

# Grand Rapids Public Library: Seymour Branch History

## *A Brief Overview*

### **October, 1960**

The Board of Library Commissioners accepts a proposal made by a citizen group to establish a library branch in Alger Heights. The citizen group will maintain the new branch (including rent and maintenance), while the library board will supply books. A potential 35,000 people will be served.<sup>1</sup>

### **1961**

The citizen group – called the Southeast Library Board and led by an advertising executive named Harry P. Symes – announces it will raise \$45,000 in funds to open the branch.<sup>2</sup>

### **September 16, 1961**

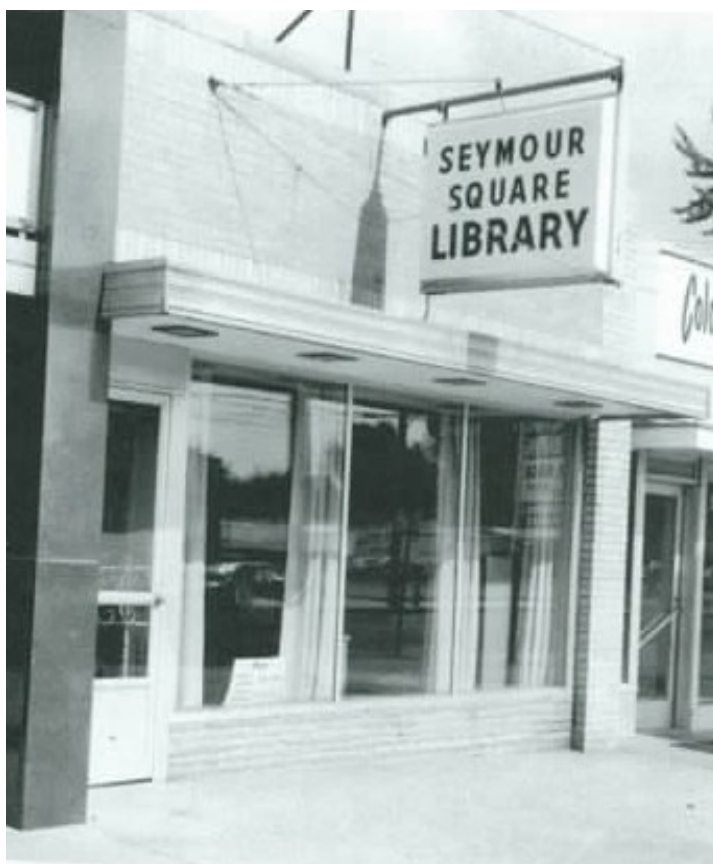
The Southeast Library Board signs a contract to purchase 2016 Eastern Ave SE – a former real estate office.

### **March, 1963**

The group campaigns in the community to raise the money needed for the branch, asserting that every citizen in the city of Grand Rapids should live within walking distance to a neighborhood branch. As the committee writes in its appeals, "...the books are compiled and stored and the staff is waiting to start operations as soon as we provide the space"; expanding the downtown Ryerson building takes budgetary priority for the Grand Rapids Public Library at this time.<sup>3</sup>

### **June, 1963**

Formerly known as *The Southeast Library*, the Alger Heights-based branch officially opens as the *The Seymour Square Library*. It serves an area containing 12 school districts.<sup>4</sup>



*2016 Eastern Ave. SE, circa 1963 - original location*

1 "OK Branch of Library, Alger Heights." *The Grand Rapids Press* 7 October 1960. Print.

2 Olson, Gordon L. *A Free Library for Everyone: The History of the Grand Rapids Public Library*. Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Public Library, 2003. 51-52. Print.

3 Grand Rapids Public Library Archival Collection 109: Seymour Square Branch Library Origins.

4 Ibid.

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### **August 12, 1981**

City commissioners purchase the former Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. building at 2350 Eastern Ave, SE. According to the *Grand Rapids Press*, Seymour is “the city's smallest and most heavily used branch library, where hundreds of books are stored in boxes or stacked on floors...”. Robert Raz, then-director of the Grand Rapids Public Library notes that the library commission had been looking for a larger space for several years.<sup>5</sup>



*2350 Eastern Ave. SE, circa 1982—second location for the Seymour Branch*

### **1997**

A successful capital millage secures funds for a renovation to the branch.

### **June, 1999**

The neighboring property at 2354 Eastern Ave SE.—Alger and Eastern Gas City Inc.—is demolished to make room for the new, larger Seymour Branch Library location. The Alger and Eastern Gas City Inc. sat at the Northeast corner of Alger and Eastern Ave.

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<sup>5</sup> “City Buys 3rd Ward Building for Branch Library” *The Grand Rapids Press* 12 August 1981. Print.

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*Pictured above is the 2354 address (Gas City) in December of 1983; the Seymour Branch at 2350 Eastern Ave. can be seen in the photo to the left.*



*June 1999: Gas City is demolished to make more room for the “Present and Future home” of the Seymour Branch.*

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### **September 25, 2000**

A grand opening is held at the 2350 Eastern Ave. SE location for the new building, which provides more than 10,000 square feet of space.<sup>6</sup>



*2350 Eastern Ave. SE - current home of the Grand Rapids Public Library Seymour Branch*

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### **Photo Credits**

Page 1: Grand Rapids Public Library Archives

Page 2: Grand Rapids Public Library Archives

Page 3: Betty Gibout Real Estate Listing Cards Collection; Grand Rapids Public Library Archives

Page 4: Grand Rapids Public Library Archives

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<sup>6</sup> Olson, Gordon L. *A Free Library for Everyone: The History of the Grand Rapids Public Library*. Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Public Library, 2003. 69-70. Print.