

ETNA LIBRARY TURNS A CENTURY

"Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday dear Etna Library, happy birthday to you!"

That song is usually followed with the verse: "How old are you now? How old are you now ..." The answer is an unbelievable *100 years*

In actuality, the present Etna Library building has reached its 100th birthday this year, but the Hanover town library had its beginnings almost 200 years ago.

It was in 1801, that the first town library was incorporated by a special state charter. The collection was made up of donated books. These were housed in various private homes, so, over the years, people could simply visit their neighbor's house to borrow a book. In 1883, The Etna Library and Debating Society was formed. Each year, one member of the society was paid an annual fee of \$5 to house the collection. It was in 1899 that the first real library was housed in Hayes Hall located over "Charley's Store" in Etna. The collection consisted of the 224 books from the Library and Debating Society combined with the gifts of 100 new books provided by the state of New Hampshire and donations of books from the Dartmouth Bookstore. The budget for the operation of the library, as presented in the Hanover Town Report in 1899, was \$151.50.

In 1905, the town of Hanover appropriated the sum of \$2,500 for the construction of a library building in Etna. History runs true to form, so, of course, a committee was formed and charged with the task to come up with a design, to build the new facility, and to save \$500 dollars from the appropriation to be used as an endowment. Three very familiar

names in the history of Hanover were entrusted with this task. H.W Hoyt, Chandler P.

Smith and Robert Fletcher (a busy man, who was simultaneously designing and constructing the Hanover Water Works). They drew up the plans and supervised the construction. The building was to be rectangular in shape, and one story high. The interior was to be a single room, 25 by 33 feet. The building had a decorative paneled ceiling, and the doorway, bookshelves and front desk were all

crafted from native hazelwood. Air spaces were built between the double walls to protect the building from dampness. To complete the look, the entrance was a flight of native granite steps, donated by Henry C. Whipple in memory of J.W. Dodge.

Over the years little has changed in the original building. The few changes have been those necessary to keep up with the times. For example, in 1932 electricity was installed. As the library became more popular, attracting all ages, young and old, the hours of operation were extended. This led to the installation of plumbing in 1970. And, over the years, the granite foundation has been shored up. The original desk chair in the main library has a new seat, but otherwise, things inside look the same. The beautiful woodwork remains as it did when the building opened in 1905.

What many people may not know is that the Etna Library as we know it today remains

the official Hanover town library. The newly enlarged and renovated Howe Library, located in downtown Hanover, is a semi-private organization governed by a privately appointed board of trustees. The trustees of the Etna Library are elected by the general population of the town of Hanover.

Over the years, many prominent Hanover citizens have answered the call to assist the Etna Library. Edward P. Storrs, founder of the Dartmouth Bookstore, made sizable donations of books to begin a collection that now numbers almost 9,000 items. The flowering crabapple tree growing on the front lawn was planted in memory of James Campion. Throughout the years, the librarians have made the library a welcoming place for young and old. It is cozy. It is comfortable. It is an inviting place to visit, browse and spend some time with a book or a friend.

I would like to thank Barbara Prince, the present librarian, for her help in supplying facts for this article. Residents of Hanover, go and visit your town library. Witness for yourself the charm and beauty of the building that was conceived 100 years ago. You

can't help but sing out Happy Birthday and to offer the wish that it may continue to bring the printed word alive to readers of all ages for many, many more years. With its solid foundation of creative construction and its tradition of support from local citizens, I am sure it will.

Willy Black is a retired schoolteacher and the town meeting moderator of Hanover.



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