LIBRARY TIMELINE

1884 – Library Association of Menasha forms with 60 subscribers, headed by Elisha D. Smith with support from Lucy Lee Pleasants, using a room in the Menasha High School (which coincidentally stood where the library stands today).

April 18, 1896 -- The first meeting of the Menasha Library Association board of directors was held in the parlor of the National Hotel on Saturday evening. The first business of order was to elect officers and directors. It is decided to rent a space for a library.

May, 1896 – A purchasing committee is authorized to select and purchase $1,000 worth of books for the rooms leased on the second floor of the Adam Tuchscherer building on the northwest corner of Chute and Milwaukee Streets. Mr. Tuchscherer agrees to provide free rent until September. Rent is $75 per year, with heat and one electric light in each of the two rooms furnished.

August, 1896 – Miss Lucy Lee Pleasants is appointed the librarian. A large number of the books purchased for the library are in German and Polish. This is still a subscription library.

March 22, 1897 – Library trustees vote to transfer all of the library's assets to the city with the condition that the city accept, establish, and maintain the library as a free public library according to law. The city agrees to levy a tax to maintain the library.

July 12, 1897 – The library is no longer a subscription library. It is now the Free Public Library and Reading Rooms of Menasha. It has an inventory of 1,458 volumes and pamphlets. Elected Board of Trustees officers are President E. D. Smith, Vice-President F. D. Lake, and Secretary J. L. Fieweger.

September 1, 1897 – E. D. Smith announces that he will supply a $25,000 gift to the library to "invest in a building and the furnishing of the same . . . with $10,000 to be placed as an endowment fund when the building is completed". Construction will eventually cost $17,000, but Mr. Smith will still establish a $10,000 endowment fund.

Friday, March 18, 1898 at 2 o'clock – The cornerstone of the new library on Mill and Water Streets is placed by Mowry, Margaret, Carlton, and Julia Smith – grandchildren of E. D. Smith. A German song is sung by St. Mary's School students, a Polish song by students of St. John's School.

October 21, 1898 – The new Free Public Library of Menasha opens. The afternoon dedication is held in the auditorium of the new library, the evening celebration is held at the Germania Opera House. Addresses are made by Samuel Plantz, president of Lawrence University, Dr. E. H. Merrell of Ripon College, F. A. Hutchins, secretary of the state library commission of Madison, Charles K. Adams, president of the University of Wisconsin, Reverand H. A. Miner of Madison, and E. D. Smith who says that he wanted "our library to be a constant and increasing benefit to our community". Mr. Smith relished in hearing users of the library speak with pride of "our library", which includes a system of

fifteen traveling libraries with fifty volumes each to provide library service to those residing outside of downtown Menasha. (One traveling library has been preserved and is located outside of the present administrative offices.)

November 1898 – Juvenile books are added to the library. Some people complain that the library is so overrun by children that there is no place to sit.

June 1899 – Elisha D. Smith passes away.

November 1899 – A portrait of Mr. Smith was accepted and paid for by the board of trustees. The work was done by A. Y. VanWagner. (The portrait hangs above the library's fireplace today.)

1902 – A Library Visiting Committee was appointed to invite people to visit and use the library.

1904 – The Ladies of the Federated Clubs are granted permission to charge admission for lectures, concerts, or other entertainments. They use the money to purchase a piano for the library's auditorium, gifting it to the board of trustees. (This piano is still owned by the library.)

1909 – A telephone is installed in the library.

1918 – Miss Pleasants retires. She passes away on October 29, 1925.

1931 – A children's room is added onto the building at a cost of $20,000. It is decided to call the room the Lucy Lee Pleasants Memorial Room. A portrait of her was given to the library by her family to be hung in a conspicuous place in the room. (This portrait hangs in the current Children's Room, close to the story room.)

1933 – Juvenile delinquency "rears its ugly head" and the board arranges for a guard with police powers to be on duty each evening from 7:00 to 9:00.

1936 – This is the year of the high school fire. All books checked out to students who had them at school are written off without fault to the borrowers. Rooms of the library not in constant use are turned into school rooms.

1946 – It is established that the name of the library will henceforth be the Elisha D. Smith Public Library.

1952 – The library board purchases a new Radio-Phonograph combination, and movie projector is installed.

1955 – A polio epidemic disrupts operation of the library.

April 15, 1956 – The library holds a celebration of the 60th anniversary of the first meeting of the Menasha library board of trustees.

1965 – The decision is made to build a new library on Racine Street. (This was the site of the high school that had burned down. In 1965 it was the site of the Racine Street Park.)

August 5, 1969 – The new library opens. Children are lined up the length of the children's room to check out books. Circulation for the day was 1,818.

September 14, 1969 from 2:00pm to 5:30pm -- Dedication and open house ceremonies are held. The meeting room in the basement is designated as the Company E Room, dedicated to the memory of 170 Menasha men who comprised the entire Company E unit that fought in France in World War I. The children's room is designated the Lucy Lee Pleasants Children's Library. The new 28,000 square foot library was built at a cost of $592,000.

January 1, 1980 – The library becomes a member of the Winnefox Library System.

1988 – The library is named Wisconsin Library Association Library of the Year.

November 17, 1996 – The library celebrates its 100th Anniversary.

December 2003 – Renovation of the library is completed at a cost of $4.5 million, with slightly more than $1 million coming from private donations. Floor space is 46,000 square feet. A grand celebration occurs on January 31, 2004.

2008 -- The library is again named Wisconsin Library Association Library of the Year.

2018 – Library Board Chairman James C. Englebert is named Trustee of the Year by the Wisconsin Library Association

2020, 2021 – The covid epidemic disrupts operation of the library.

2021 -- The library celebrates its 125th Anniversary.