

HISTORY OF LIBRARY SERVICES IN BOLTON, CONNECTICUT



In 1881 the Bolton Hall and Library Association was created primarily through the efforts of Dr. Charles F. Sumner. An organizational meeting was held at the Bolton Center School on March 1, 1881. The first directors elected were C. F. Sumner, Joseph Gilbert, and Joseph Alvord. In 1883 the first library was housed in the E.K. Williams general store in Bolton Center (219 Bolton Center Road). Frank Williams was recorded as the first librarian and paid \$10 per year “provided he attends to his duties.”



In 1886, the library was moved to the house of deacon Charles Loomis, located at 25 Hebron Road. There the library books were housed in cases in the front room until 1915. His daughter Adelia Loomis was appointed head librarian. She would hold that post for 57 years, until 1943. Adelia was well-known in town, and her house was already used as a post office and a candy store. In 1900 a vote was taken at town meeting to establish a Free Public Library maintained by the town; the proposal did not pass.



In 1912 the Bolton Hall and Library Association was set up as a corporation with seven directors. Now the library was linked to a proposed community hall that eventually became Bolton Hall. This was a step the people thought was in the right direction, and in 1914 it was voted at a town meeting to appropriate \$50 annually for maintaining the free library. In the early 1900s Adelia Loomis (at top in the center) also helped supervise the Juvenile Grange.



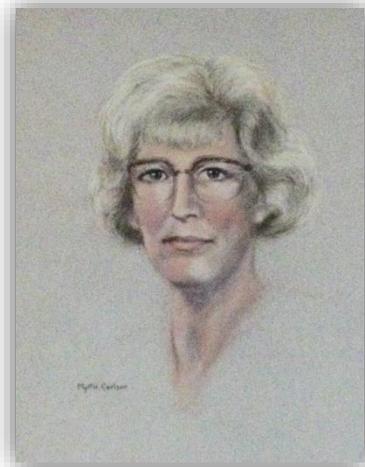
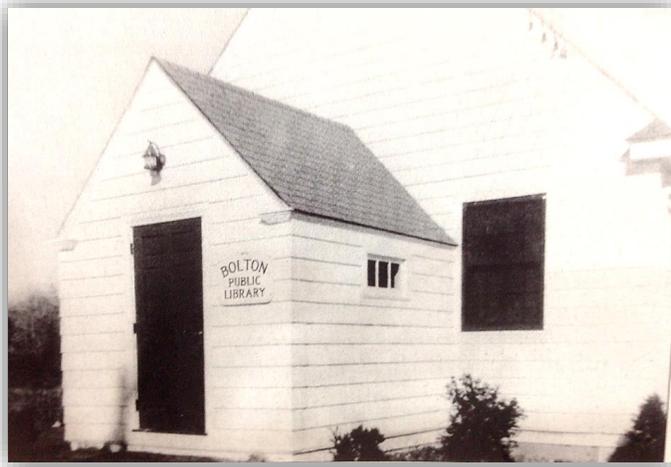
In 1915 a new library with 900 books opened in the west wing of Community Hall, which is currently the town clerk's office. The hall was a popular place where town committees, the Grange, and the Scouts would meet, and it also served as a dance hall on Saturday evenings. The library there was small, and crowded with so many books that people had to walk sideways through the aisles.



Librarian Adelia Loomis receiving award for selling War Bonds
From William Johnson, Savings Bank of Manchester



The Bolton schools were given boxes of books at first and later a bookmobile service. For a short time, the bookmobile service was a hit with the seniors. Here a Miss Clements was photographed visiting Frank and Elizabeth Strong. World War II and changing demographics ended interest in the service. Adelia Loomis died in November 1956 after having been a member of the Grange for more than 60 years and the Bolton head librarian for 57 years.



Elinor Hees Bentley

Elinor Hees Bentley was appointed head librarian upon the retirement of Adelia Loomis in 1943. The Bolton Public Library remained in the west wing of the hall until August 1958, when the former Roman Catholic chapel at 212 Bolton Center Road (now the Hans Christian Andersen Montessori School) was renovated and became the new library.

Before computers and the Internet, libraries with books, magazines, and newspapers were a cornerstone of local educational systems. Bolton resident Alan Wiedie was hired to draw up plans for a modern library on the lot adjacent to the old library, at 206 Bolton Center Road. The Bentley Memorial Library was dedicated in 1975 to Elinor Hees Bentley, who had been assistant and then head librarian for 22 years.



Open House at the new Bentley Memorial Library
November 9, 1975

(This history was excerpted from "Bolton's Heritage," edited by Bruce G. Ronson [1970]; and "Images of America: Bolton," by Hans DePold [2011].)