

Connecticut's Library Heritage II

Middlebury Public Library

Jane Gallagher

Director: Jane O. Gallagher; **Original building:** Dedicated June 17, 1972; **Renovation:** October 19, 1997; **Architect:** Tuthill & Wells; **Contractor:** Kristen B. Larsen, Inc.; **Collection:** 52,000 volumes; **Size:** 15,840 square feet; **State Grant:** \$350,000; **Total project cost:** \$1.4 million; **Population:** 6,145

The Middlebury Library was formed on September 22, 1794. A small group of Middlebury residents compiled a lending library of their own books, wrote down rules for membership, borrowing books, and set up a borrowing schedule. The early records of the library survive in a book that includes the list of borrowers, fines and fees paid, and some of the books owned by the library. It is interesting to read descriptions of the early fines; a penny for turning down pages, for dropping candle wax on a page and, of course, the perennial late charges. The library was in existence for many years moving from place to place as it outgrew its quarters. Finally, the library was housed in private dwellings, moving into the basement of the Congregational Church in the early 1800's. After the library became a "public library" in 1896 with an annual tax allotment of \$25 to be matched by the state, it was housed in the basement of the town hall. When a fire destroyed the town hall in 1935, the library was moved to an empty one-room schoolhouse across the street.

In 1971, private funds and pledges raised all the money required to build a new 7000 square foot library. Circulation skyrocketed from 9,000 items pre 1970 to 49,097 in 1977. This building was constructed from concrete slabs that were cast on the ground and raised into place. Many floor-to-ceiling windows were part of the design, which had an open interior with few physical barriers, complimenting the windows and bringing in beautiful light, allowing patrons to view the woodland site. A second phase of con-

struction occurred ten years later with the addition of a meeting room of 1200 square feet and 800 feet for more stack space. In total, the building contained about 10,000 square feet. No change was made to the heating system, which continued as an all-electric plant because electricity was inexpensive in the 70's.

In the early 1990's circulation again began to rise and the need for additional space was established by a space and needs assessment study. It was determined that the children's area was inadequate, the entire library needed to be reconfigured, more stack space and more parking areas were needed. Also imminent was the prospect of major expense to replace an aging heating system, a leaking flat roof, and to meet ADA requirements.

A building committee was organized and a fund raising committee started the hard work of raising money. Since the library had a tradition of building thorough private donation, the decision was made to continue the tradition by raising all the money for the expansion, resorting to the use of town tax money only if necessary. It was a wonderful experience working with the community and we were amazed with the support and the number of interested individuals who came forward to help meet our fund-raising goal. We were working with a very tight budget,

reusing as many furnishings as possible while creating a new look and new space. We had furniture reupholstered, tabletops replaced, and reused some of the children's wire furniture that is currently being reproduced.

The renovated and expanded building incorporated all the good features of the original building—the open space, the wonderful windows and a marvelous setting. The interior remains open with a central circulation area that allows a small number of staff to oversee the entire facility. The roofline is no longer flat, changed to accommodate the air handling units. A new oil hot water heating system was installed in a basement space that was added under the expanded children's area. An additional 5000 square feet were added on the main level with future expansion space available on the basement level.

The library was completed in October of 1997. We have made very few changes to our original plans and feel the entire facility works well. Behind the central circulation area, we have an area set up with six public access, on-line computers capable of word processing, excel, unfiltered Internet access and our library catalogue. They all print to a network laser printer and we are in the process of adding scanners.

We will host a Libratects workshop on September 16, 1999. Those involved in the design and construction will discuss the project and a tour will be given. 

