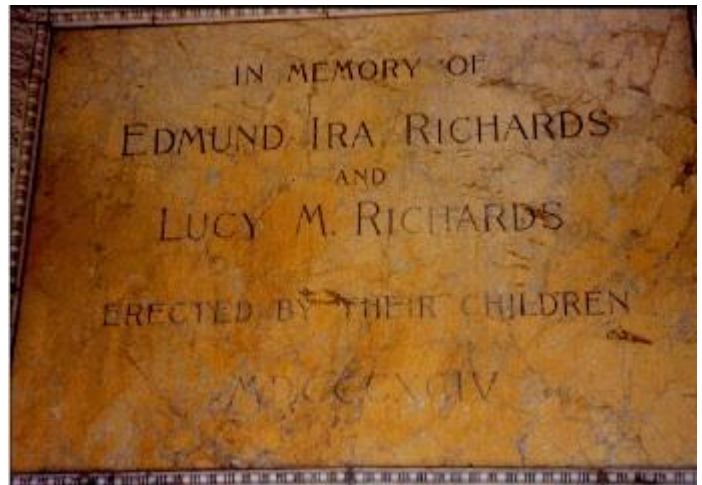


HISTORY OF RICHARDS MEMORIAL LIBRARY 1894-2019

By Elizabeth Mansfield, Trustee from
1993-1999, Maggie Holmes,
Librarian, and Frank Ward, Director.

The orchard is gone now.
The orchard had been owned by the
Orne family, one of whom, Sara, was
the first wife of Paul Revere. In its
place stands the Richards Memorial Library.



The plan for a library dates back to October 24, 1870, when a group, of interested citizens met to consider the feasibility of establishing a library. This was to be a subscription library with the membership fee being one dollar. The subscribers elected Rev. J. P. Pierce, President; S. S. Ginnodo, Vice President; F. G. Whitney, Treasurer; and O. C. Turner, Secretary.

This library was first housed in the private home owned by Willard Hall. The site was found to be inadequate as a need was seen for a reading room. The collection was moved to the Kendall Block, later to the Odd Fellows Hall, and then back to the Kendall Block. The next move was to the Boyle Block as the collection and patronage kept growing throughout the early 1870s.

With \$600 raised during the first year, the officers selected five hundred volumes of works on science and history. Mrs. Charles E. Smith thought this selection of reading material was not broad enough for the subscribers, especially the ladies. With \$100 that she raised herself, she purchased a hundred volumes encompassing books on art, travel, memoirs, poetry, essays, and fiction. She was reaching out to the interests of the reading public. This was a policy that would govern the library throughout the coming years. In the coming years there would be a continual tension between the purchasing nonfiction and classics or what the librarians viewed as lighter reading material.

In 1875 the library was transferred to the Union Improvement District, a local government agency of the Village of North Attleborough which also included the schools. This agency voted financial support not to exceed the sum of \$500.

The library, previously open to members only, now became available to the inhabitants of the district. Some restrictions remained: services were only available to teachers, scholars, club women, or persons well known to the librarian, and then only one book per day, with a heavy fine of two cents per day on overdue books.

In two years the rules were changed to allow a person fifteen years old to borrow books, but only if that person was of upstanding character!

There was no browsing through the stacks to find a book that might pique one's interest. A catalogue of books was given to the patron. When a selection was made, the librarian fetched the book from the stacks, but, of course, only if the borrower was known.

In 1887 the Village of North Attleborough became an independent municipal body, and in 1889 it assumed responsibility for the Union Improvement District, which included the library. The town's citizens voted to appropriate \$1,200 to the library and the first Board of Trustees was formed. They were the Rev. George E. Osgood, Edward R. Price, Dr. Joseph B. Gerould, John P. Bonnette, Mrs. Harvey Clapp, and Miss Linda J. Thompson. Miss Irene Day was selected as the first librarian.

In a 1883 report to the trustees, Miss Day noted that the character of the books being read had changed greatly for the better even though the requests for a "summer novel" were made occasionally.

Rev. George E. Osgood had this to say on the standards of good reading: "Some books are teachers and come to us with a systematic and well-ordered truth, while other books are friends and bring us suggestions. We value the teacher for his truth; we value the friend for his personality."

By 1893 the town felt the need for a library building, the three rooms in the Boyle Block having proved inadequate for the demands of a growing populace. As the nation's economy declined, people were turning to the library for information on career retraining, escapist literature and the opportunity to borrow rather than purchase newly printed books. This situation would be reflected through the years whenever the national economy faltered.

The trustees hoped that a public-spirited citizen might give the town a building, but pragmatically decided this would remain a dream. However, on August 25, 1893, the town's selectmen received a letter from Mrs. Anna L. Tweedy, Miss Harriet T. Richards, and Mr. E. Ira Richards. "Having purchased the land on the corner of Washington and Grove Streets with the intention of placing thereon a stone building to be given to the town to be used as a public library forever, and as a memorial to our parents, we ask you to cause an article to be inserted in the warrant for the coming town meeting, and advise us if such a gift will be accepted."

J. Hennigan, Clerk of the Board of Selectmen, answered on September 8, 1893: "To Anna L. Tweedy, Harriet T. Richards, and E. Ira Richards, We take great pleasure, officially and personally, to inform you that at a special town meeting held on Wednesday evening September 6, 1893, the town voted unanimously to accept your munificent proposition to present unto said town a memorial building to be used for the purposes of the public library of said town, and which we have no doubt will be a fitting tribute to the memory of your honored parents who were for many years interested in the prosperity and welfare of this town."

The cornerstone was laid on June 16, 1894, according to the solemn rites of the Ancient Free and Accepted Order of Masons of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Bristol Lodge of North Attleborough was chartered by Paul Revere in 1797. More than two hundred members from various local and state lodges participated in the ceremony along with town dignitaries, members of the Richards family, and the public. The Richards family selected the Gould, Angell and Swift firm of architects from Providence, Rhode Island, with the plans being drawn by William H. McLean. The

contractor was also a Providence firm, the Houlihan and Maguire Company.

The exterior of the Richards Memorial Library is in the Renaissance style, with the roof in the French style with two dormers, and the details of the building in the Italian style. The foundation is Warsaw bluestone. The porch is supported by Ionic terra cotta columns, and the walks are of brick and terra cotta with a memorial tablet of Sienna marble set into the front facade. The front door of oak is original, still opening into a haven of knowledge and pleasure.

The building, fittings, furnishings and landscaping, cost \$25,000, the entire amount being paid by Anna L. Tweedy, Harriet T. Richards, and E. Ira Richards.

Among various items placed within the cornerstone box was an envelope bearing the words "To whom it may concern in the future." Enclosed was a letter, to quote: "This building was erected to the memory of our beloved and honored parents by their three children Anna L. Richards Tweedy, Harriet Tingley Richards, and Edmund Ira Richards, with money inherited by them from those loving, generous parents. Our father was much interested in the cause of education, so we feel that our selection would have met with his approval, and we have the satisfaction of knowing that our mother approved of it, and would have done it herself, had her life been spared. Harriet T. Richards, North Attleborough, 15 June 1884."

One of the original material founders of 1890, Burrill Porter, Jr., wrote a history of the library which was placed in the cornerstone. To quote the ending of his history: "a home for many and many a year we trust for the North Attleborough Public Library which in the words of the catalogue stands today a monument to the memory of good citizens whose work here has long been finished and becoming many a tablet for the inscriptions of the names of no less faithful workers who are still in the field who ensured its blessings to this and future generations." This philosophy of a hundred years ago still governs the purpose and goals of the present and future trustees of the Richards Memorial Library. "

John Daggett and Amelia Daggett Sheffield in *A Sketch of the History of Attleborough*, written in 1894, had this to say about the new building: "North Attleborough is most fortunate in being the recipient of so noble a gift, one bestowed with a large generosity and in unrestricted entirety. In no other way probably could a gift be made whose good results would be so wide spread, diffusing themselves abroad in a never ending and ever increasing ratio for every present and future inhabitant of the town, whether high or low, rich or poor, may avail himself or herself of the advantage accruing from it at will. The memorial is a proof not only of the liberality, but of true loyalty of the members of the family to the town of their birth. For this indeed they are especially worthy of praise, because the trait is rather rare in every way they are deserving of the sincere and continued gratitude of the whole town for thus bestowing upon it a perpetual practical benefit." (page 403.)

Finally, in 1885 the building was finished and occupied. The heavy oak door swung open. Miss Irene Day continued as librarian, but now had an assistant who was paid \$4 a day. Miss Day received \$530.78 per year, actually good pay for a spinster in the 1890s.



E. Ira Richards continued, as he would for the next thirty-eight years, to donate books, especially research materials. In the 1890s other citizens and organizations donated books. The Orpheus Club donated 65 books in the music field, and the Reading Class of Ladies gave a copy of the Lucia Della Robbia relief plaque of the "Singing Boys."

A close association developed with the school system as the library could supplement the schools' materials with teachers becoming constant borrowers. One hundred years later this adjunct to the schools would be recognized by the Superintendent of schools, Dr. Joseph E. McKeigue, who urged the town finance committee to recommend an increase above level funding in order to protect state aid to the library, and to retain state certification. He wrote that the library plays an integral role in reinforcing the goals of the school system; they enhance each other's efforts to improve the quality of life in North Attleborough.

School children now were coming to the library in increasing numbers. In the original library, only adult books had been available, but now a children's literature collection was being developed. A need to bring the library's services to people living in the outlying districts of the town had also arisen. The trustees organized a traveling library which circulated books by horse and wagon to Attleborough Falls, Adamsdale, and the western area of farming settlements.

At the close of the century, Miss Day retired when she married and was succeeded by Miss Leda Thompson, a former trustee. She introduced programs and exhibitions, both educational and entertaining. Many citizens who were traveling brought back mementos which they exhibited as another way of educating the public.

In 1899 it was hoped that opening the reading room on Sunday afternoons would give working men and women the opportunity to enjoy the advantages of the library. However, this innovation soon stopped because of young ruffians congregating and causing much disturbance. The attendant even had to call the constabulary.

At the turn of the century the library stocked 6,000 volumes in a variety of subject areas. Never again would the offerings be narrowly restricted to a few disciplines of study. Card catalogue systems were becoming widely used throughout out the nations' libraries, and this was an advantage over the book catalogues which had to be published each year. A paper catalog was still printed and sold for 20 cents because people wanted to choose their books at home. Eventually the printed catalog became unfeasible and new books were announced in the Evening Chronicle. Another innovation nationwide was a new service to borrow books from other libraries. This practice would evolve into the present inter-library loan and OCLC systems.

NEW BOOKS
AT LIBRARY

The following new books have been added to the library:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Mental Development in Child and Race, | Haldwin |
| The Man in Crow's Nest, | Bayley |
| The Plain Man and His Wife, | Bennett |
| Creative Evolution, | Bergson |
| At the Little Brown House, | Brown |
| The Summit of the Years, | Burroughs |
| Social Work in Hospitals, | Cannon |
| Boy Scout's Hike Book, | Cave |
| Camp Brave Pine, | Comstock |
| A Little Captive Lad, | Dix |
| Love Affairs of a Homely Girl, | Forest |
| Dark Hollow, | Green |
| Light of Western Stars, | Grey |
| The Lady of the Chimney Corner, | Irvine |
| The Christmas Bishop, | Kirkland |
| Electro-deposition of Metals, | Langbein |
| Sunshine Sketches, | Leacock |
| Maid of the Kentucky Hills, | Litsey |
| The Best Man, | Lutz |
| In Kentucky with Daniel Boone, | McIntyre |
| Peg O' My Heart, | Manners |
| Witness for the Defense, | Mason |
| The People's Man, | Oppenheim |
| Because You Are You, | Patch |
| Miss Billy Married, | Porter |
| The Theban Eagle and other poems, | Reed |
| Thirty-Ninth Regiment, | Roe |
| The Boy with the U.S. Indians, | Rolt-Wheeler |
| The Significance of Art, | Rowland |
| The Keeper of the Vineyard, | Stanley |
| Sadhana, | Tagore |
| A Mesalliance, | Tynan |
| United Italy, | Underwood |
| Harper's Wireless Book, | Verrill |
| Vacations For Girls, | Weaver |
| Tide Marks, | Westrup |
| A Rose of Old Quebec, | Wharton |
| The House in Good Taste, | Wolf-Elsie de |
| Young Working Girls, | Woods & Kennedy |
| Library of Literary Criticism, | Reference |
| 8 vols., | Reference |
| American Year Book, | Reference |

In 1901 for the first time a donation was made to purchase books specifically for children. This Christmas gift for the children of the town by Mrs. Barrows was a memorial for her daughter, Maude Barrows. Mr. Barrows and Mr. Daggett paid for the cost of the building of an alcove in the library to house the gift. Also, in what was to become a tradition, the library held a book sale during the Christmas season. Throughout the early 1900s Mrs. Barrows continued to donate children's books. Her beneficence gave happiness to children who probably never would have had a book to borrow and read at home.

In 1907 Miss Thompson retired and the era of Miss Ada R. Perry began – at an annual salary of \$600. Through the years she would accomplish much. The first thing she did was have the library become a member of the American Library Association, beginning a much needed professional relationship.

Several notable donations were given in this period. Mrs. Edwin French gave the library a set of plate and book plates designed by her late husband who had been recognized as the best book plate engraver in the country. Eighty-five books were donated by Cotter and Master John Schowski, bringing the number of volumes in library to 42,467.



Miss Edith E. Osgood started the first story hour program at this time which met during winter months. Miss Perry reported that due to an inadequate budget, she had focused on buying books of more permanent value rather than the lighter novels.

In 1914, after much discussion, the trustees made the decision to deny children under the age of fourteen access to the reading room after seven in the evening. The adult patrons had complained of the noise and the lack of seating. Due to the need for more space, and after, consulting E. Ira Richards, the trustees hired an architect to draw up plans for an addition. However, their hopes were not to come to fruition as quickly as they had in 1893.

As the economic status of the country had affected the use of the library, so had public health problems. In 1915 a major scarlet fever epidemic sharply reduced circulation and visitations.

Another societal change that affected circulation was the advent of the moving picture houses. Now people could be entertained inexpensively while enjoying a night out. People could view "live" stories rather than read them.

The years 1917-1918 were the war years, and the library made its contribution to the cause. When a request was made to the public to donate books for servicemen, the library was used as a collection site.

During 1919, due to a lack of space, there was a reduction in the purchase of new books. It was obvious that there was a serious need to increase the physical capacity of the building. The town's population had increased; reference work had multiplied; the use of the facilities by children had grown enormously; and the adult circulation continually grew. The number of volumes circulated by the library was 58,618: 48,219 books with 10,399 of these children's books. Miss Perry and the trustees had agreed to purchase only books of enduring value, rather than popular fiction. The majority of libraries throughout the country also held this philosophy, and this caused the introduction into the marketplace of lending libraries where light, popular fiction could be rented.

After World War I, the American Association of Libraries started a fund drive to rebuild the library of Leauwaine Bel-France. This area had been the scene of heavy fighting, and many Americans had lost their lives there. The Richards Memorial Library, having been the recipient of many donations through the years, made its own donation to another far off library.

In 1925 Miss Perry died suddenly. She had devoted 18 years to the library, strengthening the collection, developing children's programs, increasing circulation, serving as a liaison between the schools and library, and providing an excellent example of librarianship.



Miss Ada Perry

The librarian who followed was to stay for forty-five years, a record unlikely to be broken. Miss Ethel Rix was the first college-trained librarian, but even she found herself seriously handicapped by the lack of physical space. During her first year she revived the children's story hour. During that year, thirty-four individual gifts had been given, the largest number until then.

The following year a building committee was formed, and in 1929, at a cost of \$30,000, the first of what would be two additions and one renovation was built onto the rear of the library. The contractors were a local firm, Munroe and Westcott. Finally, the children were to have their own room



Reading Room with the original Grandfather Clock and the famous statue.

with child size tables, chairs, and bookcases in the former Stack Room (current Reference Room.) Now, they had their library, their place! They borrowed twice as many books as they had the previous year. Fifty-five children took part in a state-wide reading initiative to read 5 books from graded reading lists. E. Ira Richards again donated reference material: twenty-two volumes of the Dictionary of American Biography, and twelve volumes of the American Encyclopedia.

The library celebrated the Massachusetts Tercentenary in 1930 with an exhibition of antiques loaned by the North Attleborough Historical Society. More than 3,000 people came to view the exhibition.

The early 1930s were the years of the Great Depression. The library noticed an increase in circulation, especially books pertaining to job retraining, federal aid programs, and other self-help material, as people lost their jobs or had their hours cut.

The year 1932 saw a reduction of 30 percent in the library's budget due to the town's financial situation. Even Miss Rix's salary was reduced by \$454 and the entire book budget was eliminated. Still with more and more patrons requesting books on technical and vocational training, it was a time of constructive reading, rather than one of pleasure. By 1936 the book budget was increasing although the number of borrowers were in decline. Miss Mildred L. Brown was an assistant in the library until she married in 1935.



1932 was the last year that E. Ira Richards would donate books to the library as he passed away that year. In the late 1930s, the first of a series of trust funds were given to the library. Included were The J. Frank Mason Fund, the Annette Clark Fund, The Sarah Daggett Fund, and the Harriet Aldrich Fund. Also, in 1939, Walter B. Ballou gave a hundred volumes of French fiction from his private collection. Mrs. Anna Tweedy, continuing Richards' tradition of giving, donated an antique plate, and more books.

World War II's approach caused changes in the selection of books in even this small American library. Technical books, especially those relating to work in the National Defense program, aviation, auto mechanics, blueprint reading, and welding, were purchased. Services to meet this demand were now forming an important part of the librarian's activities during the emergency. Besides offering books on war work training, the library joined a National Victory Book Campaign project and in one year collected 2069 books for men in the Armed Forces.

The children were not forgotten though as the library continued its involvement in the State Reading Certificate Award Program. In 1941, 319 children received certificates.

Two innovations were instituted in the work of the library. In 1944, school classes were given instructions in the use of the library and a branch library was opened at the Falls Congregational Church in Attleborough Falls. It was open two afternoons and one evening a week. In 1949 the Falls Branch

Library had grown in popularity and was now loaned a room at the newly built Falls Elementary School. Continuing as the branch library's librarian, Miss Agnes Ryder became known as the "Library Lady of the Falls." This branch played an important role in its neighborhood.

In 1947, with the Second World War over, a new challenge faced the library. A GI Bill had given veterans the opportunity to attend college, an opportunity which before had been financially denied to many of them. The library was the place to come to supplement their college library readings. Circulation finally rebounded in 1948 and the number of cardholders grew.

Some of the gifts, such as one received from Miss Mabel Brigham of an antique Chinese vase, contributed to the ambiance of the premises. Through the years the library continued to receive paintings, prints, sculpture, flowers and examples of the decorative arts. Monetary gifts were still being made and gratefully received as the average price of books, even with a library purchasing discount, had risen to \$2.53. Forty years later the cost of a fiction book would be \$20.00 to \$30.00.

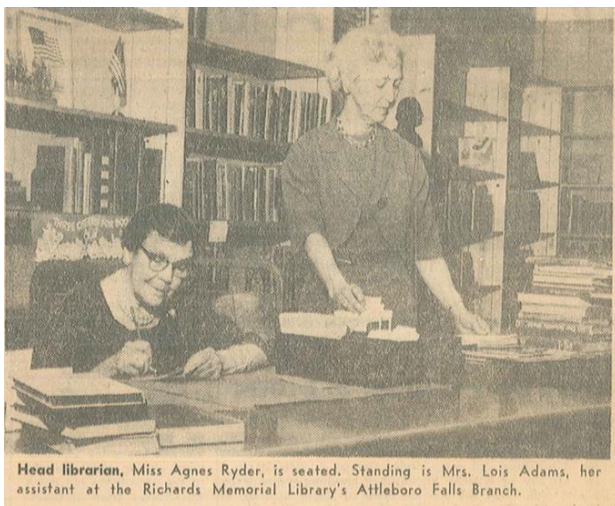
The early 1950s became the "era of anxiety." People were asking for books on spiritual and religious guidance, as well as material on self-help psychology. It was also noted that science fiction had replaced western and adventure stories in popularity. Another trend was a growing need from parents for advice on their children's reading needs and for home reference materials. 27% of North Attleborough residents had library cards.

The 1950s could also be called the era of the teenager. This age group would make an impact on the changing school curriculum, the job market, and, with its buying power, the economy. To meet the change, the library developed its first young adult reading section. This was also a time of increasing repairs at the library including repairing the heating plant. Monies from the Ellen Mason fund refurbished the reading room.

International events generated a greater interest in the progress of science. This time it was the Russian space program which led to increased book purchases in aeronautical sciences, mathematics, astronomy, and space

technology. Nonfiction titles were now nearly half of titles circulated. Entertainment wasn't forgotten as the library began circulating phonograph records and some films. A phonograph with earphones was purchased so people could listen before they borrowed.

The need for additional space was cause for concern. More and more high school students were coming to the library for research and study. The collection had increased so much that shelving space was at a minimum. A new assistant was hired to help with this age group.



*Head Librarian Miss Agnes Ryder (seated) and Mrs. Lois Adams at the Attleboro Falls Branch.
From Providence Journal, Jan. 1964.*

The Falls Branch was temporarily closed in 1959 when the school needed the space. It open again in 1960 on the 2nd floor of the Falls Fire Station. Eventually this meant a drop in circulation, especially by adults and was closed for good in 1968.

A summer reading club for children began in 1962 by Mrs. Janet Clarner. Children had become the largest user group, having borrowed 36,186 books that year. 37% of the town population had library cards.

In 1963 the trustees won voter approval of funds for an addition. Town Meeting members voted \$45,000 and the sum was matched by a federal grant.

This -- the 2nd addition -- built at the rear of the building, provided a study and research center for high school students and, eventually, a meeting room for small groups. At the opening of the center, Dr. Robert Welch, a trustee, made the following remarks: "For the majority of people the quickest and easiest access to the world's best thought is the public library, with its wealth of material." He then quoted the author Clarence Day, "The world of books is the most remarkable creation of man. Nothing else that

he builds ever lasts ... monuments fall ... nations perish ... civilizations grow old and die out, but in the world of books are volumes that live on, still as fresh and young as the day they were written, still telling men's hearts of the hearts of men centuries dead." The rest of the library benefited from new wiring and a new boiler. A stack room was created downstairs.

By now, television was exerting a strong influence on the purchase of materials. It had been thought that television would cause libraries to recede in importance, but as events would show, libraries stayed the course and would remain a source of technical knowledge for the average citizen.

The changes in school curriculum and the resulting demands on students meant young people had less time for recreational reading. School libraries were fully established by this time in elementary schools.

1968 was a fruitful year. Three trust funds were set up for use by the library: the Bronson, Carlson, and Jewett bequests. The Eastern Regional Library System was developed that provided more books for our patrons.

The advent of the information explosion became increasingly evident in the 1970s. Circulation climbed to 67,539 in 1970, and an increasingly large part of the library's work in public service was in the reference field.

Gifts of books and art objects by individuals and organizations continued, a sign that the Richards Memorial Library was still of vital importance as a cultural resource. Former trustees were remembered by families and friends. Typical was the donation of three Victorian bronze and crystal candelabra in memory of Harriette W. Paterson. The Angle Tree Garden Club started its donation of books and periodicals on horticulture, a practice that continues to this day.



In 1971 Miss Ethel Rix announced her retirement after 45 years of stewardship. She had guided the library through innovative programs offering new services, dealt with fluctuating budgets, changed the content



Miss Ethel Rix from Sun Chronicle May 5, 1971

of the collection to reflect the growth of developing knowledge, especially in the field of science, and kept the reference materials relevant. She had set a high standard of behavior for the staff and herself. To honor Miss Rix for her service, the trustees dedicated the newest addition in her honor.

The third librarian to take the reins was Wallace Mason of Cumberland, who continued to keep the services current. The national economic decline in-the mid-1970s caused a noticeable increase in circulation. History repeated itself, even in terms of use.

The Ella Driesner Fund was established with a gift of \$15,781.90. The interest of the trust funds, which are invested by the town treasurer (an ex officio member of the Board of Trustees), supplemented budget monies. Two former staff members, Miss Agnes Ryder, and her niece, Janet R. Robinson, were honored by memorial bequests.

In 1977 a "Friends of the Library" group was formed. Throughout succeeding years, the Friends have donated many special services, and also have championed the library's need for an adequate budget.

Mr. Mason retired after 10 years of faithful service and was succeeded by Ms. G. Sydney Wright. Her tenure would see many changes, especially in technical capabilities and physical space. Unfortunately in 1982, Proposition 2 ½, a law restricting a locality's spending, affected the book budget drastically.

The community tradition of giving continued into the 1980s with a bequest from Miss Grace King in memory of her father, Victor King, who had been a long time donor of books to the library. Before her death, Dr. Elsie Loeb

gave funds for children's programs. In 1983 an arts alcove in the reading room was dedicated to Dr. Loeb. (This area currently houses the encyclopedias and other reference sets.)

Nationally, libraries were moving into the automation age and Richards Memorial Library began planning to automate library services. A consortium was formed to enable area libraries to share materials. The system would eventually allow the libraries to receive books and other materials from state and national libraries, including collegiate collections. The system would in the future cut costs at individual libraries while providing a larger selection.

In 1985, the town approved funds for computer hardware to enable the library to become a member of the network of nearby libraries, and to automate its own equipment. The network titled ABLE, would revolutionize service. The card catalogue was phased out, to be replaced by a computer catalogue with terminals for patrons' access. Material could be checked for availability at all of the ABLE libraries and reserved for the patrons. The Friends of the Library furthered the technology boom by donating an Apple IIe computer.

The idea for an auditorium/meeting room had developed into a plan for a renovation which would include needed physical space. The trustees contracted for an architectural engineering survey to define the areas of renovation and repair. The sum of \$527,500 was proposed for this ambitious project.

The citizens of North Attleborough, at the 1988 town meeting, voted unanimously to allot one half of funds, with the other half the following year. The renovations planned by the Boston Architectural Firm of Stopfel & Miller, Inc., increased the library's space by 40 percent, by using two levels. Construction was started in January 1990, and was expertly managed by the Barbato Construction Firm.

Through the generous offer by the Bottomley-Riley Company of space in their building on East Street, the library was able to continue service during the construction effort.

Even through this period there were bequest and gifts of books, such as a fund established in the name of Ethel E. Rounds, and books from the Ancient Order of Hibernians. For the first time since the 1940s there were more requests for fiction than non-fiction. People may have sought refuge in fiction from the daily barrage of input by various media.

In the fall of 1990, the library re-opened. By enlarging the lower level, space became available for an auditorium-meeting room, a staff room and kitchen, art display gallery, additional stack area, and technical service office. Upstairs the children's room was moved to the rear of the building; the front check-out area was moved to provide better service; the reference facilities were enlarged; and the floors were fully carpeted. The architectural details were preserved, an extensive new electrical system was installed, and for the first time handicapped patrons could move freely inside and out via ramp and elevator.



The Friends generously provided funds for new furniture for the reading room, which was also the location of watercolor paintings donated by Gordon Morrison, a local resident and nationally known nature painter.

The total cost of the renovation was \$750,000. The Richards Memorial Library was prepared for the challenges of the 21st century, but still kept ties with the past and maintained its service.

By the end of 1991, the Angle Tree Garden Club had volunteered to landscape the Grove Street side of the building and provide urns for seasonal floral displays.

The largest bequest ever was to come in 1992 from the estate of Raymond Cassels, who left the library \$250,000, the interest of which was to be used for educational materials. Cassels stated that the staff had shown him much kindness, and that he had felt welcome at the library.

G. Sydney Wright retired in 1992, having shepherded the library through the renovation while arranging for continuous service, and bringing the library into the automation system of the ABLE consortium.

The Friends of the Library generously presented a word processor to the Library. Later in the year the local cable company, TCI, gave a television set a VCR, videocassettes, and supporting print material.

At the outset of Richards Memorial Library's second century, a new Library Director, Ms. Alison Maxell, began her stewardship by upgrading the budget procedures, increasing the staff and redefining the goals and roles of the Library in the future of information services.

The Richards family's generosity has proved fruitful for more than 100 years. The townspeople have benefited through the continuing availability and accessibility of books, audio-visual materials, information services, and social and educational opportunities, which are sheltered in a welcoming, beautiful building. The Library Director and staff, with the support of the trustees, have cultivated through the years: a new and different kind of orchard on the land of the Orne Family.

May the next hundred years of the Richards Memorial Library be as beneficial to North Attleborough, and may it be imagined that Paradise be a kind of library!

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History of the Library. Burrill Porter, Jr.

The author extends gratitude to Patricia Nicholson for support and technical help, Richard Sherman for editorial advice, & George

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Update to History 1994-2019 Frank Ward & Maggie Holmes

Director Allison Maxell left the Richards Memorial Library to concentrate on her new baby in 1994. Hilding Hedberg, the associate director of the Attleboro Public Library, became the director in 1995. During his tenure the ABLE library Network, of which North was a founding member, merged with the SEAL Library Network directly to the east of us. The new combined network was named SAILS and eventually grew to serve libraries in forty communities in Southeastern Massachusetts. The Friends raised \$24,000 to purchase new computers for the library. The Reading Room was rearranged to accommodate new shelves for magazines and videocassettes.

Hilding Hedberg moved on to an opening in Burlington, Massachusetts in 2000. At that time the Associate Director, Frank Ward, became the director. During the first years of the new century, the focus was upon building a new larger library building to serve the community. Although the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners eventually approved funding, ultimately no new library was constructed. Later events would prove this to be a good outcome for the town and the library. It's doubtful that the town could have afforded to operate a larger building in the wake of the 2008 Great Recession.

Starting in the April of 2000 Maggie Holmes began hosting the Open Mic Sundays. On the last Sunday of April, July, October, and whatever Sunday in late January won't interfere with football, the library is open for poetry readings and acoustic music. This has proven to have had loyal fans attend for years. In 2004 we received an LSTA grant to do our first Town-Wide Read of Mark Haddon's book, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. The high school and a local Autism group worked with us to provide



Maggie Holmes, Frank Ward and Trustee Sam McLanahan with Town-wide Read To Kill a Mockingbird

programming. In 2007 the head of Circulation, Mary Lou Twiraga, retired after 31 years with the Library.

The Great Recession that started in 2008 was very challenging to the finances of North Attleborough and for municipalities across the Commonwealth. The town had always funded the library according to a state mandated formula called the Municipal Appropriations Requirement, of the MAR. This dictated that any given year's appropriation should be the average of the previous three years' appropriations plus 2.5 percent. It became impossible for many towns across the state to do this and North Attleborough was no exception. The library's budget was cut as were the budgets of all departments across the town. But North Attleborough never cut the library's disproportionately from the budgets of other departments. Because of that the library never lost its certification. This meant that the library continued to receive state aid and residents of North Attleborough still had access to reciprocal borrowing privileges across the state.

As the recession dragged on, however, cuts continued. To reduce costs, the library cut its hours and the amount of money that was spent on library materials. The position of Associate Director was eliminated. When the Senior Children's Librarian, Katherine Cullinan (Miss Kit), retired, the Junior Children's Librarian, Eunice Franklin (Miss Eunice), moved in the senior position, but the junior position remained vacant.

Among the worst misfortune to befall the library were the March rains of 2010. A total of 10" of rain fell within a week and the sewers backed up through the floor drains in the public restrooms downstairs. Once the liquid touched the wall to wall carpeting in the front basement it wicked throughout the room and began to saturate the lower portions of the walls. The library was closed for two weeks as a team from J. Bryan Day began the work of sanitizing and rebuilding. The library reopened with only one working bathroom and the fiction collection boxed in storage. The Plainville Public Library graciously came to North's assistance by hosting our patron's holds during our closing. By the end of July the repairs were completed and the collection put back together again.

The recession continued and it became increasingly difficult for the town to continue its practice of not cutting the library disproportionately. There was genuine concern that cuts to the schools and public safety had reached the limit and no further cuts from them were possible. There were suggestions of closing town departments, the library among them. This idea was floated for several years leading up to the override that passed in April of 2018.

After the override passed the library's budget was restored to the MAR after 9 years of waivers. The appropriation for that year was \$98,000 more than the year before. The library's hours were restored and so was the materials budget. A new Junior Children's Librarian was hired and the Children's Room is now fully staffed again.

This update and the revisions were prepared for the 125th Anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone.

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