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Mabell Babion  
Library

Library

You know, Mrs. Babion, I told you I was going to come back and ask you to do a tape on the library, so we'll do that tape today if you would like to. That will be just fine. My knowledge of the earliest of Chesaning Library history is taken from the old files of the Chesaning Argus. In every community there's always a few people who are glad to read books and/or magazines, but not always able to purchase and keep them. In the early 1880's, when my father was in a general store and lived at 227 S. Front Street with my mother and two brothers, they took the then popular Pierson's Magazine. It seemed the neighbors all knew the day it arrived and vied with each other to borrow it as soon as my folks had read it. With ~~the~~ several short stories, the serial, along with the popular patterns, it made splendid reading. At that time, the townships had a library that was sent in small numbers, along with a bookcase to each school district. These were stored in homes in the district for the use of the people. Each school had its own separate library for the children. While I was in the lower grades, the Chesaning School had a quite large library and I still have a book that they had printed naming all their books and authors of the time. In the 1890's the Village ladies formed a Literary Society and had several amusements for the public in order to raise funds to purchase current books. In time there were enough to have a bookcase in some business place in town, and at certain <sup>times</sup> a librarian would be present to open for any of the members to borrow books. ~~In~~ The late 90's brought many women to join the Literary Group. The Chesaning Argus published a woman's supplement edition with its regular paper and every woman in the group was given something special to do. My mother, Juliette Eliza Waldron was chairman of the Literary Group and assigned different ladies to subjects pertaining to them. They were affiliated with the State federation. Then came the first World War, and in 1916 all reading was given up to do war work by everyone. It was in the 1920's when a group of young married women started a Drama Club and met in the afternoon. At this time I was working in the shoe store owned and operated by my husband and I. Several times I was invited to belong, and at last Anna Nason invited me to her home and the temptation was so great that I went. This was a delightful time. After a time I persuaded them to have evening meetings, and they elected me Secretary, a job I held for several years. In 1936 Miss Frisch, who was then County School Commissioner in Saginaw County, brought a group of books to the old Council rooms in the water works building on Pine Street, where Frank's Market now stands. In 1936, in October, we opened in Peet Center with a set of shelves for these books. The water works building was anything but a pleasant place to be in, because it was piled full of odd things that the



Council used from time to time, or the Village used from time ~~to time~~ to time, and the Council men met there, but the books that were brought were not very desirable books, and they were old books, all of them. I went down one day and Helen Walker Bessinger was the librarian at the time working for the NYA. Then I was just horrified at the condition that things were in and at that time I was President of the Chesaning Study Club and I decided that the Study Club should get behind it. So they fully agreed and each one of us went out and we tried to get donations and did everything that we possibly could to further our cause and get some things. In 1938<sup>6</sup> we opened at Peet's Community Center. We went to the Council and asked them for shelves to be put up in one of the Council rooms, or one of the Peet Community Center rooms. They said that they didn't want those old books up there. Well we promised them that if they would give us a chance, we would have new volumes to put in and we would have a decent collection of books for them to serve, and in a months time we asked for more shelves to be built and now we had about 1200 good books. The NYA girls who worked for us were Helen Bessinger, Margaret McDonagh Seminak, now of California, Dorothy Feurstein Adams, of St. Charles, Marian Knezvich and her sister Doranne Knezvich Chludil, all paid by the NYA and later by the WPA.

Mrs. Babion, was this a public Library, could anybody use it? This was a public library, everybody could come in, and we were delighted to have everybody use it that could possibly come. The officers of the Study Club acted as the Library Board and after Mabell Babion was the past President she took ~~it~~ over as President of the group each year. Our monies came from the State Penal Fines, from donations, from sales of old books and magazines. During the summer, <sup>opened</sup> only on Saturdays from 3 to 5. Members of the clubs took over, and in October, 1940 the WPA gave Helen Bessinger the job of librarian at 52¢ an hour, 30 hours per week. In May, 1942 our first State Equalization Tax money came in. The Village population was now about 1800, and our Township population was 3000. Our teachers began to bring the school children into the library for books. The WPA paid Helen until January of 1943 and we had asked lodges, patrons, and the Village until we had money to pay Helen until she was offered a better job in June of 1943. Mrs. Mary Ringler came to assist until fall, then Miss Lulu Wagner took over until her health failed her and in November she quit. Donna Ketchum now took over, and with Margaret Eila Brainerd, Donna Eastwood Brown, Doris Potter Tessin and Jean Dumas we were able to keep open a few days a week. In May of 1944 Mrs. Robinette became our Librarian. This was a red letter day for our library. A group of members appeared before the Township Board in March of 1944, asking a

quarter of a mil tax be put on the ballot for the library funds. I will now quote from the Argus of March 7, 1945. "Mabell Babion presented the matter of asking the Township Board to put the matter of a quarter of a mil tax before the voters on April 2, for a Township-Village library and the Study Club endorsed her suggestion and the petition was signed by all. The Club asks everyone to vote yes on the question". This is the end of the quote from the article. Then the Study Club endorses the aid for the Library. I now quote from the Argus of March 7 under the heading: Ask the Vote on Library Help: "Petitions are in circulation for a township vote on a quarter of a mil aid" and under this was printed and I quote, "Petitions are in circulation seeking signatures to the Chesaning Township Board asking the question of a Township levy of  $\frac{1}{4}$  mil to be put on the ballot April 2. Such money, if voted, be for the Chesaning Library which serves both the Village and the Township, and during the last few years has rapidly expanded its books and service. It is hoped if the appropriation is voted by the people that the library can be kept open much more than it is possible now." During the time following that we worked hard to get the quarter of a mil. tax on the vote, and we worked hard to get everybody to vote yes upon it, but we had quite a bit of help and they considered that <sup>about</sup> every taxpayer would be assessed 16  $\frac{1}{2}$ % per thousand dollar(s) valuation. The Chesaning Study Club, the Chamber of Commerce and many other groups had endorsed the plan and the question is simply yes or no whether it will pass or not. "At this time, and since the creation of Peet Community Center, the Village has furnished the Library with its headquarters, heat and light. It is hoped if the millage appropriation is passed to keep the Library open all school days, noon hours, and afternoons of each weekday, to buy more books, and really enlarge the headquarters that the Village is making possible." In the Argus of April 5, the first page, first column notes that Township votes Library aid. The ballot is 167 to 135 and this means added service to the Township and the voters." Plans for enlarging now greatly grew and we continued on until our one room in the Peet Community Center was so small that we had no more room to build anything except a moveable book-case on rollers. So we built that and <sup>then</sup> we had no more room to build any cases. At this time <sup>the library,</sup> the small front room that was left for a waiting room in the front part of <sup>the</sup> partition was taken out and our library was enlarged as much as was possible. Then we even got money from the salvage paper collection and from State Aid, from <sup>the</sup> Village Council, from fine money and the Study Club for books, and the Township Tax. The Township Tax at this time run \$848.72 - that was in 1946 that this all happened.

That was for a year?

April of 1946. The Study Club Officers were President, Mrs. Helen Trink;



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Vice-President, Floy Robinette; Secretary-Treasurer was Marie Young. The Library Trustees were Edna Sharp, Beatrice Dietzel, Mabel Fabion, Helen Kettler, Ruth Morse and Helen Frink. The Workshop for Librarians and Trustees was held by the State and we brought home many good ideas for our Library and in exchange told how our Library was progressing, because each year we were able to receive more money. This year we were able to get a subscription to McCall's for \$5.00, 2 years to Flower Grower for \$4.00, 1 yr. to Fellows Magazine for \$1.00, 2 yrs. to Popular Science monthly for \$5.00, and 3 yrs. to Popular Mechanics for \$6.00. Then we obtained the latest Who's Who in America for \$15.20. The dues were paid to MIA for 6 Trustees, twelve volumes of National Geographics were bound 19 books rebound. We also had to pay fire insurance and salaries and we had a balance of \$1,152.00 left on hand when we finished the year. Floy Robinette was elected President of the Study Club <sup>during</sup> the next year and she was our stand-by as the Librarian and did so much to help out in doing our different things. During this time we thought of having bookmarks, and we obtained 2500 of them with no cost to us. Five places of business were advertised on them, and this went over in a big way with the children because many of them never had had a bookmark before. Then we went to a district meeting of the MIA held in Day City for Librarians and Trustees. After those meetings we had still more anticipations of what we could do and our receipts for State Aid and fines were gradually amounting to more and more. We had bought 280 books, with all the rest of things in the following year. Our finances were good, everybody was working for it, and during the summer months Helen Frink conducted a Story Hour on Saturday afternoons at the Library. It was well attended and we considered it a success. With school starting in September, we were open at the noon hour with Joan Neuman helping. In ordering our books, we tried to supplement the volumes in the school library, and asked for lists from the teachers. Early in April of 1949 we took into consideration our inadequate lighting system and we decided it was time to install fluorescent lights. We asked the Village Council about them, and they offered to take care of them if we installed them at our expense. After searching, we finally found Herbert Bishop, then in business here on Front Street, install 6 fixtures with 4 ft. tubes. Now it was almost impossible to remember how difficult it was to find books with the old lights. This year the Michigan Library Association raised its dues to \$2.00, \$1.00 of this to go to the Marian Packard fund for the furtherance of the Trustee education, but the Librarian's dues remained the same. A business without a sign is not a mark of progression, and now the Trustees thought it was time to place a Library sign on our door. John Stewart from the Acme Welding Company and Graham Young, a sign painter for Feet Facing Company,

were asked to design and print a sign to complement the front of the Post Community Center. Mr. Young painted it and Mr. Stewart had designed and <sup>then</sup> installed it to our satisfaction. Laura Stewart was elected President of the Study Club this year, with Hazel Finn Vice-President and Carol<sup>in</sup> Duguid as Secretary-Treasurer. The Library Board still consisted of Mabell Babion, Ruth Morse, Catherine Race, Floy Robinette, Edna Sharp and Helen Kettler. At all of the MLA meetings that we attended each year, our progress was noted from time to time, and during that year we paid out for our fluorescent lights \$257.00, our salaries were \$605.00, our books were \$244.00, our magazines (9) were \$18.00, the Library sign was \$23.00, the MLA Dues \$13.30 and the registration for lunch at Lansing for six trustees was \$7.00. The Story Hour was \$10.00 and supplies \$11.00, leaving a balance of \$1,211.24 in our treasury. During December we built another section of shelves. This time they were on the northwest wall, complete to the window on the side street, and at this time there were just no more available spaces. But in 1949 and 50 we continued on with our Library growing <sup>all the</sup> time and more patronage and the Village gave us a lot of help toward our different things that we took up and it was in this year of 1951 that Charlie Nason made us <sup>the</sup> rolling shelves to serve as more room for our volumes. During this year Catherine Race, Barbara Ringler, Beverly Slusser and Sandra Slusser White assisted as librarians. Our finances grew and we always had some left over to start the next year right. Kareen Vrable was elected President of the Study Club in 1952 and she had been a great worker in all the times and had worked hard to keep things moving rapidly and in 1952 the Trustees thought it was a fine idea to ask 1 or 2 men to work on the Board with us. After much deliberation we asked Charles Drexler and Rev. Allen Gray. Both men accepted and we were most appreciative of their ~~co~~operation in times of need. Mr. Drexler took time to shop for a desk, and when the Trustees went to look at them and select one they were most satisfied. In August we selected officers in our group as follows: President, Kareen Vrable; Vice-President, Caroline Duguid; Secretary-Treasurer, Mabell Babion. This ~~was~~ the same office I had had since starting in 1937. Mark Ireland and his wife became the official historians in September of 1957 and we placed, this was the first year we placed a nameplate on the desk of our Librarian. Later in the year the Chamber of Commerce paid for 12 lovely scrapbooks marked on the outside cover with Chesaning History. These books were to be filled with clippings from the Chesaning Argus by the members of the Library Board and <sup>the</sup> Study Club. The desk we ordered arrived <sup>and</sup> the Village Council was delighted with it and purchased a chair to go with it. Among the helpers for the Librarian this year were Bonnie Schultz, Kay Schultz and Mary Boetcher. We had member-



ships for all our Trustees each year on the MLA and also ~~making~~ nearly everyone attend each Spring session gave us all a bit of inspiration. Evaluation of the Township had risen and taxes profited by this. Our tax this year was \$1,307.28, so we still had plenty of money to keep going but we did like the space to put up new books. In 1953 we found our Study Club officers Mrs. Hazel Marshall, President; Vice-President, Charlotte Quinn; Secretary-Treasurer, Dorothy Luyendyk. Our Library Trustees were Kareen Vrable, Hazel Marshall, Ruth Morse, Charlotte Quinn and Mabel Babion. The first action of the Board was to raise the salary of the Librarian to \$1.25 <sup>starting</sup> on July 1, 1953.

Was that per hour?

Per hour, that was per hour. During 1954 the Study Club elected Charlotte Quinn, President; Vice-President, Adeline Parshall; Secretary-Treasurer, Dorothy Luyendyk, and we attended the Spring meeting of #5 MLA, held at Ithaca, where they had a brand new library. We also attended a meeting in Flint and many of the officers from here, Rev. Gray was one of the Trustees from Chesaning at that time, and I went along as one of the talkers for the program of how to make our libraries grow. In referring back to our copy of Who's Who, we were quite proud <sup>when we found</sup> ~~to find~~ out that our own Chesaning man, Lee Perden, was listed in that. Now during this year the Trustees consulted with Mrs. NOONAN at the State Library about the proper manner to select our Board that they might serve on a longer and more uniform term. Since the starting of the Board, each year the President of the Study Club automatically became President of the Library Board, and she appointed the Trustees to serve, usually from the members of the Club. This was not considered proper according to the State officials, as we were receiving Township tax money. They considered it more official if the Township Board selected or appointed the members of our Board. In 1937 the Township Board had asked to be relieved of that burden, as well as helping to direct the affairs of our Library, even the taxes voted by the people. Hence the reason for <sup>our</sup> taking over the entire responsibility. Several times the State asked about the arrangements and suggested we change, but until now the time did not seem feasible. This brings us up to the year of 1955, which was another red letter day for us. This was the second red letter day and it came on July 5, 1955 when the Trustees met with Mr. & Mrs. Douglas Peet and we were informed that the Peet Packing Company wished to build a Library for Chesaning. We were all dumbfounded! We couldn't believe it! Now it was up to us to search for a place to build the library, and where we would like to have it built, and think of what we were going to really get into a new library building.