



## Gilford Public Library: A Portrait of the Town

2009

Written by: Carol Lee Anderson

“Your library is your portrait.” If the words of Holbrook Jackson are correct, then the Gilford Public Library paints a beautiful and intelligent portrait of the town. As the nation celebrates National Library Week from April 12<sup>th</sup> through the 18<sup>th</sup>, Gilford has good reason to join in this celebration as it enjoys its new and magnificent library.

While other New Hampshire towns struggle to improve their libraries or fight for a year-round library, Gilford’s same struggle has produced a library that is the envy of many a town.



*This photo from the 1970s shows just a few of the countless dedicated individuals who worked to ensure Gilford’s public library was one of the area’s best. Pictured here are, from left to right: Ruth Pratt, head librarian, Mary Carter, assistant librarian, Laura Taylor, and Horatio “JoJo” Tower, trustee.*

A close look at the history of the town’s library shows it overcoming many hurdles, but through it all the people’s understanding of the benefits of a free, public library has remained strong along each bump in the road. Remaining focused on those benefits has helped those who have been involved in the improvement of the library.

In the year 1893, a legislative act caused Gilford to lose its public library, the library located in Laconia. Townspeople promptly took action at the next annual meeting and appropriated \$25 for the establishment of a free public library within the

town. It was not until November 1894, when an additional \$25 dollars was appropriated, along with \$50 and 100 books donated by the State of New Hampshire, that Gilford officially opened its first public library.

From that day on, the town library experienced a tremendous and continual growth that has often been punctuated by town votes refusing to back the funding necessary for expansion. Beginning in one room in the Deacon Hunter house on Belknap Mountain Road, the library was moved to the town hall in 1897 with another move to larger quarters within that facility in 1907.

From 1907 through 1920, residents again recognized and debated the need for an independent library building and struggled with the “how and when” of accomplishing the goal of building a new library. They kept focused on the understanding of the fact that a library is a tremendous educational benefit for its townspeople.

Finally getting through the red tape of funding, and on land donated to the town by the Reverend and Mrs. W. F. Harding, excavation began for the new library building on October 14, 1924.



Even with a brand new library now located on the corner of Belknap Mountain Road and Cherry Valley Road, growth continued. In response to public demand and increasing usage of the facility, the addition of a new wing was proposed in February 1977 with voters then rejecting the



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project. Again the desire to offer the very best library won out, and after finding creative ways to fund the project, work began on the addition on November 5, 1983.

After expanding with the new wing, changes continued within the confines of the library. New bookshelves were constructed; display cases were added. The library worked in cooperation with other libraries in the area as well as the state library in Concord in order to expand the spectrum of books made available to residents.

Mothers during the 1970s requested a program appropriate for young children and were welcomed to a new event called, "Tales for Tots", the brainchild of then Assistant Librarian, Mary Carter, and Athaline DeHart. Wanting to offer the benefits of a library to even more children, Ruth Pratt, head librarian during those years, worked side-by-side with Nancy Campbell to organize a library at Gilford Elementary School.

It was Diane Mitton, becoming the town's librarian in March 1985, who re-organized and re-energized the then-defunct Friends of the Gilford Public Library. Mitton wisely realized the importance of the library having a group in place to examine its own needs and the changing role of the library within the community. With Mary Carter as secretary, the Friends started its second life during the summer of 1995 and has remained strong ever since.

Like other New Hampshire towns, Gilford experienced an enormous increase in its population through the 90's. The town library found itself again struggling to accommodate the demands of the increase in the number of residents; the extremely limited parking also being a perennial problem. Residents knew that growth of the library was inevitable, and even with town funding being challenged by voters, Gilford still found a way to build its new library.

After an astounding \$3 million donation was made by Dick and Betty Persons for the construction of a new library, Director Katherine Dormody, along with town residents, opened the doors to its beautiful new public library on August 18, 2008.



Dormody, with her warm and friendly staff, has equipped the library with books and modern-day needs such as computers and offers informative programs. Betty Tidd, assistant librarian, works with the many library volunteers who offer to help the library run smoothly. These volunteers donated an amazing 385 hours of their time during the month of February; that number excludes all the volunteer hours donated by the Trustees and Friends of the library.

Remembering the continual struggle for improvement the library has had throughout its history, the newest facility does indeed paint a portrait of an intelligent town, but also paints a picture of the tremendous dedication of the numerous individuals who were determined to offer the town a vehicle for information, information that helps create an educated public.

Gilford's Thompson-Ames Historical Society welcomes stories of local history. To contact the Society, e-mail them at:  
[www.thomames@worldpath.net](mailto:www.thomames@worldpath.net)