

History of Parsons Memorial Library

Our library is the result of a dream held by members of the Alfred Reading Club, which was organized by the Rev. Benjamin Snow, pastor of the Parish Church, in 1876. Try to imagine 1876. The Civil War is over, the country is 100 years old, the country's natural wealth of timber and minerals is being explored and exploited, making some people very wealthy, and people are becoming interested in improving themselves intellectually. The Reading Club started with 41 members who annually subscribed \$1.09 each for the purchase of books. The members hoped their book collection would someday become the nucleus of a free public library but in the meantime the collection was kept in Littlefield's Fancy Goods Store, now DeWolfe and Woods. When Littlefield closed the store, the collection was moved to the post office; later Hattie Shaw, across the street here, (in Brick Ends) kept the collection in her home and became its librarian. By then the collection included 1,400 books.

Twenty years later, the Reading Club began to talk seriously of a public library. Letters were sent to residents and former residents asking for donations. The goal was \$10,000 to put up a building and establish an endowment fund. Things moved slowly but two years later they renewed their efforts. A letter was sent to Rev. John Parsons of Brookline, Mass. who had grown up in Alfred, suggesting the Parsons Family might wish to donate a library in memory of Edwin Parsons, John Parsons' brother. The Parsons family were early settlers here; William Parsons was Alfred's first justice of the peace and an original owner of the land where the courthouse now stands.

The Parsons family was agreeable, stating they would give the library in memory of their brother and parents. The lot next to Conant Chapel was donated for the site of the new library by J.C. Sanborn. But this wasn't considered suitable, so it was exchanged for this lot, where at the time the Joseph Sayward home stood. The Sayward house was moved- it now stands across from Kallis garage- and work was begun on our library. The groundbreaking was held in 1900 and a long shed was put up for the stonemasons who would cut the granite coming from Bennett's Quarry for the building. Herm Sawyard laid out the patterns for the stonemasons and was responsible for the interior woodwork. By August they were able to lay the cornerstone; about 400 people attended that ceremony.

In the meantime the book collection had been moved yet again, to the home of Dr. Akers, the local dentist. Grace Akers served as librarian.

When the library was dedicated in 1903, the Reading Club donated its books, about 1400 volumes. Rev. Snow, who had been the original instigator of the club, became the first librarian. He was later authorized to hire an assistant, if necessary, at 12 cents an hour. It was suggested \$500 be spent immediately for books, then perhaps \$100 a year. Which today would buy about four books. The grand opening was well-attended. Lawyer Sam Came gave the address; a Miss Harvey from Boston provided the music.

Samuel Came's diary of 1906 states the library pump is in running order but clock will not go- very contrary. And today the clock is still contrary! In 1909 there were bigger problems- some

boys attempted to paint the town red, and included the library. Someone was hired to remove the paint from the library pillars; the parents of the five boys had to pay the bill.

In 1953, when the library's 50th anniversary was held, there had only been four librarians- Rev. Snow, Mary Emerson, who served 35 years, Florence Hewey, and Bertha Drew. Herber Fernald served as treasurer of the board for 40 years. Some of the other directors also served very long terms, including Stanley Littlefield, Martha Roberts and Barney DeHaven.

The children's room in the basement was completed in time for the 75th anniversary, the culmination of two years' work by the board of directors and Friends of the Library, with funds provided by the town. It was named for longtime librarian Bertha Drew. The juvenile books had been moved from upstairs to the new room via a human chain of 41 4-Hers, their leaders and friends. The historical records, which for a long time had been kept in the basement, were given their own alcove. A closet for many of the records had been installed by the Historical Society, which had also purchased a fireproof safe.

Yet another dedication was held in 1993, when the C.G. Magnuson Wing was completed, the gift of Gus and Donna Magnuson. Because new regulations on accessibility were in force, the whole circulation area was made accessible by wheelchair, and an elevator installed. And for the first time an assistant librarian was hired.

Librarians of Parsons Memorial Library

1903-1907 Rev. Benjamin P. Snow
1907-1941 Mary Emerson
1942-1950 Florence Hewey
1950-1972 Bertha Drew
1972-1977 Dot Hill
1977-1982 Joan Sylvester
1982-1991 Dot Faunce
1991-1992 Francis (Fran) Sullivan
1992-2001 Jean Collins
2001 Roberta Ransley
2002 Stephenie Moline
2002-2006 Susan LeRay
2006-2019 Robison "Gus" Hedden
2019-2022 Isabel Turk
2022- Roycean Weyand

Assistant Librarians of Parsons Memorial Library

Luisa Leddy
Debbie D'Antillio
Brenda Lombard
Su LaChance
Stephenie Moline
Susan LeRay
Ednamay Taraba
Sarah Pennell
Karen Spiliopoulos
Caley Mackenzie
Roycean Weyand
Kat Szmit

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