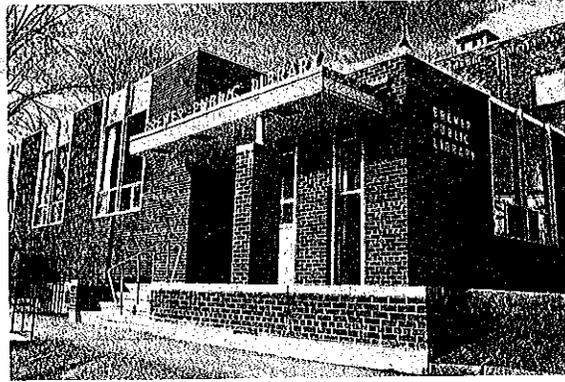


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## HISTORY OF THE BREWER PUBLIC LIBRARY

By Constance Holling



In July 1907, thirty persons met in the Aldermen's room of the old City Hall, their purpose, to discuss the feasibility of establishing a library. The idea originated with a suggestion from the men's class of the First Congregational Church. At the meeting, it was agreed or voted to start with a voluntary organization and 20 members were taken into membership. On October 14, 1907, the organization was incorporated under the laws of the state with the title of the Brewer Free Public Library Association. A constitution and by-laws were adopted, a Board of Managers, Trustees and Executive Committee named.

The history of library service in the Brewer area points up the fact that sponsorship and interest was intermittent, with a few citizens forming the working groups. Early records of the First Congregational Church gave information on a Female Cent Society, formed sometime before 1820, and having a social library of 70 to 80 volumes. The Union Library was established in Brewer Village in 1828 and existed until about 1855. This library recorded about 50 books, most of them donated. A Current Events Club sponsored a library in a room over the Sargent & Herrick Store in South Brewer. Records of this library continue to 1902. In 1896, a move was made to plan a public library to be financed by appropriation by the City and by private subscription. This plan did not get approval. In 1902, the matter of securing a Carnegie Library for Brewer was investigated, however, Brewer could not meet the qualifications. The 1907 meeting and work accomplished at that time became the basis of the first permanent library. In 1910, two libraries were operating, the one in Brewer, and another in South Brewer. The South Brewer library was located in a room at the back of what is now the Epstein building, later moving across the street to a room in back of Harnum's lunchroom. The collection of this library was stored in the Epstein building for many years until all the books were turned over to the present Brewer Public Library. In 1913, the voters turned down by 10 votes to make the library a municipal institution. On January 1, 1975, the library became a City Department, the new ordinance stating that the Librarian would be appointed by the City Manager, with confirmation by the Council. A new City Library Trustees Board was created; however, the Brewer Public Library Association, a corporation, retains its title and its trust funds management, with a Board of Directors and Trustees.

Throughout the many years of change in library service, the books and magazines used in the early reading rooms were usually donated, as funds were always scarce. Fairs, tag days and Association membership dues were the source of operating funds, until the City provided some funds in 1919 or early 1920. The first Brewer Public Library had a working capital of \$12.00 and was managed by volunteer help. The present operating budget is near \$37,000.00, approximately

\$4,600.00 of this being trust fund income, and \$21,000.00 to be used for salaries. Donations of books, and funds to buy books are still very necessary to the operation and enlargement of the collection. The Library Association continues to benefit from the gifts of many individuals and clubs, namely the M.P.M. Club, American Legion Auxiliary, Volunteer Circle of King's Daughters, Brewer Garden and Bird Club, and the Col. Brewer Lodge #56, Knights of Pythias. The book collection has grown from a start of 500 volumes of fiction to the present total of 26,822 books, 70 magazines, 272 recordings, 32 filmstrips and 206 Large Type books.

The first library assistants were volunteer aides under the supervision of Mrs. Fannie Hardy Eckstrom. The group included Mrs. F. H. Nickerson, Mrs. C. N. Perkins, Mrs. J. N. V. Lane, Mrs. Howard Cole, Miss Alma Higgins (Also Secretary for many years), Miss June Lynch, Miss Helen Dougherty and Miss Mary B. Hutchins. Miss Alice Sawyer was appointed the first librarian, a position she held until retirement in 1920. Her assistant, Miss Frances Aiken, became librarian in 1920 and held the position until her retirement in 1946. Mrs. Frances W. Constantine became the first full time librarian in 1946, leaving in 1949 to return to teaching. Miss Mary L. Haskell was librarian from 1949 to 1959, leaving to become the first librarian in the new Brewer High School. Her assistant, Mrs. Constance G. Holling became librarian in April, 1959 and is the present librarian.

The Brewer Free Public Library was first established as a reading room housed in the Emerson Batchelder Building on Wilson St. near what is now the end of the Chamberlain Bridge. Later, in 1908, when the Carter Building was completed, Mr. John Carter offered rooms on the second floor at a nominal rent. The library had room to grow, with new furnishings and shelves. The Carter Building was occupied until 1938, when new quarters were built especially for the library use in the rebuilt City Hall, rent and heat free. Plans for a library building were discussed in the 1950's, but funds were lacking to carry out the idea. In 1961, the Library Association received a sizable bequest from the Alice Farrington Estate, the fund to become the base for definite library building plans. By 1963, discussion of possible sites became important, as more funds would be needed in construction than the trust funds would provide. The committees headed by the Association President, Mrs. Agnes Ames, and the chairman of the Trustees, Mr. Robert Witham, began a series of meetings. Mr. Randolph Adams was site chairman. Final plans evolved to use the present city-owned site, the City of Brewer to use a bond issue for construction and the Library Association to use the Farrington Fund for equipment. The City's portion was between \$47,000.00 and \$48,000.00; the Association expending about \$30,000.00 for steel stacks, furnishings, drapes, etc. The architectural firm of Crowell, Lancaster,

Higgins and Webster was engaged to draw up plans; contractors, Nickerson and O'Day, the construction. Former Bangor Librarian, Mr. L. Felix Ranlett was hired as consultant. All members of the Board were committee members and worked hard through 1964 and 1965 to finalize the plans. Ground was broken on August 5, 1965, the building completed and furnishings moved in by August, 1966. The month of August was spent moving from the old library rooms to the new building, taking inventory and hoping the last of the furniture would arrive before the dedication ceremonies began September 27, 1966. The new building has proven to be well heated by the central heating plant in the City Hall, well lighted, and easy to manage with the open stack shelving. The Board members were: Mrs. Agnes Ames, President; Mr. Randolph Adams, Vice-President; Mrs. Priscilla Bissell, Secretary; Mr. John Goodness, Treasurer, Directors: Mrs. Reed Davis, Mrs. Harold Burrill, Jr., Mrs. Albert Gerry, Mrs. Dudley Utterback, Miss Marcia Smith. Trustees: Robert Witham, chairman; Wallace Witham, Gerald Hart, Frank Floyd and Wayne Libhart. Others working with the Board were F. Lyndon Trueworthy, Mrs. Dorothy Matthews, Mrs. Eugenia Witham. Many of the above still support the library organization.

Many gifts and furnishings have been presented to the library, enhancing the reading room and keeping several paintings and articles of historical value. New furniture purchased for the reading room--Children's slope top table and bench, by family of George Lealos; double reference shelving, by employees of the Eastern Manufacturing Co.; study carrels and chairs: Brewer Kiwanis Club, American Legion, Daniel Geaghan Post, Brewer J. C. Wives (also encyclopedias). In memory of:

Harold (Shorty) Brown, by friends and neighbors

Rev. Basil Gleason, by Women's Fellowship of First Congregational Church.

1911 - bust of Gen. Joshua L. Chamberlain, sculpted by Charles Tefft presented by Mrs. Sarah Chamberlain Farrington, sister of the General.

1922 - Ship models, "Nevada" and "schooner yacht" presented by Miss Edith Doane.

1938 - Gift of \$1,000.00 from Miss Eva Arey for furnishings in old library. Plaque noting gift is on wall of present building.

1961 - Paintings of Gen. Chamberlain's parents, books, papers, Farrington genealogy gifts of Miss Rosamond Allen from Farrington Estate.

1962 - The first complete History of Brewer and surrounding area written by Miss Mildred Thayer and genealogies by Mrs. Agnes Ames. Title of the book "Brewer, Orrington, Holden and Eddington, History and Families". This work is of greatest value to students and citizens of the area, and is only source of material the library has for reference. After the Sesqui-Centennial of 1962, all copies were transferred to the Library for sale, the funds to be used for general book purchase.

1964 - Books and paintings by Walter Hardy from the Charlotte W. Hardy Estate.

Memorial gift book donated by Mrs. Natalie Thayer and Miss Mildred Thayer for recording all gifts to the library and donors names.

1973 - Two pieces of sculpture presented by Father John F. Hodgins. "The Wrestlers" a marble work, and "Mercury", bronze and marble.

Citation in frame and signed by Pres. Abraham Lincoln, promoting Joshua L. Chamberlain to General. Gift of Miss Eleanor Allen, granddaughter of the General. (This gift was carried from Miss Allen's home in Washington, D. C. to the Brewer Library by Congressman William Cohen, of Bangor.)

1974 - Gift of funds from Mrs. John Littlefield for memorial to Mr. John Littlefield, work in progress on a pictorial history of Brewer, collation and preparation by Miss Mildred Thayer.

In 1974, the Brewer Public Library became a member of the recently developed Regional District system of libraries for the promotion of better service. The Northern District system of libraries for the promotion of better service. The Northern District comprised of Penobscot, Aroostook and part of Washington counties, has Bangor Public Library as its Regional Center, for distribution of machines, books and materials for the handicapped, inter-library loan service, etc. This same year, the newly formed Certification Board of Maine Library Association, with a unanimous vote, put to work the voluntary plan for certification of head librarians, standards for certification to be up-dated in five years' time. Mrs. Holling, a member of the Board, was voted in under the standards as meeting all qualifications for head librarian in a public library for the city population of 10,000.

Appreciation is due all members of the Library Boards over the years, the dedicated library staff members and all those who have shown interest in the library service.

Present Officers and Trustees of the Brewer Public Library, Inc.

President: Richard Gray

Vice-Pres.: John Cayford

Treasurer: John Goodness

Secretary: Mildred Goodness

Trustees: Charles Harmon and Bourke Trask, Jr.

Directors: Geraldine Burrill

Josephine Kiah

Dorothy Cushman

Advocate for Library - to Northeast District - Mary Parker

Collated and written by:

Mrs. Constance G. Holling

Sources used: History of Brewer Library, by Miss Irene Cousins and Miss Alma Higgins.

Brewer Orrington, Holden and Eddington: History and Families, by Thayer and Ames

Annual reports of Librarian

