

Nutley Library | Nutley Yesterday · Today - 1961

NUTLEY LIBRARY

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THE very first evidence of any sort of free public library in Nutley began in March 1875, when a public school library open to the public was established with an appropriation received from the State of New Jersey. In 1901, there were 1,500 volumes valued at \$875. These books, however, consisted mainly of reference, history, biography and poetry. They were not located in one central place but scattered through the Park School building in various rooms, and little use was made of them until 1905, when Mrs. J. Stuart Brown, a resident of town, by her enthusiasm, knowledge, and tact aroused enough interest among the townspeople so that the Board of Education assigned one room on the second floor for library use and the volumes were then collected and placed there.

In February 1906, the first travelling library of 50 books was received from the State Library Commission at the request of the Woman's Public School Auxiliary and Nutley Friday Afternoon Club. The Woman's Public School Auxiliary and members of the Friday Afternoon Club contributed not only money but their time, services, and books to make it a real free public library. The State Library Commission also cooperated in every way by loaning traveling libraries and assisting in card indexing by the Dewey Decimal System. Money was also contributed by the town and the State. The first chance for library improvements came when the Board of Education assigned a room on the first floor of the first addition to Park School, and on December 1, 1907, the library opened in its new quarters with the books newly arranged and a new card catalog. During the following two months 1,000 books a month were loaned.

The Passaic Free Public Library loaned Miss M. B. Kilgour as librarian and she remained in charge until July 1, 1910.

Upon the removal of Mrs. Brown to Montclair, the Public School Auxiliary continued the library work under the leadership of Mrs. Emil Diebitsch.

Miss Louise E. Booth succeeded Miss Kilgour as librarian until September 1, 1911, when Miss Daisy M. Enright, a graduate of New York State Library School became librarian, serving until June 1913. Meanwhile, under Miss Enright, the library was systematized, indexed, and arranged, becoming an example among small libraries.

The total circulation rose to 14,469 in 1912. Upon the resignation of Miss Enright, Miss Irene C. Phillips, a graduate of Pratt Institute Library School in Brooklyn assumed charge. Miss Phillips remained the librarian until December 1, 1943.

The second library in Town, which was to finally merge with the Public School Library to form the Free Public Library, was the Nutley Library. In the fall of 1896, through the efforts of a few women, notably Mrs. William H. Rockwell and Mrs. John S. Conduit, the Nutley Library was established. The library opened on November 14, 1896, in a little building donated by James R. Hay opposite the Erie Railroad's Nutley station. The annual subscription fee was three dollars and the library was governed by a board of six trustees, all women, Mrs. Rockwell being the chairman.

In 1898, this library moved into the Columbia Building where a room was given by Dr. Satterthwaite. A year or two later it returned to its original quarters, where it remained until the erection of its new home on the west side of Passaic Avenue nearly opposite Nutley Avenue which it occupied in August 1904. (This building with alterations is now being used as a dwelling.) The ground for the building was given by Charles T. Barney.

In addition to the subscription fee, funds were raised in various ways, and in small sums. After the Nutley Library was in its new quarters, it was decided to have a board of men trustees to work in conjunction with the Women's Board. J. V. Bouvier was appointed chairman and William H. Arnold secretary. Mr. Arnold later served on the first board of trustees of the Free Public Library. The Nutley Library was then duly incorporated. When it was first organized, the intention of the sponsors was to turn over the books to the Town of Nutley when a suitable place could be found, in order that these books might be the beginning of a public library. After the townspeople voted to have a public library in the election of November 1912, the Trustees of the Nutley Library voted in January 1913 to turn over about 3,000 books to the new Free Public Library. They agreed that the Nutley Library should be closed on January 1, 1914, the building sold and the ground to revert to the original donor. Credit must also be given to the following townspeople who were active in the early library movement: Burton G. Saunders, Arthur R. Carr, Mrs. Gilbert R. Livingston, Henry Goodrich, Mrs. J. R. Kingsland, Mrs. W. R. Nairn, Mrs. G. H. Bayne, Mrs. Edgar, Mrs. Arthur B. Proal, Jr., S. W. White, and John Cotton Dana, librarian of the Newark Public Library.

In November 1910 a movement was started by the Second Ward Association for a Free Public Library in Nutley, William J. Kinsley, Chairman of the Association's Library Committee, being the prime mover. In January 1911, a meeting of library committees was held at Mr. Kinsley's home. Seven town organizations were represented, namely: the Town Council, the Second Ward Association, the Woman's Public School Auxiliary, the Board of Education, the Nutley Library Association, the Nutley Improvement Society, and the Friday Afternoon Club.

Mr. Kinsley was elected chairman of the Nutley Free Public Library Committee. A vigorous campaign was put on for the Library cause being aided by the State Library Commission. In September 1912, the committee thought

the time was now ripe to place the question of having a free public library under the State "Third of a mill act," upon the ballot in the November election. This was accordingly done and on November 5, 1912, the citizens of Nutley voted to have a free public library by a vote of 387 for, to 359 against.

During the campaign there had been heated discussions on whether to obtain money for a building from Andrew Carnegie or to finance it by issuing town bonds. The committee refused to discuss these matters until after the referendum.

On November 11, 1912, Mayor Abram Blum appointed the first Board of Trustees of the Free Public Library of Nutley. They were William J. Kinsley, William Longfelder, George A. Hill, Dr. George B. Philhower, William H. Arnold, the Mayor, and Supervising Principal of Schools, John R. Beachler, ex-officio.

At the first meeting of the Board in November Mr. Kinsley was elected President.

The work of the Trustees for the first year was one of planning for the next year as no money was available for 1913. After discussions concerning various plans and methods of financing library buildings, it was decided to ask Andrew Carnegie for a sum sufficient to erect a suitable building and to ask the Board of Education for a site on the Park School campus and also for the books in the Park School.

In April 1913, \$20,000 was received from the Carnegie Corporation of New York for a building, although \$30,000 had been requested. On May 6, 1913, the citizens of the school district voted 120 to 8 to donate the triangular piece of land the library now occupies, which extends from approximately the High School drive to the convergence of Booth Drive and Vincent Place.

In May 1913, Armstrong and De Gelleke of New York were engaged as architects for the building, Mr. Armstrong, the senior member being a resident of Nutley. In September 1913, Edward Mutch of Belleville with a low bid of \$18,000, exclusive of furniture and electric fixtures, was awarded the contract for the construction of the building.

On November 20, 1913, the cornerstone of the new building was laid under the auspices of the Grand Lodge of Masons for New Jersey. On January 1, 1914, the name of the library was changed from Public School Library to Free Public Library. During the interim before the opening of the new building, the librarian, Miss Irene Phillips, and her assistant, Miss Margaret Bedell, were busily engaged in preparing and weeding out the books that were in the Park School Library and the Nutley Library collections. Forty-five hundred books were placed on the shelves in the new building, and on August 15, 1914, the library was reopened to the public. As one entered the building, the books for adults were on the left hand side and on the right those for the children. The basement room at this time was designated as a lecture room. During World

War I, the room was used by the Red Cross, and after the War, the American Legion made use of it for a short time. On the evening of December 12, 1914, formal opening exercises were held at the library.

The total circulation for the year 1914 was 24,424, and the number of volumes December 31, 1914, was 5,113.

Throughout the years the use of the library continued to grow under the guidance of Miss Phillips.

Due to the growth of both the Adult Department and the Children's Department, it was felt necessary that the children should have their own quarters. Therefore, late in 1925, what had been known as the lecture room, located in the basement, was prepared and equipped with new furniture and in June 1926, the Children's Room was opened to the public.

As early as 1927, the library was beginning to outgrow its building and the librarian recommended the study of an addition. This finally culminated in placing on the ballot for the November election of 1930, the question of the Town providing \$100,000 for an addition to the library. The voters overwhelmingly decided against this expenditure by a vote of 3,004 to 781.

The library continued to grow until the books seemed to be everywhere leaving hardly any place for the public as all but two or three tables and chairs were removed to make room for the book stacks that were installed. To relieve the situation, 1,400 books were stored in Junior School at this time.

During the depression years of 1930-1939 the use of the library increased by leaps and bounds. People, having little money to spend, turned to the library as one source of free instruction and entertainment. The circulation reached its peak in 1939 - 256,227 books being circulated during that year.

In 1939 the Town Commissioners voted to provide an addition to the library at the request of the Board of Trustees, who pointed out that the library had needed more space for many years. The Town Commissioners then voted to ask the United States government for a W.P.A. grant for this project. In June 1939 it was announced that the federal government had approved and appropriated \$50,200 for it. The Town supplemented it with \$30,615, the entire amount of \$80,815 to provide for an addition with equipment.

On November 1, 1939, construction work on the addition was started.

On February 23rd of the following year, informal ceremonies were held for the laying of the cornerstone. President Marion L. Lewis of the Library Board of Trustees applied the mortar to the stone.

Work on the addition was finally completed and on January 27, 1942, the enlarged library was opened to the public, having been closed since December 13th to permit renovation of the original building after the addition was completed.

The library now consists of a reference and reading room on the second floor. On the main floor the large room in the addition is used for non-fiction books, leaving the fiction in the original part of the building. The Librarian's office and the catalog room are also on this floor.

On the ground floor in the addition is the new intermediate department for boys and girls of 7th and 8th grade age, named the Stockton Room in honor of Frank R. Stockton, an author not only of children's books, but adult as well, who lived in Nutley at one time. The mural hanging on the north wall of the room, painted by Ivan Stoppe, depicts a scene from "Rudder Grange" by Stockton. The children's room is now used mostly by children in grades one through six. There are also work and staff rooms on this floor.

On March 22, 1942, a formal reception was held when the townspeople and trustees and librarians from all over the state were invited to inspect the enlarged and renovated library.

The effect of World War II on the circulation was noted, people devoting their time to activities connected with the war effort. Since the cessation of hostilities, the circulation is again showing an increase.

During July 1943, when the final ban was placed on pleasure driving due to the gasoline shortage, the library devised a way to take books to the people who had no means of getting to the library. A milk wagon and driver were hired and every Friday evening, two members of the staff took approximately 300 books to a different section of town so that the people could still have library service.

On December 1, 1943, Miss Irene C. Phillips resigned as Librarian after thirty years of service. In that time, the library through Miss Phillips' guidance had grown from 4,500 volumes to one of 40,280 and was recognized as one of the notable small libraries in the state.

On May 3, 1944, Miss Helen Terry, a member of the staff since 1929, was appointed Librarian.

In September 1947, the Board of Trustees of the Library made available to the Town the land upon which the World War II Memorial was erected.

During this period, in order to keep pace with the growing use of the library, additional book stacks were added until at present there does not seem to be any space where another stack can be placed.

The lighting of the library was modernized during this period.

Electric charging machines were installed in order to give more accurate and speedier service in the borrowing of books.

The circulation for 1959 was 191,636. The book stock numbered 65,226 and there were 15,434 registered borrowers.

The Board of Trustees of the Library has been ably led through the years by the following presidents: William J. Kinsley, Colonel H. G. Prout, Mrs. Emil Diebitsch, Dr. George B. Philhower, Frank B. Miller, Marion L. Lewis, and Mrs. Horace A. Tantom.