

WELLES-TURNER MEMORIAL LIBRARY  
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT



# Library Service in Glastonbury, Connecticut



# Association Libraries



Library service in Glastonbury developed throughout the nineteenth century with a series of private subscription libraries.

According to a time-line on the Historical Society of Glastonbury website (<http://hsgct.org/history.htm>), in 1803, Dr. Asaph Coleman, along with other like-minded citizens, formed a subscription library that was “short lived because of lack of books.” The Historical Society has a transcript of the group’s organizational meeting which took place at 2:00 p.m. on the first Tuesday of May at the home of Asaph Colemans. At that meeting, plans were made to appoint a librarian as well as a committee to manage the collection, with a detailed list of books and their owners. The stated goal of the group was “to increase and spread useful knowledge, to promote the general good, and secure the blessings of liberty and learning” — a goal that has stood the test of time.

A pamphlet prepared in 1970 for the 75th anniversary of free public library service in Glastonbury lists three additional association libraries in the 19th century. The first was organized at the Main Street home of Deacon Joseph Wright on February 20, 1837. As explained in the minutes of that meeting, twenty town residents paid a subscription fee of \$3.00 and signed the association constitution. No record of this association exists after 1840.

The next mention of an association library was the Naubuc Institute, or Atheneum. Organized sometime during the 1880s, this association housed a book collection and also held public lectures and readings. In 1951, Mary A. Kingsbury and Lucie Kingsbury Rankin wrote a brief history of library service in Glastonbury. In their essay, they stated that the Naubuc Institute Library was “in a hall in Naubuc, west of the Williams’ silver-plating factory, on a small side road leading from the bridge to a point back of the house once occupied by Harold Harrison. This building was also called the Atheneum and was used for band rehearsals and by the Germans for religious services. Later, it was used for storing oil and explosives for the factory. According to Willard Phelps, the hall was standing in 1892 but demolished at some later time.”



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In 1891, a committee of eight people met at the home of Dr. Daniel Kingsbury and organized the third documented association library. The committee collected 193 books from the preceding association libraries and for four years made them available to subscribers. During its four years of operation, the association library held a Friday night entertainment series for local talent in an effort to raise funds for additional books. The only non-local talent to appear was the Trinity College glee club. From the May 29, 1893 *Hartford Courant*:

At the recent Glee Club elections, Robert P. Parker, '04, was elected director and Solomon Stoddard, '04, manager. The first concert under the new management will be given at Glastonbury this evening under the auspices of the Glastonbury Library Association.

## Town-Funded Library Service

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, momentum grew for free library service for all town residents. The obituary for Colonel Thomas G. Welles published on March 21, 1892 in the *Hartford Courant* states that Colonel Welles was a “public-spirited citizen” who, along with his brother Edgar T. Welles, “gave \$5,000. to the Free Library fund,” which is evidence of the townspeople’s efforts to provide library service without a subscription fee. A few years later, at a Town Meeting on October 21, 1895, \$200.00 was appropriated toward the formation of a town library, a sum that was matched by the state (*Hartford Courant* article of October 19, 1895). A subsequent *Courant* article (October 22, 1895) states, “A resolution was passed appropriating the \$200. for the purpose of founding a free public library and appointing directors to care for it.” The list of directors included J.H. Hutchins, J.W. Purtill, Miss Ada Crosby, Dr. C.G. Rankin and F.A. Holden. By February 7, 1896, an additional 250 books were purchased, shelving was installed and the trustees prepared for opening a library “which will be a credit to the town.”

Kingsbury and Rankin’s essay continues with “Mr. Hutchins, High School Principal, was elected Librarian, which office he held for 16 years until his death. Many high school girls helped with pasting labels, and similar work and in about a month, the Library opened Tuesdays and Fridays from 3 to 5 P.M. At first, books were given out by the Misses Nellie Griswold and Lilian Warner. Later Miss Bertha Warner was engaged for this work at a salary of \$10 per year.”

For the first years of service, the library was housed in the back room of the original Academy School, a space that was inadequate for the growing collection.

Funding for the library continued to come from the town budget, which was supplemented by donations and contributions. A *Hartford Courant* article dated December 23, 1912 mentions a \$25.00 appropriation from the Glastonbury Business Men's Association for the support of the public library. Library Director Dr. C. G. Rankin requested the funds and set up a committee to solicit additional donations. Another gift came in 1918 from the estate of Mrs. Mercy Barber, who left \$2,000.00 to set up a book fund in memory of her sister, Mary E. Turner. In the 1920s, the library was relocated to a building on Hebron Avenue, returning in the 1930s to the main floor of the original Academy building. Open two days a week with a borrowing limit of two books per visit, the library remained on the main floor of the original Academy building until 1952.

## Welles-Turner Bequest

Harriet Welles Turner Burnham's legacy to the Town of Glastonbury is well-documented. Born in Glastonbury in 1856, Harriet Welles married Sturgis P. Turner and together they built and occupied a Main Street home on the site of the present-day Welles-Turner Memorial Library. Mrs. Welles was widowed in 1916 (*Hartford Courant* obituary January 29, 1916). Her second marriage to John W. Burnham ended with her death on November 2, 1931.



Harriet Burnham willed her estate in trust for the benefit of her husband. On his death in 1941, her will provided \$350,000.00 to the Town of Glastonbury for a public library to be built and maintained on the site of her former home on Main Street. In 1951 the R.F.

Jones Company was contracted to remove the homestead from the building site and construct a library building that would be "an ornament to the Town and a handsome memorial structure" to commemorate her family and the family of her first husband. The dedication ceremony for the Welles-Turner Memorial Library was held on October 5, 1952.

## Building

The Hartford-Connecticut Trust Company was entrusted with the design and building of the Welles-Turner Memorial Library.



A committee was formed with town officials, bank trustees and architect Roy D. Bassette. The consensus of the committee was that the library should conform to a colonial building style, looking more like a house than a typical library. The original library is a brick, three-story building with a gambrel roof.

## Furnishings

In addition to overseeing the building of the new library, The Hartford-Connecticut Trust Company also oversaw the furnishing, again in keeping with the colonial look of Glastonbury center. As described in the Hartford-Connecticut Trust Company newsletter of March 1953, the furnishings included a Grandfather clock, Windsor chairs, drop-leaf tables and other items contributing to “a certain warmth and hominess not always present in buildings of this nature.” The only remaining item from the original homestead is the horse weathervane, which is still on display in the library.

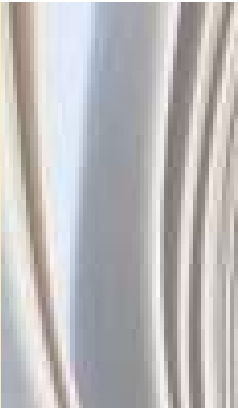


The weathervane can be seen on the first floor behind the library's lending desk.

## Building Additions

In 1965, a modern glass and metal addition was erected at the back of the library, because the original building was inadequate for the growing population in Glastonbury. Despite this additional space, by the 1980s, it became apparent that further expansion would be necessary. After a series of unsuccessful referendums, funds for an addition passed the vote on November 5, 1996. Arbones, King, and Vlock, the architects chosen to design the addition, renovated the 1965 structure with a brick exterior, blending the look of the original building and the two additions to create a unified appearance in keeping with the original structure. Support for the addition and renovation came from The Second Century Fund, a volunteer group with a goal of creating an endowment to benefit the library. The Friends of the Welles-Turner Memorial Library were also instrumental in raising support for an expanded library and for contributing funds for furnishing the addition. With minimal interruption of library service, the construction process culminated with a grand opening on January 9, 1999. ■





Welles-Turner Memorial Library  
on Main Street



East Glastonbury Library  
on Neipsic Road



South Glastonbury Library  
on High Street

**Welles**  **Turner**  
MEMORIAL LIBRARY

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