

The Bethel Library

The Bethel Library Association

Founded 1879



The Bethel Library serves patrons in the towns of Bethel, Greenwood, Locke Mills, Gilead, Newry, and Albany Township as well as all children in the regional school district. The library's funding sources include endowments, annual fund drives, quilt raffles, plant sale, book sales, and taxpayer support from Bethel, Newry, Gilead and Greenwood. The library association is a non-profit private entity.

Photo of the Bethel Library shows the John Calvin Stevens designed building erected in 1937.

The library building consists of a two part structure with the 1937 main building which faces Broad Street and an ell which holds the library's book stacks. In the front section one finds the library desk, card files, children's section, periodicals, recent arrivals and public access computers. The library's reference section is located on the main building's second floor where a second computer center is located for Internet searches. The library's rear section was originally the law office of Judge Enoch Foster and the Bethel Savings Bank. In 1899 Judge Foster offered to rent the building to the library association as he had moved to Portland. (In 1891, the Bethel Savings Bank had moved to the Cole Block.) Then in 1937 when today's main library was constructed, the old law office was moved to the rear as an ell of the new building.

First organized by a group of Bethel village ladies in 1879 it was in fact the second library in the village, the other one being the Gould Academy library. How the library association formed is told in a brief account of its early history that follows. Its mission was to acquire and exchange books among the members. At the same time, the Gould Academy library was being promoted in town as a source of daily newspapers and periodicals. The academy's book collection was also available to the public in an effort to demonstrate a contribution and ties to the community.

Bethel Library History

Bethel Library Association in 1904

by Annie Frye

The enormous increase in reading at the present day scarcely need demonstration. It is shown by the rate at which books are thrown on the market. They follow one another so rapidly it is impossible to discriminate the latest, and one writer recently styled the output of books—"a literary deluge."

When the Bethel Library Association was organized twenty-five years ago (1879) this winter, books were not as easily obtained. If one person purchased a new book, it went the rounds of the neighborhood. If the current literature was to be indulged in to any extent, one must be connected with some circulating library in one of our nearby cities and have the books sent by mail or express. Perhaps, had it not been for this inconvenience the Bethel Library Association would not have been in existence to-day. It is a woman's organization, and strange to relate, it was organized before the invasion of the "club woman"; therefore we cannot say "It is the logical outcome of Club influence".

The story is briefly this. Early in the autumn of 1878, a number of ladies who were regular patrons of the Mercantile Library in Portland, finding it inconvenient and impracticable to continue their subscriptions, began agitating a home Circulating Library. There was no opposition and very little encouragement. After agitating this scheme for several weeks with little success, a course of lectures upon historical subjects was suggested. Straightway the late Dr. N. T. True, to whom Bethel is greatly indebted for many public enterprises, was consulted and invited to give a course of lectures upon Ancient History, but Dr. True thought such a venture would prove unpopular, and the force of his argument was convincing, but not wholly discouraging to woman's perseverance. After a little more thought another suggestion was given favor, and which proved a real inspiration. For the second time the same ladies called upon Dr. True and presented their plan for a series of popular, parlor lectures.

This plan met the hearty approval of Dr. True and he generously offered to give two lectures, Hon. David Hammons, William E. Skillings and Rev. A. Bosserman each one, and the musical talent of the village one concert. The ladies most active in this enterprise were Mrs. David Hammons, Miss Annie Gross, Miss P. M. Buxton, Mrs. G. P. Bean, Mrs. W. O. Straw, Mrs. S. F. Gibson and Mrs. Ceylon Rowe; others stood ready to give assistance at the given word. Parlors were opened, and a most interesting and helpful lecture course was enjoyed. The course tickets were one dollar, and the holder

of this ticket became a member of the Association for one year, in due time. In April 1879, at a public meeting held in the parlor at the Bethel House, an organization to be known as The Bethel Library Association was perfected. Since that time up to the present, the Association has maintained its identity. The support of the Association comes through a small membership fee, and an occasional entertainment. At different times the town has voted fifty dollars toward its support and the late Hon. O. II. Mason presented the Association with one hundred dollars, the interest to be drawn annually. Mr. Almon T. Rowe and others have also contributed to its support.



Photo: The Wiley/R.E. L. Farwell building on Church Street housed the library in a rented room on the second floor.

At present (1904) there are about three thousand volumes. There is a very good collection of reference books, valuable beyond price, donated by thoughtful friends ever mindful of their home town nestled here among the mountains and picturesque hills. Such combination of circumstances, together with goodwill, public spirit, and executive ability, has brought about the institution and final success of The Bethel Library Association.

The twenty five year history of the Bethel Library Association appeared in the 1904 Special Edition of the Bethel News. Annie Frye was the association's secretary.

The Bethel Library Association 1879-1979

The First Hundred Years by Margaret Joy Tibbetts

The Bethel Library Association was founded in the spring of 1879 through the initiative of a group of local ladies who were tired of trying to borrow books at long distance from a Portland Library. A series of lectures earned about \$100 with which to buy books and others were donated from private libraries. On June 14, 1879, the Library was opened for Saturday afternoons from 3 to 5 and from 7 to 8 Saturday evenings. There were 219 books available; possibly the location was in the Rowe block—where the firehouse is today—but it is never stated in the Minutes where the Library Room was. The Association was private with members, who paid \$1 for initial membership and \$.50 each year to renew, allowed to borrow one book for a two week period. Non-members from Bethel could borrow for 5c a book; strangers had to put down a deposit which was refunded when they left. The first officers of the Association were: President, Annie Cross; Vice-President, Mrs. Ceylon Rowe; Secretary, Mrs. S. F. Gibson; Treasurer, Mrs. W. O. Straw.

In succeeding years the Library's steady but modest growth was made possible by a series of fund-raising efforts—suppers, sales, socials, concerts, etc. In 1880 the Library moved to Miss Burnham's front room; again, this location cannot be definitely defined—perhaps elsewhere in the Rowe Block, perhaps in the Chapman Building where Gordon Gillies has his Law Office today (1979). In 1884 the Library was again moved to the Wiley Building on Church Street presently owned by Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur S. Myers. Here they remained for fifteen years, but in the late 1890's they were pressed to move when Mr. Wiley sold his building to Robert Farwell. Mrs. Straw came to the rescue, and in 1899 the Library was finally located at its present location in the former law office of the Honorable Enoch Foster (later) owned by Mr. and Mrs. W. O. Straw. (In 1899 on returning to Bethel for a weekend visit, Judge Foster offered to rent his office to the library association, see photo right) The Trustees were jubilant; at last they were in a building by themselves with room for storage and expansion.



The collection had now grown to over 2,000 books and there was a beginning of a modest endowment as a result of a legacy from Mr. O. H. Mason of \$100 given a few years earlier. In the early years the Minutes are vague about the earliest librarians. The first had been Mrs. Straw, apparently on a voluntary basis and over the first thirty years Mrs. Straw appears to have filled in fairly often. In 1881 Miss Annie Cross served for a few months and in succeeding years a number of names appear: Miss Emma Roberts, Miss Alice Chapman, Miss Nora Burbank, Mrs. J. G. Clondman, and Mrs. L. T. Barker. The pay was miniscule—\$16 a year in 1881, rising to \$25 a year by the early 1900's. Most of the work which we look to the Librarian to do today was in fact done by the Trustees—ordering books, arranging them, marking them, keeping records, etc.

In 1911 a new Librarian, Miss Maud Thurston, brought continuity and vigor to the office and a number of these functions were transferred to her. She was paid \$50 a year, later raised to \$100, and stayed until 1927, to be followed by Miss Annie Hamlin 1927 -1938. Miss Maud Farwell served from 1938 to 1953, Phyllis Howe 1953-1957, and Mary Chadbourne 1957-1971. Our present librarian since then has been Virginia Keniston.

In 1912 the Trustees of the Library voted to ask the Town for an annual subsidy of \$300 on condition that the Library becomes a totally free Library open to everyone in Bethel. Probably this decision was a result of a combination of circumstances. It was a period in which a large number of free libraries across the nation had been established as a result of the initiative of Andrew Carnegie. The need for an underpinning of financial support for the Library was real despite the valiant efforts of the ladies and their food sales. Finally, there was a strong public demand for books to read. The change in the library's status was followed immediately by a marked increase in new readers and the circulation of books. Most important was the increased demand for children's books, a demand recognized with great pleasure by the Trustees.

From now on the Library was to receive Town assistance, but private benevolence and fund raising have continued to be necessary to this day.

A major gift was the legacy of \$10,000, the Library building and the land upon which it stood from Mrs. Straw upon her death in 1923. This gift gave a certain financial stability, although the Library's needs have in recent years much outpaced the Library's income. Other gifts, although not of comparable size to Mrs. Straw's, have helped, and during the years she was Librarian, Mrs. Chadbourne contributed her services. As a result of this private generosity the Town subsidy to the Library is not at a level comparable to that of other towns of similar size in this area.

Steady growth has continued to be the Library story. In 1937 the present building was built (the original building is now the back stack area). In 1961 Mr. Butler, then owner of the Inn, donated land from the original Straw property which increased the Library's living room, so to speak, and in 1976 when Gould Academy sold the Inn it arranged for the new owners to transfer additional land at the back of the building. Funds solicited from the public made it possible to renovate the second floor in 1978-1979 and additional space is now available for use and storage.

Library programs have increased considerably in recent years despite cost factors. Featured

have been programs for children- a story hour, special summer programs and Friday night films, for example. Circulation has continued to increase and there are currently approximately 11,000 books.

(After 1976, the principal historical research library function for the Bethel area was taken over by the Bethel Historical Society when the Moses Mason House library was opened.)

We can look upon the Library as a successful Bethel achievement. The beginning was modest and it took a great deal of hard work to keep the first Library operating, but from the day it opened the Library has never looked back. The major factor has been the steady desire of the Bethel people for the services which the Library has provided. The original purpose of its founders was to raise the level of literary taste in Bethel and to raise the level of general intelligence. Many high-minded and hard-working citizens have worked to these ends; no one can be compelled to read good books, but making them available means that those who wish to read are given opportunities not otherwise possible for them. And for non-serious readers many hours of pleasure are provided. We can best honor the hard-working founders and early Trustees by continuing to visit our Library for our pleasure and our profit.

1937 Work Is Begun on New Library Building



Work was commenced on Monday September 13, 1937 for the foundations of the present Library which is to be moved back 16 feet to allow for the erection of a new building upon the street front. In excavating the new space at the rear the builder in charge of the work, John Burbank, found that there had been an earlier cellar upon the lot, filled in with stones and huge boulders; it had been for a building which none of the old-timers in Bethel seem to remember.

As the present Library has been where it stands upwards of fifty years (in 1937), it would be interesting to know the earlier history of the site.

Photo above left was taken in 2009 to show the relationships between the main library building and the ell which housed the Foster law office.

At its annual meeting the Library Board approved the project of either erecting a new building or enlarging the present one and appointed a committee consisting of Dr. H. T. Wallace (Congregational Church minister), Mrs. S. N. Blackwood (wife of Bethel Inn manager), A. Van Den Kerckhoven (Bethel Telephone Company), Dr. R. R. Tibbetts (Bethel physician), and Paul Thurston (mill owner and bank

president) to secure plans and report later to the Board. John Calvin Stevens of Portland, after consultation with the committee, drew the plans for a Cape Cod cottage, 36x21 feet, to stand on the street line with the present building to be attached to the rear as an ell.

The interior of the new building is to be all in one room with a fireplace opposite the entrance and a doorway into the ell at on side from which a stairway upstairs and down will be build. It is planned to remove the partition in the stacks and also to build shelves around the main room with an alcove a reading room and a children's corner as well as the Librarian's desk. In this way ample accommodation for books will be secured for many years to come. These plans were approved at a recent meeting of the Board and the committee authorized to proceed at a total expenditure estimated not to exceed \$5,000.

During the building operations it will be necessary to vacate the building and remove the books and it is hope that arrangements can be made to secure the use of the ground floor of the "brick building" next door. Source: Oxford County Citizen, September 16, 1937

Library Report for 1979 by Librarian Virginia Keniston

The Bethel Library continues to be one of the most important educational, cultural, and recreational resources in the Town of Bethel. Its use is steady with approximately 1,500 patrons year round as well as some summer visitors. Total circulation of books and magazines for the calendar year 1979 was 15,655 divided into the following categories:



Adult Fiction	6,681
Non-fiction	1,824
Children's	5,790
Magazines	1,360

In addition records, puzzles, and patterns are borrowed.

Left photo: Librarian Virginia Keniston

The library is open four days a week (Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday from 1-5, Friday evening from 4-8); there is a regularly attended pre-school Story Hour on Thursday mornings from 10-11. Mary Angevine, Mary Valentine, and Sue Wight are assistant librarians. This past year Monique Rolfe has been working on a special project involving cataloging and establishing an accurate shelf list which will be a contribution of lasting value.

Monthly art exhibits have featured a variety of area artists: Sue Wight and Helen Morton of Newry; Douglas Bane and Lettie Lussier of Bethel; Judy McLaughlin of West Paris; Elizabeth Woronzoff of Bethel; Lucia Wilson of Shelburne, New Hampshire; Joyce Hathaway of Locke Mills; Nadja Bolio of Woodstock, and Sheila Head of West Bethel The exhibits are very popular. Other library features have included two "Meet the Author" sessions with Phyllis Dock ("Little Hawk") and

Sue Farrar ("Samantha on Stage"). There was an exhibit of books by local authors during the open house in November to commemorate the library's first one hundred years,.



The library has shown free movies for elementary school children on selected Friday evenings, and has been used by the Adult Ed program for a class on "Literature at the Library" on Thursday afternoons from 2-4 with Sue Taylor as coordinator.

Photo: Beth Hitchcock holds children's' reading hour in the second floor room of the library.

The assistant librarians are Mary Valentine and Monique Rolfe; until autumn Mary Angevine and Sue Wight were also

assistants. Edna York is a substitute. The Story Hour during the summer was conducted by Wendy Davis and Bridget Wheeler. This winter's sessions are led by Linda Bouchard. A Travelling Book Exhibit was arranged by Judy Kersey and Linda Yates.

The Library in the early 1980s was a center for Adult Education with courses in Literature conducted by Sue Taylor; a Literacy Volunteer Workshop by Nancy Watson; Special Reading Classes by Karen Paul and Ann Holt; and Yoga Classes by the Health Center.

Art Exhibits, always very well received, were by Sheila Gilbert Head, Mary Shaw, Russell Fudge, Helen Morton, Sue Wight, Romeo Baker, Jo Stevens, and Douglass Bane.

In 2009 the Bethel Library, in a healthy state, had reached its 130th year.

More recent librarians have included: Miss Maud Thurston (Mike Thurston's aunt) 1911-1927; Annie Hamlin (1927-1938); Miss Maud Farwell (1938-1953); Phyllis Howe (1953-1957); Mary Chadbourne (1957-1971); Virginia Keniston (1971-1985); Betsy Raymond (1985-1996); Michelle Conroy since 1996.

The Librarian's annual report which was published in Bethel's 2008 town report explains the library's service area and funding as follows: The Bethel Library serves all children in SAD44 and all patrons in the towns of Bethel, Greenwood, Locke Mills, Gilead, Newry and Albany Township. The library's sources of funds for operating expenses are possible due to endowments, annual fund drive, quilt raffle, plant sale, and book sale and town donations. The Library is a non-profit private entity.

Annual funds came from the following towns and activities: Town of Bethel: \$16,000.00; Town of Newry: \$5000.00; Town of Gilead: \$300.00 and Town of Greenwood: \$266.67. The annual fund drive chaired by Marjorie Osgood: \$13,624.00. Plant sale co-chaired by Susan Parker and John Applin: \$1248.00. The Book sale chaired by Sandy Dennis: \$1836.00 and the Quilt raffle co-chaired by Lucia Schwarz and Caroline Gould: \$2020.00.

Bethel Library at 130:

Besides constantly refreshing book holdings and fund raising, the library association has focused on three core programs during the last thirty years. They are: the building, integrating computer use and children. Of these three, the children's program is the one which gets the most attention.

Photo of the children's library

Children's Programs:

Almost 30 years ago, the librarian's annual report on yearly activity showed that 55 percent in 1980 and 72 percent in 1981 of book circulation was in the children's category. In looking over annual reports right up to the most recent one in 2008, one can appreciate the attention given to children's reading. In 1981 the Bethel Library received a collection of children's books from the State Library in recognition of excellence in children's programs.

Children's Preschool Story Hour, Halloween Party, a Peter Rabbit Centennial Party and visits from Crescent Park School kindergarten students were all part of the children's program in 1993. The librarian noted that children kept coming to the library in the summer both to read and take part in special events. Volunteers for these programs that summer included Sue Wight, Susie Bowie, Nancy Hansen, Dan Hannon, Levi Brown, Julie Hart, Elizabeth O'Meara and Charlie Raymond. Donations from the Bethel Rotary Club, American Legion and the Crescent Park School PTA paid for special field trips which were part of that summer's program.

In 2005, over 100 children signed up for the Summer Reading program and as before received donations from Bethel Rotary and the American Legion. Children who completed the program went on a trip to Big Adventure Center.

Students are children, too. In 1995, the librarian's report made note of how all the area's librarians had a strong connection to discuss ways to cooperate and share materials and experiences. This report said that the group included librarians from Bethel, Telstar, Crescent Park, Andover and Gould. That year some books were borrowed from Crescent Park during the summer and in turn Bethel Library supplied books to Telstar and Crescent Park teachers.

The Library Building:

Keeping the building up to snuff is a regular concern due to the cost of building upgrades and maintenance. For a quick tour:

In 1983 Bingham Betterment Fund money was used to renovate upstairs, construct new stacks, book shelves and cupboards, put in a new magazine rack, new wiring, a new fire door, a new circulation desk, painting and carpeting throughout. File cabinets, map cases and study desks went in upstairs. Mary Valentine gave the library a new card catalog.



In 2001 a grant and annual giving funds paid for a new handicap ramp and handicap bathroom.

In 2003, the library received a new roof. In 2004 the stack room was renovated; the library closed for only a week but 17,000 volumes were removed and replaced. The project lasted the month of February. In 2007 the library purchased a security camera so that the librarian could monitor the upstairs computer room. Then in 2008 the front section of the library was renovated to create a new children's section and the adult section. This is when the carpet was

removed and the floors sanded and finished; also, a new front door was purchased.

Above: computer center in the second floor reference room

Using Computers

The library's computer story began in 1994 when a computer was purchased with funds from a Tabitha and Stephen King grant. Then in 1997 a NYNEX grant provided for a bridge and an Internet connection through the Bethel Data Corp.

Adding computer technology to Bethel's library operation has covered more than a decade from 1994. While adjustments will continue, the two major enhancements installed in the library were (1) addition of a computerized book inventory and accountability (database) system and (2) connection to the Internet.

In the 1994 the Librarian's report noted that the Bethel Library acquired an IBM compatible computer made possible by a grant from Tabitha and Stephen King. The report went on to say that now patrons are able to search 230 libraries in Maine through the inter-library loan system plus students and researchers may use multi-media CDROM reference works. This addition to the library's resources allowed users to move beyond book borrowing. It was particularly helpful to those who did not have a personal computer at home but knew how to use one.

In 1996 Michelle Conroy succeeded Betsy Raymond as Librarian.

In 1995 a note was made that interlibrary loan transactions continued to increase. The next year the library received a grant from NYNEX and earmarked the grant for a bridge connection that would allow connection to the Internet from the library. The library computer had a memory upgrade from 16 to 32 megabytes. The same year the NYNEX grant was used to purchase a bridge and an Ethernet card and to connect to the Bethel Data Corp. Patrons could use the library's computer to connect to the Internet.

During the town's fiscal year of July 1997 to June 1998, the library took steps to upgrade their computer with a system that could handle a filing system trade named the Winnebago Library system. The Library purchased a Gateway 2000 computer with an Intel 300 MHz Pentium II processor and a

Hewlett Packard printer. By May 1999 the library had installed a Winnebago Library filing system and noted in the annual library report that the patron portion was complete and book cataloging was underway.



Photo left: periodicals and computer area in the main lobby

The following year the library was able to purchase another computer through a Maine State Library program for \$150. This computer became a patron's computer near the librarian's desk. It gave users faster access and browsing of the Internet. At this point the reference room upstairs inherited the

oldest computer for research and word processing.

By June 2002 nearly all of the library's collection had been entered into its computer files. Lorrie Hoeh and Jay Hansom were volunteer data enterers. This year the total collection amounted to 17,980 volumes. Other volunteers named were Lucia Schwarz, Mary Valentine and Carol Nielson. New employees were Kim Harrington and Kristy Aguilar. The following year the library had its entire inventory on the computer. In 2005 an upgrade to the Internet connection was completed with a T1 line in use. These steps were followed by opening a computer room upstairs with three computers connected to the T1 line and a wireless connection was running for laptops. This system was again upgraded with a fourth computer which is a server for the patron computers.

What you see in the library collection now is a small permanent label on each book's front cover that has the book title and a bar code for recording in's and out's with a scanner. I haven't been able to actually try out the search system on a patron computer, but the librarian's computer allows for searches by either part of the book's title or name of an author. The reference room computers have just had surgery to remove a virus, a hazard that comes with public use. Overall traffic into the library has noticeably increased as the computer facilities have come on line.

Sources of funds come from the following: Town of Bethel: \$16,000.00; Town of Newry: \$5000.00; Town of Gilead: \$300.00 and Town of Greenwood: \$266.67. The annual fund drive chaired by Marjorie Osgood: \$13,624.00. Plant sale co-chaired by Susan Parker and John Applin: \$1248.00. The Book sale chaired by Sandy Dennis: \$1836.00 and the Quilt raffle co-chaired by Lucia Schwarz and Caroline Gould: \$2020.00.

During the 2008 fiscal year the library renovated the front section of the library, creating a children's section and reorganized the current adult section. The library purchased new shelving

units, had custom shelving built, had the carpet removed and the wood floor sanded and finished, and purchased a new front door.

Annual library reports can be found in the Town of Bethel Annual Reports.

The Bethel Journals

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