

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LIBRARY:

The Bangor Public Library is the descendant of six libraries in Bangor dating back to the 1816 Bangor Athenaeum. With the 1873 absorption of the Bangor Mercantile Association and its library by the Bangor Mechanic Association (founded in 1828), the collections of six libraries came together in one location. This library was called the Bangor Mechanic Association Public Library.

In 1883 the city accepted \$100,000 from the estate of the Honorable Samuel F. Hersey. The income from this fund was to be used "for the promotion of education, and the health and good morals of the citizens" [of the city]. City Council voted to use the entire sum for the establishment of a public library. The management of this legacy was entrusted to a board of five members known as the Trustees of the Hersey Fund. Its membership consisted of the Mayor, the City Treasurer and three citizens, one to be chosen each second year, by City Council, for six-year terms. These Trustees formed an agreement with the Bangor Mechanic Association, under which the Bangor Public Library was organized using the 20,000 volumes of the Association's library as a nucleus and \$12,000 of the Mechanic Association's library funds and the \$100,000 Hersey fund as endowments. The Trustees of the Hersey Fund and the four officers chosen annually by the Bangor Mechanic Association constituted the Board of Managers of the Bangor Public Library. The Board is essentially the same today except that the Mayor of the city is no longer a member of the Library Board. This occurred when the city changed to a City Manager form of government.

When in 1893 the question of erecting a library building began to be talked about, the Board of Managers was incorporated under Maine law as the "Board of Trustees of the Bangor Public Library" with power to acquire and hold real estate. The personnel of these two bodies, the Board of Trustees and the Board of Managers, were the same, but their functions were quite distinct.

In 1904, the city adopted an ordinance which read: "For the purpose of maintaining a free public library and hereafter provide for the necessary expense of such maintenance, there shall be annually appropriated by the city council under the title of 'Library Fund' a sum sufficient to meet the estimated current expense of maintaining such library for the benefit of the public; such appropriation to be in charge of and expended under the direction of the trustees of the Hersey Fund." In 1905, the Library, which had previously exacted a small fee from its users, became entirely free. At this time the Library was housed in rented quarters in the business district. In September 1906, a Children's room was opened. By 1911 the library had 70,000 volumes, making it the largest public library in the state. The disastrous fire of April 1911 swept it all away.

In May 1911, with 29 books saved from the burning building, 1,330 returned by borrowers and 46, which had been at the bindery, the library reopened in two small rooms in the basement of the Court House. There the library remained for two and a half years.

After the fire, Peabody and Stearns, a Boston architectural firm drew up plans for an educational center in Bangor. The new high school building and the public library would stand side by side in a new public park, with another small park across one street and the new post office and courthouse across another. The corner stone for the new library was laid June 18, 1912. The building was opened for public use on December 20, 1913.

In 1913, the library also changed cataloging systems. It began using cards that were typewritten, filed in a "dictionary" catalog, using the Dewey Decimal system.

The library building remained essentially the same from 1913 through 1996, except for a 100' x 30' x 30' addition to the back stacks paid for by a \$100,000 bond approved by City Council in 1957.

Construction of a 26,000 sq. ft. addition and the renovation of the building designed by Robert A. M. Stern started in October 1996. The Library moved its books and operation to 1491 Outer Hammond Street, the "old Marden's" building, in September 1996. The Library moved back downtown to its renovated and expanded building during December of 1997 and January 1998. The Library reopened to the public on January 26, 1998. Air conditioning was added in 2005.

Even in its temporary facility, the library continued to carry out its historical purpose (as stated in the 1951 Annual Report) "to preserve and disseminate knowledge and thoughts . . . to provide recreation through print and to provide a maximum of assistance to its clients in the use of its collections. . . . [The library] is a general library yet we are also a library of record. We aim to provide printed material on all subjects likely to be of concern or interest either to present or potential users of whatever age or education."

In October 2008, the Library, with a grant from the Stephen and Tabitha King Foundation, purchased the former Moulton Library Building on what had been the Bangor Theological Seminary campus. The building will be used for last copy storage of bound periodicals and monographs from this library and from a collaboration of other libraries in the state.

The biggest change in the Library since 1998 has been technology. The Library had a 56K connection for Internet access and Library automation functions at the Marden's Building. The new addition had T1 access speed. In 2001 the Library upgraded to an ATM (asynchronous transfer modem) line with an equivalent T3 access speed. As the speed of access increased, so did the number of computers for both staff and the public. The Library received a Gates Grant for computers and software in the Children's Department and in 2004 a grant from JTG to add a computer lab. In the spring of 2004 the Library added a wireless network throughout the building, so patrons may access the Internet and the Library catalog and resources using their own laptops, PDA's or other devices.

The Library has books and information in many formats. Included in the collection are on-line databases, audio books on tape, CD and "Playaways," (pre-loaded MP3 players) as well as printed books in hardback, paperback, large type or ebooks. There are maps, microforms and paintings. The Library has motion pictures, TV programs and documentaries on videotape and DVDs.

The Local History and Special Collections staff continues to oversee the cleaning of the art collection. The Children's Department continues to initiate new programs to encourage students to use the Library and to explore new ideas. This year those programs included a Twilight Party, The Lonely Books Club, book discussions and play-readings.

The Library strives to carry out its mission during a time of changing technologies and media. We provide reading materials and information in formats that meet the needs of our users of whatever age, educational level, or reason for using the public library.