

HISTORY

The earliest libraries in Milford were in effect extensions of the book collections that were associated either with the Church as is the case with Reverend Peter Prudden and his successor Roger Newton; or with education as in the collection of Jasper Gunn, Milford's first school teacher. These book collections focused on Bibles and theological works; the works of Virgil, Ovid, other works written in Latin, as well as English language dictionaries.

In 1745 Milford's first actual library was established. It was called the First Society Library of Milford and it belonged to the First Church of Milford. It was a subscription type of library, and members paid an annual fee for its services. In addition, members had to post a bond in the amount of ten pounds for security against damage or loss of the books. The library was principally made up of books of sermons, a few books of travel, voyages, history and philosophy. The second Library was Associate Library founded in 1761, by the Second Plymouth Church.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century interest in these libraries began to wane. Between 1820 and 1858, there is no record of any library in Milford. However in 1858 the Milford Lyceum was chartered by the State of Connecticut to establish a library. The Milford Lyceum Library was not associated with any church but part of the Lyceum Movement which had its main goal the education of the common man through books and lectures. It was a social or subscription library with small dues charged to members. In 1887, a fire destroyed a large part of the collection. Through the efforts of the Friend of the Library, the collection was rebuilt. The Lyceum Library was dissolved in 1894 with the founding of the Taylor Library.

The Taylor Library built by Henry Augusta Taylor at a cost of \$25,000 was dedicated on Saturday February 2, 1895. There were 2,000 volumes on its book shelves. On the following Monday 250 library cards were issued, and 400 books were loaned. The Citizens of Milford supplemented the collection with gifts of books and periodicals. Books which were donated to preserve the memory of early pioneers were housed in the "Colonial Alcove". At the end of the first year, the Library owned 6,322 volumes and 824 borrowers, and circulated 93 items a day.

In the years that followed Milford added four branch libraries; Devon (1928), Children's (1935) Wildermere (1939) and Woodmont (1946). The Woodmont Library which is currently staffed and maintained exclusively by volunteers is still serving its community. The Children's Library was incorporated into the New Milford Public Library in 1976; Devon and Wildermere were closed in 1981.

The Milford Public Library, located at the corner of New Haven Avenue and Shipyard lane, was dedicated on Sunday July 4, 1976, and officially replaced the old Taylor Library. The building is 39,072 square feet in size and cost approximately \$2 million to construct. There were 85,000 volumes and circulation and registration tripled in the first week.

In 1982 the swollen Wepawaug River flooded the library with three and a half feet of water

causing extensive damage to the lower level where the Children's Department, Technical Services Department, and the program room are located. Among the losses were 5,000 children's books and 1,500 new books which were being processed. In addition, typewriters, shelving and furniture were ruined. It took almost two years to completely restore all affected areas. The Library received much needed assistance from The Friend's of the Library who established the Children's Library Emergency Flood Fund.

After a Long Range Plan was completed, it was clear that users wanted to see the physical space upgraded. Work began in June 2005. New carpeting, new windows and realignment of the shelving contributed to the upgrade. The Friends of the Library paid for the gallery wraps of Milford that currently hang in the Gallery space.