

HISTORY OF THE DARTMOUTH PUBLIC LIBRARIES

1878-1967

Elsie Haskell

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INTRODUCTION

Dartmouth was settled about November, 1652, but purchase had evidently been made some six months before; on March 7, 1652, a meeting was held at Plymouth of proprietors, thirty-four in number. Each proprietor held a share which was comprised of 3,200 acres. The deed was signed by Wamsutta, and for the colonists by John Winslow and John Cooke. The deed of Dartmouth read in part:

Massasoit and Wamsutta sold to William Bradford, Captain Myles Standish, Thomas Southworth, John Cooke, and their associates, for thirty yards of cloth, eight skins, fifteen hoes, fifteen pair of breeches, eight blankets, two kettles, one clock, two English Pounds in Wampum, eight pair of stockings eight pair of shoes, one iron pot and ten shillings, that land called "Dartmouth."

In 1664, King Philip, Sagamore of Pokannet who was the son of Massasoit, definitely fixed the bounds of the township and the charter began, "'Dartmouth made a town'/At the General Court of Election holden [sic] at Plymouth eighth of June, 1664...."

The bounds of the township included the Wamponoag territory of Acushena (New Bedford), Sconticut (Fairhaven), Ponagansett (Dartmouth), and Coaksett (Westport).¹

The Dartmouth seal was adopted April 3, 1893 and was the design of the coat of arms of Lord Dartmouth. It consists of a silver buck's head, full face, on a blue shield; the motto is "Service through kindness and peaceful means."

CHAPTER I

SOUTHWORTH LIBRARY

In the year 1878 (only two years after the eventful year for Dewey, Cutter and the American Library Association) the pastor of the Congregational Church of South Dartmouth conceived the idea of forming a literary and social group whose object was to establish a public library; only the village folk of Padanaram were eligible for membership. Various musical and theatrical programs were offered by the village young people and after nearly a year of such work, enough money was obtained to send the pastor, Reverend Salter F. Calhoun, to Boston to make selections for a library. The collection consisted of eight books--biography, travel, history, and fiction; the one book of fiction was Romola. The sparse but dignified collection was placed on a long table in the front hall of Mrs. Edward Manchester's home on Prospect Street, just below the present Southworth.²

When the library outgrew its first site, the books were moved to the upper floor of Potter's Store, which was two blocks south of the Manchester home. A fire in the store necessitated the transfer of the undamaged volumes across the street to a small building, one side of which was used as a boys' club.

At this time, the village doctor and the village library became associated and began their respective careers

together. Dr. Andrew B. Cushman, who was searching for a place to begin his practice, offered to pay the rent (\$24 annually) and provide the fuel for the newly situated library if he were allowed to share its quarters. The offer was accepted and Dr. Cushman, thereafter, used the library as an office. For a number of years, the association continued as both the doctor and the library performed their essential duties to the town.³

In 1890, John Haywood Southworth, a village native donated a permanent library building and 2,500 books in memory of his father, Deacon John Southworth. R.H. Slack was architect and Samuel Davis agreed to furnish materials and construct the two story building containing 1,999 square feet for the sum of \$4,785. The structure has a semi-circular end in which the reference room with a fireplace is located; the other room contains the charging desk and the open stacks of fiction. The childrens' room is in the basement.⁴ The exterior is of rough pasture stone and the doors, window trimmings and heads and arches are of brick. The sill and the belt are of rock-faced granite and the ivy-covered walls provide a correct degree of stateliness.

On the day Southworth Library was dedicated, Saturday, February 1, 1890, an original poem, which was written for the occasion, was read by its author, Reverend Martin S. Howard. The poem read in part:

The noble thoughts of bygone days;
 The legends old; the poet's song;
 The wisdom of philosophy;
 The thrilling tale where right and wrong
 In conflict met in deadly clasp;
 The stirring deeds of history;
 The strifes and toils of human souls;
 The world's great efforts to be free,

Shall here be told in prose and rhyme;
 The peerless names of earth shall come
 With all their stores and priceless wealth,
 And make these shelves their lasting homes:
 Thanks to the foresight that conceived
 So wise and rich and rare a gift;
 That sought the nobler part of man
 To bless, refine, reclaim, uplift.⁵

The library still retains a copy of the catalog of the 2,500 books presented at the time of dedication. Some of the titles which appeared in that catalog were Lorna Doone, Jane Eyre, Uncle Tom's Cabin, Gulliver's Travels, Alice In Wonderland, Robinson Crusoe, Little Women, Little Lord Fauntleroy, Lay of the Last Minstrel, Lovesongs of Childhood, and Ragged Dick.⁶

A library card cost 50 cents and there was a one cent a day charge for overdue books.

In the autumn of 1921, a donation of \$475 was received from the Padanaram Improvement Association for modern plumbing and running water and in the same year \$21.86 was spent for books, \$150 for salaries and \$1.30 for washing floors. A sum of \$100 was appropriated by the town to establish a branch of Southworth at the town hall. The library was called Apponagansett Library and was located in the assessors' office.⁷ It was in existence for seven years



SOUTHWORTH LIBRARY

and was greatly appreciated by the older people in the community who spoke no English. Books written in Portuguese were borrowed through the Department of Public Libraries and although few adults patronized the library, children made selections for their parents as well as themselves. It was noted in 1925 that a total of 26 cents was collected in fines at Apponagansett.⁸

Prior to 1927, the library was run under the management of its private board of trustees and was dependent upon the town for its financial support. It was voted by these directors to transfer the library to the town of Dartmouth and the voters accepted it in March of 1927. Circulation at that time was 17,291 and a total of 404 books was added during the year.⁹

In the winter of 1936, activity in the reading room was compared to that in a clubroom because many of the unemployed boys from Bliss Corner and Russells Mills Road congregated at the library. The effect of the Depression was felt and "the library became a haven for those who had no other means of entertainment. Boys who three and four years ago were uncouth and unruly are now very helpful."¹⁰ Around this time, also probably because of the Depression, the library appropriation was cut, and the ways and means devised to make up the difference were bridge teas and candy sales which were held in the library. A Book Week call for gifts of books was answered with donations of over 100 books which

children donated from their personal collections.¹¹

A memorable event which occurred in 1938 was the singing of Christmas carols on the library steps on Christmas Eve by the Girl Scout Mariners. The carollers were led by Miss Louise Strongman, Mariner leader and long-time library trustee, and Mrs. Dorothy Martin, who later became the first director of the Dartmouth Public Libraries.¹²

Four years later, during a Victory Book Drive, Southworth collected 1,200 books and an Army encampment at Mishaum Point benefited from the effort.¹³

In 1957, a table and a chair were introduced to the reading room at Southworth so that students might work there and the reading room became transformed into a reference room. An office was made available for the library director in the janitor's broom closet.¹⁴ During 1958, new bookcases were added to the erstwhile reading-reference room, hiding the fireplace and relegating the easy chair to the cellar, thus making the entire floor of the library one large stack room.

A library study committee presented the town meetings of 1958 and 1959 with reports of the inadequacy of Southworth as a building and of the unsuitability of the site for expansion; however, although the findings of the committee were acknowledged, nothing more constructive was done about the situation at that time. In the years that followed, battles were waged for and against a new library. Major

difficulties were the selection of a site which would be acceptable to the entire town, reluctance of the taxpayers to spend a portion of their tax dollar to build a new and adequate main library, and the sentimental attachment that the people of South Dartmouth felt for Southworth. At long last, on April 4, 1967, town meeting members voted to build a main library in South Dartmouth to replace the oldest library in the town. The sum of \$515,000 was appropriated for this purpose. The firm of Richmond & Goldberg, architects of Boston and Mr. Francis Keough, library consultant of Springfield have been retained to aid in this undertaking. The new library will have an area of 22,120 square feet, an area which is larger than that of the combined area of all of the existing libraries. It will be a modified contemporary design and the exterior will probably be of white brick and rosé stone. It can be best described as a two-story building with a 75,000 story capacity. The library will occupy one corner of the Andrew B. Cushman School property.

CHAPTER II

DARTMOUTH FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Seventy-five years ago, Dartmouth Free Public Library began at the Village School in Russells Mills. This old building, in 1895, housed thirty-one scholars from the first grade through two years of high school. The principal, Thomas Barry, felt the need for a library and persuaded the teachers to act as librarians; the State Board of Public Libraries agreed to allow the sum of \$100 which was to be expended for books provided the town would appropriate at least \$50 annually. The library was established. In those years, only the village children and graduates from out-lying schools who came to the high school had access to the library.¹⁵ Town statistics before 1900 were somewhat incomplete and although no count was kept of books, circulation or even the human inhabitants, meticulously counted were 983 horses, 1556 cows, 25 sheep, 100 swine, 13,411 fowl, and 977 houses.¹⁶

Lack of space and the inconvenience of opening the library during school vacations caused its removal in 1904 to a small building which was once used as a tailor shop. The annual appropriation had risen from \$50 to \$125. Over 130 people were listed as book borrowers and the circulation was over 1,000. During the next twelve years, the annual

appropriation rose gradually to \$400, the number of book borrowers to 200 and the circulation to 4,300.¹⁷

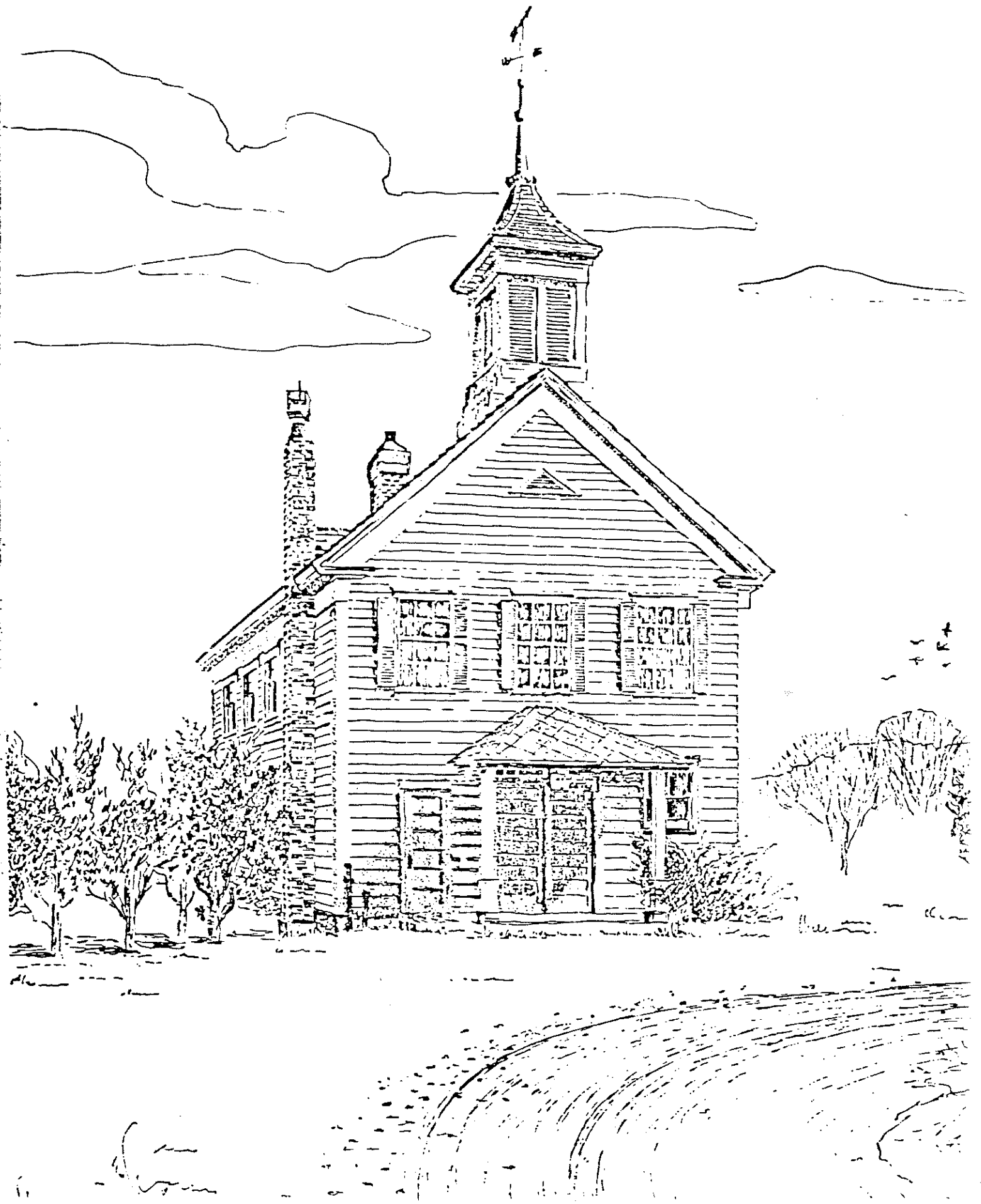
A new school house was built in 1914 and the old school was deserted. Meantime, the library quarters in the tailor shop were again becoming cramped, and in 1916, the town voted \$500 to remodel the old school house into a permanent library and Dartmouth Free Public Library reverted to its original site.¹⁸

In 1920, the library began the practice of opening at noon for the benefit of the children who attended Russells Mills School.¹⁹ This practice continued until June, 1966, when the Russells Mills School was closed permantly.

During Book Week of 1935, the school children, with Mrs. John Waldo, a library trustee, visited the historic sites of Russells Mills and learned about the village as an industrial center.²⁰

For eight months in 1940, three people employed by the W.P.A. worked at the library in Russells Mills. Library books were mended, cleaned, classified, arranged, rearranged, indexed, and cataloged. At about this same time, the State Board of Libraries made available the services of their professional staff to weed the collection. Dartmouth Free Public also depended heavily upon books borrowed from New Bedford Public Library, Millicent Library of Fairhaven, and the Division of Public Libraries to supply readers and to supplement its collection.²¹

By 1958, the needs of the library were again becoming



acute and the trustees eyed the \$5,200 in the Unusual Expenses Account and surveyed the immediate needs of the library. The town meeting in April, 1959, authorized the library trustees to expend the \$5,200 and added an appropriation of \$1,600 from the town funds. The building was completely modernized with new stacks, running water, a new heating system and adequate lighting. The main office, which had been previously at Southworth and later at the town hall finally became located at Russells Mills Library. Although the Dartmouth Free Public Library is the oldest library building in the town, it serves well as library, office, receiving room, a cataloging room, and as a storage facility for seldom-used books of the three libraries. The entire first floor is devoted to the library and the second floor is used as the bookkeeping and book keeping offices. The fireplace on the ground floor and the blackboards upstairs remain as pleasant and constant reminders of days past.



NORTH DARTMOUTH LIBRARY

CHAPTER III

NORTH DARTMOUTH PUBLIC LIBRARY

Although the town's first library came into existence in 1878, it wasn't until 1902 that the North Dartmouth branch started out as a small collection on one or two shelves in an old school building in back of the present-day Job. S. Gidley School, which is located on Tucker Road in North Dartmouth. The school principal was in charge of the library during the school year and during summer months a girl who lived in the neighborhood was in charge. The library was open two afternoons a week for an hour and a half each afternoon. As time went on, it was considered unreasonable to expect the school to carry on this outside activity and the trustee, Mr. Henry T. Gidley, made arrangements to move the library to the front room of the home of Ephriam Palmer on Tucker Road.

By 1910, the one room that the library occupied in the home of Mr. Palmer did not have sufficient space to accommodate the 1,131 books in the collection comfortably, and finally in March of 1911, the annual town meeting voted the sum of \$1,500 for the purpose of building a library in North Dartmouth. The building, located on the main street (State Road) of Smith Mills village, was 20 feet wide and 25 feet long and consisted of one room and a small front

porch. The exterior was stucco and the interior walls were of plaster and natural wood wainscoting. The stacks came from the old New Bedford Library, which was being made over into the Municipal Building in the city.²²

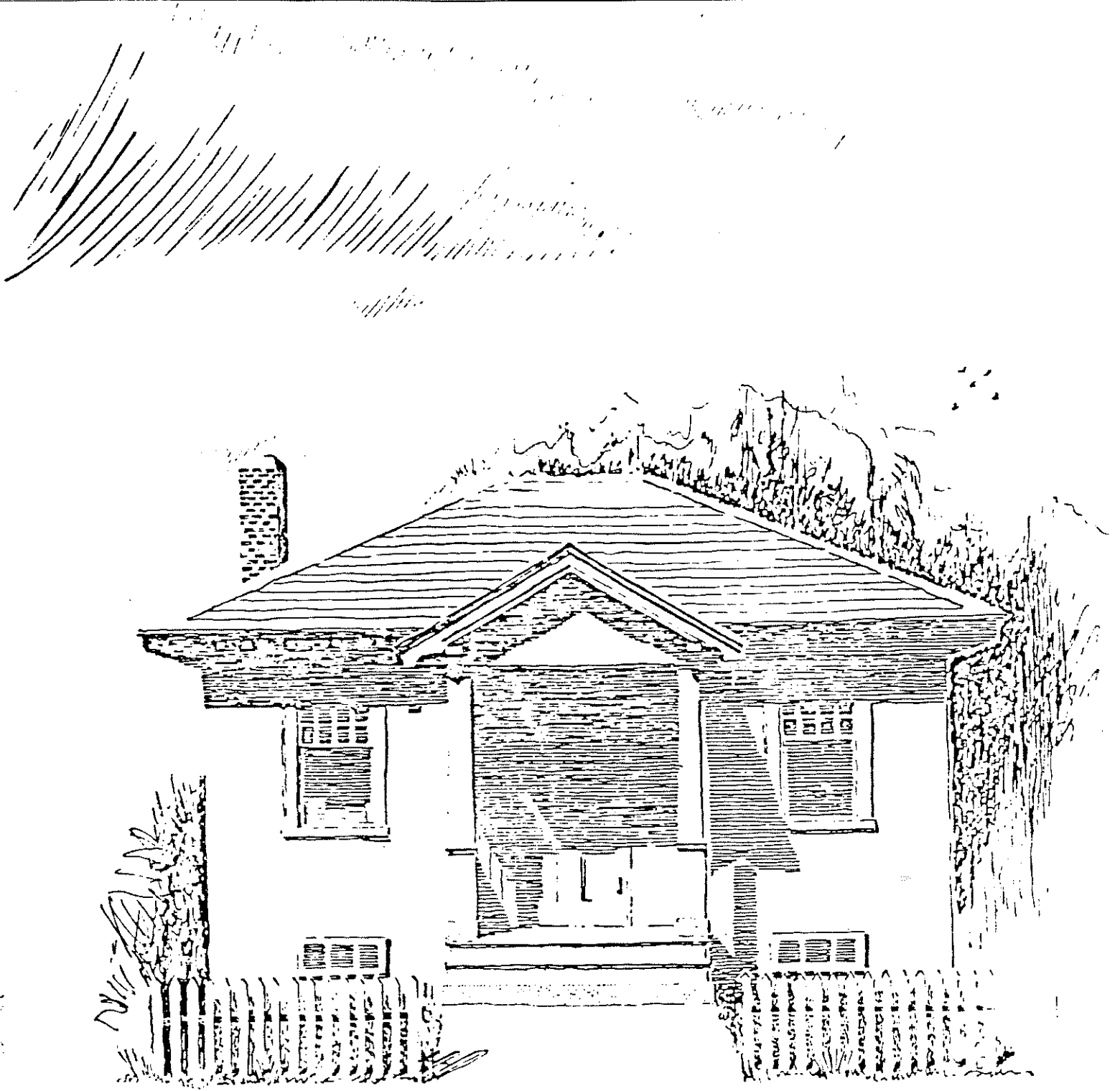
In 1919, a new rule was established which permitted any child who could write his name to have a library card;²³ the rule still prevails.

In 1924, a wood-burning furnace was installed in North Dartmouth and ten years later a wash room was installed in the basement, also.²⁴

The Chase Road School established a branch library in affiliation with the North Dartmouth Library in 1927 and Charles A. Lindbergh's We was the most popular book in the library on State Road.²⁵

In 1940, the W.P.A. conducted a bookmending project in North Dartmouth and as in the years before and after, the State Bookmobile was a source of many of our reading materials.²⁶

In 1942, the library in Smith Mills was the only library which was not adversely affected by the fuel oil shortage. Because the other libraries in the town were heated by fuel oil, they were forced to curtail their hours, while North Dartmouth, with its less progressive form of heating (wood) did prove that there most certainly is no fuel like an old fuel. North Dartmouth purchased 217 books during that year and the demand for books concerned with THE WAR was noted. Books mentioned in this connection were See Here, Private



S. Price

Hargrove, They Were Expendable, The Raft, The Last Train to Berlin and Suez to Singapore.²⁷

The library, in 1947, was scrupulously weeded because of inadequate space for the book collection, but it wasn't until eleven years later that the town meeting recognized the need for larger facilities and organized a library study committee. In April, two years later, the advice of the study committee was favorably acted upon and the town appropriated \$78,000 to construct and equip a new library. The actual cost of the building at Smith Mills was \$71,240.²⁵ and the new library is within a stone's throw of the site of the old school house where the North Dartmouth branch originally started. The new library on Tucker Road is arranged so that approximately half of its area is devoted to adult and young adult fiction and reference works; the other half is divided into the juvenile book section, office and workroom. The charging desk is centrally located and is convenient for supervising the entire library. The stacks are open and movable and an exceptionally large peg board area makes for a constant display of imagination, information, creativity, and stamina. The overall square footage of the new building is 3,600 and the book capacity is 6,500.

CHAPTER IV

DARTMOUTH PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Until 1956, each library district had one trustee who acted as overseer of the library--made up the budget for the library and, when necessary, hired personnel, in fact, was responsible for the library as an entity. In March of the year, three additional members were added to the existing board of three and the libraries, which had been autonomous, became coordinated into one system. The trustees became responsible for all of the libraries instead of the specific one in their district, and although there was geographical representation, sectional rivalries were nonexistent; the system functioned smoothly from the beginning. The position of director was created to guide the destinies of all three libraries and to act as the liaison between the trustees and the staff.

In the past decade, the most significant happenings have been the extending of borrowing privileges to the readers of Fairhaven and Westport on a reciprocal basis, supplying, once again, foreign books to our various ethnic groups through inter-library loan, and establishing rotating collections in all of the rest and nursing homes in the town. School deposits began with the association of the schools and the libraries early in the history of the town but another dimension was added in 1966 when the services of the

public libraries and librarians were extended to those schools which did not have their own school libraries. The public librarians, on a regular weekly schedule, are instructing students in library procedures, materials, and functions. Library of Congress cards have been introduced into the system, recently, making for a more uniform and complete, if less imaginative and colorful, cataloging.

The American Library Association, in its publication Public Library Service sets forth the standard:

The ultimate aim of all public library activities is service to the people. Through service functions the library staff meets the user, helps him locate resources, furnishes material, and aids him, if necessary, in its use--in short, service opens the door to knowledge. The collection is maintained for such service; cataloging activities are carried out to facilitate it; buildings and equipment provide the physical means to it.²⁸

This is our aim.

APPENDIX I

BOOK EXPENDITURES AND CIRCULATION FIGURES

YEAR	BOOK EXPENDITURES	CIRCULATION
1897	50.40	not reported
1898	49.96	not reported
1899	144.71	not reported
1908	134.44	6050
1911	320.01	8729
1921	650.87	15514
1925	942.80	23384
1927	1033.18	33901
1932	1243.31	52563
1936	1032.92	50939
1940	1238.90	48723
1946	1026.24	33471
1948	1207.14	45814
1949	1445.40	34713
1953	2447.49	47661
1954	2437.18	48115
1956	4108.31	57245
1960	6874.41	94587
1961	8498.93	110820
1963	8463.97	103448
1964	8947.35	103522
1966	9495.48	112891

APPENDIX II

LIBRARIANS PAST AND PRESENT

Mrs. Edward Manchester	Letitia Pettway
Flora Mathews	Elsie Haskell
Mrs. Walter Macy	Elizabeth Gibson
Flora Baker	Virginia Morrison
Dr. Henry Walker	Mabel Mosher
Helen Cushman	Elizabeth Gidley
Frances Tabor	Alice Gidley
Phoebe Winterbottom	Mildred Haskins
Theodosia Chace	Hildegard Hotten
Mary Wilson	Bessie Willcott
Mrs. Albert Myers	Ruth Russell
Dorothy Martin	Mona Miller
Charlotte McCoy	Ellen Wilder
Dorothy Keith	Dorothy Rowbotham
Emma Sherratt	Lucia Bolton
Mary Smith	Betty Pierce
Kathleen Murray	Ethel Jones
Mary Tucker	

APPENDIX III

POPULATION

1675..... About 30 homes
 1765..... 4,506 inhabitants
 1776..... 6,773 inhabitants

(These figures were for Old Dartmouth which included New Bedford, Fairhaven, Acushnet, Westport. These towns were not set off from Dartmouth until 1787.)

1790..... 2499	1890.....3122
1800..... 2660	1900.....3669
1810..... 3219	1910.....3669
1820..... 3636	1920.....6493
1830..... 3866	1930.....9000
1840..... 4135	1940.....9011
1850..... 3868	1950.....11115
1860..... 38883	1960.....14608
1870..... 3367	1966.....17187
1880.....3430	

APPENDIX IV

TRUSTEES PAST AND PRESENT

James Allen II	Elizabeth D. Carter
William Thacher	Louise E. Strongman
James H. Tucker	Dorothy D. Hawes
Edward B. Sturtevant	William L. Lillie
Henry T. Gidley	Viola H. Sherman
Charles E. Soule	Esther R. Walter
Clarence H. Brownell	Susan Knowles
Harry S. Goodwin	Emery O. Lewis
Elizabeth Swift	Norbert Crothers
Bertha B. Waldo	Florence Smith
Bessie B. Snow	Orrington A. Simmons
Mary Tucker	Leona Walder
Joseph Silveira Jr.	

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⁴ "Southworth Library, Padanaram, Observes Fiftieth Year of Service in Present Building," <u>Standard- times</u> (New Bedford) September 30, 1940, p.16	4
⁵ Howard, Reverend Martin S. <u>Poem</u> , p.3.	5
⁶ Book Catalog of Southworth Library, 1890.	5
⁷ Town of Dartmouth, <u>Annual Report</u> , 1921, p.37.	5
⁸ Town of Dartmouth, <u>Annual Report</u> , 1925, p.43.	7
⁹ Town of Dartmouth, <u>Annual Report</u> , 1927, p.54.	7
¹⁰ Town of Dartmouth, <u>Annual Report</u> , 1930, p.73	7
¹¹ Town of Dartmouth, <u>Annual Report</u> , 1936, p.108	8
¹² Interview with Dorothy Poulsen, March 27, 1967.	8
¹³ Town of Dartmouth, <u>Annual Report</u> , 1942, p.58.	8
¹⁴ Poulsen, <u>op. cit.</u>	8
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¹⁵ "Russells Mills Library Is Handsomely Rebound," <u>Standard-times</u> (New Bedford) January 3, 1960, p.12.	11
¹⁶ Town of Dartmouth, <u>Financial Report</u> , 1897, p.6.	11

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21 Town of Dartmouth, Annual Report, 1940, p.97.	12
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22 <u>North Dartmouth Library Bulletin</u> , 1936, p.3.	16
23 Town of Dartmouth, <u>Annual Report</u> , 1919, p.41.	16
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24 Interview with Alice Gidley, April 16, 1967.	16
25 Annual Report, 1927, <u>op. cit.</u> p.58.	16
26 Annual Report, 1940. <u>op. cit.</u> p.95.	16
27 Annual Report, 1942, <u>op. cit.</u> p.60.	18
28 "Guide to Evaluation with Minimum Standards," <u>Public Library Service</u> (Chicago, American Library Association, 1956) p. 24.	21

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- Howard, Reverend Martin S., Poem, 1890.
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