

## The Dream of a Small Town

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Connie J. Brown  
Markle Public Library

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Along the banks of the Wabash River, just off I-69, lies a small town proclaiming to be the "home of 971 happy people and 4 grouches". And the residents of Markle, Indiana appear to be just as their town sign boasts, *including* the 4 grouches who are elected each year during Wildcat Days, the local festival. Nestled in the midst of this charming community is the Markle Public Library, one of the 101 Indiana libraries serving a population of 5000 or less. Founded in the 1930's by the local chapter of Psi Iota Xi with only the books donated by themselves, the library has weathered numerous moves and a fire to continue to serve the Markle community. While much of the credit for its longevity in the face of numerous obstacles lies in the dedication of the original founders, one in particular stands as probably the most influential in its maintenance. Her name is Grayce Yoos, and much of this article is based upon her recollections of her 50 years of service as librarian of the Markle Public Library.

In the beginning, the members of Psi Iota Xi, seeing the need for a library in their community, took upon themselves the task of establishing the

Markle Public Library. Since there was little or no money for the purchase of books, they each donated what books they could from their own collections. Each of the members then volunteered time each week to preside as 'librarian'. In 1937, the library was registered with the State of Indiana, and was then eligible to receive books on two week loan from Indianapolis. These books were delivered by truck every two weeks, then picked up two weeks later with a new truckload delivered in turn. Obviously this increased their lending ability greatly. The sorority also purchased recent books as often as they could afford them. These "best-sellers" were rented out at 2 cents per day to encourage prompt return and therefore enable more people to enjoy them. The overdue fine on books was set at 2 cents per day per book, where it still stands today. In 1937 Grayce Yoos became the official paid librarian, a position she continued to fill until her retirement in June, 1985.

Since its establishment the Markle Public Library has moved eight times. It began in the home of Lillian McGuffy, the sorority chairwoman at that time. According to Miss

Yoos, Mrs. McGuffy was a teacher and a driving force behind the sorority's decision to establish a library. From there the library was moved downtown above Dr. Wood's office, and from there to the present location of Randoll's Barber Shop. Dr. Wood moved to an office down the street after the war (WW II), whereupon the library was moved back into the downstairs portion of the building it had previously occupied. The next move was across the street into the building which previously housed the Yoos Harness Shop. Library ledgers from this period list as purchases such things as coal oil and corn cobs. When questioned concerning their use, Miss Yoos explained that, in order to heat the library, a corn cob was soaked in coal oil and then placed atop the wood in a pot-bellied stove to facilitate starting a fire. Sometime around 1949 or 1950, while the library was housed here, a fire broke out in the building directly behind it. Since Markle had suffered a devastating fire in earlier years which nearly destroyed the entire downtown area, there was great fear that a similar tragedy would be repeated. As a result Miss Yoos and many nearby residents physically carried every book from the library to the doctor's office. According to Miss Yoos, everyone pitched in with boxes, baskets, or whatever they could find to carry the books in, and simply piled them on the floor of the doctor's office in their haste to remove them from any danger from the fire. While they were successful in that no books were lost or damaged, it was "a real mess" getting the books back into the library in order! (Incidentally, the library building suffered little or no damage from the fire. The building behind it was completely destroyed.) After this, the library was moved three more times before it was installed at its present location, the Markle Town Building.

Now occupying two rooms in the upper level of the Markle Town Building, the library has grown to such an extent that the attainment of a third room seems inevitable. The smaller room houses children's books for all ages, books with cassettes/records, puzzles, and games. Contained in the larger room are all adult books, periodicals (for all ages), cassette tapes, video tapes, record albums, and 16mm films. A variety of media equipment can be borrowed from the Markle Library, such as video machines, a television, a 16mm projector, Polaroid cameras, and a cassette tape player. Listed as the smallest library in Indiana in 1983 with a total of 4,455 volumes (books alone), it had increased the number of volumes to 6,828 by 1985, showing a growth rate of 2,373 volumes or 53 % in two years. By 1985, the number of cardholders stood at 597, but has since increased to 738—many of which are actually "family cards" acquired by county residents for \$5.00 each. To date, the number of volumes stands at 7,680, with 314 video tapes, 19 films (16mm), 359 children's books with cassettes/records, and numerous periodicals. While the library has funds for the purchase of books, the vast majority of the books acquired are donated and come in at such a rate that many are boxed awaiting the construction of new shelves.

From its registration as a library in 1937 until early 1982, the library was open for business Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. and Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. until 12:00 noon. At that time the hours were increased to include Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and 12:00 until 2:00 p.m. on Saturdays. A second person was hired to act as librarian at those times, while Miss Yoos continued to work as she always had. In 1985, upon Miss Yoos' retirement, Donna Brown became act-

ing full-time librarian. In spite of the longevity enjoyed by the library at that point, its existence was still relatively unknown to many of the town residents and those of the surrounding townships. To help remedy this Mrs. Brown decided to begin a publicity campaign inviting several local church groups and organizations for open houses, even providing refreshments from her own funds. At about the same time, the library began acquiring video tapes for check-out (along with VCR machines). Mrs. Brown credits much of the library's recent growth to a greatly increased awareness of the library's

existence and the community's vision as to its potential. The video tapes have also brought many patrons (and in many cases whole families) into the library who might possibly never have ventured to come and have therefore greatly increased the library's need for more books.

The story behind the Markle Public Library and its growth is both fascinating and heartwarming. It is the story of a dream fulfilled by ordinary people through persistence, dedication, and vision. It tells much about such ordinary people and what can be accomplished from one ordinary person's dream.