

*INTRODUCTORY COPY FOR WEBSITE*

## ***Calling All Readers***

### ***Assistance Needed to Complete Our New History of the Berwyn Public Library***

The celebration of the Berwyn Public Library's 10th anniversary in its new central quarters at 2701 S. Harlem Avenue inspired the writing of a new history of our library. However, the editors acknowledge that this First Edition History is far from complete. We urge readers to look in their attics, basements and even garages for documents we have missed. We welcome copies of Library Board minutes, programs and mementos, personal diaries and photographs that will enable us to present a later second edition of our history. We especially invite those with family members who served on the Library Board to make certain their names are included and correctly spelled in the accompanying list of Board Service, which we know has many gaps.

Those who wish to share personal memories of the Berwyn Public Library, suggest corrections to the site or offer additional information or documents may write to us at the library or contact us online at [Berwynlibrary.net](http://Berwynlibrary.net) by clicking on the Feedback link beneath Services. With your help, we will be able to produce a more complete recounting of the Story of Our Library.

*First Edition***HISTORY OF THE BERWYN LIBRARY**

By Eileen Pech

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**Before Berwyn**

**Before there was a City of Berwyn, there was a Berwyn Library.**

**By the time Berwyn residents voted in 1901 to separate from the Township of Cicero and become a township in their own right, the Berwyn Lending Library was already seven years old.**

1890s**Private Lending Library**

“Berwyn was still very young when a group of early residents decided the little community needed a library,” noted the *Berwyn Beacon* newspaper in a recap of the institution’s early history.

The year was 1894, and Berwyn was a village of scattered houses, street corner gas lamps and wooden sidewalks that after a heavy rain were liable to move over a few feet because the walks rested on stilts.

That spring, a handful of Berwyn’s leading ladies gathered in the home of Dr. Arthur MacNeal, founder of MacNeal Hospital. Determined to create a “book shelter” for their city, they elected as their president Mrs. Charles (Carrie Gregory) Piper\*, the wife of Berwyn’s co-founder Charles E. Piper and the first president of the Berwyn Woman’s Club. Mrs. M. M. Hitchcock was elected secretary and Mrs. William R. Porter, treasurer. The women sponsored “entertainments” to raise money to buy books and began lending them out from the Piper family home at 3427 Oak Park Avenue.

*\*EDITOR’S NOTE: Because of changes over the years in the style of addressing women, this history will use a woman’s first name wherever possible. However, direct quotes from period documents will use the style of that time with the first name in parentheses.*

The little library soon became so popular that the women persuaded Mr. Francis M. Lackey to provide room for a small rental library in his dry goods store on the southwest corner of Windsor Avenue and Elliott Avenue (now known as Grove Avenue).

Within a few years, interest grew to the point where Mr. Lackey no longer could afford the space to house the books or the time to check them in and out of circulation. The women asked permission from the District 100 Board of Education to turn the books over to Emerson School.