

# GROWING PAINS

## (1967-1999)

The state of Wisconsin as a whole was growing considerably in the 1950's and 1960's with an increase in population of 15.1% and 11.8% respectively.<sup>1</sup> Sun Prairie in particular became one of the fastest growing communities in the state. In the 1960's alone the population of Sun Prairie more than doubled from 4,008 in 1960 to 9,935 in 1970.<sup>2</sup> About 1,000 of this increase were due to the creation of a housing development in Capehart in 1961 to hold the families of Air Force men stationed in nearby Truax Field.<sup>3</sup> This development was one of several subdivisions to appear in order to accommodate the influx of people arriving in Sun Prairie. Why was Sun Prairie such a popular destination? A new four lane highway connecting Sun Prairie to Madison made travel much faster. Taxes in Sun Prairie were also lower than Madison at this time as well.<sup>4</sup> Industry in Sun Prairie was on the rise as new business opened and old business expanded, creating new jobs and opportunities. The Wisconsin Cheeseman moved to Sun Prairie in 1951 and relocated to its present location on Highway 151 in 1960. Diesel Injections Service was founded in 1961 as well as Foulke Rubber Products in 1967.<sup>5</sup> As farming land began to consolidate and give way to industry, Sun Prairie was transitioning fast from a small town to a budding city.

The growing population of Sun Prairie was having a tremendous effect on its infrastructure. Utilities were being stretched to the limit, streets were in need of repair, and buildings such as the library were becoming overcrowded. Concern over space in the current library was on the minds of Sun Prairie citizens, including Mayor Severson (served 1965-1968). A user of the library commented that, "books are now piled about the rooms, waiting hopefully for space."<sup>6</sup> Severson established a special library committee to investigate the possibility of a new library. The committee brought in expert help from the Dane County Librarians Service and quickly decided that remodeling the current building



*The Super Valu grocery store before it was converted to the new Sun Prairie Public Library in 1967. Photo taken 1964.*



*Front view of the Windsor Street library in the 1990's.*

<sup>1</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wisconsin>

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished notes from Peter Klein, Sun Prairie Historical Museum.

<sup>3</sup> 20th Century Club, *The Early History of Sun Prairie*, p107.

<sup>4</sup> Peter M. Klein, *Sun Prairie's People: Part 1, Shadows and Dreams* (Sun Prairie: Sun Prairie Historical Museum, 1993), p133.

<sup>5</sup> Klein notes.

<sup>6</sup> 20th Century Club, *The Early History of Sun Prairie*, p120.



Interior of the Windsor Street library while being refurnished in 1967.

would be impractical because of the space needed. It was also noted that building a new library was often cheaper than remodeling an existing building. The committee was also debating whether or not to have one or two floors, include music rooms, and have story hour rooms.<sup>7</sup> With recommendations from the committee in hand, the City Council decided to use a former grocery store at the intersection of Windsor Street and North Bird Street.

The library moved into its new facility at Windsor Street in 1967. The former grocery store was renovated and an addition was added. The move away from downtown Sun Prairie was

right in step with the rest of the town. The expansion of subdivisions and businesses moved the focus away from the downtown area for the first time and into the shopping centers up Main Street and on Windsor Street. The 1967 library building on Windsor Street would serve the community for 32 years. The Main Street library would become the Sun Prairie Historical Museum.

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<sup>7</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> Century Club, p120.