

Key accomplishments and activities of the Webster library

In the mid-1850s there was an interest in creating a lending library. Initially private clubs and associations filled this need, but it soon became apparent that these private groups did not serve the needs of the entire Town, and in 1889 the vote at a Town meeting established funds for a free public library. Once again citizens of the Town stepped forward, in 1918 Augusta Corbin donated funds for the purpose of the building of a free public library and established a trust for the maintenance of the library and the support of programs for the library. After years of service, the Corbin library had significantly deteriorated and no longer met the needs of the Town and in 2018 the old Corbin library was replaced by the Gladys E. Kelly Public Library.

1852 The earliest efforts to form a library came from several residents who started The Franklin Club, The private debating society included members: Dr. F. D. Brown, William Hetherington, and Edward Rogers. Town residents formed the Young People's Library Association, the nucleus for the Webster library Association.

1866 A group of citizens formed the Webster Library Association, the focus being on debates and literary exercises. Members chose Dr. F.D. Brown as chairman and J. A. Dresser as secretary. The first question for debate was "Ought the President Be Impeached?" The Webster Library Association started with three hundred books. The association enforced the following rules: membership dues of two dollars allowed the member one vote in the management of the library and the right to take out books for one year; a payment of twenty-five dollars allowed the member lifetime membership, thirteen votes in the management of the library and the right to take out books for their lifetime. Benefactors (including Chester C. Corbin) who made significant contributions to the library were allowed lifetime benefits. The Association also raised money through lectures and entertainment programs.

1876 The Webster Library Association met at the library rooms on High Street. By 1876, the library catalogued 1,118 volumes; during the year residents had taken out 3,970 volumes, an average of 76 volumes a week.

1889 At Webster's April 1, 1889 Town Meeting, taxpayers voted to appropriate \$1,500 for a free public library. Miss Maude Joslin became the first librarian of the Webster library, located in the Morehouse Block at the intersection of Main and High Streets, the library housed 1,069 books. The Town selected the following library trustees: L.E. Pattison, Joseph P. Love, E.W. Preble, E.A. Smith, and H.A. Blake.

1893 The library trustees voted to rent the corner store in the R. B. Eddy block at the corner of Main and Mechanic streets.

1902 The Webster Public Library moved from the Eddy Block to the Columbia Block on Main Street. The new space had electric lights and space for the collection and reading rooms. However, the room was soon inadequate and in 1907 additional space was acquired. The continued growth of the library and the necessary relocations convinced the trustees to advocate for a large, new library building.

1918-1921 Augusta Corbin donated a large sum of money for the building and maintenance of a Town library. A special Town meeting was held regarding the bequest and the Town voted to accept the money for a new library building. The library was the first town building donated to the town by a resident. Shortly after the meeting, a building committee was formed. Members of the building committee included: John Dobbie, Myron Freeman, John Hickey, Prentiss Howard, and Clarence Nash.

1919 The Corbin Estate trustee transferred the money. The bequest totaled \$126,542; \$75,000 of which was to be used to purchase the land and to construct the building. Two trusts of \$25,000 each were established; one trust for the purchase of books and the other for the maintenance of the building. 1920 Construction began of the library at the corner of Lake and Main Street. The architect for the library was Edward L. Tilton. 1921. Library construction was completed in 1921. As stipulated in Augusta Corbin's will, the library was to be named after her husband. The Chester C. Corbin Public Library officially opened July 30, 1921 with a general reception so that citizens might examine the new library building. The library was open from 2 to 9 pm with plans to open Sunday afternoons.

1927 Total circulation for the year was 65,438, a gain of 5,699 over the previous year. Number of books in the library 18,310. Heavy rainfall resulted in the children's room narrowly escaping flooding of the floor. The drainage system will be evaluated.

1933 During the Great Depression, the trustees acknowledged the stress of the times and voluntarily reduce the salaries by the library staff and a moratorium on the purchase of books and other materials at a savings of approximately 10% to the library budget. The library received a bequest from the late Mrs. Ellen C. Marble to establish a trust to be expended for the purchase of books of a biographical and historical nature or of standard worth in literature.

1938 While geographically small, the town has outlying districts (the Tanner and Kingsbury district and the Gore). A voluntary offer of transportation was accepted and a bookmobile carried books bi-weekly to these districts during the summer and fall. At the discontinuance of the service, a deposit of books at the Town Farm was put into place.

1942 During the first year of the World War II, the trustees established an Air Warden Post in the library with special telephone and blackout provisions. The library also served as a deposit station for the Victory Book Campaign. One thousand and five volume have been forwarded to several camps and U.S.O. clubs.

1950-1968 The children's room, the lower halls, mending room and the janitor's office were renovated. Webster has become an educational center for the area. In 1952 after a thorough inspection, the trustees brought before the Town a warrant for pointing up and waterproofing all outer walls of the building from roof to ground level. The work was required to help forestall further deterioration of the building. In 1961 new lighting fixtures were installed in the rooms on the main floor. The trustees voted to become part of the New Regional Library Program. The purpose of the program is to spell out minimum standards for free public library service; to allow the residents of our community the free use of other libraries within our region; and to effect a more economical system in purchasing library books and materials. In 1968 Noting the need for rehabilitation of the building, the trustees developed a five year capital improvement plan which included: microfilm equipment; copying machines; painting and carpeting; parking facilities; outside lighting and air conditioning.

1969 The trustees announced the formation of a chapter of The Friends of the Chester C. Public Library Inc. The purpose of the organization is to enlarge resources and expand services for the benefit of the library, as well as to increase the cultural aspects of the community. Mrs. Raymond Ciesla served as the first president.

1975 Through the services of the Massachusetts Maritime Academy, thirty years of the Webster Times were placed on microfilm. Repairs and improvement to the library included: attic insulation; replacement of roofing slate tiles; repair of drip edge, gutters and conductor pipes; waterproofing and painting of walls.

1978 Due to flooding, pumps were used in the children's room to get rid of four inches of water. With the Webster highway department doing the labor, a parking lot for twenty cars was created. In addition, floodlights were added to the lot.

1986 The purchase of a computer allowed the library to connect with the Central and Western Massachusetts Regional System (CWMARS) This mainframe computer system allows the library to increase their interlibrary loan capacity.

1997 The Chester C Corbin library was inducted into CWMARS as a full online member, expanding the infinite potential of the World Wide Web via the internet. The library received state aid towards full handicap accessibility for the building; improvements include: a dual access elevator and wheelchair ramps.

2003 The children's room suffered a major flood, causing extensive damage to carpeting, shelving and furniture. At the Town meeting, voters approved replacement of the library's 83 year old roof and restoration of the skylight.

2004-2007 The building is old, long term water damage has caused plaster to crumble and fall; settling of the granite stairs is a potential hazard; the original electrical system cannot handle modern technology; and the lack of air conditioning and insulated windows make the building uncomfortable. A grant application to Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) has been submitted and the proposed study to take place 2005 will include examination of the present site with construction and renovation options for adequate space, parking, and compliance with ADA and other federal and state laws. In 2005 The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners awarded the library a \$20,000 Planning and Design Grant to begin the process of determining what the future holds for library services in the town. A Library Needs Study Committee was formed to examine the needs of the town. In 2007 the Town hired Richard Marks and Bob White from Daedalus Project, Inc. With their assistance, the library will complete a feasibility study and schematic design either for a renovation or a new library construction.

2011-2014 The trustees completed the MBLC grant application. In order to submit the application, approval of the proposed design from the Massachusetts Historical Society was required. Approval was granted with stipulations that provisions be made to record and display the Chester C. Corbin library building and to recognize the historical significance of the building. In 2014 The Town was notified that Webster's grant application had been moved off the wait list and the application was now number one on the list to be awarded funds. With the help of Senator Moore, the library received an unprecedented provisional grant from MBLC for approximately 75% of the construction cost, an increase from the original grant award of 50%. In December of 2014, the Town approved the new construction project during Town meeting.

2015 The Town voted to approve the construction costs of the new Chester C. Corbin library. In April the Library Construction Building Committee was formed, members included; Rena Klebart, Ray Travis, Pamela Leduc, Ted Avlas, Kenneth Pizzetti, Andrew Jolda, and Amanda Grenier.

2016-2017 The selectman approved use of the Town hall auditorium as the temporary location for the library. Oudens Ello architecture, Daedalus project manager, and the library director met with Rosemary Waltos from the MBLC to finalize the design for the new library. On August 1, 2016 the Chester C. Corbin library was closed. The construction bid was awarded to M. O'Connor Contracting, Inc. In 2017 the town approved the purchase of 37 and 39 Negus Street. The acquisitions allow for additional library parking spaces and safe entrance and exit.

2018 The new library officially opened September 4, 2018. The library was named to honor Gladys E. Kelly, passionate reader and supporter of libraries.

2020 A pandemic swept the country and indeed the entire world, forcing the library to eliminate on site visits and programs. In an attempt to meet the needs of the patrons, drop off/pick up services became available. By 2021 the library had fully reopened, statistics for December 2021 indicated: the library held 8 adult programs and 20 children's programs; patron use included: computer use 434, study room use 89, WIFI sessions 589 and 2,678 materials circulated.

2021 The Webster Times editions from 1859 to present were digitalized with a link provided on the library's website, making this resource available to the public and saving a piece of Webster's history.