

The Hyde Park Library has a lengthy history with moments of triumph...and some bumps along the way.

In 1895, James Roosevelt—in his capacity as trustee of HP Union Free School-- donated 75 books. These were placed in the basement room of the school.

James, the father of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, died just a few years thereafter. His wife, Sara, honored her husband;s love of books and , would go on to fund the library--at its various locations--until her own death in 1941.

Miss Ida Dumont or “Miss Ida” as she was known to generations of schoolchildren, a teacher at the free School, served as librarian during this period.

By 1900, the library boasted over 700 volumes. At that time, it moved to St. James Chapel. Shelves were installed in what for years afterward would be known as the Reading Room. Donated materials included periodicals and newspapers from Mrs. Frederick Vanderbilt.

Books were also donated by Mrs Roosevelt and Mrs. Vanderbilt at this time. The primary donors of actual books, however, were Colonel and Mrs, Archibald. Rogers who reportedly sent books “by the clothes-basketful.”

An interesting anecdote from the era has Mrs Rogers riding horseback to the home convince Rector Amos Ashton to plead the case that one modern novel he objected to “had its good points.” She lost the argument and the book was burned.

In 1915, the collection consisted of 702 books and would double again over the course of the next ten years.

In 1920 Mrs. Vanderbilt, Mrs. Rogers, and Mrs. Roosevelt donated additional books and periodicals. Mrs. Harriet Bradley served as librarian--and would go on to hold that post for 25 yrs. Increasingly contributions the library would receive from the civic group, the

Community Club. It was now open Monday and Friday evenings and Wednesday afternoons.

Mrs Roosevelt purchased the lot where the current library now stands in March 1926. Some maintain that it was then rector Edward Parsons Newton who urged her to memorialize her husband with a library rather than with an elaborate mausoleum on the estate. If so, it's a somewhat sad twist of fate that Dr. Newton never lived to see the completion of the building. He died in 1926

Construction of the "James Roosevelt Memorial Library" was completed in August of 1927, reportedly at a cost \$45,000. The Dutch stone structure was suggested by Franklin D. Roosevelt to the architect. It was the first public fieldstone structure in Hyde Park.

The building opened on Friday, August 5, 1927 with virtually no fanfare. Borrowers simply went there instead of to the Reading Room. By October of that year, over 550 books were being loaned per month. Funding came from individual donations, the Community Club, dues and the "rental" of new fiction.

Mrs. Roosevelt had built the library as a private institution, but did offer it to town even at this point. They refused, saying it would only serve the village. She considered an endowment plan, which her son Franklin advised against on the grounds that it would be impractical.

In 1929 the James Roosevelt Library Association was formed--with dues amounting to \$1.00 per year. A board of trustees was appointed. Most trustees were appointed by Mrs. Roosevelt, although some were elected by members. Membership never exceeded 100 townspeople. The Association sponsored numerous community activities. Mrs Roosevelt met basic expenses -- except for the actual book purchases. Circulation was limited to Association members.

The Association sponsored such events as carol sings, public book reviews, exhibits, weaving classes and summer children's hours. Mrs. Roosevelt is recorded as having made a small donation so that any child in the community (up to grade 8) could use the library in

July and August. Story hours were also implemented. All of this was reflective of her desire to make the library a true community center.

In 1941, Sara Roosevelt died. President Franklin Roosevelt assumed responsibility operating expenses, often signing off on bills from his White House office. The board, however, assumed responsibility for the librarian's salary.

President Roosevelt's own death in 1945 meant the end of Roosevelt family support. Savings account from memberships had reached \$3,500 but rapidly dwindled to about a third of that. The executor of Roosevelt estate decreed that the library must be sold.

In 1946, the long-serving Mrs. Bradley retired.

In 1947, the Hyde Park Town Board purchased the library from Roosevelt Estate at a cost of \$4,500. The purchase was actually financed as part of a bequest provided by the late Dr. J. Sterling Bird. The doctor had donated \$7,000 for "purpose of establishing and providing a public library," mainly because he had been impressed with the one that he had known (i.e. the earlier library housed at St James Chapel).

The terms of Doctor Bird's will were somewhat unusual. Dr. Bird died in 1900. He bequeathed money to his son and stipulated that after his son's own death, one half of the principle should be turned over to the town to establish a library. Bird's son died in '44. The town's share was \$7,000—more than enough to purchase the library building.

At this time, the Hyde Park Town Board served as trustees of the library's funds. A Hyde Park Free Library Association was formed as (with Mrs. George Palmer as president) and that association became incorporated. Mrs. Olive Drabble, whom many Hyde Park residents still remember, was appointed librarian.

The HPFL Association sought advice from regional and state librarians. The remaining money from the Bird estate was used to run the library. The Hyde Park Free Library was established as such and became known to the general public by that name. As a "free library" (as opposed to the "subscription library" it had been, it was opened to all town residents at no charge.

Now funded in part by state and town contributions, library hours were extended, new books added to the collection, and necessary repairs made. An initial charter applied for and awarded by New York State--which meant some state aid would now be available. The State Library in Albany also sent staff to work on reorganization of the Hyde Park Free Library materials and to establish a library catalog.

In February of 1948, the Association assumed full responsibility for the Library. Increased emphasis was placed on Children's services. Additional juvenile books were made available and outdated reference materials replaced. The Margaret L. Finch Memorial Children's Corner was established (named in memory of one of the library's first librarians).

Early years saw the use of library basement rooms as meeting places for the Brownies and the Lions Club. The main floor—when closed for business--was also used for organizational meetings. The Lions Club and The Yacht Club gave donations toward building and grounds maintenance and general operations. Other civic groups also contributed. The Town of Hyde Park included a line in its budget for the purchase of books.

In 1950, the Library rented space to the Hyde Park Central School District, providing extra classroom space for a burgeoning population. These rental fees helped the Library meet increased costs. The \$75 monthly classroom rental for ten months of the year proved to be an essential component of the Library's budget. Association president Mrs Ray Todd maintained that the \$750 per year had kept the Library open in the early years.

By 1951, circulation had more than doubled since the 1948 opening of the Hyde Park Free Library. The Lions Club and the local American Legion ran a membership drive, which netted \$1,000 of the \$2500 needed to keep the Library afloat. The Lions also ran other fundraisers, such as paper drives. The Hyde Park Players, an amateur theatrical group, presented benefit performances for the Library. Volunteers with certain skills served to help the Library's ends meet, including such efforts as fence repair by Doug MacPhail.

In 1952, the building celebrated its 25th anniversary. Columnist Helen Myers of *The Poughkeepsie New Yorker* noted that there were 248 members, 840 borrowers and 800 books loaned. The Lions Club was listed as having office space in the basement, where a “Teen Age Club” also met in the largest basement room (where Myers notes, they used as a “hangout, a place to play games, dance to Victrola records or just talk”).

In 1953, the Town allocated \$1,300 for operations. Prior to that time had only offered book support (\$100 per year—which was matched by State and Hyde Park Library Association itself).

The decade saw considerable growth and by 1959, a new children's room opened in honor of Dr Bird. Mrs. Walter Cartwright became librarian. The number of books reached over 10,000. Average monthly circulation was 3,000. The Hyde Park Free Library became a chartered member of the Mid-Hudson Library System at this time.

By the late 1970s, the Library had some 15,000 volumes, and the need for some expansion seemed clear. Board members and other volunteers organized extensive fund raising campaigns that included such events as CIA dinners and wine and cheese get-togethers helped the Library reach its fundraising goals.

Ground was broken in 1980 and the construction of the what became known as the “Library Addition” was opened in May of 1981. Town support for the expansion had been considerable, as the expansion would double the floor space, provide the community with a new children’s room and more than double the size of the stack area for adult level books.

In the 1990s, a number of libraries in the Mid-Hudson region began to explore the option of establishing Special Legislative Library Districts as a means to guarantee secure, reliable funding. The Hyde Park Free Library saw the advantages presenting their annual budgets directly to the voters for approval. The Board worked closely with the Staatsburg Library to craft legislation that would create Special Legislative Districts for both of the Town of Hyde Park’s libraries and better secure their future viability.

On September 13, 2001, the voters of both Hyde Park and Staatsburg approved the formation of two new library districts within the town's borders. A provisional charter for the Hyde Park Library District was issued shortly thereafter, with an absolute charter issued in 2007.

Plans for growth and development were already underway when, in 2002, the Library became the recipient of a substantial bequest from the estate of longtime library supporter S. June Keyes. Among other improvements, the monies from this bequest enabled the Library to purchase the adjacent building at 4 Main Street, which had only just come on the market. This 1835 structure, formerly a private home, would—with extensive renovation—eventually come to house our main programming area, an art gallery and administrative offices.

The Library would soon become well-known for its extensive programming, with several adult level book clubs meeting in the S. June Keyes Annex and many music events and film screenings being held there as well. We also formed the Hyde Park Library Writers group, hosted the Great Decisions Discussion Group and a Hyde Park Library Knitting Circle as well. The Annex also provided our Board and our Friends of the Hyde Park Library group with meeting space as well as becoming the “home” for our well-known and much-loved Hyde Park Library Craft Guild, whose annual quilt auction has become a tradition at the library—and a successful annual fundraiser as well.

The Library celebrated its 40th Anniversary in 2017, with various events held throughout the year, culminating in November of that year with a celebratory dinner for our supporters at the Wallace Center at the Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site. Given the Hyde Park Library's linkage to the Roosevelt family, it seemed especially fitting to celebrate our 90th anniversary there.

Currently, the Library continues to develop and grow. The Library has weathered the worst of 2020 and is looking forward to considerable growth in 2021 and beyond. Improvements to the Children's Room have been realized, and we are looking forward to extensive renovations to the adult area in the fall of 2021.

The Board is also moving ahead with plans to improve accessibility with the installation of an elevator in the main building within the next two years. Successful completion of this project will go a long way in meeting the demands of the Americans With Disabilities Act and meeting the needs of so many in our community.

The Hyde Park Library Board and Administration recognize the importance of being as innovative and as responsive to community needs as possible in this ever-changing environment. Our community's strong sense of history and the pride we take in our own Library history provide us with a strong foundation to build upon as we look toward the challenges of the future.

2002—Bequest from the estate of library supporter S. June Keyes enables Liby bd to purchase adjacent building. Bought from former town supervisor Thom Spence, this 1835 home would become our programming room and office building.

2007 – Final charter to District Library

Known for our extensive programming, concerts, lectures, film series, our book clubs are among the largest and most varied in the system.

37,.000 holdings. per yr. Circ. Consistently in top 20 circ. 60,000.

Oral history project.