

Library growth isn't new

The way it was

By George A. Parkhurst



Need for expansion of the public library facilities in Chelmsford has arisen periodically and is again being addressed at this time. An examination of how this

problem has been handled in the past may be of interest.

It was in 1895 that a gift from a former resident of Chelmsford, Mr. Amos Francis Adams, made possible the construction of the original Adams Library building on Boston Road. This was the first public library in town. (Previous to that, since its founding in 1794 by the Rev. Hezekiah Packard of the First Parish Church, the Social Library had made books available to its subscribers).

Great care was taken in the construction to make the new library building both aesthetically attractive and structurally sound. It was probably Chelmsford's first "fireproof" public building. It served the townspeople well until, because of population growth (and the resulting increase in library usage), more space was needed.

Receipt of a very generous gift to the town in 1922 prompted consideration of expanding the Adams Library. The Report of the Trustees of the Adams Library for that year stated: "On May 9th, the Rev. Wilson Waters having been appointed by the Trustees as their agent in the matter of the bequest of the late Mrs. Orra A. George Flint, he, in company with Messrs. George Rigby, representing the selectmen, and Mr. E. R. Clark, went to Worcester and received a check for \$20,000.00, with books and portraits, from the executors of the will." The money was turned over to the Town Treasurer for later disbursement.

It was, however, not until 1929 that the building addition facing Adams Avenue was completed. By that time the value of the bequest had grown appreciably. Currently, the addition houses stacks on the ground floor and the fine arts department on the second.

Originally the 33 x 28 ft. room on the first floor, a memorial to Mrs. George's father and mother, former residents of the town, was used as a meeting and lecture room, shutters on the windows making it suitable for illustrated talks. The Chelmsford Historical Society, organized in 1930, used the second floor for several years as a place to display their many museum items until the Library Department required the space. The addition also made possible a children's reading room and a librarian's work room.

In 1960, the children's room was moved to the George Memorial Hall and a librarian was hired for that department.

Fourteen years later at a Special Town Meeting on Oct. 15, 1974, the Town voted to construct an addition on the south side of the original building. However, because of organized opposition, the project was abandoned and, instead, the Scoboria property was purchased and the present Children's House came into being. The Carriage House was opened as a meeting place in 1980. Perhaps the construction under consideration can make good use of the library-controlled land.

George Adams Parkhurst is a Chelmsford historian whose family has lived in town since 1654.