

LIBRARY ON THE MOVE

by

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**THE OTTO BRUYN'S
PUBLIC LIBRARY
241 West Mill Road
Northfield, NJ 08225**

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FOREWORD

It is fitting that the Northfield Public Library Association should record herein the story of Northfield's progressive library. No group of concerned citizens anywhere has organized itself for a common cause more effectively than the Association.

The cause we share is meeting the challenge of change. Change in the seventies is pervasive and requires a capacity for response that is more informed, quicker, more comprehensive and compassionate than at any time in the history of our community.

The library has developed from a "bookcase in the mayor's office" to become the nucleus of a multi-media center. It is an "alive-brary" offering a growing collection of printed and non-printed material for pleasure and the pursuit of knowledge.

Many people gave freely of their recollections and records to help in compiling this history. I want to acknowledge and thank especially Mrs. Elaine Swilkey and Mr. Charles Kresge.

Doris G. Mohn, President
Public Library of Northfield

The First Step

The City of Northfield came of age in 1926. It celebrated its 21st birthday by becoming the first shore community to have its own library.

And it all began with a bookcase

A citizens' association was formed, and first met on June 24, 1926, to discuss plans for a public library. The association's directors for that all-important first step, Mrs. Caroline Shreve, president, Mrs. Laura C. Duble, secretary, and Mr. George Meredith, treasurer, wasted no time in putting their plans into operation - their library opened just 48 days later!

One hundred books were carefully shelved in front of Mayor Eugene Swilkey's desk in city hall; within a year, bookcases lined the walls of council chambers. During the first year, those hundred books circulated 4000 times and \$39.00 in fines were collected.

As the young library grew in popularity, more space was soon needed. The bookcases were moved in the spring of 1928 across the street to the Muldon House on Shore Road (now the residence of Mrs. George Tomlinson.) The library was open four hours a day, four days a week, in a room on the second floor which the Association rented for \$20.00 a month.

Along with the library, the number of officers of the Association grew too. In 1931, Mr. George

Meredith was president, Mr. Wilbur McVaugh, vice-president, Miss Elizabeth Herrick, secretary, the Rev. Mr. Fred C. Hardy, treasurer, Dr. Charles Ake, Council representative, and Mrs. William Carney, member-at-large.

Public meetings of the Association were community events including prayer, songs by both the boys' and girls' choruses, selections by the sixth grade harmonica band, baritone and soprano solos, and recitations.

Miss Lizzie's Reign.

Miss Lizzie Price was appointed the first librarian in 1926. In her youth, she and her sisters, Olive and Louise, had been the belles of Bakersville (today's Northfield) as they drove about in their father's carriage with their brightly colored parasols.

Their father, Captain John Price, was a sea-captain who was then delivering ice and lumber to Atlantic City. Through the telescope in the cupola of their Shore Road home, the girls watched as Captain Price sailed his schooner up the inlet between Northfield and Margate. When they saw him dock, they knew it was time to put dinner on the table.

In later years, Miss Lizzie was still a familiar sight walking back and forth between the library and home. Eventually, the police chauffeured her. She was not young when she became librarian, but she served for over 20 years until, in her 80s, ill-health forced her to retire. She was devoted to the developing library, and never failed to open the doors even in snowstorms.

Miss Lizzie and Miss Louie ended their days in the Masonic Nursing Home in Burlington. The sad task of driving them there fell to their good friend, the present mayor, the Hon. Otto Brynys. He had promised that he would return them to their hometown of Northfield for burial; this he did.

Years of Change

Book circulation dropped in 1934 and 1935 but in 1938 the Library again needed new quarters, and this time went back across the street to a city-owned site next to city hall. Its new home was a one-room building which had been a construction office at Mill Road and the Shore Fast Line and then removed as part of the street improvement plan. It was remodeled as a WPA project with a wood paneled interior and placed in a setting of green lawn and flower beds. Today, the tiny white building stands in the yard of the Northfield Maintenance Department near Birch Grove Park - a silent testimony to a library on the move.

Another WPA project in 1939 provided for a painting by G. Francis Meredith: "The Home of Miss Lizzie Price." The painting, which is on indefinite loan from the Works Progress Administration, Federal Art Project, hangs in the front of the library behind the circulation desk. As seen in the painting, the house was built with a cupola, but this upper structure was taken down by a later occupant. The frame building has stood since 1866 and can be seen on Shore Road next to the Rugby Inn. The artist was reimbursed \$10.75 for the cost of materials.

1938 was a year of increased circulation in the

new quarters. The August, 1939, issue of the New Jersey Library Bulletin carried an article praising Northfield for its progressive outlook. But again, during the war, there was a temporary decline - part of a trend throughout the country, as Lizzie Price learned at the Librarians' Convention in Washington, D.C.

When Lizzie Price resigned in 1947, she was succeeded by Mrs. Fundis who filled the position until 1958. Mrs. Fields from Somers Point helped out for a short time, to be succeeded in turn by Mrs. Elaine Swilkey, daughter-in-law of the Mayor Swilkey with whom our story started. She served as Northfield's librarian from 1958 until 1966.

A Shoestring Operation

During the 1950s and 1960s, the City's budget permitted only a small sum for the library. In 1954, for example, just \$75.00 was allotted, though if a special request were made, Mrs. Swilkey would informally consult the Mayor and, with his approval, buy the desired volume to be paid for by the City. A set of encyclopedias was added in this manner. Most of the collection of 1,000 books was on loan to Northfield from the County Library headquarters, Mays Landing.

At this time in its history, the library was open for six hours a week, with many more hours of behind-the-scene work contributed by Mrs. Swilkey. Although she was not formally trained in library science, she possessed a genuine enthusiasm and love for good reading that generated more and more interest in the library. There was a dramatic in-

crease in book circulation during this period. Patrons were enthusiastic readers, often borrowing as many as ten books at a time, for there was no limit. On Wednesday evenings there were sometimes as many as 200 cards to be filed. During Library Week, Mrs. Swilkey provided bookmarks and forgave fines just as we do today. The Cresset Junior Women's Club offered a story hour on Saturdays for children. Those must have been crowded sessions with the children seated two to a chair in the narrow aisles. Few other special activities were planned; space was just too limited.

Reactivation of the Association

The Association had dwindled steadily for some years and in the mid-1950s became inactive. However, in 1968 a group of parents took a look at their library facilities and recognized a need. They quickly organized themselves to make effective use of a variety of training and talents. The Northfield Public Library Association was reactivated and in 1968 was incorporated as a non-profit organization. A gratifyingly large number of citizens joined the initial band until today one family in four is a member of the Association.

In 1968, Mrs. Jean Blasciak was appointed librarian, replacing Mrs. Frances Carey who had served from 1966 until late 1968. Mrs. Blasciak brought from her native England training and experience in library science. In cooperation with the Association and the City, she has been instrumental in bringing accepted library practices to Northfield.

A standardized card catalog was begun with about

1,000 volumes listed in accordance with American Library Association guidelines and identified by the Dewey decimal system. Until this time, Northfield had actually owned few books - most were county-owned and subject to recall - so that a catalog had not seemed important.

Looking to the Future

Moving day came yet again in November, 1969. A spacious and attractively decorated room was the scene of "Open House" on November 23. The City of Northfield had just completed a new municipal building on Shore Road on the same site as the old one. Here, the library found a new home for a growing collection of Northfield-owned books.

The Association's manpower furnished additional book stacks, providing shelf space for almost 8,000 books. When more shelves are added in 1972, the library will have about 10,000 volumes to offer its patrons, a far cry from the original 100 books on a shelf in front of the mayor's desk.

In addition to books, there is a selection of more than 50 magazines and a growing collection of recorded music and literature. Also available are college catalogs from schools in each neighboring state and some more distant ones.

Emphasis on Children

The Association sponsored a campaign among the business and professional men in Northfield to provide funds to "customize" the children's corner. Here, little ones may sit comfortably at

child-sized tables on child-sized chairs. Bookcases of a suitable height make the area especially theirs.

The Association has replaced the children's book browser with a larger one which will be used for phonograph records, and young members of Circle Players contributed funds which were used to buy a record player. This is available for storytelling hours and, upon request, for individual listening with earphones.

Spirit of Cooperation

Each step in the development of the library reflects bold imagination and careful planning by members of the Board of Trustees of the library. This body is appointed by the mayor and it is charged with the specific responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the library facilities, while the general promotion and special projects are undertaken by the Association. From carpeting to bicycle racks, the spirit of cooperation between these two groups is unmistakable.

An expanded program of services gives everyone more reason than ever to visit the library. Reciprocal borrowing between libraries in other municipalities was started recently. Interlibrary loan privileges between the State library and out-of-state sources is being developed.

Funding

The progressive library depends on adequate funding. In the 1970s, the library has three sources of funds providing its means of support. Local taxes

provide the major support. The county library tax is levied on each municipality according to its valuation and population. In turn, the municipality participates in the county library branch system. State library aid is paid on a per capita basis, computed by a formula similar to state school aid.

A New Focus

"Once, the idea of 'library' dealt in general terms with the educational, cultural, and recreational concerns of society; today, 'library' means expanding and developing as an essential component in dealing with these concerns. It is increasingly important to master complex bodies of facts which are fundamental to every aspect of managing our society. The individual functioning within society is the manager." Thus is a new focus outlined in the Annual Report, 1971, by the Board of Trustees of the library.

Storytelling is as popular today as yesterday, and it is an important part of the library's total program. In addition, there are exhibits of art - paintings, crafts, photographs; programs of folk music; puppet shows; and round-table discussions ranging from the stock market to great books. Among the first public discussions to be held in Northfield on drug abuse was a film and lecture sponsored by the Association during Library Week, 1970.

The scope of library service extends to many publics: children, business and tradesmen, club members who want to find out how to conduct a meeting, hobbyists, educators - and that includes teachers, PTA and PARENTS - students in school and perpetual students long out of school.

References

Library Reports, 1927, 1928, 1935, 1965, 1967, 1969, 1970 and 1971.

New Jersey Library Bulletin, August, 1939.

Northfield Public Library Association Minutes, 1926-71.

Interviews:

The Honorable Otto Brynys, Mayor of Northfield

Mr. Charles M. Kresge, former superintendent of Schools in Northfield

Mrs. Elaine Swilkey, former librarian

Board of Trustees, Public Library of Northfield, Incorporated, Annual Report, 1971.

LIBRARY STAFF

DIRECTOR OF LIBRARY SERVICES

Mrs. Jean Blasciak

LIBRARY ASSISTANTS

Mrs. Dorothy Cohen

Mrs. Leonora Haslett

Mrs. Marie Tagg

LIBRARY OPEN HOURS

Monday thru Friday - 2:30 - 5:00 p.m.

Tuesday thru Friday - 6:30 - 9:00 p.m.

Saturday - 9:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

LIBRARY PHONE NUMBER

646-4476

TRUSTEES OF NORTHFIELD PUBLIC LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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Mrs. Katharine Shippen	First Vice-President
Mrs. Penny Prosser	Second Vice-President
Mrs. Edna May Dempsey	Recording Secretary
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Public Library of Northfield