

HARRISON PUBLIC LIBRARY



100TH ANNIVERSARY

1911-2011



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**RAYMOND J. McDONOUGH
MAYOR**

TOWN COUNCIL

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ANSELMO MILLAN

JESUS HUARANGA

MARIA McCORMICK

FRANCISCO NASCIMENTO

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LAWRENCE BENNETT

MICHAEL DOLAGHAN

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TOWN LIBRARIANS

1911—2011

ISABEL F. COMERFORD

ALMA LEWIS SMITH

MARY L. FAHEY

EMMA W. H. SCOTT

AURORA McINTOSH

RUTH TOWNSEND

AGNES KATELUS JONES

PAUL BEDOR

ELLEN LUCAS
(Acting Director)

NELBA MEJIAS
(Acting Director)

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HISTORY OF HARRISON FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Shortly after the turn of the century, as people looked to ways of improving their community, the idea of having a public library was born. Alderman John J. Daly, later mayor), responded to the suggestions of the constituents and in June of 1909 introduced a resolution requesting the appointment of a committee to devise means to establish a free public library. As a result of the findings of this committee, the question of having a library was placed on the ballot. The citizens of Harrison voted affirmatively to establish a library. Mayor Joseph P. Riordan then appointed the first Board of Trustees which met on Wednesday evening, February 9, 1910 in the chambers of the Common Council. Until a suitable site could be found, the council chamber became its temporary home. Mrs. Catherine McDonald rented her store located at 612 Harrison Avenue to the town for the monthly sum of \$35.00 in October of 1910. For the next few months, the Board of Trustees purchased books and furniture with the \$3,000 appropriated by the Mayor and common council. On April 5, 1911 the doors of the first Free Public Library in the Town of Harrison were opened to the public. There were 886 books for patrons to borrow. Miss Ruth Townsend and Mrs. Johanna Keating were appointed the first librarian and janitress respectively.

Shortly after the library was in operation, the public school teachers were requested to prepare lists of books suitable for school children to read. In the months that followed, the shelves were lined with books, newspapers, periodicals and magazines geared to the reading levels of the student population. Washington Street School became the first school to be visited by the librarian and the library staff. Beginning with the visit of Miss Mary McGovern's class at Hamilton Street School to the library, the first library science class was conducted in May 1913. Children were taught how to use the card catalog and were issued library cards.

Mrs. Emma Scott, the town's second librarian, invited the young children of the community to their first story hour on June 19, 1912. She introduced first, second and third graders to the world of reading and many happy hours have since been spent by young students of Harrison continuing to the present day.

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Having successfully involved the educational community in the role of a library, the staff now approached the business community. Business leaders supplied lists of business related materials for possible purchase by the library and displayed their manufactured products in the one-room library. Worthington Pump Works displayed a moving model of the elevator installed in the Woolworth Building in New York City. Sherwin-Williams Paint Company presented the first window display-*How Paint is Made*.

Libraries can also serve as meeting places. Such were the purposes of the Boys' Reading Club which held its first meeting during October 1911. Thirty young men met weekly to discuss current events, citizenship and to aid the library in completing its daily work routine. As the Boy Scout movement advanced in our country, it assisted Mr. William Nevius in establishing the first Boy Scout Troop in Harrison. As part of their growth, the scout librarian set up a shelf of books related to the scout movement. Within a year, the Girls' Club was begun with twelve young ladies working in the library itself learning to post and stamp books and assist younger children in finding suitable reading material.

During the term of Mayor Matthew L. O'Brien, attention again focused on the youth of Harrison. As more patrons utilized the one-room library and student population increased, the facility became inadequate for meeting the needs of the school-aged pupils. To alleviate this crowded condition, Miss Alma Lewis, Librarian and Mr. Joseph Doherty, Harrison High School teacher, planned a resource room in the high school. Monies provided by the Board of Education provided furniture while 200 books were donated by the library staff. Students attending school in the late 1920's now had their own resource room as a result of the cooperation between the schools and library.

Harrison, like many of its sister communities, experienced population growth and by 1936, the present library was no longer adequately meeting the needs of the larger citizenry. Recognizing that the present facility could not provide all the vital reference materials necessary to maintain a fine library, Mayor Frederick J. Gassert initiated a search for funds to build a new struc-

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ture. His endeavors proved successful, and ground was broken for the new building on Monday, November 30, 1936 with Mayor Gassert, Board of Trustees president Thomas J. Sheridan, and Joseph W. Baker, Architect presiding over this ceremony. The present library was dedicated on January 29, 1938. Within one year a new post office building was dedicated and officially opened to the public on July 1, 1939.

Commencement exercises for graduates of Harrison High School were among the first uses of the portico spanning the front of the public library. Many young men and women cherish their memories walking up the steps of this impressive structure receiving their diplomas with the beautiful daisy chain of high school girls flanking the walkways. The American Legion and V.F.W. conducted Memorial Day services from the portico each year.

During World War II the library became the center for a variety of activities. Blood banks sponsored by the American Red Cross and Nopco Chemical Company supplied thousands of pints of blood to our wounded service men and women. Residents attended classes taught by the Red Cross, First Aid and other defense organizations in the auditorium. When the war ended a new and dynamic image of the public library began emerging with the election of Frank E. Rodgers as mayor of Harrison in 1947.

A series of sports clinics were initiated to encourage the development of interest in sports. Girl Scouts proudly displayed their crafts, The Police Athletic League and the Harrison Recreation Department began sponsoring evenings of dance and related activities in the library auditorium. The youth of Harrison flocked to the library several nights a week to enjoy the facilities and view the library in a totally different aspect. Miss Isabel Comerford and her staff assisted students in the educational phase of their lives. Library Science classes, Story Hour Programs, hiring of young part-time assistants and a classroom book-loaning program all continued as the library became a focal point in the community-at-large.

Councilman O. John DiSalvo initiated a series of summer band concerts on the portico in the 1950's. As community use of the library escalated, the scope of reference books was significantly

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increased by librarian Aurora McIntosh.

The Harrison Board of Education sponsored the first Science Fair on February 23, 1960. For the next few years, this fair was an annual event until it became too large to be accommodated. Space for reference materials was becoming a problem. This need was quickly addressed by the mayor and council. Plans for the renovation of the balcony to an adult study and reference room were formulated and the project was completed and open to the public on March 31, 1969.

During the 1970's attention was focused on the celebration of our nation's 200th anniversary. The Harrison Free Public Library played an important role in this historic celebration beginning with the purchasing of reading materials relating to the history of the United States. A resurgent interest in discovering our roots and learning about the Town of Harrison resulted in the appointment of Mr. Henry Mutz as Town Historian. As Mr. Mutz continued his research about the town, the library became the home of the "Harrison Collection". This memorabilia is now on display in the Harrison Museum located in the Town Hall Annex.

Summer reading programs were started by Miss Mary L. Fahey in 1974. The decade of the seventies culminated in the ceremony honoring the renowned turn of the century poet, Aloysius Michael Sullivan, a native of Harrison, as he was awarded a plaque in May 1979.

In 1983 the library, under the direction of Agnes Katelus-Jones, underwent extensive interior and exterior work which was completed in two years.

The 1990's brought more significant changes to the library. Raymond J. McDonough became the sixth mayor, and he continued to support the library by approving and funding additional renovations which included the installation of an elevator and a new children's library in the basement. Cataloguing the books by computer began and an overnight box was put in place. Ellen Lucas, Acting Director, was instrumental in moving the library forward into the 21st century. Infolink and TLC (The Library Corporation) were

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implemented, and the library became a WiFi hot spot. There are now 30 computers providing internet access, and the library has become a multi-media facility. Various classes and cultural programs are held in the library and it has showcased the works of local artists.

The Harrison Free Public Library continues to serve its patrons well. Nelba Mejias, Acting Director, is working to maintain the library as a cultural, social, intellectual and civic center.

Generations of townspeople have been served by the library over the past 100 years. Without the continued and dedicated support of the six mayors, many councilpersons, librarians, directors and trustees, the Harrison Free Public Library would not be celebrating its centennial in 2011.



From Left-Linda Liquori, Joan Ostrowski, Nelba Mejias, Kim Mullin

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Site of first Reading Room-Town Hall



Harrison Free Public Library-1911



Interior of the first Harrison Free Public Library



Ground breaking ceremony, November 30, 1936. 1-Joseph A. Campion, Trustee, 2-Joseph Baker, Architect, 3-Mayor Gassert, 4-Elizabeth L. Jameson, Trustee, 5-Thomas Sheridan, Trustee President, 6-Alma Lewis, Librarian, 7-Isabel Comerford, Assistant Librarian, 8-Frances E. Campion, Library Assistant, 9-Thomas Jordan

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

CONSTANCE McDONOUGH
PRESIDENT

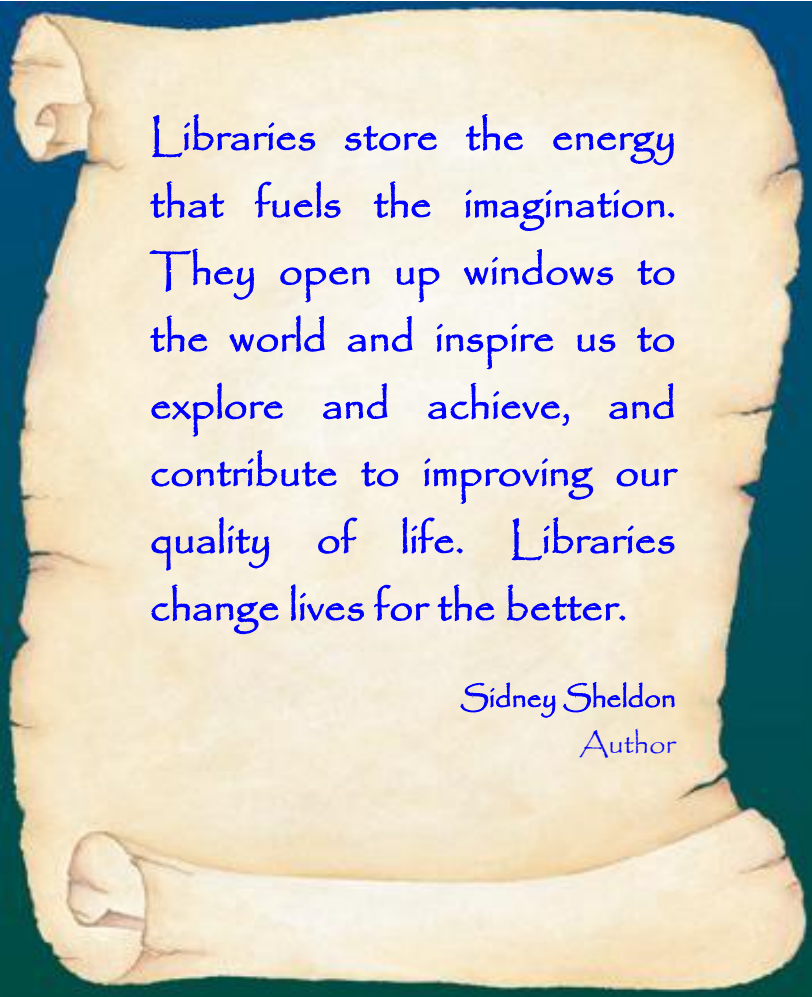
DOREEN COUCH

MARIAN GREEN COMPRELLI

CONCETTA GREGORY

MARY V. McDONOUGH

JOAN MICHAELSON

A scroll of parchment with text on a dark green background. The scroll is unrolled, showing the text in a blue, serif font. The parchment has a slightly aged, yellowish-tan color and is set against a dark green background.

Libraries store the energy
that fuels the imagination.
They open up windows to
the world and inspire us to
explore and achieve, and
contribute to improving our
quality of life. Libraries
change lives for the better.

Sidney Sheldon
Author

