

Waterboro Library History

Before there was a library in the Town of Waterboro, the State-funded Bookmobile came out from Augusta monthly to three locations in Waterboro: Champion's Store (now the East Waterboro Post Office), the South Waterboro Superette (now a Machine Shop), and Graves Store (now the Lakeside Market). This service lost funding and was discontinued in the early '80s. As she had been handling the bookmobile at the Champion Store, Betty Champion, who was also Postmaster, decided people needed access to books. So, around 1984, Betty brought the idea to the Lionesses, a community service project of the local Lions Club, of building a library in Waterboro.

They got help from a small paperback book on starting a library (their bible) that had been suggested by the Sanford librarian Scott (???) and from Shirley Helfrich, Head librarian at Portland Library at the time. Shirley advised them that many groups had started such a project, but that few if any had succeeded. This filled Betty and the others with determination to make it happen. Mary Beth Munroe was president of the Lionesses at that time, and she, Betty Champion, Pat Jones, Anne Kustron, Lee Brozek, now deceased, Lucille Corthell, Marge Kiley, Isabel Anderson, Bea Monteith, Ane Ford, Betty Morrison, Margaret Beavis, Sue Flanders, Jan Daney, Charlene (Jacobson) Michaud, and Anna Jackson were prime members of the group that set to work to create a library. Martha LaRiviere who has a Masters Degree in Library Science was a tremendous help with sorting and cataloging books. Karen McMannus, then Massabesic High School Librarian, helped train the Lioness in the proper procedures to use in cataloging.

Betty Champion recalls, "The site was to be on the top floor of the Lions' Regional Medical Center (the former Waterboro High School). At first we thought we'd use the little office over the entry door. But we soon found we had far too many books for that space already! We enlarged our plan to include the space to the right of the office. The wonderful, large sunny windows in the front were a great asset." The three selectmen at that time, Bob Fay, John Monteith, and Dennis Abbott, were extremely supportive of the project.

The Lions stripped and refinished the old, bumpy floors, heaved from three years of disuse after the close of Waterboro High School. From the original dark brown, a beautiful light oak color emerged. They lowered the ceilings, insulated, refinished trim, painted and papered the walls, installed electric heat, and new windows. In the end they produced two bright, warm, and welcoming rooms. They built about 18 bookcases that were wide and tall. These had to be bolted together, back to back, and bolted to the floor for stability. The little office became the Children's Library. It was wallpapered with an animal print (including Lions), and the floor was carpeted with a thick cinnamon-colored rug.

To begin with, three vehicles were driven to Augusta where there was a giveaway of books from the Bookmobiles, and they filled the vehicles to the brim with books to bring back. They then faced the daunting task of hauling thousands of books up all those stairs.

(This was long before the installation of the elevator!) The women then had to create multiple cards for each book, as they organized, filed, labeled, and shelved all those books. Sherry Woodsome donated a glass case, which was then used to display many collections and artifacts.

On January 18, 1985, after six months of work, the library was officially opened. Over 200 people attended the dedication ceremonies with town officials and Lions Club speakers. In March 1985, attendees at the annual Waterboro Town Meeting voted financial support for the library. In the beginning the library was open 11 hours a week, staffed completely by the Lionesses. Anna Jackson conducted the first story hour and went on to invite many local organizations, including the fire dept, to do demonstrations. That April, Frances Sullivan was hired as the first paid librarian, and she worked the 11 hours, keeping the library open three days a week. Lioness members continued volunteering hours of service. The library continued to operate at the Massabesic Medical Center for five years. As there was no elevator, volunteers made home visits to folks who could not manage the trip or the stairs, to bring them books. The town voted to support the library financially, and provided a salary of XXX for the new librarian.

A Board of Trustees was formed, to oversee the work of the library. The first Board of Directors consisted solely of Lioness members: Anna Jackson, Lee Brozek, and Betty Champion with Lion John Monteith representing the town. The library joined the Maine Regional Library System as well as the Southern Maine Library District. Later Trustees Debbie Downs, Martha Lariviere, and Nancy Harnett contributed much in expertise and fortitude to keep the Board of Directors going over the next years.

In 1990, then-selectman Bob Fay suggested that the newly vacated elementary school in East Waterboro might be a more accessible and more spacious site for the library. The building had been condemned for full-time school or Superintendent's Office use because of the presence of asbestos and a septic system smell. Since the library would be open only part-time, it was decided safe for library use. So again, the Lions did considerable rehabbing, clean-up, and painting work on the building, moved and extended the height of bookcases, and built a ramp to make the building accessible to wheelchair users. They also solved the septic problem. Among those who did this work were Don Ford, now deceased, John Champion, and John Kustron. A book signing was done by local author William Randall at the first open house in the new East Waterboro location.

Around this time, Fran Sullivan left the position, and Chris Asbas became the second paid librarian. In February 1993, Ruth Blake was hired as the first Assistant Librarian. At that time, there was only one checkout desk, in what is now the Adult Room. When children wanted to check out numbers of books during the weekly Story Time, the table where the guinea pig's cage now site, was pulled out and became a temporary checkout place. About six months later, Chris left and Ruth moved to focus on being Head Librarian as well as Children's Room librarian and was joined by Adult Room staffer, Lisa Foote. Lisa organized the first Book Discussion Club at the library. After a year Lisa left and Debra Wardwell was hired as the Adult Room staffer. When she left, Ruth moved into the Adult Room and Cyndy Pike was hired as Children's Librarian. She

maintained that position for a year or so, and left for another job. Ruth returned to the position of Children's librarian and Jean Rundgren was hired as Assistant Librarian. Ruth and Jean are still in these two positions. Book and Bake Sales, at Christmas and in the summer, were held to help purchase additional books as the library grew.

It had always been the intention of the Lioness organizers of the library, once the library was up and running successfully, to give it to the Town of Waterboro. In 1999, attendees at Town Meeting voted to accept the library as a town Department, to be paid for by town funds. At that time, the Lions relinquished all control. The Board of Trustees continued to organize activities to raise funds for additional book purchases, supplementing the budget approved by the Town Meeting.

As the library began operation as a Town Department, Pam (1998 - 2002) and Paul L'Heureaux (2000 – 2002) were very active on the Board of Trustees. The library continued to operate as it had since its creation. A major development was in the acquisition and setup of computer technology and online access. Board members Molly and Tom Williams were central in this new growth in library offerings. Tom set up and maintained staff and patron workstations, and Molly created what has become an internationally recognized website complete with extensive web logs (blogs).

Debby Downs was another active and long-term Board member, who worked at gathering adult groups with different interests – one a series on travel slide shows, including presentations about trips to Alaska, Israel, and other places. She also worked to create a local Friends of the Waterboro Library group. While there had been a Friend's group started earlier, it had failed at the point of writing up a set of by-laws. This goal was realized in 2000 when some patrons came together as Friends. Sue Dunlap, Cindy Gilmore, and Terry Blaisdell became officers, and the group sponsored a Holiday Book and Bake Sale, and a summer Yard Sale. Members included Sylvia Davis, Sandy Toothaker, Sandy Jorgensen, Karen Charland, Brigit McCallum, and Craig Tripp.

As time passed, the library became more and more crowded, and it became apparent that a new facility would be needed. Programs such as Story Hour, the American Girl Party, Summer Reading, etc. had outgrown the facilities. There were groups who could not meet at the library because of environmental allergy concerns, and items such as the display case that had allowed many collections to be viewed by patrons were relegated to the basement, to make room for more books, video and audio books. In late 2002, as many vacancies appeared on the Board, an almost entirely new Board was appointed. This group knew it would be taking on both the growth and development of the current library, and developing the Strategic Plan for a new library. Members of the Board who took on the task of directing/advising the library through this process were:

Money from the sale of land was voted to be placed in a Library Building Fund in year at the annual Waterboro Town Meeting. A significant public announcement that Waterboro was moving toward a new library occurred in early 2003 when Selectman Willis Lord's wife Barbara, a longtime passionate reader and library advocate, passed away. In the eulogy Willis wrote, donations were requested to be made in Barbara's name to the

“Waterboro New Library Fund.” During the course of the year, several others donated money to the library fund in memory of family members and friends. In summer 2003, the Friends Of the Waterboro Library, in conjunction with the Board of Trustees, organized a summer “Mega-Sale,” that combined book, bake, yard, and plant sales. Over \$2800 was raised toward the New Library fund.

Fall 2003 saw the library moving toward increased professionalization in concert with the Town’s similar movement. Financial mechanisms of a self-run organization that had served the library well in the past were changed to bring the library to congruence with other municipal bodies as a Town Department. Lines of communication between the library and Town Officers were established or clarified to allow for more efficient operation.

By January 2004, a Strategic Plan had been developed by a Visioning Sub-Committee of the Board. Through a partnership between the Library Board and Town Officials, a call was issued for applications for positions on a New Waterboro Library Building Committee.

Random Pieces to keep track of:

((info re two photos I received from Pat Jones -- Photo is of MB and Anne Kustron))

Martha LaRivierre, and Nancy Harnett joined the Board – when and for how long?
Any particular programs or issues they worked on?