

A
HISTORY
OF THE
Ogdensburg
Public Library
AND
Remington
Art Memorial



Written by
MR. JOHN C. HOWARD

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OGDENSBURG PUBLIC LIBRARY
and
REMINGTON ART MEMORIAL

Ogdensburg owes its fine Public Library and its famed Frederic Remington Art Memorial largely to John C. Howard. Mr. Howard not only gave the money necessary to build the Public Library but interested the late George Hail and together their benefactions made both projects possible. Mr. Howard served for many years on the Board of Trustees of the Public Library and has long been interested in the progress of both the Library and Memorial.

Some time ago the Board of Trustees asked Mr. Howard if he would write a history of the Ogdensburg Public Library and Remington Art Memorial. Mr. Howard consented to do so and The Journal publishes below what he has written. This is the first history of the Library and Memorial and will preserve for future generations the story of how Mr. Howard's and Mr. Hall's benefactions made it possible for the people of Ogdensburg to enjoy these splendid educational and cultural institutions.—Editor's note.

This article on the history of the Ogdensburg Public Library and Remington Art Memorial is reprinted from the Ogdensburg Journal of May 31, 1938.

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THE TRUSTEES OF THE
OGDENSBURG PUBLIC LIBRARY

By JOHN C. HOWARD

My first recollection of the Ogdensburg Public Library dates back to the dark ages. There was a small room set aside for the purposes of the library in the old Town Hall Building, which afterward became one of our public schools and was subsequently destroyed by fire. The first

librarian within my ken was one Benjamin Bridges, who brought up a likely family of boys and girls, and he was followed by Miss Fannie Rosseel, a daughter of John F. Rosseel, the original owner of the homestead which stood on the site of our present library building. The Rosseel house was a one story structure, finished in stucco, and in constructing the present library building, the front entrance and wings on either side, were practically a replica of the Rosseel homestead.

When Dr. Fred VanDusen came to Ogdensburg as principal of the Ogdensburg Free Academy, he at once took a great interest in library matters, with the result that the library was incorporated under the jurisdiction of the State Board of Regents. George Clark of Clark, Dodge and Company, brokers in New York City, married the daughter of the late James G. Averell, and desiring a summer house purchased the entire block, which now comprises library park. An interesting episode in this connection is the fact that he built the residence on the site of the present library and located a large barn for the accommodation of his horses on the North East corner of the lot. Mrs. Clark did not see the property until the buildings were completed, and she immediately criticized the location of the barn, saying that nothing should occupy the block but the residence. The result was that Mr. Clark bought a lot where the Randles Factory

now stands and moved the barn across the street to that location. The old barn is now a part of the Randles Factory. After occupying the premises as a summer residence for a number of years, the Clarks decided to summer elsewhere, and under the leadership of Dr. VanDusen, public spirited citizens came forward and raised a sufficient amount to buy the property and turn it over to the city as a public library. The lower floor was altered to fit the needs of the library, but the upper floor was allowed to remain as it was originally constructed.

The Remington Indian Collection

Upon the death of Frederic Remington, Mrs. Remington offered the priceless Indian collection, which Mr. Remington had accumulated during his life on the Western plains, to the Smithsonian Institute at Washington, with the stipulation that it was to be known as the Frederic Remington collection. According to the regulations of the Smithsonian Institute, this could not be accomplished, as firearms, saddles, uniforms and accouterments, would have to be segregated, and thus would lose its identity. Mrs. Remington, therefore, offered it to the city of Ogdensburg in the year 1914 and it was installed and finally catalogued in the old library building in December, 1915.

Shortly after this occurred, Mr. George Hall, feeling that it should be housed in better quarters suggested to me that he

would put up a building on the library property if it could be arranged with the city authorities, to be used for the express purpose of showing the Indian collection to the best advantage. This led to further talks between Mr. Hall and me, relative to the disposal of the Indian collection and the necessity for more commodious quarters for the growing public library. We finally decided to give to the city of Ogdensburg a new library building to cost \$100,000.00.

Then the World War came on, at which time Mr. Hall and I had deposited \$50,000.00 in escrow toward the building fund. On account of advancing prices, owing to war, we decided to postpone the erection of the new library until building costs were lower, and in the meantime, both Mr. Hall and Mrs. Remington passed away. As the agreement between George Hall and me was simply the exchange of a letter, there was a question in the minds of the executors of George Hall's estate as to whether under said letter the estate was liable for the advance of the other \$25,000.00 to make up Mr. Hall's subscription toward the new library. A compromise was therefore effected with the estate, whereby they agreed to turn over the Hall residence, which was formerly known as the Parish Mansion, erected in 1808, and it was decided by the library trustees to use this historic building for the paintings and bronzes which Mrs. Remington had left to the Ogdensburg Public Library under her

will, together with the Indian collection. The Remington Art Memorial was formally opened with appropriate ceremonies on July 19, 1923.

The City Pledges to Maintain The Public Library

In order to furnish what was then considered adequate support, it was stipulated that the city of Ogdensburg, before the new library building was constructed, would raise an amount of \$7500.00 a year by taxation to maintain it. Miss Emma Caten, one of the library trustees has a life interest in a fund left by Mrs. Remington, which upon her death will insure to the benefit of the Ogdensburg Public Library and Remington Memorial, the income from which shall be used for the purchase of books and works of art.

An interesting side-light which may now be divulged, because the principal has passed on, is the fact that Mr. Frederic P. Haskell of Chicago, when he found that Mr. Hall and I were about to build a new library for the city of Ogdensburg wired me asking for an interview in New York City. On meeting him there, he said that he wanted to do something big for Ogdensburg and requested that Mr. Hall and I step out of the picture and that he would build the library and let us find other ways to spend our money. After consulting Mr. Hall and finding that he was agreeable to the suggestion I wrote Mr. Haskell to that effect and received his thanks in reply, with

a statement that the new library would be an accomplished fact within a reasonable time. After several months had elapsed and hearing no further from Mr. Haskell, I wrote him, asking his reason for the delay, to which he replied that certain private reasons had developed to cancel his proposed benefaction and suggested that Mr. Hall and I carry out our original intention, which was done.

Further Facts About Ogdensburg Public Library

The late Mr. Edward L. Strong acted as chairman of the building committee when the new library was constructed, and did valiant service. It was at his suggestion that we appeared before the Council and received a guarantee of \$7500.00 per year from the city toward the support of the library. During construction, a serious fire occurred and again Mr. Strong was of great assistance in securing a liberal settlement of the fire loss from the insurance companies. When the building was completed and all bills paid, we had a few thousand dollars left, and this was used to build concrete walks in Library Park and plant shrubs to beautify the grounds. At this time, Mr. Edward Dillingham was one of the Library Trustees. He undertook to supervise the purchase and planting of the shrubs, and the result is known to everyone who strolls through Library Park. The planting is a delight to the eye and reflects great credit on Mr. Dillingham's good taste.