

Blue Hill Library Notes

Spring / Summer 2014

Vol. 16 #1



We have a telescope! Stop by the library and check it out. . . really, you can check it out with your library card.

GETTING STARTSTRUCK AT BHPL

The Blue Hill Public Library was chosen for a grant to increase afterschool STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) activities using libraries as the hub. The grant is from the National Science Foundation and administered by Cornerstones of Science and the Maine Mathematics and Science Alliance (MMSA), two Maine based non-profits. The grant provides for the purchase of a telescope, microscope, and a 3-D printer. The library will be working with area STEM guides to use the equipment and to develop programming that encourages interest in science, technology, engineering and math.

We have already received an Orion “Starblast” 4.5 inch reflector telescope that is available for a seven-day loan. Stay tuned for news of the microscope and 3-D Printer!

“The only thing that you absolutely have to know, is the location of the library.” — Albert Einstein

For questions and information about programs, services, and hours of operation, please visit our web site, www.bhpl.net, or call us, 374-5515

“The most valuable thing in my wallet is my library card.” — Laura Bush, former librarian

Have you gotten your new library card? You should! All patrons are being issued a new card, which is your key to BHPL's expanded digital library services (e-Books, downloadable audiobooks and free music files) as well as direct access to other libraries' collections. Stop in soon!

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF LIBRARIES



—RICH BOULET

It was a light bulb moment. I remember sitting in the basement of McGill University's McLennan Library in 1999, in a class discussing how to market library services. With our heads wrapped around the "four P's" (Price, Product, Promotion and Place), our professor asked a somewhat surprising question: What is the basic goal of libraries and librarians?

We were like deer in the headlights. Nobody offered even an obvious answer: we loan books; we preserve recorded history; we fight the good fight—we were all mum. The professor was flummoxed. A previously engaged class wouldn't venture an opinion on the *basic role of libraries*? Exasperatedly she said "EASE OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION, does that sound familiar to you?" That got a grunt or two, but our professor could hardly believe that as a class of nearly-librarians, we were unable to boil down our purpose into a simple, coherent phrase.

Within the profession, that same classroom dynamic could easily play out today, probably more so. In the last couple of decades, with the onset of digital information, our profession has been in a cycle of reinterpretation and reinvention. Academic libraries have largely gone the way of information commons, creating relaxed spaces that foster collaboration and networking. School libraries are chronically underfunded, understaffed and under-appreciated, if they haven't been completely eliminated. In my opinion public libraries are doing *everything* they have always done, plus...well, plus you name it: enhanced public programming, technology assistance, meeting space, serving as a public venue, historic archives, tax prep assistance, community tool shed, cake pan lending, maker spaces, fishing tackle loan, etc.

I like that libraries are changing and increasingly putting the means of production into people's

"A library is not a luxury but one of the necessities of life."—Henry Ward Beecher

hands. I like that we level the playing field when it comes to access to technology. I absolutely love that we have become community gathering spaces. However, I do worry about mission creep, so as a yardstick to measure against it, I return to that basic concept of ease of access to information. That is one of the reasons why we recently added hours to our Saturday schedule—to make the library easier for working patrons. It is the reason we have issued new library cards (with unfortunately longer numbers)—to improve patron access to digital collections and inter-library loans. And it even comes in to play with our recent acquisition of a telescope—because information isn't limited to the pages of a book. Sometimes it is written in the stars.

If you have thoughts about what we could do more of, or less of, drop me a line anytime, rboulet@bhpl.net.

SATURDAYS: NOW LONGER



Charlie Ferden and his granddaughter enjoy a favorite book.

Charlie Ferden of Penobscot hadn't been to the library in years. He puts in a full week at his business, Downeast Graphics in Ellsworth, and has errands and volunteer responsibilities on Saturday morning so he wasn't in town when the library was open.

When the library expanded its Saturday hours until 5pm last July, Charlie started coming with his grand-daughter Emma. It was an outing they could both enjoy, spending time together or browsing alone. Emma likes to check out magazines for kids and books while Charlie has renewed his love of histories and biographies. Sometimes they stay to participate in a library program. "What impresses me is how busy the library is on a Saturday afternoon," says Charlie. "there's people reading the paper, working on laptops, kids playing with legos, there's just a lot going on." And he's right. According to our door clicker (yes we have a door clicker) Charlie and Emma are not at the library alone on Saturday afternoons. The library is averaging about 100 visits during those extra 3 hours. It's not the busiest afternoon, but as people work it into their routine they are reporting that they love not having to rush on Saturdays. Now they can come to the library after running around all morning and just relax a bit. Next

time you crave some weekend down-time, head to the library on Saturday afternoon.

A GREAT PLACE TO BE A KID

On Wednesday mornings the Howard Room is transformed into an infant paradise—brightly colored blocks, big trucks, scooters, even a see-saw in the shape of an alligator. Toddlers attempt the difficult art of sharing while navigating around babies sitting and crawling on the floor. Mothers, fathers, grandmothers, aunts and friends chat and compare parenting notes. Sometimes the playgroup becomes a music class with Deborah Reinke or a baby yoga session with Rebecca Rose Tousignant. For most of the children, it is their first experience at BHPL and it is a wonderful reminder that one is never too young (or too old) to learn something new at the library.

The playgroup is just one of hundreds of programs for children, youth and their families. Each week, from structured events to hanging out after school, children of all ages call the library home.

“Having fun isn’t hard, when you’ve got a library card.”—Arthur Read



ART IN APRIL

All year the library is home to exhibits of art and artifacts – in the Britton Gallery and also the display cases in the Howard and the Larchwood Rooms, but nothing is quite as thrilling as Student Art Month in April. Every wall and every surface is covered with color. The talent and vision of the teachers and students—from kindergarten through high school—is inspiring and more than enough of a boost to get through mud season.

LIBRARY AS MEMORY

—ROB MCCALL



Not all of the stories in the Blue Hill Library are on the shelves between the covers of books. If you look at the mantel over the north fireplace you will see an ornamented silver loving cup that is listing slightly to port as though it had been dropped or damaged in

shipping. The cup was presented to Blue Hill native John W. Kane, captain of the bark *Monrovia*, in “acknowledgement for his humanity and kindness” by Queen Victoria and the owners of the steamship *S. S. Elmete* of London which foundered in a gale off Brazil with a cargo of live sheep in early February, 1895. The *Monrovia* stood by for several days to rescue crew and cargo. Hanging on the wall above the cup is a folk art painting of the event with both ships carefully rendered and scores of floating sheep dotting the waves like gobs of foam. Most of the rest of the story is now lost, but there is more than enough here to fire the imagination.

Throughout the library, atop the book shelves—on tables, on walls, in display cases—there are countless more artifacts recalling stories of adventure and courage, of labor and achievement, represented by ship models, tiny thatched huts from the South Seas, a Buddha, a stuffed loon standing awkwardly, maps, charts, paintings and drawings. All of these are softly telling stories of which we can only grasp a small part, as though we were walking by on the street and catching a whispered snatch of conversation and wondering what the rest of the story might be. The library is not only a collection of books, it is also a museum of memory.

These artifacts are not the regalia of kings or generals or emperors or the trophies of captains of industry (although that may be a portrait of Queen Victoria above the 200s and over there by the door is a coat of mail once believed to be Magellan’s.) These are mostly mementos of local history, our history, much of it forgotten now or tucked away somewhere to be retrieved only when a student wants it for a school project or an elder is working on a family genealogy.

Arrayed along the tops of the shelves are Louis Levy’s

wonderful pastel portraits of well-known Blue Hill characters from the 40s and 50s. Louie was a character himself: a world-class violinist and a gifted artist who lived alone in the oddly shaped house at the corner of Union and Main Streets. When I knew him, he was very old and leaned on a shopping cart as he walked up and down the street. When he was no longer able to climb the stairs into Merrill and Hinckley’s store, Bob Bannister would bring his groceries to him in a cardboard box as needed. Bob checked in on Louie every day toward the end, and one morning found him gone.

Many of the artifacts are from the collection of Roland Howard who was an unofficial town historian. His house faced the water at the bottom of Pleasant Street between the Blue Hill Garage and what was then Babson and Duffy’s store. I occasionally visited Rollie there surrounded by books and other gear, tackle and trim. He was tall with round glasses and thin hair combed back. The house had not changed much since it was built. He showed me a small part of his collection, including an original of Jonathan Fisher’s *Scripture Animals*, and told me story after story, spellbinding me with the history

of the mythical Maine town where he had been born and I had just arrived.

Not long after that, Roland had a stroke and utterly lost the power of speech. The town was shocked and shaken. This was

not just one old man out of many. This was Blue Hill’s Homer or Thucydides or Tacitus, the man who knew all the stories and told them again and again. It was as though our library had burned to the ground; the loss was monumental. He was one of the pillars that held up our sky, beside Effie Hinckley, Esther Wood, Helen Sylvester, Bill Hinckley, Rufus Candage, Duane Gray, and many more; all tellers of our local history and all gone now. It is one thing to look up the history of your town on a data-base, but it is another thing altogether to hear it told face-to-face by those who lived it.

Fortunately, Roland Howard’s collection was largely embraced by the library and will remain here, we fervently hope, until the

“Not only are those who forget their history condemned to repeat it, they are condemned to empty philosophies, dull theologies, boring parties, vapid conversations, and, at last, lives diminished of meaning.”



world ends in fire or in ice depending on the administration at the time. This is what libraries do: They preserve our stories through a greater span of time than any one person can. We are a story-telling species. Just as we need nourishing food and water for our bodies to survive, we need good and truthful stories for our minds to survive. Just as our bodies are shaped by what we eat, our souls are shaped by the stories told and remembered.

Not only are those who forget their history condemned to repeat it, they are condemned to empty philosophies, dull theologies, boring parties, vapid conversations, and, at last, lives diminished of meaning. Of course, stories come and go and none lasts forever. But some of our stories have lasted almost forever, and these our libraries guard and protect, even when kings and emperors and generals and captains of industry may not want them told and remembered.

The ornate silver loving cup on the north mantel could just as well be presented to the able captains and crews of our own rock-ribbed, oak-planked, copper-sheathed, full-rigged library for their humanity and kindness in preserving this precious cargo of stories, memories and histories, so valuable to all of us in this town at the head of this bay at the foot of this mountain.

Rob McCall is pastor of the First Congregational Church of Blue Hill from which he will be retiring this fall. He is a writer, naturalist and radio essayist. His books: Small Misty Mountain and Great Speckled Bird can be found in the library.

ELVIRA BASS: AN APPRECIATION

-RICH BOULET

There are few people, if any, who can claim to have raised as much money for the library as Elvira Bass. In the last twenty-five plus years she has presided over various incarnations of the Blue Hill Library's book sales, from the annual big-top tent approach, to the now regular basement "Book Nook" sales, to our various online offerings. Through the years, Elvira—now well into her nineties—has worked in the sometimes cold, poorly lit basement, content to deal with leftover shelving, in leftover space and using a leftover computer. (As an aside, luckily Elvira has a collection of many sweaters she knit herself. I once complimented her on one

she was wearing. Her reply: "this old thing? I made it 50 years ago to go skiing in Italy!")

I wish I had a tally of how much money Elvira helped to raise. \$25,000 would not be unrealistic. Twice that is likely. Four times that would be believable. Unfortunately, records are scarce and memories fade. Suffice it to say that in 2009 when we repurposed a basement space into a meeting and archive room (the very room where Elvira had sorted through donated books for years), there was no question whatsoever that it would be called the "Elvira Bass Meeting and Archive Room." It really was the least we could do.

Elvira's work extends far beyond the library's book sales. Besides having a nose for books like few others, she produced local history exhibits that were as fascinating as they were informative. A pioneer in the field of medicinal chemistry, Elvira was part of a Nobel-prize winning team in a time and field where women were scarce and rarely recognized. Curiosity and determination led Elvira to mastery in skills unusual for women of her time: vintner, "gentlewoman" farmer and carpenter. She also raised a family, balancing responsibilities at home with professional demands during the pre-feminist 1950's.

These days Elvira is slowing down a little. We spoke on the phone recently and she said it was time to pass the torch. Although Elvira has become quite adept at online book sales in the last decade, the mobility and energy for listing books now eludes her. Gail Bartlett, who has been helping with a good portion of online book sales has kindly agreed to step up, which more than meets with Elvira's approval.

I would like to publicly thank Elvira for her hard work, dedication, and for helping to make BHPL the special place that it is. It is a much better place because of her.



Elvira pulls into the library for a shift selling books in 2013.

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LIBRARY BOARD NOTES:

It is hard to sum up the many hours and extensive talent that our board members contribute to the success and welfare of the library. Board committees offer advice and oversight on everything from employment benefits to building maintenance; from financial investments to plant sales, and they do it with grace, professionalism and a sense of fun. Without filling all the pages of this newsletter, we are left to mention this year's transitions.



Incoming board members, Macy Lasky and Edward Dufresne. After two years at the helm, Ellen Best passed the presidential torch to Rit Dojny who will serve as the Board President until 2016, though Ellen will continue to serve as a member of the board, as she has done almost every year since 1991. Two longtime board members had their terms expire this year: David Snow and Marjorie Yesley. David will miss his frequent interactions with fellow board members—"an interesting, diverse and talented group committed to the library and its future." Taking their place are new board members Macy Lasky from Deer Isle and Edward Dufresne from Penobscot. Macy is a frequent library user who has served on several local non-profit boards. She is excited to learn how an organization of this size and history works. Edward is pleased to be serving on the board of such an important community resource: "I've never encountered a library that offers so much in such charming and effective ways to so many. My hope is that the library will continue to expand its unique impact on the Blue Hill Peninsula."

Sadly, we bid farewell to Richard Kelley, who passed away this spring. Although he was only on the board a short time, his humor and resilience left a lasting mark. He will be missed dearly by peers and loved ones.

40 YEARS AND COUNTING AT BHPL

The first time I walked into the Blue Hill Library, it was the summer of 1974 and it had been raining for about 20 days straight. Fourteen friends and I had pushed our old school bus up a steep hill off of South Street and pitched our tents, thus establishing Circle Farm on a bunch of acres that had been used for firewood cutting. Our land was accessible only via a right-of-way that practically ran through Gayle Durnbaugh's parents' living room.



That summer, the library became my lifeline: there were books galore, friendly people galore, a flush toilet, and a dry space. And for these forty years living in Blue Hill I have loved this wonderful place, as have my children and now my grandchildren.

Books both change and save lives, and our library has done this many times, with grace and thoughtfulness, over many, many years and for many, many people. It is the heart of our small town and everyone who enters is made to feel at home, no matter their age or address.

It has been a privilege to have served as a Trustee of the library for the past nine years. Although I'm officially termed out as a Trustee, my enthusiasm and appreciation for our library remain stronger than ever. I'm moving over to join the Friends to be part of the library in another way but with the same love for this very special place and the same willingness to help sustain it that I have had for these forty years.



Cheri Mason and a young patron in disguise share a moment in the Cluett Garden during a recent reading of her book, The Wild Fox.

OLD FASHIONED FUNDRAISING:

Fundraisers have been part of the BHPL since it was called The Ladies Social Library and occupied one room in Town Hall. Ice cream socials, rummage sales, performances, and the time-tested book sales have kept the library open and growing for over a hundred years. The best fundraisers also serve as community events—bringing people together not just to raise money but to celebrate our shared culture. This is true of today's library.

PLANT SALE AND SILENT AUCTION

Memorial Day Weekend: (typically) Lynn Cheney and Clifton Page have created an event that people eagerly await—like the peepers return, the forsythia, even the black flies, because it means the start of summer. Complementing the plants is the Silent Auction, Bake Sale and Garden Book Sale. A wonderful event that raised \$10,000 this year.



Lynn Cheney prepares the 2013 Plant Sale for customers.

PAINT THE PENINSULA

July 19th this year! Over 100 artists paint or draw some view or aspect of the Blue Hill Peninsula in the morning and we have a reception and silent auction in the afternoon/evening. The proceeds of this event are shared between the artists and the library—supporting two cultural highlights of the Peninsula—the library and our vibrant arts community. The result is a terrific art show and a wonderful party that also raises important funds to keep the library open.



CELEBRITY SPELLING BEE

October: Twelve good-humored, brave, and very funny local personalities did their best to spell under pressure, some even sang their words. Paul Sullivan kept things light and lively by providing piano accompaniment. Who knew that a spelling bee could be so entertaining? We are pleased to announce that the Celebrity Spelling Bee will once again kick off our Annual Fund drive this October. Check our events calendar and newsletter for dates. And if you want to be a speller, let us know!



Alma Mote sings one of her words for a bonus to the library.



Our Doors are Open:

Mon, Tues, Wed, Friday 10-6
Thursdays 10-8
Saturday 10-5

What we offer:

Books, Newspapers, Magazines,
Movie DVDs, Music—CDs
and Freegal, Children's Room,
Youth Programming, Research
Assistance, WiFi connection,
Computers & Printers, Copying
& Faxing, Meeting Space,
Author Events, Workshops,
Concerts, Discussion Groups

How to Support our Mission:

Use the library
Attend Events
Join the Friends
Volunteer
Donate
Join Four Seasons Giving

Want to do More? Planned Giving

Consider extending your financial support for generations to come with a bequest to the library. The library's endowment is comprised of legacy gifts, both large and small, from loyal patrons.

Please contact us if you would like to discuss how to include the library in your estate plans.



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF BLUE HILL, 1896

If you are a regular visitor to the library, you might have noticed a new map hanging on the library's wall. Just to the right of the Larchwood Room (aka: the children's room) is an original map of Blue Hill entitled "Bird's Eye View of Blue Hill," rendered in ink, watercolor and pencil by George E. Norris in 1896. We were alerted by local historian Brad Emerson when the map came up for sale last fall, after Brad had been contacted by Earl Shettleworth of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission. MHPC was unable purchase it, but they were eager to see the map become part of a public collection, rather than end up in private hands. The library agreed to pursue the acquisition and with the help of Friends of the Library and private donors (see below) raised funds to purchase and frame it, preserving the map for future generations to enjoy.

George Norris (1855-1926) was one of the most prolific American makers of bird's-eye view lithographs in the late 19th century. The view depicts Blue Hill as seen from the south. The detail is remarkable: one can make out each dormer on the roof of the original Blue Hill Inn, the rigging on schooners in the harbor, and piles of lumber at the shingle mill on Mill Street. There is an inset view of The Quarries, as seen from Parker Point. The watercolor was the original artwork which Norris photographed and then transferred to a lithographic stone prior to printing. The image has 44 numbered locations, although the legend for those locations that appeared with the lithograph was not added to this original artwork. Few original artworks of bird's-eye views are known to survive.

Norris is credited with involvement in no fewer than 135 town and city views issued between 1883 and 1897. More than half of these were New England towns, including 22 for Maine. Norris was both artist and publisher of this view. Despite his talent and output, Norris could not make a financial success of the business, and in the late 1890's he abandoned view-making and became a hotelier in Brockton, Massachusetts until his death. Fortunately for us, Blue Hill is one of the last views he created.

This purchase was made possible by the generous support of the Friends of the Blue Hill Public Library and the following donors: Elvira Bass, Ellen Best & Geoffrey Anthony, The Blue Hill Inn, Cheryl & Richard Boulet, Clements Family Charitable Trust, Leda Beth Gray & David Drake, Robert & Rebecca McCall, Robert & Linda Slaven, Ellen Werner, Karen Anthony Wyatt.