

# Westford Recollections



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The J V Fletcher Library actually had its beginning because of the interest of the Trustees of Westford Academy, particularly that of Zaccheus Wright Zaccheus Wright who served in the State Legislature in 1788-1794 became interested in starting the Academy He was one of the three highest subscribers to the Academy and gave the land for the site When the subscribers first met on April 30, 1792, he was elected president and served until 1806.

To further show his interest in the educational welfare of the town, Mr Wright, still president of the Trustees, was again one of the largest subscribers among twenty-five citizens interested in establishing a library These 25 people put their feelings and intents into a notice, the original of which is hanging today in the reading room of the present J V Fletcher Library

I shall quote a few words from this document, "We, the subscribers, inhabitants of the town of Westford, feeling ourselves willing to promote literature and useful knowledge among ourselves and our families, think it for the benefit of us, and for the town in general, to establish a social library to be put under such rules and regulations as shall appear to be the most beneficial to the subscribers, and it is proposed that two dollars shall constitute a share to each member that shall subscribe that sum, and so in proportion to those that shall subscribe for a greater sum, and we pledge ourselves to pay all the monies that we subscribe for," etcetera

Following is the list of subscribers and the amounts they contributed for the social library

James Prescott, Jr	\$8.00
Samuel Adams	8.00
Joseph Cummings	4.00
Eleazer Hamblin	4.00
Charles Proctor	4.00
John Abbot	6.00
Jonathan Carver	4.00
Abel Boynton	4.00
Zaccheus Wright	8.00
Josiah Boynton, Jr	2.00
Joel Abbot	2.00
Timothy Spalding	2.00
Thomas Richardson	4.00
Samuel Wood	2.00
Issachar Keyes	2.00
John Raymond	2.00
Ebenezer Prescott	2.00
Benjamin Osgood	2.00
Caleb Blake	2.00
Francis Leighton	2.00
Reuben Leighton	2.00
Wyle Richardson	2.00
Joseph Jewett	2.00
Joseph Keyes	2.00
Amos Crosby	2.00
A total of \$84.00	

When these 25 subscribers met on April 3, 1797, they chose Zaccheus Wright as moderator and Rev Caleb Blake as clerk Three others were chosen with them to draw up rules and laws for the intended library of Westford These were some of the rules "the Library shall consist of fifty shares, at least, and shall always be kept in the town of Westford, that the Westford Library Company" - its name - "shall always consist of thirteen members, at least, and seven shall constitute a quorum, that the librarian shall provide, at the expense of the company, a convenient place for the safe keeping of all the books belonging thereto, and shall keep a fair catalogue," etc Members were allowed one vote for each share, and any number could vote by proxy No person was a member till he had paid for one share A member could give, sell, transfer or bequeath his share, but no person or member shall withdraw any share from the library, or receive the value thereof of the company under any pretense The shares of a deceased member became the property of his heirs "There shall be no books in the library upon civil or religious controversy, or tending to deprave the morals of men" How different is the controversial material that is being read today

In 1801, a vote was passed changing the name from the Westford Library Company to The Proprietors of the Social Library in the Town of Westford

In 1816, a printed catalogue was issued, showing that the library contained 179 volumes Today's number of books is approximately 28,000

In 1853, a committee was chosen by the town to report a plan for establishing a town library and to find out at what price the Social Library could be purchased No report has been found on that committee's results

In November of 1858, another committee was appointed to see what measures could be adopted by which a town library could be established with amerging of the Proprietor's Library

In March of 1859, the report of this committee and the Proprietor's committee resulted in the following

1 - The townspeople should spend not less than \$30.00 a year on books

2 - The townspeople should furnish and keep in good order a suitable room in the middle of Westford with a suitable librarian in charge

3 - The townspeople should have suitable and proper regulations respecting the preserving, keeping in repair, and loaning the books in said library

4 - Whenever the townspeople shall refuse to do the aforementioned, the library should revert back to the Proprietors This report was accepted and so the Social Library of more than 1300 volumes was given to the town

In 1873, the Agricultural Library of about 100 volumes was donated to the town by the subscribers Since that time, three trustees are chosen annually who attend to everything connected with the library

In 1885, the library received a trust fund of \$1000.00 for the purchase of new books from Stephen S Stone of Revere, Mass Another gift of \$1000.00 was made by Mrs A K Fletcher in compliance with her late husband's wishes Additional funds have been given since that time

On December 5, 1891, the Wright house on Main Street burned, leaving a suitable lot for a public library building At the request of the library trustees, the Selectmen of the town took the necessary steps to obtain possession of this land The townspeople voted to erect a library at the town meeting in March of 1895 Before they could vote on the next article which was in reference to money for this building, a letter was read in which J V Fletcher of Belmont, Mass., stated that he wished to donate a sum of \$10,000 to help in the building of the library

This information was received with cheers and the Selectmen resolved to thank the Honorable J V Fletcher for his generosity In his honor, they expressed the desire that it be called the J V Fletcher Library



In reference to Caleb Blake, the original clerk of the Library Association, it is interesting to note that he was the last pastor hired by the town In his home, on the corner of Graniteville Road and Main Street, one room contained the books of the Library Association. He also had a store in his home In Revolutionary times, Dr Asaph Fletcher lived there. After that, it was occupied by Dr. Asaph Byam and known by his name for many years In 1895, the house was moved to 4 Main Street Mrs. Frank Miller is now the current owner. So you see, we still have one of the original locations of the Social Library right here on our Main Street, a forerunner to our J V Fletcher Library.