

*Transcription by Erin Hughes, Library Director  
2021*

## WOOD-RIDGE MEMORIAL LIBRARY

### Organization of the Library

On January 23, 1930, at a meeting of the Manor Community Club of Wood-Ridge, Mrs. Arthur R. Hotz proposed formation of a free public library. The suggestion was well received and Mrs. Hotz and Mrs. Harry Rossler were named to proceed with the project. A letter was sent to all organizations of the Borough, inviting them to send representatives to a meeting.

A group of interested citizens met at Mrs. Hotz' home and the Library Association was formed. The first Board of Trustees was composed of Robert Stoesser, President; Mrs. Harry Grimshaw, Vice President; Mrs. Arthur Hotz, Secretary; Mrs. Harry Rossler, Treasurer; Mrs. Florence Hughes, Mrs. William Wesp and William Simpson.

Mrs. Hotz, a dynamic and energetic worker, organized a successful campaign for donations of books and money. A loyal body of workers canvassed the community, and their efforts made it possible to apply for a charter and open the doors of the Library that same year.

The Board of Education permitted the Association to use a basement room in School No. 2 (now the High School), and the Library was started with 2,000 books.

In the beginning, the Library was open only a few hours at a time. Members of the Library Board served as staff, together with volunteer workers, among them Mrs. Eleanor Noble. When money was made available for a salaried librarian, Mrs. Noble was hired, and served until her death in January, 1956. Her ready wit and pleasant personality contributed much to the popularity of the Library.

### Growing Pains

Four years later, in 1934, the school system needed the space occupied by the Library, and the Mayor and Council consented to pay rent for the library quarters in a store at 219 Valley Boulevard. At that time the Library was open from 2:00 to 5:00pm on Monday, Tuesday and Friday, and from 7:30 to 9:30 on Tuesday and Friday evenings.

A series of capable boards under enthusiastic and intelligent leadership gradually brought the Library to a point where it became an important part of the Borough's life. Florence Hughes, Helen Andrews, Linnes Schwab and Frederick Settle served as presidents until 1944.

All this time the Library had functioned almost entirely on donations from patrons. However, in 1944 the electorate of the Borough voted to take over the Library as a public responsibility, including the salary of a librarian. The Reverend Mr. Francisco served as president for the first year under the new organization.

In the following years the Library grew, and service were expanded to a point where space was inadequate. Various solutions were considered- even, as early as March 1947 the idea of using the Brandenburg house as a Library. But this seemed impossible, so in July of 1947 arrangements were made to rent a store adjacent to the Library. An opening was cut through and alterations made. In September the expanded quarters were made available to the public, providing a separate section for the Children's Department and another for the adults.

### War Memorial Committees

In 1950 several problems were being considered by different groups in Wood-Ridge.

1. Consideration was being given to various suggestions for a memorial to those Wood-Ridge servicemen who died for their country.
2. Library trustees were looking for larger quarters for the Library.
3. A group of citizens was trying to preserve the historical Brinkerhoff-Brandenburg house.

The proposal was made that consideration be given to restoring the old building by converting it into a Library and dedicating it as a war memorial. Opposition developed from those who believed it impractical because of the general disrepair of the old house.

However, Ernest Camisa, chairman of the War Memorial Committee, worked diligently to bring the matter before the public. Mr. Arthur Wakeling, a member of the Library Board of Trustees, undertook the task of presenting the project to the people of Wood-Ridge, and laid the foundations for success. Petitions were circulated, and eventually the Mayor and Council were persuaded to present the question to the voters in November, 1952. The referendum was approved 1602 to 1384!

It was decided that the Borough Council and the Library Board would act jointly in planning the project. A Memorial Library Commission, composed of Guy W. Calissi (Mayor), Gustave C. Bickert, Albert M. Ludlam, Charles E. Rodgers and Arthur Wakeling, was appointed in February 1953, to assist coordinating all community efforts. At the first meeting of the Commission in March, Mrs. Paul Eckardt was appointed secretary.

In outlining the work which lay before the Commission, Councilman Bickert said at that first meeting:

"Wood-Ridge is about to create something of enduring value. As a War Memorial, it will be preserved against all ravages of time. It will enshrine not only the memory of those who served their country in war, but also the memory of those who founded this area. In Addition, it is certain to take rank among the more notable small public libraries of the Country."

On April 15, 1953 the Borough Council adopted an ordinance to provide funds for the conversion of the Brinkerhoff House into a library building. The total amount appropriated was

\$50,000. A contract was signed with Mr. Edgar I. Williams of Rutherford, one of the foremost library architects in the country. He had done considerable preliminary work in planning the Memorial Library. Bids were advertised for in October., contracts were awarded on December 8, and the actual construction began in January 1954.

From January 29 through July 18, 1954 the following members of the Memorial Commission met every Friday:

Guy W. Calissi, Chairman  
George T. Walkthrough, Vice Chairman  
Eugene C. Spies, Treasurer  
Charles E. Rogers, Director of Campaign for Donations  
Arthur Wakeling, Publicity  
Mrs. Paul Eckardt, Secretary.

Others who worked faithfully on the project were: James J. Lambert, liaison officer for the Borough Council; Library Trustee I.V. Young Jr., Chairman of the Building Committee of the Borough Council; Tax Collection James S. Young, who served as Co-Treasurer of the Memorial Library Fund and kept the books of the Commission; and Norman Weiss, Treasurer of the Library Board who coordinated all purchases.

On February 18 a campaign for donations was opened. Letters were mailed to all organizations, business firms and individuals in Wood-Ridge. A special trust fund was created so that monies received by the Commission could be applied directly toward the purchase of necessary furniture and equipment.

The Commission collected \$5,511.22 which it used to purchase bookcases, shelving, cabinets, tables, chairs, etc. There were 362 donors- 279 individuals, 21 organizations, 3 churches, 16 business firms, 7 industries- and their names were all inscribed in the "Golden Book of the Wood-Ridge Memorial Library."

Committee chairmen who assisted the Commission in the fund-raising campaign were:

Mrs. Grace Castagnette- Committee on Organizations  
Mayor Clarence E. Mathe, Jr.- Industries  
Paul Hammig- Business  
Robert I. Stoesser- Individuals  
William L. Kour- Grounds and Landscaping  
Austin Reed- Publications

Mayor Clarence E. Mathe, Jr. proclaimed September 19, 1954 as Dedication Sunday and invited all the citizens of Wood-Ridge to attend the ceremonies. Governor Robert B. Meyner gave the dedication address, after which the library building was open for inspection.

### *History and Restoration of the Building*

Wood-Ridge was apparently first settled by a branch of the Joris Dircksen Brinckerhoff family, who, originally residents of Drenth, Holland, arrived in New Amsterdam in 1638. Hendrik, Joris' son, moved to the Jersey side of the Hudson in 1685, and his descendants built homes in Bergen County.

These early settlers built log houses as temporary shelters. With the growth of the family, the original small buildings were added to by constructing stone or frame wings. The Dutch style developed here.

One of the descendants, George Brinkerhoff, built a long cabin on the site of the present Memorial Library, and later had his home constructed of thick, hand-cut sandstone- plentiful in that area. John Stagg, mason, of the old First Church at Acquacknock (Passaic), built the house and bound the stones together with mortar, straw and hog's hair. Some of the original hand-hewn timbers, believed to have been cut from trees in and around Berry's Creek, can still be seen in the basement of the Library.

The stone wing is the oldest existing part of the original building. No one knows just how old. According to the author Elizabeth Gale, a member of the Brinkerhoff family who once lived in the house when it was their homestead, the early wing was of stone with quarters in the attic for house servants. Unlike the stone wing, the fram wing has a carved date stone in the foundation, in old-style figures, 1792.

The mansard roof on the stone wing was added over hundred years ago to improve the second floor, and replaced the original ordinary gambrel roof.

The ceiling in the main room of the Library is exceptionally high because old oak-hewn beams were removed to lower the floor. It took four men to carry each beam.

The Reference Section in the Adult Department is a replica of the original colonial design, with a beautiful fireplace and a special reproduction of a colonial clock on the mantel.

On the second floor are the Art Gallery, the Music Room and the Library Board Room.

At the top of the stairs hangs a hooked rug, made by Mrs. Sarah Catherine Gale when was more than 80 years old. She dyed all the materials used, and they still retain the original colors outling the house, shrubbery and flowers.

Also in the upper hall is a copy of the coat of arms of the Brinkerhoff family. It was painted on canvas and gives dates back to 1307. As noted earlier, the first Brinkerhoff to come to New Amsterdam was Joris Dircksen Brinkerhoff with his family in 1638. The complete history of the Brinkerhoff family is contained in a rare book, The Family of Joris Dircksen Brinkerhoff 1638.

\_\_\_\_\_The landscaping of the grounds was accomplished from an architect's plan, and Wood-Ridge Garden Club created a Living Memorial Fund for this purpose.

The Brinkerhoff family retained the property until 1906 when it was passed from the estate of Henry E. Brinkerhoff to Leopold Brandenburg who later became the Mayor of Wood-Ridge, 1918-1919.

The Borough of Wood-Ridge acquired the property on November 12, 1941 for unpaid taxes and a nominal payment to Dorothy Cameron, Thomas Cameron, and Madge Snow who, as Brinkerhoff heirs, still had an equity in the land, plus a small additional payment to the estate of Henry E. Brinkerhoff. Members of the Brandenburg family continued to occupy the building on a rental basis until 1952, when it was decided to convert the house into the Memorial Library.

### *A Community Service Center*

The new home on Hackensack Street afforded the Library and opportunity to serve the community as a cultural center. Since 1954 the Arthur Wakeling Gallery, named for the man who had worked so tirelessly to bring the project of a Memorial Library to the public, has been the scene of many art exhibits. Lectures on art, flower arrangements, and other current topics of interest are presented periodically. A lively Great Books discussion group meets regularly, and book reviews are presented from time to time. The exhibit cabinet in the main reading room displays hobbies, handwork, collections, etc.

The History of Wood-Ridge Committee, appointed by Mayor Clarence E. Mathe in 1960 with the specific assignment of preparing a history of the borough in time for the New Jersey Tercentenary, has continues to meet and use the Library as its base of operations.

Traditionally, the Memorial Day Parade begins at the Library where a ceremony is held under the bronze plaque bearing the names of those soldiers from Wood-Ridge lost in the wars.

### *The Space Problem Again*

In September 1964, ten years after moving into the Memorial Library building, a report by the Board of Library Trustees indicated the number of persons using the Library had doubled and the Library was being used as a student reference center- a service that had not been possible before.

But once more space had become a problem- a larger Children's Department was needed, room for reference workers, as well as shelving and storage space. And plans were under way to add a new wing to the building to fill the library needs of Wood-Ridge.

However, local officials were slow to act on an application for a Federal grant. Instead, the question was placed on the ballot and the Library addition was defeated.

When the 40th Anniversary of the formation of the Library was celebrated in 1970, a special program was held. It was very evident that space was at a premium, for people could

not get into the gallery to hear the speakers but stood in the hallway and on the steps. Shelves were crowded with books, tables and chairs squeezed together.

In the following years the Board of Trustees systematically worked with funds available from State Aid to acquire sufficient monies to expand facilities. At one time consideration was given to a prefab-type room which could be added on. Again, there was the thought of acquiring a small building on Highland Avenue, which had been used as a civic center, for use as the Children's Department, but the cost of maintaining two separate buildings was prohibitive. At the same time the value of the dollar steadily decreased.

In 1974 it was finally decided to process. Mr. Gossman, of Gilcrest Associates, served as architect, and construction was done by Ridge Construction. Because of the lack of funds, a basement was not provided. But a large room was added to the rear of the building to serve as the much-needed Children's Department. This was finished in the Fall of the year, but could not be used immediately for lack of funds for furniture and equipment.

Finally, with the help of some of the organizations in town, the room was fitted out with shelving and furniture and an official dedication was held on February 15, 1975. The new room has alleviated much of the overcrowded condition that had existed.

Those who have served as president of the Library Board of Trustees since 1945 are: Robert Stoesser, Alwina Bailey, Arthur Wakeling, Helen Christensen, Hattie I. Grimshaw, Marily Spilker, and Ruth Lopoti.

Library Directors have been:

Mrs. Paul Exkardt	April 1956-April 1959
Mrs. Alwina Bailey	Sept. 1959- July 1965
Mrs. Edith Erickson (Acting Director)	Aug. 1965-Sept. 1967
Mrs. Bonne McDonald	Oct. 1967- July 1972
J, David Kamykoski	Sept. 1972-June 1975
Miss Patricia A. Hannon	July 1975-

Two members of the staff retired- Mrs. Catherine Kehoe in 1974, and Mrs. Edith Erickson in 1975. Both had worked in the Library a number of years and were well known to the public.

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