Rhode Island's Newest Library

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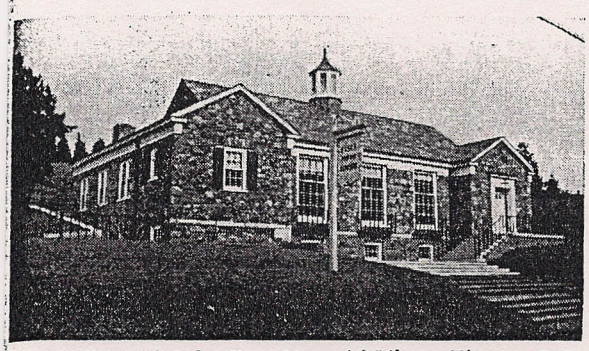
WHILE CIVILIZATION TOTTERS in Europe, while great storehouses of learning are the target of invaders' bombs, America carries on the torch of enlightenment. Among happier incidents of 1940 has been the establishment of a new library in Tiverton, Rhode Island, the Lydia Smith Baker Essex Memorial Library. Located in a lovely setting, designed in perfect proportion for its function, this little temple of learning symbolizes the aspirations of its donor, Lydia Essex.

Partial service to readers began January 17, 1940, but on June 20 there took place the dedicatory exercises in an atmosphere of solemnity and appreciation. The Reverend Willard D. Callender read the invocation, George Delano, President of the Board of Trustees and Chairman of the Building Committee, gave the opening address, and Mrs. May B. Church, a Board member, and Grace M. Sherwood, Rhode Island State Librarian, spoke on the historical significance of the occasion.

The town of Tiverton has antiquity, measured in terms of the "New World." King Philip's War reached this section, originally known as Pocasset, also as Punkateest. Incorporated in 1694 and added to Rhode Island in 1747, Tiverton was moreover the scene of the Battle of Tiverton Heights in August, 1778. Less than

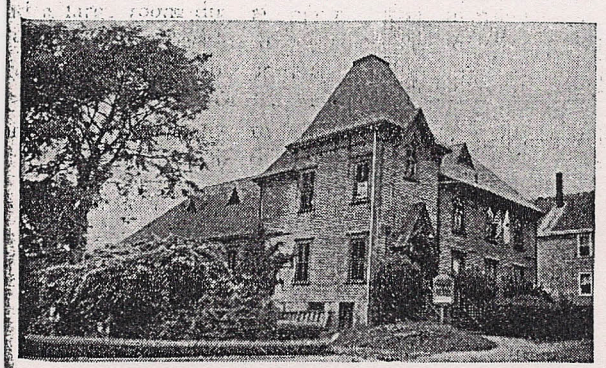


New Lydia Smith Baker Essex Memorial Library, Tiverton, R. I., Of Colonial Design Built With Local Field Stone

a century later enterprising citizens were involved in a library movement which culminated in the Sunday School Library of Bowen Memorial Chapel, Whitridge Hall. The names of Mrs. Anna M. Bowen, Thomas Whitridge, Charles Seabury, first Librarian, the Reverend Sarah A. Dixon, trustee, and Mrs. Mary Seabury Stimson, Librarian for more than fifty years, belong in the annals of library history.

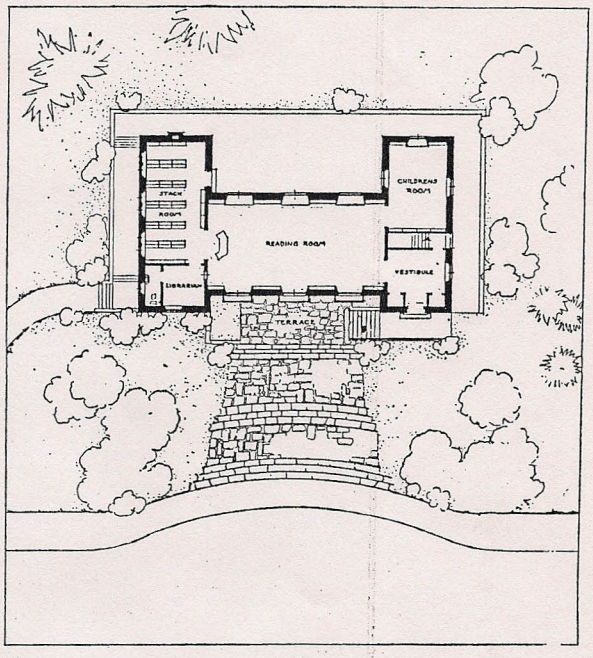
Co-operation between summer and native residents planted the seed that was to grow into a fine new library for the town of Tiverton. When Lydia Essex, a school teacher, called informally at Whitridge Hall during the summer months, she found a friendly and responsive person in the Librarian, Mrs. Stimson. She made generous gifts of books and money during her summers' stay in the locality. Finally, by the terms of her will, Miss Essex proved a lasting "Friend of the Library."

Terms of her bequest stipulated that land of two acres was to be given to Tiverton on condition that it be used for a public library. Residue of her estate of $42,000 was allotted, provided that the town built and maintained a free public library named for her mother. In 1937 the gift was accepted at the Town Meeting, and soon after, the Board of five Trustees was appointed by the Town Council as Building Committee. The forward looking Committee sought an architect who could realize a two-fold objective, beauty of design and practicality of lay-out. Charles G. Loring of Boston best fulfilled their aspirations. His plans took form through the work of Stanley B. Grinnell.



Old Quarters Of Library

From the accompanying picture an understanding of the appearance and arrangement of the Essex Memorial Library may be derived. Fitted to an upgrade, approached by flagstone terraces, the building, which measures 70 by 40 feet, uses a rustic, Colonial design. Local field stone that had weathered to shades of gray, green, yellow, and violet was chosen by a local mason for size, flatness, and variegated colors. A slate roof, white wood trim, dark green shutters, and black iron



rails are outside features. Concrete terraces on the two sides and rear provide ample daylight, and protect the building from dampness. The interior uses wood framing and plaster walls, secures a feeling of height by means of an arched ceiling over the Main Reading Room. The block plan shows the compactness of arrangement. The Librarian's desk is situated at the head of the main room, permitting both ready access to stacks and supervision of the Children's Room, diagonally opposite. The basement may be reached by stairs from the main floor vestibule or from an outside entrance at the opposite end. It contains a boiler room equipped with automatic hot air, fan-controlled oil burning heating and ventilation, and a large room directly under the Reading Room. This unassigned space with concrete flooring may be used for storage, stacks, or for museum purposes.

Furnishings of the library proper are the answer to many a librarian's prayer. Tables and chairs of dark finish oak dot the Reading Room; those in the children's part being of suitable size. The Librarian's desk, the catalog beside it, the truck, the magazine rack, and the children's catalog are of the same wood. Stock bracket type metal shelves have been used in the stacks. The Librarian's office, jutting off from the stacks, provides a splendid, well-lighted work room. The entire flooring is

hardwood, protected by rubber matting in the frequently trod lanes by the wall and wooden bookcases.

This Library may be cited as a case where the collection of books and the building are appropriately matched. About 9,000 books belonged to the collection at Whitridge Hall. To cope with the accessioning, classification, and cataloging of this goodly number, the services of the WPA State-Wide Library Project were enlisted. Sponsored by Grace M. Sherwood, State Librarian, the Project was made possible through the co-operation of Mrs. Margaret N. Staley, Director of Professional and Service Projects, and Thomas J. Madden, Supervisor of State Projects for Rhode Island. Mrs. Ethel S. Rader, Supervisor, directed the work, and was assisted by Mrs. Mildred A. Wunsch in charge of the Extension Library Service, Mrs. Herman Riddell, Field Agent, and M. Bradford Eddy, Appraiser and Discarder. Margaret A. Waring, Librarian at Whitridge Hall, has been appointed to the post of Librarian at the Lydia Smith Baker Essex Memorial Library. Among objectives toward which to work are wider and more intensive use of improved facilities, so as to warrant opening for more hours per week. (Two afternoons for a total of eight [open] hours comprise the present schedule.)

Tiverton may well be proud and happy over its contribution to learning. It sets an example of what people can accomplish working together for a noble purpose. At a time of frustration and destruction for the library world, it stands a beacon of hope. May its rays reach far and wide to cheer, to encourage, and to inspire emulation.