

HISTORY OF THE BARRINGTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

WRITTEN BY JANET VARNEY

1963

The Barrington Public Library has a history of 168 years, dating back to November 2, 1795, when a group of residents met at the home of Major Isaac Waldron to form a library association, to be known as the Barrington Social Library. The following preamble taken from the original records shows how this group felt in regard to a library.

“When as the supreme being hath given to men, the favorite of heaven, the power of reason, and made him capable of thought, of reflection, and of everlasting improvement in knowledge and virtue; and as it is by the cultivation of this noble power that man attains to superior dignity among his fellow men, as by this he is brought to the knowledge of his end, and of the wisdom of that being to whom belongs the tribute of praise; and as by learning and virtue the civilized man is distinguished from the savage and raised as far above the uncultured part of his species as they are above the animals; as learning enlarges the mind—frees it from its native barrenness and austerity—collects and strengthens the mental portions—reduces the passions to a proper subordination to the law of reason, and restores harmony to the soul—cherishes a manliness of spirit; it flourishes under the shield of virtuous freedom—is the enemy of slavery—the support and ornament of every profession, of the ground, the sword, the Bar and the Pulpit; it expands the heart with universal philanthropy, stimulates the soul—(two lines were not readable)

The general collection of books is absolutely necessary to the improvement of the mind and advancement of useful knowledge; and as some who have the desire for such improvement and are not able, or have not the opportunity to furnish themselves with so large a collection as is desirable; and as Social Libraries have been found by experience to serve the cause of learning and virtue in places where they have been established.

Therefore we the subscribers being desirous of enjoying these advantages and of obtaining the happy end ourselves and of transmitting them to those who shall succeed us, have agreed to, and do by this instrument form ourselves into a library society to be regulated and governed by the following rules and such others as shall from time to time be found necessary and agree to consistent with the following articles.”

The first librarian was the Rev. Benjamin A. Balch who was also Clerk. He held the office of librarian for 15 years. There is no mention during this time of the location of the library, but it is assumed it was in the Congregational Church, then located on Oak Hill or in the home of a member. The actual location of the library isn't mentioned until in 1821 when it was voted to keep the library at the home of Jeremiah Kingman. In the rules set up to govern the society it was stated that all books should have printed tickets on the inside cover showing the number and the society's property. Each member was to pay annually two shillings to be paid out for books to increase the library. Members who kept books out more than two months had to pay six pence a month for each book so kept out and would be suspended of privileges until payment was made. The first members were to pay eighteen shillings to the treasurer in order to make the first

purchase of books. All conveyances of property in the library from one member to the society or to another person, and all receipts and accounts should be entered at full length by the clerk in the records of the society.

One such transfer of property was recorded in this manner: Voted that Israel Babb be received a member of the Society by virtue of a conveyance of property in the original right of Arthur Rogers to Isaiah Sanborn, and which was transferred from said Sanborn to Israel Babb. The original conveyance was in these terms: Know all men by these presents that Arthur Rogers in Barrington in the County of Strafford, gentleman for and in consideration of the sum of three dollars in hand paid to me by Isaiah Sanborn of said Barrington, Physician, at or before the sealing and delivery of these present, the receipt, I do hereby acknowledge, have granted, bargained and sold, and by these present do grant, bargain and sell unto the said born, his executors and administrators and signs my share in the Social Library of said Barrington and likewise all and singular the privileges, rights and advantages I possess as a proprietor of said library. To have and to hold the said share of said Library with all the rights and privileges there unto belonging to the said Sanborn, his executors, administrators, and assigns forever, and I the said Rogers for myself and my kin and executors and

administrators promise to defend and secure the share with the rights and privileges belonging unto the said Sanborn, his executors, administrators and assigns against all and any person or persons what so ever. In witness where of I the said Rogers have here unto set my hand and seal this fifth day of August in the year of the Lord 1796. Signed, Sealed and Delivered in presence of Mary _____.

The length of time that books could be kept out was in the by-laws as two months but was voted on at each annual meeting and it was often changed to a 3-month period. Fines were imposed upon members keeping books out longer than the time limit, and these fines, along with taxes assessed each member every year, paid for new books. Damaged books and lost books had to be paid for by the person who had them out. The taxes varied each year and in 1804 were one shilling and six pence, in 1806 it was 25 cents on the head. In 1806 the members voted to have no tax, while in 1811 the tax was one dollar. In 1806 new members were taken into the social library at the rate of twenty-one shillings and six pence. Members were considered stockholders and the stock could be transferred but no stockholder could withdraw his stock from the library. A person could purchase stock from a

member and receive a certificate from the clerk of the society by presenting him the bill of sale from the purchaser.

The Barrington Social Library voted to incorporate at the meeting of 1808, and on February 27, 1809, the Rev. Balch took the oath of Librarian and Clerk, while Samuel Hale Esquire, Isaac Waldron Esquire, and James Hayes took the oath of Committee--the oath of office having to be given by a Justice of the Peace. In the incorporation the Library Society could receive grants, subscriptions, and donations of personal estate not exceeding \$1000.00 for the purpose and use of their association.

The annual meetings of the Social Library were posted for a week or more in advance of each meeting in two public places. Today it still has to be posted for two weeks prior to the meeting. Early in the 1800s the places of posting mentioned were "Mr. Balch's Meeting House" and some public place at Crown Point, referred to in one place as the "Temple". All books had to be returned to the library within 5 days of the meeting or a fine had to be paid. This fine was as much as \$1.00 per book. No books could be taken out 15 days prior to the meeting.

In the records of the meeting of November, 1820, it was voted to revise the by-laws of the society and the meeting was adjourned until January 1, 1821, at which time it was voted to repeal all by-laws existing and a new code of by-laws drawn up by a committee was accepted, but was not signed until 1822 with 32 members signing them. For a period of nearly a year the Social Library nearly was disbanded as the members voted in January 1822 to divide the books or pay the petitioner in compensation for their shares and a committee was named to divide the library. In March of the same year the voters of the January meeting were reconsidered and repealed and the new by-laws of the previous year were signed. New members at this time were accepted upon the payment of the appraised value of a share and had to subscribe to the charter and by-laws of the corporation. Privileges of the members were according to the shares owned. A member with one share could take out two bound volumes or three pamphlets while a member with two or more shares could take out twice the number of volumes and pamphlets. At this time the fine for a book kept out over two months was changed to one cent a day for each volume. No fine was to exceed the original cost of the book. No member could have a book out of his family and if he did he was fined twenty-five cents for each volume loaned. Today

the fine is two cents a day for adults after three weeks and one cent for children.

When the warrant was posted in January, 1834, one article in it was to see if the members of the Social Library and the Barrington Franklin Library should be united in one society and to see what method the members would take to unite the libraries. It wasn't until January, 1835, that the two did unite and it was voted to retain the name of the Barrington Social Library. A new set of by-laws and constitution weren't presented to the society until 1836 and they remained much the same as the previous set. It was mentioned in these by-laws that any member not paying his fines and assessments within three months after they became due and he had been notified, his shares in the association could be sold at public auction, the proceeds to be used to pay his fines and assessments, the surplus, if any, to be subject to the order of the delinquent member provided he should in one year pay the fines and assessments and he would be reinstated to his former privileges.

The library association was apparently dormant between 1843 and 1885 when it was reorganized on November 2. The by-laws and constitution were

revised but remained similar to the previous ones. The date of the annual meeting was changed from the second Wednesday in November to the last Saturday. At this time the length of time a book could be kept out was changed from two months to two weeks, but the time could be extended to four weeks by the say of the executive committee. Elmer E. Wiggin was chosen Secretary and the association retained the name Barrington Social Library. A suggestion of a life membership at a cost of \$15.00 was made but wasn't accepted. It was incorporated into the by-laws in 1924 that a person contributing \$25.00 shall be a life member.

Again there is a lapse in the records of the association from 1889 to 1920 but during this period the library was located in the vestry of the Congregational Church and Melvin Hall of Green Hill was the librarian. The library was opened each Sunday and Mr. Hall walked from his home, a distance of three to four miles, each Sunday for this purpose and also to attend church. This was done until about 1915. On October 13, 1920, the association was reorganized when a group of interested citizens met in the Grange Hall for this purpose. Mr. Elmer Wiggin was named Chairman Pro-Tem and was later elected President. He retained this office until 1951, and in 1952 he was made president emeritus of the Barrington Public Library

Association. At the reorganization meeting the name was changed from the Barrington Social Library to the Barrington Public Library. In 1923 the date of the annual meeting was changed from the first Wednesday in January to the first Wednesday in April.

The Library Association tried to obtain the Oak Hill School to use as a Public Library but was unable to do so at this time. It did purchase it in 1938 for a sum of \$100.00. The first annual meeting was held in the new library building in April 1940, and it remained in use as the library until 1954, when the library was moved into a room built for this purpose as part of the addition to the Barrington Grade School, where it is now located. During the winter months, while the library was located in the Oak Hill School, books could be obtained at the home of Mrs. William Haley.

When the association was unable to obtain the Oak Hill School in 1920, the members decided to start a building fund with which to build a community building in which the library would be located. In 1924, the fund had amounted to \$1494.48 in pledges and cash. Twice members of the association met with the Cemetery Association to see if the Cemetery Association would give them a piece of land on which to erect a community

building. In 1924, the trustees reported having investigated the property known as the May Place and the association purchased this property soon after. The library was then located in one room of the building until 1938 or 1939. The rest of the main floor was rented to the New England Tel. & Tel. Co. at a rate of \$10.00 a month for at least five years and was rented to private individuals as a home at other times until sold in 1944. The association first decided to dispose of this property in 1927. In the meantime, the association purchased additional land from Arthur W. Turner which was located between the Congregational Church and the Cemetery which they gave to the church in 1957 for the sum of \$1.00 with the provision that the Cemetery Association have a right of way through this property to Route 4 & 9. The old Oak Hill School was sold in 1955 to Thomas Menten for the use of the Catholic Group after the library moved into the school.

The greatest improvement to the Barrington Public Library came in 1954 when it moved into the Grade School. This made it available to more people and could be used for reference work at the school. The library hours formerly were on Thursday afternoons and with this move, the library is open each Thursday from 9:30-4:30 P.M. In addition, it is opened during

the P.T.A. meetings once a month and twice a month on the evening the Grange meets. Books are now available through the Bookmobile and in 1956 and 1957, the state librarian visited the library for the purpose of indexing and screening the books.

The association has been self-supporting throughout the years, although the town has made a yearly donation of \$100.00 for a good many years to be used for books and for the past two years raised this to \$200.00. The book committee purchases books each year for adults as well as children, and books have been donated by members and friends. Ten books were received from the Dover Library in 1950. Prior to 1931, no mention of the librarian receiving any pay was made. Since then, a gift has been given each year starting at \$10.00, and now \$50.00, and an assistant is also paid.

**History Part-2
1970's-2012**

1973 Library moved from school to the Town Hall Building (current location at 105 Ramsdell Lane) but still served a dual purpose as school/public library.

Librarians were Phyllis Andrade and Ann Brooks. Andrade retired after 10 years in 1974. Ann Brooks remained on as the school librarian.

1978 Peggy Smart becomes the school librarian.

1980 Irene Saunders becomes the school librarian and the library adds an assistant, Nancy T. Callahan. Hours expand.

1980 The Friends of the Library group is started.

1980 Irene and Nancy leave in November and Jennifer Wilson becomes the librarian.

1981 State Library Cards are stopped and residents need local card to access materials.

1982 School & Public libraries split. School books moved into the Elementary or Middle School while public library books remain in town hall location.

1983 Karen Littlefield becomes public librarian. Library is still a private association provided with funds from fees and dues.

1984-1986 Town funds are used to augment the public library budget.

1987 First library Summer Reading Program.

1988 At Town Meeting in 1988 the Town voted to establish the Barrington Library as a Public Library (pursuant to New Hampshire RSA 202-A:3) and accepted the books and equipment of the Barrington Library Association. The Trustee become elected officials.

1990- The library receives a \$50,000 bequest from Gladys Steel Lund.

1995 The Friends of the library produce an oral history book called "Traditions & Transitions" a compilation of interviews of Barrington residents to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the library.

1995- New librarian is hired, Laure Lam

1997- New librarian is hired, Amy (Richards) Inglis

1997- A public computer with Internet Access is showcased and a new online card catalog is unveiled. The old card catalog is phased out. Online databases are added to services.

1998 Adult Book group begins...continues to run to this day.

1996-1998 Annual Garden Tour...sponsored by the Friends of the Library.

1999 Annual Perennial sale fundraiser begins...done by the Friends of the Library.

2000- Library does a \$100,000 renovation to take over the first floor of the building at 39 Province Lane after the police move into their new building. We now have 3,900 sq. feet of space.

2000- The library receives a donation of \$8,000 for a children's materials trust fund from Thelma Swain. The library also received numerous donations to help furnish the facility.

2003- The library is named "Community Supporting Organization" of the year by UNH.

2005- Library Teen Advisory Board wins the NHLTA Special Library Service award for their fundraising and program help.

2009- Amy Inglis is named NH Librarian of the Year.

2011- A new online card catalog is purchased; Atrium is web based and allows online renewals, reserves, and a host of other capabilities.

2012- The library remains in the renovated space. Circulation has risen to over 100,000 items per year and the library is full, with over 36,000 items. Plans for a new library are being developed by the library Trustees.

2013- The Library has 100,842 circulations, the highest number in our history. The library is offering digital materials for check out on electronic devices and we begin to circulate electronic devices such as Kindles and Tablets. The Friends of the Library donate a large screen TV for use in the meeting room for presentations and gaming tournaments. New wall shelving is purchased to try and make room for the growing collection in the current small space.

2014- The Library is nominated for the National Medal for Museum and Library Services by Senator Jeanne Shaheen. We are not selected but even a nomination is an honor! Donor purchases all new chairs for our meeting room and second flat screen TV is donated for gaming days. A donation of LEGOS makes a new LEGO building club a reality. The ability to pay fines or fee for lost books by credit card is

added and an online registration module is installed so patrons can sign up for programs from home. Plans for a new library continue to be hashed out.

2015- The library began circulating digital magazines in addition to e-books and download audio. The library also purchased a new public access computer server system and a system to track Wi-Fi usage which we offer free to patron 24/7. Library website was revamped to work better on mobile devices. New adult programming is added including art classes and crafting sessions. Creation kits (science and technology games) were added to the circulating collection and our video game collection was expanded. A new Library Foundation is started to help raise funds towards a new library facility.

2016- Another digital service that offers download music, movies, comics and TV shows is added. The Library Foundation raises its first funds to hire a fundraising consultant and the Board of Selectmen approves the library going ahead with conceptual drawings for a building to be located on a portion of the parcel previously inhabited by the Town Hall. Plans are developed and work begins on a feasibility study for fundraising and materials to educate the public on the project.