

THE SUMMIT FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

A TOWN TREASURE

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“It is worthwhile to make a deliberate effort to keep up the reading of noteworthy books... In following the written thoughts of his own age, each man’s individual life is enriched and deepened... Thinking along with a great thinker brings, as its heritage, a surer power of thinking for oneself.”

The above quote was written by Miss Mabel R. Haines (Summit Librarian 1913-1914) for the Summit Herald in one of her columns of book reviews entitled: “The Library Shelf.” Although written in the masculine vernacular of the day, it remains a very relevant observation of the true meaning of books, reading and libraries. As we will see, the library has grown and changed with the times and its importance to the Community is critical.

Miss Haines’ stay in Summit was short-lived, but her emphasis on publicity through her book reviews, scheduled library exhibits and working with the schools expanded library usage in the community at a time when moving pictures were emerging and threatening the reading of books, at least in some peoples’ minds. She campaigned for women’s suffrage and resigned her librarian post in 1914 when she was appointed to a high position in the headquarters of the Women’s Political Union of New Jersey in Newark.

THE BEGINNINGS

In 1869 Summit seceded from New Providence Township and created itself as an independent Township. Just a few years later, some of the women in Summit whose husbands were prominent leaders in the community formed the “Ladies Book Club of Summit.” They would gather at various homes to discuss books of biography, history and literature. One afternoon the conversation centered around the possibility and the need for a circulating library in Summit.

In December, 1873 a group of citizens met to discuss such a project. Another meeting was held in January which resulted in the formation of the Summit Library Association to be incorporated under the New Jersey Act of 1846 (used to incorporate societies for the promotion of learning). The first Board of Trustees was headed by William Z. Larned (1821-1911).

The Association issued \$10,000 in stock (2,000 shares at \$5.00 each). Stockholders were allowed to check out two books for two weeks. For the first few years the books were kept at the home of Dr. William

H. Risk at 513 Springfield Avenue. At that time he was the town's only physician. The library was open for two hours each Saturday afternoon.

In 1878 the Association was offered, by the Trustees of Public School No.1 on Springfield Avenue, the free use of the library room in the new school. In return, the Association gave five annual library subscriptions that were awarded to pupils in the school for "meritorious scholarship." The library was now open on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. The use of the library was also expanded to a "responsible" person paying 15 cents a week to borrow a book.

It remained at this location for four years and in 1882 moved its 800 volumes to the rear of Rapelyea's Thread & Needle Shop at 408 Springfield Avenue . The books were largely gifts. Mrs. Rapelyea's daughter, Mary, became the librarian. The library remained at this location until 1891.

1893 - A SIGNIFICANT YEAR

In 1891, the Summit Library Association constructed the first library building. It was located on a piece of land surrounded by Tulip Street, New England Avenue and Locust Drive. The land was donated to the Association by George Manley (1818-1891). The building was completed in April.

From 1891-1893 the library serviced stockholders and subscribers. But on April 11, 1893 the trustees announced that the Summit Library would be a "Free Library, open to all the residents of Summit and its vicinity without charge provided adequate support can be secured." The library at that time held 2,000 volumes and its weekly circulation of books numbered 50. It became a pioneer in having its volumes in stacks open to the public.

An appeal to the community gradually gained support. New subscriptions were given and the Town Council made an annual subscription of \$150.



*First Library
1891 - 1911*

1901 - LIBRARY BECOMES TAX SUPPORTED

In 1901 the Association asked the city to support the library by taxation. On the town's election ballot of November 5, 1901 the following appeared:

**FOR
A FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY
OR
AGAINST
FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY**

The ballots were cast: 596 FOR and 49 AGAINST. The library was handed over to the city for a rental fee of \$1.00 per year.

The library became tax supported at the rate of 1/3 of a mill on each dollar of assessable property. The rate remains at this level today. The Board of Trustees numbered five and were appointed by the Mayor.

1905 - SUMMIT'S FIRST PROFESSIONALLY TRAINED LIBRARIAN

Summit's first professionally trained librarian was Miss Louise R. Morris. She was a graduate of the Pratt Institute Library School in 1903 and worked for one year at the YMCA Library in Brooklyn before coming to Summit in 1905.

The following year the Trustees decided, after many residents expressed concern over the distance of the library from the center of town and also at the prompting of Miss Morris, to open a branch library at No.12 Highland Avenue. It became an instant success and in 1909, Miss Morris wrote an article in the Summit Herald describing the need for a centrally located library building. She reported that circulation had increased to 20,597 (10,472 were circulated through the Branch). Adult memberships had reached 1,324 and juvenile memberships were 481. The number of books totaled 7,700. Of the total, Hamilton Wright Mabie had given 1,000 volumes.

The main building was used as a library until another was built in 1911 on Maple Street. It was used as a temporary school until construction of the Brayton School was completed in 1912. After six years of being underutilized, the Summit Playhouse Association took over the building in 1918, leasing it from the Summit Library association for an annual fee of one dollar. They rented the building until 1967 when the Summit Library Association gave it to the Playhouse.

1911 - ANDREW CARNEGIE ENTERS PICTURE

Leading community residents such as Hamilton Wright Mabie, William Lyall (member of Common Council and a close personal friend of Andrew Carnegie for forty years), and the Bonnel family were instrumental in securing the funding for the new Summit Free Public Library in 1911. The mayor at the time was George F. Vreeland.

Andrew Carnegie gave \$21,000 to the funding and the Summit Home Land Company (President Jonathan Bonnel) donated the land located on the north-west corner of Morris Avenue and Maple Street. Its value was appraised at \$10,000. Other gifts totaled \$1,200. The book capacity of the new building was 30,000 volumes compared to the 8,305 volumes the library currently owned.

The building was described as "an impressive building constructed of terra cotta block with pressed Philadelphia brick veneering. The roof was Spanish



Carnegie Library
1911 - 1964

tile with a large copper dome." The portico and the pillars were of stone. The interior had four fireplaces with paintings above them. Electric lights were introduced and in 1915, plaster busts of Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Emerson and Tennyson were appropriately placed.

On May 11, 1911 the library was dedicated. It was a time when concern was being expressed over the library's future because of the growing interest in moving picture shows. By 1913, Miss Morris retired as librarian after eight years.

The Summit Free Public Library building of 1911 (often referred to as the Carnegie Library) remained at its Maple Street site until 1964 when a new building was constructed at the same location.

1964 - NEW BUILDING

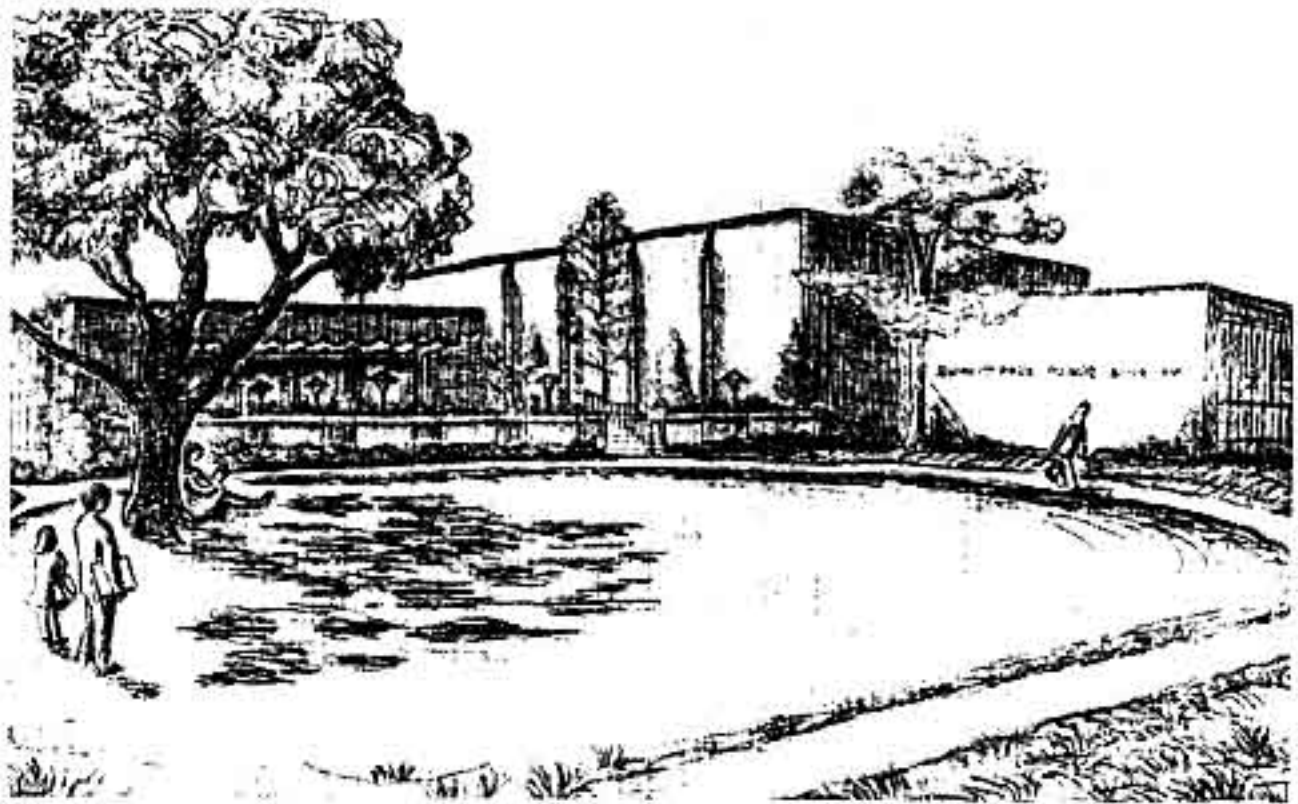
From 1914 to 1947 the library was under the supervision of Miss Emile Hill. She served during two world wars, a depression and the early post World War II period. Despite these tumultuous times, there was a steady increase in book stock and in circulation. Under her direction, branch libraries were set up for children and adults in East Summit and the Roosevelt School. Libraries were also established at Washington School, Franklin School and the Neighborhood House.

When the library celebrated fifty years as a city institution on November 29, 1951, it had 43,000 volumes and was facing problems such as an overcrowded building; out of date facilities and limited services. These problems grew even more severe over the next several years.

By 1957 Mayor C. Philip Dean appointed a committee of fourteen Summit citizens to look into the matter of constructing a new library to address these issues. The conclusion of the committee was that the present facilities were inadequate to meet the library's pressing needs and that a new building should be constructed on the same site.

The Council finally approved a bond issue on January 19, 1961 for the construction of a new library. The building was completed at a cost of \$676,000 in January, 1964. During that month Summit actually had two library buildings. The building of 1964 was erected behind and to the right of the 1911 building before the latter was razed. A chute was built between the two structures which were ten feet apart and the cartons of books moved smoothly along the chute to the new building.

The architecturally beautiful old building, although outdated in terms of size and functionality, died hard among the sentimentalists in the community. Funding was enhanced by the Committee for a New Library. The land which was originally given by the Bonnel family in 1911 for the "Carnegie Library" continued to serve as the foundation for the new building. The dedication took place on May 2, 1965.



1964 Library

Etching by Madeline Cooke

The library was designed to hold about 100,000 volumes and floor space increased from 8,000 square feet to 21,000 square feet.

1970'S LIBRARY EXPANDS WELL-BEYOND THE COMMUNITY

One of the most significant accomplishments of the library during the 1970's was becoming part of a network of libraries called the Morris Union Federation (MUF) which exists today. Cardholders could now tap the resources of other libraries with specialized collections: Berkeley Heights (Art); Bernards Township (Theatre & Performing Arts); Library of the Chathams (Psychology); Madison (American & English Literature, History of Books & Printing); Morristown/Morris Township (Local & State History, Geneology, Astronomy); New Providence (Education & Mathematics) and Summit (Business).

Growth of the library's services, activities and circulation continued to grow over the next three decades. Circulation was up 40%, while 72% of Summit's 19,757 residents were registered library users and in 1994 280,000 books, periodicals and multimedia items were borrowed by library patrons of all ages. Activities consisted of workshops, lectures, pre-schooler story times, craft hours, summer reading programs, etc. The need for a library renovation and expansion became evident. The project was financially approved in 1997 and construction began in the fall.

1997-1999 RENOVATION, EXPANSION, COMMUNITY WIDE EFFORT

By February, 1999, after sixteen months of construction and with the library operating out of temporary trailers, the newly expanded and renovated library was opened. The building's dedication took place on May 2, 1999.

Funding for the \$4.5 million project, which actually came in under budget at \$4.3 million, included the following: Community fund raising campaign brought in \$1.5 million (\$55,000 from "The Music Man"), the library endowment added \$300,000 and bonding from the City accounted for \$2.7 million.

Capping the community's two-year fund raising campaign for the library was the performance of a city-wide musical: Meredith Wilson's "The Music Man." Auditions were held in April and performances were given



*Renovated and Expanded Library
1999 -*

at the high school on June 26, 27, 28, 29, 1997. The production raised more than \$55,000. It was truly a city-wide effort with 400 volunteers (70 in the cast) working together to support the library. The requirement for the participants was that "they live, work or worship in Summit." The cast and crew included an array of community residents, including teachers, doctors, lawyers, students, mayors, policemen, secretaries, salesmen, CEO's and the library's own Director Glen E. Devitt, who is now in his twentieth year at the library.

The \$4.5 million project included, among other things, 13,774 additional square feet of space, increased book capacity by 18%, added sixty reading seats, constructed a large public reading room, enhanced the layout of the building for greater efficiency, completely enlarged the wiring infrastructure to support future computer use and at a cost of \$1.0 million made the necessary changes (including restrooms, ramps, elevators) to meet the provisions of the Americans With Disabilities Act.

LIBRARY GROWTH SINCE 1997 CAPITAL PROGRAM

	1997	2007	Change
Books	108,235	106,821	(1.3)%
Audio, video	5,054	15,864	313.9 %
Registered residents	15,843	19,817	25.1%
Percent of residents as registered users	76%	90%	
Average weekly patronage	4,238	4,614	8.9%
Average monthly computer usage	none	2,624	

As shown in the table, several notable changes have occurred in the past ten years. Although the number of books in stock has dipped 1.3%, audio and video resources have soared 313.9%. Registered memberships (cardholders) have jumped 25.1% for Summit residents and the percent of Summit residents now with library cards is 90%. Average weekly attendance has increased 8.9% to 4,614. Average monthly computer usage was a nonevent for the library in 1997. It was still wrestling with needed funding for computers and whether or not the internet would be useful in the expansion. Fortunately, these issues were answered affirmatively and the wiring infrastructure was put into place. This is another example of the library moving ahead with the times. However one looks at the data, the Summit Free Public Library is a heavily used institution in this city.

The Mission Statement of the library reads as follows: To serve the total community as the center for intellectual, literary, cultural and information services, programs and activities.

"The Board of Trustees of the Summit Free Public Library endeavors to achieve this mission through the provision of collections of books, tapes, discs and other informational and cultural materials designed to appeal to the total community; through the provision of a physical plant designed to attract and stimulate all of Summit; and through the provision of information and reference service to the community."

Some of the cultural activities presented by the library are lectures, seminars, workshops, a book club, an international film series, etc. The Children's Department has story times with each month highlighting a different country, a summer reading program, guest authors, special holiday presentation days, etc. A different theme each month emphasizes books based on that theme: April, for example, was National Humor Month and May is Cartoon Appreciation Month.

The library also sponsors Online Book Clubs (allows a cardholder to receive chapters from popular books daily in your e-mail). NextReads delivers lists from your library to your Inbox. Free audiobook downloads are also available. The library has not sat on its hands, but has continued to meet the needs of the community. The library's website is www.summitlibrary.org.

FUNDING IS KEY ISSUE FOR THE FUTURE

On March 25, 2008 Patricia Tumulty, the Executive Director of the New Jersey Library Association testified before the New Jersey Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee. In her testimony she stated that "funding for library programs in the FY 09 state budget is less than it was in the FY 89 state budget-twenty years ago. I believe that few, if any, other state funding programs have sustained this limited level of support." The total state funding for library programs amounts to about \$1.80 per year per resident.

She discussed three myths, regarded as factual by some, about libraries that probably influence policymakers.

One - Libraries are not being utilized as in the past. Not so! She stated that "Last year there were over 45 million visits to the public libraries in New Jersey. That is an increase of 1.4 million from the previous year. ...Thousands more visit libraries electronically every day through the use of electronic resources provided through our libraries webpages."

Two - Everything is free on the internet. Not so! "There is no doubt that the information provided through our program-The New Jersey Knowledge Initiative-would never be free on the internet....the really important reliable information critical to doing research in the areas of business, medicine or science you must pay and pay dearly."

Three - Taxpayers are unwilling to provide tax support for libraries. Not so! She stated that the New Jersey Library Association recently had "Potomac Incorporated of Bethesda, Maryland conduct a survey to determine people's attitudes about library funding in New Jersey." Potomac has been researching opinions and attitudes for 25 years. It has widely publicized voter surveys for the media and corporations. Their findings for New Jersey were as follows:

- 85% of residents went to a public library at least once during the past year. Currently, public libraries are being used extensively in-person and on-line.
- 71% considered libraries an essential service in the community just like schools.
- 69% want more state money to go to libraries. Currently it is less than one-tenth of one percent of the state's budget.
- 95% believe public libraries are essential to lifelong learning.
- 83% believe libraries are a good investment of their tax dollars.

All of the evidence supports the fact that the residents of New Jersey value and support their libraries. More importantly, the evidence also demonstrates that the Summit Free Public Library is a vital and key element in the Community. It is not a static institution!