

History of the Grosvenor Rare Book Room

The Grosvenor Rare Book Room at the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library takes its name from Seth Grosvenor. After the British burned the village of Buffalo in the War of 1812, Grosvenor played a prominent role in helping to rebuild the devastated community. Although Grosvenor took his expert business skills to New York City in 1815, at his death in 1857 he bequeathed \$40,000 to the City of Buffalo to establish a public reference library. The Grosvenor Library opened in 1871. For most of its existence it occupied a building at Franklin and Edward Streets, later adding the nearby Cyclorama building.



Seth Grosvenor

A history of the Grosvenor Rare Book Room would not be complete without mentioning the Young Men's Association, the first circulating library in Buffalo, established in 1836. Initially, the library was open only to men, and there were membership and annual fees for circulating



Buffalo Public Library, Lafayette Square

privileges (women were admitted after 1857). Many of today's renowned city cultural organizations began as committees of the YMA, including the Historical Society, the Buffalo Society of the Natural Sciences, and the Fine Arts Academy. In 1887, the library was renamed the Buffalo Library and moved to Lafayette Square. Within ten years, it would contract with the city of Buffalo and become the Buffalo Public Library.

In 1953, Grosvenor and Buffalo Public Libraries merged with Erie County's rural library services and the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library. All library collections were moved to the Central Library which was completed in 1964 and officially dedicated on October 18th of that year. As the Grosvenor Library was a non-circulating reference library, many of the items in the Rare Book Room came from the old Grosvenor collection, with a portion from the Buffalo Public Library. The Grosvenor Rare Book Room was one of the first rare book collections in a public library in the country and remains one of about 20 such public library collections today.



Reading Room, Grosvenor Library