

MILESTONES in the HISTORY of Bridgton Public Library

(Stan Cohen, Trustee – March, 2016)

Bridgton Public Library (BPL) was founded in August, 1895 and received a “charter” from the state of Maine as a “Social and Literary Library to be established at Bridgton Center Village”.

The first libraries in the town of Bridgton were subscription libraries, the oldest documented one dating to 1819. The early “library societies” were selective in membership and charged dues. It wasn’t until 1941 that Bridgton Public Library became a “free” library.

The section below is taken from “Bridgton, Maine 1768-1994” (Pages 508-511) – published by the Bridgton Historical Society:

The first Chairman and Librarian was Dr. Frank E Stevens – a Bridgton druggist. The library was housed in his store. In 1898 the library moved to the Wight building (the insurance office of Howard Libby near Post Office Square).

On February 1, 1900 a new library building was dedicated, funded by donations raised by a ladies’ organization, and built on a lot donated by Miss Clara Fogg. The “Fogg building” (at 173 Main Street) currently houses the Hospital Guild Thrift Shop.

Sometime after the turn of the century, Dr. Nathan J Davis (born in Bridgton and died in Massachusetts in 1911) bequeathed his large book collection and \$10,000 to “erect a brick building in Bridgton to be called (in memory of his son) the Dalton Holmes Davis Memorial Library”, and another \$8000 as an endowment to be used to run the library. The new building, erected on the site of the Amasa Merrill lot, was dedicated on July 30, 1913. The architect was Harry S Coombs of Lewiston. Another library, identical in design, was built in Wilton, Maine in 1915.

Later in 1913, former Maine Governor Henry B Cleaves contributed his collection of 887 volumes to the Bridgton Library.

For lack of funds, on Oct. 17, 1936 the library was closed. It reopened 5 months later when the Town began supporting the library at a rate of \$500 per year.

The apparent first paid librarian, Charlotte L. Frost, served from 1937 to 1940.

In 1941, with a change in the by-laws, the Bridgton Public Library became a free, public institution.

MAJOR RENOVATIONS – REPAIRS - ADDITIONS to PHYSICAL PLANT:

1952 – Repaired roof and installed new oil burner.

1953 - External painting and repair of wood siding. Fluorescent lights installed in two reading rooms.

1959 – Cement parapet decomposed requiring brick work and molding replacement.

1961 – Parking lot graded and re-surfaced.

1967 - The library contracted for a new tar and gravel roof.

1970’s - The beginning of some plant “modernization” projects. The ceiling was lowered and more fluorescent lights installed.

1974 – The meeting room in the basement was completed and the “South Room” received a face lift.

1980 – A new heating system was installed.

1982 – The Children’s room was dedicated.

1990 - Architect Tim Smith of Bennington, Vt. performed a building needs assessment.

1991 - The library purchased the J. Clayton Sanborn home which was situated on Church Street on what is now the library parking lot. The house was removed to provide for additional parking. \$63,000 was borrowed from Norway Savings Bank for this acquisition.

1991 - The library roof was replaced with a rubberized membrane.

1993 - Architect Bill Hamilton was appointed for a planned renovation and addition, including an elevator. The project was completed in **1995** at a cost of \$350,000. Trustee President Al Glover acted as “clerk-of-the-works” and the general contractor was Glen Builders. The project was funded with grants from the Maine State Library, David Faxon, the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, the Town of Bridgton, Friends of the Library, the Kendal C & Anna Ham Foundation, numerous individual donors, and an FHA loan (\$207,000) from Norway Savings Bank.

1999 - The library bought the property of the late Norma Farnham situated on Church Street adjacent to the MacLean home. The purchase price was \$65,000. It was financed by Norway Savings Bank (\$54,543). The house was razed, at a cost of \$8,500, to accommodate more parking for the library.

2002 - A new air conditioning system and de-humidifier were installed by Thayer Co. at a cost of \$11,455.

2007 - The roof membrane was replaced by Gladu Roofing. The Kendal C & Anna Ham Foundation awarded a grant of \$21,500 for this project.

2007 - A brickwork job on the roof – inside the front façade - was done to correct disintegration and leaking, at a cost of \$34,500. This project was partially funded by the Kendal C & Anna Ham Foundation.

2009 – Hubka Construction completed a window replacement and repair project as well as replacement of siding on the building addition.

2012 - The Main Street Courtyard project, begun in 2010, was completed. Perennial Point of View was the general contractor. Total cost of \$106,907 was financed from the Library’s Capital Reserve funds, grants, donations and a matching grant from Lorraine Gardiner.

2013 – An internal space re-allocation and improvement project was completed. Total cost was \$88,215 including air conditioning upgrades (\$13,016), financed from capital reserve funds.

2014 - A technology update project was completed at a cost of \$3350. The principal contractor was Nickerson Consulting.

2015 - The library parking lot was completely reconstructed with focus on environmental conservation. The project cost was \$ 148,914. Primary contractors were Peters Construction of Gorham, Me. and Perennial Point of View of Bridgton. It was engineered by Fay, Spofford & Thorndike of Portland. Trustee Wilbert Libbey acted as “clerk of the works”.

2015 - A “Windows Weatherization” project was completed in the fall, funded by a grant from the Davis Family Foundation of \$16,900.

OTHER OPERATING MILESTONES

1954 – The library sponsored its first major art exhibit.

1971 - The library by-laws were revised to allow two students to serve on the board of trustees.

1972 - A bequest of 800 volumes was received from the estate of Arthur and Elizabeth Pingree.

1974 - BPL joined the Southern Maine Library Council.

1977 - The 4 on the Fourth race was inaugurated by local residents Jerry and Phoebe Levine as an independent fund raising event to benefit the library children’s room.

1980 - The “Friends of Bridgton Public Library” was organized to support expansion and improvement of library services. Robert Van Waes was elected president, and Gail Tarr was made honorary chairperson.

1983 - Jay and Loraine Spenciner took over management of the 4 on the Fourth race. By 2005 a new race committee re-organized as a 501[c]3 non-profit whose by-laws require that at least 90% of the net race proceeds be donated to the library. Jim Cossey became race director beginning with the 2006 race. In **2015** the race was able to contribute \$29,000 to the library.

1987 - The introduction of personal computers helped bring the library into the “modern” technology era.

1988 - A committee was formed to prepare for the celebration (called the Diamond Jubilee) of the 75th anniversary of the dedication of the current library building. Several events were conducted serving as a kick-off for the capital campaign needed to fund the new addition and presenting preliminary architectural plans for that project.

1989 - The library building was placed on the National Registry of Historic Buildings.

1990 - Modern Articles of Incorporation (organized as a “literary and social library”) were prepared by Myron Friedman of North Bridgton so that the Library could obtain “non-profit” status for tax purposes.

1995 – Installation of the Winnebago automated circulation system and on-line catalog was partially completed.

2002 - The library by-laws were up dated to be in conformity with the latest Articles of Incorporation.

2002 – The development and implementation of the library WEBSITE began. The “webmaster” was Melissa Norton.

2002-2003 - Bridgton Public Library changed its fiscal year from calendar year to a 7/1 – 6/30 year.

2013 - Digitization of past issues of the Bridgton News was substantially completed, funded by a grant from the Kendall & Anna Ham Charitable Foundation.

PROGRESS of library CIRCULATION [*selected waypoints*]

1937	10650	1974	17300
1941	16485	1991	28602
1950	9517	1994	21628
1958	13049	1996	29402
1961	14552	2000.....	32785
1968	19245	2005	39730
1970	20500	2010	43236
		2015	36976

MAJOR GIFTS / BEQUESTS / TRUSTS [in excess of \$5000]

1911-1912	Nathan Davis Trust	\$18,000
1960	Harry Bisbee	\$7,790
1968	Arthur Cole	\$7,409
1986	Margaret Cook	\$134,000
1988	Richard J Davis	\$12,069
1988	Florence F Davis	\$14,602
1994	David Faxon	\$25,000
1996-1999	Kendal C & Anna Ham Foundation *	\$100,000
2000	Thomas E Carr	\$10,000
2006	James McHenry Gillet	\$10,000
2006	V.A. Insurance (anonymous)	\$10,707
2007	Janette Walker [For capital expenditures]	\$273,600
2007	Ann Weld	\$10,000
2014	Marilyn Van Saun	\$25,000

* [to retire debt in connection with the building expansion project]

OPERATING EXPENSES & TOWN SUPPORT [selected waypoints]

	<u>Total Library Expense</u>	<u>Town Support</u>
1937	\$754	\$500
1948	\$912	\$500
1953	\$2240	\$1500
1962	\$4069	\$2300
1967	\$7519	\$2500
1970	\$6186	\$3000
1975	\$12111	\$4000
1980	\$18831	\$13970
1985	\$48130	\$20000
1990	\$71802	\$25000
1995	\$72320	\$35000
2002	\$158503	\$62500
2005	\$137819	\$97206
2006	\$141233	\$67000
2008	\$133200	\$74000
2009	\$161364	\$75000
2010	\$157706	\$75000
2011	\$164211	\$75000
2012	\$182633	\$70000
2013	\$190587	\$70000
2014	\$184733	\$70000
2015	\$196966	\$70000
2016	tba	\$79000

CHRONOLOGY - LIBRARY DIRECTORS (HEAD LIBRARIANS)

1937 - 1940	Charlotte L Frost
1941 – 1942	Ellen Morris
1943 to 1957	Edna Coleman
1957 to 1960	Emma Ntceros
1960 to 1968	Mrs. Leslie Dudley
1968 to 1969	Anne Mommers
1969 to 1973	Helen Bonnie
1973 to 1976	Alice Town
1976 to 1995	Sally MacAuslan
1996 to 1997	Susan Peterson
1997 to 1998	Shelley Chick-Gravel
1998 to 2000	Charles Howell
2000 to 2002	Duffy Carabia
2002 to 2006	Diane Am Rhein
2006 to 2015	Holly Hancock
2015 to present	Allison Griffin

CHRONOLOGY - PRESIDENTS OF BOARDS OF TRUSTEES

1895 -	Dr. Frank E Stevens
[Town reports do not address library issues during these intervening years]	
1953 - 1953	Charles Taylor
1953 – 1960	Charles Morris, Jr.
1961 – 1963	George Oberg
1963 – 1964	Ray T. McDonald, Jr.
1964 – 1966	George Oberg
1967 - 1971	Burton Mabry
1971 – 1972	George H Cooper
1972 - 1974	Henry A Shorey
1975 – 1979	D. S. Collins
1979 – 1981	Jonathon Ray
1982 - 1983	Charlotte Price
1984 - 1987	Richard Goldsmith
1988 – 1991	Michael T Ballard
1991 - 1993	Al Glover
1994 - 1996	Tom Gyger
1997 – 1998	Randy Greason
1999 – 2000	Sharon Abbott
2001 – 2002	Marita Wiser
2002 – 2005	Tom Gyger
2005 – 2010	Jim Cossey
2010 – 2011	Dave Hursty
2011 – 2015	Carolyn Ehrman
2015 -	Sally Dunning

Notes for “MILESTONES”

“Milestones in the history of the Bridgton Public Library” is an attempt to highlight some of the important events in the library’s “life” in a format that can be used as a reference by Bridgton library boards of trustees, librarians, and others who may find it useful.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to the following people who provided valuable information or suggestions. Sharon Abbott, Ned Allen, Laurie Chadbourne, Laurie Chalmers, Jim Cossey, Sally Dunning, Carolyn Ehrman, Al Glover, Allison Griffin, Tom Gyger, Holly Hancock, and Carol York.

Sources:

- Town annual reports (at Bridgton Historical Society)
- Digitized back issues of the Bridgton News (on BPL web site)
- BPL board meeting minutes back to 2002. I could not locate minutes before 2002.
- BPL financial reports
- Assorted, abbreviated BPL histories
- Archived files at the library

Disclaimers:

- There were few records (that I could find) that provide information about physical plant projects or other milestones before 1952.

- Although I chose to include only “selected waypoints” in the list of “Total Expense and Town Support”, I have separately assembled a complete database of the amount of town support for every year from 1937 to the present time. That listing is in Excel format and a copy will be on e-file at the library.
- I could not find a record of names of librarians before 1937. Town reports do not address library issues prior to 1937, which is the first year that the town provided financial support to the town libraries.
- I could not find a record of names of board presidents before 1953 except for the very first one (Dr. Stevens).