History of the Hanover Town Library

July 1, 2026

Self-Guided Tour

Welcome and History Overview

The Etna Library's official, legal name is The Hanover Town Library. It was established in 1898 as the original public library for the entire town of Hanover, NH.

From 1899 through 1905, the Hanover Town Library operated above Hayes' Hall and Store, with a collection of about 400 books.

In 1905, the Town of Hanover approved plans for a new one-room library, 25-by-33 feet, with ceiling, vestibule and door of varnished hazelwood and a vault.

Robert Fletcher, Dartmouth Thayer professor and library trustee, drew up the blueprint. The total cost of the building was a little over $2,800. On March 10, 1906, library books were moved from Hayes Hall to the new building.

You stand in that building tonight! Thank you for joining us for this special celebration of the Hanover Town Library.

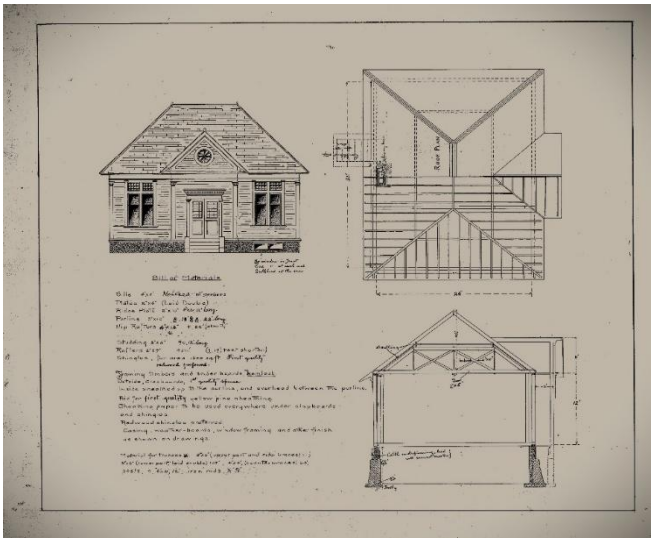
During this self-guided tour, we invite you to imagine the library as it was 120 years ago. You might have arrived this evening via horse-drawn carriage. The building would have been heated by a wood stove, and electric lightning wouldn't be arriving for another twenty-six years. The songs you heard playing as you entered the building this evening were some of the most popular of the period.

In the world outside these walls, 1906 was a year marked by several massive natural disasters (like the devastating San Francisco earthquake) and important breakthroughs in early radio and aviation. The First World War was still eight years away.

Self-Guided Tour

Explore the library, finding each point of interest below, in the order shown. Each location/item will be marked by its corresponding number. If you need help tracking anything down, let us know!

#1: Bookshelves/Cabinets



Much of what you see around you is original to the building's construction in 1905, including the bookshelves and corner cabinets that wrap the building's perimeter.

In the 1906 Hanover Town Annual Report, the Library's Trustees described the construction of the library building:

"After the vote of the town to build with brick there was $2,100 available, with interest accrued. In such a case an architect's fee and a contractor's profit would have taken too large a share of the amount; hence the trustees themselves made the plans and bought the materials and superintended the work.

"The best materials were procured, the workmanship is first-class throughout, and it is believed that there will be little or no need of repairs for years to come. The underpinning, although it has a three-inch cut chamfer, was secured at the price of plain stone, as it was originally cut for a building elsewhere. The brick was from an extra good lot at the Lebanon yard, and was laid by very competent masons. [The building's interior includes] window casings, the vestibule and door, the shelving which extends entirely around the room, and a paneled ceiling overhead."

(Before moving on to #2 on the tour, make sure you take a moment to look up at the ceiling. As mentioned above, it's also original from 1905, and is beautiful)!

#2: Table & Chairs

The large table at the center of the library has been in the building since 1906 and was donated by E.H. Wright.

Take a moment to think about all the people who have gathered around this very table in this very room over the last 120 years, engaged in countless activities: book discussions, children's story times, individuals reading books and newspapers, people writing with pens dipped into an inkwell, arts & crafts and knitting groups... the list is endless.

And, that list includes library patrons gathering to assist with war efforts. From the 1944 Library Trustees' report:

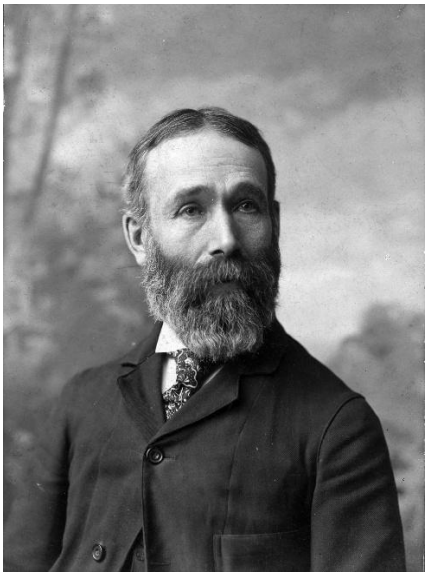
"The Hanover Town Library has been open ninety-seven days this year. The number of books loaned has been slightly smaller this year. This fact is not surprising when we realize the extra amount of work everyone is called upon to do in these days of war. The library is still being used every Thursday for the work on Red Cross surgical dressings."

#3: Circulation Desk

The circulation desk was also donated by E.H. Wright and has also been in the library since 1906. Twenty different Library Directors have sat at this desk over the last 120 years.

For more information on some of these librarians, see below.

#4: Past Librarians



Return to the library's table to learn about five of the Hanover Town Library's directors. These librarians were chosen to highlight because of the significant impact each of them had upon this institution.

(The original photographs of Thomas Praddex, Nettie Praddex, and Kathrina Spencer are hanging, framed, on the library's walls).

A. **Thomas Praddex** (1898 – 1910)

Thomas Praddex was the first Hanover Town Librarian, serving as director of the library from 1898 until his death in 1910. He spent part of his time as director while the library was still located over the Haye's Store and then helped oversee the construction of the current library building in 1905.

B. **Nettie Praddex** (1910 – 1929)

Thomas Praddex passed away on May 29, 1910, at the age of 72. At that time, his wife, Nettie Praddex, assumed responsibilities as the Town's librarian. Mrs. Praddex would serve as director of the Hanover Town Library until her retirement in 1929.

C. **Kathrina (Katarina) Spencer** (1935 – 1953)

Kathrina (sometimes written as 'Katarina') Spencer served as librarian from 1935-1953. The unforgettable photo you see on the table captures both the warm spirit Miss Spencer was known for, as well as the rich rural and agricultural past of Etna.

In her 1946 update in the Town of Hanover Annual Report, Miss Spencer wrote:

"The card catalogue is in the process of revision. The juvenile books have been classified according to the Dewey Decimal System. The library has received some valuable gifts. Mrs. E. M. Hopkins of Hanover gave four bound volumes of the Youth's Companion... The librarian visited the upper grades in our village school during Book Week, showed books and told stories. Every book was borrowed and the children came to the library for more."

D. **Patricia Hardenberg** (1988 – 1999)

Patricia (Patti) Hardenberg served as director from 1988-1999. Patti made many important changes to the Hanover Town Library during her time here, focusing on community outreach and new programming.

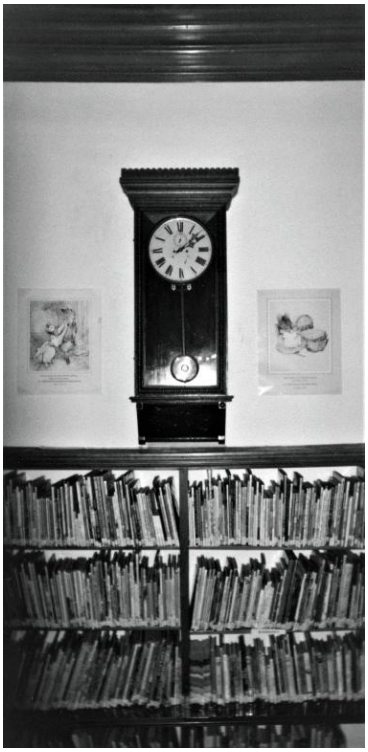
Open hours were steadily increased during Patti's tenure, story times were revitalized, and craft activities were plentiful. One of Patti's final responsibilities as director was to oversee the transition of the Hanover Town Library's catalog from print to digital format.

E. **Barbara Prince** (1999 – 2021)

Barbara was the Hanover Town Library's longest-serving director thus far, shepherding the library from 1999-2021.

Barbara adored reading to kids during her weekly Story Times and offered frequent special events for all ages. During Barbara's tenure, library hours increased and an addition to the building was constructed.

Barbara infused warmth and creativity into the Hanover Town Library for over twenty years, leaving an indelible mark on this institution and on this community.



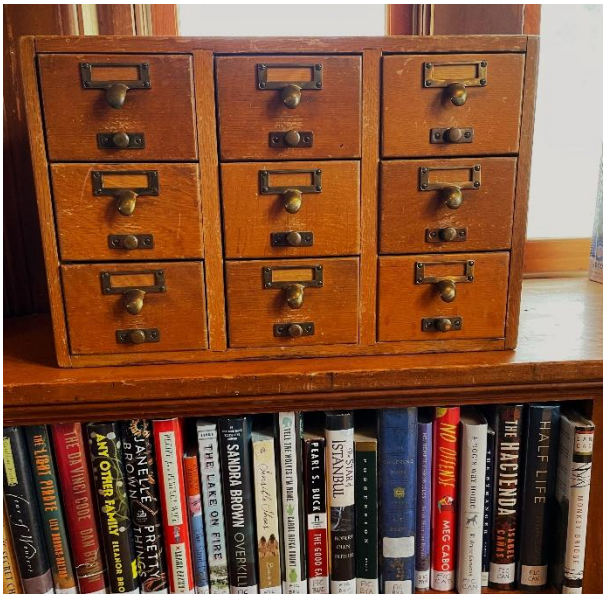
#5: Clock

The Hanover Town Library's clock was made by the Waterbury Clock Company, one of many Connecticut clock manufacturers founded in the mid-19th century. The library's model, a Waterbury model 67 regulator, was first made in 1912.

It is a unique time piece because it uses two balanced weights to run a single time gear train. Each weight is wound by its own winding arbor. This was considered a simple form of maintaining power and an innovation at the time. The importance of this feature is that while one weight is being wound, the clock won't miss a tick (or a tock) because the other weight continues to drive the movement during the winding.

The librarians still, to this day, wind this clock once every week.

#6: Card Catalog



This card catalog was purchased by the Hanover Town Library in 1936. From the Library Trustees' 1936 annual report:

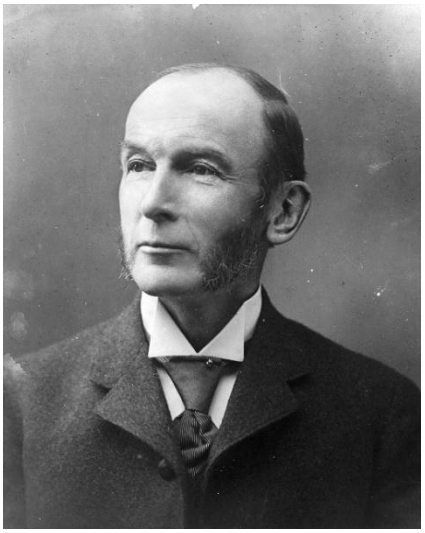
"A new nine drawer card catalogue has been purchased to replace the four drawer one which we have outgrown."

The original four-drawer card catalog has unfortunately been lost to time. This nine-drawer model also took a long hiatus from the building. Librarian Patti Hardenberg was allowed to purchase the card catalog from the Town when she left her role as director in 1999.

When the library's current director found out Patti had this card catalog at her house, he asked (maybe begged 😊) if she'd consider bringing it back to the library. Patti generously donated the card catalog and, after decades away, it was returned to its original home.

It's now used to house our popular Seed Library.

#7: Trustees



The Hanover Town Library has, since its founding in 1898, been governed by three voter-elected Trustees. Fifty different Trustees have now served the Hanover Town Library and, by extension, the larger community.

If you return to the library's table, you'll find a photograph of one of these Trustees: Robert Fletcher.

Mr. Fletcher was the director of Dartmouth College's Thayer School of Engineering for forty-seven years, and director and president of the Hanover Water Works Company for almost forty years. He served as a Hanover Town Library Trustee from 1906-1934 (there are now Trustee term limits, but there were not, originally).

Upon Mr. Fletcher's resignation as a Trustee, the other Library Trustees wrote this about his years of service in the 1935 Annual Town Report:

"A word of appreciation should be spoken for the devoted interest and splendid service rendered by Prof. Fletcher on behalf of the Town Library. His name appears on the written contract for the building of the Library, which goes back to 1905. During these long years he has served faithfully and in a capacity which has helped to make the Library what it now is."

Levels of support for the Hanover Town Library from Town Management and the larger community have seen highs and lows across the library's long history. (As you would expect with any 128-year-old institution).

During periods of lower support, the library's Trustees have consistently been stalwart champions of this institution. In 1924, for example, the three Library Trustees (including Mr. Fletcher) penned this update within the Town of Hanover Annual Report:

"The Trustees believe that it is necessary at this time to call the attention of the townspeople to the present status of the library, its history and need of more liberal support.

"It is self-evident that less than $250 (see treasurer's report) for operating this town library through an entire year is pitifully and ridiculously small, and constitutes a reproach upon the intelligence and interest of the people. Although all books that could be discarded have been removed from the shelves, these are now much overcrowded, and one or two new bookcases have been needed for more than a year. There is constantly an insistent call for more books, especially for those suitable for the young people." - Robert Fletcher, Irving P. Fitts, Mrs. E. F. Emerson, Trustees

We thank all Trustees, past and present, for being champions of this library for over 120 years!

#8: Fire-proof Vault

The Hanover Town Library originally ended at... a vault. From the 1906 Town of Hanover Annual Report:

"The vault, added by special vote of the town, is entirely outside of the building itself, and is as fireproof as brick and cement-mortar can make it. This feature is very important as affording a safe depository for town records, and any other documents or valuables of small bulk, such as church and society records, etc., which the custodians may wish to

place beyond the risk of loss by fire. The interior dimensions of the vault are 4x9x8 ft., with another space about 4x5x4 ft., over the basement stairway."

In 1978, indoor plumbing was added to the building, and the vault became a bathroom. (And now, vault and bathroom have become a corridor between the old and new parts of the library building).

#9: Historical Items and Photos

Return to the library's table one more time to browse a collection of historical items and photographs:

- **A:** This ornate Bible has been at the library for well over a century. A hand-written note inside reads: *"This Bible was purchased for the Hanover Town Library and placed in the library May 21st 1910."* – Thomas Praddex, Librarian
- **B:** A photograph of students and children at the Etna School, dated June 1898. The Etna School once stood where the Etna Post Office is now found.
- **C:** Two programs (or 'programmes,' if you will) from the Etna Ladies' Reading Club. One is dated 1903-1904, the other 1905. (Feel free to flip through the pages, but please be gentle, as they're rather old)!
- **D:** Photograph from the Hayes Store. The Hanover Town Library originally resided over the store, from 1899 through 1905.
- **E:** Photograph of the Etna Fair, 1910. (You can see the First Baptist Church in the background).
- **F:** Photograph of the sawmill that used to be across from the library. Because of the multiple mills that once existed along the Mink Brook, Etna's original name was Mill Village
- **G:** Photographs of the Hanover Town Library's interior, including views of the wood stove (and the same table where you now stand, and the Bible from 'A,' on a side table in the photo on the right). [Not Dated]

#10: Library Addition

In 2010, the Town of Hanover purchased Hayes Farm Park from the heirs of Morris and Ethel Hayes, who owned the farmhouse and barn next to the library.

In 2014, a sunny post-and-beam addition was added to the original library building, and a lilac reading garden planted at the base of the path to the Nan and Allen King bird sanctuary.

Before the addition, there was no parking lot, and library visitors had to park along Etna Road and climb the steps to the building's front door.

Beside this numbered sign, you'll see a list of all the community members who donated to help make the Hayes land purchase and library addition possible.

#11: Etna Telephone Company

Now that you're in the library's addition, look over the row of New Book shelving to see one of the original telephones from the 'Etna Telephone Company.'

Origins of the Etna Telephone Company:

"Irving Powell Fitts (born 7/26/1856 died 3/11/1936) and Sam Stark ((born in 9/19/1880 - ?) who worked for him on Sunny Vale Farm) started the Etna Telephone Company. They bought a carload of instruments, telephone wire, insulators, brackets and one pair of climbers sometime between 1904 and 1912.

"Farmers dug the holes and cut their own poles to run the original lines. When enough customers joined, they

needed more lines so they set up a switchboard at Nellie Camp's (Millard Camp's widow) home at the corner of Dogford Rd near the cemetery. She ran the switchboard. Irving Fitts put up a private line down the old trace of the Wolfeboro Rd. from Sunny Vale Farm to Manassa Foss' place so the sisters Harriet (Fellows) Perley and Minnie (Fellows) Foss could visit.

Perley Fitts (my grandfather) recalls that as a boy he had some fun tapping into the private line and listening in on his grandmother Perley's talks with her sister Minnie."

- Excerpted from 'Fitts Families (Fitts-Fitz-Fittz) : a Genealogy'/ Sylvia Fitts Getchell c1989 p.253

#12: Food (AND appreciation for the library's amazing volunteers!)

The Hanover Town Library offers a huge number of special events and ongoing programs for our size and staffing levels. We're partially able to offer everything we do because of our incredible group of volunteers.

Our volunteers bake pies every year for the library's Pie Sale, staffed the library on Saturdays for decades, serve pizza at LEGO Club gatherings, help with arts & crafts activities, assist with reshelving books, courier circulating items back and forth between the Etna and Howe libraries every weekday, and so much more!

One example of 'so much more' – the food you're about to enjoy! Thank you to everyone who contributed to this special feast – food made using recipes from the late 1800s and early 1900s.

As you partake in food that would have been popular around the time the Hanover Town Library was founded, we hope you'll reflect upon where this library has been, where we now are, and where we hope to go in the future as we continue to serve this community.

Thank you so much for joining us for this event, and for being a part of the Hanover Town Library's ongoing story!