She was a typical member



New Library under construction, mid-1901

of a new college-educated American profession, only recently developed under the inspiration of the great library pioneer Melvil Dewey. Female, like the great majority of librarians, she had learned Dewey's system of classification, cataloging, and reference work.

Mabel Collins was a capable and energetic woman, and would shape the library for its first fifteen years. In the first years, she had only one assistant, Winifred Jones, and a janitor, J.N. Wagner. For a salary of \$75 a month Miss Collins kept the library open from 9AM to 9PM, Monday through Saturday, closing only on Sundays and legal holidays. The library was open 85 hours per week, and charged

5 cents per day for overdue book fines. A levy of 1 mill also supported the library. The library in its first year acquired 2456 volumes, of which 1309 were donated, and 140 periodicals. The very first item accessioned, a seven-volume set of Hubert H. Bancroft's *Chronicles of the Builders*, is still in the library's Reference collection. Like many of the first books in the library, it was a donation of the Billings family.

The quality of the books acquired was impressive. Works by William James on psychology, John Bach McMaster on American history, James Bryce on American politics, all leading authorities of the day, were included. There was a complete set of Shakespeare. The fiction titles included novels by many authors now long forgotten, but also Mark Twain, Arthur Conan Doyle, and William Dean Howells, and Sir Walter Scott.

In her first annual report, delivered to the library Board of Trustees in September 1902, Mabel Collins recorded 12250 checkouts by 745 cardholders. The Parmly Billings Memorial Library was a reality. It had a building. It had a staff. It had a collection of books and periodicals. As important as any of these was a population of library users, and this too was in place.

EARLY YEARS, 1901-1923

Miss Collins began an effort to establish children's services almost as soon as the library opened. There was no children's room in the original building, but she was able to set up a "children's corner" with separate bookcases, a bulletin board, and

child-sized furniture. In her annual report for 1905, Mabel Collins recorded her pleasure that the circulation of books sometimes exceeded that of the adult department. She realized that a separate children's room was needed, and the first addition to the original building was done to provide space for one.

The tiny staff made it difficult to offer programs for children, so Miss Collins sought as much cooperation as she could from the schoolteachers of Billings, with results that she called "gratifying." The first children's story hour was offered on Saturday mornings in 1912 by Miss Ruth Shepherd, a teacher.

Mabel Collins can also be credited with the beginnings of the library's Montana collection. As early as 1902 she was collecting books and other materials on the history of Billings, the Yellowstone valley, and the state of Montana. As there was then no organization in Billings devoted to preserving local history, Miss Collins considered it was important that the library do so. In 1907, the library began to keep files of the Billings newspapers, originally in large bound volumes.

The Parmly Billings Memorial Library was not only functioning as a full-service public library but had also become a museum. This seems to have happened without any deliberate planning. Library benefactors sometimes donated physical objects as well as books and money. In 1907, an Army sergeant (later Cap-



The new library, 1901. Director Mabel Collins stands on the top step.

tain) named Horace W. Bivins made a major donation of animal specimens from the newly-acquired Philippine Islands. What was unusual about Bivins was that he was one of the few African-Americans in Billings, a former cavalryman of the famed "Buffalo Soldiers." This collection formed the core of the museum maintained by the library for many years. Many other items were added, including a stuffed bear and even a gun collection.

Providing display room for these items worsened an already serious space problem. In the first ten years after the library opened, its book collection almost tripled in size, growing from 12,250 volumes to 35,465. The need for a separate children's room was often stressed in the reports made by Mabel Collins to the city council.

Again, Frederick Billings Jr. came to the library's assistance. Miss Collins had lunch with him and his mother during a 1910 visit to New York City. Billings initially offered her \$5,000 towards the construction of an addition to the library. This sum he later raised to \$7,500, and eventually donated \$11,000. Link and

Haire of Helena, the original architects of the library building, also designed the addition. A contract was put up for bid in September 1910 and let to E.O. Blais, a local architect.

Originally it was hoped that the new addition would be completed in two months time, but it was not finished until March, 1911.

The library was

closed for ten days that month. On March 22 the newly enlarged library was re-opened. Available space increased by fifty percent. On April 29, 1911, the children's department of the Parmly Billings Memorial Library formally opened.

The existence of a distinct children's library almost demanded the hiring of a staff member to run it full time. However, no staff was added. Miss Collins and two assistants handled all library functions. These three not only served the public in the immediate area of Billings in 1914. They found themselves conducting an early



Children's Room, 1911

version of interlibrary loan service to small towns and rural schools all over eastern Montana and Wyoming.

For a deposit of one dollar, any citizen of Montana could borrow books from the library (twenty-five cents went to the library itself; the balance was used to pay postage for sending the books out and back). Teachers were allowed to borrow up to twenty books at a time for one month, and were charged a dollar for the school year. Already the library in Billings was serving a vast region and not just one city.

When Mabel Collins resigned her position as Librarian in May 1916, she gave no specific reason. It seems quite likely that exhaustion and what is now called "burnout" played a part in her decision. There is no sign that the Library Board of Trustees was dissatisfied with her job performance. In fact, the Board passed a resolution accepting her departure with "extreme regret", and praising her "untiring energy, unvarying courtesy, and complete knowledge of her calling." Without a doubt the library had grown and flourished under her guidance. The Billings Gazette published an editorial regretting her departure. Instead of immediately seeking another library position, she returned to her parents' home in Great Falls. Later she worked for a book dealer in Spokane who dealt with public libraries.

Miss Collin's successor was Elizabeth Abbott. When hired, she was employed by the Studebaker Company Library in Indiana, but had worked for three years in Chicago in a public library in children's and reference services. She had been the librarian in Grand Forks, North Dakota for another eight years.

Shortly after coming to Billings Miss Abbott met a local man named Henry Garber. Within a few months they were married, and never again throughout her long tenure was she referred to by any other name than Mrs. Henry Garber.



Main wing interior, 1911

An important addition to the staff occurred soon after Mrs. Garber's arrival -- the first children's librarian, Florence Fisher, was hired. Both Miss Collins and Mrs. Garber (who had a strong background in children's work) had urged that such a position be created. Miss Fisher did not stay long-- she was succeeded by Nina Fjeldstad in 1919--but a major gap in the library's services to Billings was at last filled.

Mrs. Henry Garber's career at the library was eventful in other ways. In February 1917, the building had a narrow escape when a fire broke out beneath a big fireplace in the main reading room, and was barely extinguished before it could do major damage. As it was, repairs were required to the children's room.

In April 1917, the nation found itself at war. The library soon was engaged in major efforts to inform the people of Billings about the world situation and participation in the war effort. It was also involved in projects to provide books to soldiers in the training camps and overseas.

The library was even more affected by the deadly influenza epidemic that swept the world in late 1918. In November a quarantine was imposed throughout the city that closed the library down for several days. The gallant staff came in to work (they regarded it as a fine opportunity to catch up on their endless backlog of card filing and other tasks), but the public was not admitted.

The library also found itself unwillingly involved in a dispute between the

Billings city council and the Billings Utility Company. This company owned the hot water heating plant that served most of the downtown area, including City Hall and the library. When Billings Utility attempted to charge the city for heating the city buildings the



Adding a new wing in 1923

city council refused to pay, on the grounds that the original franchise agreement guaranteed free heat for city property.

In August 1918, Billings Utility got a ruling from the state Public Service Commission that raised rates and authorized the company to charge the city for heating. The city of Billings went to court to overturn the ruling, and the battle went on for more than two years. In October 1920, Billings Utility increased the

pressure by cutting off service to the city. The city council found itself wearing overcoats to its sessions at City Hall, and the library was forced to borrow two gas-powered heaters to provide enough warmth to keep operating. The city gave in after adverse court decisions upheld the original Public Service Commission ruling.

In addition to these temporary difficulties, the library continued to battle its perennial problem—inadequate space for its collections and services. The addition built in 1911 alleviated but did not solve this problem. Since there was still space on the library's grounds to build on to the west end of the original structure, it was not long before pressure built up to do so.

Once again the ever-generous Billings family came to the library's assistance. Frederick Billings Jr. had died in 1914, but his sister Elizabeth Billings was willing to supply the funds for a wing for the Parmly Billings Memorial Library. She donated \$20,000. The library board approved the construction project in May 1923. Construction began immediately. The library was closed down for a month that summer, but was able to reopen in September. The formal dedication of the new wing was held on February 12, 1924. The library building had assumed its final form. The library as an institution would see much change in years to come but was already highly appreciated and heavily used.

YEARS OF QUIET GROWTH, 1923-1944

There were no major physical changes to the library building after the dedication of the new wing in February 1924. A furnace was installed as part of the remodeling of the building -- there would be no further reliance on an outside heat source.

Mrs. Garber reigned as the benevolent autocrat of the library, assisted by two trained staff members and two "apprentices," young women who learned the librarian's skills in-house. Like her predecessor Mabel Collins, Mrs. Garber was an important figure in library matters statewide. She served as president of the Montana Library Association and regularly attended conferences of the American Library Association.

Mrs. Garber was also involved in a kind of activity that librarians today would never associate themselves with, but was quite common in her time—battling "immoral literature." On November 13, 1926, she spoke to the Billings Woman's Club on "The Menace of Immoral Reading". In this talk she denounced the presence of sex magazines available for sale on Billings' newsstands. She also mentioned that

the library's collection contained books unsuitable for young people, but reassured her listeners that "every effort within the power of the local library staff is being made to prevent youthful borrowers from taking out books in this classification."



Library in the 1930s

In January 1930, Mrs. Garber assisted a campaign by County Attorney R.C. Dillavou against obscene publications by compiling a list of 45 magazines that had resulted in convictions of dealers in these publications in other localities. The local newsstand operators fought back, and were able to prove that most of the magazines on the Garber blacklist had ceased publication and only eight really belonged in the "smutty" class. In this era, long before the Library Bill of Rights and the strongly anti-censorship attitude of today's library profession, what Mrs. Garber did was considered part of her duty.

During Mrs. Garber's tenure, the Great Depression engulfed Montana, a state that had never shared the prosperity of the "Roaring Twenties." Inevitably,

this economic calamity had its effect on local government budgets, and therefore on the library. In April of 1932, the city and county governments formed a committee to recommend reductions in their budgets. One of the committee suggestions was a fifteen percent cut in the library funding, which would save \$2,000 per annum. There were some cuts in the library hours, especially on Sundays.

However, the library survived hard times very well. The collection continued to grow. Circulation figures actually increased. This was a phenomenon that was noted nationwide during the Depression, since libraries provided free entertainment and information to patrons who were often penniless.

The library was itself involved in New Deal job creation programs. In 1934, 781 dollars in funds from the Civil Works Administration (CWA) furnished employment to workers hired for renovation and repair work to the library building. In 1935, the CWA's successor agency, the Public Works Administration (PWA) funded the hiring of six women to assist in shelving. In the following year, Mrs. Garber was in charge of a National Youth Administration (NYA) project that solicited books for communities not served by any public library. This effort involved the spending of 56,000 dollars and the employment of 33 teenage girls and adult women. The NYA employees collected donations of books and magazines. These materials were then cleaned, repaired and sorted, and sent to outlying rural communities. There, other NYA staff supervised their circulation and ultimately sent

them on to the Montana State Library in Helena.

In May of 1936, Mrs. Henry Garber celebrated her twentieth anniversary as city librarian. In that very same month, she resigned her position. She had been a very active and ener-



The library melodeon in 1934

getic library head. Under her leadership, a children's department had been created, and the library's building expanded and improved. In later years she headed the library in Laramie, Wyoming. She died in 1958 in Evanston, Illinois, her hometown.

Mrs. Garber's successor was Miss Margaret Fullmer, who began work on June 7, 1936. Miss Fulmer, a native of Nebraska, had been librarian of the city of Hastings in that state. She had a BA and a library degree from the University of

Nebraska. Margaret Fulmer does not seem to have been as innovative or as forceful a personality as her two predecessors, but she was thoroughly competent and was to head the library through years of depression and world war.

About a year after Margaret Fulmer took over the leadership of the Library, Billings suffered the greatest natural disaster in its history. On June 13, 1937, a flash flood roared through downtown Billings. Drowning one person and inflicting enormous damage on many businesses and homes, the deluge left the library largely untouched, if the lack of contemporary evidence to the contrary is any indication. Detailed newspaper reports immediately after the flood do not mention the library, and the Library Board meeting the following month was utterly routine, with no mention of any damage to the building or its collections.

On September 9, 1939, the Library Board Of Trustees formally adopted a "library bill of rights" which originated at the public library in Des Moines, Iowa. This document was adopted by the American Library Association at its annual meeting in Berkeley, California, which Miss Fulmer attended. The Library Bill Of Rights became the foundation of a new commitment by public libraries to freedom of expression and inquiry. It represented an attitude very different from that represented by Mrs. Garber's crusades against immoral literature.

The Library Bill Of Rights also represented a new awareness of threats to freedom in an increasingly menacing world. The library adopted it a week after war erupted in Europe—a war that in two more years would engulf the United States. As it had during the First World War, the library engaged in book-collection drives, gathering materials to send to servicemen in training camps and overseas. Circulation went up as patrons sought both information about a great war and fiction to escape the worries that war inspired.

On March 10, 1944, Margaret Fulmer announced her resignation as Librarian. She left to take a position as assistant to the chief of the Public Library Division of the American Library Association in Chicago. After working in this capacity for two years, Miss Fulmer returned to Montana to serve as a member of the State Library Extension Commission in Helena.

The new city librarian, Ann Whitmack, began work on June 2, 1944. It was very much a homecoming for this Billings native who had served as one of Mrs.



Ann Whitmack, Director 1944-1965

Garber's "library apprentices." She was a graduate of the library school at Western Reserve University in Ohio. Before she returned to her hometown, she worked in libraries in Illinois and served as director of the public library in Baker, Oregon. Returning to her home as head of the library where her career began must have been a great satisfaction to Ann Whitmack. Her tenure would be long and very eventful.

YEARS OF INNOVATION AND TURMOIL, 1944-1969

Ann Whitmack's accession to the leadership of the library was followed the next year by the departure of I.D. O'Donnell from the library board. This was a landmark, if a sad one. One of the most prominent of the early settlers in the Yellowstone valley (and partner of the late Parmly Billings in the cattle business), O'Donnell had played a key role in the creation of the library—and then served forty continuous years on the board, often as chairman. Advancing age finally forced his retirement in 1945, although he lived until 1948. His experience, judgment, and influence were greatly missed. In 1950, a bronze plaque dedicated to his memory was mounted on the door of the library's Montana Room.

The new librarian had to struggle with a problem that once had been solved,

but had now reappeared—lack of sufficient space. As early as 1940, there were complaints that there was not enough room for the collection. The solution adopted in earlier years, an addition to the original building, was no longer possible, as there was no space available on the library lot.

Billings had outgrown its library. What had been more than adequate for a town of 4,000 (the population of Billings in 1901) no longer met the needs of the 24,000 who dwelt



Parmly Billings Library in January, 1949

in the fast-growing city in 1940. Population growth never slowed down; 10,000 new residents were added in each decade until Billings surpassed Great Falls to become the largest city in Montana in the 1960's.

To make matters worse, what had once been a highly desirable location in the downtown business district turned into a handicap. The library had been built a decade before the automobile age dawned, when no one worried about finding a

“place to park”. Parking space was very scarce close to the library, and the presence of the railroad tracks made it nearly impossible to increase it.

The railroad corridor in which the library was located ceased to be the heart of the business district, and the area deteriorated over the long term. “Skid Row” cropped up uncomfortably close to the library as bars and cheap hotels proliferated along Montana and Minnesota Avenues. Some library users were reluctant to enter the neighborhood or let their children go there—especially after dark. Heavy traffic along Montana Avenue was blamed for reducing library access.

Major population growth now took place beyond the city limits, but only city residents were entitled to free library service. For a fee of two dollars, people outside the city limits could obtain library cards, but this restriction limited the user population.

The library had to cope with this situation for decades, and the staff carried out their duties despite the difficulties. This sometimes required hard decisions, as in August of 1949. In that month, the popular museum displays in the library basement were done away with.

The collection of mounted ani-

mals and birds which had begun with Horace Bivins' donations almost 40 years earlier was transferred to the Eastern Montana College of Education campus. The stuffed polar bear which had once been the highlight of the collection, and beloved by generations of Billings schoolchildren, had to be discarded when it was found to be infested by mice. The library did keep its collections of art and historical relics. The basement space once occupied by the museum was used to expand the children's library and provide a headquarters for a bookmobile service.

This major development in the library's service came in 1950. A demonstration program in August of 1949 was funded by an appropriation of \$2,000 from the City Council. A bookmobile purchased for \$4,000 began regular service in March



Inside the Library, 1952

of 1950. It carried a collection of 1,800 books aimed at juvenile readers, and made its stops at the city elementary schools. The vehicle was parked at the South Side fire station when not in use, as there was no room for it on the library grounds.

From the start of this service to 1993, bookmobiles were operated by Parmly Billings Library for 43 years of continuous service. Billing's growth was the motivator, since the bookmobile was acquired to serve children not in walking distance of the library, considered to be one mile. A second larger and better equipped bookmobile was acquired in 1955, and was in use at least through 1965. Due to a budget cut, the first vehicle was taken out of service in the late 1950s. Soon after bookmobile service first began, the library building at 2822 Montana Avenue became so crowded

that the bookmobile collection was moved to the Colborn building at 2706 Montana Ave.

The bookmobile proved very successful in extending library service to the community. A year after it began, the bookmobile ac-

counted for forty-three percent of the library's total circulation. This kind of outreach always remained vulnerable to budget cuts and other financial constraints, but served a real need. In 1966 the City Library began a two-year federal Library Services and Construction Act project to provide library service to Yellowstone County, and bookmobile service increased again. In 1969, a similar federally funded project began, serving Big Horn and Carbon Counties with a third bookmobile. Also in 1969, the whole library became mobile and moved from Montana Avenue to newly remodeled and spacious quarters at 510 North Broadway, the present location.

In her annual report for 1950-1951, as the library reached its fiftieth anniversary, Ann Whitmack described the library as "bursting at the seams." The 54,000 volumes in the collection filled all the available shelf space. Some improvements in the building had been made recently—the roof had been replaced and new wiring installed, and the interior redecorated—but the changes could not solve the fundamental problem: the library was too small.

Some personnel problems also plagued the library in the early 1950's. Miss Whitmack complained that she had too few staff members for the workload and turnover was high. In 1953 she was simultaneously short a reference librarian, a



The first Bookmobile & driver Clarence Smith in 1963



Setting up the Evergreen Branch Library, 1963

circulation and children's librarian, a secretary and a bookmobile assistant. The library could not offer competitive salaries even by the modest standards of the library profession, which were always lower than the average wages of the era.

Eventually the vacant slots were all filled, and Ann Whitmack wrote that she was pleased with the quality of her staff. She continued to seek better funding in an effort to improve services. Later in the 1950's she suggested that the growth of Billings made branch libraries necessary. In her annual report for 1956-1957, Miss Whitmack proposed "building a branch in the Northwest part of Billings where we have a population of about 25,000 people." The branch would cost about \$300,000, and circulate about 100,000 books per year. She also wanted a branch in the southwest, and another on what was then called the Bench, if it was ever incorporated into the city.

In December 1962, a branch library actually was opened. Located in the Evergreen Shopping Center on Grand Avenue near what was then the western end of Billings, it had a collection of 5,000 books. Financial assistance from the Junior Service League, which underwrote the rent and heating costs, allowed the branch to begin operations early. It was originally authorized for the 1963-1964 fiscal year. Unfortunately this branch lost its lease later, but was able to relocate to new quarters at 920 Wyoming Avenue in November 1964, with minimal interruption in service.

Public support of the kind offered by the Junior Service League was invaluable to the library. On November 3, 1959, the Friends of the Billings Library held its organizational meeting. Ten "library friends" groups already had been formed in Montana, most notably in Great Falls. Like these, the Friends of the Billings Library provided invaluable fundraising and public consciousness-raising to support the library. One example is the annual book sale conducted every year by the Friends of the Library, raising thousands of dollars for equipment and book purchases as well as other library needs.

1965 saw the end of Ann Whitmack's long career as city librarian. In the face of inadequate resources she had managed to preserve and even to expand the services the library offered to the people of Billings. She remained in her hometown after retirement, passing away in May of 1989.

Her successor was Miss Shirley Hake, a native of Ellensburg, Washington and a graduate of the University of Washington School of Librarianship. She began work on October 1, 1965.

The new librarian was faced almost immediately with a near-crisis. In February of 1966, Miss Hake told a Billings Woman's Club meeting that the library



Story Hour, 30 June 1965, Mrs. Stuart Conner (Betty), storyteller.

was a "disaster area." A new building was urgently needed. The staff was stretched to the limit, and more books were necessary. The branch library on Wyoming Avenue had been a promising experiment, but could not be sustained in the face of the library's other problems. In February of 1966, the library board voted to close the branch. Miss Hake advised the closure on the grounds that maintenance costs for the Wyoming Avenue library were too high. As a substitute, bookmobile service in the city was expanded. There were now two bookmobiles, which were no longer restricted to serving the schools. Most of the staff of the branch had been volunteers. Mrs. Myrtle Cooper, the

manager, returned to the main library to head the Reference department.

Closing the "Junior Service League Branch" was unpopular, especially in Billings' fast-growing West End. It stimulated the demand for a new library building, a necessity now apparent to all. In fact, serious planning for a new library had begun as early as 1958.

There were two alternatives for a new library: building a brand-new facility or converting an existing building. Both alternatives had their advocates and both were considered. In October of 1965, architect Robert E. Fehlberg submitted a proposal for a new building with 60,000 square feet of floor space (compared to 9,000 square feet in the existing library) estimating the total cost at \$1,573,700. The money for the new library was to be raised by a bond issue to be submitted to the voters in 1966.

In January of 1966, library consultant Bernard Van Horne proposed to Mayor Willard Fraser and the library board that a new library could be constructed for \$1,930,000 downtown or \$1,060,000 in the West End. The problem in deciding between the two locations was that no one could at that time predict the directions in which growth would be greatest. While Shirley Hake pointed out that "library dogma" recommended a downtown site, there would be advantages in relocating to an educational and residential center. For one thing, the library could be built on one level, while a building in the city center would require more floors, elevators, and extra costs for staff and maintenance.

In May of 1966, Mayor Fraser suggested that the new library should replace Cobb Field, the city baseball



Successful bidders carry away their new possessions after the library auction, 1969.

arena. A new, bigger stadium could be constructed elsewhere, Fraser said. Unsurprisingly, this idea stirred up a storm of opposition. The city's athletic community and multitude of baseball fans was not willing to exchange an existing ballpark for a promise which might or might not be kept. At first Fraser vigorously defended his proposal but eventually backed off, commenting that it was "only a suggestion."

This episode swung the balance towards the second alternative for a new library--finding a suitable existing structure and converting it. As it happened, the Billings Hardware Company building at 510 North Broadway, originally opened in 1956, was available, since the company management wished to move their business. Willard Fraser was at first an opponent of moving the library to this building, which conflicted with his desire to build a new structure on the Cobb Field site. He claimed that the costs of remodeling the Billings Hardware Company had

been underestimated. He argued that "Billings deserves something better than a remodeled warehouse for a library, and I do not think either the City Council or the Library Board will want to face the bar of history, and say that we gave the city less than the best."

Fraser's passion and eloquence failed to move Library Board Chairman E. Burton Maynard, or a majority of the board and the City Council. As proposed, a new library building would cost almost two million dollars, and would include 40,000 square feet of floor space. The converted building, besides being in the downtown, offered 100,000 square feet of floor space--enough, said Maynard, "that all the books in Montana could be placed in it without fear of so much as a sagging corner." Maynard also called attention to the "uncanny similarity" of the building to the Cincinnati Public Library, "the most functional in the

United States."

The strongest argument for the Billings Hardware building, however, was expense. It was available for less than \$1,000,000, and any new library building was certain to cost much more. In September of 1966, Farwell, Ozmun, Kirk, and Company of Minneapolis, the actual owner of the Billings Hardware warehouse, offered it to the city of Billings for \$750,000. The Board's library site committee (Board Chairman Maynard and city alderman Dale Madson) eagerly accepted the offer on September 2.

Some complications immediately arose. Billings Hardware had to find a new location for its business, and negotiations had to be suspended until this was done. Also, an existing contract turned up with Cushing, Terrell, and Associates, a Billings architectural firm, for the design of a new library. The contract had to be submitted to the city attorney's office for a decision whether it obligated the city to actually build a new library.



Auctioning the stereopticon, 1969

Finally, the Library Board settled on a price of \$675,000 for the building, and voted to start circulating a petition to put a bond issue for \$996,500 on the ballot, to be voted on April 3, 1967. The actual costs for the transfer came to \$1,177,100, but some of this amount would be covered by matching funds through the federal Library Services and Construction Act.

Willard Fraser finally dropped his opposition to the Billings Hardware site and backed the petition drive in March of 1967. There was no chance that his own scheme for a new library on the Cobb Field site would ever become reality, and no other solution was feasible financially. Fraser's conversion was welcomed by the Library Board members and by Shirley Hake. Miss Hake had supported the Billings Hardware acquisition all along. When the election was held that second day in April 1967, vote of 7,780 ter decades, finally had quarters it desperately.

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tensive remodeling was required before the new facility could accommodate the li-
brary. A federal grant for \$180,000 paid for this renovation, planned by Oswald
Berg & Associates of Bozeman under the supervision of Pacific Consultants.

Bids for contracts for the remodeling were opened in June of 1968. Travis-Jam, a Billings construction firm, won the basic contract, with Biegel Plumbing & Heating and Central Electric Company getting contracts for mechanical and electrical work. The combined costs ran \$13,000 over the original estimates. This resulted in changes to the design. A decorative façade intended to beautify the building exterior was eliminated. Plans to refurbish the elevator and a stairway were also dropped.

Billings Hardware Company left the building ahead of schedule, which raised hopes that the new library could be ready by the end of 1968. This was not to be; the massive reconstruction was not finished until March of 1969. The move from the old library building to the new one began April 7, 1969. Book stacks and

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New Library building, 28th Street entrance, 1970s.

other furnishings were first moved to the new library. The books were loaded on shelving carts and trundled into moving vans for the drive to their new home. Moved carefully in correct Dewey number order for non-fiction and fiction alphabetically by author order, they were then re-shelved. On April 14, the new library opened to the public. Much of the furniture and equipment in the old building was not moved, but sold at auction on May 3, 1969.

YEARS OF NEW CHALLENGES, 1969 -2001

The new library building was officially dedicated on May 25, 1969. Dr Stanley Heywood, President of Eastern Montana College, delivered a formal address, and the keys of the building were presented to Shirley Hake. 400 persons attended the event, which proved to be a great success. The new library building had in fact been in use for over a month by the date of dedication.

Both staff and patrons were pleased with the new environment. Miss Hake was able to report an increase in circulation of more than fifty percent since the move--as compared with an average of thirty percent for most library relocations. "Great flocks of new users" were coming to the new building, Shirley Hake announced in July of 1969. Children's librarian Mary Schmiedeskamp reported increased use by family groups.

The book collection was far more accessible than in the old building, and the atmosphere cheerier than in the gloomy, ill-lighted quarters on Montana Avenue. Parking space, vital to public access and use, was far more abundant than at the earlier location. Access for the handicapped was not yet the issue it would become in later years, but elderly and physically impaired patrons found it much easier to enter the new library than to climb the stairway to the adult floor of the old one.

Of course, the library still had problems to face -- utopia had not arrived, and never would. The federal funding that had made the library's move possible, and was relied upon heavily for some of its functions, was cut sharply in 1969. Miss Hake remarked that if these funds had been cut earlier, the library would not have been able to relocate. In its very first year in the new Broadway location, the library was faced with a budget cut and a choice between reducing hours and staff or cutting book purchases.

A cut in the book budget -- the usual remedy in such situations -- took care of the immediate problem. There was another problem, already ongoing for years, which proved much harder to solve. How could full library service be extended to all of Yellowstone County? Parmly Billings Library had been created to serve the



Checking out a book in the new building, 1969.

city of Billings only. But it was situated in Yellowstone County, by 1960 the most populous county in the state. The only other public library in Yellowstone County was in Laurel, the next largest community. There were many smaller towns, from Broadview to Custer, and rural residents who needed library service.

The library budget was inadequate for both purchasing new materials and continuing the bookmobile. To provide real countywide service, funding from the county as well as the city was needed. This proved difficult to arrange, since few

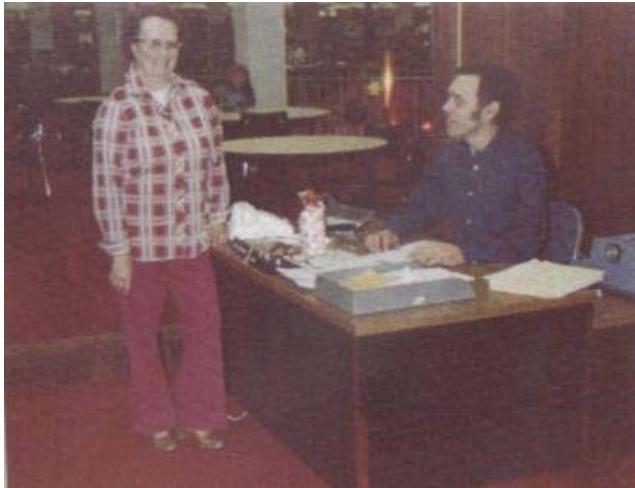
out-of-town residents wanted any tax increases. A federally funded demonstration project, begun in July 1966, made possible bookmobile service in the county, but this lasted for only two years

Library services to the county were provided by service contracts negotiated with the Yellowstone County Commissioners. The contracts provided walk-in access to the main library and bookmobile services to county stops. Contentious contract renegotiations took months beyond expiration dates, which brought service interruptions and layoffs of library staff members. It took nearly a decade of petition

drives, votes on mill levies, and sometimes acrimonious negotiations between the Yellowstone County Commissioners and the Library Board to formally agree to designate Parmly Billings Library as a permanent city-county library. The City Council approved the agreement on October 27, 1975. A new City-County Library Board of Trustees took office on New Years Day, 1976.

The bookmobiles now had secure funding, ending an absurd situation under which the Parmly Billings Library had at times provided service to neighboring Big Horn and Carbon Counties (under special agreements with those county governments), but not to all of Yellowstone County. The agreement permitted a major ongoing effort to maintain and expand services outside the library's walls. Billings and Yellowstone County were served each by one vehicle, and contract services to Carbon and Big Horn Counties by a third bookmobile. Stillwater County joined by contracting for bookmobile service from 1979-1983. Contracted bookmobile service ended in Big Horn County in 1984 and ended in Carbon County in 1985.

In 1966, public libraries in the area were linked by the creation of the South-Central Library Federation. To promote cooperation, Yellowstone County, Carbon County, and Big Horn County set up this organization; other counties such as Fergus, Judith Basin and Musselshell joined later. Federation headquarters was at



Children's Librarian Mary Schmiedeskamp and Director Robert Cunningham, late 1970s.

Parmly Billings Library. The federation expanded to eleven counties by 1976. In November 1973, the library underwent its first change of leadership since 1965. Shirley Hake resigned to take care of her elderly parents in her native state of Washington. Her successor, Robert Cookingham, was a native of Michigan and a graduate of the University of Michigan library school. He came to Billings from the library in Monroe, Michigan. The first male director of the Parmly Billings Library did have a Montana connection--his Bachelor's degree was from the College of Great Falls.

Cookingham quickly showed himself to be energetic and innovative. He changed the library's hours, restoring Sunday service for the first time since Depression-era budget cuts in the 1930's. He made efforts to get the unoccupied third and fourth floors of the library building put to use. He also spent much of his tenure involved in one controversy after another.

The most spectacular of these controversies was a dispute with the union representing the library staff (and other city employees): the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) over the termination of a library clerk by Cookingham. AFSCME brought suit against the city of Billings, Cookingham, and the members of the Library Board, which had upheld Cookingham's firing of the clerk. The union demanded her reinstatement, and an award of back pay.

Cookingham and the Library Board contended that the autonomy of the library was in jeopardy if it was treated as just another city department, and that the library director, under the supervision of the Library Board, had full authority to hire and fire library personnel. After a full year of litigation the case went to the Supreme Court of the State of Montana, which upheld an earlier ruling. The court handed down its decision on January 30, 1976. Ruling that the clerk was a city employee, the Court awarded her reinstatement with back pay. This established that all library employees are represented by a union, (now the Teamsters) with the same rights and duties as other city workers.



Installing the library's first computer system, CLSI, in 1978. First library computer systems administrator Dan Bowen stands at right.

Cookingham had one other personnel problem of a different kind. He hired a seventeen-year-old ex-convict directly out of Montana State Prison to work as a custodian. Soon afterwards the young man was arrested for shoplifting. Cookingham refused to fire him on the grounds that it was the parole officer's responsibility, not the library's, to regulate this employee's conduct away from his job. As always, Cookingham was backed by the Library Board.

There were persons in the city government not so supportive of the library director. In July of 1976, Alderman Dr Wilbur Armstrong objected to the presence of "smut" (specifically a copy of the novel *Mandingo*) on the bookmobile. Cookingham refused to pull the offending book, citing the library's right-to-read policy. That same month Alderman James Kerr stated that "Cookingham has walked all over this council and has to be stopped." Mayor Joseph Leone made a thinly-veiled threat to cut the library's budget.

In January of 1977, Alderman Roy Rye demanded that Cookingham be dismissed, largely because of the union problems and the "illegal" firing of library employees. Rye got nowhere, since under Montana state law the library board and no one else had authority to hire or fire the library director, as Bruce Ennis, a lawyer and former board chairman, immediately pointed out.

A major change in the city government occurred in January of 1977. The mayor-council pattern in force in Billings since its founding was replaced by a city manager-council pattern in the new city charter, approved by the voters in 1976. An appointed City Administrator now had authority over the operation of the Billings city departments under the supervision of the City Council.

Cookingham and the first City Administrator, Richard Larsen, did not always get along. Ever ready to defend the library's autonomy, Cookingham felt that Larsen (and the City Council) were all too willing to usurp power that really belonged to the library board.

On September 28, 1978, Robert Cookingham announced his resignation as library director, effective as of March 1, 1979. He expressed his frustration with the city government, and said that he had intended to remain in his position for no more than five years.

Cookingham, described by the Billings Gazette as "flamboyant," spent only five years as library director but those years were productive. Despite his problems with the city union and the city administration, he was a most creative



L-R: Director Steve van Vogt, City Council member Lucille Mills, and Children's Library Mary Schmiedeskamp at Mary's retirement, 1982.

and dynamic individual. Staff members today who worked with Cookingham remember him fondly.

One Cookingham project was the Last Copy Fiction Depository. Copies of older fiction titles, gathered from other libraries all over the state, were stored in the basement of the library building. The purpose of the fiction "pool" as it is usually called, is to insure that copies of scarce fiction would be available within Montana and accessible to other libraries throughout the state.

Cookingham initiated the creation of a library foundation in October, 1975 with a donation of \$12,180 from the estate of library supporter Don L .Hayes. This was seed money toward what Cookingham planned would be a million-dollar foundation, able to supply as much as \$ 100,000 a year for the library's financial needs and lessening the burden placed on the taxpayers. As with other Cookingham

ideas, the library foundation did not reach maturity until long after he left. Possibly Cookingham's major contribution was the beginning of the computerization of the library. In 1978 he persuaded a reluctant City Council to provide funding to purchase a CLSI library computer system, then the most advanced available. The addition of computers required an expert "systems coordinator" to cope with their complexities. This important new staff position was first held by Dan Bowen.

In 1980, the library joined the Western Library Network (WLN) headquartered in Everett, Washington. WLN provided an invaluable bibliographic database for cataloguing and interlibrary loan. Ellen Newberg, Technical Services Coordinator for the library, played the major role in securing the grant funding needed for the WLN connection.

The introduction of computers into libraries revolutionized them. Mabel

Collins could have walked into the library in 1970 and seen little in the way of technology that was unfamiliar to a librarian of 1901. By the year 2000, the ways libraries operated had changed utterly, bringing exciting new possibilities--and some major new problems--to the librarian's profession.

Robert Cookingham's successor was Steven C. Von Vogt, formerly director of the public library system in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. Von Vogt began work as Director in the spring of 1979.

Von Vogt, like his predecessor, was very customer-oriented. In February, 1980, he took a scientific survey of library patrons to determine their preferences.



Ellen Newberg, Director 1982-1988

He also advanced the use of computers in the library, even when the costly CLSI system suffered serious malfunctions. In July, 1981, Von Vogt threatened to sue the vendor of CLSI because of "three years of serious non-performance." Despite this, he introduced the Dialog online search service, a fee-based system used to find information for mostly business clients.

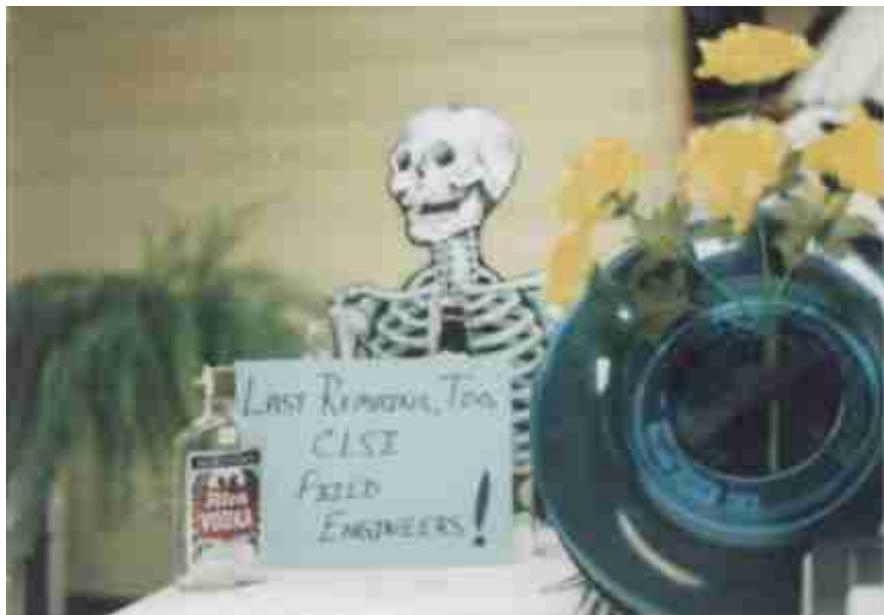
In September, 1982, Von Vogt took a leave of absence to attend the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and obtain an MPA degree. While at Harvard he decided to change careers, and submitted his resignation. Ellen Newberg, head of the library's Technical Services department, served as acting director in Von Vogt's absence. She was appointed Director permanently after his departure in May 1983, the first such internal promotion in the library's history.

The new director soon established a reputation as an excellent manager, a role model for other library directors in Montana. She would need all the managerial skills she possessed, for by the early 1980s, Parmly Billings Library was suffering from dire financial troubles. As early as 1982, the city government was facing serious deficits, and the property tax which supported the library was providing inadequate revenue for the city as a whole. The economy of the region was hit hard by the collapse of the oil and coal mining industries that had boomed during the "energy crisis" of the 1970s.

In January, 1983, the library was forced to stop book purchases for the remainder of the fiscal year, and lay off two part-time workers. Bookmobile operations were almost ended; but enough funds were scraped together at the last moment, mostly from the county, to keep the bookmobile on the road.

On June 13, 1983, the library's hours suffered the greatest cut in its history, from 60 hours per week to 44. The building was now open only five days a week, from Tuesday through Saturday. Library fines were raised, and a charge introduced for reserving materials. The library's staff, 38 workers in 1982, was cut to 27. The remaining staff worked to exhaustion keeping up with the workload, a major reason for the Monday closing.

Ellen Newberg responded to the library's woes



Old computer system "funeral," 1988

with imaginative fund-raising as well as cuts in hours and services. She sought book donations from individuals and organizations. At her husband Alan Newberg's fortieth birthday party, for instance, she asked guests to donate books for the library, instead of bringing other presents.

In 1987, Mrs. Newberg revived the library foundation that Robert Cunningham had begun but had since languished. Finally established on a sound basis, the Parmly Billings Library Foundation proved invaluable for fundraising and special projects.

Also, she was outspoken about the library's financial problems and did not hesitate to air her opinions publicly. In 1986. Initiative CI-27 was placed on the ballot to abolish property taxes statewide. Mrs. Newberg announced that passage of the initiative would eliminate eighty percent of the library's funding and force its closure. This statement aroused some opposition, but it was no more than simple fact. The library's financial mainstay was its share of the local property taxes, and without that money there was no way it could operate. CI-27 was narrowly defeated in the November general election.

As if its funding problems were not enough, the library barely escaped a physical disaster on June 30, 1987. A leaking gas valve caused an explosion in the city office area on the fourth floor. \$50,000 dollars in damage occurred, but the fire started by the blast was contained and quickly extinguished. A teenage job trainee was critically injured and Jim Southworth, the building engineer, suffered serious burns. Southworth earned praise for his coolness and heroism--despite his burns,

he organized the evacuation of the building. The accident occurred in the morning before the library opened, so that the number of people in the building was small. What might have been a monumental disaster was prevented by the prompt action of library maintenance staff and the Billings Fire Department.

The following year was marked by the replacement of the library's original computer system, trouble-plagued CLSI. In March, 1988 a new Dynix system went into operation. Provided by a Utah vendor, Dynix was much more user-friendly than its predecessor. The library staff held a mock funeral to "bury" CLSI.

After more than six years as Director, Ellen Newberg announced her resignation in December, 1988. She left to take a position as head of the Kitsap County Library System in Bremerton, Washington. Diane Cross, who had been Director of Administrative Services, became Acting Di-



Bill Cochran, Director 1990—present

Ellen Newberg announced her resignation in December, 1988. She left to take a position as head of the Kitsap County Library System in Bremerton, Washington. Diane Cross, who had been Director of Administrative Services, became Acting Di-

rector.

In July 1989, Miss Ricky Johnson of the Virginia State Library was appointed to succeed Ellen Newberg. The new director, however, suffered from health problems that led to her departure in September of that same year. Diane Cross once again became Acting Director. She was offered the permanent Directorship but declined. A new search for the Director's position was opened in 1990. The successful candidate was William M. Cochran of the Iowa State Library, with previous public library experience in Des Moines and Red Oak, Iowa. Bill Cochran (as he preferred to be called) assumed his duties at Parmly Billings Library on October 1, 1990.

After a few months settling in, Cochran began to introduce some major changes to the library. When he arrived, the library hours had not been increased since the drastic cuts of 1983, and the building was open for a shorter period each week than any other major library in Montana. In June, 1991, Cochran was able to increase open hours by opening on Sunday afternoons during the school year, and staying open one hour later from Tuesday through Friday. The library's tight budget prevented reopening on Mondays, which required an increase in staff. The new hours were made possible by revising work schedules.

In January, 1992, the library underwent some major physical remodeling. On the first floor, the location of the Circulation Desk was moved from its former location to the south entrance of the library. The entrance onto North Broadway was closed off. The library's first security system was installed, reducing a serious theft problem. While convenient for patrons, the earlier floor arrangement had been an invitation for a few persons to steal whatever they wanted. The book sorting area was moved up from the library basement to a room directly behind the new circulation desk, to speed up re-shelving.

On the second floor, the Reference Desk was relocated, moved closer to the Montana Room (which had been moved to the old Technical Services area in 1989). This made it possible for Reference staff to keep an eye on the Montana Room. This in turn allowed the Montana Room to be open the same hours as the library. Major improvements were made in the library's computer system. Under the supervision of Thurman Smith, library computer systems coordinator, the Dynix sys-



Infomobile Senior Homebound Van, Winter 2000

tem underwent a major upgrade. The library's catalog was now available to the public on computer terminals, and the last remnants of the card catalog (itself replaced years before by a computer-generated microfiche system) disappeared.

In 1993, the library connected with the Internet--an event of major importance in its annals. The connection was funded by a grant of \$150,000 from the Wendy's Foundation. The grant was made in September, 1993; two public Internet terminals were operating by the end of December. Parmly Billings Library was the second library in the northwestern United States to provide Internet access, and the new service was put to constant use by the library's patrons. By July of 2001, the number of public Internet terminals had increased to eighteen, which were barely enough to meet the incessant demand. Providing Internet access now ranked as one of the library's major services to its users.

The remodeling of the library and the installation of the Internet had been paid for out of capital improvement funds in one case and a foundation grant in the other. The tax revenues which supported the daily operation of the library would not have been adequate to finance these projects. By 1993, the library's longstanding financial problems demanded a solution.

The immediate measure taken was a cut in the budget for the fiscal year beginning in July of 1993. The library's materials budget was almost eliminated, and bookmobile service ended completely. There were no reductions in staff, however,

and the library hours, only recently expanded, were maintained.

It was obvious that constant budget cuts were no permanent solution to the library's problems. That could come only from an increase in the library's revenues. The mill levy that supported the institution would have to be raised.

Bill Cochran knew that in an era even more hostile to increased taxes



The new Infomobile on display at North Park, 1996

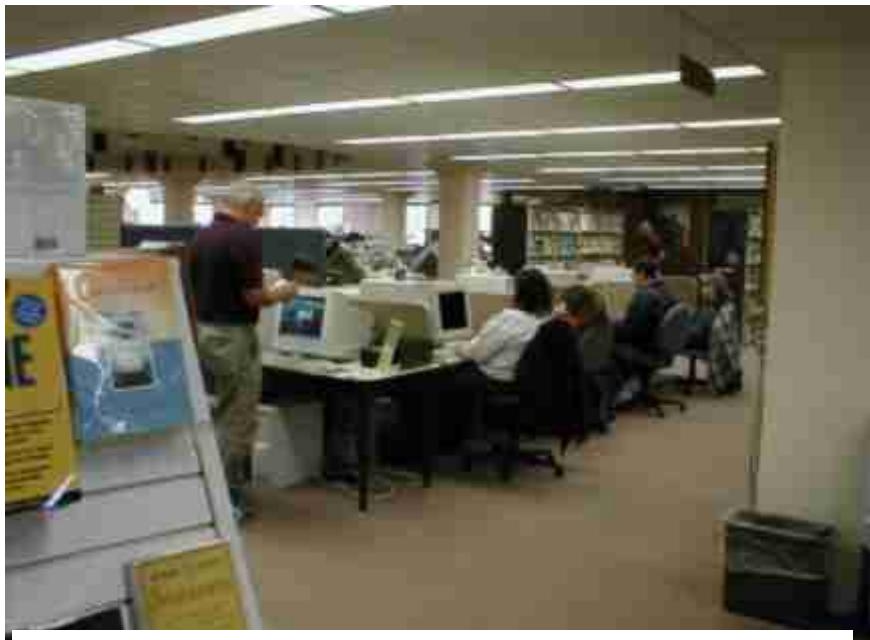
than most, the ground would have to be prepared and the public made aware of the library's plight. He organized a citizen's Task Force of volunteers to explore funding alternatives. He obtained a recommendation from the Task Force that the library mill levy should be increased by 5 mills to 9.5 mills total. This proposal was endorsed by the City Council in December, 1993. It was put to a public vote on April 5, 1994.

The mill levy passed overwhelmingly, by a vote of 6,242 to 2,247. The suc-

cess of the mill levy increase made it possible to restore the earlier service cuts, and to expand the library's operations. In September, 1994, the library opened on Mondays for the first time in eleven years.

A major improvement in the library's service was launched even before the mill levy passed—service to people kept out of the library by age, ill health or imprisonment. Parmly Billings Library's Senior/Homebound Outreach Program was started in September 1993, with a Federal Library Services and Construction Act Title I grant of \$16,550 from the Montana State Library Commission and an in-kind match of \$21,370 from the Library. In 1994, the program's funding was supplemented with a Community Development Block Grant of \$5,300 from the City of Billings for circulating materials. The primary goal of the new outreach program was and is to make library services and materials more readily accessible for the less mobile elderly and homebound residents in Yellowstone County.

Beginning with a 1985 Buick with two book carts in the back seat and boxes of library materials in the trunk, the Outreach Program progressed through three phases. The old Buick was replaced first by an even older Ford van, and in July, 1998 by a specially designed and equipped "Infomobile Senior" van, with a hydraulic lift. This vehicle served 19 nursing homes, senior housing facilities, hospice centers, and homebound residents, and made regular visits to the Yellowstone County Detention Center and the state's Women's Prison.



Library Internet users, 2nd floor, July 2001

It took longer to reintroduce regular bookmobile service. The library's old vehicle was worn out, and its original manufacturer no longer made bookmobiles and could not supply spare parts. A new "Infomobile" specially-built in North Carolina was not ready for use until the spring of 1996. It was displayed to the public in the city's Saint Patrick's Day parade, and began regular rounds on April 27, 1996. The name change to "Infomobile" reflected a change in the nature of the materials carried--not only books but videos and other formats. The Infomobile had on board computers linked to the library's Dynix system.

In the year 2000, Dynix was replaced by the new Horizon system, which

used Windows from Microsoft. Horizon allowed many new functions not available on Dynix. The library was more and more a supplier of electronic information, although its original role as a source of books and other print materials had not diminished. In its second century, Parmly Billings Library would need to meet the challenge of keeping up with constant changes in the computer age. New formats such as DVD's and CD-ROMs were becoming ever more popular, posing new problems of storage and security.

In May 2001, the library opened the new Teen Center on the 2nd floor, in the area where back issues of magazines had been. The center was funded by money raised by the Library Foundation, and the Friends of the Library, and was designed to appeal to the young adult age group. Books, music CDs, and magazines dedicated to 13-17 year olds make up the Teen Center collections, and four computers for games, Internet access, and homework help (word processing, encyclopedias) are also available.

The Library collections contained over 291,000 items in July of 2001. Of these, approximately 264,000 were books, of which approximately one-third were the children's/young adult fiction and non-fiction, one third were adult non-fiction arranged using the Dewey Decimal System for organization by subject, and one-third were adult fiction (novels) arranged alphabetically by author's last name. Of the adult collections, 9473 were Large Type books, both fiction and non-fiction, and about 5936 were biographies arranged in alphabetical order by the name of the subject person.

Other items that could be checked out by patrons included about 100 current magazines, 6800 music CDs, an increasing number of books on CD, over 5990 books on audiotape, over 8800 videos, and 750 interactive media CD-ROMs (computer games and programs), and a pamphlet file arranged alphabetically by subject.

The non-circulating (cannot be checked out) reference collection consisted of approximately 4970 books, back issues of magazines in microfiche or microfilm or



Teen Pit opening day, May 2001

in the online magazine database, all the back issues of the Billings Gazette on microfilm, about 30 newspapers including local, state, and national papers, an assembly of local, state, and national telephone books, and miscellaneous other handy reference tools.

The library's computer resources consisted of 2 word-processing computers, 18 Internet stations and numerous terminals for accessing the computer catalog and magazine databases. The statewide Infotrac database accesses 7 magazine index databases, including the Expanded Academic Index, the General Reference Center, the Health Reference Center, and the Business & Industry index. The word processors have both word-processing and spreadsheet programs. The library also provides access to one LaserCat station for finding locations of books at other libraries.

The Montana Room contains a special collection of about 8623 volumes plus assorted microfilms, magazines, and newspaper clippings, including references pertaining to Montana as both state and territory, works by Montana authors, and works about events of interest to or occurring in Montana, such as the Battle of the

Little Big Horn. The Montana Room files contain pictures of early pioneers, settlements, newspaper stories, biographical clips, information about the city of Billings, and many other items of local interest.



Centennial Birthday Party helpers:

L-R: Diane Cross, City Administrator Dennis Taylor, Bill Kennedy, Mayor Chuck Tooley, Carol Drum, Director Bill Cochran (in back), Nancy Swanson, Don Allen, Lisa Webb, Steve Fenter

The Youth Services collections consist of non-

fiction, fiction, and magazines geared to readers from kindergarten to 17 years, divided between the Youth Services department on the 1st floor for younger readers and the new Teen Pit area on the 2nd floor for the young adult population. There are also materials for parents and homeschoolers.

In August 2001, the Library celebrated its 100th birthday with a full day of festivities, including clowns and face-painting for children, a raffle, sales of the *Billings A to Z* and *Writers under the Rims* books written to raise funds for the library, and of course, birthday cake for everyone.

Along with the new challenges in its centennial year the library faced a problem that was all too familiar—an aging building that no longer really met the institution's or the public's needs. The structure, not originally designed as a library, still offered plenty of space but was difficult to adapt to the requirements of the computer age. The heating and air conditioning systems dated from the 1950's and were prone to breakdowns. The electrical system was equally archaic, and raised problems when constant computer upgrades were needed. As in the 1960's, the best solution was a new building, ideally designed with a library's particular characteristics in mind. A major remodeling of the current building was an alternative, but this would be on a scale so large that a new library structure might actually be cheaper.

The library also needed branches. Except for a few years in the 1960s, it had never had any, although population growth in the city and county it served had been enormous. In the 2000 census, 129,352 persons were counted in the Billings metropolitan area. This was by far the largest population concentration between Denver and Calgary, or between Spokane and Minneapolis-St Paul. Within the city limits growth was fastest on the West End, the area farthest from the downtown

where the library building was located. Bill Heights, a population of its own somewhat from the city by trans-bottlenecks, an obvious location for a branch

only library was located in a major center in the right cut off downtown portation also was a location library.



At the Centennial Birthday Party, August 2001, the Cat in the Hat meets Parmly Bear, Chucky Cheese, and a volunteer.

Given sufficient funding, improvements in the library's physical facilities would surely be made. In any case, Parmly Billings Library has for a century served the people of Billings and the Yellowstone valley, often in the face of far greater handicaps than it suf-

fered in its centennial year. With the support that it has always had from the people it serves, the library will continue to do so for another century, and likely much longer.



Parmly Billings Library in the mid-1990s.

APPENDIX A

BOARD OF TRUSTEES., OCTOBER 1, 1901 PARMLY BILLINGS MEMORIAL LIBRARY

J.D. Matheson, Chairman
A.L .Babcock
Rev .W.D .Clark
J.R .Goss
I.D. O'Donnell
Rev. Francis Van Clarenback

APPENDIX B

LIBRARY BOARD, PARMLY BILLINGS LIBRARY, OCTOBER 1, 2001

Don Allen, Chair

Lou Aleksich

Carolyn Boyd

Julie S .Brown

Rebekah A .Propp

APPENDIX C

LIBRARY DIRECTORS, 1901-2001

Mabel Collins, 1901-1916
Mrs Henry (Elizabeth) Garber, 1916-1936
Margaret Fullmer, 1936-1944
Ann Whitmack, 1944-1965
Shirley Hake, 1965-1973
Robert Cunningham, 1973-1979
Steven Von Vogt, 1979-1983
Ellen Newberg, Acting Director, 1982-1983, Director 1983-1988
Diane Cross, Acting Director, 1988-1989
Ricky Johnson, Director July-September 1989
Diane Cross, Acting Director, 1989-1990
Bill Cochran, Director, 1990-

APPENDIX D
LIBRARY STAFF, OCTOBER 1901

Mabel Collins, Librarian
Winifred Jones, assistant
J.M. Wagner, janitor

APPENDIX E

STAFF, PARMLY BILLINGS LIBRARY, October 1, 2001

Bill Cochran, Director
Jim Peters, Assistant Director
Sandra Raymond, Administrative Coordinator
Dee Ann Redman, Systems Coordinator
Carol Allison
Delilah Brown
Karen Collings
Jim Curry
Jerry Dalton
Amy Fugate
Deborah Jennings
Kathy Jones
Jerry Kettenacker
Patty Koch
Kristi Laib
Rita Moore
Gary Mueller
Diane O'Malley
Cindy Patterson
Lynne Puckett
Holly Rathie
John Riffe
Gene Robson
Dale Spaulding
Dave Shearer
Karen Stevens
Loren Thompson
Margaret Wiser



The Library staff on the roof, May 2002