

# A Library MNO: Peter Lor's library ABC, part 5

**M** is for **Mineral Point** (population c. 2500), a small town (US: "city") in Iowa County, south-western Wisconsin, which we visited on our first US road trip in August 2009. It was an early mining town (lead and zinc) and Cornish miners were recruited to work the mines. This heritage is reflected in the town's unique architecture. It looks a bit run-down but is staging a come-back as a tourist centre. The library, pictured here, is quite small and cramped, but it was a friendly place and, in the middle of the summer vacation, a hive of activity. Good use was being made of the Internet-enabled workstations, by both old and young inhabitants.



**N** is for **Napier**, a small town (population c. 3200) in the Overberg wheat-growing area of the Western Cape province. In the 1970s my parents considered buying a house there for their retirement, for around \$200 – property was dirt cheap, as the population was declining, (They moved to Sedgefield instead.) Today it's a different story, as tourism has taken off and Napier has become a popular weekend destination for Capetonians. I was told that there are about 650 registered borrowers (400 adults and 250 children), but in contrast with Mineral Point there were none in this neatly kept, spic and span, little library when I visited, I was told this was because the school term had ended. In South Africa public libraries are not necessarily the community hubs that American public libraries tend to be. The librarian and the cleaning lady kindly posed for me at the circulation desk.



**O** is for Oudtshoorn (population c. 80000), the major town of the Little Karoo and the world capital of ostrich farming. Two major booms in ostrich feathers (1870s and early 20<sup>th</sup> century) resulted in fortunes being made, and this is still evident in the large Cape Victorian mansions ("feather palaces") to be seen in the town and district. The town's most famous citizen was the Afrikaans writer, C.J. Langenhoven, after whom Oudtshoorn's public library is named. It's a spacious, well-stocked library. Here some users were in evidence, but there were none in the trilingual (Afrikaans, English, isiXhosa) "Information Station", which is equipped with eight Internet-enabled workstations and a good reference collection. Again the absence of users was attributed to the school holidays. In South Africa public libraries are an important resource for students, who may not have suitable study facilities at home or in their schools, but I do sometimes



worry that the perfectly-ordered bookshelves reflect a lack of usage for recreational and other general reading.