

**A Brief History of the
Clifton Park-Halfmoon
Public Library**

Clifton Park-Halfmoon Public Library Milestones

1966

- Shenendehowa Rotary Club launches broad community-based Library Steering Committee for purposes of starting a Library for Clifton Park and Halfmoon

1967

- Residents of School District veto creation of a Community Library

1968

- Shenendehowa Free Library Association founded
- Library secures space above bank building at Rt.146 & Rt. 9 intersection

1969

- April 19, 1969 – First Library Opens over National Commercial Bank (Rt.9&146)

1971

- Library Moves to Cemetery Road Location in 1,000 sq. ft. old schoolhouse, former Baptist Church, provided by the Shenendehowa School District.

1973

- Friends of the Library formed

1974

- Library Board begins search for a permanent site for a 18,000 sq. ft. facility

1976

- Assemblyman Robert D'Andrea proposes state legislation to form a joint special Library District. Halfmoon rejects idea.

1977

- Building drive launched to solicit funds for building a new Library on donated site off Rt. 146

1979

- Rt. 146 site deemed too costly for development

Clifton Park-Halfmoon Public Library Milestones

1980

- Stephen Vinciguerra donates land on Clifton Country Road for a new Library.
- New Library construction completed by December

1981

- New 4,600 sq. ft. Library Opens, Built from Public Donations
- Population served – 36,000, Collection grows to 20,000, circulation at 115,000

1983

- First Computers in the Library, provided for training Children to program
- Long Range Planning committee formed

1984

- Long Range Plan identifies ways to stabilize funding and cope with growth
- Board votes to form a tax-supported special Library District

1985

- Special Tax District formed by State Legislature, signed by Gov. Cuomo
- Clifton Park residents approve 716-460, vote annually on Trustees and budget
- Halfmoon participates through annual contract

1986

- Name changed to Shenendehowa Public Library

1988

- Halfmoon voters defeat proposal to include Halfmoon in District 193-121
- Clifton Park voters approve expansion of Library to 18,600 sq. ft., 1,519-314
- Halfmoon continues on annual contract basis

1989

- Library provides on-line access to circulation
- May 24, 1989 Ground broken for expansion project

Clifton Park-Halfmoon Public Library Milestones

1990

- Enlarged Library opens with 45,000 volumes, 199,000 circulation
- Expanded facility serves 42,000 population in combined two towns

1991

- “Beginnings” sculpture by Bruno La Verdere unveiled

1992

- Circulation tops 300,000 mark

1993

- Library purchases adjoining parcel of 1.54 acres to expand parking

1994

- Library celebrates 25th anniversary
- Expansion proposal to 13,200 sq. ft. defeated 617-555

1995

- Parking lot expanded
- Library holds its first juried art show
- Patrons allowed to access availability and reserve on-line

1996

- Library web-site established
- Collection at 80,000, circulation grows to 362,000

1997

- Library re-configured to accommodate computer lab, reference room and reception desk. Program space shrinks to one room.

1999

- Library Celebrates 30th Anniversary, First Citizen Laureate Award given to Stephen and Beatrice Vinciguerra

2000

- Library acquires its 100,000th book.
- Library first offers e-books and e-mail reference
- Board re-addresses need for expansion

2001

- Library offers wireless access

2002

- Vote to enlarge the district to include Halfmoon passes 174-173
- Search for land begins for expanded Library

2003

- Woodward, Connor, Gillies & Seleman selected as architects for new Library
- \$15 million, 68,000sq. ft. Library on Moe Rd. defeated 1,876 -1,678
- Board opts to renew proposal process, begins new search for possible site

2004

- Proposal for a \$15 million, 55,000 sq.ft. Library passes 3,782-3,553
- YMCA announces plan to buy existing Library

2005

- Zoning variance approved, new Library construction begins

2006

- Groundbreaking take place for new 55,000 sq. ft. Library on Moe Road
- New Library Opened on December 11, 2006

2009

- Library Celebrates 40th Anniversary

A Brief History of the Clifton Park-Halfmoon Public Library

The history of the Clifton Park-Halfmoon Public Library has been characterized by vision and determination, serving the rapidly changing needs of a community in the throes of unrelenting growth. In only four decades, the Clifton Park-Halfmoon Public Library has evolved from meager beginnings to become a major community asset thanks to pioneers who first saw the need, citizens who guided development and staff that created and delivered unique, value-added services and patrons and residents, who in increasing numbers, have found value in and support the Library.

In late 2006, the Clifton Park-Halfmoon Public Library will moved into its fourth home, reflecting the ongoing challenge of providing adequate space, programs and services to the fastest growing community in the Capital District. The new, modern Clifton Park-Halfmoon Public Library, a two-story, 55,000 sq. ft. facility, held its grand opening on December 11, 2006.

Herein is a brief history the Library and the progress the Library has experiences since its inception.

Origins

Back in the mid-1960s Southern Saratoga County was in the early stages of population growth as one of the Capital District's most sought-after suburban communities. Although still largely rural in nature, residential development had begun in earnest in the 1950s with the population shift to the suburbs in full swing by the mid-1960s.

It was in the mid-1960s that William Fitzner, President of the Shenendehowa Rotary Club, spearheaded a project to start a Library. He put together a steering committee comprised of residents from both Clifton Park and Halfmoon, recruited from some sixty different civic organizations and clubs. The goal was to develop a plan to start a Library and solicit public input and approval.

After a year of work, a proposal went before voters in June of 1967 as part of the Shenendehowa School District Budget. Despite an initial budget request of only \$45,000, voters defeated the proposal 699 to 426. It was the first of many setbacks and a precursor of the ongoing challenge of gaining public understanding and support for the benefits a Public Library can bring to the community.

Origins (cont'd)

Despite the narrow loss at the polls, the original organizers were not deterred. They immediately went back to work on another plan. In early 1968 they established the Shenendehowa Free Library Association, setting up the library as a separate entity, independent from both town and school operations. Five trustees were chosen, by-laws written and on April 19, 1969 the Shenendehowa Free Library opened on the second floor of the National Commercial Bank and Trust Co. at the corner of Rt.9 and 146.

Books were obtained through a major effort of collecting donated texts and by the time the Library had its 'Grand Opening' on April 19, 1969, some 2300 books had been gathered, with another 1,000 books borrowed from the Southern Adirondack Library System (SALS). Mina LaCroix volunteered as the Librarian and the Library was open thirteen hours a week. That first year circulation tallied 9,000 volumes. Application to the State Education Department for a one-year provisional charter which was filed on October 29, 1970 and approved on January 27, 1971. After almost five years of struggle, the Library was finally functioning and gaining recognition as a community institution, a result of the persistence of those early pioneers who were determined to bring the benefits of a Library to their community.

Early Growth

While the 300 sq. ft. over the bank served the purpose of launching the Library, it was recognized early-on that the Library would quickly outgrow the space. The need for larger quarters was filled when the Shenendehowa Central School District made available an old school building it had acquired at the intersection of Old Route 146 and Cemetery Road. Originally built in 1843 as a Baptist Church and later used as a schoolhouse, the building provided about 1,000 sq. ft. or three times the space of the original Library.

The Library Board officially dedicated its "new" Library on April 16, 1972 and in June, Judith Levine was appointed as the first professional, paid Librarian. The Library made good use of this 130 year old building for most of the 1970s, with circulation reaching 100,000 volumes by the end of the decade.

Friends of the Library Established in 1973

As the Library grew, the Library Board helped organize a group of avid users to form the Friends of the Library in 1973. The Friends became an active and vital support group, raising funds and helping to promote interest in Library affairs throughout the two towns. The Friends also enjoyed the social aspects of organization. They held their first dinner dance in 1974. These annual affairs became major fund raisers that augmented funding provided by the towns of Clifton Park and Halfmoon. Over the years, the Friends have donated thousands of dollars to the Library in addition to their volunteer work.

Building a New Library

In 1977 a Building Development Committee was formed to explore approaches to raising funds and for gaining approval to build a new Library. By then the community population had risen to close to 36,000 people, over five times more than when the initial organizing effort began in 1966.

Land for a building site north of Rt.146 was generously donated by the Vinciguerra and Vinci families in 1977, and a major capital fund campaign was undertaken. A year later the architectural firm of Feibes and Schmitt designed a 4,600 sq. ft. building with future expansion factored into the plan.

Unfortunately, by 1979, it became apparent that the Rt.146 parcel was not going to be feasible because of high development costs and was subsequently abandoned. However, in 1980, a new site, on Clifton Country Road, was donated by the Vinciguerra Family. This site eventually became the location for the new Library.

While the Library was fast becoming recognized as an asset by residents of both towns, elected officials made it clear that the Library Board would have to raise the new building funds on their own. In addition to the capital campaign, a mortgage had to be obtained and, without the assurance of governmental funding, it fell to Library Trustees to guarantee the loan. The Burke and Rodgers families signed their names to the mortgage, risking their personal finances to guarantee the loan. Fortunately the Library was able to meet its obligations. Once again the Library had faced a formidable obstacle and had overcome with the help of an extraordinary contribution from supporters.

Building a New Library (cont'd)

Groundbreaking for the 4,600 sq. ft. building was held in May of 1979 with the building completed in December of 1980. The new Library, built solely by public subscription and a secured mortgage, opened on January 2, 1981. There was shelving for 30,000 books with 24,500 on hand at the opening, including 2,000 borrowed from SALS.

By now the Library was open 48 hours a week. In November of 1980 Nola Reis took over as Library Director when Judith Levine left for a directorship at a larger Library.

While the new Library facility was a welcomed improvement over previous quarters, the size was primarily determined by the reality of available funds. The Trustees recognized from the beginning that expansion would be required to accommodate the growth now evident everywhere in the community. They also had to consider alternate approaches to stabilizing funding so the Library could effectively operate and plan for its future.

From Private to Public – 1986

Recognizing the acute challenge of meeting the needs of a rapidly growing community, the Library Trustees appointed a Citizen Long Range Planning Committee in 1982 to examine future needs and to arrive at a plan for the Library.

One element of the committee's report was a recommendation to change the status of the Library from a free association to a special public library district in order to stabilize funding and operations. This required passing legislation at the State level and in 1985 the New York State legislature enacted a law, Chapter 519-Laws of 1985, establishing a Special Tax District, only the second such district to be approved by the State. In September of 1985, voters in Clifton Park approved the move by a vote of 716 to 460.

This meant that, every year, residents of Clifton Park would vote on the budget and elect trustees. At the time, the Town of Halfmoon was participating in the Library through a contractual relationship. On January 1, 1986 the Library officially became a public institution known as the Shenendehowa Public Library.

Growth Drives Expansion

The inevitability of expansion was apparent from day one when the new Library opened its doors in 1981. By the mid-1980s patrons numbered around 5,000 and circulation was rising rapidly each year. The size of the collection soon filled all the shelves and overcrowding was evident just three years after the opening.

1990 Expansion Planned

The Citizens Study of 1982-1984 had recommended enlarging the building. The Library Board of Trustees began planning for expansion by the late 1980s. In 1988 the architectural firm of Dodge Chamberlain was selected to design a major addition to the existing building. A plan was developed based on what the Trustees thought was affordable for residents.

In September of 1988, a proposal for a \$2 million dollar, 14,000 sq. ft. expansion went before voters and was overwhelmingly approved by a vote of 1519 to 314. The new, enlarged Library of 18,600 sq. ft. broke ground on May 24, 1989 and the Library moved into its new quarters in March of 1990.

The “Beginnings” Sculpture Commissioned

In conjunction with the expansion, the Board of Trustees commissioned an artist, Bruno LaVerdiere, to design a sculpture for the new Library. The result was a 12 ft. obelisk design containing the opening lines of some 75 noted literary pieces. Titled “Beginnings,” the sculpture was unveiled in October of 1991, the first anniversary in the new building.

Soaring Growth Impacts Operation

By the time the expanded Library was completed, population of the served two towns of Clifton Park and Halfmoon had risen to 44,000. Library patronage had grown to 6,500 and circulation was 243,000 by the end of 1990. Once the expanded Library opened, a surge in patronage occurred as residents in both towns began to use the Library in increasing numbers. By the early 1990s Trustees were already beginning to study and address future expansion as it was apparent that the Library would, again, simply run out of space.

Expansion Defeat Stymies Plans

A proposal was formulated to further expand the Library to 32,000 sq. ft. but was defeated by voters, 617 to 555, in September of 1994. The loss was due in part to a controversy that developed over the planned extension being placed in a small area near a creek on the southern border of the property.

The creek is actually the storm run-off from the Clifton Country Mall but had been designated a wetland. Even though the expansion plan had gained approval of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the Town Board, a few vocal residents made an issue out of it and the resulting controversy led to the defeat. This issue essentially stymied the Board from developing any practical plan for expanding on the existing site.

After this setback, the Library began years of reconfiguring and adapting the Library facility to serve varying needs. In 1995 the Board purchased land to the west of the existing lot and expanded the parking area using residual funds from the 1990 expansion.

Further efforts to accommodate growth within the existing building included reconfiguring the Library into three rooms in 1997; a Reference area, a Computer Lab and a Program Room essentially by sacrificing program space. The Trustees and staff continued in this mode into the new Millennium as they focused their creativity in meeting growth within the constraints of the existing building, but the Library was literally running out of space by the end of the 1990s with many programs oversubscribed and residents turned away due to lack of space.

Technology and the Modern Library

Besides being impacted by population growth, the Library also experienced major challenges and opportunities brought about by technology, especially the introduction and evolution of computer technology. At the same time, computer literacy, in the general population, was becoming more and more important for education, at home and in the workplace.

First Computers in the Library – 1982

The first use of computers in the Shenendehowa Public Library dates back to 1982. A SALS grant brought two Apple IIE computers to the Library for use in computer training. The Library then purchased its own computer for automating Library operations and programs were developed for the acquisition of new books. This early Apple computer was soon outgrown, replaced with a new IBM Model 50 boasting a, then large capacity, 20 megabyte hard drive.

In 1983 a grant was obtained from the New York State Division of Youth to teach computer operation and elementary programming to 7-18 year olds. Ten Commodore 64 computer stations were installed and the training courses were begun. Several students, who were first introduced to these primitive early computers at the Library, went on to successful professional careers in programming and information system technology-related work. Over the years the computers were upgraded to keep pace with technology development and computer training remains a popular and valuable service.

To automate Library operations, SALS introduced a Digital Equipment VAX computer in 1986, permitting remote terminal access for its member libraries. CD-ROMs, produced by SALS, contained author, title and subject data, formerly stored in card files. These CD-ROMs received wide acceptance when they were put to use in the Shenendehowa Public Library in 1988.

Internet Promises Virtual Library

As the Internet developed, the opportunities to access information sources from around the world created the potential for a Virtual Library without walls. The Library began to offer Internet access via the Library Without Walls Program in 1994 and later launched its own web site in 1996. The web site eventually has evolved to allow patrons remote access to various databases and reference material as well as the opportunity to reserve books and audio/video materials and download audio books, e-books and music.

Computer Training

By the decade of the '90s computer literacy in the general population had evolved into a vital skill for many occupations and for residents to effectively compete in the Information Age. The Library developed and

offered courses in computer applications and usage. These programs continue to be very popular.

Wireless Access

In 2001 the Library set up a wireless access point within the facility that enabled patrons to bring their own computers into the Library and access the Internet. This helped relieve congestion in the computer lab while accommodating additional patrons.

Halfmoon Joins the District

A significant event occurred in 2001 when the Halfmoon Town Board approached the Library Board, petitioning to be included as a partner in the District. Halfmoon had participated in various arrangements over the years, but now the town was growing at double-digit annual rates. Halfmoon residents had grown to about a third of the patron base and town leaders recognized the time had come to expand the town's commitment. This meant that the legislation that created the district had to be amended and voted on again. After passing the state legislature, the proposal went before Halfmoon voters on February 28, 2002 and won narrow approval 174-173.

With Halfmoon now as a proportional partner, the Library was in a more secure position to plan for its future and once again address expansion in a meaningful way.

Creativity Runs Its Course

While the 1997 reconfigurations helped launch additional services and maximized the use of the 18,600 sq. ft. facility, they also eventually eroded many of the core service areas as space was lost for programs and private study. At the same time, the space allocated to computers, childrens programs and reference quickly became inadequate to meet community demand.

It was also clear from years of previous studies that expansion of the current facility was not feasible. The one story design of the facility made adding another story too costly and not practical. The Library also investigated leasing commercial space but that too was deemed not in the best interest of the district. So it was determined that the best approach to expansion was to build a new Library on a different site.

New Expansion Efforts

After years of study and research the Library Board hired Woodward, Connor Gillies and Seleman to design a new Library to meet current and future needs. A new proposal was developed in 2003-2004 to build a 68,000 sq. ft. Library on a site off Moe Road. A thorough study of needs and space requirements was completed and factored into the overall proposal designed to meet the community's needs out into the mid-century. Controversy over the siting and size of the Library plagued the proposal and on September 11, 2003 the proposal was defeated 1,876 to 1,678.

Faced with this narrow defeat and the reality of the still burgeoning need to expand, the Library Board decided to re-address the proposal and began anew in 2004 to craft another proposal and conduct a more intensive communications effort to gain public approval.

2004 Proposal Wins Approval

The Library Board revamped its decision processes and arrived at a more modest proposal but one that was directly tied to existing and forecast needs of the community. The result was a proposal to build a 55,000 sq. ft. Library on the Moe Road site. In addition to a number of public meetings, an aggressive grass roots campaign conducted by the Friends of the Library and other supporters resulted in a record turnout at the polls and the voters approved the proposal 3,782 – 3,553. The long and tedious effort to address expansion had finally succeeded. The neighboring YMCA agreed to purchase the existing Library and work on the new site began in early June of 2005. The new Library opened to the public on December 11, 2006.

Future Challenges

The Moe Road Library has been in operation for over five years, and during that time circulation has increased to over 800,000 items per year and nearly 500,000 visitors per year. Keeping pace with the growth in the community will continue to be a primary challenge for the Library as population forecasts predict double-digit growth will continue. While, today,

over 70% of residents hold Library cards, future Boards will still have to assimilate growth and maintain high quality services while keeping costs increases to a minimum. The Library will continue to adapt its role to the changing needs of the community and society while fulfilling its unique mission of being the community's center for life-long learning.