

Celebrating the Yarmouth Port Library

In March of 1866, a committee was formed to start a subscription library in the Town of Yarmouth. Their work was the beginning of the Yarmouth Port Library you know today. The evolution of the Library and the library building is an interesting story. Starting with this issue of *The Yarmarm* we will present various aspects of how the Library came to be what it is and some, we think, interesting tidbits you may not be aware of culminating in a celebration of the Library's 150th anniversary in 2016. To start, we present a brief chronology for the Library below.

Library History Highlights

“A library is not a luxury but one of the necessities of life.” Henry Ward Beecher

Agriculture was a prominent part of Yarmouth life in the 18th century, and the town's location led its people to make much of their living from the sea. Throughout the 19th century, there was also a vibrant literary circle in Yarmouth, giving force and direction to its intellectual growth. In 1808 Dr. Calvin Bilden and others established the Union Library in Yarmouth, but it was not until March of 1866 that twenty men, answering an appeal to consider forming a library, met in the home of Charles Swift, now known as the Old Homestead. Mr. Swift, Dr. Shove and the Rev. Joseph B. Clark were named to a committee to sell shares for a subscription library at \$10. The cost of the shares was kept low so all might participate.

By late June, the Yarmouth Library Association was organized with the assumption of corporate functions, the adoption of a constitution and the naming of officers. Shortly after, the Rev. Nathaniel Cogswell offered a building that he owned, formerly occupied as a law office, to serve as the library. When a new building was built, this office was incorporated into the new library building as the kitchen of the Librarian's living quarters.

On July 13, 1866, Mr. Henry C. Thacher offered the land on which the present library stands. Many public-spirited citizens gave of their time to grade the land and to help move the building donated by Reverend Cogswell. The building was moved to this site on August 24, 1866 and by December of that year, the library was opened.

On December 10, 1870, Nathan Matthews offered to erect a library building, costing about seven thousand dollars, in memory of his father James Matthews. At the same time, he announced that the interest on five thousand dollars would be placed at the disposal of the trustees. The result was the central area of the present Yarmouth Port library. The original Gothic-style brick building included a balcony, which ran around the building's second floor, and the two spiral staircases, and was given upon the condition that the library shall be enjoyed by all the citizens of Yarmouth.

On March 18, 1871, the Yarmouth Port library was organized under the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, with a Board of Trustees to manage the library for public use. On December 20, 1871, the new building was opened for inspection following dedication exercises held at the First Congregational Church.



Library Yarmouthport, Mass

The building also contained an apartment which was to be the home of the Librarian. In 1945 the dwelling quarters were remodeled and the Tower Room, which was a third-floor bedroom, was declared unsafe and was removed as was the dormer in the attic.

In April of 1951, the John Simpkins wing was added, a gift of Mrs. George R. Agassiz. This wing was given in memory of Mrs. Agassiz's brother, Congressman John Simpkins.

Other additions followed: in 1958, the Mary Thacher Wing was opened as a children's room. In 1966, the Mary Rousmaniere room, the room where currently the books of fiction are shelved, was added. In 1983, the Librarian's quarters were taken over for library expansion.

On July, 2008, the Yarmouth Port Library became independent of the Town of Yarmouth and is now supported by private funds. Starting in 1866 and continuing to the present day, the Library serves the community as a free public library open to all.