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CELEBRATES
100 YEARS

High Style
+ Structure

ARCHITECTURE IN THE GARDEN



The light-filled work area in the Peterson Wing is a favorite for quiet reading or studying.

The 100 *Year Story*

GREENWICH LIBRARY HAS GONE FROM A SMALL BOOK-LENDING NOOK ON THE AVENUE TO A **BUSTLING HUB OF TECHNOLOGY, ART, BUSINESS** AND—EVEN IN TODAY’S DAY AND AGE—BOOKS



BY **BILL SLOCUM**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **JULIE BIDWELL**

THEN AND NOW:

The most recent addition to the Greenwich Library joins the original 1931 building and a 1960 addition. World-renowned Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects used two large curved areas of glass, each one overlooking an open courtyard, to convey a transparent, friendly and welcoming vibe.





In addition to plenty of spots to quietly read, there are over 100 computers with free Internet access and business software. Wi-Fi is available throughout the buildings.

Greenwich Library means different things to different people: A beehive for business researchers, a rendezvous for students, a gem in the crown of town services that realtors proudly use to close the deal. For the past 100 years, the library—today a sprawling, curving, 104,000-square-foot edifice on West Putnam Avenue—has been something else, too. A case study of civic symbiosis that transformed a humble, struggling village library into a twenty-first-century marvel of affluence and growth. “There is a wow factor about the library,” says Barbara Ormerod-Glynn, Greenwich Library’s director since 2013. “It’s just a great place to be. I get the sense it was always a special place.” The public-private relationship began in 1917, when the town appropriated \$1,000 to help keep open a tiny but stately book-lending center and reading room on Greenwich Avenue (the space would later house Woolworths until becoming today’s Saks Fifth Avenue). Then as now, the library was privately owned, and its once-generous endowment was running out.

Today, the town annually appropriates \$9 million to one of the premier community libraries in the United States, a recipient of *Library Journal*’s coveted five-star rating for all but one of the last nine years. “It’s been recognized as one of the best in the country,” notes Maureen

100 YEARS OF SERVICE: *A Look Back*

1917

Town appropriates \$1,000 toward the operating expenses of Greenwich Library, thus beginning its formal public-private partnership. It doubles to \$2,000 the following year, grows to \$15,000 by 1928.



Greenwich Library is respected for the depth and breadth of its collections, offering patrons a huge array of opportunities to explore.

1930

First branch library established in Cos Cob.

1931

Second branch library established in East Port Chester (now Wyram).



The library's original location on Greenwich Avenue

1933

Sunday concerts begin with piano loaned by Mrs. James Goldmark.



Greenwich Library Bookmobile c. 1940

1943

War Council agricultural committee turns library's art gallery into a hothouse for growing plants.

1948

Film lending service begins, at a time when only thirty libraries across the country were loaning films.



In the Periodical Reading Room, two Calder tapestries hang over stairs leading to the Technology Training Center and Library cafe. *Right:* The Jewel reading room

Mid-1950s

Town appropriates \$100,000 to the library's development fund, eventually used to purchase and remodel the former Franklin Simon department store.

1960

Library is moved to its present location.



The Cole Auditorium
c. 1970

1969

Marie Cole Auditorium is built, with the capability to add a second level.

1974

Byram Shubert Library is opened at a cost of \$370,000, most of which is donated by the Sam S. Shubert Foundation. This year also marks the start of the Oral History Project.

1978

"Raise The Roof" drive leads to completion of Greenwich Library's second floor (in September 1981).

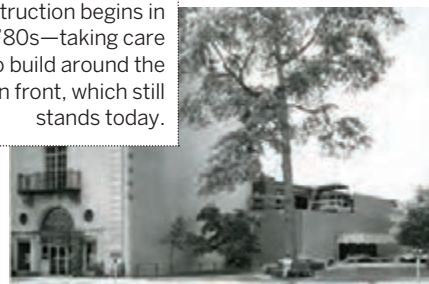
1983

Mezzanine is added to the main reading room, opening up arched windows and adding seating capacity.

1992

\$25 million bequest from Clementine Lockwood Peterson is largest gift ever made to any community library.

Second floor construction begins in the '80s—taking care to build around the tree in front, which still stands today.





Attracting nearly 10,000 visitors a year, the Flinn Gallery is a nonprofit exhibition space that presents art in all mediums. The sale of artwork helps support programs.

Sullivan, past president of the American Library Association who has consulted with Greenwich Library over the years.

Connecticut State Library records show Greenwich Library leading all in-state libraries in several categories, including the highest number of library visits per capita (10.3) of any municipality near its size or larger.

Just as impressive is its sophistication of services. Some 100 computer terminals are spread across the palatial Peterson Wing, built around a business information center endowed by the largest bequest ever given to a community library (the \$25 million Clementine Lockwood Peterson gift, which contributed to the library's massive expansion in 1999).

Each workday morning, moments after doors open at 9 a.m., the first floor speedily transforms into a de facto operations center for dozens of area entrepreneurs. Some adjourn to conduct teleconferences in the basement café, or to study alone in an eerie fortress of solitude called "The Jewel." Some 1,900 visitors enter daily.

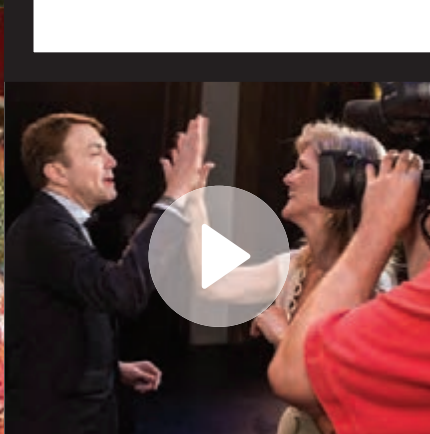
"Even when people can work from their homes, they like to come to the library," notes Chip Haslun, president of the Greenwich Library Board of Trustees. "I think you feel the buzz when you walk through the library now. It's respectful, but you definitely get this sense of energy."

What Greenwich gets out of this 100-year relationship includes access to a state-of-the-art research institution that doubles as a hub for 1,800 community programs. Greenwich Library offers everything from a concert series and Friends Friday Films at the 368-seat Cole Auditorium to a medical reference library. It also houses the Flinn Gallery as well as the town's Oral History Project, which contains more than 950 interviews with people who have helped shape Greenwich.

The library also spreads its bounty across town, with long-established branches in Byram (the Byram Shubert Library) and Cos Cob. Another local library, the Perrot Memorial in Old Greenwich, is not connected with Greenwich Library but has a similar arrangement with the town. »



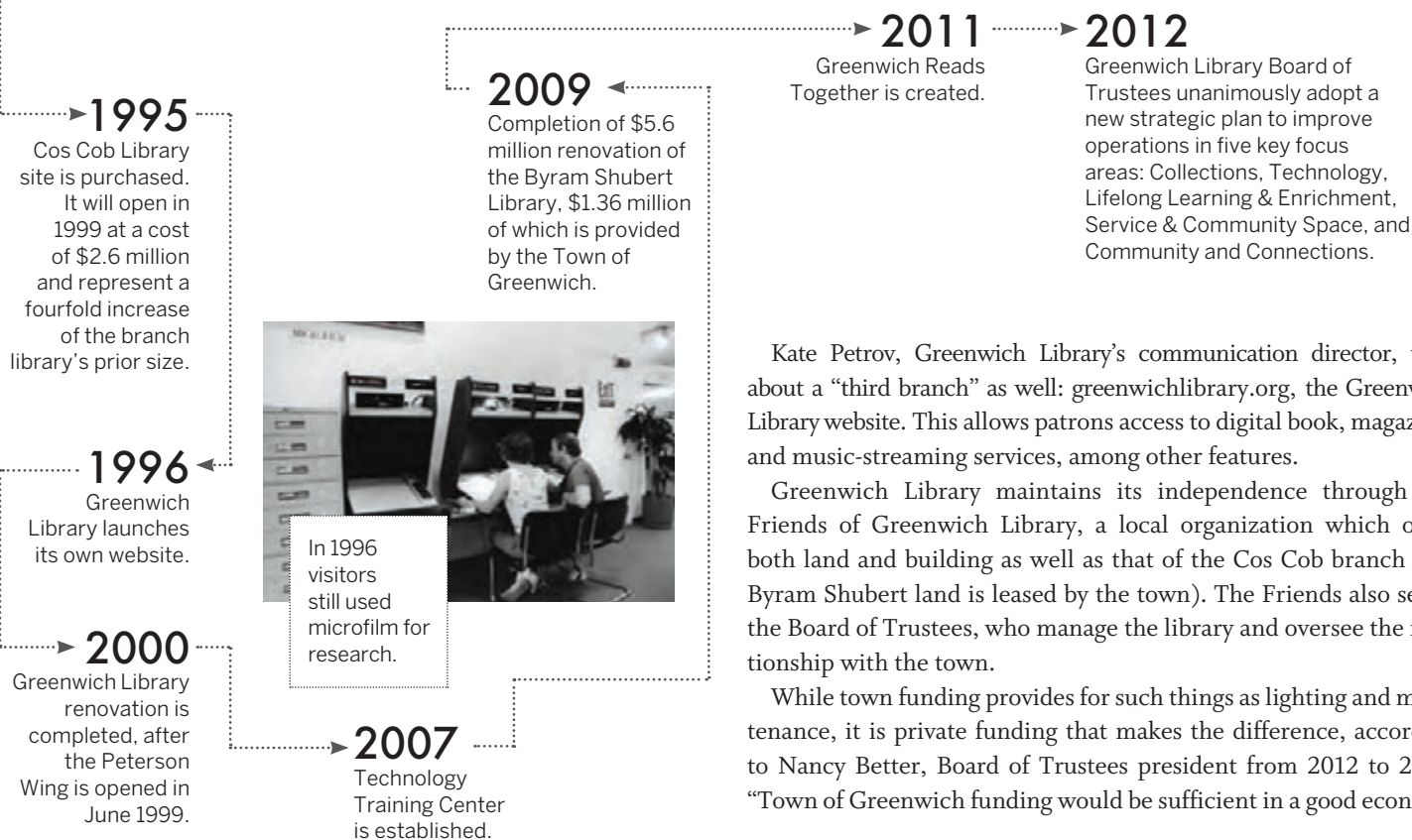
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Kate Petrov, Greenwich Library's communication director, talks about a "third branch" as well: greenwichlibrary.org, the Greenwich Library website. This allows patrons access to digital book, magazine, and music-streaming services, among other features.

Greenwich Library maintains its independence through the Friends of Greenwich Library, a local organization which owns both land and building as well as that of the Cos Cob branch (the Byram Shubert land is leased by the town). The Friends also select the Board of Trustees, who manage the library and oversee the relationship with the town.

While town funding provides for such things as lighting and maintenance, it is private funding that makes the difference, according to Nancy Better, Board of Trustees president from 2012 to 2014. "Town of Greenwich funding would be sufficient in a good economy

CHANGEMAKERS *Greenwich women of vision*



The Captain

For over thirty years, Isabelle Hurlbutt dominated Greenwich Library so absolutely that people would recall her with awe, pacing the balcony overlooking the main desk at the library's Greenwich Avenue location like a sea captain in a dress.

Isabelle was among other things an early champion for women's rights. Yet that didn't translate into a liberated atmosphere at the library she ran for well over thirty years, until 1961. "She was brusque and very businesslike, very impatient

at times," Marion Nicholson, a longtime library employee who Isabelle hired in 1938, would explain in a 1976 Greenwich Library oral history. "She would stalk that balcony and bellow at the staff when someone was out of line." Yet Marion went on to add that Isabelle was also "very farsighted," with a focus on building the library beyond conventional bounds.

Under Isabelle's leadership, the library instituted such novelties as a music program, a business section and a sturdy network of membership support that would rescue it from "village library" status to eventually outgrow its Greenwich Avenue location. She then oversaw the move to its present site. "She really planted many of the seeds from which grew the library as we know it today," notes Mary Ellen LeBien, a former library trustee.



The Fundraiser

When Marie Cole agreed to run a drive to build a 368-seat auditorium at Greenwich Library in 1967, reaction wasn't all positive. "My husband thought I'd lost my mind," she recalled in a 1978 Greenwich Library oral history. That was because fundraising for the library was a brutal time commitment, something already known in the Cole household. Marie, a Norwegian-born landscape architect, was first selected to chair the library's Development Committee

in 1958 during the purchase and refurbishment of an abandoned department store on the library's current site.

The earlier effort was a literal door-to-door affair. "Contributions ranged from twenty cents to ten thousand [dollars]." This time, Marie worked from her well-kept list of local names to determine who could contribute what to a new auditorium. By 1969, the auditorium, which bears her name, was reality. Marie's fundraising also included work on the Byram Shubert Library. Noting its roofline, shaped like a Viking longboat prow, she joked about what happens when you let Norwegians help.

In 1975, she was chosen outstanding public library trustee of the entire U.S. by the American Library Association. "All it is is a piece of paper, but it's one I treasure," she said.

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to give us only a pretty good library,” she says. “What takes us to the five-star level is the private funding. That allows us to dream big.”

A recent example of this, Nancy points out, is the employment of BiblioCommons, an open-source online cataloging system that she calls “a complete game-changer” for the way it allows patrons to interact with the library collection online. No town funds were used to bring BiblioCommons to Greenwich Library; instead a presentation was made in 2012 to the Board of Trustees, which approved library-held funds to acquire the service.

Soliciting funds in Greenwich is no easy task; a multitude of causes compete for attention. Yet somehow the library, even without a fundraising unit of its own, has always found a way. Mary Ellen LeBien saw this in action when she was on the Board of Trustees in the late 1990s, right after the Peterson bequest was announced.

“We had just determined the library needed more space to expand its business area, and so we had begun a \$10 million capital campaign to renovate the building,” she recalls. “You talk about a challenging campaign! When the press says you just received \$25 million, even if that is specifically earmarked for business and music purposes, and you commence a \$10 million capital campaign on top of it, that’s a pretty big challenge.” The library managed not only to reach its goal, but exceed it.


Greenwich Library boasts a long history of anticipating the future, whether hosting a business section at its Greenwich Avenue location in the 1950s or computerizing its card-catalog system in the 1970s. Wayne Campbell is one of Greenwich Library’s longest-serving employees, hired in 1969 to manage what was then a fledgling film collection. “We were ahead of the whole state,” he recalls. “Of course, at the time it was all sixteen-millimeter. It was often a sight on weekends, to see a mom and dad in the library lugging two suitcases of films, with maybe their kids following them carrying a projector.” (The library used to loan those out, too.)

Today, thousands of DVDs, Blu-rays and video games sit on carrels filling much of the library's second floor. A third floor features an extensive children's section, which incorporates its own bank of computers as well as a play area, a storytelling center and a longstanding summer-reading program. "Now we offer the summer-reading program online," notes Deirdre Sullivan, the library's head of Children's Services. "No matter where a family is during the summer, they can still participate by accessing a computer or mobile device."

The library has a philosophy regarding adapting to the future. Barbara Ormerod-Glynn calls it "leading-edge, not bleeding-edge." Board of Trustees President Chip Haslun adds, "As an institution, we recognize we have to constantly think of new ways to respond to the needs of the community. That's our obligation and our fiduciary duty."

The library has just completed its first-ever five-year strategic plan and is about to embark upon another. "We are all thinking about what the digital age means for libraries," Barbara says. "We are going to work with the footprint we have, but try to modify the interior to make it more flexible."

These days, Greenwich Library staff work just as hard helping patrons figure out their Kindle or mobile device as they do answering questions. They also have experience pitching in during times of emergency; in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, the library became refuge for those seeking food and shelter.

The library has conducted multiple surveys to measure what the public values most. What they found, Nancy Better says, didn't tie too closely to any specific offering but rather the totality of the library experience. "It all just pointed to learning," she says. "The big overarching question we had was: How does Greenwich Library remain relevant? We can't be too far ahead, but we can't be Luddites. Where's the sweet spot? What we decided was that we want to get ahead of users in anticipating what their demands might be. We want to get just a little ahead of them, and then execute on it." 



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