



ELISHA D. SMITH

MENASHA

PUBLIC

LIBRARY

CELEBRATING

125 YEARS

1896 - 2021

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Elisha D. Smith Menasha Public Library Announces 125th Anniversary

Library's Quasiquicentennial year (1896-2021) celebrates 125 years of Inspiring Learning and Connecting Community

Menasha, WI – The Elisha D. Smith Menasha Public Library announces a year-long celebration of its 125th (Quasiquicentennial) Anniversary, beginning in January 2021 and extending throughout the year. Over the next several months, special events and programs will highlight the library's history, showcase current offerings, and focus on the future of the library.

The library will host its premiere anniversary event—a virtual concert, *Music Notes for 125 Years of Service*—live streaming it on Facebook @MenashaLibrary on Thursday, January 14, at 7:00 p.m. to commemorate and celebrate the signing of the charter for the Menasha Free Library 125 years ago. Performers will include local favorites like Randy Peterson, Still Blue (Christopher Evanson), Elvis John, and several more. Watch for details coming soon on the library website at www.menashalibrary.org and on Facebook @MenashaLibrary.

The Menasha Library's Expanding Reach

Located at 440 First Street in Menasha, Wisconsin, the Elisha D. Smith Menasha Public Library serves approximately 25,000 area residents in the City of Menasha and east side of the Village of Fox Crossing in Northeast Wisconsin, lending out tens of thousands of items annually. Any person living in Wisconsin may register for an Elisha D. Smith Public Library card free of charge.

"The Menasha Library has been a valuable asset to the community for 125 years, providing patrons with free access to traditional and digital information. The Library also provides learning programs and entertainment for patrons of all ages," said Bob Golz, Chairman of the Library Board.

While the Covid-19 pandemic has limited in-person community use of the facility during most of 2020, library patrons continue to have access to books, magazines, CDs, DVDs, and other materials via online ordering at www.menashalibrary.org with curbside pick-up. To learn more about library services and programs, follow us on Facebook @MenashaLibrary, visit www.menashalibrary.org, or call (920) 967-3690.

Most recent statistics from 2019 include the following:

- Our library circulated 389,000 items, including books, magazines, e-books, audiobooks, DVDS and CDs, and more to adults, young adults, and children.
- The library's programs and tours attracted approximately 24,000 participants of all ages.
- Its doors were open for public groups, hosting 2,000 community meeting room uses across last year. On its website, the library drew about 77,000 visits per year with 186,813 page views.
- The library welcomed more than 1,500 hours of volunteer assistance, with volunteers delivering books to the homebound, facilitating book sales and assisting with various library programs.
- In addition, its Reference Desk staff also answered more than 46,000 questions.

One priority goal of the Library's 125th Anniversary is to increase its patrons of all ages.

Menasha Library 125th Anniversary

Library's Founding and Early Timeline

- **January 14, 1896** – The Wisconsin Department of State granted the new Menasha Public Library Association the powers and privileges to institute a public library.
- **April 18, 1896** - The Menasha Library Association Board of Directors held its first meeting, pledging greater access to knowledge and learning for local residents. Heading the group was Elisha D. Smith, a successful businessman and owner of the Menasha Wooden Ware Company, who approved \$1,000 to purchase books.
- **August 1896** – Miss Lucinda Lee Pleasants, author, poet and another driving force in the founding of the library, was appointed as its first librarian. The children's room addition which was built in the Mill St. library in 1930-31 was dedicated to her, as is the Storytime Room at the current library building.
- **July 12, 1897** – The library became a free public institution open to all residents when the City of Menasha agreed to levy a property tax to maintain it.
- **September 1, 1897** – Elisha D. Smith bestowed a founding gift of \$25,000 to invest in the construction of its new building and another \$10,000 grant providing for an operations endowment. He also convinced the City of Menasha to fund the library. Smith's combined donation in today's adjusted dollars exceeds \$1.16 million.
- **October 21, 1898** – Grand opening and dedication of the new Free Public Library of Menasha. Hundreds attended a jubilant dedication at the downtown corner of Mill and Water streets. "It is a good thing for us to engage in any work that has as its aim the enlightening of any whom we can reach," said Elisha D. Smith, the Library's principal founder, donor, and trustee. That mission remains the library's core purpose today.

For more information about the Menasha Library's 125th Anniversary celebration events in 2021, follow the library on Facebook @MenashaLibrary, visit www.menashalibrary.org, or call (920) 967-3690.

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Photos with captions



Thanks in large part to a generous founding donation of Elisha D. Smith, the Menasha Free Library building became a reality in 1898.



Menasha Free Library, circa 1898, located on the corner of Mill and Water Streets. According to the *Menasha Breeze* newspaper in October 1898, "Mr. Smith had the working people in mind when, for their special comfort and happiness, he erected this magnificent library building ... so that they might better their condition of life and fit them for a higher position according to the merits of each man, woman and child."