

Social Movements

Intellectual Societies

Intellectual societies in the nineteenth century were not limited to one sex and largely focused on the creation of libraries. In 1859 the Altheon Institute rented reading rooms to house its library of periodicals and books (Menasha Conservator, 6/18/1859, 3). That same year the Ladies Corban Society and the Menasha Lyceum were drawing sizable crowds for their lectures and debates (Menasha Conservator, 1/8/1859,3). The lyceum was offered land for a library, but a building was never constructed (Menasha Conservator, 2/12/1859, 3). In 1870 the Menasha Library Association was organized with 100 members that included E. D. Smith, A. J. Webster, W. P. Rounds, and C. F. Augustine. The association collected dues and bought books, but the library closed after only a few years (Winnebago County Press, 11/19/1870, 3; 2/25/1871, 3).

More than twenty years would pass before another library was attempted. In the interim various short-lived societies filled the gap. The Dime Readings group, Candle Light Club, Shakespere Club, and various reading clubs prompted one editor to write, "Menasha is nothing if not literary" (Menasha Press, 1/17/1878, 3; 3/9/1882, 3; 10/17/1891, 1; 11/2/1889, 1).

Then in 1895 there was another attempt at establishing a permanent public library (Menasha Press, 11/16/1895, 8). In that year an organizational meeting was held and articles of incorporation were filed for the Menasha Free Library Association (Lawson, 737, Menasha Press,

12/21/1895, 1). Rooms were rented in the TUCHSCHERER BLOCK [#66/18, 360 Chute Street] and 1,000 books were ordered, including a noteworthy collection of Polish works (Menasha Evening Breeze, 8/12/1896, 3; Augustin, 16; Menasha Evening Breeze, 10/19/1896, 3). In 1897 the library was given to the city, afterwhich Elisha D. Smith gave the funds to construct the ELISHA D. SMITH LIBRARY [#93/32, 3 Mill Street; Upper Main Street Historic District, NRHP 1984]

With the construction of the library, intellectual societies declined in number and significance.

Temperance Movement

The temperance movement in Menasha was closely associated with the development of intellectual societies and youth organizations. In 1869 a local editor urged every young man "to turn his back on the saloon...and spend his spare time and money on books" (Island City Times, 4/10/1869, 2). Nevertheless, organized temperance in Menasha did not come into being until 1882. In that year the Menasha chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union formed and held monthly meetings (Menasha Press, 3/2/1882). Establishment of a temperance library was discussed, a temperance billiards hall opened, and a Prohibitionist party put up candidates for county office (Menasha Press 5/25/1882; 6/22/1882, 1; 9/14/1882, 2). That same year John Strange and J. M. Dunn gave lectures on temperance, and after one gathering at Concordia Hall, 400 men pledged abstinence (Menasha Press, 6/1/1882, 1; 10/5/1882, 4).

Temperance organizations came and went until the turn of the century, after which interest waned. Then as American participation in World War I became eminent, parents and church groups reorganized to protect young men in military service from temptation. In conjunction with this activity a commandery of the Knights Templar organized in 1915 and met in the MASONIC BLOCK [#91/2, 163 Main Street; Upper Main Street Historic District, NRHP 1984]. The organization formed in response to the prohibition movement, but was unsuccessful in a "no license" referendum (Shattuck, 91). In 1929 the Knights moved to Neenah (Shattuck, 274).

Labor Movements

As local industry expanded and prospered, the disparity between the living standards of the workers and their employers increased and resulted in restlessness. Menasha Wooden Ware, the largest single employer in the city, had the greatest number of labor disputes in the late nineteenth century. The first came in the fall of 1885, when 100 coopers struck Charles Smith's cooperage and formed a union (Menasha Press, 11/19/1885, 2). The company attempted to hire strikebreakers, but was unsuccessful. Meanwhile Knights of Labor organizer Robert Schilling had organized a Menasha lodge and recruited about half of the striking coopers. Representatives from the lodge then negotiated with the company and after three weeks reached a settlement (Glaab & Larsen, 239). Its terms did not satisfy the rank-and-file coopers in the Knights of Labor, and the lodge did not long survive the strike (Glaab & Larsen, 240).

