



Our History

The First Hundred Years: Key Facts & Timeline

1790

The Rev. Justus Mitchell, nephew of Roger Sherman, creates New Canaan's first lending collection, with 100 circulating books established in Mitchell's home on Oenoke Ridge.

1877

The "Free Reading Room" was opened in the first floor of a rented building on Elm Street with \$70 in funding and 200 used books available for circulation.

1878

The Library's Articles of Association are adopted and a plan drawn for a non-profit New Canaan Library/Reading Room Association.

1879

The Library's first fundraiser held - a peach festival held to raise money for Library!

1885

The Reading Room Association buys a lot on Elm Street and builds a brick building, the upper level of which was home to the Library for 28 years.

Only members of the Association could borrow books.

Mrs. C. A. Simonson was the first Librarian employed in New Canaan and was paid .50 cents per week.

1892- 1895

The Library was forced to shut its doors due to insufficient funds which led to townspeople rallying to save the Library. Town contribution of \$200 puts the Library back in operation.

1895

Town makes its first \$100 budget appropriation to the Library which results in first free access to the collections for all residents.

1903

Mr. Alfred Comstock and Jesse St. John made legacy gifts that later helped fund the construction of a new building at 151 Main Street.

1910

New Canaan Reading Room & Circulating Library Corporation buys land and old house on Cherry/Main from Sherman and Naomi Weed for \$7,000 for new building project.

1911

Architect Alfred H. Taylor's design plans for a new Library are described as colonial style and will cost \$25,000 to be raised by private funds.

1913

New building opens to the public in July.

New Canaan Historical Society housed in a room at the Library.

Time capsule buried, intended to be opened when building taken down in 100 years (2013).

At the dedication of the new building, the philosophy of the Library was articulated as a "place for reading, research, study and **reflection.**"

1914

Summer residents—Charles E. Merrill, Payson Merrill, Neilson Olcott, Dickinson W. Richards & Rush Taggart - made a gift of real estate to the Library whose sale helped reduce debt incurred with the construction of the new building.

1937

\$5,657.06 was approved for the Library's operating budget-- \$3,500 to be contributed by Town and the rest to be raised in memberships, fines, donations, thus beginning the public-private partnership that remains to this day.

This year, an addition that is now the Curtis Gallery, was added to accommodate the great growth in public use.

1944

Amanda Weed bequeathed the property located at Cherry/Main streets.

1952 - The 1952-53 Expansion Project

The Library Board and volunteers assessed the needs for a new building, considered several new sites including a lot near the secondary school on South Avenue (now the Police Station).

Ultimately, the Library purchased a lot on Cherry Street and expanded its footprint with the help of architect John Moore. This resulted in what is now the Children's Room. The Library took a mortgage of \$130,000 to pay for this addition.

For many years, this was used not only as a reading room, but as a venue for concerts and art shows.

1953

Library reopened in March 1953 doubled in size.

1962

Town's population grows to 15,000 inhabitants adding new pressures on the Library's small space. The 1937 addition converted to offices.

1963

New Canaan Historical Society permanently relocates to Main Street.

1964

The Library purchased the property to the south along Main Street to Maple Street from the Fasoli Family.

1972

Town leases to the Library the telephone building on corner of Main St for much needed book storage as the Library once again outgrows its space.

The Last 50 Years

1974 - Start of the 1979 Expansion Project

Design plans begun for Library expansion to double its size and improve accessibility.

1978

Library announces \$1.6 MM capital campaign to support a new wing expansion project.

1979

Construction of a new wing designed by Willis N. Mills of SMS architects is completed. Ruth Lapham contributed \$750,000 to new space in honor of her father now called the Lapham Wing.

1980

1937 addition renovation by SMS Architects renamed H. Pelham Curtis Gallery.

1990 The Lamb Room

The basement of the Library is renovated to create a multipurpose auditorium space with latest AV technology and room for 200 seats designed by SMS Architects.

2001

Update to the Childrens Room - interior finishes.

2005-2007 Start of the First New Building Project

The Library Board engaged Architect [Elisabeth Martin](#) of MDA group to conduct a Facility Evaluation and Space Utilization Study for the Library.

The study urged a complete rebuild - "While the ability to add space is often part of a plan to add services, the current 35,475 sq ft New Canaan Library building fills much of the usable site and possibilities for physical expansion are limited. As such, a significant expansion is not the suggested approach."

2008 - The 2008 New Building Project

First Selectman, Jeb Walker, expressed the wish for a new municipal center behind Town Hall to include a new home for the Library.

A Library Committee meets with town officials to discuss new Library plans and location as part of a "[Civic Center Master Plan](#)" that included the creation of a new 60,000 square foot Library, a Library Green and lower level parking.

Thanks to a generous donor, the Library Board hired Yale Architecture School Dean, Robert Stern, for a pre-architectural study to assess a variety of potential building scenarios. Stern studied 4 potential new Library sites including Park Street behind Town Hall, the Center School site, and the current library site.

The Library made a strategic acquisition of an adjacent Maple Street property.

2010-2012

[Three community conversations](#) were held with town residents led by the New Canaan Long Range Planning Committee.

In December 2011, following the LRPC's fourth public hearing and after evaluating the options, the Library Board of Trustees announced that they had decided to build on the existing site and would start to acquire adjacent properties to enable the new facility.

The Maple Street lot acquired in 2008 was demolished to create a parking lot (The DeCew Parking Lot) for 24 additional spaces.

2012 The New Building Project

The Library Board engaged [Centerbrook Architects](#) and commissioned a [Facilities assessment report \(MEP\)](#) from [Kohler Ronan, LLC](#) which assessed existing building system conditions, outlined building code deficiencies, yielding an overall conclusion that the mechanical, electrical plumbing and fire protection infrastructure were well out of date.

Centerbrook commences a four-month long community workshop with 40 residents—representing a diverse cross-section of the community that considered 9 iterative concepts in depth.

During this extensive series of workshops, the participants reviewed the condition and functional needs of the library and other important considerations such as zoning requirements. The group evaluated renovation options before forming a consensus that rebuilding was the best course of action.

- 3 new concepts were then developed and evaluated.
- Participants formed a consensus on the concept of a library that consisted of a Library wing and Events wing
- 2 more concepts were developed which included partially covered parking and alternate locations for the legacy building.
- Further drawings were done integrating the preferred concepts ultimately leading to a plan for a new building that was over 60,000 square feet, saw the legacy building moved to a new position facing Cherry Street and had partially covered parking.

2013

In April 2013 Library purchased property at corner of Maple Street and South Avenue, now the site of Christine's Garden.

Lisa Oldham was recruited from The National Library of New Zealand as Executive Director to lead the library and new building project

2014

Library commissions a Feasibility Study to assess financial prospects for a major Capital Campaign

2016

Capital Campaign Committee Formed

2017

48 South Avenue lot purchased with financial assistance from TONC pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding in accordance with TONC wishes to ensure construction of a new, fit-for-purpose facility on the existing site.

New Canaan Library instructs Centerbrook Architects with this newly secured footprint and a defined budget and asks that they build on the work of 2012 to design new building intended to serve the community for the next 100 years.

2018

The completion of these new plans heralds the launch of The Campaign for the New New Canaan Library which to date has raised over \$16 million in private funds and pledges for the construction of this 2017 Centerbrook plan.

