BUILDING ON THE PAST

During a deep dive into the archived files of the two earlier Library additions in the 1950s and 1990s, we discovered a treasure trove of photos and the ephemera that is saved during any important project!

A few days after we found these materials, Tolly Boatwright, a Professor in the Department of Classical Studies at Duke University, began her September 8th presentation on Rome’s Imperial Women with a personal reflection on family, books and the Stonington Free Library. It was no surprise that her love of learning was nurtured by untold hours spent at the Library, but particularly notable was her remembrance of Rose York, head Librarian during the 60’s.

“I remember how welcoming she was,” reminisced Tolly, adding “I’ve always felt very much at home and welcome at libraries thanks to the Stonington Free Library. The walk to the Library - a jewel set off in the middle of Wadawanuck Square with those beautiful, very unusual diagonal walkways - was always a wonderful place to go. We were always welcomed; it was a place to go and read. In fact, one day I guess I had graduated to the young adult books (what I thought of as chapter books), and I thought, ‘I will just read all of them, one after another!’ It was a beautiful autumn day, the sun was coming in, and it was quiet in the library. I finished my book and I closed it and looked around - I was the only one left! I thought ‘hmmm…’, but of course I had known Rose York well enough, I knew where the phone was, and I called my mother who came and got me...but by that time I had started the next book!!”

Where this story connects to the present is the photo of Rose York, discovered only days before in a photo album visually documenting the 1990s building project. For members of the community who did not know Rose, it is important to share a bit about her steadfast commitment to the Stonington Free Library and her belief in the importance of what libraries mean to each and every individual who comes to the Library.

Rose York was first the librarian, then served on the Board of Trustees and was President from 1987 to 1995. Rose oversaw this major addition to the Library, funded partly through a gift from the Wimpfheimer family in memory of Jocko Wimpfheimer and partly through a very successful capital campaign of which she was the leading light.

Now, in early 2020, as our new construction is well under way it is good to pause and think of those who have gone before us who embraced a vision of an expanded library and brought that vision into being.

We hope to share these stories throughout the coming months and if you have any pictures, stories or reminiscences we would invite you to send or bring them to the Library. We are grateful that our past has provided the foundation upon which to build for the future.
A Thank You from the Director

By Belinda de Kay, Director

It was the English 16th Century theologian Richard Hooker who came up with the simple but profound concept of the three-legged stool – one that still holds true over four hundred years later for the world of polity and governance, whether in macrocosm or in microcosm – whether for the Anglican Church, which was Hooker’s concern, for our three branches of government or for the daily governance of a small non-profit. The steady balance of the stool depends equally on each of those three legs – Stonington Free Library depends every day on its wonderful staff, on the faithful financial support of its patrons and friends in addition to the Town and Borough and on its dedicated team of volunteers.

In this Winter Issue of The Librarian, our special Valentine is a tribute to our volunteers. As Director I don't think a day goes by without my feeling grateful for each and every one of them, such is the impact that they make on the life of the Library - both collectively and individually. So many of the core programs, offerings and activities that take place throughout the year would not happen at all if it was not for the generous gifts of time and talents of our teams of volunteers. Somewhat breathtaking when one stops to think about it!

Our Board of Trustees is entirely volunteer and involves a large commitment of time, talent and treasure. Each Trustee serves from three to six years and many continue to offer their time and invaluable expertise long beyond their term of service. The collective pool of talent, wisdom, historic memory and life experience that is brought to the table guarantees the continuing good governance of this vital community institution.

Our list of volunteers is long and the tasks they take on are of infinite variety. There are those who faithfully serve throughout the year on a weekly or monthly basis. For very many years a former member of staff volunteered every Wednesday morning to give much needed help at the front desk. We have a group that turns up every Friday morning to cover our new books. We have rotating teams who manage our weekly Library mornings at Stonington Human Services. Volunteers care year round for our four Little Free Libraries, keeping them well stocked with a fresh supply of books, each one stamped with the LFL stamp so that borrowers know the place of origin. They even repair and clean the kiosks on occasion when this is needed, as do our partners the SVIA who supplied and installed them (two were built in the shop class at Stonington High School). Another kind of library is our very popular Seed Library, lovingly stocked and maintained throughout the Spring and early Summer by a volunteer who is a Master Gardener. In our Children’s Room parents and teens offer support in all kinds of ways – especially in the summer months. Generous volunteers also help maintain the Library by giving their time to clean the windows and take care of the plantings around the outside of the building. Volunteers moderate our book groups, here at the Library and off site at Stonington Human Services. Our all-volunteer Program Committee provides invaluable support to the staff, working year-round to bring enriching and entertaining programs to the community - from the birth of an idea to reaching out to speakers, organizing publicity and flyers –
all that is involved in putting on a program. Our Development Coordinator is supported by the Development Committee with fund raising ideas and projects. Without any one of these gifts of help the Library would not be the place that it is.

Then there are the once a year big events that are run by teams of volunteer committees – in the case of the Mystery Dinner the same core group have organized it for eleven years. Many people are involved in this popular annual fundraiser, including the generous hosts, who work hard and creatively to make it the special event that it is. The Book Sale at the Village Fair is expertly managed by a hard working team who collect and sort the book donations over many weeks and then sell them on the day of the Fair. The Village Stroll event at the Library is supported by help with making tree ornaments, supplying cookies and yes, Santa Claus. Our friends in the Garden Club and the SVIA decorate the Library for the Holiday Season and Garden Club members bring us beautiful flowers for the front desk throughout the summer months. Readers of all ages – from the very young to those who have been young for a long time - take part in our annual ReadAThon fundraiser. Lastly, and miraculously, the complex task of managing the different phases of our construction project has been taken on by a retired Pfizer project manager – taking a time consuming burden off the staff. Such skills, generosity and dedication are the true wealth of the Library.

This is indeed an awe-inspiring honor roll, one that includes all those who are currently involved in the life of the Library as well as all those who have gone before, laying a firm foundation of a tradition of service to this community. Circling back to our friend Mr. Richard Hooker, there is one special quality that makes our particular three-legged stool even stronger, the love that all these individuals and groups bear for this Library - a love that comes from the recognition of the value of libraries as the living heart of community.

This is all so encouraging to contemplate as we continue to strive to meet the needs of our own community in these challenging times.
Giggles and Wiggles Story Time was well attended on Fridays in September and Baby and Preschool Drop In Story Times ran from October through November on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Outreach Story Times began to full classes at area preschools and we read to the afterschool elementary group at the COMO weekly.

The annual Look It Up collaboration between the Rotary Clubs of Mystic and the Stoningtons, the Leslie Buck Memorial Fund and the SFL saw all community third graders visit the library for a library card, personal dictionary, story time and a tour. Their visit always wraps up with a scavenger hunt around the library.

The annual Village Stroll kicked off with an afternoon of crafts for children and a reading of The Polar Express. Santa arrived with candy canes for all and awarded lovely prizes, generously donated by Tom’s Newstand. Our Holiday Gingerbread House Workshop was VERY well attended by families who enjoyed decorating their own (very delicious and assembled!) houses baked by Vesta Bakery. This has become quite an anticipated holiday tradition that is fun for everyone.
CURRENT AND UPCOMING PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

We are very excited about the construction going on, working to make our space accessible to everyone.

Winter Drop In Story Times began the week of January 7 and will continue through February 27. We have babies – 2 year olds on Tuesdays, 2 – 5 year olds on Wednesdays and 3 – 5 year olds on Thursdays.

Our Winter Reading Challenges began on December 2 and will continue through April 3. We have an early literacy program, 50 to Grow On for children ages 7 and younger, a Family Reading Challenge for students in grades 1 – 8 and a NEW Adult Reading Challenge – something for everyone! For Dungeons & Dragons fans, we have a new club open to students ages 12 – 18 on Friday afternoons from 3 – 4:30 pm.

Take your Child to the Library Day was held on February 1 this year. We celebrated Pete the Cat Day with storytime and then a chance to meet Pete. There were Pete the Cat activities and a prize drawing with 80 people in attendance. This was a free event and open to everyone.

If your child does not already have one of our Youth Library Cards, stop in to sign up today! There are no overdue fines assessed on children’s and teen items checked on Youth Cards.

We want to thank our wonderful volunteers, Helen Godshall, Hope Grant, Claire Leamon and Bailey McCarney. Their help is much appreciated!

Please watch our website and Facebook pages for any program and event updates.

Helen Godshall, Volunteer
new Wednesday Evening Book Group will begin at the Library in February. The group will meet the first Wednesday of each month at 5:30 pm. The Library will provide coffee and tea, while volunteers from the group will bring snacks and baked goods. A library volunteer has generously offered to moderate the discussion each month.

Wednesday, March 4 @ 5:30pm - *The Orphan Train* by Christina Baker Kline
Wednesday, April 1 @ 5:30pm - *Caleb’s Crossing* by Geraldine Brooks

The Library’s outreach initiatives, previously held at the Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center, have moved to Stonington Human Services. Our dedicated volunteers will provide library services at Human Services every Wednesday from 10:30-11:30am. Stop by to sign up for a library card, check out materials and request items.

A monthly book group will take place at Human Services on the third Friday of every month at noon. This group is open to all, no registration required, just drop in. Upcoming dates and titles:

- February 21 – *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens
- March 20 - *Summer of ’69* by Elin Hilderbrand
- April 17 - *Educated* by Tara Westover
- May 15 - *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman
- June 19 - *Big Little Lies* by Liane Moriarity
The State Bond Commission approved a $145,000 grant for the Stonington Free Library on Wednesday, December 18th, 2019. The Library was awarded the funding by the State Library Construction Grant Program last year. Once awarded, the Library was required to raise matching funds within a year before seeking bonding approval. Thanks to our generous community the matching funds were raised through awards from state and local governments, foundations and private individuals.

The Library is most grateful to State Rep. Kate Rotella, D-Stonington, for her continued support of this project. Her persistent advocacy enabled the project to be added to the Bonding Commission's agenda and to be approved.

The Library will use the grant to help fund Phase 2 of its planned Renovation and ADA Accessibility Building Project. The second phase of the project addresses the existing spaces of the Library and focuses on creating more flexible, functional, user-friendly spaces throughout the building, including movable furniture, mobile shelving, new carpeting and paint, improved electrical infrastructure and critically needed work space for the public. The State Library Construction Grant will cover half of the estimated $290,000 cost of Phase 2 of the project.

Library Director Belinda de Kay, stated “We are so excited to see our vision of providing a Stonington Free Library for the 21st century come one step closer to reality! We would like to extend a special thanks to the CT State Library for establishing the public library construction program, and to the governor and our local representatives for their efforts in placing it on the Bonding Commission agenda.”

Thank you to the Rotary Club of Mystic, the Rotary Club of the Stoningtons and Rotary District #7980 for your very generous gift of the new "Children’s Technology and Collaboration Area" at The Stonington Free Library. This will be a valuable addition to our Children's Room.
Don't Wait! DONATE!

If you have not already donated, please join your family, friends, and neighbors by generously supporting The Stonington Free Library. www.stoningtonfreelibrary.org/support/support-us/

Your Annual Fund donation supports:

- Early literacy programming
- Teen programs
- Adult programs
- Tech help
- Books Clubs
- Little Free Libraries
- Computers & Wifi access
- Online resources
- and so much more!

We are more than books.