



News & Events

Following in the esteemed footsteps of the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, our department has changed its name to “Local & Family History.” Hopefully this change will make our purpose clearer to new patrons, as well as prevent the misunderstandings that arise from people thinking we specialize in geography or geology. (Not to mention the memorable call I had this year from a fellow who wanted to know if he had reached the “Gynecology Department”!)

Did You Know ...?

There’s still a little time—but not much space—left to register for our upcoming program, “Limburger & Lace: Belgians in St. Joseph County.” The program will be held next Saturday, November 11, at 10 am, here in the St. Joseph County Public Library’s Dickinson Room. Jim Vertenten of the Belgian American Historical Society of Chicago will be the speaker. Space is limited by room capacity, so preregistration is required. Call us at 282-4621 to sign up for one of the last few spaces.

From the Past, by Libby Feil

Toni Cook, one of our hard-working volunteers, recently found a list of library books while perusing Horatio Chapin’s ledgers in our microfilm collection (the Northern Indiana Historical Society Local History Manuscripts, in the CRIMP filing cabinet in the Microfilm Room).

Mary Waterson, former head of Local History, wrote the definitive history of local libraries, *The Library at the Bend in the River* (available for checkout in the Local & Family History Department). According to her book, Horatio Chapin was given city money in the 1830s to start a public library in his store. At least part of this collection found its way into the holdings of the McClure Workingmen’s Institute Library in New Harmony. A local branch of this library was established in 1857, but it is not clear whether any of the Chapin books from the main Workingmen’s Institute Library ever made it there. Also, it is unclear what happened to the books from this local WIL branch when it closed in 1867. Not until 1889 did the South Bend Public Library open, in its current location at the corner of Main and Wayne Streets. I have been able to find a few books from the McClure Workingmen’s Institute Library on the shelves here in Local History, but they were all published too late to have been part of the Chapin collection. So, do any of Chapin’s books reside in the current Library? If we ever find any, we’ll let you know!

The titles that Chapin bought in August 1835 give an interesting glimpse into what was considered essential and interesting reading at the time. Some of the items are still often used today, such as Webster’s *Dictionary* and the *Encyclopedia Americana*. Some are still viewed as classics, such as books by Plutarch, Gibbons, Boswell, Locke, Webster, Byron, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats. Fittingly for an age of exploration, many of the volumes purchased were scientific reference works on natural history, mineralogy, botany, astronomy, and geography. Perhaps reflecting the relative youth of the United States, several of the items concern political theory and philosophy. The book I’d most like to read? *Domestic Happiness*—a bargain at only \$1.25!