

New library building attracts plenty of readers

Read was first town librarian at Fletcher

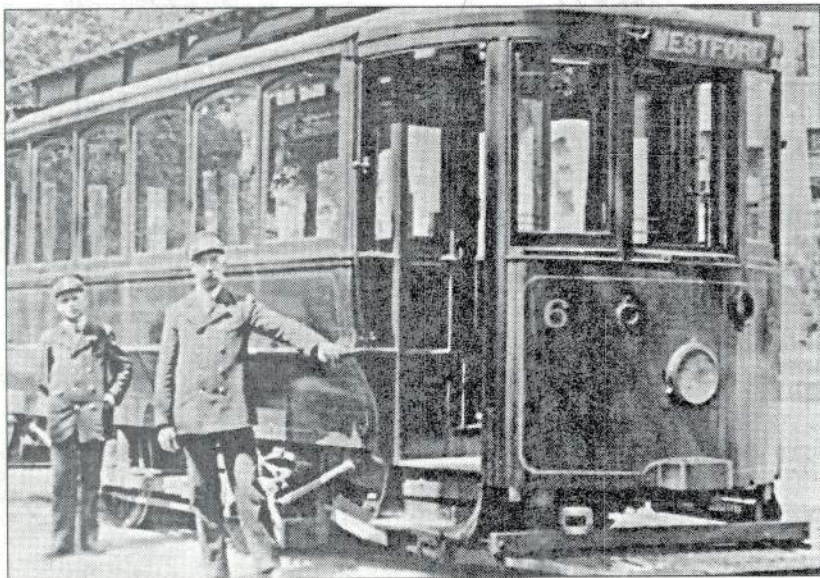
BY JUNE W. KENNEDY
GUEST WRITER

Carrie E. Read had the distinction of being town librarian when the new building was dedicated in June 1896. Her salary was \$160, with \$23 for extra work.

In recognizing J. V. Fletcher's gift, she implied that his name on a label affixed to all reading material would be a reminder "that wise philanthropy is better than hoarded wealth, that the only priceless service is that which promotes human welfare." During the next seven months the total number of visits to the library from appreciative patrons and people from other towns exceeded 6,500.

New rules were made, and services expanded. The Library and "reading-room" were open on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 1:30-5:30 and 6:30-9 p.m. Sunday hours were 12:30-1:30 p.m.

Books were delivered, with increasing circulation, to the separate villages of Westford: Forge Village, Graniteville and Parkerville. Later, Brookside (Nabnas-set) was included. The Town appropriated \$50 for periodicals for the "reading-room." Here, one could read Harper's, Atlantic, Popular Science, Good House-



The trolley ran to Westford center from 1907 to 1920. The Fletcher Library is on the right.

keeping and Ladies Home Journal.

Space for research, reference and note taking without interruption was most attractive and a far cry from the previous cramped quarters of the Town Hall. Circulation in books increased over 16%, and, it was felt it would have been nearer 20% had not the Library closed for a month while books were arranged. Al Bicknell, the janitor, moved over 8,500 books from the Town Hall to the new building. Charge for his labor was \$8.25.

Charles Henry Prescott, descendant of the Westford Prescott family, added greatly to the interior beautification of the Library. In 1898, he gave a statuette of Minerva, two bas-reliefs and six busts.

In his will, he left the Library the antique grandfather's clock.

As the century came to an end, so did the life of the Hon. J. V. Fletcher, who died in December 1899. The Library closed, and the Trustees attended his funeral. And, after a service of 11 years, Miss Read handed in her resignation.

In 1900, Mary P. Bunce assumed her duties as librarian. The years that followed saw the Library literally and metaphorically enter the 20th century. A. Conan Doyle's "Hound of the Baskervilles" and "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch" by Alice Rice were surely among the volumes that were cataloged by her under the new Dewey Decimal System. Miss Bunce started the Children's

J. V. FLETCHER LIBRARY

As the Board of Health has reported a case of contagious disease in your household, the Trustees of the Library must deny you and your family the privileges of the Library until all danger of contagion is passed.

Children excluded from school should not visit the Library.

Any library books now in your possession should be kept until disinfected by the Board of Health.

Librarian.

Westford, Mass. _____ 19__



In 1900, Mary P. Bunce took over as head librarian.

happening in the world at home and abroad.

Over 250 local residents were involved in World War I, and the home front was hardly spared. The influenza epidemic that killed thousands of Americans forced the closing of the Fletcher Library for a month. One printed plea from the librarian requested patrons to "bake all books" before returning them to the library.

This is the sixth in a series of historical articles by June W. Kennedy, acknowledging the Centennial Gala of the J. V. Fletcher Library, which will be held on Saturday, June 1 and Sunday, June 2. Although tickets are sold out for the June 1 dinner dance on the common (a waiting list is being formed), townspeople are all invited to a free family concert on Sunday, June 2, with music by the Westford Academy Band under the direction of Blair Bettencourt. Also Odyssey, a female barbershop quartet, will perform.

In the early part of this century, contagious diseases were a serious threat to public health. This card was sent to Westford families by the trustees to make sure visitors to the library went home with only books and not a disease.

Collection in 1908.

During these early years, Edward M. Raymond, great grandson of Social Library founder Ebenezer Prescott, gave gifts of oriental porcelains, oil paintings and numerous artistic appointments which added to the dignified decor of the building.

In 1906, when book deliveries in Brookside flagged, the Town Report for the year ending March 1, 1907, stated: "As Brookside will be in communication with the Library by street cars, we have omitted to ask for an appropriation for carrying books to this village." Indeed, the trolley service to Westford Center was a way of

life from 1907 - 1920.

By 1916, electricity had replaced the gaslights, the better to knit, fold bandages and perform other relief work as the Library opened its doors to the local branch of the Red Cross and the American Fund for the French Wounded. Fletcher Library bookshelves were lined with such titles as "Germany and the Germans from the American Point of View" by Price Collier, and "With Poor Immigrants to American" by Stephen Graham — which mirrored those formative and turbulent years of our country's history, and surely helped Westford residents better understand what was