



A Continuation of the History of the Public Library in Brunswick, Maine

Elisabeth Doucett

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the Public Library in Brunswick,
Maine**

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Cover image: "Curtis Memorial Library"
by Diane de Grasse, 2004.

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*Curtis Memorial Library in 2019
Photograph courtesy of Jamie Doucett*

Acknowledgement

Acknowledgment is a simple way of showing respect and a step toward correcting the stories and practices that erase Indigenous Peoples' history and culture, and toward inviting and honoring the truth.

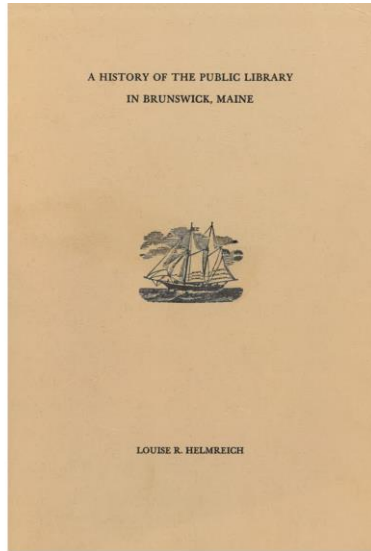
Curtis Memorial Library would like to acknowledge that the land on which we gather is the occupied and unceded territory of the Wabanaki, the People of the place where the sun first looks our way, who have stewarded this land throughout the generations.

We extend our respect and gratitude to the many Indigenous people and their ancestors whose rich histories and vibrant communities include the Abenaki, Maliseet, Micmac, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot Nations and all the Native communities who have lived in Chuwabunkeag for over three thousand generations in what is now called New England and the Canadian Maritimes.

We thank them for their strength and resilience in protecting this land and aspire to uphold our responsibilities according to their example.

Introduction

The first history of Curtis Memorial Library (*A History of the Public Library in Brunswick, Maine*) was written by Louise R. Helmreich and published by the Brunswick Public Library Association in 1976.



*Cover of Louise R. Helmreich's
History (1976)*

This history has been an important document for the Library. It has preserved the details of the long life of Curtis Memorial Library in the community. Those details in turn reveal some of the many ways that librarians, staff, and volunteers have used their creativity and dedication to build an organization able to meet the ever-changing needs of the community. The history also illustrates the community's ongoing dedication to the shared values represented by the Library. Finally, the history serves as an important reminder of

how many people in the community have worked to maintain and care for Curtis Memorial Library over many years.

In 2022, the Curtis Board of Directors determined that it would be useful to update the history; since 2023 will be the 140th anniversary of the founding of the Library, it seemed an appropriate time to celebrate the long-term role of Curtis in the community. When I went on sabbatical in the summer/fall of 2022, this became my project as the current Library Director.

Particular thanks goes to the *Times Record* newspaper and its reporters over the past 45 years. Much of the research for this book came from that resource, and any newspaper pictures came from the *Times Record* as well. The newspaper's role in preserving local history has been invaluable.

It should also be noted that this history is not able (due to space constraints) to share the many, many names of and projects executed by the volunteers and staff who have made Curtis such an important community institution. However, they deserve a special notice and thank you. Volunteers have supported the Library by doing a huge variety of tasks; from watering plants, to shelving books, to selling books at Twice-Told Tales, to serving on the Board of Directors, Curtis volunteers have provided the daily support necessary to keep our operation running smoothly and efficiently. Our Library staff come to work every day determined to do the best job they can meeting the needs of the community in whatever way is necessary. They bring creativity, caring, and energy to their work, which shows in everything they do. These individuals make Curtis Library an institution that truly defines "community."

Finally, it should be mentioned that Curtis Library has had a long and constructive relationship with the community of Harpswell, Maine. The full history of that relationship is also not included here, again because of space constraints. The partnership between Curtis and Harpswell started in 1974 with a vote to appropriate a sum to Curtis for the provision of library services to all Harpswell residents. In 1974, that amount was \$510.00. This relationship has continued for 48 years to the present, with every inclination that it will exist going forward. Curtis has provided many diverse services to Harpswell including a weekly “pop-up” library at the Harpswell Town Office, programming on a variety of different topics such as genealogy and small business development, and the ability to obtain books through interlibrary loan.



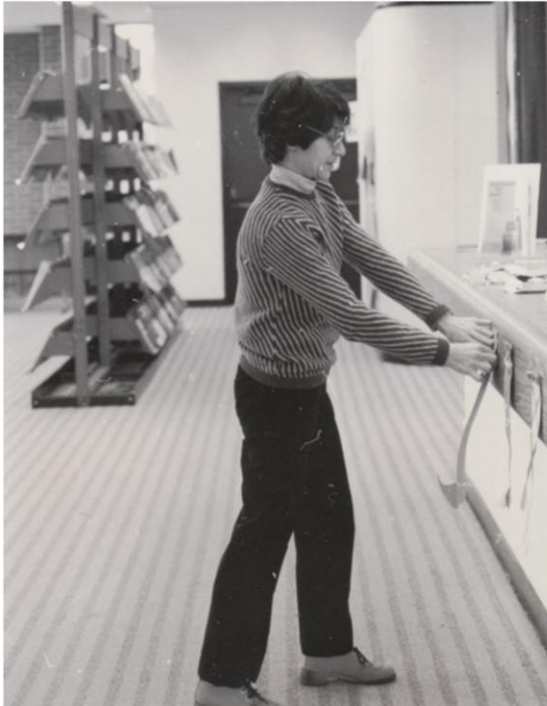
*A draft rendering of the Curtis Bookmobile,
a 2023 Ford E-Transit Electric Van*

In 2023, Curtis Library will be putting an electric bookmobile into service that is guaranteed to be very helpful in continuing to serve residents throughout Brunswick and Harpswell.

*Elisabeth Doucett
Executive Director & Librarian
Curtis Memorial Library
December 2022*

The 1970s: A New Library Addition & Growth in Library Use

We pick up where the first written history left off: November 1974, at a party celebrating the first anniversary of the library's addition.



Director Suse Weissman (1974)

Director Weissman indicated that this was an opportunity for “those who’ve used it to tell us what they’ve liked, and for those who haven’t set foot in it to take the plunge.” According to the *Times Record*: “the new library has better lighting, the book stacks are out in the open where

people can get at them, the color scheme is inviting rather than imposing, and there's scarcely a wall in sight."



The interior of the 1973 Library addition

Community response to the new addition was very positive, with patrons particularly enjoying the natural light and open spaces. The only real complaint was that the much-loved, working fireplace in the original 1904 Building was no longer available to the public as it was now a workspace for the librarians. Director Weissman indicated that—hopefully in the next few years—the Fireplace Room would be reopened for public use.

Two of the services offered by the Library in 1974 are particularly interesting, because they are no longer present in

the world of 2022: a sitting area equipped with headphones for listening to LPs, and a film delivery service that would acquire film reels from the Maine State Library for loan to community viewing groups.

The Library was also moving into a new role as a community center: “The biggest impact the [new] library has had is on the middle-aged and older people who see it as an extension of the living room, to come and visit, write letters, meet their friends.” Additionally, Director Weissman noted that teenagers were showing up more than ever because the library was a comfortable place to come at night and meet friends. She added, “We were hoping this would happen...”

After the opening of the addition, the 1970s were a period of growth for the Library, driven partly by the community’s enjoyment and use of the new addition, but also by an increase in children’s services, including the hiring of a part-time children’s librarian. After one full year of use of the new addition:

- Book circulation increased by 26,000, rising from 92,000 in 1973 to 118,000 in 1974.
- \$21,625 was spent on books/periodicals in 1974. Director Weissman indicated that inflation had cut the library’s book purchasing power to about 2,000 titles a year, when “it should be acquiring at least 3,000.”
- Close to 7,000 people in Brunswick had library cards.
- Almost 10,000 people saw films made available through the library.

In February of 1975, the Library announced that it had received a total of \$15,000 in federal matching grants to extend services, particularly in areas in which service was inadequate.

Emphasis was placed on establishing and expanding programs for disadvantaged people.

The Friends of the Library had a busy year in 1976, sponsoring a number of programs for the Library. One such program, "An Evening with Mr. Longfellow," featured Mrs. Alice Packard of Card Cove, Harpswell who portrayed—among others—the character of Lavinia Pennell, a classmate of Longfellow's mother, who reminisced about the time and events surrounding Longfellow's 43rd birthday. Many of the attendees of this event came dressed in period costume.

In May, the Friends held craft demonstrations at the Library including jewelry, decorative painting, macramé, bookbinding, papier-mâché, quilting and others. The Friends much-loved Annual Book Sale was held in June.



As captioned by The Times Record:

"Claire May Taylor received the 19th annual citizenship award of the Brunswick Area Chamber of Commerce last night during the chamber's annual meeting at the Holiday Inn. Making the presentation is outgoing president Frank V. Wright. (Frank Connors photo)."

Also in 1976, the Brunswick Area Chamber of Commerce named Claire M. Taylor their “Citizen of the Year” for her more than 35 years of devoted service to the community. During this time, Ms. Taylor had been president and director of the Village Improvement Association, treasurer and member of the Regional Memorial Hospital Auxiliary, and president of Curtis Memorial Library.

In December, the Bowdoin Dance Group led by June Vail presented “Beginnings and Endings” with music by Abe Morrell at the Library.

In 1977, an article in the *Times Record* indicated that the Library had over 250 Friends of the Library. The Friends were established in 1965 to create a closer relationship between the town-supported library and its patrons. The article noted that twelve of the Friends worked one afternoon or morning a week volunteering for any number of jobs at the Library, including checking out books, carding returned books, mending books, shelving books and retrieving overdue books. They also checked out books and delivered reading material to homebound persons, and ran the Library’s annual book sale as a fundraiser.

In April of 1979, the Board of Directors at Curtis demonstrated that they were ahead of their time by the degree to which they supported the librarians and staff at Curtis Library. They approved a 7% cost of living raise for all library staff. Additionally, the Directors started investigating ways to participate in a retirement fund for the benefit of library staff; they agreed that the Library would pay 90% of health insurance costs for employees. These were unusual and much-appreciated benefits for librarians in the 1970’s.

At the end of the same Board meeting, the Friends of the Library met with the Board with concerns and questions about their role in the Library. After discussion, the two groups agreed that the Friends would focus on:

- Providing support at Town Council meetings and budget hearings
- Advocating around library legislation
- Fundraising for the Library
- Developing and executing programs such as luncheons and book sales
- Surveying library users to determine what they think are the good/bad points of the library
- Encouraging interest in the Friends membership.

The Friends enthusiastically accepted this agenda, and to this day continue to advocate for the Library and maintain a strong membership of Friends who support the Library financially.

In 1979, the United States faced an energy crisis caused by a drop in oil production during the Iranian Revolution. Crude oil more than doubled in price. As a result, the Board of Directors began to investigate how they might spend less on the Library's heating costs. They decided to install storm windows on the original 1904 Building with the goal of making the building more weatherproof during cold, windy Maine winters.



*1904 Building with storm windows
Photograph courtesy of Benjamin Williamson*

The storm windows have been very effective at blocking out drafts and preventing heat loss throughout the years, and the 1904 Building's original windows have been protected from the distressing and damage caused by weather. One of the goals within the Library's 2022 sustainability initiative is to restore the original windows in the 1904 Building and replace the aging storm windows with ones that will better insulate the building.

The 1980s: A Growing Library Community, Arts at the Library, and Computers

At the beginning of 1980, the Library Board of Directors received notice of an increase in the cost of insurance for the library's fine arts collection to \$200 per year. Demonstrating good Yankee frugality, Library Board member Mrs. Jean Pinfold raised the possibilities of either discontinuing the insurance on the collection, or disposing of the collection, since Library funding was very tight at that point in time. The Board decided to maintain the status quo, but was open to considering a possible future sale of one or more of the paintings if it became desirable to do so. Note: The Library's art collection in 2022 is considered an important community asset both in terms of its monetary value and in terms of its role as a visual representation of Brunswick's maritime history.

Arts and crafts have consistently been an area of focus at Curtis. In 1981, the Library exhibited a large display of crafts from local artisans that encompassed a variety of disciplines including calligraphy, candle making, basketry, and hand weaving; demonstrations of glass blowing by Herbert Merrill and displays of rug hooking by Ruth Twombly were some other highlights. The Library was fortunate to receive the donation of a hooked rug by Ms. Twombly at that time—a lovely example of the primitive rug hooking style. In 2022, Ms. Twombly's piece hangs in the Library's newly created space dedicated to “making and creating” on the Library's second floor.



Hooked rug donated by crafter Ruth Twombly

1981 saw the start of annual displays of art created by Brunswick schoolchildren. These yearly shows have continued for 40 years since that time, interrupted only by the Library's closure during the COVID-19 pandemic. Curtis also observed 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons, with displays, demonstrations, films and other presentations.

1982 was an eventful year for the Library, as it brought the death of Brunswick resident Emery W. Booker. Mr. Booker was a local banker, real estate broker, antique collector, and horse trainer. From the *Times Record*: "...he was well-known locally as a historian who loved to spin tales of old Brunswick and sing ballads of Brunswick characters." One of these tales recalled when a young Mr. Booker saw Joshua Chamberlain at the train station. He asked, "General Chamberlain is it going to

stop raining?" In typical fashion, Chamberlain responded, "It always has!" As he walked away, he turned to the boy and said, "Remember, Emery, after the rain, the sun always comes out." (*Times Record* 9-20-1982). Mr. Booker told the story many times in town.



Curtis donor Emery W. Booker

It came as no surprise that a man who so dearly loved his town would choose to leave a legacy behind in it. The estate of Mr. Booker bequeathed Curtis Library the substantial gift of \$107,000, which established an endowment that continues to fund the purchase of books for the community in the present day. Booker's gift tripled the library's endowment at that time and helped support the growth of Curtis Library as one of the largest and most heavily used public libraries in the state of Maine.

Of note, Mr. Booker also left a gift to the Brunswick Area Student Aid Fund that allowed the group to offer more than double its scholarship awards in future years. As the *Times Record* noted in a September 30, 1982 editorial:

"Generations of area people will benefit from the Bookers' gifts to their community. And the lives of the Bookers themselves demonstrate that community opportunity can be sustained only when people fulfill community responsibility."



*As captioned by The Times Record:
"Robert L. Morrell relaxes in his greenhouse at this home on Coffin Street Sunday, the morning after he was honored by the Brunswick Area Chamber of Commerce as 1982 Citizen of the Year. (Scott Perry Photo)."*

Also in 1982, Bob Morrell was designated "Citizen of the Year" by the Brunswick Area Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Morrell was President of the Library's Board of Directors for many years, and he, his wife Nan, and their children's families

have all supported Curtis through their volunteerism and generosity. It is safe to say that the Curtis Library of 2022 would not be the outstanding institution it is today without the support of the Morrell family over many years.

Books and reading continued as key areas of focus at the Library. In May 1982, the Curtis Friends presented the program "An Evening with Maine Writers and Illustrators at Work." The event included authors Elizabeth and Jan Pierson (*A Birder's Guide to the Coast of Maine*), Philip W. Conkling (*Islands in Time: A Natural and Human History of the Islands of Maine*), and Laurie James in a dramatic reading: "A Celebration of Edna St. Vincent Millay".

1983 was a banner year at Curtis as it commemorated the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Library. In celebration, there was an exhibition at of the Library's fine arts collection, many pieces of which were donated during the Library's fledgling years.

An official birthday party was held in April 1983, with a headline in the *Times Record* that read: "Book bags, balloons and birthday cake." Throughout the month, Library treasures and memorabilia were on display.

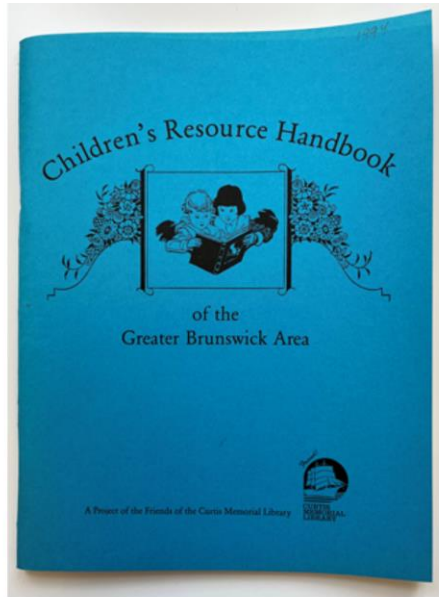
"The library is heavily used for purposes other than reading," said Director Weissman, who, in 1983, had been the head librarian for 16 years. She also indicated that there was no predicting how many people would be in on any day. "Morning starts with mothers and kids coming in, followed by an older set looking for mysteries, then the lunch hour crowd, then students after school. Before dinner, folks come from work, from 7-9 pm, older children come in, and fathers with children and young couples. Saturdays are families. Genealogy, travelers from away,

Young People's Theater with Al Miller, maritime painting, photocopy machine users." These comments demonstrate just some of the many ways that Curtis Library was a community hub, even in 1983 before such a concept became popular among public libraries across the country.

After the 100th anniversary, 1984 was back to business as usual. Illustrations from *Miss Rumphius* by Damariscotta author Barbara Cooney were displayed at Curtis, due to children's librarian Phyllis Fuchs writing a letter to Cooney. The letter was a general invitation to drop into the library to exhibit, visit, and browse the collection. Cooney responded, said she would love to visit the Library at some point, and offered the illustrations for display before they went to New York City for the book's printing. The display was a hit with Curtis patrons of all ages, and the book went on to win an American Book Award "for outstanding literary achievement."

In November 1984, there was very good news for the Library. The Town of Brunswick appropriated funds so that the Library could be open a sixth day on Mondays, due to ever-increasing use of the facility. The hours were to be: 9:00am to 9:00pm on Monday-Wednesday, 9:00am to 6:00pm on Thursday-Friday, and 9:00am to 5:00pm on Saturday. This brought the number of open hours to 62/week.

Also in 1984, the *Children's Resource Handbook of the Greater Brunswick Area* was started by Cara Hayes and maintained by Virginia Hopcroft. The *Handbook* was a highly popular list of resources for children and their families in the Brunswick community. Its production and printing was supported by the Friends of Curtis Library, and continued to be released until 2010, at which time it was determined that most of the information could be found online.



*Children's Resource Handbook of the
Greater Brunswick Area (1984)*

Curtis Library joined the digital age in 1984, obtaining an IBM computer. The goal of the computer was to enable “staff members to perform their work faster and more efficiently.” In particular, it was used to catalog books and periodicals and to process interlibrary loans. Director Weissman said about the computer, “It’s much easier than we expected to learn how to operate it.”

At the same time, Curtis Library joined OCLC (Online Computing Library Center), which was a national consortium of libraries that shared resources through interlibrary loan. OCLC was a precursor to Curtis’ membership in MINERVA, the Maine interlibrary loan consortium. MINERVA was established in 2000, with Curtis as was one of its founding libraries. In both instances, Curtis viewed interlibrary loan as a necessary

resource to meet the ever-growing reading demands of the Brunswick community.

In 1985, Curtis Library was honored to receive 10% of all sales at Bookland, one of Brunswick's much-loved bookstores. Curtis has always supported the local independent bookseller community in Brunswick; the Library often invites Gary Lawless, owner of Gulf of Maine Books, to attend Library author talks and to sell the speaker's books to program attendees.

The Curtis Library of the 1980s was still a traditional library in that it was a quiet environment where silence was prevalent. The following letter from a Library patron, dated June 19, 1986, indicates some displeasure with the enforcement of the "quiet" rules, and provides an interesting snapshot of the evolving community perspective about how the Library "should" be used:

To: Librarian

Capt. John Curtis Memorial Library

By coincidence, the following text came to my attention just a few days after an almost unpleasant discussion on the "virtues of silence" with a member of your staff, who had rather patronizingly shushed me as we searched in the stacks.

"Some libraries have overdone the virtues of silence. Contemplation and chaos don't go together, but there is altogether too much restraint in libraries. A place comes alive when people laugh out loud, when friends can discuss the things that concern them, and when people can eavesdrop without too much straining. Keep the reading rooms sealed off, but make the rest of the library hospitable to the sound of the human voice.

Bookshelves are not a final resting place for the written word; they are or should be the traffic centers for ideas – even when the traffic is noisy. The important thing is to get rid of the feeling that services for the dear departed are going on just across the hall.” From Human Options by Norman Cousins.

*Sincerely yours,
[A Brunswick citizen]*

1986 also saw the initiation of an “anti-obscenity” referendum in the state of Maine, which was identified by the leadership at Curtis Library as an attempt to impose censorship. The Board of Directors and the librarians at Curtis published the following resolution in the *Times Record* newspaper, stating their position toward censorship:

June 1986

Whereas, there will be a proposal on the June 10th ballot to make it a crime to “make, sell, give for value or otherwise promote obscene material,” the Director and staff of the Curtis Memorial Library make the following findings and resolution:

- 1. While obscene materials are offensive and repugnant, there is widespread disagreement throughout society as to what constitutes obscenity. What is obscene is a personal, subjective determination.*
- 2. The specific language of the proposal raises many questions about precisely what materials, institutions and individuals would be subject to criminal penalties.*
- 3. The proposal specifically fails to protect libraries, museums, galleries, theaters and others from subjection to government censors.*

4. *The proposal's reliance on "contemporary community standards" raises unanswered questions about whether there would be one statewide standard or different standards for each of Maine's nearly 500 cities and towns.*
5. *The law would result in police and other state and local government officials deciding what Maine adults will read, see and hear.*
6. *The threat to intellectual and artistic freedom created by government censorship is worse than that posed by the existence of obscenity.*

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Directors and staff of the Curtis Memorial Library are opposed to passage of the so-called anti-obscenity referendum and urge all Maine citizens, Independents, Democrats, and Republicans, who oppose government censorship to vote "no" on June 10th [1986].

Signed by: James E. Arsenault, Randolph Bean, Cheer Beth, John P. Bibber, Brian Damien, Glenda Derbyshire, Janet Galle, Pamela B. Galvin, Cara J. Hayes, Sidney B. Hodgdon, Elizabeth A. Horton, Craig A. McEwen, Jean L. Pinfold, Elena Schmidt, Peggy B. Smith, Geoffrey R. Stanwood, Suse Weissman, Jan Wilk.

The referendum was voted down in Maine via a wide margin.

On Monday, October 27, 1986, Curtis Library sustained a roof leak that resulted in water damage to thousands of books. Fire alarms sounded, and firefighters responded. Director Weissman estimated that 8,000 of the library's 50,000 books were damaged in the flood. The portrait of Capt. John

Curtis got wet (for the second time in its history). “For several years, library personnel have been battling roof leaks, with sections of the stacks often draped with plastic to protect the books.” The library’s addition had a flat roof that was not holding up well to Maine winters.



The 1973 addition with flat roof

An intriguing example of how society was changing in 1980s can be seen in a Letter to the Editor in the *Times Record* on March 23, 1987 from Director Weissman:

Does no one care?

To the editor:

An interesting phenomenon is occurring at the Captain John Curtis Memorial Library. Our building is crowded with teen-agers every afternoon – a good development, we think. Among them is a large group, which even by today’s tolerance for noise, must be considered rowdy. They are also slobs, leaving litter

wherever they sit. Requests for acceptable behavior and evictions are of no use.

The phenomenon that intrigues me is that no other adults using the building ever chastise them or set them standards for behavior. This leaves the staff in the position of zookeepers, without community support. Do we no longer care about young people growing up amongst us? Are we so afraid of becoming involved that we would rather ignore our neighbors' children?

1987 also saw the beginning of the ongoing connection between Curtis Library and what would become the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) movement. A Science Club for kids aged 5-8 was offered at Curtis, consisting of six, one-hour weekly programs for children to explore science topics through hands-on experiments. Many children participated in the program, foreshadowing the popularity of STEM in the future.

At the beginning of May 1987, the announcement was made that Director Weissman would be leaving Curtis Library after 20 years of service. She had arrived at Curtis from a position at the New York Public Library, with a Master's in Library Science from Columbia University, and a B.A. from Hunter College. During her tenure, the collection increased from 18,000 to 52,000 books and records. Circulation and the number of cardholders both doubled. Director Weissman was the moving force in planning the new library wing, which opened in 1973. As a token of their friendship, the Friends of the Library gave her the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*. She was Brunswick's first credentialed librarian.

Steve Podgajny began working as the new Director of Curtis Library on October 1, 1987. Director Podgajny came from

Saco's Dyer Library where he started as Director in 1981. The announcement about his acceptance of the job hinted at future areas of focus for the role of the Director, mentioning his background and "proven leadership in fundraising and long-range planning."



*As captioned by The Times Record:
"Director Steve Podgajny in the stacks at
Dyer Library."*

In an article in the *Times Record*, Director Podgajny commented that he was enamored of public service, computers, and books, and that for a library to get its job done, it needed both books and technology. He particularly gave credit to Director Weissman for the library's strong foundation of public-private partnership of financial resources and dedication to public service.

A fun note about Curtis Library showed up in the *Reader's Digest* in 1987 in the "All in a Day's Work" section:

As a conservator of paintings in the seaport town of Falmouth, Maine, I often clean and repair portraits of 19th-century sea captains and their wives. I had finished the painting of one Capt. John Curtis and returned it to its place of honor in the Curtis Memorial Library, but was still working on the portrait of his wife. After several months of painstaking restorations, I received this post card from that library: "I miss my mate. How clean does she have to be? John Curtis"

Contributed by Nancy Lee Snow

The remainder of the 1980s passed with standard Library events and programming:

- In 1988, Philip M. Brown, a retired Bowdoin professor, as well as a director and treasurer of Curtis for 23 years, died.
- AARP started offering tax aid at Curtis for "elderly, low-income, and the handicapped— provided by volunteers". This service has continued at Curtis in one form or another for over 30 years since its inception.
- Local artist Hati Modr held an art exhibit in the Library.
- The Library started delivering books to seniors at home.

In September of 1988, a five-year plan was developed for by Director Podgajny. The main goals were to: obtain more high-tech equipment, determine space needs, locate new members, develop a public relations plan, increase the operating budget and lengthen library hours.

The strategic plan noted that the library spent about \$3,000 on new equipment each year. Director Podgajny hoped

to increase that figure to \$10,000 in the next year for the purchase of computers and video equipment. Additionally, the point was made that available library shelf space would run out in three years, so a plan for new storage space needed to be created.

1990s: More Growth and a New Addition

The early 1990s saw the advent of a very difficult recession in Maine that received national attention. From the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper (November 17, 1991):

Not since the Great Depression, people say, have conditions been as desperate as they are now in Maine, the poorest of the New England states and the most sparsely populated state east of the Mississippi. In less than three years, Maine has lost 40,000 jobs, cut its budget three times and seen its personal income growth fall to dead last in the rankings of the 50 states. The result is an economic free fall challenging Maine's lifestyle, which attracts and holds people who by choice would live nowhere else.

This recession had a substantial impact on the Town of Brunswick's financial support for Curtis Library. During budget discussions in 1992, it was noted in the *Times Record*, "In Brunswick the Library's share of the town's budget has shrunk from a high of 1.7 percent in 1984 to 1.4 percent last year [1991]." There was a failed effort by Library leadership to obtain funding to reinstate Sunday hours, which had previously been cut to save money. At the same time, Library staff wages were frozen.

Despite the difficulties inherent in a poor economy, in 1993, the Library leadership started a community discussion about the need for an expanded library. Additionally, research was conducted to determine whether the Library should stay in its current location, or if it needed to move to expand its footprint. One of the drawbacks in staying in the downtown location was a lack of available public parking.

Complicating the proposed building expansion discussion was the fact that in October of 1993, the State of Maine eliminated per capita support of public libraries— 23 cents per person. To offset this loss, a group of Maine libraries started a network connecting 15 communities, including Patten Free Library, Topsham Public Library, the Wiscasset Public Library, Skidompha Library and the Waldoboro Public Library. Under the new program, any resident who held a library card from one of the participating libraries could borrow material from the other libraries at no charge. Curtis was invited to join, but declined, as the Library was supported fully by local taxes. Participating in this reciprocal borrowing agreement would have reduced the likelihood of local taxpayer support, since, in essence, Brunswick would be underwriting the use of its Library by other communities if it joined this network. Curtis did not join the program.

In 1994, a consultant was hired, and plans were drafted for a library update and addition. The plans came with a preliminary cost estimate of \$6 million. The Curtis Board of Directors asked for money from the Town of Brunswick to allow them to hire an architect and come up with more exact cost estimates and building plans. Responding to the need for more space and the heavy use of the Library, the Brunswick Town Council agreed in July 1994 to contribute \$10,000 to hire an architectural firm to draw more specific plans for a library expansion.

In December 1994, in support of this initiative, the Town of Brunswick closed a deal to buy land that would provide parking for an expanded Curtis Library. Additionally, the Town Council determined to factor a library expansion into its 1996-97 plan for capital projects.

In November 1995, the Library launched a capital campaign in support of expanding the Library with \$755,000 of a \$1,500,000 already raised. Then-Governor Angus King spoke at the Library about the importance of combining public and private funding for public projects such as the Library's expansion. King spoke also about the need to preserve the quality of life in Maine through institutions such as the Library. "The quality of community is what sets Maine apart and we've got to fight like hell to keep it," he said.

Also in 1995, the CHIP (Community Health Information Partnership) program was started at Curtis. CHIP was a local consortium that provided health and wellness information and programs to the community through the combined resources of Curtis Library, Mid Coast Hospital, Parkview Hospital, and Bowdoin College.

The goal of CHIP was to increase access to accurate health information for the community. The program was in place until MaineHealth and Mid Coast-Parkview announced plans to merge in February 2019. At that point, the program was ended. It was considered a success by all of its partners, having done an outstanding job of providing literature and programming to help community members better manage their health for over 20 years.

In October 1995, the Library held a joint celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Friends of Curtis Library and the birthday of Capt. John Curtis, the Library's namesake. A children's party led the day off with music, games, and cake. In the evening, there was a tour of the Library and a party for adults, complete with cake, coffee and conversations with local authors including Charlotte Agell, Margy Burns-Knight, Franklin Burroughs, Charles Calhoun, John Cole, Barbara Cooney, Gary

Lawless, Karen Mather, Elizabeth and Jan Pierson, and Charles and Samudla Shain.

1996 was a critical year in the evolution of Curtis Library. On June 11, a referendum vote was held in the community to determine support for the planned expansion of the Library. The cost of the project was estimated to be \$5.5 million. The Library would raise \$1.5 million and taxpayers would cover \$5 million via bond.

Voters overwhelmingly approved the library measure—2,235 in support versus 972 against. According to the *Times Record* of June 12, 1996: “The proposition had provoked little public controversy – at the town council hearing on the matter no one spoke out against the plan, which has been developed and promoted by the library for the past two years.” Construction was scheduled to begin in the fall of 1997.

In May 1997, Curtis Library started moving to temporary quarters in anticipation of the ground breaking for the new Library addition. The Library closed its doors at 23 Pleasant Street on June 16 and, thanks to a great deal of hard work by the librarians and volunteers, reopened at the old Brunswick High School on the corner of McKeen and Spring Streets on June 28.

The Library’s Building Committee approved designs for a \$5.5 million project in September 1997.



*Plan for the 1999 addition to
Curtis Memorial Library*

The Boston architectural firm Amsler Woodhouse MacLean, Architects Inc. in collaboration with the local firm Douglas Richmond Architects were ultimately hired to design the new addition to the Library as well as oversee building renovations. The primary architects were Tom Amsler from Amsler Woodhouse MacLean and Douglas Richmond and Bob Kahn from Douglas Richmond Architects.

The new Library addition would create a modern library for the community, complete with quiet study areas, an after-school hangout area for teens, and a large meeting room that could be used for multiple programs and purposes. Additionally, the building would offer charging locations, at which people could plug in their own laptop computers or use one of the library's 50 desktop computers for public use. Some of the specific architectural elements that were approved by the Building Committee included:

- Dots of black brick in the mostly red brick exterior wall to reflect the original 1904 building.

- A starburst motif found in the 1904 building was included in multiple places in the new addition's interior to help connect the old and new.
- Two large atriums with natural light as requested by the community.
- Windows in shapes of half circles, small squares and rectangles.

Along with the new addition, the 1904 building would be refurbished for public use. Since the 1970's addition was built, it had been closed off to general public use and was more of a space for meetings, storage and offices.

Community member Jan Wilk led the extensive fundraising effort for the new Curtis Library addition. Because of her work and the success of the fundraising effort, she was honored at the beginning of 1998 as "Citizen of the Year" by the Chamber of Commerce.



*Jan Wilk at the ground breaking ceremony
for the 1999 addition*

Before breaking ground for the new Library addition in March 1998, an interesting project was completed first. 12 Middle Street, known as the Curtis Homestead, was an antique house—built in the 1800s—that was in the way of the new construction. Due to the house’s historical value, there was great hesitation in having it demolished. Local conservationist Steven Weston was called in by Director Podgajny—with input from the director of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Earl Shettleworth—to evaluate the situation.

Ultimately, the house was carefully pulled apart board by board, with each board numbered for future reassembly. From the *Times Record* (February 6, 1998): *Steve Weston said, “There were five fireplaces inside, and so far we’ve saved about 3,000 bricks. They’ve also removed each door and window as well as the moldings around them. When the house is rebuilt at another location, it will be put together exactly as it stood on Middle Street.”*



*12 Middle Street. Photograph courtesy of the
Pejepscot History Center*

The pieces were moved to storage in East Winthrop, Maine. Research for this book did not reveal if the house was ever rebuilt in Maine.

Finally, the ground breaking for the new Library addition happened in March 1998, with planned completion by August 1999. The 1973 library addition was completely torn down, leaving only the original 1904 Building on-site as construction started.



Removal of the 1973 addition

The life of the Library continued. Attendance and borrowing grew, despite readers having to visit the Library's temporary location for two years.

A new teen librarian, Melissa Orth, was hired in September to meet the needs of young adult readers. Ms. Orth was the first teen librarian in the state of Maine and reflected ongoing efforts by the Library to be responsive to the changing needs of the community.

In September of 1999, the librarians started moving the collection into the new library. The grand opening of the addition was scheduled for October 1, 1999 and was sponsored by the Curtis Friends and the Bookland bookstore.

The community was invited to attend an open house to tour the new addition and enjoy entertainment, readings and music, much of which took place outside on a closed-off Middle Street.

The dedication ceremony featured Jane Morrell, Chairwoman of the Board of Directors; Library Director Steve Podgajny; Governor Angus King; and Brunswick Town Council Chairman Stephen McCausland. The Library was now comprised of two connected buildings on 44,000 square feet. The community embraced the new space and Library usage started to increase immediately.



*Curtis Memorial Library at dusk.
1999 addition on left, 1904 original Library
on right. Photograph courtesy of Lisa Fehl*

Some of the most notable aspects of the new addition included:

- Two floors of space for the Library's fiction and nonfiction collections.
- A large and well-resourced Youth Services department, as well as a dedicated space for teens.
- The Morrell Meeting Room, a large community meeting space with the capacity for 220 people.
- A stand-alone computer room in the middle of the first floor, providing access to public computers for adults.
- A Reading Garden at the Union Street parking lot entrance.
- Study rooms and small meeting spaces on the second floor of the Library.

The 2000s: More Growth, a Centennial, and a New Director

Phyllis Fuchs, who had been children's librarian at Curtis for two decades, retired at the end of 1999. Mrs. Fuchs created a strong, vibrant children's program at Curtis that encouraged several generations of Brunswick children to become lifetime readers.

Pam Jenkins was hired in January 2000 to replace Mrs. Fuchs. In the article about Pam in *The Times Record* of February 3, 2000, the headline noted, "Librarian says she has the perfect job at Curtis." Pam was quoted, "*The thing about being a children's librarian is the day-to-day variety... One minute you're singing songs with 2-year-olds, and an hour later, you're helping sixth-graders with a book report. Something fun happens every day.*" She also noted that the flexibility of the new, large children's area was welcoming to young readers of varying ages and interests—a wonderful opportunity.

Curtis Library Director Steve Podgajny was honored as the 2000 Outstanding Librarian of the Year at the annual Maine Libraries Council for his work on creating the state's new Century Community Grants Program which included \$1.3 million for library renovations, preservation projects, a Maine history website and projects by the Maine Arts Commission and Maine Humanities Council.

In 2002, after the final renovation of the 1904 Building, the Library leadership decided that the building needed a finishing touch in the form of a new rug for the 1904 Building's Reading Room. Director Podgajny asked Clare and Stephen Moss, Brunswick residents and owners of Araby Rugs, to help

find a handwoven rug suitable for use in the newly updated space.

The Fireplace Room already had a Heriz rug that many generations of Brunswick children had settled on for story time. The goal was that the new rug would work within the color and pattern framework of the Library's original Heriz, thereby helping to further unite the old and new in the renovated 1904 Building.



*The Library's antique Heriz rug in the
1904 Fireplace Room*

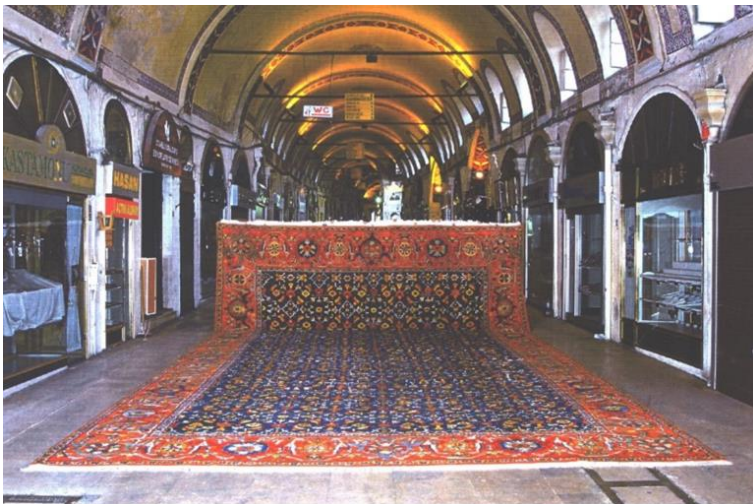
Clare and Steve started the project by offering to restore the Heriz rug. They then recommended that one rug be created for the Reading Room with measurements of 19 by 33 feet. They also proposed providing rugs for the magazine and newspaper rooms and the front door foyer area, all of which would complement the Library's original Heriz.

After much research and work, the Mosses went to the rural village of Gordes, Turkey to have the new rug handwoven. The village was home to seven experienced hand weavers who were excited by the idea of being able to work on a project of this size together. The wool used was the best handspun wool

from Konya, a region famous for its high-quality wool. The carpet was woven onto a strong cotton foundation so that it would withstand the hard use from Maine winters in a public space.

Finally, the carpet was finished and cut off the loom in May of 2004. There was no indoor space large enough to unfurl it, so it could only be opened in a public market.

The rug was shipped and arrived in Brunswick in September. Its creation and voyage to Brunswick was made possible through the generous financial support of Clare and Stephen Moss, Priscilla Q. Newgarden, Marilyn and Warren Dwyer, and Ruth and Rupert White. It was installed in October 2004 with much appreciation for its beauty and for how it successfully spoke to the original vision of Director Podgajny: to create “a special space for public contemplation.”



*The Rainbow Rug in the public market,
Gordes, Turkey after completion*

The names of the women who wove the rug for the benefit of our library were: Gulsum Kayhan, Gulumser Demir, Hatice Kulek, Emine Uslu, Fadime Altuntas, Gulten Cakiroglu, and Hatice Cakiroglu. If visitors look carefully along the edge of the rug, they will see the weavers' initials woven with pride into their creation. The full story of the rug's weaving, written by Clare Moss, can be found in a binder in the Reading Room.

With the opening of the Library's new addition, more and more community members started visiting Curtis and using its resources. In 2004, the Library was accessed a record number of times, with 219,000 visitors to the building and over 5 million hits on its website. These statistics placed Curtis Library third in service size in the state of Maine, behind Portland and Bangor.

In 2004, Curtis Library celebrated the Centennial of the 1904 Building and the fifth anniversary in the new addition. The Centennial had a focus on "The voices of the city and the sea" – a line from a sonnet by Longfellow. Events during the year included lectures, author visits, exhibits, book signings, an original play, a film viewing, and opening and closing receptions. The Centennial was planned to provide an opportunity to celebrate the past and look ahead to continued excellence and the innovative ways in which library services were connecting people to information.

The celebrations were also meant to pay tribute to Maine authors and readers: Edna St. Vincent Millay, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Children's authors were also included in the tribute: Charlotte Agell, Mary Morton Cowan, Lea Wait, Margaret Wise Brown, Barbara Cooney and Robert McCloskey.

Cornerstones of Science, “the library’s initiative to promote science literacy by identifying the best books of science, posting reviews on the Web, and organizing science programming,” was formerly started at Curtis Library in 2004. The idea had been the result of a brainstorm between Library Director Podgajny and physicist and MIT Professor of Physics, Emeritus Lee Grodzins in 1999. Cornerstones continued to grow at Curtis throughout the 2000s with support from Lee Grodzins; Barry Logan, Associate Professor of Biology at Bowdoin; and Walter Rosen from the National Academy of Sciences.

Of additional note in 2004:

- Jennifer Finney Boylan, professor at Colby College, bestselling author and transgender activist lectured in 2004 at Curtis on transgender issues. Ms. Finney Boylan read from her book *She’s Not There: A Life in Two Genders*.
- Southern Maine Library District designated Curtis as “Library of the Month” for May. Shirley Helfrich, spokesperson for the district, described Curtis as “a forward-looking institution with a great variety of services and programs for all ages.”

In December 2005, after 18 years at Curtis Library, Director Podgajny announced that he would be leaving his position in February 2006 to take over as director of the Portland Public Library. Podgajny replaced Sheldon Kaye, who was the Director at Portland Public Library for 18 years.

From the *Times Record*: “During his tenure at Curtis, Podgajny led the library through a major addition and remodeling project in 1999. He was named Maine Librarian of

the Year in 2000, is on the advisory board of the Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance, serves on the Maine State Cultural Affairs Council and is on the board of the Maine Humanities Council. Podgajny said that he has enjoyed his work at Curtis, but after nearly two decades, he is ready to move on to new challenges.

Assistant Director Brian Damien also left Curtis in May of 2006 to move to Portland Public Library and continue working with Podgajny. Damien had worked at Curtis for 29 years in multiple roles, and had done much of the work to integrate and improve technology at Curtis during that period.

A nationwide search was instituted for a new director, led by Curtis Board president Jamie Kaplan, and seasoned Library volunteer Michael Jones.

In November of 2006, Elisabeth Doucett was hired as the new Library Director out of a pool of 60 candidates.



Liz Doucett, new Library Director 2007

Ms. Doucett had an MBA from the Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University and an MLIS from Simmons College. She was the Assistant Director at the Lucius Beebe Memorial Library in Wakefield, Massachusetts prior to taking the position at Curtis.

The hiring committee was particularly interested in Doucett's background in business, fundraising, and marketing, combined with her more traditional librarian training. From the *Times Record* of November 15, 2006: *"It is an understatement to say that we are remarkably fortunate to have attracted Liz to Curtis," Jamie Kaplan, president of Curtis Memorial Library's board, said in announcing Doucett's hiring. "She has a perfect skill set to lead Curtis to the next level and into the future. We all truly owe a debt of gratitude to the Search Committee for months of hard work and superb judgment."*

Also in November of 2006, a major gift was made to Curtis Library by Lee and Lulu Grodzins to support the Cornerstones of Science program at Curtis. The gift was meant to provide science books and programming for patrons of all ages to stimulate interest in science in all of its many forms. The Cornerstones program at Curtis was recognized with the Highsmith Library Innovation Award in 2006. This award was given to one library nationally and recognized a public library's innovative and creative service program for its community.

In the fall of 2007, the Library fielded a community survey with the goal of collecting perspectives to help inform the next strategic plan. The over 850 responses received were used by Director Doucett to help define future strategies for the Library's development.

In 2007, national magazines and newspapers started identifying Brunswick as a desirable place to retire. Over time, it became clear that the Library played an important role in Brunswick's new popularity. Frequently, newcomers would mention to Library staff and Board members that the Library had provided the tipping point in deciding where they wanted to move in retirement. They thought it reflected very well on Brunswick that maintaining and support such an outstanding public library was obviously a priority.

In December of 2007, warning bells started to sound, predicting the Great Recession.

Of additional note in 2007:

- The Friends of Curtis and the New England Chapter of Sisters in Crime formed a partnership to provide a mystery writers' series for the library's readers.
- The Midcoast Community Read featured *Grapes of Wrath*. Curtis, Wiscasset, Patten Free and Topsham Libraries all participated with book and film discussions.
- The Maine Historical Society and organizations around Maine hosted exhibits, lectures, trips, programs, and other events that explored the poetry and legacy of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Included in this celebration were readings by local community poets including: Herb Coursen, Courtney Hill, David Adams
- Cornerstones of Science invited artists to submit proposals for a native-to-Maine butterfly mural. Olga Pastuchiv of Richmond and Jane Page-Conway of Bowdoinham were chosen. Their mural continues to be used in the Children's Butterfly Garden.



Jane Page-Conway and Olga Pastuchiv in front of the Butterfly Mural, 2007

In response to the national recession and the closing of the Brunswick Naval Air Station (BNAS), the Library developed the Curtis Job Center to help unemployed community members. Resources for job hunting included resume writing, networking, and job applications. Three computers were reserved on the Library's second floor for this work.

Additionally, thanks to a grant from Friends of Maine Libraries, job seekers could sign up for a half-hour of one-on-one job search assistance from a Librarian, focusing on issues such as resume writing, how to sign-up for an email account, and getting pointers about how to research job opportunities. The community heavily used the Job Center, particularly in 2009 and 2010 as the national and local economy bottomed out.

The first "Conversation at Curtis" event was held on September 9, 2008. These gatherings were designed as a way to thank donors and supporters by providing an opportunity for

them to hear from some of Maine's most interesting and accomplished professionals from a variety of disciplines.

The inaugural speaker, Senator George J. Mitchell discussed peace in Northern Ireland and the Middle East and his heading of an investigation into steroid use in Major League Baseball. Additionally, he talked about his time in Brunswick attending Bowdoin College and working for the Morrell family at Brunswick Coal and Lumber.

Between 2008 and 2022, there were 24 speakers at Curtis as part of Conversations at Curtis, covering diverse backgrounds and experiences but always with an eye to the Maine touch. Some of the people who spoke included: writer Colin Woodard, Olympian and marathoner Joan Benoit-Samuelson; Fore Street chef Sam Hayward; Pulitzer Prize-winning author Elizabeth Strout; Director of the Portland Museum of Art, Mark Bessire; Former U.S. Ambassador to Gambia and Haiti, Pamela White; and former Library Board president and writer/publisher Kate Egan and her sister, author/New York Times editor, Elisabeth Egan.

Of additional note in 2008:

- The practice of stamping due dates in the back of books was stopped. Instead, a patron could ask to receive a printed receipt listing all items checked out to their card.
- The 2008 Community Read focused on "The Titanic's Last Secrets" by John Chatterton, a deep-wreck diver. Mr. Chatterton spoke at Curtis to a full house of people fascinated by the story of the doomed Titanic.
- The Library also started investing in the early precursors of digital books. Thanks to support from the Curtis

Friends, the Library purchased a PlayAway Collection. The PlayAway was a small, portable media player (MP3) with earphones. Each player contained one book for the reader to listen to at their leisure.

- In November, the Curtis Friends elected to hold a first-ever Children's Book Sale at the Library to raise money for Youth Services at Curtis. The sale featured local author/artist Charlotte Agell who was on hand for two hours drawing portraits for those willing to wait in line. The sale raised nearly \$2,000 for the Youth Services program at the Library and became a regular staple of the Curtis Friends fundraising initiatives for the Library.

In 2009, the last squadron in service left the Brunswick Naval Air Station. The reality of the base closing and the resulting loss of jobs was now clear, as 5,000 military residents were transferred to other bases.

At Curtis, the library staff won the 2009 American Library Association's Baker & Taylor Entertainment Audio Music/Video Product Award. The award is given to one library nationally each year to recognize outstanding creativity in library programming. In particular, Curtis was recognized for a series of Friday film nights of Bollywood movies, supported by speakers discussing the genre and Indian food to enjoy while watching the movies. The series was very popular at Curtis and resulted in many views of the Library's Bollywood CD collection.

Local artist Heidi Boyd, along with Library volunteer John Haddon, helped update the playroom in the Youth Services area. The room, with its circular steps meant for reading and playing, was renovated with a carpeting update, a woodland scene painted by Ms. Boyd, and two wooden trees designed and built for the space by Mr. Haddon. The result was an updated

room whose popularity continued to grow as a meeting place for patrons and their families.



One of the trees in the Youth Services play room

Curtis started to do much more to promote genealogy research at the Library in 2009. Genealogy was fast becoming one of the largest hobbies in the United States, and it seemed like an obvious match for Curtis, given that there were already many patrons interested in the topic.

The first step in supporting genealogy was for the Library to purchase an institutional membership to ancestry.com for community use. As the largest database of genealogy information in the country, ancestry.com was, and is, an expensive purchase. Making Ancestry free to use in the

Library immediately became a draw for those researching their family history were no longer faced with a financial barrier to do so.

Curtis continued to explore the growth of digital reading by purchasing a first-generation Kindle Reader. The Kindle was particularly useful in that the size of the print could be increased at will, making it helpful to vision-impaired readers.

In September 2009, the Library debuted new logos for the Library.



The Library's new logos, 2009

The result of nine months of work and research by Library staff and the Board of Directors, the Library logo was based on the architectural “starburst” motif found throughout the 1904 Building and was representative of possibility for the community during the difficult closing of the BNAS and the Great Recession.

The logo was meant to standardize communications across the library; the new logo was supported by a family of

sub-brands like Curtis Teens for each department in the Library. There was also the intention to increase recognition of the Library “brand” within the community through consistent use of the brand and its colors.

The logo was debuted in September via an open house and a new video titled “A Day in the Life of the Library,” created by two Brunswick High School students Rip Swan and Jasper Lowe.

In November of 2009, the Library was vandalized when a window was broken on the first floor of the Library along with graffiti written on the exterior brick walls. The community was very supportive in this situation.

At the end of 2009, the number of items borrowed was up by 10%, and the number of visits was up by 4% as the community started increasing their use of Library’s free resources in the face of the negative financial impact of the Great Recession.

The 2010s: A Community Hub During Hard Times

Funding continued to be a key focus in 2010. In January, the library staff celebrated receiving a \$15,000 grant from the Davis Family Foundation to purchase additional large print books for the library's collection. The Large Print Collection at Curtis was—and still is—of great aid to those in the community with age or illness-related vision impairment.

During budget discussions with the Town of Brunswick, the Library's budget proposal for the year was cut by \$50,000 due to the impact of the Recession on the Town's budget. The original plan had been to cut the Library's budget by \$100,000, but due to substantial community input about the need for and value of the Library—particularly during difficult economic times—the cut was reduced to \$50,000.



Douglas Preston at Curtis Memorial Library

In April, the Library was honored to host national best-selling author Douglas Preston in the Morrell Meeting Room. Preston, who lived part of each year in Maine, generously agreed to speak at Curtis at no cost. He spoke about his nonfiction book “The Monster of Florence”.

In 2010, the Library received funding from the Curtis Friends to purchase a self-checkout machine, a major innovation for the Library. The automated system was meant to support library staff in managing the large increase in borrowed books and visitors during the recession. In 2021, the Curtis Contemporaries and the Curtis Fund at the Maine Community Foundation supported the purchase of a second self-checkout machine.



Lending Services staff coach a family through their first time using the new self-checkout machine

Of additional note from 2010:

- Cornerstones of Science celebrated its tenth anniversary.
- A use fee was instituted for the Morrell Meeting Room to help pay for heavy use of the room by the community.
- Curtis partnered with Merrymeeting Adult Education to provide a number of adult learning classes at the Library around topics such as how to use ancestry.com, novelist.com and Marvel – Maine’s Virtual Library.
- Curtis participated in the first “Libraries Snapshot Day” in Maine. Involved libraries took photos throughout the day of people, events, and programs at their library. Statistics were collected about the number of people using the library that day, the number of programs, and the amount of borrowing that took place. This information was compiled across the state and the resulting booklet used as an advocacy tool for Maine libraries.

In 2011, Curtis started to plan adjustments to its HVAC system to ensure the Library could take advantage of natural gas for heating whenever possible. The Town of Brunswick converted the Library’s boilers to dual-fuel, meaning they could burn either gas or oil. This flexibility allowed the Library to take advantage of lower gas prices that were available at that time.

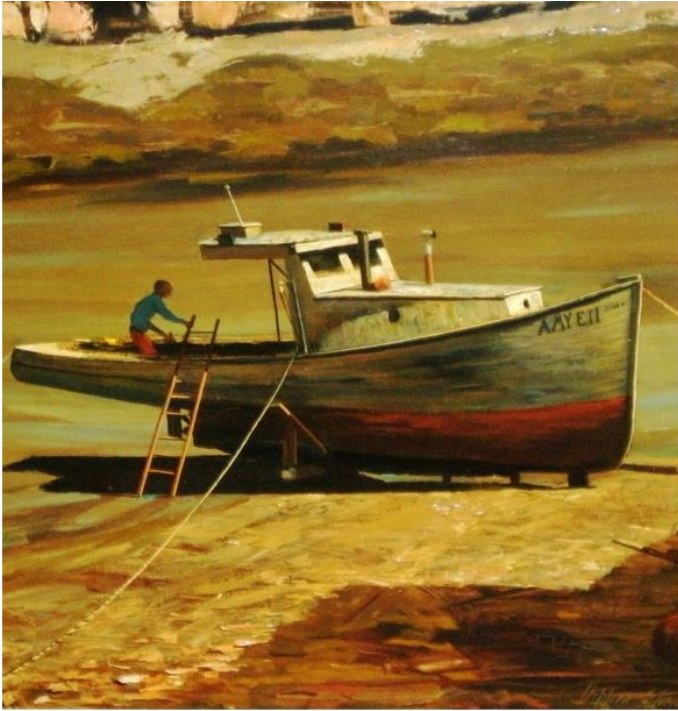
To accommodate the new burners, the antique chimney in the 1904 Building required maintenance. Master Mason George Walter was called in for the job. Mr. Walter rebuilt over 60 feet of the interior of the chimney. Working from the inside out, he made only four openings from basement to roofline to preserve the structure. Enlarging the flues was necessary for the

new burners, and a new tile lining was installed to meet 21st century building code. Mr. Walter worked at night to cause minimal disruption to regular library activity, which was much appreciated by Library patrons and staff. Thanks to his careful and precise craftsmanship, the Library chimney was guaranteed to last for at least another 100 years.

Through its participation in the Maine InfoNet, the Library received high speed, optical fiber internet and Wi-Fi. The result was the fastest internet in the Town of Brunswick. Concurrently, Curtis' digital offerings expanded to include eBooks. Curtis also started lending out eReaders to patrons, each one loaded with multiple books in a specific genre such as mystery, romance, or biography. The increase in Wi-Fi speed helped patrons access larger files and downloads, including lengthier eBook titles.

Twenty-eight new public computers were given to the Library from a grant to Maine State Library from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. These provided an important update to the public access capabilities of the Library and were very timely, given increased use of the Library's Job Center.

In February 2011, Curtis applied for and was awarded the FINRA Investor Education Foundation/ALA grant to support financial literacy among women. Curtis was one of only 20 libraries nationally to be awarded the grant. The program ran for a year at the Library and involved the addition of books to the collection, speakers on financial literacy, and programs for library patrons to learn how to better manage their money.



Detail of "Beached" by Stephen Etnier

2011 was also an important year for the Curtis art collection. Knowing about the existing concentration of maritime art on the walls at Curtis, former Bowdoin College professor Gerard Brault and his wife Jennie donated "Beached" by Harpswell artist Stephen Etnier. When the 1999 addition was completed, the Bowdoin College Museum of Art agreed to hang a collection of their Stephen Etnier paintings in the Library with the goal of having more people in the community see them. In 2022, many of the Etnier paintings hang in the 1904 Building.

In December of 2011, Jim and Susan Carter donated two outdoor sculptures to Curtis: "Night Portage" by Mark Herrington and "Woman with Swan" by Lise Becu. *Night*

Portage was placed in the Library's Reading Garden and *Woman with Swan* was placed in a small pocket garden at the corner of Pleasant Street and Middle Street. Both settled comfortably into their spaces where they have been much appreciated by the local community.



"Woman with Swan" by Lise Becu

Of additional note from 2011:

- Librarians attended a statewide seminar offered by “the Black Belt Librarian.” The goal was to teach librarians how to deal with problem situations in the Library safely, effectively and with respect for all involved.
- Because of the great number of mystery readers at Curtis, a new book group focused on mysteries was formed, titled the Just Desserts Mystery Book Group.

- The Library participated in the Brunswick Fall Festival, providing a large floor loom that was used to create a community weaving.



"Night Portage" by Mark Herrington

In 2012, a new Amtrak service was opened between Brunswick and Boston. The Brunswick Visitor Center was opened at Maine Street Station to help direct those new to the Brunswick area. The service was even more popular than anticipated with twice as many people as anticipated using it in the first few months. This development was seen as a vital step in drawing more families and retirees to Brunswick since the train would provide easy connections to metropolitan centers in the Northeast.

The Library lobby "refresh" was an important staff project in 2012. A New Book Room consolidated all of the

Library's newest titles (fiction, nonfiction, mystery, large print) into one, easy to find and use space. Fabric sails made by Transformit of Gorham were hung in the Library atrium, providing all with a fun opportunity to decide what the shapes most resembled.



Transformit sails in the atrium

A wall of book recommendations was created to provide weekly book recommendations from across the library's collections. The display helped identify interest areas for readers such as Romance, Science Fiction, and Staff Picks. The wall became very popular with Library readers and became the first place visited by many patrons, providing new ideas for reading.

The Lobby refresh also included the creation of an "information center" for the community, which included substantial wall space for posting information about both library and community events. Finally, new signs were created

throughout the building with the goal of improving the ability of new visitors to find locations in the Library for themselves.

Due to the hard work of Bowdoin College Library Associate Librarian Judy Montgomery and Curtis librarian Sarah Brown, for the first time there was a joint Community Read between Bowdoin College, Curtis Library, and the Town of Brunswick. The programming centered around the book *Nickel and Dime: On (Not) Getting by in America* by Barbara Ehrenreich. The discussions about the book were particularly rich because so many people in the community had suffered financially through the Great Recession and were still feeling its impact.

Thanks to the financial support of the Curtis Board of Directors and the Curtis Friends, the senior librarians were all able to attend the 2012 Public Library Association (PLA) conference in Philadelphia in the spring. The conference, considered a critical component of professional development for librarians, is held every other year. Often, the Library only had funding for one or two librarians to attend; as financial restraints eased, Curtis decided to send all of the senior librarians, helping to generate new ideas, thinking, and energy.

Technology continued to expand as an area of focus at the Library. In April, the Library's Tech Meetups started: a series of lunchtime gatherings focused on helping attendees learn about the newest technologies available. Some of the topics included photo sharing with Flickr and Picasa, an introduction to Facebook, and suggestions about how to buy digital cameras. The series was very well attended.

Supporting the Library's technology focus, Curtis received an Orion Starblast telescope from the Cornerstones of

Science program. Astronomer Ron Thompson from the Southern Maine Astronomy Club demonstrated to community members and librarians how to use the telescope before it became available for borrowing by the community for stargazing.

At the same time, that the Library was providing technology education, it was also continuing to support the crafters in the community. A new craft area was developed in the Library on the second floor overlooking the Reading Garden. The new space had crafting books and magazines, tables and chairs for crafting and chatting, and provided access to online crafting resources. Weekly crafting meetups began, which proved an immediate draw to local folks who either did crafts, wanted to learn new crafts, or just wanted to make new friends.

The Library created a new program partnership with the Midcoast Senior College, starting the Current Events Forum at the Library in April 2012. The goal of the program was to use the Library as a neutral environment where individuals of different political backgrounds could meet and talk to each other on a weekly basis. The focus was on respectful dialog and careful listening with the goal of learning from their fellow community members.

For the first time in 2012, the Library celebrated Giving Tuesday. Giving Tuesday was an opportunity at Curtis for the Library Board of Directors and library staff to say thank you to the community for their support of the Library. Tables were set up by the Library's main entrance, staffed by Board members and Library staff, providing treats and hot chocolate. Conversations were held with many community members, which proved useful both to say thank you, as well as to identify interests and concerns on the part of the community with

respect to the Library. As of 2022, the Library has continued to celebrate Giving Tuesday; it has become an opportunity for connections and fundraising and a day that is anticipated by the entire Library community.

Based on user browsing habits, the Library began moving its nonfiction collection into “neighborhoods” in 2012. The collection was divided into thematic areas, much like how a bookstore is organized. Within each neighborhood, the Dewey Decimal System is retained. The goal of this change was to make book browsing easier by putting books of similar topics together, and to help users discover new titles within similar areas of interest.

Of additional note from 2012:

- Thanks to the support of the Curtis Friends, the Library was able to offer a new service – the Bestseller Express collection. This collection was leased and provided only those titles that were in the highest demand by community readers. The books could not be put on hold, could not be borrowed by anyone outside the Curtis community, and a patron could only take out two books at a time for seven days. That meant that it was very likely that a reader would discover the bestseller they wanted to read soon after it was published, rather than resigning themselves to joining the long hold list with all of the other readers in Maine. The service was a big hit with Curtis’ voracious readers, and, in 2022, has grown twice as large to meet growing demand.
- The Library held the first “Genealogy Get-togethers.” Five programs held over the course of two months focused on a number of popular genealogy topics.

2013 started out on an interesting note at the Library. A group of Brunswick High School students was found to have been filming in the Library without permission using realistic-looking guns as props. The students were banned from the Library while information was collected. Ultimately, it was discovered that the guns were fake; the students had removed paint identifying them as such in the interests of realism. Director Doucett met with the students involved and their parents and ultimately the ban was lifted. This event provoked a great deal of discussion in the Library and the community about guns and safety in public spaces. Given that the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School had just happened (December 14, 2012) none of the discussion was surprising.

On a calmer note, a second series of Genealogy Get-togethers was held with the following areas of focus: the organized genealogist; maximizing your census research; maximizing your newspaper research; tips for a successful genealogy research trip; and how to Google your family tree. The get-togethers were always full, supporting the theory that genealogy was quickly becoming one of the most popular hobbies in the United States.

In 2013, the Curtis Friends created an endowment fund for the Library with a gift of \$10,000. They pledged to add \$10,000 a year until the endowment reached \$50,000. This was an extraordinarily generous level of support from the Curtis Friends and was one of very few such gifts to a library from a Friends group in the United States. The Friends endowment was unrestricted so the Library could use it in the areas of greatest need.

Curtis Library joined the Little Free Library (LFL) movement on May 9, 2013 by dedicating its own LFL at the

Brunswick Visitor Center. The LFL was created in partnership with the Region 10 Technical High School, with students putting together materials purchased by the Library. Modeled on Curtis Library, the LFL even had the iconic Curtis starbursts on its door.

There was so much community interest in the LFLs that the Library sponsored a community build of them. The basic structural pieces for a LFL were cut by Region 10 students and then individuals and community groups signed up to assemble and paint them at the Library. At last count in 2022, there were over 20 official (registered) and unofficial LFLs throughout Brunswick in many different neighborhoods.



The Curtis-sponsored Little Free Library at the Brunswick Visitor Center

In November, a plaque was installed on the historical 1904 Building by the Brunswick Rotary in recognition of the importance of the building to the Brunswick community. United States Navy Capt. Charles “Chuck” Mull and Kate Egan, president of the Library’s Board of Directors led the dedication of the plaque, one of 13 historical sites to be marked in Brunswick by that time.



Kate Egan, President of Curtis Board of Directors (left) and US Navy Capt. Charles “Chuck” Mull (right)

On February 21, 2014, the Curtis Genealogy Room opened. The room was established to collect all of the Library’s genealogy resources in one place, and to give local genealogists a place where they could work on dedicated computers and find volunteer genealogists to help them.

In May of 2014, StoryCorps was brought to Brunswick to conduct interviews with the community’s French-Canadians to ensure the stories of their work in the Brunswick mills would

not be lost. The program was held in partnership with the Pejepscot Historical Society.

A “Day of Listening” followed the interviews, where the community was invited into the Library to listen to the recorded interviews. These interviews were archived at both Curtis and the Pejepscot History Center and provide valuable insight into the lives of the French-Canadian community in Brunswick.

Curtis Creative Spaces, a virtual art gallery, was also started in 2014. Each month it featured a new local artist who could display their work digitally. This service was provided to expand the opportunity for new artists to display their work and to make it much more accessible to do so. Local artist Maria Castellano-Usery supported the program by creating a new Curtis logo to market the concept to local artists and by providing her own art for digital display.



Maria Castellano-Usery painting a new logo for Curtis Creative Spaces in 2014

The Librarians had fun hosting an April Fools' Day that included jokes and puns throughout the Library, as well as costumes worn by the staff.



A problem at the book return, April 1, 2014

The Library's first How-To Festival was held on May 10, 2014. The focus of the event was to "learn 30 new things in 5 hours." Local experts from across the community, as well as Library staff, taught subjects such as salsa dancing, kayaking, brewing Chinese tea, starting a family tree, hooking a rug, and making greeting cards. The program focused on the idea of making lifelong learning easy, free and accessible in a fast-paced, expensive world.



Curtis How-To Festival

The Curtis Collaboratory was also started in 2014. Due to the increase in personal computer ownership, the library consolidated its public computers to one area on the second floor. The central space on the first floor was emptied and available for new ideas. Librarians came up with the Curtis Collaboratory concept, based on a similar idea developed at a library in Illinois.

The Collab, as it became known, encouraged participation in the reinvented space. It was “part interactive mini-classroom, part think tank, part play space, part studio, part museum, part gallery and all parts library – a dynamic participatory learning experience for people of all ages and interests.” The grand opening featured Maina Handmaker, a Bowdoin College graduate, sharing her thoughts about her FoodShed Project.

One of the most popular yearly programs in the Collaboratory was “In Bloom” which started in March of 2015. The Collab space was transformed into a greenhouse complete with plants and bird song— an oasis in which to sit briefly and escape from winter.



Curtis Collaboratory's "In Bloom" Exhibit

Despite its popularity, the Collaboratory was put on hiatus in 2020 due to COVID-19. To accommodate social distancing recommendations, the new books were moved into the Collaboratory space, allowing multiple individuals to browse the Library's most popular collection comfortably and safely.

In October of 2015, the Library hosted its first Booked for the Night after-hours event. The Curtis Contemporaries, a group founded to start developing the Library's next generation of leaders and advocates, hosted the evening. Booked for the Night was their largest effort in this area.

The concept was to provide a fun social event in the Library that would get first-timers into the building while providing an opportunity for celebration among those who were regular patrons. The event included local businesses: 111 Maine Catering, Baxter Brewing and Gelato Fiasco. The event continued through 2020 before going virtual in 2021.

In 2015, Curtis Library was awarded a second FINRA grant to provide financial education in the community. The program was titled “Making it in Maine; Living the Good Life” and was created to provide a yearlong financial education program. The grant was for \$92,000 and was the only one awarded to a New England public library.

In March, the Library started Coins for Curtis. Modeled on the concept of UNICEF that many adults remember from their childhood, the program was created to encourage adults to talk to their children about philanthropy and start them on a lifetime of giving. The first event raised nearly \$1,000 for the Library.



Coins for Curtis

The Library launched a community input project in April. Called “Ten Days, 100 Great Ideas,” the goal of the program was to collect ideas and concerns from citizens in Brunswick and Harpswell. These would then be used to inform the Library’s next strategic plan. Each day, a different question was asked of the community and answers were collected. Traditional paper surveys, website surveys, and emails were all used to ask the questions and collect answers. By the tenth day, there were over 1,800 responses, many, many ideas, and a wealth of information to inform the strategic plan.

In June 2015, the Curtis Friends decided to change their primary fundraiser, the community book sale. The storage facility that had been made available to the Friends for free throughout the year—allowing them to store large numbers of donated books for the sale—was no longer available. In addition, with the closing of the Brunswick Naval Air Base the book sale lost many of its strong helpers who every year moved 50,000 books in just a few days. After much discussion, it was decided that 2015 would be the last year for the sale and that, immediately after the book sale was completed, the Friends would open a bookstore.

On June 6, 2015, the new Curtis Friends store, Twice-Told Tales Quality Used Books was opened with nearly 15,000 volumes. The first shop was located at 11 Pleasant Street, was open 6 days a week, and was staffed completely by volunteers. The bookstore opened and closed several times at 11 Pleasant Street during various building renovations. Through it all, it proved to be very popular with local readers and the Friends financial support of the Library started to increase substantially.



Twice-Told Tales

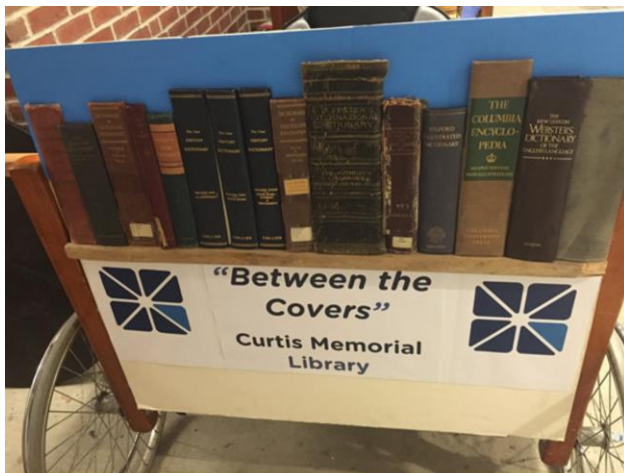
Also of note in 2015:

- In April, the Library offered an Ekphrastic Poetry Café. Ekphrastic poetry is poetry written about works of art.
- The Library purchased its first membership in Flipster, which provided digital magazines for library cardholders.
- In October, the Library sponsored a Spindleworks art show – Monster Mash at Curtis – featuring local Spindleworks artist Kevin Babine. The Library staff hosted a dance party for the Spindleworks participants, which was greatly enjoyed by all.
- The Library's How-to Festival got bigger, including mini-workshops, information tables, food and fun. Middle Street closed, and events were also held inside the Unitarian Universalist Church across the street. Food trucks, giveaways, demonstrations, live music, and Slugger from the Portland Sea Dogs were all part of the excitement.

- Curtis Library staff and friends participated in the Brunswick Downtown Association Bed races in November



*Kevin Babine, Spindleworks artist at
Monster Mash art show*



*Curtis' entry into the
Brunswick Downtown Association Bed Races*

- Booked for the Night also got bigger. The theme was “Celebrate Creativity at Curtis” and featured Brunswick native Fritz Grobe of EepyBird. The Curtis Contemporaries decided to support the Collaboratory via this event. The evening, which was a sell-out, featured hors d’oeuvres, local beer and wine, music from 317, Main Community Music Center, a raffle and the consecutive launching of 35 paper airplanes from the mezzanine over the heads of guests below.

2016 featured the Making it in Maine events, including a Money Smart Book Group; programming focused on “How Does Your Garden Grow,” with experts from the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust discussing how to prepare healthy meals with local ingredients on a budget.

The programs strengthened partnerships with Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program, Tedford Housing, United Way of Mid Coast Maine, Brunswick Housing Authority, New Ventures Maine, Brunswick High School and Region 10 Technical High School. Over 2,000 people attended the various events.

A Summer Spotlight Series for adults was created with a focus on executing programming that could help spark interest in addressing community social issues. The topics included *Weathering Shame* (mental health), *Becoming Nicole* (transgender youth), *Dinner with the Smileys* (becoming part of a community). The goal was to feature a prominent and respected Maine-based speaker and focus on issues that spoke to human freedom, personal and social responsibility, the connections we have with each other, and the obligations that flow from our shared humanity.

The Playing with Paint Program was offered to the community for the first time in 2016. Held weekly for four weeks, the program was meant to inform attendees about well-known artists and then provide everyone with the opportunity to try painting one of a famous painting. The programs were free with all materials provided by the Library. Local artist and library supporter Maria Castellano-Usery hosted the first series.

2017 was a year of repair and restoration at the Library. The doors to the 1904 Building had warped over many years of holding back Maine winters. Over time, a crack opened on the lower panel of one door, which meant that cold air flowed into that space in the winter.

With the support of Mrs. Betty Bibber, the doors were taken down and restored to their original condition by Exactitude, Inc. in Cumberland, Maine. When completed, a dedication was held honoring Mrs. Bibber's late husband, former Town Manager John Bibber. Mrs. Bibber also donated a clock to be housed in the 1904 Building in her husband's honor. In attendance was the Bibber family, including Mr. & Mrs. Bibber's daughter Paula, who worked at Curtis for a number of years.

A number of the Library's maritime paintings, many of which are on display in the 1904 Building, required restoration. Restoration of the paintings and their frames was done by Nina Roth Wells and Johanna Moore. A new maritime painting was added to the collection by Brunswick patron Eliza Stark, in memory of her late husband Richard Stark. The painting, titled "A Ship's Portrait of the Charles S. Pennell," fit beautifully alongside the other paintings in the Fireplace Room of the 1904 Building.



"A Ship's Portrait of the Charles S. Pennell"

Under the main floor of the 1904 Building was a basement area; for many years, this space had been used as a receiving/sorting room for books donated for the Friends' book sale. This area was no longer needed for book sorting as the new bookstore had its own area for doing this work. The Library staff decided to do a basic update of the space to allow its use by the public for "messy" programs like painting. The room was emptied out, the cement floors and walls received a fresh coat of paint, and tables and chairs were moved into the room.

Named the Curtis Underground, the space was used immediately by the community, with most patrons appreciating its simplicity and utilitarian nature. Teens in particular enjoyed the space because they didn't have to worry much about making a mess. It also helped greatly with the constraints in the Library for public meeting spaces.

In 2017, Down East Magazine asked their customers to vote for “Best of” local services and programs in the state of Maine. Curtis Library was voted Best Library in the State of Maine by those participating. A small party for the community commemorated the event. The Library went on to win the award again in 2018 and 2019! Sadly, Down East did not offer a “Best of” category for libraries again after Curtis won the award for the third time in 2019.



Best Library in Maine! 2017

Also of note in 2017:

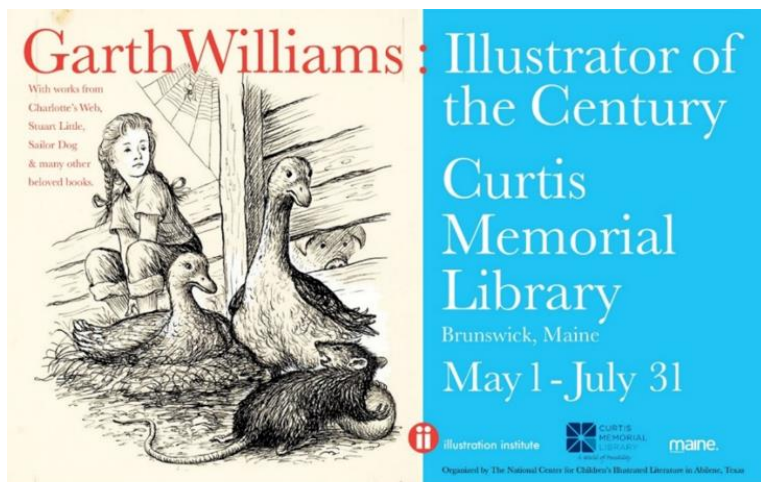
- Author Ellen Cooney led a monthly introductory-level writing group for people interested in applying their language skills to creative endeavors.
- Even though he couldn't join in because of health issues, the Library held a celebration in honor of the 94th birthday of Ashley Bryan, writer and illustrator. The

event included a film screening and birthday cake and a phone call with Mr. Bryan.

- Teresa Gillis started leading younger patrons and their caregivers through songs and finger plays, and dancing with scarves and rhythm instruments on Friday mornings.
- The Library sponsored another community build of LFLs with materials donated by Hammond Lumber
- At the 2017 Booked for the Night event, LFLs customized by local artists were auctioned to support the Library.
- *Writings on the Wall: Searing for a New Equality Beyond Black and White* by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was the focus of the “One Book, One Community” reading program.

On January 3, 2017, after exceptionally cold weather, a connection in the library’s sprinkler system broke in the west entrance of the 1999 addition, resulting in water running down the walls and into the Lending Services area.

While the quick action of staff and the Brunswick Fire Department stemmed the flow of water, enough damage had resulted that walls had to be taken out and dried to ensure no mold grew, and new computers had to be purchased. During the eight-week period of this work being done, Lending Services moved its offices across the hall. The community was supportive, and many individuals offered to support the purchase of the books that had to be replaced.

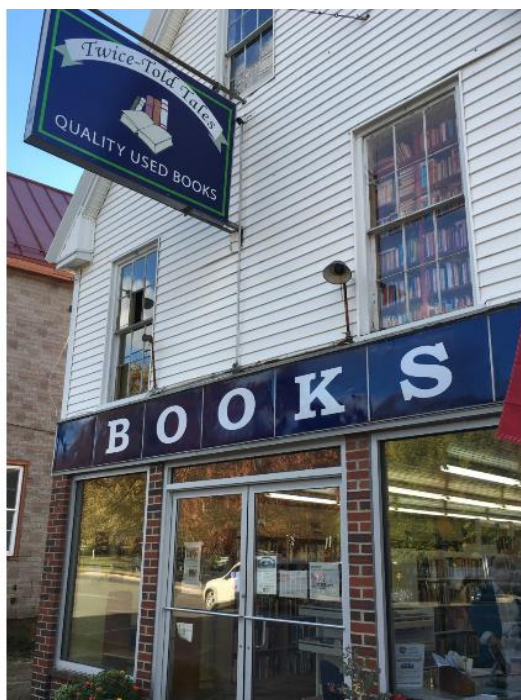


Promotional poster for Garth Williams exhibit, Summer 2018

During the summer, the Library was able to enjoy hosting an art show titled *Garth Williams: Illustrator of the Century*. The Library was full all summer with patrons and visitors who came specifically to see the show, many of whom remembered fondly the Garth Williams illustrations of their favorite childhood books such as *The Cricket in Times Square*, *Stuart Little*, *Little House on the Prairie*, *Charlotte's Web*, and many others. The Library estimated that over 10,000 visitors saw the show. Visitors from 35 states and 7 countries signed the guest book for the show; comments left indicated that many people had made a trip to Brunswick that summer specifically to see the exhibit.

The Curtis Friends' Twice-Told Tales bookstore transitioned from its original Pleasant Street location to 200 Maine Street, the former location of Bamforth Marine. A great deal of work was done on the space before books were put in place, including installation of new lighting, walls, flooring, painting, and plumbing by volunteers from the Library and

Lowe's. The space was an instant hit with the community upon opening. Sales increased substantially and the Curtis Friends were able to increase their support for the Library.



*Twice-Told Tales in their location at
200 Maine Street*

In 2019, Curtis officially established a Library of Things collection. Building off the model of alternative lending libraries—including the Maine Tool Library in Portland—this collection served to supplement all forms of learning. For example, under this lending model, not only can a patron check out a book to teach them how to start and plant seeds, they can also borrow a seed-starter kit with all the necessary tools—right from the same nonfiction neighborhood.



The Library of Things selection in the Cooking & Entertaining nonfiction neighborhood offers everything from kitchen gadgets to pom-pom buntings

The benefits of the Library of Things (LOT) collection to Curtis are myriad:

- Encouraging lifelong-learning not limited to the printed page
- Supporting the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals through a "borrow-not-buy" ideology
- Celebrating the rich history of crafts & trades in our area, including textiles and basketry
- Eliminating the financial and logistical barriers from learning a new skill, hobby, or trade

Board games and puzzles were already a thriving part of the Library collection, showing that the model of lending non-book items was already of use to our community. These were the first

entries into the Library of Things catalog. Through generous donations from the community and enthusiastic business partners, the Library of Things has grown to over 500 items and is available to Curtis patrons completely free of charge. Borrowing statistics for the year 2021 showed that every item in the LOT collection had been checked out at least once—a feat not shared by any other collection in the Library.

A selection of the most popular items includes: an electric pressure washer, a clothing & upholstery steamer, individual knitting needles and crochet hooks, a cornhole set, a lobster pot, a bike repair kit, a metal detector, ukuleles, meditation chimes, a papermaking kit, ergonomic gardening tools, a crockpot, and the kid’s favorite: the bubble maker.

Other programming in 2019 included:

- Genealogy help was offered on Fridays in the Genealogy Room
- The Books & Brews book group was established at Flight Deck Brewing, with support from the Curtis Contemporaries
- A Fireside Writers group met on Fridays in the 1904 Fireplace Room
- The Library held a Letter Writing Social at Curtis
- A series titled “Eat Our Yards” was held to help anyone turn their yard into an edible paradise.
- The Chess Club continued meeting at Curtis.
- Affordable Housing Action Meetings were held at the Library. These were a series of public meetings for those interested in taking action on affordable housing and were a follow-up to the fall 2018 Affordable Housing Forums.

- A Veterans Book Group met at the Library through a partnership with the Maine Humanities Council and Maine veterans' centers. The group offered the book discussion group for all veterans and former service members.
- Typewriter Tuesdays became a popular event. The Library's collection of vintage typewriters were put out at tables in the Library's atrium and anyone that wanted to spend some time typing "the old-fashioned way" was welcomed to stop and enjoy. Kids and teens in particular seemed to find the typewriters fascinating because, unlike with computers, they could see the mechanics of how the typewriter worked.
- Responding to shifts in how families spend time together, the Youth Services staff created "drop-in" activities at the Library on Saturdays. No sign-up was necessary and activities such as art make-and-takes and LEGO play were offered.
- Curtis Community Concerts started in September at the Library. The concerts provided opportunities for students to perform with Brunswick's professional and teaching musicians.

The 2020s: A Global Pandemic Changes Everything & Celebrating 140 Years in 2023

2020 started out normally at Curtis Library. There was a Winter Wonderland theme in the Collaboratory for January and February. The Library started offering a beginner yoga class for adults. The Midcoast Indigenous Awareness Group (MIAG) held a book group at the Library that featured discussions about *Neither Wolf Nor Dog* and *An Indigenous People's History of the United States*. A climate change panel discussion and a housing panel discussion were both held. The Youth Services department created a Harry Potter Escape room in the 1904 Building in February. The William J. Curtis Giving Society dinner was held in the 1904 Building in February with guest speaker Matt DeLaney, director of the Millinocket Memorial Library. At the beginning of March, the Library held its annual "Booked for the Night" event/fundraiser with a sold-out crowd.

However, during this time the news started to focus on the new flu spreading in China. In January, China began to inform the World Health Organization that they had identified over 40 cases of pneumonia of an unknown etiology, later named COVID-19.

On March 11, with 118,000 cases in 114 countries and 4,291 deaths, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 to be a global pandemic. At that point, Curtis, along with much of the rest of the United States, closed its doors to protect the safety of its employees and to minimize community spread.

The rest of 2020 was comprised of instability for both the Library and the country. During the March and April shutdown, the Library was empty, with staff working from home via their computers. Library staff began evaluating and adding

digital services that patrons could access from home. These services included:

- Hundreds of virtual books added to cloudLibrary
- Tumble Book Library featuring animated picture books, chapter books, and read-alongs for children
- Dozens of e-magazine titles were added to the Flipster Digital Magazine collection
- Creativebug.com was added to offer art & craft video classes
- The Library subscribed to Kanopy, which provided streaming movies/documentaries as well as Kanopy for Kids
- Ancestry.com was made available at home for genealogists
- Mango Languages was made available for at-home learners and their partner site Little Pim was accessible for children
- Online learning database Lynda.com provided over 16,000 online business, creative, and tech courses from category experts which was particularly useful for those seeking to expand their skills as part of job-hunting
- An online virtual art gallery was used by local artists to help continue Curtis' commitment to the arts
- All programming became digital, including the popular children's story time.

On May 1, 2020, essential library staff started working in the Library again on staggered shifts to keep the potential for exposure to COVID-19 infection low. The Library book drop opened on May 11, and the staff began processing over 15,000

books that had been out in the community when the Library closed.

On June 1, the Library staff initiated Curtis Curbside pickup. Patrons called the Library with a materials request; the librarians pulled the items, checked them out, and put them in paper bags. The bags were then left at a table outside the Library when the patron called to say they were there to pick up their items. There was no contact between patrons and staff from Curtis Curbside, but the community was able to get a smile, a wave, and a book, which, during the shutdown, meant the world to many community members. By the time the Library reopened fully in June of 2021, over 26,000 trips had been taken outside by Library staff to deliver curbside books.



Patrons returned to Curtis by all modes of transportation

In August, the Library tried a limited reopen of the building when COVID-19 numbers dropped. 30 patrons could be

in the building for 30 minutes and had to be masked the entire time, as did all Library staff. Additionally, patrons had to go in one door and out another, furniture was removed to discourage patrons from staying longer than 30 minutes, Plexiglas was installed at all service desks, over 300 masks were sewn by Library volunteers for the public's use, hand sanitizer was placed everywhere, and collections were moved to open up space in the Library to support social distancing.



Eager young readers return to the familiar fun of the Youth Services department

In addition, the following services were provided:

- Contact-free delivery of material to senior and assisted living facilities including Coastal Shores, Creekside Village, Coastal Landing, and Sunnybrook.

- Books on Wheels delivery service to those unable to get to the Library for curbside book delivery.
- The Library of Things added 10 Wi-Fi hotspots that were borrowed just like a book. The Library also purchased three laptops that could be borrowed by library patrons who did not have a telephone or computer for internet access.
- Interlibrary loan services for materials from out-of-state were resumed.
- Library staff resumed weekly pick up of Harpswell book drop on Tuesdays.
- Telephone discussions were held with patrons about next book recommendations and regular blogs with reading recommendations were offered online.
- Tech Wizard support was provided by phone/email.

People were thrilled to be back at the Library even with restrictions but ultimately the Library had to close down physically again in November when COVID-19 cases numbers started skyrocketing in the area. A substantial number of Library programs were now provided virtually, ensuring little-to-no contact. The physical Library building was closed, but the Library was still open to help the community. The Curtis craft meetup was a constant, continuing outdoors—when the weather was nice—and via Zoom. They are the first to say that their connections as a Library group were an important component of getting them through the isolating effects of pandemic in 2020 and 2021.



*Curtis Crafters meeting in the Library
Reading Garden during the
pandemic closure*

This closure necessitated additional digital resources including:

- The library staff started their own podcast – Curtis Casts – to try another safe venue for providing ideas and information to the community. Individuals such as Dr. Nirav Shah, Director of the Maine CDC and Larissa Vigue Picard, Executive Director of the Pejepscot History Center, were interviewed on the podcast in addition to regular “segments” by Curtis staff.
- Staff started a video series of 60-Second Book Reviews, which continue to be popular in 2022.
- Monthly virtual and in-person (outdoors/social distanced!) book group meetings were held.
- Virtual film discussions and virtual scrap craft classes were held via Zoom.

- Virtual mystery Author Series was held, comprised of four Zoom get-togethers.
- Weekly virtual story times continued
- Take and make bags for kids and curated book boxes for teens – over 1,600 created by librarians.

The Library also finished Phase 1 and Phase 2 of digitizing the *Times Record*, completed thanks to financial support from a retired librarian and the library's endowment, resulting in a free, searchable database of the *Times Record* (and earlier versions) from 1853 – 1977.

Also thanks to donor support, the Library completed a needed upgrade of the AV system in the Morrell Meeting Room. In addition, the Town of Brunswick with financial support from the Curtis Friends had the entire Library re-carpeted and the Youth Services department repainted. All of this work ensured that when the Library re-opened to the public, it was fresh, updated, and a space to which the community wanted to return.

In the midst of all of the pandemic challenges, on January 29, 2021, the Library had another flood. The HVAC system in the ceiling of the 1904 Building froze and water came streaming down from the ceiling.

Fortunately, the leak was discovered almost immediately and the Library staff got buckets and plastic boxes under the waterfall before the damage was too extensive. One of the Library's antique rugs had to be dried and cleaned, and the walls affected had to be opened up and dried out. Otherwise, the damage was relatively minor and confined mostly to the basement of the 1904 Building where the flowing water ended up.

Given that the space affected by the flood would have to be repainted, it was decided to repaint the entire 1904 Building, which was something that had been on the to-do list for several years. New colors were chosen and the entire building was updated. The colors were selected specifically to highlight the Library's maritime art collection.

At the same time, thanks to the support of a number of Library donors, the tired—but much loved—leather sofas in the Fireplace Room were replaced with new individual chairs. Because so many Library patrons loved the old furniture, the Library staff decided to auction it off for fun. Every piece of furniture was sold to happy patrons and the funds supported the purchase of the new furniture.

The plan of Library staff was that the change in the 1904 Building would create a more attractive workspace for the many people in the community who were now consistently working at home versus in an office.

Finally, in 2021, the Library Board of Directors made the decision to eliminate overdue fines at Curtis Library. The Board chose to do this because fines were identified by the American Library Association (ALA) as a barrier to access at public libraries. The ALA published a resolution in 2019, identifying fines as a form of social inequity to which Curtis Library subscribed:

"The American Library Association asserts that imposition of monetary library fines creates a barrier to the provision of library and information services; [ALA] urges libraries to scrutinize their practices of imposing fines on library patrons and actively move towards eliminating them; and [ALA] urges governing bodies of

libraries to strengthen funding support for libraries so they are not dependent on monetary fines as a necessary source of revenue.”

However, understanding the funding pressures that always exist for the Library, the Board also decided to take the following steps to offset the financial impact of this decision to the Library’s operating budget. Local businesses were invited to use their support to offset the lack of fines, along the lines of “This week’s fines are paid for by John Smith Insurance Company. Donors to the Library’s Annual Fund were invited to increase their gift by a small amount to help offset the loss of fines. A “voluntary fines payment” jar was put out at the front desk. Finally, the Curtis Contemporaries decided to support the “No Fines” program through their fundraising initiatives.

By June 2021, COVID-19 case numbers had dropped enough that the Library could reopen. However, in August 2021, the Brunswick Town Council mandated that in all Town buildings (including the Library) staff had to stay masked. The mask mandate was not lifted until the end of March 2022 at which time the Library finally returned to the new post-pandemic normal.

2020 and 2021 were very difficult years for the Library, the community, the world. At the beginning of the pandemic, no one knew what to do except to go home and shut the door. The Librarians at Curtis struggled greatly with the fact that they couldn’t be at the Library to help the community. However, they were always able to retain their spirit of hope, and they were always able to use their creativity to find ways of serving the community. They did both regularly and often despite their own fears and concerns during the pandemic.



The joy of being back to "normal!"

One of the most obvious ways that the Library staff tried to share their spirit of optimism was seen through the “Hopeful” sign that was mounted on the Library’s exterior in the fall of 2020. The piece was on loan from artist Charlie Hewitt and used as the centerpiece of the Library’s Annual Fund campaign in 2020. Patrons told Library staff frequently how much they appreciated seeing the sign shining night and day outside the Library all through the winter.

In 2021, Charlie Hewitt very generously decided to donate the sign to Curtis Library, which was his library when he was a child. The sign now holds a place of pride immediately by the Library’s Middle Street entrance and continues to share its powerful message to all who enter the Library.



Outside the Library during the pandemic



*The "Hopeful" sign, gifted to Curtis Library
by artist Charlie Hewitt, 2021*

2022 has been a year of new horizons. The Curtis brand was updated in with the goal of ensuring the Library brand was still reflecting the role of the Library in the community. The revised logo was intended to express energy and movement at the Library post-pandemic, and to exemplify the ability of the Library to always be responsive to the changing needs of the community.



*The updated Curtis Memorial Library
brand, 2022*

With support from Darling's Brunswick Ford, Curtis Friends, and the Manton Foundation, Curtis Library will have the first electric bookmobile in the state of Maine in mid-2023. With so much development happening at Cook's Corner and Brunswick Landing, combined with the desire to serve those parts of the population that can't get to the Library, the Library staff have long wanted to provide mobile services. Darling's Brunswick Ford offered to provide the van and the Manton Foundation and the Curtis Friends funding will turn the van into a fully supported bookmobile for the community.

The Library continues to host a Gleaning Table every week provided by the Midcoast Hunger Prevention Program and Merrymeeting Gleaners. The table provides free produce to anyone who needs it with no restrictions. The ultimate goal of this program is to help eliminate hunger in Maine.

On March 5, the Curtis Contemporaries hosted their first outdoor Winter Carnival. The goal was to provide fun and interaction for the entire community outside where all could feel safer about the possibility of COVID-19 infection. Over 600 people attended the two-hour outdoor event, and there was general celebration in being able to see neighbors and friends.

Curtis Library decided to join the Sustainable Libraries Initiative in 2022, with the goal of becoming certified in 2023. Curtis was the first public library in Maine to do this, and did so to learn how the Library could best support local, national, and global efforts to address climate change

In July of 2022, the Curtis Contemporaries hosted *New York Times* food editor Sam Sifton in a large outdoor event on the Library's parking lot. The event was a fundraiser for the Library and sold out at 250 tickets. Local chefs and brew houses provided food and beverage, and an intriguing conversation was held between Sifton and local Maine food writer Christine Burns Rudalevige for all attendees to enjoy. The event was very much a celebration of the Library, the community, and the revived connections between people that had faced so many obstacles during the isolation of the pandemic.

2022 saw a national increase in book challenges in public and school libraries. Several Maine schools held school board meetings to discuss and decide if certain titles would be retained in library collections.

In September, the Library observed the American Library Association's annual Banned Books Week, an event highlighting the importance of preserving the freedom to read and celebrating frequently banned or challenged titles. Because of the national discussion happening on the issue of intellectual

freedom, The Library decided to supplement its existing Banned Books Week programming with the first Banned Books Read-Out at Curtis.



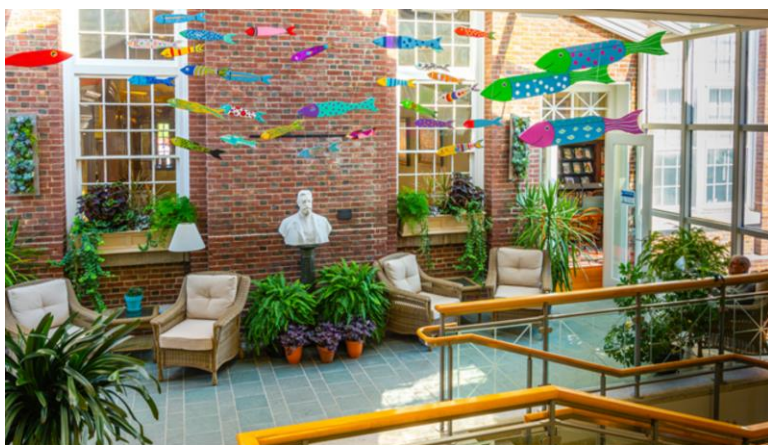
Brunswick High School Librarian Daurene Jerome read aloud from All Boys Aren't Blue: a Memoir-Manifesto by George M. Johnson

Community members of all ages read aloud passages from their favorite banned books. The event was held outside by the Middle Street entrance to welcome anyone and everyone who wished to stop and listen. It was a true display of the spirit of Curtis Memorial Library and its passionate community of readers.

At this point, it seems fitting to end this chapter of the history of Curtis Memorial Library with the same words that ended the 1974 volume of the Library's history:

...it is a time when the library is perhaps of even greater service to the town than ever, and Brunswick must be both proud and grateful for all those citizens who have labored over the years to establish, maintain, and improve their public library.

*Elisabeth Doucett
Executive Director and Librarian
December 2022*



*Connecting the community – Curtis
Memorial Library mezzanine
Photograph courtesy of Jamie Doucett*

Appendix

Head Librarian/Director

Mr. Lyman E. Smith	1883 – 1895
Miss Mary G. Gilman	1894 – 1940
Mrs. Mildred Strout	1919 – 1941 (Assistant) 1941 – 1952 (Head)
Mrs. Mary H. Donahue	1946 – 1952 (Assistant) 1952 – 1966 (Head)
Mrs. Marguerite S. Lunt	1953 – 1966 (Assistant) 1966 – 1967 (Acting Head) 1967 – 1971 (Associate)
Mrs. Suse Weissman	1967 – 1987
Mr. Stephen Podgajny	1987 – 2006
Ms. Pam Jenkins	2006 – 2007 (Acting Director)
Ms. Elisabeth Doucett	2007 –

Presidents of the Brunswick Public Library Association

Professor Franklin C. Robinson	1883 – 1910
Professor Henry L. Chapman	1911 – 1912
Russell W. Eaton	1913 – 1921
Thomas H. Riley	1922 – 1937
John W. Riley	1937 – 1941
Norman G. Smith	1942
Thomas P. Riley	1943 – 1967
Arthur Monke	1968 – 1971
Claire M. Taylor	1972 – 1975
Robert L. Morrell	1976 – 1982
Janet Galle	1983 – 1985
Pam Galvin	1985 – 1988
Craig A. McEwen	1989 – 1991
David Gleason	1991 – 1993
Jan Wilk	1993 – 1996
Dale Douglass	1996 – 1998
Jane McKay Morrell	1998 – 2001
Jim Henderson	2001 – 2002
Michael Jones	2002 – 2004

Jamie Kaplan	2004 – 2006
Debbie Schall	2006 – 2008
Deb DeGraff	2008 – 2009
Chris Goodwin	2009 – 2011
Cathy Barter	2011 – 2012
Kathy Smith	2012 – 2013
Kate Egan	2013 – 2016
Karen Budd	2016 – 2020
Shiloh Theberge	2020 – 2022
Lisa Botshon	2022 –

National and Regional Awards/Grants Received by Curtis Memorial Library

2000 – Steve Podgajny named Maine Librarian of the Year in recognition of his distinguished record of professional service, both to libraries and to the broader civic and cultural domains.

2006 – Winner of the Highsmith Library Innovation Award, which recognizes a public library's innovative and creative service program for the community. Awarded to one library nationally. Given to the Cornerstones of Science program at Curtis Memorial Library.

2009 – Winner of American Library Association Baker & Taylor award to promote the development of a circulating audio music/video collection in public libraries. Awarded to one library nationally. Given in recognition of the Curtis Library Bollywood film series.

2011 – Awarded FINRA Investor Education Foundation/ALA grant to support financial literacy among women. Awarded to 20 libraries nationally.

2015 - Awarded FINRA grant to provide financial education in the community. Curtis held the "Making it in Maine; Living the Good Life" program.

2017/18/19 – Curtis Library voted "Best Library in Maine" by readers of Down East magazine.

2019 – Winner of the MINERVA Library Consortium Innovation Award for "Lending Transportation" concept.

2020 – Awarded a grant from the American Libraries Association: "Resilient Communities: Libraries Respond to Climate Change."

2021 – Awarded a grant from the Manton Foundation to establish a bookmobile program/van at Curtis Library.