

Library Services

History

The Rockport Public Library was established in 1914, when the YMCA, then located in the theatre part of the Rockport Opera House, made available its “box office” area and collection of 1,000 books as the nucleus of a town library. This collaboration with the YMCA continued until 1925 when the YMCA closed. The Opera House became the Town Hall; the Library was relocated to the lower level of the building.

In 1929, a Library Building Association was founded with a bequest of \$5,000. The association raised money in various ways: two concerts by students of the Curtis Institute of Music, a Chauffeur’s Ball, card parties, food sales and donations. Much of this money was lost in the wake of the Wall Street crash of 1929.

In 1943, Mary Louise Bok gave Rockport the Hotel and Burgess lots on the east and west sides of Limerock Street for a library site. By December 1949, the new library building was constructed at a cost of \$11,884, and with countless hours of volunteer support.

Room for expansion was left on either end of the building. In 1967, a nonfiction room was added to the Lily Pond Outlet side at a cost of about \$6,830. In 1977, the Eleanor Clark Apollonio Children’s Room was added not to the Limerock Street side of the building, as originally planned, but, because of zoning issues, to the front. This changed the entrance from Russell Avenue to Limerock Street. The cost of this project was \$20,974. A Town appropriation of \$3,418 for carpeting, bookshelves, painting and light fixtures was the first time any tax money was spent for library equipment.

In 1979 an Endowment Fund was created with proceeds of the sale of Eastman Johnson’s painting, “Sugaring Off at the Camp,” which had been given to the Library in 1953 by Clifford Smith.

The Friends of Rockport Public Library was established in 1979 with the purpose, as stated in its constitution and bylaws, “to develop and maintain public interest in the Rockport Public Library; to assist in developing and maintaining its service and usefulness to the community; to encourage community support of the library by gifts, records, periodicals, money, personal services, and other resources; and to encourage the use of the library’s facilities in the intellectual and cultural enrichment of life in the Rockport community.” That year, the Friends took responsibility for the annual book sale. Since that time the book sale has raised more than \$76,000, which has been used exclusively for the benefit of the Library. There are currently about 200 Friends members.

In 1987 a renovation project installed a new heating system, created staff workspace and storage space in the attic, provided a handicapped accessible bathroom and added a

handicapped accessible rear entrance. This project cost \$80,000, with \$8,800 contributed by the Town of Rockport and the rest raised from private donations.

A fourth building project in 1994-95 added the 24 x 30 Marjorie B. Dodge Room at the back of the library, expanded the Children's Room and restored the Library's front entrance, now made handicapped accessible, to its original Russell Avenue orientation. A fundraising campaign raised the \$180,000 needed for this project.

Computers were introduced at the Library in 1990 and became progressively more important in library operations. In 1996 free public Internet access was made possible through the Maine School and Library Network. In 2002 the Library automated its circulation and catalog as part of MINERVA, a statewide integrated library system created by the Maine Info Net Project. From the Library's website, www.rockport.lib.me.us, it is possible to search Rockport's catalog, the catalogs of the other 37 MINERVA libraries, and the catalogs of major libraries and library systems across the state that are part of Maine Info Net. Cardholders can also view their current borrowing records and renew materials online.

Patron initiated interlibrary loan requesting may be implemented as soon as 2003. Borrowers will be able directly to request materials from Maine Info Net libraries; the system will route the requested books to the Rockport Public Library for pickup.

This innovation will greatly facilitate interlibrary loan requesting, which can now be done only through library staff. Expanded availability of interlibrary loan will greatly increase the number of books available to Rockport cardholders. In 1914, cardholders had direct access to 1,000 titles; by 2002, the collection had grown to 28,000; in the near future, with the implementation of patron initiated interlibrary loan, borrowers will have convenient, direct access to the statewide union catalog of 2.5 million items.

Findings

Funding

Funding for the Rockport Public Library comes from a variety of sources:

1. The Town of Rockport pays staff salaries and benefits and audit expenses. This represents 66% of the annual operating budget.
2. Income from the Endowment Fund, currently managed by FL Putnam Investment Management Company in accord with state statutes, accounts for approximately 17% of the operating budget.
3. Restricted and unrestricted gifts; desk income, including nonresident fees and overdue fines; and State aid account for the remaining 17% of the operating budget.

Both (2) and (3) are administered by the elected Library Committee.

State standings

According to FY 2001 statistics, the most recent available from the Maine State Library, Rockport Public Library's performance ranks near the top of the 64 libraries serving communities of 2,500 to 4,999.

- ❑ 3rd in annual circulation (62,535)
- ❑ 2nd in circulation per capita (19.49)
- ❑ 2nd in weekly hours open (53.5)
- ❑ 1st in annual expenditures for collection (\$37,003)

Annual circulation is the best single indicator of a library's activity. According to FY 2001 statistics, of the 12 Maine libraries with annual circulations of 50,000 to 70,000, Rockport accomplishes its work with a comparatively small building and small staff.

- ❑ 4th of 12 in annual circulation; **62,535**; average: 60,368
- ❑ 2nd in annual turnover (the average number of times per year a book is checked out): **2.31**; average: 1.78
- ❑ 9th of 12 in space in existing building: **3,324 sq. ft.**; average: 8,017
- ❑ 11th in FTE's (full time equivalent staffing): **2.63**; average 6. [The addition of a fulltime position in FY02 brought Rockport's FTE's to 3.2, still about the half the average for a library with this level of circulation activity.]

Space needs

Rockport Public Library is fast running out of shelf space. By 2005, according to an estimate by Library Director Sally Regan, *it will be necessary to remove one book from the collection for every book that is added.* Lack of shelf space has already forced the Library to cut back subscriptions to current magazines.

Insufficiency of on-site programming space, especially for children's programs, is also felt. Preschool story times are often very crowded. Some types of children's programs cannot be scheduled due to lack of space. Although the Meeting Room of the Opera House is available, holding children's programs there does not serve a major goal of programming—bringing people into the library so that they will become familiar with its resources and become library users.

Community members frequently ask for a small meeting area where a few individuals could meet or a teacher could tutor a student. Since the building is so small, such meetings inconvenience other library users. This use is currently kept to a minimum.

The number of computers available for public use is also limited by insufficient floor space. Currently, for the public the library has two OPAC (online public access catalog) computers and three Internet-accessible computers. Even as technological advances bring wireless access, smaller equipment and more home use, the public continues to use the Library for Internet services. More floor space could provide computer access areas in the children's room and computer instruction and tutoring areas for the general public.

Parking

Library users frequently remark on the need for more parking. When the Center for Maine Contemporary Art or the Rockport Opera House have public programs during library hours, people often cannot find a place to park at all.

More parking convenient to the building is particularly needed. Especially disadvantaged by the current shortage are two groups of prime library users: people of retirement age who have some degree of mobility problem and parents with babies or toddlers.

Recommendations

- ❑ Maximize availability of books and other lending materials to Rockport residents by supporting increased interlibrary loan services. Increases in staffing and delivery costs may be involved.
- ❑ Address long-term needs for increased shelf space, programming space, computer work space and parking by weighing cost and benefits of
 - expanding the library building and creating more parking at its current historic location in Rockport Village. The present building is widely admired for its architecture and landscaping. Zoning and traffic issues will need to be addressed.
 - constructing a new facility on one of Rockport's major routes. In a larger, more centrally located, conveniently accessible public space, Rockport residents could meet, interact and build the bonds of community.