

HISTORY of



Briggs Lawrence County Public Library System

Briggs Lawrence County Public Library is one of 251 public libraries in the State of Ohio. Of the different types of statutorily created public libraries, Briggs Lawrence County Public Library (BLCPL) is a County Free Public Library system. The Ohio Revised Code, Chapter 3375.06 provides for the establishment of a County Free Public Library, in part;

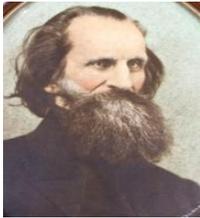
“In any county in which the board of county commissioners has accepted a gift of bequest, pursuant to volume 122, Ohio Laws, page 166, section 1 at “Sec. 2454,” a county free public library shall be established for the use of all the inhabitants of the county. Such library shall be under the control and management of a board of library trustees consisting of seven members. Such trustees shall be qualified electors of the county and shall be appointed by the court of common pleas of the county in which such library is situated. They shall serve for a term of six years.”... “The board of library trustees shall organize as provided by section 3375.32 of the Revised Code. Such board of library trustees shall have the control and management of the management of the county free public library, and in the exercise of such control and management shall be governed by sections 3375.33 to 3375.41, inclusive, of the Revised Code.”

The intangible tax had been the primary source of Public Library revenue since 1933. In 1983, the Ohio General Assembly repealed the intangible tax based on recommendations from a bipartisan study of the state’s entire tax system. Governor Richard Celeste created the Public Library Financing and Support Committee, which set forth two goals for the state’s future library fund distribution plan: 1. To preserve excellence in existing service, and 2. To improve library service in underfunded and underserved areas. Over time, the distribution to counties began to balance and libraries saw growth in funding due to overall economic growth. Due to economic pressures beginning in 2001, the distribution of funds from the State to Public Libraries has deteriorated.

Nearly 98% of the funding perceived by Briggs Lawrence County Public Library is provided by the Public Library Fund of the State of Ohio. The remaining revenue comes from fines, fees, and donations. Briggs Lawrence County Public Library does not receive any revenue

from Lawrence County's property tax or county sales tax, or any other local tax revenue sources.

The Briggs Lawrence County Public Library is named for Dr. Caleb Briggs, who was a distinguished geologist who worked in Virginia, New York, and Ohio in the 1800's.



Dr. Briggs was born in Plymouth County, Massachusetts in 1810. Arriving in Lawrence County, Ohio, around the year 1838, he was appointed as one of those assigned to do survey work in southern Ohio. It was Dr. Briggs' suggestion to lay out a town to serve as the terminus of the Iron Railroad, which became the City of Ironton. He lived in Ironton about 12 years after its founding.

While living in Ironton, Dr. Briggs helped to organize a private library society, and in 1853-54, helped establish a library association, into which the existing library society was merged and to which its books were transferred. The early membership of this library association embraced nearly all the heads of the first families in Ironton with annual membership fee of \$3.00.

Owing to the financial depression throughout the Civil War, the library association was suspended. The books were boxed to wait for more favorable times, but in 1865, they were destroyed by fire.

Dr. Briggs returned to his birthplace in Massachusetts in 1867, but kept a soft spot in his heart for Ironton. In the fall of 1881, Dr. Briggs wrote a deed of Trust. His desire was that Ironton would have a public library for the benefit of its residents without postponement. His generous donation at the time was \$25,000.00, which in today's dollars would be more than \$590,000.00.

After Dr. Briggs' death in 1884, his bequest was made public. Under the terms of the Trust, no part of the fund could be used for a building until the fund had reached \$80,000. The trustees named to handle the gift were W.W. Johnson, H.S. Neal, J.H Campbell, and E.S. Wilson. The Briggs Trust still exists today.

In the winter of 1892, a committee was formed and solicited funds for the purpose of starting a public library institute. They raised funds and were able to purchase 700 new books.

The collection also added one thousand donated books, plus another thousand books being stored at Mrs. John Campbell's home.

During this time, Market Square in Ironton became the site for a Memorial Hall, which was dedicated on October 19, 1892, in memory of the Grand Army of the Republic, honoring Union Soldiers of the Civil War. On March 17, 1893, in Memorial Hall, the library was opened to the public as the Briggs Library Institute.



The Briggs Library Institute sold tickets costing \$3.00 per year for each patron to raise funds to run the library and during the first year of its operation, the Institute had 9,155 visitors sharing the 2,700 volumes of the collection.



In 1919, the library was moved from Memorial Hall to the former home of Halsey and Hattie Kingsbury Burr, on the corner of Sixth and Jefferson Streets, which had been donated to the Library Institute. The Briggs Trustees were able to renovate the home into an accommodating library and reading rooms for the public to enjoy.

The Briggs Trust Fund largely dissipated during the depression of the 1930's. A new board was appointed to bring the finances back in order. A petition was jointly circulated by city and county organizations, initiated by the Briggs Trustees, for the establishment of a countywide library, which was finally approved in 1946. In October 1946, the first County Library Board was appointed, and there was an intangible tax fund of \$6,000 allowed for Library operations in 1947.

The library continued its operation from the Burr home until 1960, when a fund drive by the Library Trustees resulted in many gifts and donations from private citizens, local businesses and school children, and provided for a new library building, which was built on the corner of Fourth and Washington Streets in Ironton.



From its humble beginnings in 1893, the Library system has seen dramatic growth. The Library system now includes the Main Branch in Ironton, and community branches in South Point, Chesapeake, Proctorville, and Willow Wood. In 2006, a renovation of the Main Branch in Ironton was completed, modernizing and nearly doubling the square footage of the original 1960 building.

The library system has grown not only in the number of branches, but also in its methods of providing services. In addition to the over 192,000 print items available to check out or to use for reference purposes, the Library also offers magazines and newspapers, and has over 45,000 DVD and VHS movies, music CDs and books on cassette and books on CDs.

The Library offers year round educational and recreational programs for adults, children, teens and seniors. Programs are also provided for homeschooled students, Head Start and daycare students, and for residents of nursing homes and senior citizen housing facilities. Each library branch has high speed internet accessible computers and wireless connections available to the public for free, as well as meeting rooms, and offers copiers and fax machines.

The Library is also a partner with the Library of Congress Talking Book program for the visually impaired, and provides at-home delivery services to homebound residents.

The Library provides Inter-Library Loan (ILL) services free of charge, for those times that a patron needs an item that is not in our collection. ILL services seek out and then borrow items from other public libraries and ship it to the branch nearest the patron for them to pick up. Briggs Library is a member of the Ohio Valley Library Consortium, which gives our patrons borrowing privileges to the Consortium's shared catalog, providing access to an additional 400,000 print, video and music titles. Also, the Library participates in the online "Ohio Digital Library" which provided free access to Briggs Library patrons to 190,000 downloadable eBooks and 41,000 downloadable audiobooks.

In addition, residents can register to Vote, sign up for a Golden Buckeye Card, and get free State and Federal Tax forms at each library branch building as they are made available by state and federal tax offices.

At the Ironton Branch, the Phyllis Hamner History and Genealogy Room has records of Lawrence County deaths, births, marriages and obituaries available on microfilm, and is

updating some of its holdings to digital information as time allows. Court House archives are currently being digitized and can be perused at the Genealogy page on Briggs' website. The room has Ironton's papers dating back to 1850 on microfilm, as well as donated materials on local families, cemeteries, and local history.

Due to the vision of a man who loved the community, and the efforts of the many others who have served, led and encouraged the growth of the library system over the years, today's Briggs Lawrence County Public Library has expanded, now serving over 30,000 cardholders. During an average week, the five locations of the library system are open to the public 220 hours and have nearly 5,000 visitors who check out over 9,000 items.



The mission of the Briggs Lawrence County Public Library is to serve the informational, educational, and lifelong-learning and entertainment needs of all the citizens of Lawrence County, and to provide these services in a professional, friendly manner, and in a clean and safe environment.