

2000s

New Century – New Director

After 34 years in the library field, 26 of them devoted to the Berwyn Public Library, Mrs. Lofgren retired on June 29, 2001. As library director for her last five years of service, she had guided Board and staff to fulfillment of the long-held dream of a single, centralized facility.

Mrs. Kathleen Behrendt, Director of Youth Services, took over as interim Library Director but chose not to seek the top administrative spot, saying she was eager to return to her first love — serving the children of Berwyn.

After interviewing 11 candidates, the Board on October 23 obtained City Council concurrence to hire Bill Hensley as director at an annual salary of \$45,000-plus. Both library and city officials said they were impressed with Mr. Hensley's background in business as well as library work.

Possessing a Master of Arts degree in Library Science from the University of Chicago and a Bachelor of Arts and 30 hours of graduate work in sociology from Wichita State University, Mr. Hensley had broad library experience. He had served as director of the Kankakee Library, serial librarian for John Crerar Library, special projects librarian for Charles Merriam Center Library, associate librarian of the Central YMCA College and public services librarian and library media technology instructor with Southwest College. He also had combined service as librarian and English teacher at Chaplain Kapaun Memorial High School in Wichita.

Mr. Hensley's business background included work as database maintenance module contractor at Lucent Technologies in Lisle, project and records management at Litton Enterprise Solutions in Naperville and service as assistant director of finance for the Mayor's Office of Employment and Training in Chicago.

The new director came on board as the nation, still reeling from the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, was beset by fear and suspicion of anything even remotely Arabic.

A day or two before Director Hensley's arrival, an incident occurred in which an uneasy patron summoned the North Riverside police because two "Arabic-looking"

gentlemen were in the Berwyn Library looking at maps of the North Riverside Shopping Center. Thus, one of the new director's first tasks was to reaffirm the Berwyn Library's support for a patron's right to confidentiality.

"The prying nature of certain Patriot Act ² provisions sparked a firm affirmation of patron privacy by the American Library Association and policy reviews by libraries across the country," Director Hensley later explained. "The Berwyn Library had come down on the side of confidentiality and any invasion of privacy would be a violation of our library's mission.

"Unless the police come with a subpoena, we cannot provide them with any information about our patrons," the director explained. "We can't even use a patron's registration card for a mailing list unless we get the patron's permission."

To further protect privacy, it was decided following the map inspection incident that Internet usage records were to be purged at the end of the day with the shredding of logs that record patron signup for computer timeslots.

When Director Hensley arrived that fall of 2001, the library also was abuzz with preparations for celebrating its 75th anniversary. The three-week observance, October 29 through November 17, was designed to "get all of Berwyn reading and talking about books. *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White was chosen as the commemorative anniversary book in recognition of its universal appeal to children and adults. More than 100 copies were given as gifts, and a performance of *Charlotte's Web: the Musical* was presented in the Berwyn Public Safety Building.

Space Reconfigurations

It did not take long for the new Director to spot the difficulties involved in converting a building constructed for a national insurance company into a library.

"I could not believe there was so much wasted space in the processing area, and I wanted to make major space changes," Mr. Hensley later recalled. "We used hallway space to create storage, enclose three offices and set up a technical support area with printer, fax and copying machine."

² The Patriot Act of 2001 expanded the authority of U.S. law enforcement agencies to search records including e-mail communications. One of its most controversial sections related to the right to access library records. *Wikipedia*.

It was the first of many building reconfigurations designed to address the changing technological and service missions of 21st century libraries in general and the Berwyn Library in particular.

By February 2002, for example, it was apparent the Readers' Advisory Department, full-service since the year 2000, was starved for space. The Friends of the Library Gift Shoppe located just inside the library entrance was seen as the answer. Down to four hours of service per week because of a shortage of volunteers and lack of public interest, the shop was no longer a viable source of revenue for the library. The Board conceded the space could be better utilized for Readers' Advisory staff and materials, and the little shop that had opened with such high hopes in 1996 closed its doors.

That October of 2001, the library initiated a new service by taking to the road to deliver books and other materials to residents homebound by disabilities.

By 2002, many Berwyn residents wanted to travel a different avenue to learning — the Internet highway — and the library staff began planning a huge expansion in technology services.

The second-floor computer room that patrons had used primarily for word processing now would be retooled to provide direct patron access to the Internet, a service previously available only at two terminals in the library or through a staff intermediary at departmental service desks. The room's typewriters, once hailed as a great advance in public services, were with only one exception sent into storage.

At the same time, computers were set up in the Reference Department for patrons wishing to pursue online job searches and applications. Then, recognizing that even grandparents wanted to become part of the technological revolution, the department designated a computer "for seniors only." The desire to communicate with grandchildren via e-mail and check on stock holdings and investments proved so great that the service soon expanded into a senior center where staff members could assist those wishing to learn computer and Internet skills.

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Video Fee Controversy

Meanwhile, another revolution was in progress as patrons increasingly turned to videos rather than books for entertainment. When video circulation exceeded books, a group of Library Board members led by Dr. Margaret Otto began to question whether videos were an appropriate part of the library's mission. In December 2003, Dr. Otto asked the staff to draft a rental fee policy for fiction videos and also to investigate the possibility of opening the library on Sundays.

The Sunday opening proposal was welcomed by the public, but, by the time the video rental fee policy was ready for review at the March 2004 Board meeting, more than 25 patrons came to protest. Still more signed petitions opposing the fee.

The policy proposal sparked intense debate among the Board members themselves. Some trustees saw the imposition of a video rental fee as a way of directing the public's attention back to the value of reading books. Others supported the prevailing staff view that the fee was a contravention of Illinois State Library policies calling for free access to library materials. Still other trustees cited the precedent of a subscriber fee briefly charged some years earlier to help finance the initial development of the video collection. All conceded the fee could produce much-needed revenue for the library, and, faced with the prospect of additional library budget cuts because of the city's growing deficit, the Board by a 5-3 vote imposed a charge of \$1 per fiction video for a trial period of one year.

When a draft of the new policy was presented to the Board the following month for ratification, it immediately was amended on its face to waive the fee for children's educational videos. Staff members pointed out that a large portion of children's fiction videos have educational value, and Dr. Otto later noted it was never the Board's intent to charge for educational materials but exclusively for fiction movies.

Nevertheless, the new policy proved difficult for patrons to grasp and resulted in a 75 percent drop in children's video circulation in the first month. As promised, the Board reviewed the policy a year later. A motion to rescind the fee was rejected 5-2.

The split votes were indicative of the breach that the video debate had opened between the Board and staff and among the Board members themselves. It would prove difficult to repair.

Adding to the tension was the fact that, although the City Council approved the new fee, it did not stave off a 5 percent cut in the library's 2004 operating budget. Nor did it result in an immediate increase in library resources, since video revenues were deposited in the city's corporate fund rather than library accounts. It was not until September 2005 that the Board received confirmation that the video fees were being credited to the library.

The video fees would remain a topic of debate as Board and staff tried to balance the need for some \$35,000 in annual video fee revenue against the ideal of free public access to library services. It is an issue Director Hensley believes eventually may become moot as Berwyn follows the lead of other libraries in offering per-view videos and CDs over its website as an alternative to check-out service.

In May 2004, the City of Berwyn completed the purchase of a triangular lot on Riverside Drive across the street from the library, land long sought to relieve parking congestion in the library's adjacent lot and on neighborhood streets. That fall, city workers made a curb cut and poured gravel for a "temporary" parking surface. However, without money available to complete the project, the lot remained unfinished for another two years. It took a turnover in city administration before a delegation of Berwyn officials led by new Mayor Michael O'Connor traveled to Springfield to seek help with the much-needed paving, lighting and landscaping. There, through the good offices of State Rep. Robert S. Molaro, they were able to obtain a \$300,000 grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to complete the 60-car lot.

Strategizing the Future

Another long-term effort on the Library's agenda was completed in June 2004 — a five-year strategic plan. Developed with the assistance of the Executive Service Corps of Chicago, the plan called for enhancing buildings and grounds, improving patron services, expanding community support and building staff-board-government relations. However, committees to implement the plan were not established until after Board elections were held tardily in November and Dr. Otto became president.

The strategic plan resurrected the old debate about the relative value of a municipal library with an appointed board operating under the protective arm of the city

versus an independent library district with an elected board and a voter-established tax rate sufficient to support library services. The plan suggested incremental steps that could lead to a voter referendum on the issue. However, after studying the pros and cons with the help of Philip Lenzini, a legal advisor to the Illinois State Library and Metropolitan Library System, the Board in December 2005 tabled the proposal indefinitely with the option that some future Board might wish to reconsider the matter.

The 2005 budget year followed the customary pattern of funding cutbacks and stalemated plans. The City Council in March cut the 2005 library budget for new books, reference and databases by \$45,195 and audiovisuals by \$20,400. Because of the cuts, the library was unable to allocate 12 percent of its budget for new acquisitions as required by the state. So as not to jeopardize the Berwyn Library's eligibility for state grants, the Metropolitan Library System advised returning to the 12 percent level as soon as economically possible.

Also struck from the budget was a line item to reinstate the position of outreach director. Outreach responsibilities had been redistributed among a library staff that already had been reduced 165 service hours below the previous year through budget cuts and a city hiring freeze. To achieve greater flexibility among remaining staff members, Director Hensley began cross-training personnel to serve in more than one department. Coupled with customer service training and a newly created staff morale committee, the approach was designed to assure patrons courteous and professional attention despite shortages in personnel.

With a "can-do" spirit, on January 9, 2005, the short-staffed library launched the long-desired Sunday hours, opening for the first time from 1 to 5 p.m. on Sundays. It was some weeks before patrons caught on to the new hours, but by March 9 nearly 240 people were coming to the library during those four hours of Sunday service.

Daily as well as Sunday patrons found a more efficient circulation service waiting to serve them. By redesigning the Circulation Department workroom, traffic flow was improved at the main service desk. In addition, Readers' Advisory and Youth Services desks were relocated to make them more visible to patrons.

In June 2005, the *Library Journal* featured Berwyn as an example of services that can be offered in middle-income communities. Oak Park was profiled as a provider at the high end of the economic spectrum, Robbins at the low income range.

“The Berwyn Public Library ... is no showpiece,” the *Journal* concluded, “[but] it is certainly a community resource — and its circulation, given the budget and space available, is healthy.”

Expanding Technology

Demonstrating its value as a community resource, the library in October 2005 responded to patrons’ growing appetite for computer access by embarking on yet another expansion in technology services. Orders were placed for 13 new personal computers that offered patrons direct Internet access and the use of Microsoft Office applications. To make room for the new equipment, periodicals were moved down to a quiet reading area on the lower level adjacent to the Reference Department. Into the open space on the second floor went rows of computer tables and chairs and a joint service desk for the newly merged Computer and Audio/Visual Department. The former computer and typing room was retooled as a technology classroom for use by community organizations as well as library staff.

The library’s exterior appearance also was changing. Morton West High School horticultural students under the direction of Instructor Clinton Zellmer and Board President Otto cleared underbrush along the railroad right-of-way behind the building and spruced up the library grounds. President Otto then recruited staff and community volunteers to plant and maintain window boxes and flower beds, a project that evolved into a permanent Library Garden Club.

Just as alterations were taking place in the library’s physical arrangements, its relationships with various governing authorities were in transition as well.

In June 2005, the library’s aldermanic oversight committee was eliminated during the reorganization of City Council committees that followed the near sweep of city offices in the March elections by Mayor O’Connor and his Independent Voters of Berwyn Party. It was replaced by a single library liaison — Alderman Nona Chapman, a former Library Board member and aldermanic oversight committee chair.

Winds of change were rocking the Library Board as well.

Director Hensley wanted Board members to become more proactive. “It did not seem right to me that it was solely the director making decisions,” Mr. Hensley would later recall. “There needed to be more collaboration.” He encouraged the trustees to participate in Metropolitan Library System training sessions to prepare for a more active role.

Director Hensley found some ready sympathizers in a contingency of new members led by President Otto. Others seemed content in a more traditional “leave it to Bill” role, relying on the director to intercede for them with city officials, patrons and staff.

Board tensions escalated as President Otto tried to resuscitate the dormant committee system, and in November the frustrated president, whose appointment had ended in August, left the Board.

That leave-taking focused attention on the Board’s long-time practice of encouraging members whose terms had expired to continue to serve while waiting for a successor to be named. This unwritten understanding had developed as a way short-handed Boards could cope with recurring appointment droughts — months and sometimes years when certain city administrations seemed unable to find willing volunteers.

Noting the practice was not spelled out in Berwyn Library Board bylaws, President Otto called it into question. Since her term had expired, the president said she no longer had status as a member of the Board. She said she could not continue to participate in meetings she felt she “had no right to attend” but for which she would be legally responsible.

Director Hensley reminded remaining Board members that a provision in Illinois State Library law states “trustees may serve until their successors are appointed.”

Dr. Otto later said that, if the law had stated trustees “must” serve, she certainly would have complied with the law.

“The word ‘may’ gets to the crux of the matter,” Director Hensley noted, “and I am certain a battalion of attorneys could debate the matter.”

For the Berwyn Library Board the debate was over. At a special meeting on November 30, the trustees elected Mrs. Patricia Zank to fill the presidential vacancy.

Notwithstanding, the year 2005 ended on a positive note. Repeatedly tight budgets had led to an aggressive outreach for outside funding by director and staff. The effort paid off in more than \$138,000 in state per capita grants and other financial support.

Throughout 2005, the Board had sought a way to cut through the lengthy and expensive red tape needed to create a foundation to handle a wide variety of donations including corporate gifts. In January 2006, the Board discovered that, since the library already possessed 170(c) 3 fund status as a unit of local government, it was not necessary to establish a separate foundation. All that was needed was to send an application to the Illinois Library Systems Directors Organization (ILSDO) to serve as the pass-through agency for donations such as corporate matching funds. ILSDO would receive the money and then remit it to the Berwyn Library. The new Foundation Account was opened in June and later was renamed the Library Board Fund.

To oversee the new fund and other library accounts, the Board re-established the dormant office of treasurer and unanimously elected Member Phyllis Walden as its occupant. With the addition of new Member Deborah Cullen, the Board now had a core group committed to obtaining ongoing training through the Metropolitan Library System and regularly scheduled guest speakers to prepare for a more active role in library governance. Unfortunately, this new activism came too late to offset strained relations that had developed between the library director and the new city administration.

City-Library Issues Resurface

Once again in April 2006, city and library officials had occasion to review the unclear boundaries of their relative authority under state law. The problem arose when Mayor O'Connor informed Library Director Hensley that he would not be reappointed when his contract expired on April 25.

As Board, staff and aldermen began rallying around the director and patrons began circulating petitions on Mr. Hensley's behalf, the mayor asked to meet with the Library Board. Six Board members; Aldermanic Library Liaison Chapman; Aldermen

Joel Erickson and Michael Phelan; two staff members; and one resident attended that April 12 meeting of the Board's Policy and Personnel Committee.

Mayor O'Connor told those assembled that he had a dual purpose for the meeting: First to make sure the committee had copies of personnel evaluation forms currently used by the city so the Board could select a format most suitable for its annual evaluation of the library director. Secondly, to inform the Board that he had notified Director Hensley of nonrenewal of contract.

Responding to a question from the audience, Mayor O'Connor declined to explain his decision to fire Mr. Hensley but said he would present his reasons to the City Council on April 25. President Zank said the Board would take the mayor's comments under advisement.

Five days later, the Board conducted a closed session review of the director and found his performance to be "exceptional." Then, in open session, the seven members present unanimously voted to reappoint Director Hensley until May 10, 2009. Mindful of the potential for debate between Board and mayor over their relative powers of appointment under state law, the Board authorized expenditures of up to \$750 for the services of an attorney if needed. The mayor and City Council were informed by letter of the Board's decision.

On April 25, Library Board members, patrons and staff crowded into City Council chambers to support Director Hensley's cause. According to *Berwyn LIFE* newspaper reports, petitions signed by nearly 300 residents were presented to city officials, and former Board President Otto and former Board Member Lucile Evans "spoke highly" of the Director:

"Mr. Hensley knows his job, he does his job and he truly cares about the people he serves," Dr. Otto said. "He has shown the foresight to persistently update the library so it will continue to serve, with excellence, the people of Berwyn. Bill even gives his time unselfishly to support many volunteer programs that certainly help in these times of financial constraints."

Mrs. Evans, who had served on the search committee when Director Hensley was hired, told those present, "We chose Bill because we felt his qualifications best met the job requirements. In the last five years, Bill has done a marvelous job as director."

With mayor and aldermen already at odds regarding their own respective lines of authority over city appointments, Library Liaison Chapman was able to round up the votes needed to request that Berwyn ordinances be changed to conform to state library law. They were thus to affirm in writing that the power to hire and fire the library director belonged to the Berwyn Library Board and not the mayor.

No public explanation of the attempted dismissal was offered at that Council meeting, but the following month Mayor O'Connor came to the Library Board meeting and in closed session explained his issues with Hensley. The discussion ended with the mayor saying he did not plan a legal challenge to the Board's employment authority under state law and with Board President Zank affirming the Board's desire "for all to work cooperatively."

Once again, city and library appeared to have avoided a freefall into legal battle over their relative lines of authority.

Central Library Marks 10th Year

Library Board and staff refocused their attention on the library's upcoming 10th anniversary at the Harlem Avenue location. On June 10, 2006, the library celebrated the anniversary jointly with the kickoff for its summer reading program. In keeping with the reading program's animal theme, newcomers to the library were introduced to the location of services throughout the building by following a Winnie the Pooh trail.

City officials and longtime library supporters were honored at the rededication ceremonies and open house. Mayor O'Connor addressed the crowd, hailing 10 years of progress, and former Mayor Shaughnessy dropped by to check on "his baby," the Shaughnessy Center in which the library is housed.

Director Hensley traced for the audience the history of the land beneath their feet beginning with its days as a part of the Ritzma family farm that in the late 1860s extended from Pulaski to Harlem Avenues and Cermak Road to Ogden Avenue. The City of Chicago later purchased a portion of the land stretching from Harlem to Home Avenues and Cermak Road to 26th Street and operated it as Gage Farm, a tree nursery for municipal landscaping projects.

When Chicago began selling off portions of Gage Farm for commercial and residential development, the triangular bit of land bounded by Harlem Avenue, Riverside Drive and the tracks of what is now the Canadian National Railroad was offered in 1947 to the Berwyn Post, American Legion. To mark their new post home, Legion members erected flag poles that remain a focus for patriotic observances to this day.

In a 1996 *Berwyn LIFE* interview, Legion Post member George Boucek described the comfort he and other veterans derived from the preservation of those flag poles. As judge advocate for the Berwyn Legion Post, Boucek handled the sale of the property to CSA and recalled feeling “a terrible loss” when watching the demolition of a post home he said was “intended to stay for a century to accommodate the needs of the veterans organizations in the area.” Boucek took consolation in CSA’s promise that the Legion’s flag poles would remain and that post members would have permission to use it for patriotic observances. In 1995, as a member and general counsel of CSA, Boucek again handled the sale of the building, this time to the city of Berwyn. Once again he negotiated a comforting promise that patriotic ceremonies would continue at that location.

“The Legion’s preamble speaks of ‘obligation to community, state and nation,’” Boucek told the *Berwyn LIFE*. “As a public library, the property is furthering the needs of the community.”

How well those needs were met was detailed in a chart developed by the library’s new Archives Committee to trace achievements during the first decade at 2701 S. Harlem Avenue:

<u>10-Year Growth in Berwyn Library Collections</u>		
	<u>1996</u>	<u>2006</u>
Books	142,594	169,268
Audio/visuals	3,785	9,440
Computers for patron use	11	48

Reflecting later on those 10 years, Director Hensley recalled that, when the newly centralized library opened in 1996, staff members were excited to be able to offer patrons collection information via computers rather than referring them to tiers and tiers of card catalog boxes jammed with 3- by 5-inch cards. They were pleased that patrons finally had

access to the Internet through a staff intermediary and could be offered a choice of typewriters or computers for writing letters and composing resumes.

In the decade that followed that 1996 opening, Mr. Hensley noted that a revolution in information technology had led to a quadrupling of computers available to Berwyn Library patrons, along with the institution of such services as computer instruction and access to the Internet directly by the individual patron rather than through an intermediary. By the end of the decade, patrons were able to research reference questions through specialized databases subscribed to by the library and available not only through computers in the Harlem Avenue building but online from home, school or office through the library's website.

The library also began planning to use new technology such as digitization to preserve local history. Aging documents such as old telephone directories, anniversary issues of community newspapers and City Council minutes were to be digitally converted into a web-accessible database linked to the library's website.

Despite all the technological advances, the library never lost its people-centered focus, Director Hensley said.

A Teen Board was organized to plan activities and programs to capture the attention of teen-agers and draw them into the library. A Senior Center was established in the Reference Department with computers reserved for older citizens and staff available to help them navigate computer codes and the Internet.

For a generation seemingly always in a hurry, the library offered a "Holds without Hassle" service in which additional copies of books in great demand were rented temporarily to eliminate long waits for bestsellers.

For those with a more leisurely lifestyle, the Periodical Department introduced free "coffee and the newspaper" socials. Initially offered in 2004 as a "first Friday of the month" activity, the socials proved so popular that they soon expanded into a regular Friday get-together. The following year a senior club was introduced with older residents gathering in the Community Room on alternate Wednesdays to play games and socialize.

As in the past, the library was responsive to changes in the city's ethnic population. Between 1996 and 2006, the Berwyn Library increased its Spanish-language

collection from virtually zero to 1,643 adult and 1,527 juvenile books, both fiction and nonfiction; 602 adult and juvenile audio/visual items, plus newspapers, periodicals and databases. Promotional flyers were printed in Spanish as well as English, and the library staff began searching for programming that would appeal to its new constituency. An English as a Second Language book club lasted only from January through May 2006, faltering because of a lack of funding for book sets and disruptions from young children who frequently accompanied parents to the book discussions. However, the staff learned from the experiment and began offering programs that could be enjoyed by all members of the family.

But this positive growth also had a negative side. Expanding collections crowded into the few remaining open spaces and impeded logical service flow. The building began to show its age, and parts often proved no longer available to repair heating, ventilating, air conditioning and other support systems dating back to the building's birth in 1974.

Nor could staff or patrons be certain of the roof over their heads. On New Year's Day 2005, two roof drains separated and brought down ceiling tiles over the audio/visual department desk, closing down the department for the first week of the year. It was the harbinger of many leaks to come until funding to replace the roof finally was obtained nearly two years later.

The roof was just one example pointing the Library Board toward proactive planning. As the anniversary year wore on, the Board coalesced around an executive committee leading the way through improved parliamentary procedures and organizational structure to a more active role in budgeting, monitoring and long-range planning for an as yet uncertain future.

"In this rapidly changing 21st century, no one can say with certainty what lies ahead for the Berwyn Public Library," Hensley concluded. "The one thing our patrons can count on is the commitment of our Board and staff to serving our residents' needs."

**EDITOR'S NOTE: While the library certainly has continued to make history since the June 10, 2006 celebration of 10 years at the Harlem Avenue location, the editors have chosen to end this document with that observance so as to allow sufficient time to put recent events into proper perspective.*