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McFadden Discusses History Of Library

ROCK SPRINGS — Wilmett McFadden, Rock Springs Public Library director, discussed "giant strides" made by the library since 1900.

Mrs. McFadden quoted a thesis written by Shirley Millner called "Rock Springs Now and Then."

"It was a strange twist of fate that the desire to build a church should provide our town with a library. The dusty, dirty, rambling coal town was beginning to grow. The building of the first frame house in 1870 spurred others to build.

"In the same year, a store and saloon were erected and the very first school was established on the second floor of that saloon. The people, too, were beginning to grow spiritually and culturally as well. With the establishment of the school, churches followed. A doctor came, an undertaker, later a library was built as were many other businesses.

"The Rev. Kippenger, a Methodist minister, trying to raise funds for a church building, wrote to many philanthropic organizations and only one responded. It was the Andrew Carnegie Foundation. They said that they could not build a church, but if the town would provide a site, they would furnish the funds for a public library.

"This was 1900, the land was purchased by the city where the present day library still stands and the old Carnegie Public Library was built for the sum of \$11,323. When it was completed, Mayor John Anderson appointed the first Rock Springs Library board of trustees."

Taken from the minutes of the first meeting of that same board on June 29, 1910, "the following citizens were appointed as board of trustees for the Rock Springs Carnegie Library, H. Van Deusen, for three years; Charles H. Powell, for two years; and Frank B. Crumley for one year.

"Charles H. Powell was elected president; F.B. Crumley became secretary and Van Deusen was made treasurer. Mary Clark was appointed librarian of the new Carnegie Library and was also to act as assistant secretary.

"Mary A. Clark, a teacher, was appointed the first librarian and she served until

March 1, 1930. For several weeks, her niece, a Miss Beveridge, was in charge until the board appointed Mrs. Estelma Elder as librarian.

"Mrs. Elder held that position until 1944. Adele Ruotsala became the new librarian and was in charge until her resignation in April of 1953. Ada Starman, her assistant, was asked if she would assume the position, but she declined.

"Mrs. McFadden, who was Mrs. Ruotsala's assistant from August 1947 through 1949, applied for the library directorship and was appointed by Mayor Edwin James May 1, 1953.

"In 1954, given permission by the members of the library board, Richard Day, chairman, Paul Ryan and Joe Wilmett approached the Mayor and the City Council concerning the condition of the building.

"Mayor James selected a committee on which Sen. Steve Majhanovich, D-Sweetwater, then a councilman, looked into the matter.

"After an inspection of the building, they reported it was in much worse condition than previously suspected. The city of Rock Springs, mayor and councilmen found the funds to make necessary repairs to the building.

"This wasn't an easy task at that time. The coal mines were closing. Some had already closed and the future of Rock Springs looked very bleak. It seems to always happen," the minutes said, "that when economic conditions are bad, the library business booms."

"Every Help Wanted ad in the local newspaper and out-of-town papers was scrutinized. Some were even clipped out.

"People who had never used the library before poured in, and during all of this, the library was remodeled."

The library did not close during the 'shoring-up' of the foundation, re-wiring, installation of the new roof and new ceiling and painting. The library officially opened September 1953 with a separate children's library downstairs. "There weren't many books for them, but it was a start and the kids loved having a place of their own," says Mrs. McFadden.

In 1958, city board members Clarence Samuels, Richard

Day and Leno Zancanella approached Sweetwater County Library board members Halilo Tallaferro, Mrs. John Bernard and Vernon Hurd about the possibility of receiving county funds to aid the Rock Springs Library.

According to Wyoming Statutes, any town over a certain population was entitled to a county branch library. The Rock Springs Public Library did not ask to become a branch at that time, but the city library, in lieu of a branch, could receive funds for a library already established.

Some years later, an agreement was reached and Rock Springs Carnegie Library received the first funds from the county. These funds were primarily for maintenance and equipment. Later funds were approved for books and other library materials.

Rock Springs citizens paid taxes to maintain the city library, but their taxes also supported operation of the county library for over 30 years. County librarian Grace Gasson's expertise and consideration paved the way for the excellent libraries the people in Sweetwater County enjoy today, Mrs. McFadden said.

"In 1963, the Rock Springs Library was again 'bursaling' at the seams, and a sympathetic Mayor Paul Wataha and city

council put an addition to the library on a city bond issue," she adds.

Of the four issues brought to the people at that time, only two passed, an improvement and addition to the sawn plant and the library addition.

In ensuing months the librarians worked among the jack-hammers, carpenters, painters, carpet layers and electricians. The back door was used for patrons, both adults and children. New additions on each side of the library, upstairs and down, were used by many and enjoyed.

It had seemed that the latest addition would prove to be enough for a successful library operation, but about 1971 the old "growing pains" were becoming an affliction again, Mrs. McFadden says.

This time, the city and county would alleviate the situation as a joint effort.

A Community Fine Arts Center was purchased by the Sweetwater County Library Board and a lot next to it for parking. The arts building was formerly the old LDS Church.

The street section of Blair Avenue was decided to be the county bond by the city of Rock Springs for an additional library section and the final result was the Fine Arts and Library Complex of today.

"We obtained over \$60,000

from the state through the Federal Library Services and Construction Act; \$5,000 from city revenue sharing and \$70,000 from county revenue sharing. The rest of the needed construction and remodeling money came from Sweetwater County which levied that money for library building use," Mrs. McFadden says.

"The building project cost under \$500,000 and was paid for by the time it was completed for operation. An anonymous donor furnished the adult reading room, the Rock Springs Woman's Club furnished the listening rooms in the music room and many other Rock Springs citizens donated gifts to the new complex. It was officially dedicated Sept. 21, 1975.

"The boom was underway by then and facilities had again reached capacity level and library services were not available to all," Mrs. McFadden says.

Allied Chemical donated one of its mobile office buildings to the city of Rock Springs and funded remodeling it into a small branch library.

Even this did not suffice the needs of a growing area so progress is being made on a large new branch library funded by the county which will be situated at the corner of Dewar and Sweetwater Drive.



to investigate a gas leak claim. As the two walked by the he pilot light ignited the sewer pipe. The explosion physical out stairs and against the kiln, he returned to the burning is the first local account of the fired such a high award.



an Warkworth, Luke Meeks, n and Jesse Pincock. In front off, Joe Vickers, center, and

Values

periences are a must for them, e added. They need to be constantly trying out new muscles id abilities, she explained, th Day Camp offers that opportunity, she said.

Scouts between the ages of -18 will find excitement at the nnell's Camp New Fork north Pinedale, Netterfield said. ds year Scouts will arrive in 4, he said.

Camp Director Ray Ball has on working on new ideas for a annual summer learning experience, Netterfield said. He



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land for the original library was purchased by the Rock Springs Town Council.

According to library board minutes from the period, the first librarian, Mary Clark, started at a salary of \$40 a month and was earning \$85 a month at the time of her death in 1937. The first janitor only earned \$11.50 a month. Energy costs for the library were

with the reference area study room consisting of two wooden tables and some chairs.

By 1954, the original building had deteriorated and the library board and head librarian Wilmet Hamm petitioned the city council to repair the building. According to scrapbooks kept in the library, the floor in the basement had

building across the street.

In 1965, the library won the Book-of-the-Month Club's Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award for library excellence in a town with a population of less than 25,000 people. The award included a \$1,000 prize that helped the library purchase new research materials for the high school section of the library. Hamm, who



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LIBRARY EXTENSION — The extended portion of the Rock Springs Library includes the main desk, computer terminals, new release sections and the CD and DVD collections. The second floor of the extension

has offices and a magazine section. married and changed her last name to McFadden, was congratulated by Vice President Herbert H. Humphrey in 1965. McFadden would continue to work at the library until retiring in 1986.

The final renovation and expansion, which was completed in 1973, caused a section of Blair Avenue to be permanently closed so the library and the Community Fine Arts Center could be joined, affecting a part of national history.

"Blair Avenue originally was the Lincoln Highway. It turned on C Street and ran across the railroad tracks," Bob Nelson, coordinator of the Rock Springs Historical Museum, said.

Additions to the building were also made during this time, including a group of meeting rooms located in the basement of the building, a parking lot to the side of the CFAC building and added space for the library and a corridor that leads directly into the CFAC.

The CFAC portion of the building originally was an LDS Church that occupied 301 C St. and was dedicated Sept. 27, 1931.

Debora Soule, director of the CFAC, said, "The building was leased to the county and eventually it was purchased."

The Community Fine Arts Center started in 1939 when a science teacher at Rock Springs High School, Elmer Halseth, purchased a painting titled "Shack Alley" by Henrietta Wood for the high school. After that, Halseth would use dimes and nickels gathered from students and donations from community members to buy artwork during the summer and eventually collected one of the largest high school art collections in the nation, possessing works from Grandma Moses, Norman Rockwell and Elliot Orr among others. When the CFAC opened, Halseth was chosen to be the center's first director because of his contributions.

Much of the Rock Springs High School collection is on display at the center, with a few of the works in the collection displayed in the Sweetwater County School



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MAIN LIBRARY — The children's library downstairs and the reference section and adult library upstairs are part of the original Carnegie Library.

District No. 1 Central Administration Building.

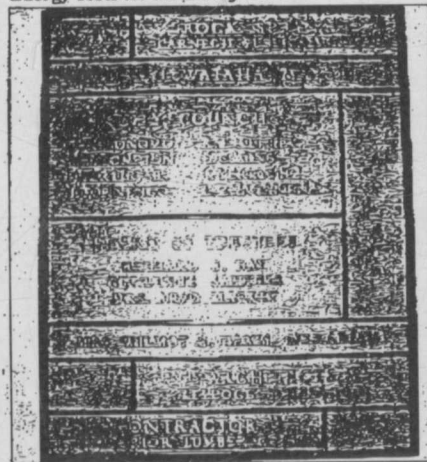
Since its opening, the CFAC has hosted a lecture by horror movie icon and art expert Vincent Price, hosted shows for numerous local and nationally known artists and has even drawn fire from Rock Springs residents for artwork displayed.

The work, "The Worldly Chapel" by Darryl Newton, was acquired by the CFAC as a donation from Newton. When the work was first displayed, it met with harsh criticism and the CFAC decided to take it off display.

"It was too real for them," Debora Soule, director of the CFAC, said. "There were depic-

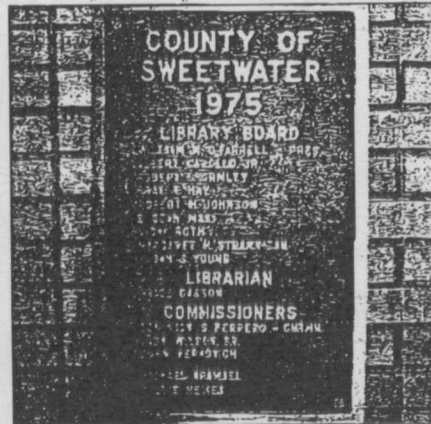
tions of people laying in the nude. Some people thought he (Newton) had portrayed people from the community."

According to a display about the picture next to "The Worldly Chapel," it was moved to the director's office and would only be shown to people who specifically asked to see it or people curious about the history of Rock Springs. When a show of Newton's art was hosted by the CFAC, "The Worldly Chapel" was placed on display again. According to the display, one visitor said, "The Worldly Chapel was so bad, it should have been burned the first time it was displayed." The painting is currently displayed at the CFAC.



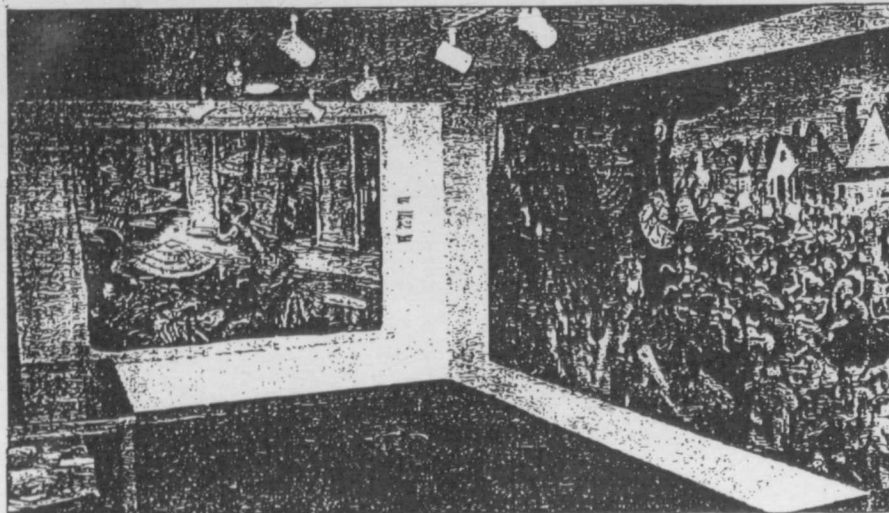
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1964 COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE — The plaque commemorates the renovation done to the Carnegie Library in 1964. Paul J. Wataha was the mayor of Rock Springs at the time and the contractor for the renovation was Superior Lumber.



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1975 COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE — The plaque commemorates the completion of the joining of the Carnegie Library and the Community Fine Arts Center. The building stretches over a portion of Blair Avenue, which was formerly a part of the Lincoln Highway, the first transcontinental highway in the United States.



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DISPLAY ROOM — This display room that connects the Rock Springs Library to the Community Fine Arts Center was a staircase that led to the conference rooms below. The room was renovated four years ago to create another display room for the CFAC.

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