

Paging Through Our Past

The History of the Joseph T. Simpson Public Library
of Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania

50th Anniversary Edition



New Heights of Knowledge, Gary Lee Price

January 2011

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Friends of the Joseph T. Simpson Public Library

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January 2011

To those who created and cultivated the library during its first 50 years, and for all who will contribute to its future.

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Director's Note

We are very excited about our Golden Anniversary celebration in 2011. The growth of our library has been phenomenal since our founding in 1961. To our founders, benefactors, donors, customers, trustees, staff, volunteers, and elected officials, we thank you all for the role you have played in our growth and success over the years. We couldn't have done it without you.

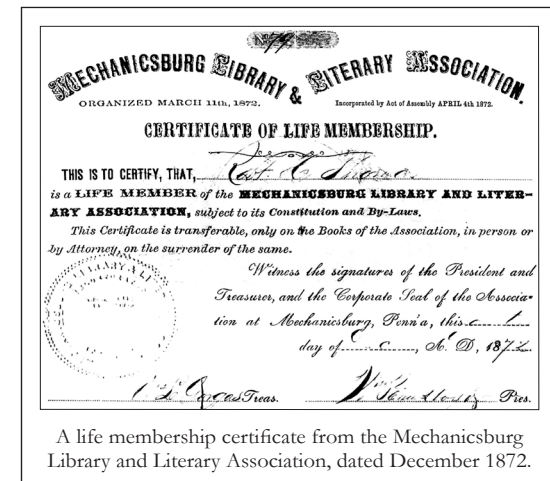
Visit our website at www.simpsonlibrary.org for a complete list of anniversary events throughout 2011. Please join us in sharing and celebrating this very special milestone.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sue Erdman".

Sue Erdman, Library Director

History of the Library

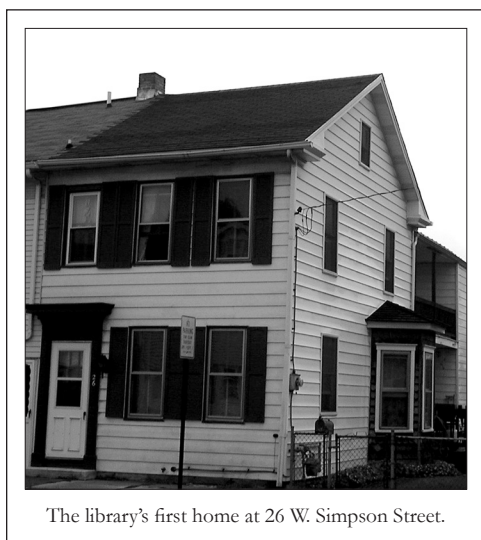
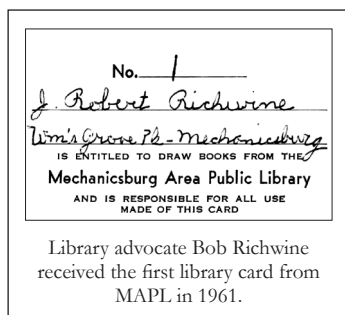
Residents of the Mechanicsburg area have long loved books and reading. A predecessor of today's public library was created in 1872 with the incorporation of the Mechanicsburg Library and Literary Association. The 115 members of the Association paid dues in order to borrow items from a modest collection that included poetry, classics, nonfiction, adventure, and travel literature. The Association placed strong emphasis on intellectual debate and met Tuesday evenings in a room on the corner of Main and Frederick streets to discuss topics ranging from current congressional bills to the type of school textbooks used in Pennsylvania. In his 1877 history of the Association, secretary John A. Eberly recalled proudly that the group's 1873 debate of Pennsylvania's new constitution drew a large public audience who "took interest in our affairs and had at least a little confidence in our intelligence and judgment." Little is known about the Association after the turn of the century. It was eventually dissolved during World War I and its collection of classics was reportedly donated to the Mechanicsburg Area High School library.



Early History: Establishing the Library

Shortly after World War II, residents began to talk about the need for a local public library, but it wasn't until 1961 that the Community Development Council of the Mechanicsburg Area Chamber of Commerce

decided to sponsor a library committee. Chauncey L. Gunderman served as the committee chair, and J. Robert Richwine, the then owner of Williams Grove Amusement Park, oversaw fund-raising efforts. Although the library committee had hoped for at least \$50,000 to help fund the construction of a new library building, they raised only \$15,000. Construction plans thwarted, the library committee decided to purchase a seven-room, two-story home at 26 W. Simpson Street. Volunteers refurbished the house, installed wooden shelves, and collected donated books from residents.

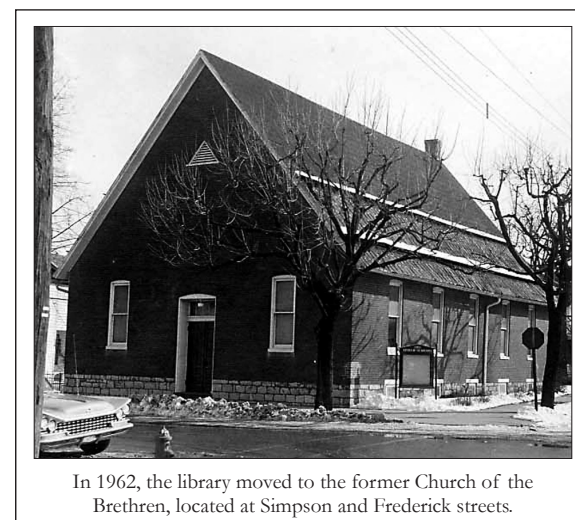


“A long cherished dream of citizens of the Mechanicsburg area” finally became a reality on October 17, 1961, when the library first opened its doors to the public, recorded the *Mechanicsburg News*. Open 31 hours per week, the library owned 4,200 volumes. The home’s dining room served as the children’s department and the living room housed the adult collection. The second floor contained local history and the kitchen was used as a work area for the staff members — all of whom were volunteers.

Jean Huber served as the first librarian of the newly incorporated Mechanicsburg Area Public Library (MAPL). A native of the area, she attended the local Irving College and then received her degree from the Pratt Institute School of Library Science in New York City. She worked as an assistant librarian in Superior, Wisconsin, and Brooklyn, New

York, before a 25-year term as the assistant librarian at the Harrisburg Public Library. Shortly after her retirement, she became involved in Mechanicsburg’s campaign for its own public library and agreed to volunteer temporarily as the librarian. Later described in an April 1968 *Evening News* article as an “unrelenting battler for bigger and better libraries,” Huber and her strong leadership contributed enormously to the rapid growth of the Mechanicsburg Area Public Library.

A mere two months after opening, the library had outgrown its home. After receiving 2,000 additional donated books, many of which had to be placed in storage, the library board decided that it was time to move. In December 1961, the board purchased the Church of the Brethren at Simpson and Frederick streets through a \$14,000 loan from First Bank and Trust, now owned by PNC Bank. Volunteers immediately organized to convert the 61-year-old building into a library and painted the walls and woodwork. Board member Bob Elser led efforts to construct and install bookshelves. By February 1962, the library faced the daunting task of transporting its 6,500 books to their new home. With the help of 17 boys from the Methodist Home and 20 local volunteers, “we walked the collection from one side of the street to another” during a single day, recalled former library director Clare Walker, who served as a staff member at the time. “It was a great community effort.”



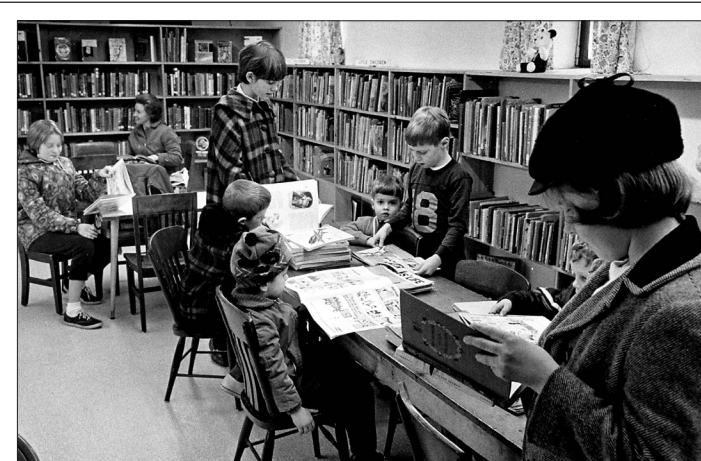
Despite receiving barely \$1,000 in state funding per year and experiencing consistently disappointing fund-raising results, the library managed to expand its hours and services. Rather than depend solely on donated books, the library began to purchase some of its own with guidance from Mechanicsburg Area High School librarian Millie Vogelsong. Under the sponsorship of the Junior Woman's Club, a Saturday morning story-telling hour was started in October 1962. The library also offered its first ten-week adult education course on the topic of the mass media's influence on the public. Soon after, former Nineteenth Congressional District Representative George A. Goodling rewarded the young library's efforts with the presentation of an American flag that had flown over the nation's capitol. By the end of 1963, the library had firmly established itself in the community, with 3,448 registered borrowers, 11,000 cataloged books, and 34,635 books circulated during the year. Library board president Bob Richwine continued to spearhead fund-raising efforts, and in 1964 the library held its first Jubilee Day pancake breakfast. Six hundred diners attended the event, which the library hosted for the next several years.



The first floor of the Mechanicsburg Area Public Library, 1968.

In 1965, the library pushed ahead with efforts to expand its children's collection. Volunteers renovated a new children's library in the lower level of the building. With brightly painted yellow walls compliments of the

Mechanicsburg Junior Chamber of Commerce (also known as the Jaycees), the room gave local children a space of their own and opened up the first floor for an ever-growing adult collection. That year, the library also became part of the newly formed Cumberland County Library System. MAPL's official service area included the boroughs of Mechanicsburg and Shiremanstown and the townships of Upper Allen, Monroe, Silver Spring, and Hampden, the last of which is now serviced by the Cleve J. Fredricksen Library.



The children's room in the lower level of the library, 1968.

In 1966, the library paid off its mortgage, thanks in part to fund-raising by the staff. Their hard work was rewarded as they received salaries for the first time ever at the library — 70 cents per hour. The library also increased its outreach efforts that year with the launch of a bookmobile service. The first of its kind in Cumberland County, the converted Army bus was equipped with shelves and stocked with over 4,500 books. Driven by the tireless Bob Richwine, the bus maintained a year-round schedule based on two-week intervals that included stops in Shiremanstown, Grantham, Williams Grove, and New Kingstown. Stops lasted for 45 minutes and hundreds of books circulated from the bus in a single afternoon.

Former library director Clare Walker recalled working the bookmobile shift with then children's librarian Katie Moder. She said that although

they loved hearing the sound of excited children as the bookmobile pulled up to a stop, they did not always relish riding in the back of the bus. Steep hills and sharp turns provided a thrill for the librarians, who would stand with their backs against the shelves in order to prevent books from tumbling across the interior. Although the service was popular among both young and adult readers, it ceased after two years due to the high cost of operation.

Despite the loss of its bookmobile, the library continued to garner widespread public support. “The (library) interior is not elaborate, but it is clean, pleasant, and filled with tempting books, displays, and paintings that bid you welcome,” read an editorial in a 1970 issue of the *Mechanicsburg News*. In one of many glowing editorials printed during the library’s early years, the editors encouraged readers to visit their library and offer it “heartly support.” Readers seemed to heed the advice, and book circulation swelled to over 100,000 that year. In anticipation of future expansion, the board purchased the house adjacent to the library at 209 S. Frederick Street that had once served as the church parsonage.



Clare Walker, Ellen Page, and Jean Huber (clockwise from left) served as the first three directors of the library.

Continued Growth and Development

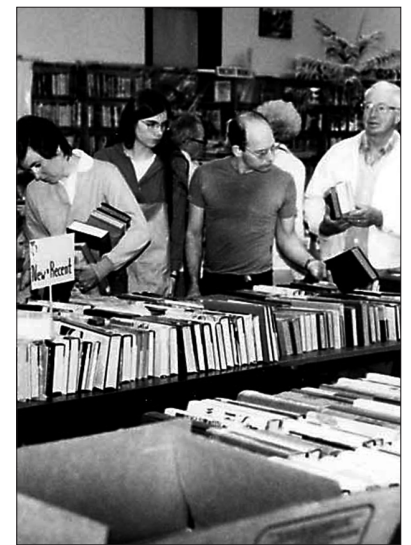
In 1971, Jean Huber retired from her ten-year, “temporary” position as librarian. Former assistant librarian Ellen Page took over as head librarian and immediately went to work expanding the library’s reference section. “Ellen Page had boundless energy — she even spoke quickly,” recalled former library director Christine Metcalfe, who served as a volunteer under Page. Page also began planning for the construction project that would eventually connect the library building with the former parsonage. Local architect Richard

Parsons designed the 30-by-55-foot expansion, which was funded in part by \$104,000 in community donations and completed in time for National Library Week during April 1974. The project enlarged both the children’s library and adult section, and doubled the book capacity to 50,000.

The library took a technological step forward in 1977 with the acquisition of a Gaylord Charge-Out machine used to check out books. Patrons received new library cards with metal clips that could be read by the machine. Soon dubbed “the chunker” by staff members because of its distinctive sound, the machine enabled patrons to use their cards at all libraries in the Cumberland County Library System.

Long-time volunteer and staff member Clare Walker became library director in 1980. Well-acquainted with the kind of creative thriftiness needed to run a small public library, Walker knew where to turn when patrons asked for a book drop. Seeing the similarities between library book drops and mailboxes, she approached the Mechanicsburg Post Office with a request for a used mailbox. Staff at the post office agreed, and not only provided the box but brought it to the library and installed it.

The year 1980 also saw the beginning of the Friends of the Library — a group of patrons who support the library through fund-raising and volunteer work. Spearheaded by Walker, who recognized the advantages of such a group, and led by president Vickie Coover, one of the group’s first acts was to buy a bicycle rack for the library. In the years since its inception, the group has raised thousands of dollars for the library through the popular Jubilee Day Book Sale and the Holly Trail House Tour, and has purchased much-needed items ranging from books and bookshelves to computer equipment and children’s puppets.



An early book sale run by the Friends of the Library, a volunteer and fund-raising group.

Clare Walker retired as director in 1983 but stayed on as assistant director until 1990. Robert Horvath filled the position for the next year, and in 1984 the board hired Christine Metcalfe (née Martin) as director. A volunteer since age 11, Metcalfe had grown up with MAPL and eventually decided to return to her hometown to serve as its librarian. As one of her first projects, Metcalfe worked to have the first floor of the library freshly painted and newly carpeted. The remodeling required the temporary move of 20,000 books, which were packed by over 35 volunteers and staff members into boxes donated by Book of the Month Club. After the five-day spruce up was complete, the first floor was rearranged to maximize space.

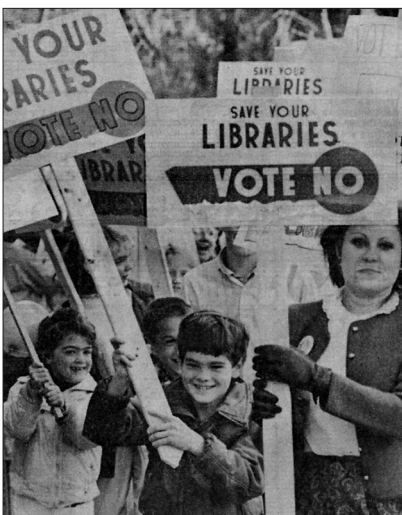
The library celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1986 by joining in a central Pennsylvania campaign to increase public library funding. Because of the elimination of a federal revenue sharing program that had provided a significant portion of their budget, libraries needed to find a new, stable source of income through their local tax base. Cumberland County commissioners agreed to place a referendum on the May primary election ballot asking voters if they would agree to pay a special tax of 1.5 mills (15

cents per \$100 assessed valuation) toward the library system. The tax would cost the average household \$10.80 annually and would raise about \$810,000 for the Cumberland County Library System, which included the Mechanicsburg, New Cumberland, and Shippensburg libraries along with Bosler in Carlisle, West Shore in Camp Hill, John Graham in Newville, and Amelia Givin in Mt. Holly Springs. Volunteers from MAPL campaigned hard for votes and helped work the polls. Ultimately, the boroughs and townships in MAPL's service area

accounted for 22.7 percent of the “yes” votes on the referendum, which passed.

Unfortunately, in 1987, residents opposed to the new tax gathered a sufficient number of signatures to place a recall vote on the November ballot. Library supporters were soon embroiled in a battle to preserve the tax. *The Patriot-News* and *The Sentinel* provided extensive coverage of the issue, with the former declaring the tax a necessity and encouraging voters to uphold it. The Mechanicsburg Area School District also voiced its support of the tax. MAPL volunteers again mobilized for their library, conducting a phonathon, distributing lawn signs and bumper stickers, and working the polls. Shortly before the vote, Metcalfe and a group of young patrons marched through Mechanicsburg carrying signs urging voters to support their library. “I was very proud of the public — and very exhausted,” recalled Metcalfe of the collaborative efforts. The campaign ended successfully, and the library tax continued to ensure the longevity and quality of Cumberland County libraries.

Throughout the 1980s, children's programming remained a priority at MAPL, and the number of young faces steadily increased. The trend took off in 1985 when Metcalfe and then children's librarian Melonie Babich brought a break-dancer to the library to demonstrate his skills to



Source: *The Patriot-News*

Former library director Christine Metcalfe (front right) and 75 young library supporters encourage voters to maintain the library tax in the 1987 recall vote.



Children line up for a ride on “Buffy,” an African elephant who visited Memorial Park as part of the 1989 summer reading program.

76 children. By 1986, registration for the summer reading program had doubled to more than 200 children. Soon after, preschool story time was expanded and the board approved a special \$2,000 budget allocation to purchase more children's fiction. "Hopefully we are increasing the number of lifelong readers each year by reaching out to children in their early years," wrote Metcalfe in her 1988 annual report. By 1989, the children's section had surpassed the adult department in the number of books circulated per year. That summer, 582 children participated in the "Kids Have Tons of Fun!" reading program that concluded with an appearance by "Buffy," an African elephant. A logistically difficult task, the elephant's visit sparked much interest within the community. When Buffy did not arrive at Memorial Park on time, local police volunteered to go and search for her and her handlers, who eventually showed up an hour later.

With the turn of the decade came the library's increased access to technology. The library received a grant-funded fax machine, which bolstered its ability to answer reference questions and conduct interlibrary loans. In July 1990, the staff embarked on the arduous task of barcoding each book and installing the Winnebago automated circulation system. MAPL's 30-year-old system of painstakingly recording by hand each book checked out and returned was rendered obsolete as the library became more computerized, and not a moment too soon. Within a year of the barcoding, the library's 14,046 eager card holders had caused the circulation to swell to over 300,000. To create more space for the growing library, staff members moved their offices into empty rooms in the former parsonage attached during the 1973 expansion and turned their old offices into an enlarged reference area. Acknowledging the library's hard work, former Representative Jerry Nailor delivered a proclamation from the Pennsylvania House floor in recognition of its 30th anniversary in 1991.

Favorite fund-raiser Bowling for Books made its debut in 1992, when 128 bowlers raised \$10,130 to purchase books for the library. Local businesses sponsored teams and Trindle Bowl owner and then library trustee Karl Schweitzer hosted the tournament, which has become an annual event.

Also in 1992, the library began work on a grant to organize and store the archives from Irving College, a Mechanicsburg women's college that

existed from 1856 to 1929. Although the college records and memorabilia had been in the care of the library since the mid-1960s, staff members and scholars now had the opportunity to study and catalog the collection. To supplement the archives, the library hired oral historian Eileen Franz to interview five Irving College graduates and record their memories on audiocassettes. The completion of the project in 1993 left MAPL with a valuable set of archives and in-depth research about one of the first women's colleges in the nation.



Former Representative Jerry Nailor shoots for a strike during Bowling for Books in 2002.

On the Move Again

The crowded shelves, limited quiet areas, and tight parking situation finally forced the library board to make a serious decision: It was time to move, again. The board purchased a building at 16 N. Walnut Street for \$260,000, hired an architect, and launched the "Vision 2000" \$1 million capital campaign. Although some community members were skeptical about whether the former grain warehouse could be transformed into a library facility, most agreed that the building had great character.

Constructed around 1840, the three-story stone building was first owned by Thomas B. Bryson, whose original gristmill still stands on Lambs Gap Road. Bryson built the future library building directly beside the Cumberland Valley Railroad so that grain could be loaded easily from the warehouse into railroad cars for transport. Despite its mundane beginnings, the building had a unique brush with history two decades after its

construction. When invading Confederate forces occupied Mechanicsburg for three days prior to the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863, Brigadier General J.B. Jenkins used the building as a hospital. According to local legend, when the soldiers left on June 30, they filled their saddlebags with grain to feed their horses during the ride to Gettysburg. The building was later owned by the Pennsylvania Railroad and eventually served as the headquarters for an egg-packing business. In more recent years, Howard and Verona Walton used the building for their Home and Hearth Shoppe. With a colorful past, 18,000 square feet of floor space, 55 parking spaces, and handicap accessibility, the building would give the library room to grow well beyond its then 9,000-square-foot home.

Fred Harle of Harle Architects in Mechanicsburg handled the task of designing a modern library among the numerous old wooden columns that dotted the building. The board's building committee, chaired by Foster Berkheimer, studied layout plans and searched for contractors, choosing McCoy Brothers to renovate the aging structure. Fund-raising efforts were led by campaign chair Thomas Wetzel, and patrons and community members pledged over \$1 million by the end of 1995 to renovate two of the three floors in the building.



The transformation from nineteenth-century grain warehouse to modern-day library began in 1995.

Amidst all the excitement, the library staff members faced switching to a countywide automation system which required them to re-barcode all of the books and learn a new circulation system. Meanwhile, patrons adjusted

to the replacement of the traditional card catalog with an automated catalog. The modifications would eventually allow libraries in Cumberland County to be networked to one another.

The momentous changes continued into 1996 when Christine Metcalfe resigned to pursue a career as a library consultant. The board hired current director Sue Erdman, who had most recently served as the assistant director of the Bosler Free Library in Carlisle. Successfully taking the reins during one of the most challenging times in the library's history, she coordinated the library's move to its newly renovated facility in December 1996. The library closed its doors for 15 days during the move, as furniture, shelving, and over 50,000 books were transported by a professional moving company whose fees were paid by the Mechanicsburg Area Foundation.



Current director Sue Erdman was hired by the library board in 1996.

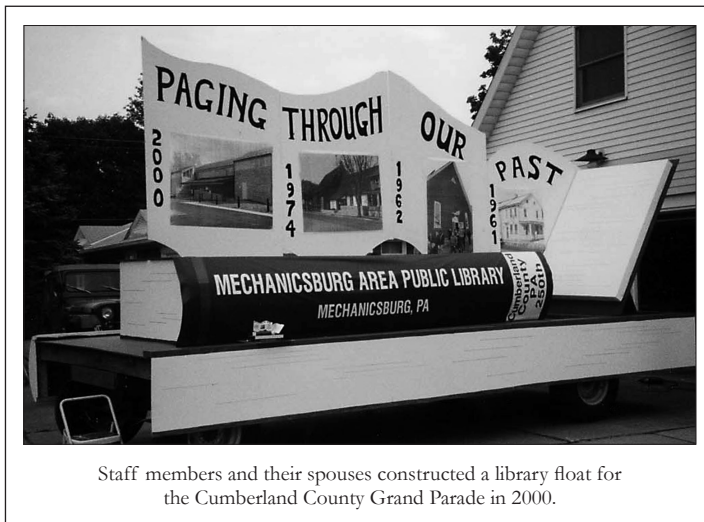
On December 26, 1996, the new library opened to the public. The official dedication of the building occurred on April 6, 1997, when over 100 library patrons gathered along with local and state elected officials to hear a keynote address delivered by then Pennsylvania First Lady Michele Ridge. A librarian and former executive director of the Erie County Library System, Ridge talked about the role of modern-day libraries. "This new building proves that Mechanicsburg is strong in its commitment to provide technological resources for today's world," said Ridge, as quoted in *The Sentinel*. "Libraries are our link to the future and our bridge to the past."

Backing up Michele Ridge's words, MAPL first offered a free Internet terminal in 1998 on a computer provided by Anyware Computer Systems and with an Internet account donated by the Pennsylvania Network. A year later, the Cumberland County Library System provided four more terminals, and the library soon upgraded its Internet connection speed. Also in 1999, the Cumberland Perry Area Vocational Technical School donated a computer with word processing software. Meanwhile, the library decided to diversify its collection of resources for adult and ESL (English as a second language) students. In 2000, it purchased a collection of adult

basic education materials including not only books but also computer software, videos, and audiocassettes with a \$3,700 donation from the General Federation of Women's Clubs of Mechanicsburg.

With the increased space, expanded services, an ever-growing collection, and online resources, customers wanted to be able to spend more time at the library. Director Erdman decided to extend the library hours from 58 to 62 per week. The change went into effect in March 2000, and the library is now open on Sundays from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. during the school year.

In celebration of Cumberland County's 250th anniversary, the Millennium, and the library's own dynamic 39 years, MAPL constructed a float for the county's Grand Parade held in Carlisle in May 2000. Built by staff members, the 18-foot-long float was entitled "Paging Through Our Past" and featured large wooden books with photos of the library at each of its three locations.

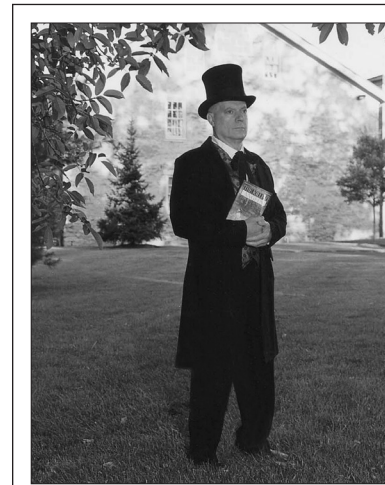


Staff members and their spouses constructed a library float for the Cumberland County Grand Parade in 2000.

A year later, the library observed its 40th anniversary. The celebration included an appearance by beloved children's storybook character Corduroy the Bear. Once again, the library received a congratulatory proclamation from then Representative Jerry Nailor. "Since reopening, the library has experienced record-breaking growth and usage" yet "has stayed true to its mission ... to be a force of education, information, recreation, and

inspiration in the community it serves," read the official Pennsylvania House Citation.

Reflecting that sentiment, customers connected with readers outside their own library in the fall of 2002 by participating in "One Book, Two Counties," a program designed to encourage reading. Cumberland and Dauphin County public libraries teamed up to read and discuss Michael



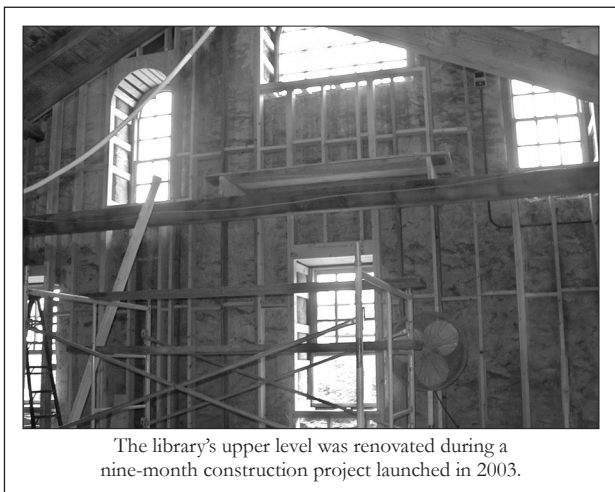
Mechanicsburg Mayor Jack Ritter poses in Civil War-era dress to promote "One Book, Two Counties" in 2002.

Shaara's Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Killer Angels* about the Battle of Gettysburg. During the eight-week program, more than 50 events were held at the 28 libraries in the two counties. Mechanicsburg Mayor Jack Ritter gamely posed in Civil War-era dress for promotional posters advertising the book and related events at MAPL. Two years later, the program expanded to include seven counties and was renamed "One Book, One Community." A similar program for children, "One Book, Every Young Child," was launched in 2006 by the Office of Commonwealth

Libraries. To engage local children in this statewide initiative, the Friends group has annually purchased hundreds of copies of the chosen book and distributed it to every kindergarten child in the Mechanicsburg Area School District and in Cumberland Valley School District elementary schools in the library's service area.

Encouraged by a 50 percent increase in circulation since its move in 1996 and nearly 700 visitors each day, the library began to look for opportunities to expand. In 2001, the board purchased the Wilcox Forging parking lot adjacent to the library property to provide 50 additional parking spaces. Plans were proposed to finish renovating the building, whose large upper level had not been revamped during the 1996 construction. In September 2002, the library unveiled final architectural drawings for the next wave of renovations, and in January 2003, it introduced a \$1.3 million

capital campaign called “Enriching Minds, Expanding Opportunities.” The family of Joseph T. Simpson, former president and chief executive officer of Harsco Corporation, made a generous \$500,000 gift to rename MAPL in his honor. Mr. Simpson was active in many community organizations and, according to his son Jerry Simpson, he loved to read and was rarely seen without a book in his hand. Through this lead gift from the Joseph T. and Helen M. Simpson Foundation, the library was able to launch its capital campaign.



Construction began in June 2003, launching months of dust, noise, and excitement. Staff worked tirelessly to keep books available, programs running, and customers safe. As areas were cordoned off for construction, staff set up portable bookshelves with best sellers and other popular works. When the banging of hammers grew too loud on the lower level, children were shepherded to quieter areas for story time. “You wouldn’t have known you were in a library — everything was in transition and on the move! People were literally entering a construction zone, but somehow we stayed open,” recalled former assistant director Charlotte Henneberger. “Fortunately, the customers were flexible, and everyone liked seeing the progress.”

Any headaches caused by the construction were well worth it, and when the newly expanded Joseph T. Simpson Public Library was completed in March 2004, the upper level contained a stunning mezzanine seating area,

tutoring rooms, staff offices, and the adult fiction collection. As part of a simultaneous renovation project, aisles between book stacks were widened and extra shelving and lighting were installed throughout the facility. On the first floor, the library’s entrance was reconfigured to expand the area around the main circulation desk, and the reference desk was reoriented. On the lower level, the children’s library got a new circulation desk, child-friendly shelving, and a staff office. “This nine-month project provided countless opportunities to remind ourselves that change is constant, but that in the end, it was a temporary inconvenience for a permanent improvement,” wrote Erdman in her 2004 annual report.

Donors, whose financial contributions made the expansion and renovation projects possible, were honored during a reception in March 2004, and a month later, the library hosted an open house celebration for the public. Among the attendees and well-wishers were state Senator Pat Vance, then Representative Jerry Nailor, Cumberland County Commissioner Rick Rovegno, and Mechanicsburg Mayor Jack Ritter.

After temporarily relocating to the Mechanicsburg Municipal Center during the upper-level construction, the Friends secured a new, spacious home on Cheryl Avenue for its book sale. Located in a warehouse at the rear of the John Gross Administrative Office, BOOKS BY THE GROSS now serves as headquarters for the Friends to sort and store donated books and to hold three annual sales, in February, June, and October. A permanent “mini book sale” is located on the library’s upper level.



The Friends’ annual book sales, held at BOOKS BY THE GROSS in February, June, and October, raise thousands of dollars for the library.

Over the years, the Friends' book sales have grown in size and profit; in 2010, the sales earned more than \$35,000 for the library. In 2005, the Friends celebrated its 25th anniversary of providing financial, volunteer, and advocacy support to the library, and today, the Friends' 1,000-plus members continue to offer invaluable assistance. The group received a much-deserved award in 2009, when it was named "Friends Group of the Year" by the Pennsylvania Citizens for Better Libraries. That year, the Friends raised an impressive \$73,200 for the library's operating budget and programming activities.

Advancement in Services

The library reached an important milestone in 2006 when its circulation surpassed the half-million mark. That year, "items were borrowed 515,160 times from our community of avid readers," wrote Erdman in her annual report. The library's popularity and role as a vital local institution was acknowledged in WTF's 2006 production of *Our Town: Mechanicsburg*. Copies of this DVD are available for loan at the library. Also that year, the library took a technological step forward when wireless Internet access was installed throughout the facility. This valuable service, free to any visitor, was implemented through a partnership with Pa.net and the Friends. As with all of the library's Internet services, the network is filtered so as to comply with the federal Children's Internet Protection Act. Along with providing the Internet to anyone with a laptop, the library also offers ten public computer terminals, as of 2010.

Throughout the last decade, technology has played an increasingly important role at the Simpson Public Library. In 2003, the library received a state grant from the Department of Community and Economic Development through former state Senator Harold Mowery to begin a DVD collection. In 2005, an additional grant of \$10,000 paid for the purchase of more DVDs, educational software, and audiobooks on CD and cassette. In the ensuing years, this collection has blossomed, reaching 15,000 items in 2009.

Other technological conveniences abound. Downloadable audiobooks were added to the collection in 2006 through the Capital Area Library District. Customers can now download digital audio files to their computer

and transfer them to an MP3 player or iPod. The library also established a collection of e-books (electronic books), which can be downloaded and read on a computer or e-reader. Starting in 2007, customers could pay for merchandise or late fees at the library with credit or debit cards; by mid-2011, they will be able to pay library fees online. Also in 2007, the library added a "Language Line" telephone service, which provides interpreters on demand to translate more than 170 languages for non-English-speaking customers. In 2008, as part of a grant obtained by the Cumberland County Library System, the library installed a self-checkout unit, which allows customers to check out their own materials. This speeds up the checkout process and gives staff members more time to help customers with other tasks.

With society's increased focus on online activities, from researching information to connecting with friends, the demand for computer-based services has grown. Between 2008 and 2009, computer usage at the library increased 17 percent. Through the library's website (www.simpsonlibrary.org) customers can check the availability of materials, place holds, renew items, read library-related blogs, and more. The library also maintains a profile on the popular social networking site Facebook (www.facebook.com/simpsonlibrary).

"Technology is a whole new avenue that we have been able to offer in the past few years," said Erdman on WIOO's *The Rick Smith Show*. "It has opened up so many doors for everybody — there's so much more information we can find quickly and access for people through the computer that we could not before." The transition to more computer- and Internet-based services has not been without its challenges, but the library has handled the transition with grace. Staff members strive to meet modern-day expectations while still offering the key services for which libraries are known. "Libraries have really changed over the years. They're not what people remember from when they were kids, but reading is still the core mission of what the public library offers for people. The books that we have are why we're here," emphasized Erdman.

Never losing sight of its commitment to children's literacy, in 2007 the library launched "Run for Reading," an annual fundraising event benefiting the children's library. With the help of volunteers from the Mechanicsburg

Brethren in Christ Church, the inaugural 5-K run and 1-mile fun run/walk was held in August at Friendship Park in Upper Allen Township. Since then, this community event has grown in popularity, and in 2010 more than 360 participants ages 3 to 70 raised \$8,700 for children's programming.

Recognizing the vital role it plays in community education today, the library has continued to provide a full slate of programs for young customers. Each year thousands of children and their families attend a variety of offerings such as "Rhyme Time," a song- and rhyme-focused program for infants up to 18 months of age, "Toddler Time," featuring songs and stories geared for 2-year-olds, and traditional story times for children ages 3 to 6. Library staff members also visit local daycare centers and preschools regularly to read stories and promote school-readiness skills. A grant from the Mechanicsburg Area Foundation provided 40 "literacy bags" in 2009. Each bag contained a book, puppet, and story-related activities. That same year, children's librarian Linda Stoner received a "Best Practices Award" from the Pennsylvania Library Association for the library's kindergarten readiness class. She received two additional awards from the Association in 2010 for the library's Family Harvest Festival and the Kindergarten Club.

The library's eight-week summer reading program is another continuing success. Participating children and teens set their own reading goals for the summer and are rewarded for their accomplishments at the end of the program. More than 2,000 youth participated in the 2010 program. Older adolescents are also included in the library's programming efforts. A Teen Advisory Board, designed to give local youth a voice in their library, was developed in 2006. The group meets regularly to plan teen-specific activities such as movie and video game nights and book discussions.

Through events such as "Bowling for Books" and "Run for Reading," the library has always worked to increase public awareness of its services. Each year, the library participates in a myriad of community events, including back-to-school nights, college fairs, West Shore and Mechanicsburg Chambers of Commerce events, and festivals such as Jubilee Day, Art Walk, and Streets of Treats. The library's director and staff are active in the local Rotary Club and Chambers of Commerce, among

other organizations, and provide book reviews and informative talks to community groups. Since 1997, the library has hosted the Municipal and School Officials Breakfast each October as a way to promote the library and thank local leaders for their continued support. These community leaders have provided immeasurable assistance to the library, helping to facilitate grants, aiding in fundraising efforts, and boosting morale through personal appearances. During National Library Week each April, local VIPs read to children during the library's story time. "Celebrity readers" in 2010 included state Senator Pat Vance, Representative Sheryl Delozier, Mechanicsburg Mayor Jack Ritter, Police Chief David Spots, Borough Manager Patrick Dennis, and firefighter Brian Smithmeyer.



Children and their families race in the Run for Reading in August 2010.

The recession that began in 2007 impacted the community deeply, and the library was not spared. State funding for the library diminished, and donors had less to give. In 2010, the Pennsylvania Legislature cut its subsidy for public libraries by 20 percent and eliminated funding for a statewide library card program. Faced with a \$96,000 reduction in funding, the Simpson Public Library made the tough decisions to close on Sundays in June and on four additional holidays throughout the year, decrease spending on materials, and implement other cost-reducing measures.

“With the majority of library funding coming from governmental sources, cuts in government spending do impact library funding, which is already stretched to the max,” explained Erdman. Now more than ever the library depends on the generosity of donors who attend fundraising events or “just write a check to their public library because they believe in what we do. Donations in any amount always help the public library,” said Erdman.

Meanwhile, the library’s services are in great demand, as out-of-work customers seek help getting their lives back on track. Library staff members offer one-on-one assistance in filing unemployment claims online, setting up free email accounts, and accessing employment applications via the Internet. This help is especially vital for customers lacking computer skills, and the county library system has responded with training workshops on resume-writing, Internet use, and more. Beyond aid for the unemployed, the library also provides a source of education and entertainment for anyone on a tight budget. “Public libraries across the country are experiencing record-setting levels of usage,” said Erdman. “The Cumberland County Library System is no exception. ... Families are looking for ways to stretch their budgets, and the public library is the perfect way to save money by borrowing books instead of buying them, borrowing DVDs instead of renting them, and attending educational and entertaining programs for free instead of paying an admission fee somewhere.”

Determined to keep the library’s collection up to date despite funding shortfalls, Erdman has found success in applying for several highly competitive grants. In recent years the library has won four federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grants — \$18,000 for teen materials in 2007, \$9,000 for educational DVDs in 2008, \$18,000 for educational video games in 2009, and \$10,000 for business-related materials in 2010. The library also received \$1,500 from the Mechanicsburg Area Foundation in 2009 to purchase job- and career-related books.

Along with continuing to expand its collection, the library strives to maintain its now iconic building. In 2009, the library underwent several maintenance and enhancement projects. The historic exterior stonework was repointed and the window trims painted. Meeting rooms were modified to reduce noise, and shelving was installed for the ever-expanding DVD collection.

Looking Ahead

The broad scope of materials and services available at the library today may surprise some customers. Along with more than 81,000 books (in regular- and large-print format), the library boasts 15,000 CDs, DVDs, audiocassettes, and videotapes, 400 video games, and numerous popular magazines. It offers computers, wireless Internet, and access to investment tools, word processing software, and research databases. User-friendly educational materials abound on topics ranging from tax preparation to selecting a college. There is truly something for everyone at the library, whether a customer is searching for an interesting book, help with a school assignment, entertaining children’s programming, or simply a peaceful spot to read and relax. The library’s diligent efforts to develop a broad, accessible collection of materials and appealing array of programs for children and adults is appreciated by community members, who have expressed their thanks by giving of their time, money, and praise. Fittingly, the library was named the “Readers’ Choice Library” by *Harrisburg Magazine* in 2006 through 2010.



An early children’s story hour at the library.

Over the years the library has also amassed a collection of thank-you notes from pleased customers. The varied topics of the notes reveal the diverse needs that the library fulfills for the community. Wrote one customer, “I work for a mental health group and love that this library and

the individuals who work here are kind and considerate to my client. He loves coming to the library to use the Internet and look at books. The best part is that he doesn't have to pay for any of the services."

"I was getting C's and D's but by coming to the library and working and studying in a quiet environment, I get A's and B's," shared a local student. "The library is my number-one resource and teacher in many ways. It has really played a great role in enhancing and building my English," said another. "As home educators, our library resources are invaluable. We couldn't do what we do without our library. The Simpson Library staff has been very welcoming and helpful to us over the years," wrote a parent.

"Books have gotten me through the hardest times in my life. My family doesn't have a lot of money, so I love the Joseph Simpson Library because they allow me to read books I wouldn't otherwise have access to!" wrote a grateful customer. "I have cancer and this library is truly a godsend to me. It gives me a reason to live. This library has opened up a whole new world for me. If they don't have what I'm looking for, they get it for me. The people are wonderful and so pleasant and helpful. God bless all of you," shared another.

The year 2011 marks the library's golden anniversary. To celebrate 50 years of service, the library has planned a variety of events, including special receptions, dinners, a bookmark and poster contest, a display of historical photos and memorabilia, and an endowment drive, the last of which represents an important step in the library's long-term financial security. The library will also unveil merchandise commemorating the anniversary, and has commissioned a film about the library's history and work.

Coinciding with this time of celebration, the library received a \$100,000 bequest from the estate of Mechanicsburg native Mary Ann Landis Alexander for the purchase of sculptures. The library bought a three-piece outdoor sculpture, which was installed in front of the library in October 2010. Entitled *New Heights of Knowledge*, the bronze sculpture by Gary Lee Price features a boy and girl reading while leaning against a stack of books. In November, the library received two indoor, book-shaped benches from the Randolph Rose Collection. "We are truly humbled and grateful for Mrs. Alexander's generous bequest to the Simpson Library,"

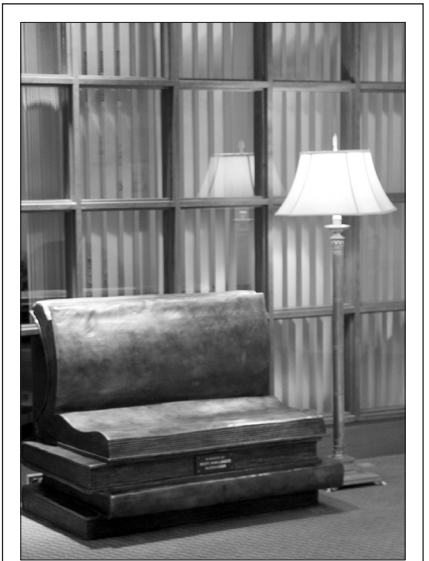
said Erdman. "Her gift enabled us to purchase five beautiful sculpture pieces that fit in perfectly with the library's mission of books, reading, and literacy." Remaining funds from the bequest will be saved for future library needs.

Despite its triumphant development as a public library and its exciting future, the Simpson Library currently faces the same financial challenges shared by many libraries across the state and country. As throughout much of its history, the library will continue to rely upon the donated time of volunteers and the financial contributions of community members and businesses.

Beginning with the first volunteers at the library who assumed full-time positions for no pay, volunteers now contribute thousands of hours of work each year, nearly equivalent to an additional two full-time employees. Whether volunteering out of a love of reading, knowledge, or service, the reason for the strong local interest in the public library was clear to Clare Walker: "This is a community of book lovers."

Through good times and bad, the Joseph T. Simpson Public Library has continued to provide an array of public services far beyond the dreams of its founders. In response, customers just keep coming back. "In 2010, more than half a million items were borrowed from our library. Attendance at programs topped 38,000," said Erdman. "But it is not just statistics that tell the library's story. The library provides a welcoming atmosphere to those who visit, an attentive ear to their questions and requests, and a smile from the staff simply for stopping by."

The overwhelming public response to the library during the past 50 years has demonstrated both the integral role that the library plays within the community and the library's dependency upon its customers for



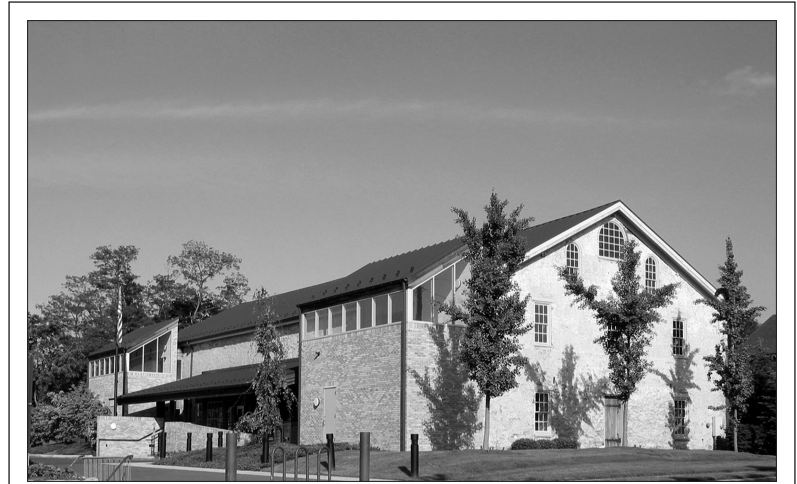
A bequest from the estate of Mary Ann Landis Alexander allowed for the purchase of five sculptures, including this bronze, book-shaped reading bench.

survival. It is through the time and gifts of customers that the library is able to give so much back and to fulfill its mission of serving as “a center of learning and leisure.”

The book-loving spirit of the original Library and Literary Association is alive in Mechanicsburg and shows no signs of diminishing. The impassioned words of secretary John Eberly ring as true today as in 1877:

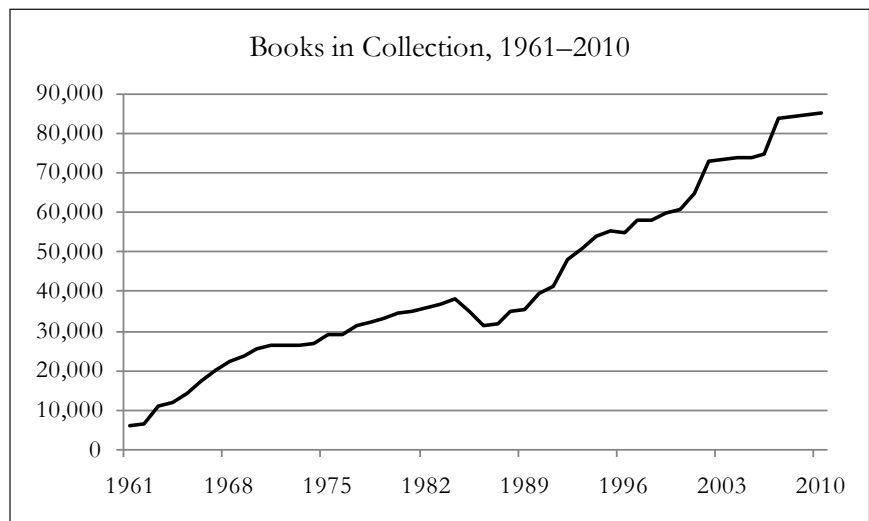
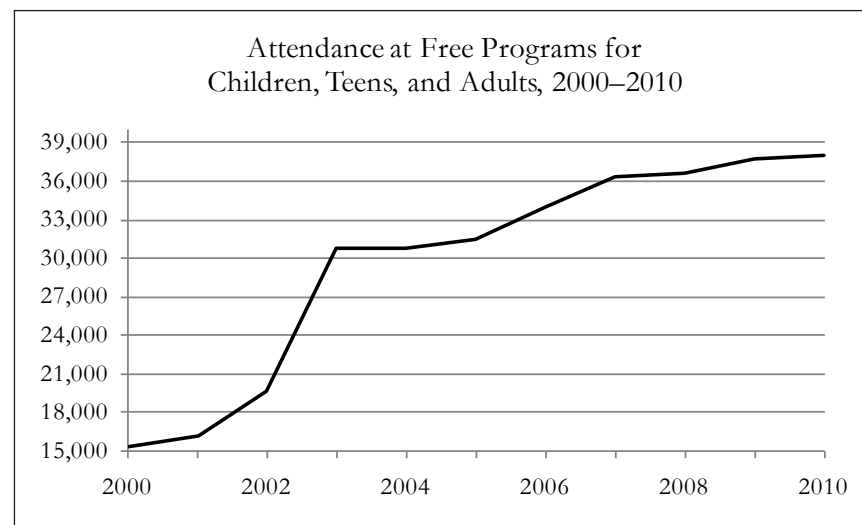
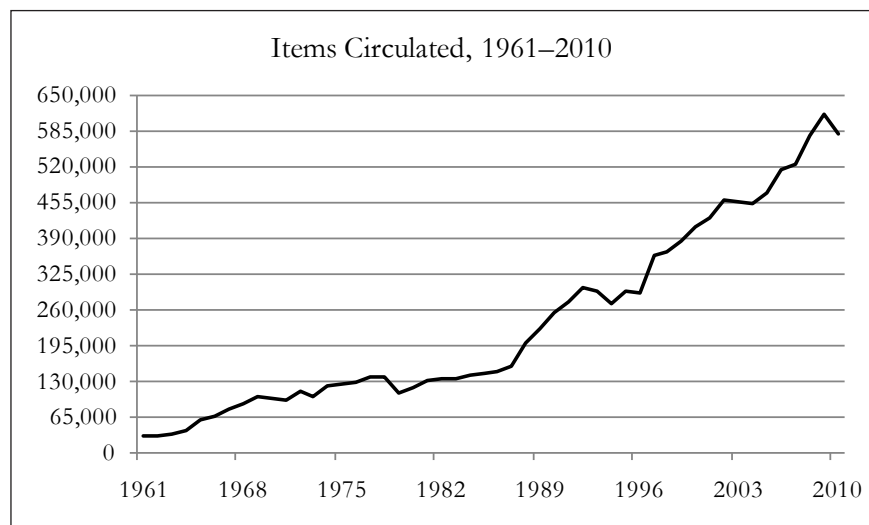
From a very humble beginning, our Library has grown to be one of the institutions which we believe the public would be loath to give up. (It is) an agency that silently influences and directs the minds of those growing up in its atmosphere; and while becoming imbedded in the thoughts of those who sustain it, it is creating for itself a firm and lasting source of strength. We trust its career of usefulness is but opening, and that no untoward circumstance shall ever arise to destroy its noble work.

The Independent Journal, January 10, 1877



The Joseph T. Simpson Public Library today.

Library Performance Statistics



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JOSEPH T. SIMPSON PUBLIC LIBRARY

50
years



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