

FRIEND MEMORIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY

1912-2012
The First Hundred Years



Friend Memorial Public Library



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Brooklin Corner in the late 1920s, with Gott's Store, now the Brooklin General Store, across from the library.

The Early Years

The seeds of a plan to create a library in Brooklin were planted in the summer of 1896 in the Haven Colony, just a mile or so from the center of town. It was the summer that Professor Frank Cushing had traveled to Brooklin to excavate the shell heaps whose deposits of shells, animal bones, and other debris were indicators of early human settlements. One might imagine it was one of those raw, damp days when the fog blew in, discouraging the best-laid plans for sailing or hiking and offering, instead, the perfect opportunity to stretch out on the sofa with a good book. There, among the misty spruce and pine of the Haven, one might also imagine how a few restless minds might have begun to scheme about organizing a way to circulate what books were available. In addition to Cushing, among those restless minds were Colonel John Powell, the first explorer of the Grand Canyon, and the Reverend Parson, an intrepid traveler to Japan and the Far East. All were members of the Owls Club, a group of scientists, professors and intellectuals who summered in the Haven. Devoted



Brooklin Corner as it appeared in the late 1920s with the original library building.

to the town of Brooklin, the members of the Owls Club came up with the idea of establishing a library that would benefit both the summer people and the permanent residents. They only needed to find a way to fund their idea.

With so many accomplished individuals available, these men decided to organize a series of lectures for which they would charge admission to raise money to establish this library. Among those recruited to speak was Professor Cushing, who lectured on his experiences with the Zuni Indians and his research on shell heaps. Evidently Cushing terrorized the audience when, in the semidarkness of the room, he let out a Zuni war whoop.¹ In addition, Reverend Parson delivered a travelogue on his trip to the Far East and Colonel Powell gave a lecture on the Grand Canyon. They drew large, enthusiastic crowds and raised enough money to begin collecting donated books to establish the first circulating, subscription library in the town of Brooklin.

The organizers hired Edith Mayo to be the first librarian, but she resigned



The Odd Fellows Hall (on the left) in the early 1900s, located at the end of the road to Center Harbor, where the Owls Club established Brooklin's first subscription library.

within a month. A young woman named Annie Dollard replaced her and would spend the next forty-four years as director of the library. At that time, she was paid twenty-five cents a week to oversee the one afternoon a week that the collection of donated books was available to its subscribers.

Housed in the Odd Fellows Hall at the corner of Reach Road and the lane down to Center Harbor, the library offered its subscribers one box of books at a time that eventually would be returned and exchanged for another box. The yearly cost to subscribe was \$.50 for women, \$1.00 for men, and \$.05 weekly for non-subscribers. Clearly the suffragette movement had not reached Maine, as this discrepancy in fees indicated that there was a presumption among its founding members that men were more inclined and perhaps more qualified to read than women.

By 1900, the library had outgrown the Owls Club's informal, loosely structured organization. On June 28 of that year, a meeting was called to establish the Brooklin Library Association. Dr. F.S. Herrick was elected chairman of the committee, which went right to work drawing up a constitution

and some bylaws. Soon afterward, other officers were elected. To raise money to buy books and to finance the library, all kinds of recitals, garden parties, and lectures were organized and offered to the public.

At about the same time, the Friend brothers of Melrose, Massachusetts, arrived back in town. Although they had been born in Brooklin, Victor and Leslie and Robert moved with their parents to Massachusetts as youngsters and grew up there. Having made their fortune producing Friend's Brick Oven Baked Beans, the brothers had the bright idea of building a roller-skating rink for the enjoyment of the Brooklin community. It was quite an undertaking, as they had to special-order an expensive type of wood to create a floor smooth enough for skaters to glide. The Rink, as it was called, quickly became a popular Saturday night activity. Young couples from Brooklin flocked there to while away the hours, skating together around and around until curfews called them all home. Not everyone was as pleased about the Rink as the young people, however. Brooklin's First Baptist Church was appalled at all the couple "togetherness" the Rink provided and reacted by making sure the Friend brothers knew they were not welcome in the church.

In 1902, perhaps influenced by the church's disapproval, the Friend brothers decided to offer the Rink and the land beneath it to the Brooklin Library Association for the price of \$1.00. The members of the association eagerly accepted their offer and began building shelves to move their collection of books from the Odd Fellows Hall.

Money, of course, had to be raised to renovate the building to serve as a library. Newspaper accounts said that the community enthusiastically came together, and many people volunteered to give lectures and perform recitals, and local writers and poets staged readings. All of the admission money for these events went to the building fund. It was also at this time that the association had the good sense to amend the discrepancy of subscription fees and charge both men and women \$.50. By 1908, newspaper accounts said the library had more than 975 books in their collection.

The enthusiasm for the library may have been what convinced the Friend brothers of the library's worth to the community, because in 1910 they gave the princely sum of \$1,000 as a matching grant for a new library building. The community, succeeded in matching the Friends' \$1,000, and that, along with all the other monies raised, enabled the Rink to be torn down; a new building, designed by William Nelson Wilkins of Magnolia, Massachusetts, husband of Brooklin native, Ella McFarland, then began to take shape.



The library in the 1930s. It would take another ten years until trees were planted and the area around the building was landscaped. In the background were the First Baptist Church and a small building that served as the Brooklin Post Office.

Friend Memorial Library

In 1912, the new library was completed. To honor major donors, it was named Friend Memorial Library. The only part of that original building left today is the front section of the present library building.

Fortunately for the library, Annie Dollard moved with the books from the Odd Fellows Hall and continued be the librarian until her death in 1945. During those years, she worked mostly from her home, as the library was only open one afternoon a week. Her salary of \$13 a year made quite an impression on the well-known author of *Charlotte's Web*, E.B. White who moved to North Brooklin with his wife, Katharine, in 1938.

After attending a Brooklin Town meeting, White wrote to his friend Frank Sullivan on December 20, 1938, commenting on how different small-town life was from his life in New York: "They voted to raise the salary of the librarian in the Brooklin Library. She now gets \$13 a year. I believe it's to be doubled. They're even talking of putting lights in the library, so people can see to read after dark. (It gets dark here at ten past three in the afternoon.)"²

In another letter, White, who was clearly an admirer of Miss Dollard's talents as librarian, said, "... everybody was much interested and enthusiastic

about Miss Dollard.”³ He added an amusing footnote when he described Miss Dollard as a “tiny spinster with firm convictions about which books were fit to read. The library had acquired *The Grapes of Wrath*, but Annie took it off the shelf and placed it on her chair and sat on it. That solved that.”⁴ It was clear that Miss Dollard had strong opinions about books and felt free to express them. In fact, the chair that White referred to was a stool, and the library staff is still using that stool behind the front desk to this day.

Unfortunately, because Annie Dollard worked from her home and kept the library’s business there, most of the records from 1910 to 1950 were lost when she died. However, from the Whites’ correspondence and other town records, it becomes clear that the Whites were to play a significant role in the library’s history.

It all began soon after their arrival in Brooklin when Katharine began contributing the children’s books she reviewed for the *New Yorker* to the library for its children’s section.⁵ Former librarian Gretchen Volenik said in a piece she wrote about the Whites: “From what I have heard, before Katharine came and began to donate children’s books, our children’s section was rather lacking.”⁶ In addition, Katharine White would also contribute greatly to the library’s gardening and cookbook section with her donations of books on those subjects that she reviewed.

A Free Public Library

In 1939, there was a movement by some of the citizens of Brooklin to reorganize the library. Bernice Sylvester, the librarian who took over from Annie Dollard in 1944, recounts that a group of citizens, spearheaded by Katharine White, met and formed a new library association.⁷ An article in *The Bangor Daily News* reported that the Library board and Miss Dollard “were glad to have this matter taken up.”⁸ The article states that a Town Meeting was called and in 1941, it was decided to incorporate as a free public library. Mr. Owen Flye, a charter member of the earlier organization, was elected president. The article says: “The town immediately went to work to put the library in order. The girls of the 4H Club and the Girls’ Mission Club cleaned and scrubbed and a book committee was formed whose members went over the books, discarding badly worn or outmoded ones.”⁹

Minutes of Town Meetings from 1941 show that for the first time, the townspeople of Brooklin voted to support the public library and appropriated

\$350. The state of Maine also sent a stipend to buy books. In an article in the Bangor Daily News on January 25, 1944, Friend Memorial Library was described as “one of the finest up-to-date small libraries in the State.” In addition to the main library building, the collection, which included approximately 7,300 books,¹⁰ was housed in branch libraries located on Naskeag Road under the watchful eye of Mrs. Roy Bowden and in West Brooklin under Mrs. Joseph Tapley. In large part due to Katharine White’s donations, the article goes on to say, “Its thousands of books include the finest in children’s literature....” For the first time also, a children’s reading hour was instituted.

Katharine and E.B. White

While we can’t be sure, it isn’t hard to imagine that the town’s hard work and enthusiastic participation in improving their library may have influenced Katharine to take the next step to make the library more accessible to the community. In 1941, Katharine White arranged to have two professional library catalogers, Mrs. Edgar Holmes of Gotts Island, who had once worked in the New York Public Library, and Eleanor Snow of Blue Hill, catalog the library’s growing collection of books.

June Eaton, a teenager at the time, who had been helping at the library, worked with them and remembers how pleased everyone was to have the catalogers at their little library. According to June, all the books were catalogued by the end of the year, and from time to time, Mrs. Holmes returned over the next few years to help update the catalog.

Meanwhile, from E.B.’s letters it was clear that Katharine White’s commitment and dedication to the library was only deepening. In February of 1942, E.B. wrote to her while she was at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York for surgery following a fall on the ice in Maine, to reassure her he would attend the Town Meeting to “look after the interests of the Friend Memorial Library in your absence.”¹¹

Katharine White was elected a trustee of the library on June 18, 1951. Although it was highly likely that Katharine White had become a trustee earlier, we have no official record because all those early library records were lost. During that period in the early fifties, it was becoming clear that the library needed to expand. More and more books were being donated, and there wasn’t enough shelf space for them all.

While the board began its discussions about an addition, Katharine White,



E.B and Katharine White, 1941

who could not be at the meeting due to illness, had a four-page handwritten letter delivered to the board offering her views on the matter. She was firm that she would like to see a well drilled and a flush toilet installed. She was concerned that if the library didn't offer these amenities, they would not be able to attract good librarians in the future. In the letter, she also was concerned about purchasing a record player and records for the residents to use.

While she played a role in many of the design decisions, probably the most important action Katharine White took was to write the Friend brothers about the expansion plans for the library and ask the brothers for some financial help. Her passionate commitment to the library's well-being and its future must have resonated with the Friend brothers, because they sent the library \$3,000, a sizable amount for that time.

The addition, built by William Henderson and his construction crew, was completed by 1952. Katharine White was part of the committee that chose the lights for the lobby as well as other design features, including special shelves for that record player and a collection of records that she eventually purchased herself for the library. In the years ahead she would also contribute a typewriter, and later she chose the floor tiles. A gifted gardener in her own right, Katharine White also helped plan a garden for the library where

residents on warm summer afternoons could sit and enjoy the flowers while reading their books.

The library records from those years contain many instances of the Whites being thanked for all that they gave. In 1952, they were thanked for sponsoring book prizes that were awarded to grade-school children for the best reading lists. They were constantly donating money for various events and even subscribed to periodicals for the library.

In 1955, after Katharine became concerned about an unsightly unoccupied building adjacent to the library being a fire hazard, E.B. responded by paying for the cost of having it torn down.

In a letter dated July 18, 1954, E.B. wrote,

K:

So many times I have felt I wanted to present you with a fine ruby, or we'll say a perfect sapphire, or a couple of matched pearls that step along together, yet in the presence of rubies, sapphires, pearls or in almost any jeweled atmosphere whatsoever I have turned away empty, blinded by the glitter probably. This impotence in my relationship with precious stones has left me a rich man, and you are my precious stone, all the more so because you don't glitter. So now I have the strong desire to make you a gift in lieu of rubies, and it seemed to me the other night that the thing you most wanted was to tear down Earl Firth's house – so I am giving you that, my love, my own. Hit it hard and true!

*EBW*¹²

In 1959, the library received E.B. White's donation of a Waldo Peirce painting of his daughter as a young girl clamming on a summer day in Maine, and in 1968, White donated two original *Stuart Little* drawings by Garth Williams. In a 1969 Friend Memorial Library Annual Report, White was quoted as saying, "I'd rather give them to this library than any other place." All of these drawings are still hanging in the front section of the library to this day.

In the early 1960s, the library was once again going through some growing pains. Just as the library was about to embark on a new addition, there was a flurry of letters among Katharine White, Roy Barrette, soon to be president of the board, and Alan Bemis, who was in charge of the endowment fund. Because of the library's good fortune in having the Whites, along with Russ Wiggins and a few other loyal patrons who had stepped up whenever funds were needed, the library didn't have a budget. While Barrette and White were



A 1940s photograph of the high school band marching past the library now planted with trees. On the left is the Earl Firth House that E. B. White had torn down for Katharine's birthday in 1955.

reluctant to ask the town of Brooklin for more money, Bemis was refusing on principle to allow funds from the endowment to go toward upkeep and expenses. Meanwhile, the library's bank account was perilously low. According to the then-librarian, Martha Tyler, there were some back taxes that were due and other expenses that needed covering. There was even talk of having to close the library down until the financial responsibilities could be met. In the end, however, Katharine White once again came to the rescue with a large check. But this time, the board saw the wisdom in creating a budget to ensure the good health and well-being of the library into the future.

The Waterman Bequest

In 1962, a bequest from George Arthur Waterman provided the funding for the completion of another expansion. Waterman had left his shell collection to the library, and the library needed exhibition space for the shells as well as more shelving for their growing collection. Among other major donors for this expansion were the Goddards, the Woods, the Nichols, the Hamiltons and Allene White, who had married Joel White, E.B. and Katharine's son. This



The E.B. and Katharine White Memorial Garden as it looks today.

new addition was designed by Harold Willis, and Arthur “Tut” Wood was contracted to build it.

In 1963, due to ill health, Katharine White offered her resignation as a trustee to the president, Mr. Kaiser. She had worked with three out of the six librarians that Friend Memorial Library was fortunate to have; Annie Dollard, Bernice Sylvester, and Martha Tyler. Between them, E.B. and Katharine had played a huge role in transforming an informal, small circulating library into a respected public library serving a wide range of citizen interest. Her resignation letter below says much about her commitment to the library and her hopes for its future:

It is my strong belief that what the Library most needs now is a strong and active Board of Trustees—people who can be at every meeting, barring unusual circumstances, and who can and will actively work for the good of the Library from week to week and month to month. For twenty-five years now I have been absorbed in the progress of the Library, and it is still one of my most earnest interests, so I shall not stop thinking about and working for the Library even though I hold no office. I now serve on the Book Committee and this is work I can continue to do even when at a distance. I eagerly hope that, as those of us who helped found the Library have to drop out one by one, a younger group will take up where we left off and carry on the valuable work of this Library. We have a fine and now adequate building, we have a better

*than average basic set of books for a town of this size, and we have a reading public unexcelled in Maine for a library of our size. This is a town that reads. But a public library is not a static affair. Every year if it is not to retrogress, it must grow in service and in use. Every year it must add more books—the best of the old and new books. Our collection still has some bad gaps. Every year we must spend more time and money if we are to progress.*¹³

Katharine White kept her promise to stay connected to the library and continued to be on that book committee right up until her death in 1977 at the age of eighty-four.

In 1995, librarian Gretchen Volenik, with the help of Brooklin resident Jean Hylan, established a group known as the Friends of Friend Memorial Library, who created a garden to honor the Whites. The E.B. and Katharine White Memorial Garden was dedicated in 1997. Volenik said the garden brought together all the things that were important to the Whites: “...flowers, birds, books, and children, and we thank them for their legacy.”¹⁴

Bearing a library banner, Gretchen Volenik marching in Brooklin's traditional Fourth of July Parade.





Current director of the library, Stephanie Atwater, behind the exquisitely curved front desk built by Doug Hylan.

An Award-Winning Design

During Gretchen's tenure as director of the library, the pressing need for more shelves and more program and reading space initiated discussions about another renovation. According to Volenik, it took more than five years to complete the planning and the fund-raising of \$300,000 to begin the renovation.¹⁵ The architects' plans called for tearing down the portion of the building that was previously added in order to double the library's size. For the project to move forward, Volenik first had to move the library's collection into the back of the Town Hall. She then worked tirelessly to put into place a system for people to continue checking out books while the construction was in progress.

The renovation, designed by Elliott & Elliott Architecture of Blue Hill and built by Jon D. Woodward & Sons, included new lighting and movable shelves that can be reconfigured to allow more program space in the center of the library. There is also a new reading room with tall windows that look out into the garden and the woods beyond. It provides gallery space for artwork and room for computers as well. In addition, an office for the director

was added and a handicapped-accessible bathroom. Well-known boatbuilder Douglas Hylan carved the beautifully curved front desk for the new entrance. The work on the library was completed in 2000, and the next year Elliott & Elliott Architecture received the prestigious 2001 American Institute of Architects award and the American Library Association award for the outstanding renovation and addition to the library.

Gretchen also wrote that when she arrived in 1989, the library was heavily used in the summer months, but not so often during the rest of the year. She went on to say that little programming had been done outside the summertime. She was determined to change that and to bring in as many year-round residents as she could. She started a Children's Story Hour, added videos and audios to the collection, increased periodical selections, and focused on collecting more books for babies. She also instituted a weekly reading program for Brooklin Elementary School students, who at the time still did not have their own library. With the help and support of the Friends group, Gretchen was able to increase their program offerings and fund-raising events and add gardening activities.

In a recent email, Gretchen wrote, "At library conferences I had heard horror stories about renovations and so with some trepidation, I entered into the process. Again the committees that worked on this project were so dedi-

A side view of the library's handicap entrance that was added in 2000.



The award-winning library addition with its moveable shelves in place displaying the books collected to be auctioned as part of the library's one hundred year birthday celebration.



cated and respectful of each other that we came through this process not only with an award winning library but our friendships still intact.” The theme of friendship and goodwill has been a cherished value at Friend Memorial Library and continues to be so today.

The Digital Library

Stephanie Atwater, the present director of the library, has almost completed a project to automate the library's collection of more than 18,000 books, DVDs, and CDs to make sure the library goes into the future fully equipped to keep pace with the digital age. Since Stephanie, who has a master's degree in library science, became director in 2005, she has created a technology plan, installed high-speed wireless, and added an Internet pavilion for round-the-clock summer access. In addition, she began purchasing DVDs and audio books rather than relying on donations. It is also now possible to download library e-books. In order to broaden the year-round program offerings, she purchased a digital projector. Just recently there was a program on whale watching and this summer, among other activities, there will be an interactive program for children called "Forest Stories," put on by the Chewonki Foundation, and a reading by Martha White from her new book of quotations from her grandfather, E.B. White.

Three years ago, Stephanie, along with Jill Knowles, Pat Fowler and many other volunteers, organized "LOVE YOUR LIBRARY", an online and in-



Here the shelves have been rolled away into the stacks to accommodate an audience.

library auction with items donated by the citizens and businesses of Brooklin and the surrounding areas. Bidding begins early in February and closes on Valentine's Day. This event—which finds many of Brooklin's citizens crowded into the library on February 14, trying to outbid each other for items ranging from two dozen fresh oysters to handmade jewelry to three days in a Maine cottage—is the highlight of the library's yearly fund-raising activities.

While the state no longer offers stipends, the Maine State Library Association provides all Maine libraries with free Internet access and offers access to a collection of online databases. Library fund-raisers, donations from library patrons, and the significant financial support of the Town of Brooklin have contributed to a sound budget that has been able to fund the cost of automation as well as the purchase of new materials to add to the collection.

As more and more people use the library, its hours have been expanded to meet the need. The library is now open in the winter Tuesdays and Fridays



The Aponte children trying out the new digital catalog in the Children's Section.

through Saturdays 10 am to 4 pm and Thursdays 10 am to 6 pm, and Stephanie has increased the hours in the summer to Tuesdays through Saturdays 10 am to 6 pm. In addition to Stephanie, the library now employs two part-time staff members.

When asked whether automation was the biggest project the library has undertaken during her tenure, Stephanie said that it is, and that in many ways automation would help provide better service to library users. “Yet, overall, what I’m proudest of,” she said, “is building a particularly great collection of books and other materials and of continuing to maintain the library’s welcoming and helpful atmosphere. Those things are more important to the soul and the life of the library.”

What Stephanie Atwater said strikes the same chord as what Gretchen Volenik said before her. Friend Memorial Library has always been a welcoming place for the citizens of Brooklin and its summer visitors. Perhaps it is that spirit of welcome that has inspired the generosity of the citizens of Brooklin who so freely give their time and talents to support the library.

Over the years, many of those same citizens have volunteered to work in the library. At the present time, there are five regular volunteers who every week help with repairing books, filing, mail, and whatever else needs doing.

One of many volunteers who have given so generously of their time, and also a trustee, Jill Knowles putting the final touches on the display at the first “Love Your Library” Auction in 2009.





June Eaton and local kids admire original illustrations for *Stuart Little*.

There is one citizen, however, who stands out. June Eaton came to the library as a teenager to help Annie Dollard, and she has served under all six librarians. She has not only been a volunteer, she has also served the library as a paid staff member. She has been and continues to be one of the library's greatest advocates. Her invaluable service to Friend Memorial Library was recognized in 2011 with a party at the time of her retirement. While acknowledging that she deserved to have more time for herself and her family, the library reluctantly bid her farewell and Godspeed.

Friend Memorial Library has had only six librarians in its one-hundred-year history; Miss Annie Dollard in 1902, who was there forty-four years, was followed by Bernice Sylvester in 1944, Martha Tyler in 1953, Nancy Hitchcock in 1977, Gretchen Volenik in 1989 and our present librarian Stephanie Atwater who arrived in 2005. Some were self-taught, others had some training, but each one of them has left her mark. The ever-expanding shelves housing the library's collection of books, CDs, DVDs, and computers available to library users are witness to their continuing efforts to improve the quality of the collection.

It is the soul and the life of Friend Memorial Library that the citizens of Brooklin will celebrate when they gather on Sunday, July 29, 2012, to mark one hundred years. Perhaps Cicero said it best when he observed, "If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need." Happy Birthday, Friend Memorial Library. Here's to the next one hundred years.

—Emily Blair Stribling

Footnotes:

- ¹ Darrab, William Culp, *Powell of the Colorado*, pg. 371, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1951
- ² Guth, Dorothy Lobrano Ed., *Letters of E.B. White*, pg. 192, Harper & Row, New York, 1976
- ³ Guth, Dorothy Lobrano Ed., *Letters of E.B. White*, pg. 227
- ⁴ Ditto
- ⁵ Guth, Dorothy Lobrano Ed., *Letters of E.B. White*, pg. 192
- ⁶ Volenik, Gretchen, *Katharine and E.B. White and Friend Memorial Library*, 1994
- ⁷ *Brooklin Centennial Celebration Booklet*, pg. 31, 1949
- ⁸ *The Bangor Daily News*, "Brooklin Library Started in 1902", [date unknown]
- ⁹ Ditto
- ¹⁰ *Brooklin Centennial Celebration Booklet*, pg 31, 1949
- ¹¹ Guth, Dorothy Lobrano Ed., *Letters to E.B. White*, pg. 237
- ¹² Guth, Dorothy Lobrano Ed., *Letters to E.B. White*, pg. 397
- ¹³ *Letter from Katharine White to Mr. Kaiser*, June 1963
- ¹⁴ Volenik, Gretchen, *Katharine and E.B. White and Friend Memorial Library*, 1994
- ¹⁵ *Ellsworth American*, "Brooklin Library Nears Goal" by Catherine Heins, 1998
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