

The end of the Civil War enabled Americans to try to rebuild their lives and their communities. Rutland was no different. On March 5, 1866 the Town of Rutland voted to appropriate one hundred dollars for a public library. George A. Putnam was appointed librarian and the library was set up in his home on Main Street. This is currently the Bracebridge home at 237 Main Street. The library was opened for the loaning of books on May 26, 1866.



The Putnam House

In 1879 Almina Foster became the third librarian and the library was relocated to her house. She lived in the “little house”, next to the current Stidson home at 228 Main Street. This house is no longer standing. John B. Wells, a local cabinet maker, made and donated the first bookshelf for the library while it was located at the Foster home. The Annual Report from 1885 contained the first report by the Library Committee. The library had 1,307 books on its shelves and those books were signed out 1,640 times that year. Around this time the residents wanted a list of the books available at the library. In 1888 the library published the “*Catalogue of the Free Public Library, Rutland, Mass.*”, which contained a list of all books at the library. Books purchased after this were listed each year in the Annual Report.

The library, and other town offices, were growing and in need of more space. The “Red School” was built to house the town offices, the grammar school, and the library. The “Red School” was located at 280 Main Street the current location of the library. The



The "Red School"

library was moved to the “Red School” in 1899 when the “Red School” was completed. The Rutland taxpayers paid \$2.50 to have the library moved to its new home.

The library was growing and the residents were looking for another catalogue of the library contents. In 1909 a 54-page pamphlet was created and made available for “the small price of ten cents”. Every year after, until 1950, new books added to the library were listed in the Annual Report. As the library cataloguing system improved, the pamphlet and the annual list were no longer needed.

Although 1918 brought about the end of The Great War, also known as World War I, it was also the year of the influenza pandemic, which killed more people than the war. The influenza directly affected Rutland when the library had to close for 5 weeks to limit the spread of the disease. This year also brought about good news. Babe Ruth and the Boston Red Sox won the World Series against the Chicago Cubs and the estate of Horace H. King gave the Rutland Library its first Trust Fund of \$200. Many library patrons after this have followed Mr. King’s lead and had part of their estate set aside in trust funds to benefit the library and its patrons.

Rutland continued to be a popular place to reside and in 1933 the town began another study to deal with the need for additional space for the school, the town offices, and the library. The Board of Selectmen and the Library Trustees recommended a new two-story building for the town

offices and the library. On April 22, 1939 the library opened on the first floor in the newly constructed Community Hall in the center of town at 250 Main Street. The library was in the rooms where the current town clerks office is now located. A new oak desk was made and



Community Hall

donated by Mr. Chester E. Williams to be used to check out books. This desk was used for years as the main circulation desk and is still maintained by the library to this day.

The winter of 1942 was especially hard. World War II was going on and the entire country was feeling its devastating effects. The library was forced to reduce its hours to only Tuesdays to reduce fuel consumption which was needed for the war effort.

The town was growing and library use was expanding. In 1964 discussions began on the need for additional space for both the library and the town offices. These discussions went on for 5 years until the Trustees requested that the townspeople support the establishment of a new library. At the Annual Town Meeting in March of 1969, a library building committee of five members was appointed by the Selectmen to review costs, plans, and a site. The five members were; Carl R. Griffin Jr., Chairman; Albina B. Murphy, Clerk; Vivian W. Endicott; Stanley U. Pierson; and Arthur E. Smith.

On May 15, 1970 the voters of Rutland appropriated \$104,522 to prepare the site at 246 Main Street, construct the library, and furnish it for use as a library. This property was located adjacent to Community

Hall. The ground breaking took place on June 26, 1970 and on May 2, 1971 the building was dedicated and accepted by the town. On May 7, 1971 the library was officially opened to the public. The building committee commented that “the townspeople of



The Rutland Free Public Library

Rutland are getting a well-built, functional, and attractive building at an extremely reasonable cost”. 1971 was also the year that the “Friends of the Rutland Library” was created to conduct fundraising and provide programs and services at the library.

As the population continued to grow and library use increased, the library was unable to provide many services. Conditions were very crowded. Tables and chairs were removed to make room for bookshelves but this left table space very limited. Eventually the additional shelf space was full and book purchases were limited because there was no space to shelve them. The library was busting at the seams. The overcrowding problem at the library was noted as early as 1984. A Library Needs Study Committee documented the need for more library space in 1985, and in 1987 the study was continuing. By 1989, circulation was 37,971 books being checked out by 3,244 library patrons. The library was a busy place. In 1990 the roof began to leak and was threatening to damage the books. The town appropriated money for the repairs. By 1995, 4,156 borrowers checked out 55,699 books.

In October 1996 a Library Building Study Committee began to meet and study possible solutions. The Committee members were Sharon Berndt and John Scannell, co-chairs, Janet Barakian, Jack Brennan, Judy Daniel, Len Gengel, Harry Johnson, Beth Lambert, and Pauline Nylin. They spent years studying the library problems and different alternatives.

In May 1999 the voters of Rutland overwhelmingly approved funding for a new library with the understanding that the project would be held off until May of 2000 to see if the State of Massachusetts would have grant money available for the construction. In May 2000, the groundbreaking ceremony took place for the new library. The library was built on property at 280 Main Street, the location of the former “Red School”. In May 2001 the library closed for

three weeks while an “enormous volunteer effort” moved the contents of the library to its new home. On June 10<sup>th</sup> the library was opened to the public.



Rutland Public Library

The town residents were very excited about the new library. Circulation increased 22 % and patrons increased 18%. The meeting rooms in the basement were quickly utilized by the many town boards and organizations in need of meeting space. Eventually the large meeting room became Precinct 2, the polling place for half the town.

The Rutland Free Public Library, as it was known in 1866 when it started, is now commonly called the Rutland Public Library. As of 2004, when this article was written, the library has been serving the Rutland community for over 138 years. The strong community support for the library and the returning benefits to the community make the library an essential part of Rutland.

No library could function without a librarian putting in countless hours maintaining the library and serving the patrons. Although we have listed only the head librarians, it is important to remember the countless others who work as librarians, aides, and pages and keeps the library functioning. Volunteers donate numerous hours

providing a number of services to benefit the community. Since 1866, community residents and businesses have recognized the importance of a town library and have donated money, books, time, and possessions. Although the library provides a service to the community, time has shown that it takes a community to make a library.

Librarians:

1866-1875	George A. Putnam
1876-1878	Sarah Taylor
1879-1898	Almina A. Foster
1899-1914	Mrs. E. J. Prouty
1915-1919	Charlotte Drury
1920-1939	Edna Wheeler
1940-1964	Linda Hanff
1965-1977	Albina B. Murphy
1978-1987	Dorothy R. Patch
1988	Theresa M. Doresy
1989	Renee Voorhees
1990-1994	Belinda F. Thomasian
1995	Claire White & Jean Bigelow
1996-2000	May Lee Tom
2001-	Kerry Remington

This history was written by the Stephen Bedard from the Friends of the Rutland Library with the assistance of many others. Every effort was made to provide accurate information. Any known inaccuracies should be brought to the attention of the Library Director and we will make every effort to verify and correct the article. We also welcome any additional library related history.

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