

Dear Friends and Patrons of the Byron Public Library District:

It is my pleasure as President of the library board to be able to announce the naming of our library building The Gene R. McNames Memorial Library. Our district will continue to be known as the Byron Public Library District, but without the commitment and the involvement of Gene, we may still be only a dream. I had the opportunity to serve with Gene on our current board for the past several years and know of his dedication to our library. Ironically, my distaste of speech class which was one of Gene's passions will be evident today at this dedication. Maybe if I had grown up here and had Gene as a teacher, this speech would be a lot better for us all.

Gene was born in Byron on January 11, 1936. He grew up and attended school in Byron. After graduating from Northern Illinois University, Gene returned to Byron as a teacher. He taught 7th and 8th grade language arts and high school speech, as well as coaching Byron's speech teams. During this time, Gene established a Junior High Library in his classroom and a paperback book store for students. This was Gene's first involvement in libraries. He later moved to the high school staff to teach English and Speech and was the advisor for Theater and Speech. He also continued his, by then, very popular paperback book store. Gene was named citizen of the year in 1975 and was praised for his work in establishing the Byron Public Library, worked with Meals on Wheels, and many years of service to the Byron community.

For many years, the volunteer community council had faithfully provided Byron with a small public library. The needs and demands of the community eventually became overwhelming and the volunteers (which included Gene) looked to NILS-the Northern Illinois Library System based in Rockford for assistance.

In May of 1970, the group met with NILS and advised that before they could receive assistance, they needed an ordinance passed by the City. Ordinance 69-11 stating, "Establishing a public library and providing for the levy of taxes in support thereof." was adopted by the Byron City Council at the May 26, 1970 meeting. Mayor Stewart Norton appointed nine members to the first Byron Public Library Board and asked Gene to act as Chairman, pro-tem. Gene was immediately elected chairman unanimously. Gene continued to serve on the library board for the following 22 years.

In the months that followed, the basic concerns of committees, financing, insurance, inventory, and long term housing were considered. With the help of Julius Chitwood, Director of NILS, a survey of the city was conducted and his oral evaluation of the current library site in the old Community House was provided concerning the potential, needs, and direction of expansion of the Byron Public Library.

At the July 7, 1970 Board Meeting, Gene asked that we consider the possibility of offering library service to the patients in the nursing home now under construction. The community house was appraised for remodeling and other sites were evaluated for possible use. After our acceptance into NILS, all of their resources became available to everyone in Byron. The Byron City Council approved \$1,200 for the library until the time of the annual appropriation. With these resources and the publicity, the next months found the growth and use of the Byron Public Library mushrooming.

In January 1971, the Board discussed the dire need for more space. The Minutes state, "it was decided that we will start a concerted effort in March to get a new library." At the City Council Meeting on April 12, 1971, Gene gave the library's annual progress report and formally presented the Resolution adopted by the Library Board asking for the space adjacent to the City Hall. In May, Gene reported to the Library Board that the City Council was considering purchasing the old United Church Building for a civic center. It was a possible site for the future home of the library. For that purchase to be possible, it was necessary to have a referendum vote. Gene was the spearhead for this referendum vote which would be held September 9, 1971. Gene wrote and supervised the publicity and directed the campaign. With all of his efforts, the referendum passed. The library was moved over April 28 and 29th, 1972 into its new located in the cultural center.

Growth of the library continued for several years. In 1977, Gene introduced an idea of the Byron Library becoming a District Library following the School District boundaries to take advantage of the increased tax base. The referendum to create the Library District was held in 1979 and passed overwhelmingly thanks to Gene's help. By 1981, it was evident that the library was rapidly outgrowing its space in the Cultural Center. Gene and Blaine Auker began a search for possible new sites for the Library. That search led to the eventual purchase of the Library's current site in September 1982. Gene was a Board Member of NILS at that time and learned of the availability of building grants. A grant was applied for and received by the Byron Public Library District to construct a new building. Our current building was completed in 1985 and is the result of many years of Gene's hard work and dreams.

It is with great pride that we are here today to dedicate this building as the Gene McNames Memorial Library. Thank you to Cleo Boger, a past Library Board member for her help with the history of the library district. Included in Cleo's history was this statement:

"There is no finish to Gene's Dream! Whatever he started he meant to be continued and expanded to include new dimensions not yet realized. He gave of his best and we can do no less."

Cleo P. Boger

Former Byron Public Library District Board Member

Speech given by Dr. Nicholas Johnson