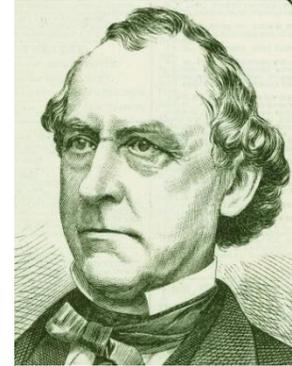


A History of the Port Chester-Rye Brook Public Library



The Port Chester-Rye Brook Public Library began its years of service to our community in 1876, on Main Street in the Brundage Building, now the site of Eugene's Diner and Bar. The three story building was given to the newly formed Port Chester Free Reading Room by Jared Valentine Peck (September 21, 1816 – December 25, 1891), a wealthy Port Chester lumber and building supplies businessman and a representative to the New York State Assembly and the United States Congress. The Brundage Building housed Lambert's Dry Goods Store on its first level, the library on the middle floor and the Mamaro Lodge of Masons on the top floor. The income from the rents of the first and third floors supported the library during these first years. On April 14, 1877, the library was incorporated as "The Library and Reading Room of the Village of Port Chester."



Jared V. Peck

The first trustees of the library made up a "who's who" of prominent Port Chester businessmen and clergy, led by Amherst Wight, a village lawyer. He was joined by F. M. Osborn, a patent-holding manufacturer of dental supplies; the Rev. Brockholst Morgan, the rector of St. Peter's Episcopal Church; Norton J. Sands, a physician and President of Port Chester (as mayors were called until 1910); E. S. Fisher, carpenter, cabinet maker and undertaker – his assistant acquired the business upon his death and started John Sloat & Company, Undertakers, Funeral Directors and Embalmers (and furniture sales) which today is known as the Craft Memorial Home; Robert H. Thomas, the Grand Librarian of the Free and Accepted Masons of the State of New York; John W. Lounsbury, business owner of "John W. Lounsbury & Sons" and Director of the First National Bank on Main Street in Port Chester; Captain Nelson Studwell, a director of the Port Chester Transportation Company; Herman L. Marshall, a stockholder owner of the Globe Foundry Company and trustee of the Port Chester Savings Bank; Ephraim Sours, a member of the Board of Directors of the Ridgefield and New York Railroad; William P. Sherwood, a pharmacist; Josiah Wilcox, a tinsmith manufacturer and trustee of the Port Chester Savings Bank; the Rev. W. W. Dowd, a Presbyterian minister; the Rev. S. M. Hammond, a Methodist minister; and the Rev. J. D. Barnes, a Baptist minister.



Captain Burnham

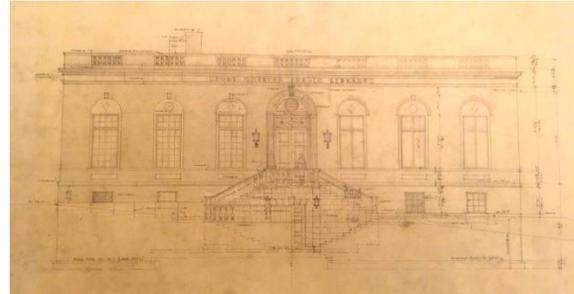
While the gift of the Brundage Building was important to the start of our library, another generous person permitted the library to take its next giant step.

William Dixon Burnham was born in Litchfield, CT, in 1847. As a young teen, he ran off to sea and began a long seafaring career. As shipmaster, he made many voyages around the world and made his fortune with the American-Hawaiian Steamship Company that traded in sugar from Hawaii.

After a life at sea, Captain Burnham and his wife Matilda settled

in Port Chester and remained for the rest of their lives. Captain Burnham died in 1919 and, in 1920, his estate granted a \$60,000.00 bequest to the library. Captain Burnham was an extremely well read man and, besides his bequest to the Port Chester library, he also left funds for a library in his Connecticut hometown.

Because of the Burnham bequest, the trustees of the library decided to sell the Brundage Building on North Main Street and to use the funds from the sale and the Burnham bequest to build a new library. The Village of Port Chester agreed to supply the library's operating budget with the name of the library changed to "The Port Chester Public Library."



The trustees purchased land on Westchester Avenue at the corner of Haseco Avenue and engaged the firm of McKim, Mead and White to design the building. The architectural drawings for the library are stored at The New-York Historical Society. Construction began in 1925 and the new library was dedicated on June 26, 1926.



By the 1960s, the library needed to expand to improve its service to the community. John W. Diehl was a member of the library Board of Trustees beginning in 1895. From 1909 until his death in 1944, Mr. Diehl served as library board president. In 1963, the remainder of Mr. Diehl's estate was left to the library. It was a gift of \$270,000.00. The addition,

dedicated in memory of Mr. Diehl, increased the library floor space by 9,000 square feet.

The library is now governed by a Board of Trustees made up of eleven members with four officers: president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary. Board members also serve on six committees: finance; personnel; buildings, grounds and security; nominating; planning and development; and communications/public relations.

To maintain support for the library, in 2008, the Villages of Port Chester and Rye Brook entered into an inter-municipal agreement to fund the library's operating and capital budgets, with Port Chester contributing 65% and Rye Brook adding the remaining 35%. The term of the inter-municipal agreement was ten years, and due to the success of the arrangement, the agreement was renewed in 2018.

In 2012, the library completed a major renovation, which included the creation of a teen room, a multipurpose meeting room, the addition of new furniture and carpets, the relocation of the children's room and the addition of an elevator. Although the renovation did not add square footage to the original three-story, 18,900 square foot building, it did provide a more open design with better use of space and light to promote parent and child reading activities. These multimillion dollar renovations were funded by a bequest from the former owners of "Jack's Fabrics," a well-loved downtown Port Chester business, the late Douglas and Elise Lefferts.