

Celebrating Our 110th Anniversary | 1900-2010

## Wallkill Public Library

Where Good Things Happen

### History of the Wallkill Public Library

To begin the history of the Wallkill Public Library, one must go back in time over 100 years to circa 1881. It was then that Penelope (known as Nellie) Borden and a group known as "Kings Daughters" started a traveling library in Wallkill. Mrs. Sarah E. Relyea, the "librarian," would obtain about 100 books in the fall of the year, which were then circulated in the winter. In the spring, these books were packed up and returned, and new ones obtained later.

When the "Kings Daughters" disbanded, Mrs. Relyea carried on the circulation of books from her home and millinery shop on Main Street. She was assisted by Penelope Borden, Ellen L. Borden, and Marion Borden, who not only contributed books from their own libraries, but also aided with monetary help for the expenses of the operation.

On April 17, 1900, the first meeting was held to organize the Wallkill Library Association. The first trustees were Mrs. Ellen Borden, Marion Borden, and Mrs. Dayton Relyea.

In September 1905, a committee was formed to investigate incorporation of the library. This was required as revealed in a letter from L.A. Hamilton stating that the library must be incorporated before a legacy of his late wife could be paid to the library. His late wife was Penelope (Nellie) Borden Hamilton, one of the "Kings Daughters" previously mentioned.

One June 28, 1906, the Board of Regents issued a charter to the Wallkill Public Library and reports showed an endowment from Mrs. Penelope Hamilton of 20 shares of Borden's Condensed Milk Co. stock and a \$200 donation by Mr. L.A. Hamilton.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the library received a legacy of \$1,000 from Ellen Borden and a \$7,500 legacy from George Halliday, at one time the husband of Marion Borden.

In 1934, the library received a legacy of \$30,000 from the estate of Marion Borden, which was to be used for the construction of a new library building and for equipment and supplies.

It should be pertinent at this point to interject a reminder of how deeply indebted we are to the Borden family for their many contributions made over a period of years. They gave generously of their time and talents as well as much-needed financial assistance.

In the early part of this history it was indicated that the original library had been located in the home and millinery shop of Mrs. Dayton Relyea. She passed away in 1907 and then the library was moved in 1911 to the Deyo building at the corner of Church and Main streets.

With funds now in hand from the estates of Marion Borden for the construction of a new building, it became necessary to find a location.

In 1895, John Gail Borden and his wife had deeded the two parks in the center of town to the Town of Shawangunk. In 1934 the library trustees were: Martin J. Dewitt, J. Addison Crowell, and John B. Hamilton. It was through these forward-looking men, along with the cooperation of the Town of Shawangunk fathers, that the library acquired one park from town, the Village Park. This was soon after receiving the Marion Borden legacy (several years later the library, in turn, gave back the northern section of the park to the Town of Shawangunk for their then-new Town Hall).

Architects were engaged and construction soon started on the new building. Older residents will recall that the site had been a large circular flowerbed with a pathway around it from paths leading from each corner of the park. The cornerstone was laid in 1935, and a list of the contents may be found in the November 1935 minutes. The trustees first met in the new building on February 10, 1936.

After moving to the new building, the activity grew steadily and as early as 1966 thoughts were given to an addition. This was found to be too costly, so in 1967 an extensive remodeling program was undertaken in the basement area, with a separate entrance, and this was then used as the children's area. These rooms have been dedicated in the memory of Mrs. William E. Bruyn, since funds received from her legacy were used towards this renovation cost.

Once again in 1970 more space was required. The trustees then started a remodeling program in the upstairs in what had been an attic storage. It was necessary to lay new flooring and carpet, install heating, air conditioning, electric, etc. New bookcases were built by one of the trustees. Much of this work was done by volunteer labor and funds to hire contractors were limited. It was not finally completed until 1982. Already we are looking for more space.

In 1984, thank to volunteer labor and financial assistance of local organizations, a ramp for the handicapped was completed. Since then an alarm system has been installed for burglary, fire, and high water in the basement. Half of this cost was met by a gift from one of the patrons.

In addition to the approximate 12,000 books on the library shelves, a large number of weekly and monthly magazines are available, as well as a supply of records and video tapes. All of the library materials are loaned to our patrons at no charge. It is interesting to note that our circulation (the number of items loaned out) for 1989 was just a bit over 25,000. That figure represents an increase of over 25 percent just in two years.

Of this total 25,000 circulation, 14,711 was accounted for by young people, who along with their parents, enjoy the summer reading program and arts and crafts sessions.

None of the above figures, of course, include the many patrons, including young people, who find our reference room an excellent source of information for their research.

Growth in circulation and activity has, of course, resulted in ever-increasing expenses for new books, supplies, personnel, and the maintenance of our building, which we own, etc. Our annual budgets continue to increase, and sources of income must continually be explored. The following will show our annual budgets:

1984 - \$23,800  
1986 - \$28,000  
1988 - \$34,800  
1990 - \$40,200

(an increase of 40 percent in six years)

How does the library meet this budget? In several ways: For 1990, we expect to receive \$9,000 in support from the Town of Shawangunk; \$8,500 from the Wallkill Central School District; and \$4,400 from Ulster County. It is important to note that these three items, representing more than 50 percent of the budget, must be approved by the taxpayers in each taxing district. A negative vote would seriously impact our operations.

The remaining portion of the budget is met by interest on endowment funds, donations, memorial gifts, and fundraising.

Concluding this brief history, praise should be given to the many men and women who have gone before in our nearly 100-year history as a public library. To the Borden family, to those with foresight at the beginning of the century who chartered our library, to those who acquired our location and arranged construction of our beautiful building, and to the many trustees, librarians, and volunteers who have been instrumental in bringing us to where we are today.

As we near the close of our first century, we do hope that those who follow will continue with the same dedication which has been shown in the past.

*Researched and prepared by  
Fred C. Terwilliger, Trustee  
August, 1990*

Fast forward to the present...

Twenty years later, our wonderful little library has continued to grow and prosper under the care and dedication of many trustees, staff, volunteers, and patrons.

In 1996, we became a Special Legislative District Public Library, which allowed us to obtain tax support from our citizens. Our annual budgets are now approved by the voters and our trustees are elected officials.

In 2008, our budget was \$200,000, staff increased to one full-time and six part-time staff, and the total registered borrowers rose to 2,650. Since 1990, our collection of circulating books, print serials and periodicals, electronic materials, audio books, and video/DVD recordings has increased to almost 103,000 (a 258 percent increase in 19 years!). This includes our increasingly popular interlibrary loan, which allows patrons to borrow materials from 46 other libraries in our system - estimated to be another two million items. We offered 464 programs for adults and children in 2008, with an attendance of more than 4,500. Library visitation totals were well over 17,000 for the year. We are small, but we are mighty.

In 1990, trustee Fred C. Terwilliger identified the need for additional space to house the growing collections and programs of the Wallkill Public Library. We are now bursting at the seams. Plans for significant renovation are in the works and we look to our dedicated public to enthusiastically support our plans for growth so that we may provide the Town of Shawangunk with a 21st century library and community learning center.

As we near our 110th anniversary as a library and our 75th year in this building, may we have the vision to look deeply and purposefully into the future with the same dedication which has been shown in the past.

*Mary Lou Carolan, Director  
2008-present*

