

# Today's library has deep roots in past

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**A**s the J. V. Fletcher Library celebrates its gala centennial this June, it owes a debt of gratitude to the far-sighted, public-spirited and generous body of men who 200 years ago, within the brief span of five years, established the Westford Academy and Social Library and built the First Parish Meetinghouse.

The name of Zaccheus Wright holds a place of honor here. While serving in the State Legislature from 1788-1794, he became interested in organizing the Academy. He was one of the three highest of the 54 subscribers to it and gave the land for its site. When the subscribers first met in April, 1792, he was elected president and served until 1808.

In 1797, Wright furthered his interest in the educational welfare of Westford by becoming one of the largest subscribers among 25 citizens interested in establishing a social library called the Westford Library Company. It was quite fitting that a plaque dedicated to Zaccheus Wright was placed in the library of Westford's fourth and present Academy building in 1975. It reads:

**ZACCHEUS WRIGHT  
MEMORIAL LIBRARY  
FIRST PRESIDENT  
TRUSTEES OF WESTFORD  
ACADEMY  
SOCIAL LIBRARY FOUNDER  
1728-1811**

Today, the original document bearing the signatures of the 25 subscribers is in the historical collection of the J.V. Fletcher Library. It is dated "Westford, 14th of February 1797." In part, it states:

"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;



STAFF PHOTO BY SCOTT WALLASK

**The former Byam House at 4 Main St. was once the first social library in Westford.**

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, etc."

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

James Prescott, Jr., \$8; Samuel Adams, \$8; Joseph Cummings, \$4; Eleazer Hamblin, \$4; Charles Proctor, \$4; John Abbot, \$6; Jonathan Carver, \$4; Abel Boynton, \$4; Zaccheus Wright, \$8; Josiah Boynton, Jr., \$2; Joel Abbot, \$2; Timothy Spalding, \$2; and Thomas Richardson, \$4.

Samuel Wood, \$2; Issachar Keyes, \$2; John Raymond, \$2; Ebenezer Prescott, \$2; Benjamin Osgood, \$2; Caleb Blake, \$2; Francis Leighton, \$2; Reuben Leighton, \$2; Wyle Richardson, \$2; Joseph Jewett, \$2; Joseph

Keyes, \$2 and Amos Crosby, \$2.

A total of \$84.

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 Westford's first library such as: "the Library shall consist of fifty shares, at least, and shall always be kept in the town of Westford; that the Westford Library Company 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

bequest 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. A further quote from the subscribers states: "There shall be no books in the library upon civil or religious controversy, or tending to deprave the morals of men." Richard Kneeland was elected first librarian.

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 catalog was issued: the library contained 179 volumes.

— *From The Westford Recollections Series by June W. Kennedy. This is the first of an eight-part series of historical articles in honor of the Centennial of the J. V. Fletcher Library.*