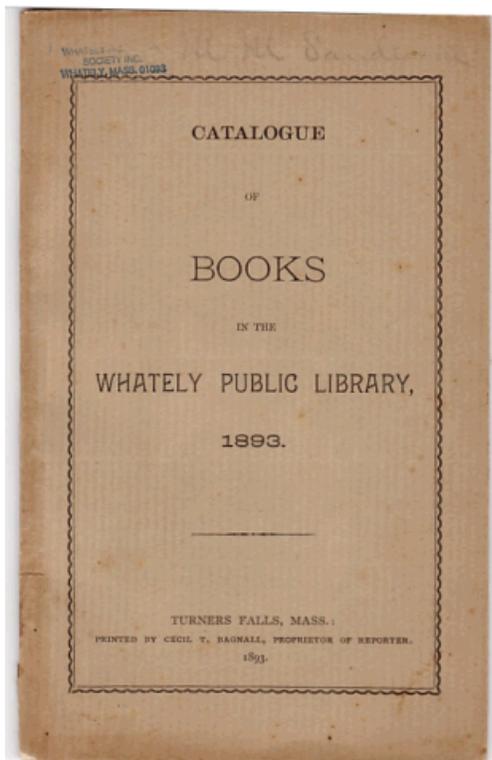


## History of the Whately Library

Whately's first libraries were for men; the earliest, 1790 to 1795, was financed by forty-seven of the town's leading citizens. The next library lasted from 1820 to 1832. This was an association where books and purchases were financed by fees and annual dues. In 1842, school district libraries were set up with books provided by the Commonwealth. Unfortunately, the school libraries quietly faded away.

An agricultural library was formed in 1861, with each member paying five dollars into the book fund and thereafter a dollar a year in annual dues. The books were not just about agriculture but also covered astronomy, geology, natural history and taxidermy. When the library failed, the books were auctioned off.

In April of 1874, the town voted to establish a town library. A room was set aside in the Town Hall in 1875 and its shelves were stocked with books "that included fiction, in appreciation of the public's right to read for pleasure"<sup>1</sup>.



1883 Catalogue of Whately Library's books, listed alphabetically by title. Now in the collection of the Whately Historical Society.

By 1898 the collection had grown to 2279 volumes and the room at the town hall was expanded. Two branch librarians were added to the staff in 1912. Mrs. Florence Wood and Mrs. Grace Bardwell were paid one dollar a month and the parlors of their homes in East and West Whately respectively became branch libraries. The librarians stocked these branches weekly from baskets that they carried back and forth from Town Hall.

In 1822, Salmon White Dickinson was born, and he would change the history of the town library. He lived to the age of 98 and had two daughters, Jennie and Anna White Dickinson. Upon his death, he left his entire estate to Anna with instructions that it be given to the town to build a library in his memory. By sage investments, Anna, upon her death, was able to give the town \$225,000 for a library. The will was contested, and by 1945, the amount had dwindled down to \$165,000.

In 1945 the inhabitants of the town were deeded 7 acres on the east side of Chestnut Plain Road by Howard R. Waite. This was to become the site of the

S. White Dickinson Memorial Library. The architect was Walter P. Crabtree of West Hartford, Connecticut. The original plans called for an elaborate building with three stories, but due to monetary constraints, another plan was submitted to the town. Construction began in 1949. The new design was a small Georgian style building on the

hilltop site with the view across the valley. The building was finished a year later and the doors were opened to the townspeople on December 17, 1950.

Arlene Rote Waite had been librarian for almost 50 years, presiding “over the book-crowded shelves in the library room at the Town Hall every Saturday, helping youngsters make their selections, choosing books for the bedridden, knowing the tastes of the townspeople as well as she knew the stock of the small grocery store she kept at the Center”<sup>2</sup> [now the post office]. Mrs. Waite was also the town clerk and post mistress and resigned due to the additional hours the new library would require.

Ena M. Cane, librarian from 1952 to 1980, was instrumental in expanding the library’s role in the community.



Ena Cane ( right) at the book signing for her book *Whately 1771-1971*. At her left is Alice Scott Ross, who wrote the introduction.

Since Whately had no movie projector or movie theater she created committees with members from every part of town to brainstorm ideas for getting a projector, which was ultimately followed by a slide projector. The Christmas Book Fair she established became an annual Christmas tradition.

The library has become an integral part of the community. It continues to expand

services and offers a variety of programs. The Trustees have continued to have an active role, working on the problems of maintenance and improvements to the building.

The S. White Dickinson Memorial Library is a town institution, reflecting Salmon White Dickinson's loyalty to his birthplace and Whately's appreciation of it.

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Abstracted from Chapter X, "Of Books and Readers", *Whately, Massachusetts 1771-1971*, by Ena M. Cane, Northampton , 1972.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, page 53.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, page 55.