

Nichols Memorial Library

Since its creation in 1894, the town library has been marked by a continuing theme: “We are growing and need more space!” Originally housed in the Selectmen’s Room in the town hall, the library boasted a collection of 420 volumes, books, and magazine. Most of these had been donated by the Kingston Book Club which was formed in 1878 with the purpose of giving members the opportunity to meet and discuss literature and borrow any material they wished to read. Soon the trustees of the newly formed library reported that they were experiencing a demand for books of a greater variety of tastes and asked the town for more than their current yearly appropriation of \$25. This request met with approval and the numbers of books began to grow, especially for young people “to keep up an interest which results in entertainment, profit, and good influence for our boys and girls.” (History of Kingston, Book Committee 1996, pIII-9) By 1897 the trustees reported conditions so crowded that they could not shelve, care for, and properly offer distribution of their volumes, and the search for better space began. Within 1 year, a new building was built by the generous Kingston native J. Howard Nichols, a successful Boston businessman. Given in memory of his parents, the library was dedicated as Nichols Memorial Library on June 9, 1898 by invitation. Music, prayers, lemonade, and treats were offered to the 216 people who attended. The guest book includes many names well-known to Kingstonians such as Clark, Sargent, Tucker, Sanborn, Chase, Kimball, and Gilman. Certain standards were set for the new facility. The building was to always have a reading room; that room was to be kept perfectly quiet – no conversation was allowed. The shelves were closed to the public and books could only be obtained by request to the librarian.

For nearly 70 years the library prospered and modernized – many books were made available to the general public in the reading room; lights were installed, then central heat, a listening center, a powder room, and by 1981 even air conditioning. Growth continued and in 1921 a branch library was started in South Kingston in Roland Cheney’s store and the basement of Nichols was remodeled for a children’s room.

Several grants and many gifts from generous town’s folks added to the resources for these changes and upgrades, but by 1970 the cry for more space to keep up with the growing town became more insistent. The challenge for growth on the relatively small lot of the original site brought forth creative solutions including the purchase of a new site and a proposal for an addition to the current building and parking space on abutting land donated by Marilyn Bartlett. With each defeat, however, the building committee was undaunted and persisted in informing the town of the many advantages of an enlarged facility. On March 8, 2011 Kingstonians accepted the challenge - a new library to be located on the new site on Church Street. So take a good look on your way to the post office. Visit the website www.nichols.bib.nh.us and learn about all the ways you can currently “check out a book” electronically and read about all that the new facility will offer our town.

BUT WHAT ABOUT NICHOLS MEMORIAL LIBRARY? you may ask. The hopes are that the Historic District Commission, the Historical Society and the Museum Committee will join forces to house the treasures of the town’s history there.

In the next issue of the Kingston Chronicles, learn about the unique structure and materials used in building Nichols Memorial Library, one of the four buildings Kingstonians can proudly say is accepted into the National Register of Historic Places.