

Coldwater Woman Starts Movement

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the 11th and final article written in commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the gift of a public library to the City of Coldwater)

By **PHYLISS HOLBROOK**
 "Coldwater as ever at the front", ran the headlines in the Coldwater Republican reporting the first meeting of the Michigan Library Association at Detroit on Sept. 1, 1891. And so indeed it seemed.

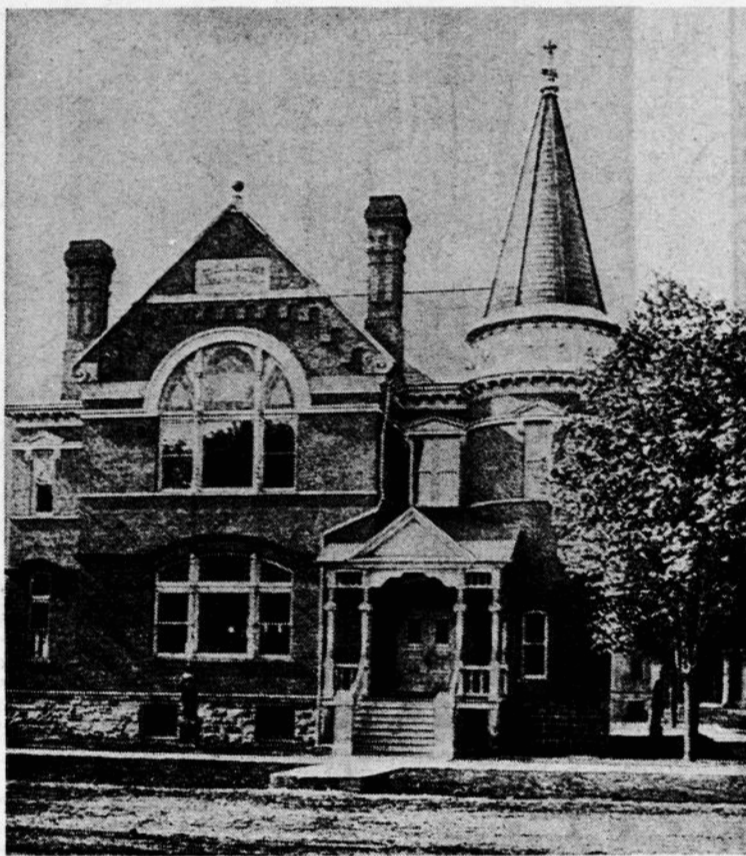
Coldwater's Senator Morgan had been responsible for the state library law of 1877. Coldwater's public library had been among the first, if not the first, of Michigan city libraries to be established under this law. Coldwater had its fine Clarke Library building, designed expressly for library use, years before cities like Grand Rapids, Adrian, or Kalamazoo boasted such buildings. (Most Michigan city libraries in those years were tucked into a spare corner of a city hall or into a vacant storeroom over a place of business — any temporary quarter that could be found.)

And now Coldwater was taking a leading role in organizing a state library association, where all those interested in improving libraries could meet to discuss problems and exchange ideas. The person chiefly responsible for this move was our city librarian, Miss Mary A. Eddy.

The need for such a society had impressed Miss Eddy so strongly, while attending the 1890 meeting of the American Library Association, that she decided to discuss the matter with Henry M. Utley, librarian of the Detroit Public Library. He agreed that her idea was good and offered to help put it across. Afterwards Mr. Utley always insisted that credit for the founding of the Michigan Library Association should go to Miss Eddy of Coldwater.

In the following months considerable correspondence took place among librarians in the state, and the first meeting of the projected association was arranged. Of the 37 delegates registered at this gathering, five were from Coldwater, the largest single group except that of Detroit. With Miss Eddy were: Franklin E. Morgan and Mr. H. P. Collin of the Coldwater Library Board, Miss Florence Holmes, and the Rev. H. P. Collin of Coldwater's Presbyterian Church.

As soon as the meeting got underway, F. E. Morgan, author of the above mentioned library law, was appointed on a committee to frame a constitution for the association. This document drawn up and accepted, Mr. Morgan was elected



COLDWATER PUBLIC LIBRARY, 1900

ected as one of the organization's vice-presidents, with Mr. Utley of Detroit as president.

The meeting then turned to a series of talks on various library problems. Miss Eddy, one of the speakers, read a paper on the work the Coldwater Library was doing with study clubs and adult education classes in the fields of history, literature, and botany. Much surprise was shown at the extent of this educational program in Coldwater and considerable discussion followed. THE Rev. H. P. Collin, who had lead some of these study groups at the Library, took considerable part in this discussion.

Later, Mr. Morgan read a thoughtful and suggestive paper on the relationship between the public library and the public school. He showed by statistics that only a very small percentage of students, at that time, ever reached college. The majority of people had only the public library to turn to for education beyond the public schools. The public library, he urged, must become the People's University.

In years to come this, of course, was exactly what the American public library did become for a great many people. It is a source of pride to Coldwater to know how early we caught this vision. No one person alone was responsible. It was all a part of the library dream as it grew from the beginning in Coldwater.

If we contributed something to the first meeting of the Michigan Library Association, we also received much, especially from the discussion of the Dewey Decimal System of classifying books, as it had been introduced into the Detroit Public Library. Coldwater decided to follow this Detroit lead. In the next years this was accomplished with the help of Miss Margaret Parkhurst, daughter of General Parkhurst and later the wife of William C. Morey.

At the second meeting of the Michigan Library Association, in 1892, Miss Eddy was elected a vice-president.

Mary A. Eddy, was a daughter of Franklin T. and Elizabeth (Garland) Eddy, who came to St. Joseph county, Michigan, from New York State in the 1840's, settling in Coldwater about 1853. Mary was probably born here soon after the family's arrival. In later years the Eddys lived on South Fremont-st in the lovely white frame house now belonging to Dr. and Mrs. H. R. Weidner.

Franklin T. Eddy, born in 1816, had studied law in Rochester, N. Y. and was admitted to the bar there. In Coldwater he became active in politics, holding such public offices as Register of Deeds (where his beautiful penmanship caused considerable comment), supervisor from the Fourth Ward, and Justice of the Peace. In 1857 he helped establish the Branch County Republican, which paper he edited "with a trenchant pen," making it an important Michigan publication.

Mrs. Eddy had been born in Kent County, England, and came with her parents to Rochester, N. Y., when she was ten years old. She married Mr. Eddy, July 8, 1843, and to this exceedingly happy union five children were

born: Caroline G. (Mrs. Mortimer Knowles), Lily L. (Mrs. William H. Donaldson), Frances, Mary A. and Franklin T. Jr. Mrs. Eddy died in Coldwater, May 20, 1884, aged 59. Mr. Eddy died June 6, 1890.

Mary Eddy was appointed first librarian of Coldwater's newly organized Public Library in July, 1881, and continued in this position until July, 1895. Her sister Frances is said to have worked as assistant in the library. The "Eddy girls" moved from Fremont to Marshall street after their father's death.

Miss Eddy's first experience as librarian occurred in the little brown house which had been the home of the Ladies' Library. She presided at the opening there, in Nov. 1881, of the Coldwater Free Public Library. She watched this new institution grow in size and usefulness, till its overcrowded quarters seemed ready to burst. During this time Henry C. Lewis, president of the Library Board, died, bequeathing his fine book collection and other items to the library. General John G. Parkhurst became the Board's second president. Shortly thereafter, Edwin R. Clarke came forward with his unexpected proposal to provide the city with a fine new library building. These were years of adventure.

On the evening the Clarke building was dedicated, Dec. 29, 1886, Dr. J.B. Angell, President of the University of Michigan, declared that he could think of no Coldwater office he would like so well as that of librarian for the next year. The opportunities, which the new building afforded in extended services, were almost boundless, he pointed out. No one understood this better, or was happier about it, than Mary Eddy.

But first there were such practical concerns as the purchasing of the handsome wall clock which O. D. Chapman father of our late librarian, Miss Margaret L. Chapman, let the Library have at less than cost. There were carpets, curtains and draperies to purchase for the lecture hall on the second floor, where plans for adult education already were unfolding.

The new building had scarcely opened when the Rev. Collin began his series of history courses

which became so popular that he had to repeat them at the Library over the years. The Rev. Herbert Sowerby of St. Mark's offered a course of free lectures on art. A museum collection of mineral and natural history specimens carefully mounted and cataloged by Calvin J. Thorpe, Coldwater teacher and newspaperman, were donated for display in the lecture hall. "Library Hall" became the focal point for a number of educational and cultural projects

Miss Eddy, who encouraged and coordinated all these activities, is remembered for her intelligence, her rather prim and precise manner, her dark blue dresses relieved by white ruches. But more importantly she is remembered for her dedication as a librarian. While she was rapping with her letter opener for order and quiet in the library, she was also noting the special needs of her public, especially those of the students who crowded the reading room.

She was a keen judge of character. Among the young people under her eye was a Coldwater school girl of unusual initiative, character and talents, Frances Alice Kellor who might never have become one of our country's great women, a leader in social and economic reforms, and founder and eloquent spokesman of the American Arbitration Association, but for the encouragement, guidance and practical help given to her by Coldwater's discerning librarian, Mary A. Eddy.

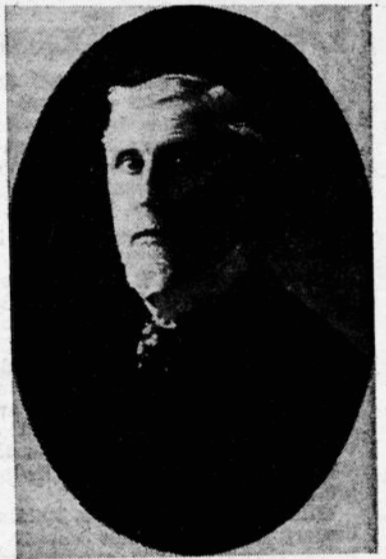
Little is known of the later years of Miss Eddy's life. Apparently she left Coldwater soon after 1898, probably for Chicago, where her name appears in the city directories of 1913 through 1917. From that time until May, 1935, she was librarian at Chicago's South Shore Country Club. Her last known address was 5602 Maryland Ave., Chicago.

Mary A. Eddy died on Oct. 13, 1940, at the South Side Sanitarium, Drexel Blvd., Chicago, Ill. She was buried in the Eddy family lot at Oak Grove Cemetery, Coldwater.

The fine work she started in our Public Library was carried on by her successor, Miss Florence Holmes, who is remembered in later years as Mrs. E. D. Legg of Coldwater.

This story of Mary A. Eddy, who started the Coldwater Public Library on a high road, brings to a close the series of articles commemorating the 75th anniversary of the dedication of the Clarke Library Building.

These have been proud stories of people who dared to dream and were willing and able to make their dreams come true. Stories of citizens eager to give Coldwater their best. Some gave their wealth and the treasures collected through a lifetime. Some offered wisdom, surely as precious as gold. Others gave imagination and enthusiasm and faithfulness. And always there was the gift of appreciation. None of this giving was greater or less than the heart of the giver. And so our library was founded and grew. And so, through the years to come,



ABRAM J. ALDRICH

it will continue to grow in its splendid tradition reflecting the character and dreams of the people who are COLDWATER.

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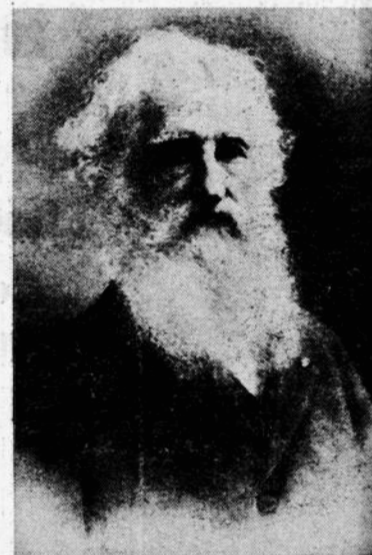
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