

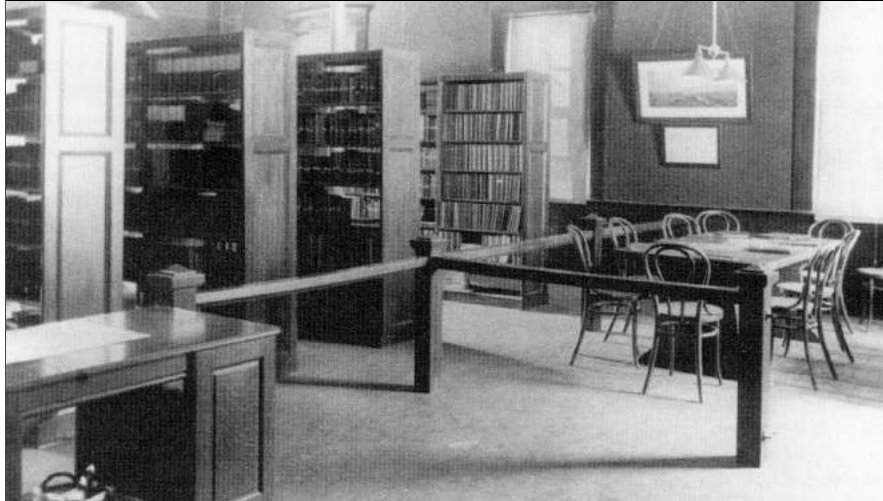
*A History of the*  
**Wenham Library**  
*From 1840 to 1998*

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Jack E. Hauck



Wenham Public Library in Town Hall, 1900. Wellington Pool was the librarian.  
Photo courtesy Wenham Museum

## Wenham Library

In the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, literacy in Massachusetts was quite high. <sup>1</sup> Most homes had a Bible and it regularly was read, as well as used to teach children to read.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, for most people, there was little else to read than the Bible. Newspapers, left by travelers, occasionally could be found at the town's tavern.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Wenham did not have any type of library. However, in nearby Salem, 10 newspapers were being published. In Boston, many religious books began to be printed.

It would not be until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that books and pamphlets became available to most people.

In 18<sup>th</sup> century Massachusetts, there were fifty-two libraries. They included subscription, rental, medical, church and academic libraries. The wealthy had private libraries in their homes. <sup>2</sup>

From 1840 to 1850, various towns, including Wenham, had a district library. However, for the most part, the district libraries had very few books.

In a letter from Amos Patch, in Boston, to Wellington Pool, in Wenham, Patch wrote:

*"When I went to live with my uncle, Amos Gould, in 1846, the district library was in Adoniram Dodge's wheelwright shop, near Dr. Jones' house, where it remained for three or four years.*

*"In 1850, he persuaded my uncle to take it. It was removed to his house, and I had the care of the books. There were about eighty volumes, I think, many of them in bad condition. I was allowed two dollars for taking care of it and the fines. It was kept in the front entry of his house, and it was still there in 1853."*<sup>13</sup>

The Dodge shop was on Main Street, about where 172 Main St. is today.

### **Parochial Library**

At Wenham's First Church, there was a parochial library with books containing church records, as well as other documents and historical books.<sup>3</sup> Pastors often had their personal reference books that they used in preparing their Sunday sermons.

The June 1860 church record states that the library, having been left very much at the disposal of the scholars, was in disorder and many books were lost. The librarian requested he be allowed: 1) To take entire charge of the books; 2) Keep scholars out of the library; 3) Keep track of books borrowed by scholars and books used by teachers in Sunday School classes; and 4) Require books be promptly returned to the librarian." The church agreed and appointed Arthur Kimball as the librarian.<sup>3</sup>

All the books were of a religious nature, and published in the 17th century, from 1601 to 1682. Of the 29 books, 25 of them had the inscription "1724, the gift of Mr. Samuel Gerrish."<sup>9</sup> Two books were gifts of Samuel Mather, son of Rev. Cotton Mather, in 1728.<sup>9</sup>

On Apr. 2, 1878, the church donated to the Congregational Library of Boston (*Congregational House corner of Beacon and Somerset Streets*) all its books, which constituted the Parochial Library of Wenham."<sup>4, 13</sup>

### **Private Library**

In the autumn of 1857, a group of people formed a "Social Circle," for "promoting kindly feeling, social intercourse, and mental improvement." The Circle was a small, private group of men and women of the town.\* They met monthly at member homes.<sup>7</sup>

The Circle had a small initiation fee and there was a 3¢ fee, at each of its meetings. With the fee-money, the Circle bought books that were exchanged among the members, at their meetings, held at member homes.<sup>7, 9</sup>

The first librarian was Woodbury P. Conant. His brother, Benjamin Conant, in 1897, would become the Wenham librarian. A small bookcase of three shelves, about thirty inches long, provided ample space for storing the Circle's books. Woodbury Conant kept the books at his house.<sup>7, 9</sup>

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\* In 1941, a combination dormitory, auditorium, and gymnasium was built at the Iron Rail Vacation Home, in the Neck area of Wenham. It also had a private library.

Relying on the 3¢ member fee to buy new books meant that book buildup was slow. In 1858, seeing this, the Circle decided to reorganize into a more formal and hopefully larger group, which they called the Wenham Library Association. All the books of the Circle were transferred to the Association and the members became exofficio members.<sup>7</sup>

On Nov. 16, 1858, the Association held their first regular meeting, at the home of Joseph Cook. The first officers of the Association were: Robert Putnam, President; Abbott Johnson, Vice President; and Dr. Myron O. Allen, Secretary and Treasurer. Samuel Porter, Solomon E. Kimball, and L. Dodge were Library Committee members.<sup>7</sup>

The Library Association opened membership to everyone in Wenham. For maintaining and increasing the number of library books, the Association charged a \$1 initiation fee, and an annual assessment of 50¢.<sup>7</sup> The Association prepared a hand written catalogue of its books.

Those people annually paying 50¢ were termed “reading members.” They were allowed to borrow books, but did not own any of the books and had no voice in the library’s administration.<sup>9</sup>

Many people soon joined the Wenham Library Association. According to the 1850 Wenham census, there were only 29 people that could not read, out of the total population of 977.<sup>37</sup>

With the purchase of books using the new member funds, and the gifts of books received from various sources, the library soon outgrew the small three-shelf bookcase. Wenham’s selectmen allowed the Association to store its library in the selectmen's room in the town hall, which was on the rear left-side of the first floor. The Association provided new bookcases.<sup>9</sup> The library was open for circulation of books on alternate Saturday evenings, a schedule maintained until 1893.<sup>9</sup>

In 1860, Dr. Myron O. Allen wrote:

*“Like other libraries, however, its (the Circle’s) volumes became old and worn, and as no funds were provided for obtaining new works, its contents became scattered and much reduced, and what few remained were finally disposed of. Within a few months, an association has been formed for the purpose of purchasing new and standard works, as they may issue from the press. A small but select library has, thus, been formed, of about one hundred volumes, which we trust may yet be the nucleus of a large and valuable collection.”*<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Allen pleaded for people to help build the number of books at the Library Association:

*“In a town like this, there are often young men of active minds, but limited advantages, to whom access to such a library would be worth more than its entire cost. Many a restless spirit might be saved from a career of vice, perhaps from ruin, disgrace and prison, by pre-occupying his mind with a taste*

*for useful and instructive reading. An amount of intelligence and general information might thus be diffused through the community, such as can hardly be estimated.*

*“Will not someone be public-spirited enough to take the lead in this good cause, and thus secure the lasting gratitude of his fellow-citizens?”*<sup>12</sup>

Donations did not come flooding in.

The Association, of which Dr. Allen was the treasurer, realized that more money was needed to buy new books and replace some old and worn books.<sup>12</sup> On October 17, 1860, the Association raised the membership fee from \$1 to \$2, and the annual membership fee to \$1.<sup>9</sup> (NOTE: In today's economy, the \$2 fee in 1860 would be about \$55.)

Apparently, the fund-drive was very successful. Popularity of the library steadily grew in the 1860s, to a level where the Association considered offering their books to the town, to become the beginning of a free public library. The members also wanted to unburden themselves of the many hours they were providing to run the library. The idea of giving the books to the town was proposed in 1870, as well as several times subsequently. However, nothing happened<sup>9</sup>

## **Public Library**

In December 1884, the Library Association unanimously voted to give and transfer to the Town of Wenham the library belonging to the Association. This was to be done providing the town would keep the library as a free public library, and annually make an adequate appropriation to maintain and increase the number of books.<sup>5</sup> From experience, the Association knew all too well that the success of a library depended on having enough money to buy new books.

At the 1885 Wenham Annual Town Meeting, Library Association members Wellington Pool and Elbridge Porter presented the matter to the town voters.<sup>17</sup> The town thankfully accepted the gift, upon the terms proposed by the Association.<sup>5</sup>

It was a sizable gift. The Library Association's collection had grown to slightly more than 700 books, which were, generally speaking, in fair condition. They included: about 60 history books; 65 biographies; about 50 travel and exploration books; 13 theology books; 10 books about agriculture; 10 poetry books; more than 250 books of fiction; 40 books of miscellaneous content; and about 150 books and publications dealing with State and National government, as well as agriculture, commerce and education.<sup>7</sup>

Several of these books still exist and are kept in the archives section at the Hamilton-Wenham Library, including, “A Modell of Divinitie ...,” by John Yates, published in London, in 1622. Also from the Association's books is “The Course of Time, A Poem,” by the Scottish poet, Robert Pollok, published in 1838.

The first year of the public library, the townspeople voted \$100 for its support.

Was \$100 an "adequate appropriation" by the town?

It was more than what the Association had been gathering from its members that numbered well below a hundred paying a dollar a year.

The selectmen appointed a Library Committee, of five members, to take full charge of the library books, in the town hall.<sup>5</sup> Committee members were: Abbott Johnson, Rev. John C. Mitchell, Elbridge Porter, Henry Cook and Everett Day, as secretary;<sup>5</sup> all previous Library Association members.

The Library Association also gave the town its records, to be preserved in the archives with the town records. (*The Association's minutes now are at the Hamilton-Wenham Library.*) In addition, the Association gave the town its bookcases and lamps for use in the selectmen's room, where the books were kept..<sup>7</sup>

In the first year of the Wenham Free Public Library, 1885, the library was open 45 evenings; 3,654 books were loaned to 273 people.<sup>8</sup>

As a result of the strong use of the library, an additional book stack was erected in the center of the library room in the town hall.<sup>5</sup>

The Wenham Free Public Library opened May 8, 1885.<sup>14</sup> The first year, 1,756 volumes were circulated.<sup>17</sup>

The large number of books and the wide array of subjects they covered made the library very popular. So popular, that its quarters in the selectmen's room became inconvenient. In 1886, the southeast room on the first floor of the town hall, originally used as a recitation room by the Wenham Select School, became the library.<sup>9</sup>

### First Public Library In U. S.

There are many claims to having opened the *first* public library. In Boston and Philadelphia and **New York**, there were, in the 1600s, repositories of books, but they were not "public." It was not until 1852, that the official Boston Public Library was organized.

In 1731, Benjamin Franklin and friends, called the "Junto," organized the Library Company of Philadelphia. The subscription library allowed members to buy "shares" and used funds to buy books. Members could borrow books and use the library.

Darby, PA opened a library in 1743, which is claimed to be the "oldest continuously operating free public library."

In 1778, Franklin Massachusetts was named after Benjamin. He gave books to the town for use by its residents. Franklin had been asked to donate a church bell: he declined, saying that "sense" was preferable to "sound."

Several towns claim to have opened the first public library, including: Scoville library in Salisbury, CT, which opened in 1803.

The library in Peterborough, NH, claims to be the first *publicly-funded* library; it opened in 1833.

The library in Arlington, MA, claims to have had the first free *children's library*; it opened in 1835.<sup>16</sup>

To efficiently store the library books for inspection, the room had double-sided, wood book cases, with seven shelves. There were six of these stacks lined against one wall. (*See picture on page one.*)

With limited library space, there was little space for a reading area: a table with ten chairs around it. This meant that the library mainly was a place from which books were available for home circulation.

Town hall was 38-feet wide, 54-feet long, and it had a 16 by 25 foot front section, with a cupola. On the first floor, the private "Select Grammar School" had a large classroom, recitation room, and dressing room.

From 1885 to 1893, the library was open for exchange of books once every other Saturday evening. In 1893, it was opened every week, and the day of opening changed from Saturday to Wednesday evening. Beginning in 1900, the library was open every Wednesday afternoon, from 3 to 4 pm, and evening, from 7 to 9 pm.<sup>49</sup>

For the first few years, the Wenham librarian, Committee Member Abbott Johnson, received a small salary, \$10 per year. In 1889, the Library Committee began dividing the duties of the librarian among themselves, and thus saved the \$10 for the purchase of books.<sup>5,9</sup> Typically, at the time, books cost from \$2 to \$5 each.

The next librarian was Henry A. Moulton, who served in this capacity until 1897. He was succeeded by Benjamin Conant.

In 1902, the librarian, Benjamin Conant, again began receiving an annual salary, and the members of the Board of Trustees received 20¢ for each hour of service.<sup>9</sup> In 1907, the total amount paid to library workers was just over \$100. The town appropriation, that year was \$200, plus there was another \$31 from other sources.<sup>9</sup>

From 1885 to 1907, the town annually provided from \$100 to \$200 for maintenance of the public library. In 1908, the town gave \$300 to the public library for the year and allowed the library be kept open three afternoons and one evening each week.<sup>22</sup>

Having the library in the town hall allowed the teacher of the grammar school, also in the town hall, to make frequent use of it. Further, students had ready access to books for reading and other purposes connected with their studies.<sup>5</sup>

### **Board of Library Trustees**

The Library Committee remained in charge of the library until 1893, when it was disbanded in order to secure the benefits of chapter 255 of the Acts of the General Court, May 6, 1892. By this legislation, the State established the Massachusetts Free Library Commission. The state Commission could disburse \$100, for books, to a public library in a town where the property valuation of the town did not exceed \$600,000.

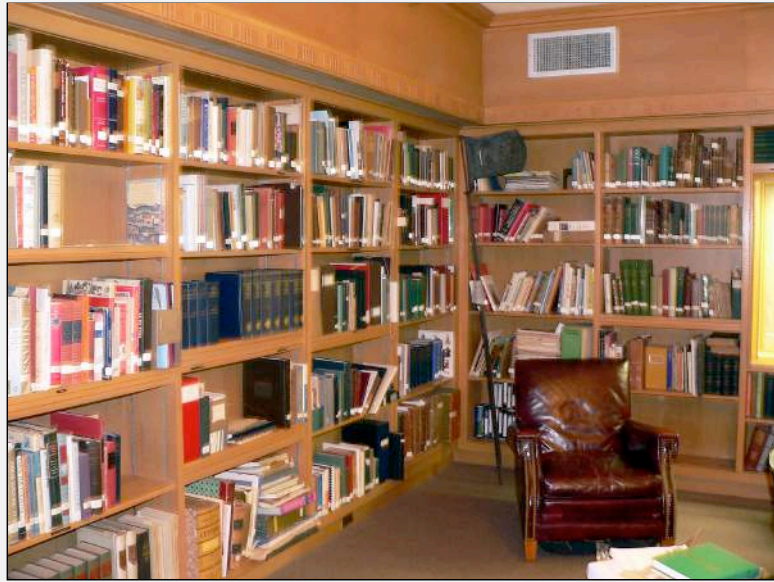


Photo J. Hauck

### **Museum's Pickering Library**

In 1953, the Wenham Historical Association and Museum, Inc. opened a research library in the Claflin-Richards House. The Colonel Timothy Pickering Library was the headquarters for the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture. It contains the Society's collection of books on agriculture, farming and horticulture.<sup>24</sup>

The library also has a great many family histories and genealogies, extensive manuscript material on Wenham history, a complete record of all the early houses in Wenham's Historic District, books by local authors, and an extensive collection of early town records and Essex County histories.<sup>24</sup>

Among the reference books in the collection are many on quilts, dolls, toys, costumes, needlework, antiques, and early American architecture, herbs, and gardens. The library may be used for research, by appointment.<sup>24</sup>

A key force in establishing the library was Adeline P. Cole. At the opening of the Pickering Library, she said it was important "to make it a real source of research."<sup>25</sup>

The Massachusetts Society for the Promotion of Agriculture helped fund the building of the concrete portion of the museum and provided some of the furnishings in the library. In exchange for the MSPA's support, the library served as MSPA headquarters, and stored and displayed the Society's collection of artifacts and books and files on agriculture, farming and horticulture. This agreement continued through 2011, when the MSPA moved its headquarters to nearby Appleton Farms, whose agricultural mission it shares.



The Massachusetts Free Public Library Commission was the first of its kind in the United States.

A prerequisite of the state law was that the town have a Board of Library Trustees.<sup>29</sup> The first Wenham Board of Trustee members were: Elbridge Porter, chairman; Benjamin H. Conant, secretary; Henry A. Moulton, librarian; Charles H. Stanton, Frank H. Tarr and Rev. Arthur N. Ward.<sup>30</sup>

Also in 1893, the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Wenham's incorporation, the citizens of Beverly gave the Wenham library 50 books, "In friendly remembrance" of that event.<sup>5</sup>

Many organizations, agencies and private individuals annually donated books, pamphlets and periodicals to the library. Often, over a hundred books were provided. In 1896, Henry Hobbs donated 63 books.<sup>23</sup>

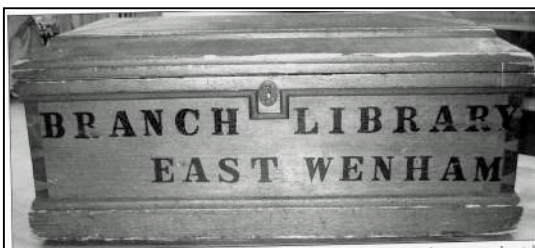
With a large number of library books, the selectmen, in 1893, had a library catalogue printed and issued to residents.<sup>5</sup> The catalogue listed all the library books by category, title and author. By three years later, 1896, another 266 volumes were added to the library.<sup>52</sup>

Major sources for adding library books were bequests made by Wenham residents. In 1897, the library received its first substantial private bequest. Edwin D. Hawkins, of Stoneham, and a native of Wenham, by his will, bequeathed \$125 to the Wenham Public Library.<sup>5</sup> (NOTE: In 2010, this would be equivalent to about \$26,000.)

The Mary Woodbury Neilson Fund of \$3,000 was a bequest from the daughter of Isaac Woodbury, who formerly lived in Wenham.<sup>45</sup>

The Judson Dodge Fund, by the will of Elmer Dodge of Danvers, was left in memory of his father, Judson Dodge, who was the son of Adoniram Dodge, in whose shop was kept the district library, on Main Street.<sup>45</sup>

In 1894, the library established a delivery station for delivery of books in the east part of the town.<sup>5</sup> Addison Williams was in charge of distributing books. In 1896, the library established a similar station in West Wenham, at the Mapleville chapel, on the corner of Topsfield Rd. and Maple St.<sup>72</sup> In 1902, a station was established Wenham Neck, with Miss H. A. Wilkins distributing books, at the Baptist Church.<sup>9</sup>



Books were distributed to district distribution centers weekly. Photo courtesy Wenham Museum.

Distribution of books to the districts was quite brisk, as can be seen by an 1895 library report citing 364 books being borrowed from the East Branch.<sup>52</sup>

Starting in 1902, the branch library custodians began receiving an annual salary of \$10.<sup>9</sup> Branch locations came to an end in 1942.<sup>45</sup>

Books at each of these stations were supplied weekly in a large wood box. The manual training classes in the school made the boxes used to transport the books.<sup>45</sup>

The function of the public library was significantly broadened in 1895, when the Board of Trustees decided to begin collecting and preserving, for future reference, various documents related to the history of the town and the manner and customs of the people. Such material included newspaper accounts of town events and meetings, biographical information, historical references, and geographical notes of local interest.<sup>23</sup>

### **Many More Books**

Libraries, both public and private, became very popular in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With the demand for more books many book publishers brought the price of books down.

In the 1880s, most books were paperbacks and cost 5 to 15¢. This gave everyone the chance to read and own books. Most of the content of these paperbacks was illegally copied, without compensation to the original authors and publishers, from best-selling books being published in Europe. Unlike hardcover books, a problem with the paperbacks was that they quickly became worn and pages fell out.

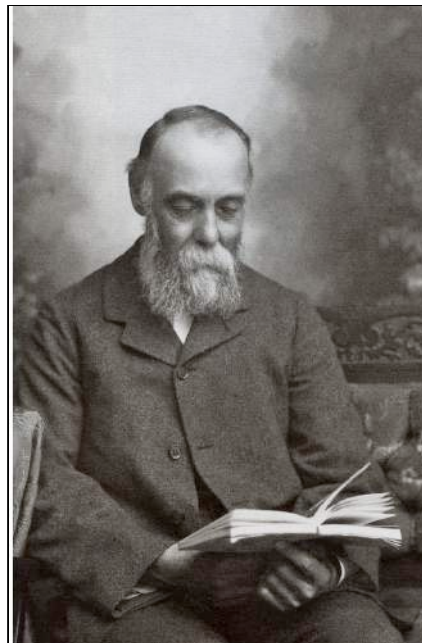
During this time, American book publishers shunned American authors, who they would have to pay, in favor of the free content taken from the European writers and publishers.

By the mid 1900s, book publishing had become highly commercialized. Companies such as McGraw-Hill, Pocket Books, and Bantam Books were major book publishers.

### **20<sup>th</sup> Century**

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century began, the Wenham Free Public Library had about 2,800 books. Annually, the library lent nearly 3,300 books. It was open alternate Saturday evenings and Wednesday afternoons.<sup>49</sup>

Benjamin Conant, the local photographer, and secretary of the Board of Trustees, was the librarian until his death in 1921.<sup>14</sup> In 1920, Conant was paid \$125 a year for being the librarian, the most he ever received.<sup>14</sup> His first year as librarian, he was paid \$37.50.



Benjamin Conant was librarian from 1897 to 1921.  
Photo courtesy Wenham Museum.

During his many years working out of the library, which was at the left-hand side, at the end of the first-floor corridor, in the town Hall, Conant made every effort to build up a library of worthwhile books, and to collect documents, notes and other material related to the history of the town.<sup>14</sup> With time, bookcase after bookcase was added until the entire available wall and floor space was nearly filled. Many books and pamphlets were stored in the librarian's house.<sup>9</sup>

In 1907, when the new schoolhouse was completed, the large room in the Town Hall occupied by the grammar school was left vacant. General alterations commenced, in October 1907, for remodeling the entire first floor of the town hall.<sup>9</sup>

The library was closed, and the books removed to the new quarters. All that winter, with no heat in the building (*a new furnace was being installed*), a group of volunteers worked with a cataloger, supplied by the State, preparing to publish a library catalogue, using the Dewey Decimal System.\* The Wenham Village Improvement Society provided both money and time to complete the renumbering of the books and the printing of a new catalogue.<sup>9</sup> A new card catalogue was assembled and new bookcases and furniture were added.<sup>45, 9</sup>

To pay part of the cost of printing, the library catalogue was sold for 25¢. The following year, the town voted to distribute the catalogues free, one to each patron of the library. In addition, a refund the 25¢ was given to those who had previously purchased copies: the total cost came to \$11.50.<sup>5</sup>

Several years later, 1911, with much greater use of the library, the first library assistant, Addie Alley, was hired.<sup>50</sup>

Book circulation continued to grow steadily following year until the United States entered World War 1, when circulation went down decidedly.<sup>51</sup>

### **Larger Library Call**

In 1900, the facilities of both the center school and the library needed more space. In February 1903, the Committee on Enlarged and Improved School and Library Accommodations recommended that the town build a new four-room school building, at or near the center of the town, and that the existing school room, in the town hall, be given to the Trustees of the Public Library.<sup>6</sup>

In the following years, discussions continued about building a school in the center of the town, and expanding the library space in the town hall. However, it was not until early 1907 that work began on building a new school, on the Perkins property off of Arbor Street. The Center School, on School Street, opened in the fall of 1907.

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\* Using the DDS, books are organized into 10 main classes, which are further subdivided into 10 divisions, and each division into 10 sections. Books are placed on the shelf in increasing numerical order of the decimal number. The original DDS has been greatly through 23 major revisions, the most recent in 2011.<sup>55</sup>

At the March 1907 Annual Town Meeting, it was voted to remodel the entire first floor of the town hall, at a cost not exceed \$2,500. <sup>9</sup> The library expanded into the former school room. More space, but still not enough.

Not only were many books being added. In addition, for many years following Conant's time as the librarian, the library continued to collect and preserve for future reference accounts of significant events of local interest, and also numerous items bearing upon the past or present history of the town. The librarians annually created scrap books.

When this practice stopped cannot be determined. There are only scrap-books relating to the final years of the Wenham library, in the archives of the Hamilton-Wenham library.

During its early years in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the library catered to the reading interests of adults. By 1910, there was a bookcase containing books of interest to children. Two years later, 1912, it was moved to a sunny side of the library. <sup>46</sup>

In 1915, the school system hired a trained instructor teach the children of the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades how to use the library for their studies. <sup>45</sup>

Following World War 1, an increased number of books written for children were made available. In 1920, the library began being opening at noon for convenience of children coming to school by bus. <sup>43</sup>

What may have been the library's first children's program began on Thursday afternoons during summer of 1921. Ruth Sherbourne, of Community Service, conducted story-hours for children under 12. <sup>43</sup> Two years later, in 1923, a children's corner was created in the library in the town hall. <sup>44</sup>

Subsequently, Helen (*Aylward*) Page conducted storytelling, which for many years. Being held at the library room in the town hall, only nearby children came. In order to make it possible for the children living at a distance to enjoy this privilege, the story hour was transferred to the center school in 1943 and ceased to be a library service. <sup>45</sup>

In 1922, the Wenham library had its first woman librarian, Mary Batchelder. In the summer of 1921, she attended a course, at Simmons, in library management. <sup>45</sup> In 1925, she was succeeded by her daughter Margaret, who would be the librarian until 1928. <sup>63</sup> After her withdrawal, there followed a period when there was no permanent trained librarian to coordinate the work. <sup>45</sup>

Mrs. Frank Burton, in 1928 was chosen to take charge of the library. She brought to the position the experience of a successful teacher and a desire to take advantage of all specialized library conferences to fit her for specialized library technique. <sup>45</sup>

A recurring comment annually made by the Library Trustees was the need to restock old and worn books.

In 1923, an on-going book-mending program began. The library hired an expert in book mending to instruct the librarian; however, it soon was realized that the librarian did not have the time for his much needed work. An assistant librarian, after being trained, was hired repair books one afternoon a week.<sup>44</sup>

In the summer of 1929, a Book Caravan visited the Wenham library. The Caravan toured New England selling books to replenish library stock. It was the idea of Mary Frank of the New York Public Library.<sup>43, 47</sup> the initiative, however, did not become practice.

At the start of the 1930s, interest in the library was very high. The library reported that half the population of Wenham were registered readers.<sup>26</sup> With the town population was 1,119.

It was not just books that people wanted to read. Photojournalism began to the vogue of readers. Life, Look, Saturday Evening Post. In 1932, a magazine rack was purchased to display current periodicals. Previously, the magazines were scattered on the reading table.<sup>48</sup>

In 1937, changes were made in the time the library was open. On Tuesdays, it was open from 3 to 4 P.M., for children and from 7 to 9 P.M. for adults; and Thursday and Saturday, from 3 to 5:30 P.M.<sup>64</sup>

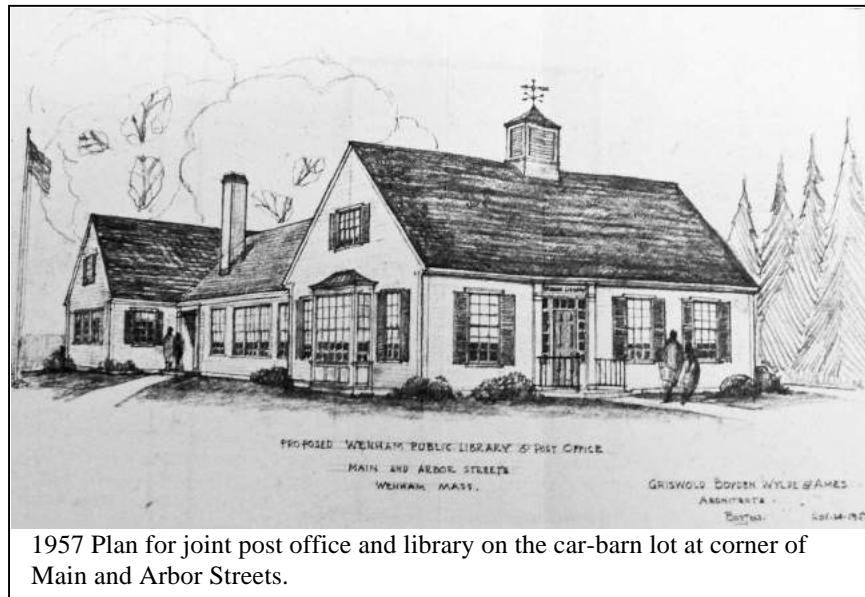
When the United States entered World War 2, there initially was an increase in book borrowing when families of people in the armed forces were eager to read books about the countries where American troops were serving. Following years, however, circulation significantly declined.<sup>45, 53</sup> Circulation of magazines spiked with interest in war in Europe.<sup>15</sup>

During World War 2, although the library was open Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from 2 to 5 pm, and Tuesday from 7 to 9 pm, fewer people were going there. Gasoline rationing kept many people from getting to the library.<sup>15</sup>

In 1942, the librarian suggested that a good book from the library might replace the old "night at the movies," which required gasoline and fuel for heating the theatres.<sup>57</sup>

In 1944, the library room, on election days, the library room was used for voting. Prior to then, voting was done on the second floor, an inconvenience for some people.<sup>54</sup>

Back in 1926, the town accepted, as a gift, from the Wenham Improvement Trust, a parcel of land at the corner of Main and Arbor streets, known as the car-barn lot. A condition of the gift was that reasonable sums of money be appropriated, from time to time, for the planting of trees and the general care of the land. Also, the land was to be held by the town and used as a public park until such time as circumstances justify its use as the location for a public library or other suitable public building, which were to be subject to the approval of the donors.<sup>28</sup>



1957 Plan for joint post office and library on the car-barn lot at corner of Main and Arbor Streets.

Over thirty years later, in 1957, the town considered building a combination library and post office, on the car-barn lot. The building envisioned was a colonial type structure that would harmonize with the surrounding buildings. The front of the building, facing Main Street, was to be the library. The library portion also was to have a memorial room, dedicated to the veterans of all wars. (*In 2011, the town decided to build a veterans monument on the site.*) The post office portion was to face onto a parking area. The total cost for the library and post office building was to be about \$103,000.<sup>18</sup>

The plan was rejected by voters at the 1957 Annual Town Meeting. Various factors contributed to the rejection of that plan. The book-packed library remained in the town hall.

Two years later, 1959, the Library Board of Trustees recommended an expansion of the library's existing space of 1,170 sq. ft., in the town hall, to 2,100 sq. ft., in 1960. The Board went on to propose that the library space become, in 1980, 4,200 sq. ft.<sup>34</sup> The Board did not suggest where this space might be found.

During 1958, the State Bookmobile began making regular stops in Wenham every two weeks. It first went to the library to bring and collect books. Then, it made stops at Eaton and Topsfield roads. Money for the service



In 1958 State Bookmobile began coming to Wenham every two weeks.  
Photo Univ. Massachusetts Library

came from the Federal government. But, these funds stopped in 1961.<sup>56</sup>

Besides having the opportunity to borrow recently published books not available at the local library, people could ask for a book to be delivered when the bookmobile next returned. Bookmobiles became popular in the U. S. in the 1950s. But by the late 1980s, their popularity began to fade.

There was growing concern about how long bookmobile service could continue. The Federal funds would stop in 1961, and it was hoped that the State would step in with funds, as it had done in other areas.<sup>56</sup>

In 1969, bookmobile service began to be supplied the Eastern Regional System. The Topsfield stop was halted.<sup>59</sup>

The Wenham service stopped in 1986.

In 1956, the Massachusetts Division of Library Extension recommended that the library be open more hours. In 1957, the Wenham library began being open on Saturdays during the school year, from 10 am to 5 pm.<sup>62</sup>

More space was not found for the library to increase its book supply, but in 1961 more money became available. A new State law on aid to public libraries resulted in the State paying 25¢ per head of population. With Wenham's population of 2,798, the town library received \$699.50 from the State.<sup>35</sup>

In 1967, Wenham stopped taking the State library money. The State, in 1966, began requiring that libraries employ a college-trained librarian, to receive library funding. At the time, Wenham's librarian was not college trained.

The Chairman of the Library Trustees said that the salary of a college-trained librarian would be at least \$7,000, for a 30-hour-week, and the current librarian received \$3,500. Thus to receive about \$700 from the State, the town would have to spend \$3,500 more for a college-trained librarian. The Chairman went on to say that the current librarian was very competent.<sup>61</sup>

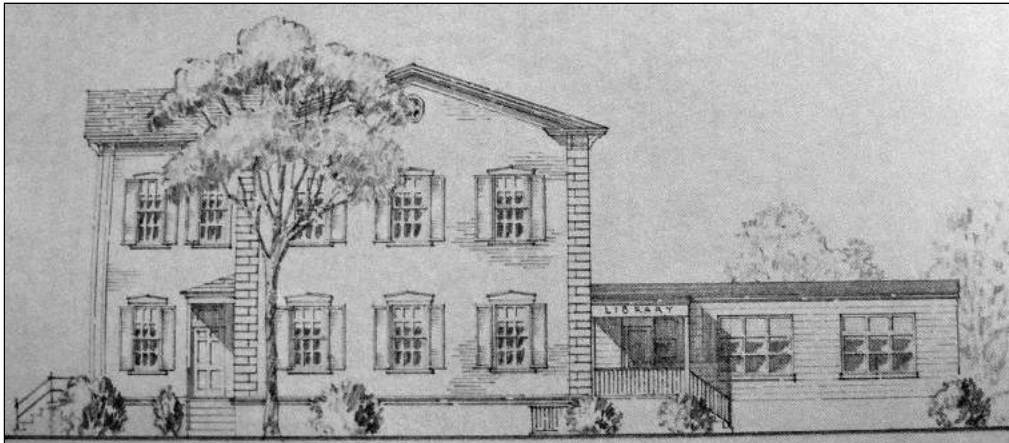
In 1964, Eldred was certified, by the State, as a professional librarian.<sup>60</sup>

Ensuing years saw more and more people calling for the library to be removed from the town hall. Many wanted a restructuring of the first floor to provide adequate office space for town employees. Many others wanted more library space. Added to this was the need for more space for the police and fire departments.

In 1961, the Wenham Library Trustees, in their annual report, said "Either books or people must go – there is no longer room for both." The library had more than 17,000 volumes packed into less than 1,200 sq ft of floor space.<sup>35</sup>

### **Town Hall Library Addition**

Finally, at the March 1962 Annual Town Meeting, the three factions agreed upon a single Package Program Committee to address the needs of more space for the fire, police, library and town hall. The committee came up with a \$170,000 "Package Building Plan."<sup>21</sup>



1962 proposed ell at back of town hall would add 2,000 sq. ft. of library space.

For its part of the Package, the Library Board of Trustees recommended the building of an addition behind town hall to provide 2,000 sq. ft. of space for the library and the area below also would be for use by the library.<sup>36</sup>

The following year, at a Special Town Meeting, held Jul. 17, 1963, voters approved the construction of a building containing fire, police and civil defense facilities, on the north corner of Main St. and Friend Ct.. In addition, voters approved the construction of an ell at the back of the town hall, into which the library would be moved.

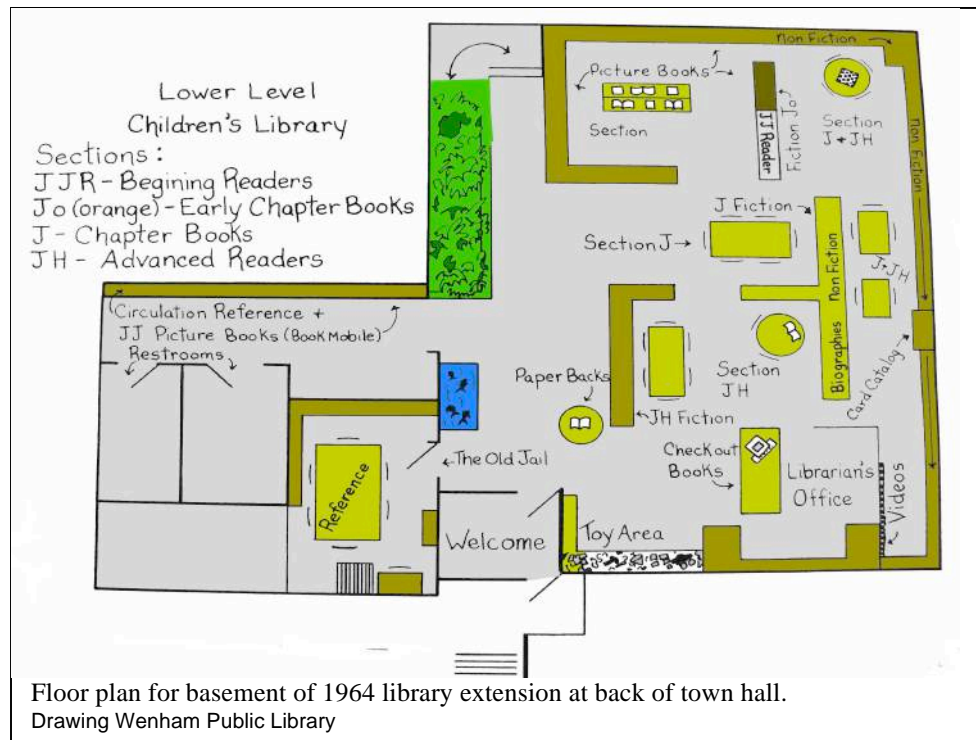
In conjunction with the building of the two structures, voters approved the creation of an off-street parking area behind the town hall, and remodeling and rehabilitating the existing library, town offices and other facilities, in the town hall.<sup>11</sup>



In 1964, a library extension was added to back of town hall. The addition provided more library space, but it did not enhance the appearance of the town hall.

Photo J. Hauck





The total amount for making these additions and improvements was about \$45,000.<sup>11</sup>

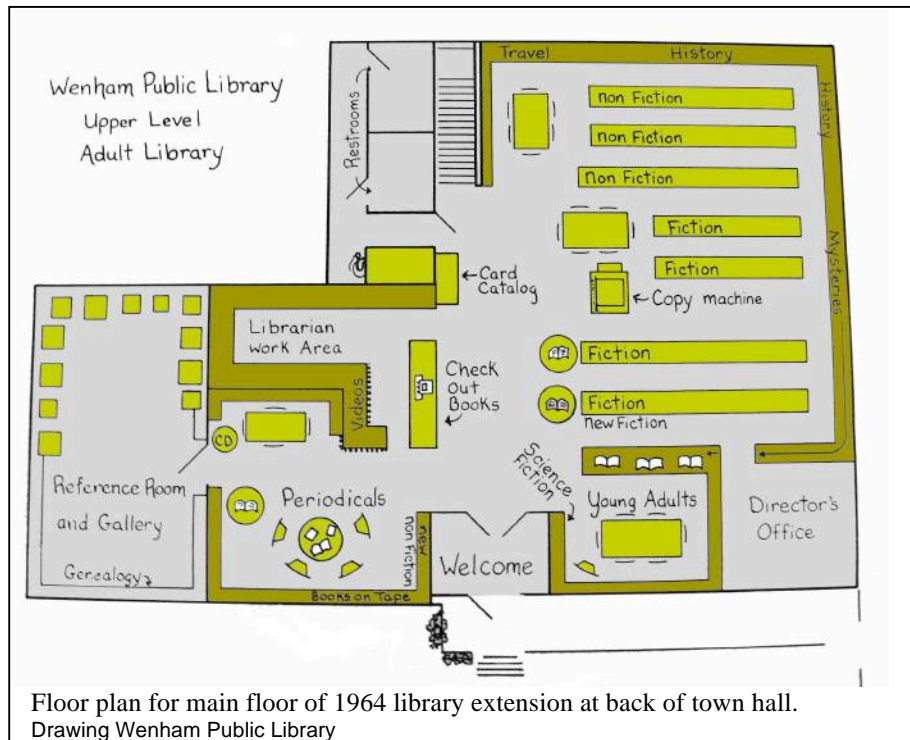
The library addition was completed in late 1963. The adult library was on the first floor and the children's library was on the south side of the first floor of the town hall.

During construction, in cold months, the library was closed because no heat was in the building. Several thousand reference books were transferred to the Junior High School library.<sup>11</sup>

More than 15,000 volumes were moved to the new library.<sup>11</sup> Apparently, about 2,000 volumes were discarded from the number reported for 1961 (see pg. 15)

In 1964, in its first full-year of operations, the town hall library was open 253 days. Nearly 33,000 volumes were circulated. 15,000 books were cleaned and put in order during January and February, prior to the TH library opening in March.<sup>60</sup>

While the addition provided more library space, it did not enhance the appearance of the town hall. It was a rectangular box built of cinder blocks. One of the library workers recalls, "We hated the cinder block addition that was approved. It never worked well as a library. The reason for choosing that design, was the MONEY."



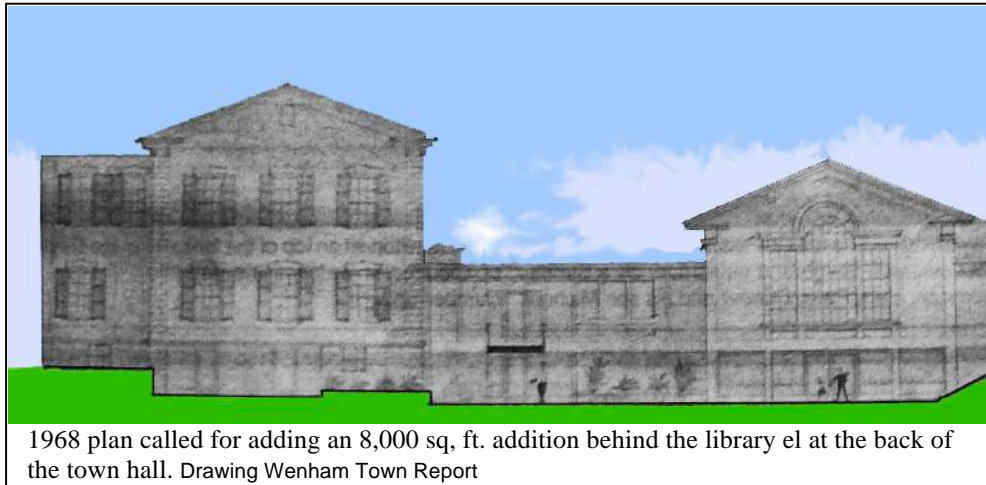
The library hours again were increased. It was open Monday through Thursday, 2 to 5 PM, and 7 to 9 PM; Friday, 2 to 5 PM; and on Saturday from 10 AM to 5 PM.

Just four years after the library expansion, 1968, the number of volumes was up to nearly 19,000, and 31,000 volumes were circulated that year. An expansion plan was developed for adding 8,000 sq. ft. at the back of the 1964 library addition.

The library committee wanted more space for books storage and to provide more services associated with library functions. The library recommended the addition be capable of storing at least 60,000 volumes.<sup>19</sup> One of the major reasons for expansion was to provide more space for a children's section in the ell that was opened in 1964.

Town government also said that it needed more space and could use the space still occupied by the library, in the town hall.

One of the architectural features of the proposed library annex - its Palladian windows – drew a lot of controversy. Members of Wenham's Historic Commission said that the large Palladian window, two side pilasters and semicircular arch over them did not fit into the overall architectural scheme of the area. They were significantly different in design from the town hall's windows *This objection was not raised, when the cinder-block ell was added behind the town hall.*)



1968 plan called for adding an 8,000 sq. ft. addition behind the library el at the back of the town hall. Drawing Wenham Town Report

The Library Committee felt the large windows were essential to the overall design, and that they would allow a good amount of natural light into the building.<sup>19</sup>

Another debated-aspect of the construction was that the drive-around circle, in front of the town hall, would have been closed. An access road was to be made behind the building and intersecting Friend Court. In addition, the new structure would have substantially reduced parking space behind the town hall.<sup>19</sup>

Voters did not accept the library expansion project.

Well, if space could not be allocated behind the town hall, how about finding space below the town hall.

In early 1975, the Library Trustees developed a plan to convert the basement of the library addition, for use as a children's library, and to reconfigure the existing children's library in the town hall to office space. At the May town meeting, voters approved the plan.<sup>10</sup>

The renovation commenced in December. Students of the North Shore Regional Vocational School, under the supervision of Michael Anthony, Superintendent, and licensed tradesmen, provided much of the labor.<sup>10</sup> The old jail cell was refurbished in 1976 as part of the bicentennial year celebration. As part of the renovation project, the old jail cell, in the basement of the town hall, was converted into a study room.

A factor not considered in the basement renovation was that the town hall was built on the site of a pond and stream which had been on the property before the town hall was built in 1854. In years to come, the library basement would flood during rainy periods, especially in the spring. Much to everyone's relief, the long-standing leak problem that plagued the library basement was alleviated by some repairs, but not until 1993.

Library space was not keeping up with increases in library use and the growing number of books.

Priscilla , Eldridge, Head Librarian, in the 1981 Report of the Wenham Public Library, said, since 1966, “while the (*Wenham*) population has grown by 2%, the library registration has grown by 80%, circulation by 63% and the total volumes by 40%.”

In 1982, Cynthia McCue became the 17th Wenham library director. Prior to coming to the library, Cynthia McCue was a volunteer librarian at the Bes-sie Buker School. In 1975, a library position at the Wenham public library opened and she was hired part time and began working in both the children's and adult library.<sup>20</sup>

Much-needed help in money to help the library grow came in 1980, when Friends of Wenham Library was started by Leah Kelly and a small committee. The Friends raised much-needed funds through book fairs and an annual auction.

In 1983, a significant improvement began at the Wenham library. With the approval of the Town Meeting, in May, and the receipt of a state-funded grant, plans were formulated to begin computerization of the library's records and circulation system.

Much-needed help in money to help the library programs came in 1980, when Friends of Wenham Library was started by Leah Kelly and a small committee. The Friends raised much-needed funds through book fairs and an annual auction, which funded programs for children and adults programs, museum passes, and purchases of items outside the Town allotted budget.

A significant change that occurred in 1985 was the move to computerize all the information that previously was kept on catalog cards. The switch to a computer took two years to complete, with the assistance of both staff and volunteers. This took many hours of work. At the end of 1987, the computerized network was completed.

Computerization was much needed. In the 1983 Report of the Wenham Public Library, it was stated that, “A record number of items circulated during the year, an increase of 22% over the previous year. Approximately 12,000 books were added to the library's 28,000 volume collection.”<sup>70</sup>

Computerization began of all the information that previously was kept on file cards. The switch to a computer took two years to complete, with the assistance of both staff and volunteers.<sup>20, 65</sup>

During this time, the library became affiliated with the Merrimac Valley Li-brary Consortium, a group of 26 libraries that shared materials and infor-mation. By joining with the consortium, the Wenham Library had access to a database containing, at the time, over 470,000 titles, most of which were available to the Wenham's library through the inter-library loan program.<sup>27</sup>



Robert Parker. The North Shore's best-selling mystery writer, spoke at the Wenham library on Apr. 29, 1985.

In the 1987 Report of the Wenham Public Library, it was stated that, "Retrospective data entry of the library's holdings into the Merrimac Valley Library Consortium's computerized network was substantially completed by the end of the year. Over 36,000 records have been entered into the MVLC data base, which now totals over 470,000 titles, most of which are available to library patrons through the inter-library loan program."<sup>67</sup>

Another significant change that began in the 1980s was that the library no longer was just a source for books and periodicals. The library became a source for video tapes, books on tapes, and even games.

In 1989, a plan to significantly increase the size of the library was presented at a town meeting. It was defeated.

During the 1980s, proposals to regionalize Hamilton and Wenham libraries came up periodically. Library Director, McCue, was opposed to this idea, saying, "The library reflects the character of the town and keeping separate libraries is one of the ways to preserve Wenham's character."

A well-known author came to Wenham to speak at a Friend's luncheon. Robert Parker. The North Shore's best-selling mystery writer spoke on Apr. 29, 1985. An author of 67 novels, Parker's most famous works were about the private detective Spenser. ABC television network developed the television series Spenser for Hire, based on the character. He had included the Wenham Public Library in one of his books.

An author of 67 novels, Parker's most famous works were about the private detective Spenser. ABC television network developed the television series Spenser for Hire, based on the character.

Much to everyone's relief, the long-standing leak problem that plagued the library basement was repaired, in 1987.<sup>27</sup>

In 1987, responding to many requests over several years for additional hours, the library added 7 hours per week to its public schedule, bringing the total working hours to 40 hours per week, during the winter season. In October, the library began opening all-day Tuesday and Thursday, from 9 to 5. The complete schedule changed to: Mon. 2-5, 7-9; Tue. 9-5; Wed. 2-5 & 7-9; Thur. 9-5; Fri. 2-5; and Sat. 10-5."<sup>67</sup>

The issue of more library space arose once again in 1988. In the Report of the Wenham Public Library, it was stated that, "Considerable effort was expended in developing plans to expand the library, following a long-range plan previously adopted. After available sites were reviewed by the Board of Library Trustees, the (*then*) building consultant from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, and the Director, it was decided that the best option was to expand at the present location.

"The town voted funds for schematic drawings at the May Town Meeting and the architect Robert Farley of Danvers was hired to do that work. At a Special Town Meeting in December, the voters turned down the request for construction funds."<sup>68</sup>

Periodically, there was some support, during the 1980s, to regionalize Hamilton and Wenham libraries. Perhaps by combining the libraries more space might become possible.

However, Library Director, McCue, was opposed to this idea, saying, "The library reflects the character of the town and keeping separate libraries is one of the ways to preserve Wenham's character."<sup>20</sup>

In 1985, the Wenham Library celebrated its 135<sup>th</sup> birthday. While no longer residing in the town hall, the library, then in an annex to the town hall, was in desperate need for book space.

In the 1990, more space was found for the library, in the town hall. The former coal bin in the basement was converted into a periodical room. It was a heated, dry, and well-lighted room for the storage of back issues of the 90 magazine titles in the library's collection."<sup>69</sup>

Computerization of the library took another large step in 1991. Plans began to provide direct patron access to the data base via terminals with inquiry (*search*) functions.<sup>58</sup>

The following year, 1992, 99% of Wenham's books were entered into the data base, providing its share of unique titles among over 500,000 titles listed, and thus becomes available for borrowing by other residents of the state. Whereas Wenham loaned out about one book a month 8 years ago to other libraries, it now loans about 75 in the same time period.<sup>71</sup>

In June of 1993, Cynthia McCue retired.<sup>65</sup>

Two months later, in August 1993, Sylva Rego, formerly head of the West Branch Library in Peabody, replaced McCue as the Wenham Library Director. She was a native of Brazil, and she had 20 years of library experience.

However, Rego left about a year later.

In March of 1994, residents from both towns formed a committee to investigate how a joint library could be formed. In May of 1995, each town voted the appropriate funds to research the feasibility of a joint library.



In 1964, a library extension was added to back of town hall. Photo Bing Maps

That year, the library budget was \$115,000, which the librarian, Sylva Rego, described as “bare bones” and would likely result in cutting back of hours that the library was open.

The joint-library committee’s recommended building a new library. Both towns voted in favor of the recommendation. The site chosen for the library was on the corner of Linden and Union streets, in Hamilton. Previously, Hamilton’s high school had been on this site.

In June 1994, Doris Gallant became the Wenham Library Director; she had been Assistant Library Director, since 1990.

Gallant, in 1977 received a Masters in Library Science at Salem State College. Previously she was a high school teacher. In 1978, she began volunteering to teach library skills at the Bessie Buker School. In 1981, she started working, part time, in the children’s and adult room. From 1985 through 1987, she helped in entering items into the computer database, in addition to assisting programs for children and young adults.

In her first Report of the Library Director, Gallant said the estimated 1994 attendance at the Wenham Library was over 36,000 people.<sup>41</sup>

In the 1998 Wenham Public Library Report, Doris Gallant stated, “The collection grew to 49,449 items, holdings are up 4%, circulation up 175 and non-resident circulation is up 16% (includes Hamilton). ... The number of Wenham patrons registered is 4,200.

Almost immediately, she initiated preparations for the merger of the Hamilton and Wenham libraries.

In August 2001, when the Wenham Library was integrated into the Hamilton Wenham Public Library, Gallant stepped down as the Library Director.

James McShane became the Director of the Hamilton Wenham Public Library, in July 2001. He guided the two libraries through their final months, before opening the new building in November 2001.

The Wenham library closed Nov. 10, 2001. It was the last of six different library locations, the first having been at Adoniram Dodge's wheelwright shop, on Main Street.<sup>66</sup>

At the close, the Wenham library had about 51,000 publications. During the final year, over 67,000 books and other materials were circulated and, on average, about 1,500 people per week visited the library.<sup>42</sup>

The Hamilton-Wenham Library opened on Dec. 17, 2001. James McShane was the first library director.<sup>66</sup>

In 2006, reconstruction of the Wenham town hall began, with the complete removal of the interior of the building, and also the removal of the cinder-block library addition. In its place, a 2-story ell was built. The exterior is in complete harmony with the design of the town hall. The ell is the primary entrance to the town hall.

The only vestige of the previous Wenham libraries is the director's desk that is in the hallway of the town hall. It sits below a memorial quilt that is across from the Finance Department office.

*Updated 06-01-2014*





Library annex, 2001.  
Photo Wenham Public Library



Basement study room, once was a jail cell. Photo Wenham Public Library



Computer station, 2001.  
Photo Wenham Public Library

## Final Pictures of the Wenham Public Library



Book stacks, 2001.  
Photo Wenham Public Library



Librarian's desk, in town hall, was in original library room.  
Photo J. Hauck, 2012

## Wenham Librarians

Years	Name	Library Location
1840-1850	Adoniram Dodge	Adoniram Dodge wheel-wright shop
1850-1857	Amos Patch	Amos Gould house
1857-1860	Woodbury Conant	Conant house
1860-1868	Joseph Cook	Cook house
1869-187?	George Howe	Town Hall
1873-188?	Jerry Choate, Jr.	Town Hall
1883-1885	Henry Cooke	Town Hall
1885-1888	Abbott Johnson	Town Hall
1888-1893	None	Town Hall
1893-1897	Henry Moulton	Town Hall

1897-1921	Benjamin Conant	Town Hall
1922-1926	Mary Batchelder	Town Hall
1926-1928	Margaret Batchelder	Town Hall
1928	3 Asst. librarians	Town Hall
1928-1945	Gertrude Burton	Town Hall
1945-1967	Hazel Joiner Williams	Town Hall & Annex
1967-1982	Priscilla Eldred	Town Hall Annex
1982-1993	Cynthia McCue	Town Hall Annex
1993-1994	Sylva Rego	Town Hall Annex
1994-2001	Doris Gallant	Town Hall Annex
2001	James McShane	Town Hall Annex

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**Special thanks**, for their assistance in supplying information, goes to: Doris Gallant, Cynthia McCue, and Luci Lynch.