

**HISTORY
OF THE
ESTABLISHMENT
OF THE
NORTH MERRICK PUBLIC
LIBRARY**

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ABSTRACT OF MASTER'S REPORT

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North Merrick is an unincorporated area in the Town of Hempstead in Nassau County, New York. Due to the revivalism of the 1860s plus the availability of two trains daily to New York City, the Long Island Camp Meeting Association selected North Merrick for its permanent camp site. This was instrumental in bringing early settlers to the area. From its inception in 1891 until 1964 when the North Merrick Public Library was founded, the Merrick Library served all the citizens of Merrick and North Merrick, although only Merrick residents were taxed for its support. To partially compensate for this, the overcrowded library charged North Merrick patrons a series of increasing minimal fees for its use.

After the population explosion of the 1940s, North Merrick PTA groups established a committee which inquired into the possibility of establishing a library in North Merrick. After concluding that most of the population of the district found the Merrick Library too inaccessible, they presented a library proposition which called for \$26,000 budget, including \$13,000 for land and a building. Despite the support of many community groups, the open opposition of a civic league worried about the possible tax burden of a proposed school building program, when coupled with the opposition of those who felt consolidation with Merrick should be effected, combined to defeat the proposition.

A second committee made another attempt in 1957. They also investigated the possibility of consolidation with Merrick and found, as had the first group, that it was legally impossible. Despite publicity to this effect, the continuing desire of the North Merrick citizenry to consolidate with Merrick, plus a smear campaign waged by an anti-library group, combined to defeat the \$23,400 budget and \$127,000 bond issue.

The third and successful attempt to establish a library was made in 1964 by a large group working under the direction of Len Kirsch and an executive committee which represented every facet of the community. They succeeded in getting approval of a \$56,000 budget, with no land or building purchase considered, by concentrating their campaign completely on the "yes" voter.

During the five years since the establishment of the library, with the help of \$28,000 in matching LSCA funds, and the move from a store front location to the present one in a portion of a school building, patronage has climbed to 59 percent of the population. While many areas need improvement, programs for children and young adults, exhibits, displays, and special collections are available, as are best sellers on a nonrental basis. The library truly reflects the community it serves and the Director, Dr. Roland Carlton, who guided it during its first five years, 1964-1969.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A BRIEF HISTORY OF NORTH MERRICK, NEW YORK.....	4
II. THE FIRST ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH A LIBRARY IN NORTH MERRICK.....	12
III. THE SECOND LIBRARY PROPOSAL.....	17
IV. THE SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN TO ESTABLISH A LIBRARY.....	28
V. HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FIRST FIVE YEARS.....	37
FOOTNOTES.....	46
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	62

CHAPTER I

A BRIEF HISTORY OF NORTH MERRICK, NEW YORK

North Merrick School District #29 is an unincorporated area in the Town of Hempstead and is located in Nassau County, Long Island, New York.¹ It is bounded on the north by East Meadow, on the south by Merrick School District #25, on the east by North Bellmore, and on the west by Meadowbrook Parkway. It is a suburban community covering an area of 2.1 square miles on the south shore of Long Island whose population in 1969 was approximately 14,250 persons, according to the school district census.²

In order to understand the setting of this story, it is appropriate to have some background in the early history of the area. In 1784, the Town of Hempstead split into two parts, one henceforth to be called North Hempstead and the other, southern portion, to retain the name of Town of Hempstead. It is in this latter half that the Merrick area is located.³

The name of Merrick is one of the numerous variants used to describe a tribe of Indians (also called the Merioke, the Maracock, the Mericoke, etc.)⁴ who claimed all the lands south from what is now Rockville Centre to the boundary line of Oyster Bay, to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean.⁵ English settlers from Stamford, Connecticut, seeking religious and political freedom migrated to Long Island and entered into negotiations with the Indians. On December 13, 1643, an agreement was reached with Sachem Tackapausha and a deed giving the colonists that half of the Great Plains lying on the south side of the island and extending to the ocean was signed.⁶ The settlers cleared the land of trees and established crude homes. Their diet consisted mostly of fish and clams until their farms began to produce crops. While the early settlers of Merrick were farmers, and agriculture was the principal occupation, there were several paper and grist mills on the banks of the Merrick River which thrived until the end of the nineteenth century.⁷

The Indians of Long Island were generally peaceable and merely provided an annoyance to the settlers from whom they constantly attempted to steal pigs and cattle. In 1675, the Indians were forced to give up their arms, in 1676, harmony was restored between the settlers and the Indians and permission to retain weapons was returned to the Indians. Soon afterward, however, the Indians began to decrease rapidly leaving the land to the colonists.⁸

The South Shore Railroad, which was an early competitor to the Long Island Railroad, built a railroad from Jamaica to Babylon which was completed in October, 1867.⁹ Two trains ran daily, but no station or shelter existed at the Merrick stop until two local residents, Mr. William E. Hewlett and Mr. Frank Miller build a shed at the railway stop during Christmas week of 1867. Later, the railroad built a station at Merrick which also housed a hotel and the post office.¹⁰

As a result of the upsurge of revivalism in the 1860s and no doubt influenced by the added attraction of the train, transportation now available from Jamaica, in 1869 the Long Island Camp Meeting Association selected Merrick as the permanent site for its camp meetings. The camp grounds were located approximately one mile to the north and to the east of the Merrick railroad station in an area which now falls within North Merrick Union Free School District #29. This religious group built approximately sixty cottages on the grounds for the use of their members during the summer convocations. The cottages were rented during the summer months and held an average population of 1,300 people with a large number of additional visitors swelling this number during meeting sessions.¹¹ Some of these cottages were sold to the members and remodeled into all-year-round residences. Thus, the Association was instrumental in bringing settlers to Merrick. A few of these original cottages still stand along the narrow, circular camp ground streets, east of Merrick Avenue and north of Camp Avenue. In fact, it was in a chapel on these camp grounds that the newly formed Union Free School District #29 opened its first school on September 21, 1921.¹²

The historical background of the entire community of Merrick at this point was similar to many of the other Long Island communities which surround it. They consisted of a mill or two, a post office, and a railroad station up to the latter part of the 19th century.¹³ The predominant forms of industry were agriculture, fishing, and light manufacturing. Agriculture was generally in the form of a cash crop, such as the widely grown Long Island potato. In addition, greenhouses and nurseries were developing.¹⁴ By 1902, Merrick was connected to New York city by fourteen daily trains each way during the summer and a few less during the winter.¹⁵ Thus, with both better travel conditions and opportunities for employment locally, more and more people were coming to live and work on Long Island.

In 1891, a free circulating library was begun in Merrick by two college students, Edward C. Cammann and Richard P. Kent in a barn belonging to the Cammann family. It remained there until 1897 when it moved to the dark-shingled home built for it at the corner of what is now Kirkwood and Merrick Avenues. (This building is still standing and is now used as the administration office for Union Free School District #25.)¹⁶ Although the library was an association library, books were freely loaned to any person applying for them, provided the person was known to the librarian or was introduced by a member of the association.¹⁷

At the turn of the century, Merrick remained a farm community, differing from its neighbors only because wealthy city-dwellers found it an ideal place in which to build their summer homes. The year-round population was below 1,000. By 1910, the big farms were beginning to divide into smaller ones and small shops were appearing along Merrick Avenue, the Widmer Church Organ Works located in Merrick, and the population inched upward.¹⁸ “During the early years of the century, various real estate developers tried and failed to capitalize on Merrick’s reputation by attracting city-dwellers to buy vacation or year-round homes.”¹⁹ It wasn’t until the mid-twenties when the railroad was electrified and Sunrise Highway became Long Island’s first modern automobile artery, that new home construction caught on.²⁰

The population growth and economic development of the area is paralleled by its political and institutional development. Early in the century, in 1810, the towns of Hempstead, Oyster Bay, and North Hempstead contained considerably more than half of the total population of Queens, and by the end of the century, in 1899, the portion of Queens County not included in the incorporation of the greater city of New York became known as the County of Nassau.²¹ Similarly, whereas, in 1814, the Town of Hempstead divided into thirteen school districts, with Merrick, North Merrick, Bellmore, and North Bellmore all included in one district, subsequently, in 1901, the villages of Bellmore and Merrick separated into two separate districts, Bellmore becoming District #7 and the entire Merrick area becoming District #25 by order of the Nassau County School Commissioner.²² In August, 1921, Union Free School District #29 was established in North Merrick, which then had a total population of 1,400, including 280 children of school age, and in 1922, Union Free School District #25 was created in Merrick.²³ Consolidation, therefore, meant proliferation. And it might be noted that neither necessarily led to contentment.

According to Professor Alvin C.W. Bahnson, whose father was a member of the first School Board of District #29, and who subsequently became President of that Board, the Board was made up of definite cliques, and arguments were vociferous. He remembers that the State Police were often called upon to preserve law and order at School Board meetings, and the startling times when revolvers were drawn by Board members who wished to enforce their own point of view during heated discussions.²⁴

Since both of the districts then formed were elementary school districts, pupils desiring a secondary education were sent to high schools in nearby towns at the Union free School Districts’ expense. However, according to Bahnson, the School board did not encourage pupils to go on for a secondary education as they not only resented the expense but because many of the Board members were essentially anti-education. Since they had not received a secondary education themselves, their general outlook was that what had been good enough for them was good enough for their children. When someone suggested that space for a library be provided in a school, the reply from most

Board members was that there was a library in New York City that could be used should anyone feel it necessary.²⁵

As late as 1927 most of the residents of North Merrick still used kerosene lamps, and at about the same time that electricity wrought changes in the life of North Merokians, other factors also interfered with the heretofore unchanging scene. In some cases, the older families of the area began to die off without leaving any children, and those relatives who inherited the land sold it to builders without a backward glance. In many other instances estates were left to be divided up among so many children and/or grandchildren that the only practical way of dividing the inheritance was to sell the entire parcel. In this way, many of the original large tracts and estates were broken up and sold to real estate developers and builders, opening the way for the building boom which was soon to follow, much to the horror of the old-timers still left. Many of them still remember with nostalgia the sign which read "Peaceful North Merrick" which stood at the corner of Merrick and Camp Avenues.²⁶ This is the same corner that was to become the scene of a typical North Merrick argument some forty years later, when North Merrick Public Library attempted to locate there.

The Merricks were not the only communities faced with a sudden, rapid increase in population. The same thing was happening all over Nassau County, and as a result, one by one, the secondary schools in neighboring towns refused to accept Merrick and Bellmore students. Therefore, in 1934, Central High School District #3 was formed to provide a secondary education for the children residing in Bellmore, North Bellmore, Merrick, and North Merrick.²⁷

Despite the crash of 1929, which slowed progress in Merrick, as it did elsewhere, the Long Island Almanac and Year Book lists the 1930 census for Merrick as 4,368 (four times that of 1921) and of North Merrick as 1,572.²⁸ As educational facilities on Long Island grew to meet the growth in population, public library service usually followed. As late as the year 1930, it is estimated, nearly two-fifths of the American population were without access to any local public library service.²⁹ North Merokians were not among those unfortunates, for residents of North Merrick, if they so desired, were able to use the Merrick Library.

By 1940, Merrick and North Merrick had a combined population of 7,181, according to the population survey conducted by the Long Island Lighting Company.³⁰ The growth of the Merrick Library during most of this decade had been unspectacular. One important event, however, had taken place. At the annual meeting of School District #25, held on May 3, 1938, the Merrick Library changed from an Association library, dependent on its memberships' contributions for its sustenance, to a school district library supported and maintained by the citizens and taxpayers of the district. Despite the change in status, North Merokians were still granted cards in the Merrick Library although they did not support it tax-wise.³¹

As long as Mr. Richard P. Kent was alive, he was president of

the Board. He had started the Merrick Library with Edward C. Cammann and others, and he would have no stopping at south Merrick boundaries. He was adamant that all Merrick should be served, even though School District #25 had assumed its support. However, time and growth caught up with the facts and the Board saw differently after he was gone.³²

While North Merrick did not have as spectacular an increase in population, as had District #25 during the decades of the twenties and thirties, the community had grown enough to warrant an addition to its Camp Avenue School in 1939.³³

In the Merrick Library's Annual Report of 1943, Mrs. Evelyn MacFarland, Director, announced that "in order to extend service in these rationed times, neighborhood libraries and three week loan periods were offered to members living over one-half mile distant." Mrs. MacFarland's continued concern with libraryless North Merrick is again evident in her "Annual Report" of 1944 when she reported that during 1944, 350 books were stored in the North Merrick school library which was open one night a week for circulation with Mrs. Albert Settani, Roosevelt Library librarian, acting as volunteer librarian for the night. She noted that the arrangement was a temporary one in the nature of an experiment and that three hundred and fourteen books were circulated from this collection during the year.³⁴ These books were mostly fictional works although some nonfiction was included.³⁵

The war effort, with its restrictive rationing, had made travel to the Merrick Library especially difficult for residents of District #29. As a result, a representative of Union Free School District #29, North Merrick, attended a Merrick Library Board meeting on January 25, 1944 and stated his School Board's interest in having the Merrick Library establish a branch at one of their schools.³⁶ The Merrick Board of Trustees discussed this proposal at their next meeting held on February 21, 1944 and it was agreed to put the plan into action.³⁷ Books were collected and packed for shipment by Mrs. MacFarland in March. In the "Annual Report" of the Merrick Library dated December 31, 1944, Mrs. MacFarland wrote that "the branch library in North Merrick contributed little to the circulation for the year." In time, it would become obvious that this effort to provide service would be defeated by lack of patronage. An evening of service from 7:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M. once a week, plus a brief period after school, was just not enough time to encourage a continuing patronage.³⁸

The physical plant of the Merrick Library was already inadequate even before the population explosion began with the war's conclusion in 1945. However, since the overcrowding in the schools was an even more serious problem for the community, the Trustees decided to postpone a request for a new building for the Merrick Library.³⁹ The library, furthermore, continued to treat North Merokians as though they were tax paying members of District #25, as is witnessed by an article about the library appearing in the Nassau County Review on December 2, 1945, "Dale Dode, 12, pupil in the eighth grade

of the North Merrick School made the illustrations of the characters in children's books which adorned the walls of the children's room during the exhibit."⁴⁰ Furthermore, new books were continuously being sent to the branch library in the North Merrick school according to another article which appeared earlier that year in the Nassau County Review.⁴¹

On July 18, 1946 the Board of Regents, State of New York, granted the Merrick Library an Absolute Charter.⁴² Plans were underway to build a new edifice for the library which would serve as a Memorial in honor of the community's World War II Veterans.⁴³ Despite the free library service received by North Merrickians through the years and for reasons never publicly stated, the North Merrick Community Memorial Committee decided unanimously that rather than turn over its memorial funds (approximately \$2,500.00) to the Merrick project, they would go ahead with plans to build a small memorial park on the school grounds in North Merrick, with a flagpole and memorial plaque to honor North Merrick residents who were members of the armed forces during World War II.⁴⁴

Merrick Life, in an article entitled "Merrick Library is Community Cultural Center," noted that District #25 suddenly tripled its population in 1947.⁴⁵ Certainly, the library was hard pressed for space and budget monies and as a result decided to institute a charge of \$1.00 per family for all borrowers who resided outside the School District #25.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, the Trustees were concerned with the citizens of North Merrick. As a possible way to help them to obtain library services and at the same time supply additional funds to District #25, the Board decided to check into the possibility of entering into a contract with the North Merrick School District to supply them with library service. Mrs. MacFarland, Merrick Director, wrote to Mrs. Marion L. Moshier, Public Library Supervisor with the Division of Library Extension of the State of New York, asking for information on this subject.⁴⁷ Mrs. Moshier's reply of December 5, 1947 makes it apparent that other local libraries in Nassau County were having similar experiences and were also considering contracts for services with neighboring communities.

In her "Annual Report" for 1948, Mrs. MacFarland delineates the Merrick Board's thinking apropos the construction of an extension to the library building which had been begun two months earlier. Although the Board would have preferred a new building rather than an addition to the old one, the reason given for postponing the building of a new building was the rapid growth in population taking place in North Merrick, in District #29, which lay outside the library's taxing area.⁴⁸ The Nassau Review of August 8, 1948 pointed up this growth, noting that total real estate valuations in District #29 had gone from \$4,415,397.00 in 1943 to \$7,249,630.00 in 1948.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the Merrick Board noted District #29 had no community policy towards the Merrick Library, and the nonresident membership fees from District #29 was too small to materially aid the library. It was, therefore, the Board's decision to wait and see what the

new area in the North would develop in the way of a community policy toward the library. Obviously, District #25 could not also serve an area with an almost equal population without support from them. Thus, a wait and see attitude on the part of the Merrick Board.⁵⁰ In the meantime, the charge for library membership for families from School District #29 was increased to \$1.00 per adult and \$.50 per child, and by the end of the year, eight children and 105 adults from School District #29 had paid their fees and registered at the Merrick Library.⁵¹

In 1949, all persons living outside District #25 were required to pay an annual fee of \$1.00 each to register at the Merrick Library, and 189 North Merokians became members.⁵² However, this figure simply lists those who paid in order to circulate books, it takes no account of the students and adults who made use of the books within the confines of the library, or who used the reference services.

By 1950, the population explosion had reached unprecedented proportions. Because of the increasing incomes and the availability of government-backed financing arrangements, more and more families were able to move to the suburbs. The urge to own one's own house and lot holds a high priority for American families who are economically able to acquire them. This, furthermore, became even more compelling when school-age children were involved, and the five to eighteen age group represented an ever increasing fraction of the total population throughout the postwar period.⁵³ Many New York City migrants to Nassau County had as prime reasons for their move, a better educational system than they had left, better housing, and better outdoor recreational facilities. Whether or not their expectations were met usually depended upon the particular school district to which they moved. Some school districts planned well, while others fell behind and resorted to makeshift arrangements.

The descendants of the early settlers must have had mixed feelings about the influx of "foreigners," largely from New York City. Many of those who owned land and profited from its increased value, as the migration raised land values, probably felt adequately compensated for the intrusion on their territory, although they may have wished they had the foresight to wait longer for even greater rewards. Also, the migrants in their zeal for a good education for their children probably raised the quality of education available to many of the earlier settlers' children. Although many of the early residents may have viewed the better educational services with their attendant higher taxes as a disservice, the welfare of their children, at least, was enhanced by this change. In District #29, a second elementary school became a necessity and the North School was thus built in 1950.⁵⁴

While the Nassau County Data Book, prepared by the Long Island Planning Commission, lists the 1950 census for District #25 as 4,024 and of District #29 as 8,122,⁵⁵ the Long Island Lighting Company in their survey lists the total census of the two Merricks for that year as 16,041,⁵⁶ and the Merrick Library in its "Annual Report" of December 31, 1950 asserts that District #25 has a population of 10,000 and that District

#29 has a population of 9,000. Obviously, new residents were moving in at such a rate that it was impossible to obtain a truly accurate count. In any case, a minimum of 12,146 or a maximum of 19,000, depending upon whose figures you use, were drawing upon the inadequate library facilities in District #29. Of the 891 new borrowers who registered with the Merrick Library that year, 294 lived in District #29. There were all adults, paying a \$1.00 per year nonresident fee, as membership to children was now restricted to Merrick School District #29.⁵⁷ In Merrick, the rapid proliferation of schools made necessary by the growing population had placed a stumbling block before the Library Board; new schools had become the first order of business, delaying the building of a new library.

CHAPTER II
THE FIRST ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH A
LIBRARY IN NORTH MERRICK

In North Merrick the continuing population increases forced local civic leaders to begin thinking about the possible need for a new kindergarten through sixth grade school in the foreseeable future. One of the most influential of these local organizations was the Community Civic League. In January of 1951 the League voted unanimously to approve the proposed purchase of a third school site in North Merrick, eight acres to cost \$37,000. Further, the school committee of the League informed its membership that they thought this land could be purchased out of the surplus funds in the present school budget and would not require a new bond issue in the district.⁵⁸ On February 8, there was an open meeting at North School at which time it was pointed out that the tremendous growth of the district indicated that consideration should be given to acquiring the land to be used if the need arose.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, there was so little interest in this issue that a total of only thirty persons including the Board attended this meeting.⁶⁰

At the same time, the women of the community were also actively thinking about current problems and future plans, with particular regard to the children. The North Merrick PTA established a library committee at the beginning of the 1950-1951 school year. The members of this committee were Mrs. William Scott, now a resident of New Hampshire, Mrs. Julia Darrow (deceased), Mrs. Henrietta Nathanson, now a resident of District #25, and Chairman, Mrs. Joseph Cucinotta, the school librarian, presently retired and living in District #29. Mrs. Cucinotta, while the nominal head of the committee, actually served in an advisory capacity only. She was "official chairlady" but was too busy in her role as school librarian to do much of the legwork. She did give her professional advice when it was needed, however, and allowed her name to be used. In actuality, it was Mrs. Nathanson, whose husband, Arthur L. Nathanson, was a member of the School Board, and who therefore, preferred to remain out of the limelight in school matters, who chaired the committee.⁶¹

The purpose of the committee was to inquire into the question of whether or not a public library should be established in North Merrick. They conducted an informal survey and discovered that a large number of residents had long felt the need for a library in a place more accessible to them than the Merrick Library. Although the Merrick Library, supported by the residents of District #25, permitted the North Merrickians to become members upon payment of any annual \$1.00 fee, North Merrick now had a larger population than District #25, but because of the inaccessibility of the Merrick Library, only 200 of its 10,000 population had availed themselves of the membership offered to

them. While a few of the children were transported to story hours and special exhibits, it was almost impossible for most of the children or young adults to use its facilities readily. This was due to the excessive distance from their homes, and the hazards of crossing the railroad tracks and heavily trafficked Sunrise Highway.⁶² The idea of a library in North Merrick, therefore, was generally acceptable in the opinion of the committee.

The committee did, therefore, make inquiries to the Public Libraries Extension Division of the State Department of Education as to what procedures were necessary in the establishment of a public library. Mr. Jack Spear, State Supervisor, spent an afternoon with the committee, plus an interested group of local women, and explained the details of what was required. Following that, the committee visited all the libraries in the surrounding communities, consulting with local directors and studying plans.

Then, in compliance with Education Law #255, a library proposal petition of forty-seven names was presented to the Board of Education of Union Free School District #29 by Mrs. Cucinotta at a regular meeting of the School Board held on March 12, 1951. A proposed slate of five trustees was also presented. This petition was accepted by Mr. Reid A. Curtis, President of the Board. After a lengthy discussion of the matter, Mr. Arthur Nathanson moved that the Board "make publication as required by law advising the people of this district of the establishment of the library which will be submitted for their determination at the annual meeting".⁶³ The motion was seconded and then was amended to read that it was agreed to have the library committee arrange for the Board to meet with Mr. Spear within the next ten days so that they could discuss legal matters with him, and that they would then proceed accordingly.⁶⁴

On March 15, Merrick Life announced that a proposal to establish a library would be presented to the voters of District #29 at the annual meeting in May and that a slate of five trustees would be presented also at that time.⁶⁵ On page eleven of the same issue in "Letters to the Editor," a letter signed by the Library Committee of North Merrick after stating the initial purpose of the committee, the survey of public regarding the library, the geographic problems which existed for North Merokians who desired to use the Merrick Library, went on to state that the

...enormous growth of North Merrick has made it necessary for the community to build a new school and a new church, but for those people who are out of school and still seeking knowledge, the district should provide a library...⁶⁶

The committee requested comments, questions, and help.

On April 5, Merrick Life wrote that the voters of District #29 voted for the spare school site, and that 123 ballots were cast for acquiring it while thirty-one were in opposition.⁶⁷ The library committee felt that this vote was an indication of the mood of the community and were most optimistic. In the same issue on page ten, the "Legal Notices" bore an announcement of the annual school meeting of Union Free School District #29 to be held on May 1, 1951 at which time school taxes would be discussed as would the proposition to establish a public library. The voting would take place the following day, May 2, polls to be open from 6:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M.⁶⁸

It was an event-filled week for the members of the library committee. On April 9 at the regular school board meeting, Mr. Curtis read to the Board the proposed library budget which had been sent to him a few days previously. A discussion followed with

Mr. Frank Visone outlining the procedures it would be necessary to take at the meeting on May 1. Mr. Nathanson suggested a library supplement as part of the School Board's budget booklet.⁶⁹ Earlier in the week, at the regular monthly meeting of the Community Civic League, the question of the proposed library for North Merrick was taken up, and after considerable discussion it was decided that the association would like to learn more about the cost and plans for the contemplated structure before going on record in favor of it.⁷⁰

On April 11 at the regular meeting of the North Merrick PTA, the 200 members present unanimously went on record as favoring the new library after hearing a report by Mrs. William Scott on the work done by the library committee.⁷¹

On April 12, Merrick Life carried the completed library proposals on its front page. The library committee of PTA reminded those who were not familiar with it, of Education Law #225 which decrees that

...by majority vote at any election or at a meeting of the electors duly held, any school district...may establish a public library with or without branches, and may raise money by tax to equip and maintain...to provide a building...may acquire property...whenever 25 taxpayers shall so petition... the question of providing library facilities shall be voted on at the next election or meeting...providing that due public notice of the proposed action shall be given.⁷²

The committee specifically proposed that a library be established, that the sum of \$26,000 be appropriated to operate it, and that five trustees should be elected.⁷³ The \$26,000 figure for operating the library was broken down as follows:⁷⁴

Books, periodicals, and newspapers	\$3,500.
Library equipment	2,500.
Maintenance: building and grounds	2,120.
Retirement costs	380.
Janitorial services	500.
Salaries: librarian and clerical	3,800.
Land	3,200.
Building	10,000.

The committee further proposed the following names for trustees: Dr. George B. Tulloch, Mr. Frederick E. Beck, Mrs. Joseph Cucinotta, Mr. Edwin F. Van Rees, and Mrs. William D. Scott. In closing, the article urged all qualified voters to attend the meeting on May 1. It reminded them that the establishment of the library would not only mean having a cultural center in the community, but would eliminate the necessity of "having our young people cross the Long Island Railroad tracks and Sunrise Highway when they wish to go to the library on their bicycles."⁷⁵

On April 18, Mr. Spear wrote to Mrs. Cucinotta acknowledging receipt of a copy of the notice from the newspaper. He noted that "the budget is even better than he hoped for" and advised that the only issue to appear on the May ballot should be the proposal to "establish a library." Then, presuming the voters approved the establishment, the next

step was to vote for the trustees and the budget, probably at the June meeting. Later, he concluded, approval on a ballot for the site selected would be necessary.⁷⁶

The April 26 issue of Merrick Life brought the committee both support and disappointment. The Editorial

...strongly urges that all district #29 voters approve the library expenditure. It will be a great asset to our community at very small cost.

It reminded the voters that while registration was necessary in District #25, none was necessary to vote in District #29.⁷⁷

The lead article on the same page noted that the Community Civic League, having met and after having heard a discussion of the library proposal from Mrs. William Scott, moved that it could not support the proposition at this time in view of the possible future tax burden the district faced in connection with the school building program of Central High School District #3, and that more consideration should be given to the possibility of establishing a joint library district with School District #25 in Merrick.⁷⁸ It should be noted that the building program of Central High School District #3 was a very controversial political issue at that time.

In "Letters to the Editor" of the same issue, Mr. J. Philip Anderogg suggested that the Community Civic League was

...straining at the gnat while swallowing a camel...a proposal for \$26,000 for a library is condemned as it will wear out the temper of the taxpayers who are now being asked to underwrite the construction of 2 junior high schools at an expense of 5 to 6 million dollars...I will vote for the library and ask that the school budget be cut by \$26,000.⁷⁹

On page twelve there is yet another article pertinent to the library issue. It is noted that local tax experts have determined that there may not be a tax rate increase in 1951-1952 as the increase in state aid coupled with the increase in assessed property valuation may make it possible to keep the present tax rate, depending upon the exact amount of increase to District #29's share of Central #3's budget, which is not yet known, will be.⁸⁰

The library committee spent the week distributing brochures throughout the community. These leaflets were made up in the form of questions and answers. The first query was "Why not affiliate with UFSD #25?" The legal barriers to this union making it a virtual impossibility are explained in the reply. The second question asks how adequate a building is planned for \$10,000. The answer that an architect has advised the committee that an attractive building 25' x 40' of cinder block with stucco finish, designed for the future addition of wings could be erected for this sum. The final question asks where the suggested site is located. The plot chosen by the committee and secured with a binder was located at the corner of Merrick and Whaleneck Avenues with an 118' frontage on Merrick and 82' on Whaleneck Avenue and is 170' deep. This land was almost the exact geographic center of the district and within walking distance of the North Merrick School. Furthermore, it was on a direct route between the northern and southern parts of the district and the asking price was considered a fair one.⁸¹

The annual taxpayers meeting of the UFSD #29 was held on Tuesday, May 1, 1951 in the auditorium of the school at Merrick and Camp Avenues. Mr. Curtis, School

Board President was elected chairman of the meeting. The Call of the Meeting was read by the Clerk stating receipt of affidavit of publication in Merrick Life pursuant to law. Tellers were selected. The qualifications of a voter were read by the Clerk, followed by the reading of the proposed budget items by Mr. Curtis.⁸² Mrs. Scott spoke at length to the exceptionally small turnout⁸³ about the library proposition. Mrs. Scott, seconded by Mrs. Cucinott moved that a free public library be established in District #29. After a general discussion, the question was moved and the voting took place by secret ballot. The total votes were 342. The Yes votes totaled 100, the Noes 242, the proposition was defeated.⁸⁴ The committee, confident of victory until the last moment, was later told that it was an inopportune time to ask for tax money; that it had not proposed a budget sufficiently large to arouse public pride; that a more substantial building would probably have interested more voters, and that a regular budget meeting was a poor time to ask for monies for special purposes.⁸⁵

CHAPTER III

THE SECOND LIBRARY PROPOSAL

In 1952, 354 North Merricks joined the Merrick Library, the population of both Merricks was 19,015 according to the Long Island Lighting Company,⁸⁶ and the population of District #25 is variously listed as approximately 10,000⁸⁷ and approximately 11,000,⁸⁸ making the North Merrick population approximately 8,000 or 9,000. In any case, the population in both the Merricks continued to rise and in 1953 North Merrick build the Old Mill Road School, which it expanded in 1956 when the Meadowbrook Road School was also built.⁸⁹ On September 6, 1956 Merrick Life headlined a story, "Merrick Library Raises its Fee for Non-residents." The annual fee to nonresident adults went up from \$2.00 to \$4.00 and for children from \$1.00 to \$2.00.⁹⁰

Despite the addition of a second wing to the library building, severe overcrowding made conditions poor at the Merrick Library. In December of 1956, an open meeting was held at the Camp Avenue School in North Merrick to discuss the public library situation in Merrick, and William Lewi was named temporary chairman of a District #29 Library Committee. Both Mrs. Evelyn MacFarland of the Merrick Library and Mrs. Wilfred Morin, Library Consultant of the New York State Department of Education answered questions from the floor and described the manner in which libraries had been organized in other Nassau school districts. It was noted that according to state law, a public library district may be superimposed on a school district and the mechanism of the School Board is used to bring the matter before the voters of the district, along with the allocation of funds for the library and the election of library trustees.⁹¹

The committee discussed the alternative possibility of a "bookmobile," and decided against it because an adequate one would cost in the vicinity of \$18,000. They also noted that the formerly discussed possibility of a merger with District #25 was legally impossible.⁹² The only other viable alternative, then, was to request the Merrick Library Board to service the north area for an annual fee. If they would agree to do so, however, the continuance of the arrangement as well as the amount of the annual fee would have to be voted upon at each annual District #29 budget meeting.⁹³

On January 26, 1957, Merrick Life notes that the North Merrick Library Committee met and chose a permanent chairman and committee heads in order to begin preparing a proposal to be presented to District #29 taxpayers at the annual budget meeting in May.⁹⁴

William Lewi was chosen as permanent chairman and Mrs. Joseph Beck was named secretary. Mrs. Howard Phanstiel will head the publicity and

public relations committees; John Lange and Irving Lieberman will study cost and budgeting. Mrs. Arthur Nathanson and Mrs. Edward Kayatt will survey libraries in adjacent communities. Dr. Stanley Erlits and Mrs. Marcia Waters were chosen to direct a group studying existing library facilities in District #29 schools. Patricia Vecchione's sub-committee was assigned to present choices of sites and possible locations for the library. Mrs. David Rubin will direct a liaison committee to maintain contact with organized community groups. Marvin Christenfeld was placed in charge of the legal committee.⁹⁵

Following the meeting, a delegation of committee members went before the District #29 School Board to make a formal announcement of the existence of the committee and to acquaint the Board, and the many observers from local civic organizations at the meeting, with its intended program.⁹⁶

An article on the same page of Merrick Life advised its readers that William Lewi had invited all interested persons and organization representatives to attend the next meeting of the North Merrick Library Committee on January 28 at the Camp Avenue School.⁹⁷ A few days later, the Library Committee received its first formal endorsement. At a general membership meeting, the Camp Avenue PTA heard a report from the library committee given by Mrs. Arthur Nathanson and voted to endorse plans for the library.⁹⁸

At the committee's January 28 meeting, Mr. Henry J. Shearhouse, representative of the Library Division of the New York State Department of Education, gave committee members information on the extent to which the state would cooperate with new libraries, the legal restrictions involved, and the optimum library conditions for a community the size of North Merrick. Mrs. Arthur Nathanson, Mrs. Edward Kayatt, and Mrs. Irwin Gordon submitted reports on libraries in the neighboring communities of Seaford, Massapequa, and North Bellmore. These reports included a description of how they were started, the initial outlay needed to establish them, and their annual operating cost. Mrs. Nathanson, chairlady of the Survey Committee, expressed the hope that these reports would give the residents of North Merrick a fair idea of what similar communities were willing and able to set aside for local library expenditures.⁹⁹

During the following week, the committee met in executive session, and after investigating and evaluating all the other possibilities, decided to present the District #29 taxpayers with a proposal for a separate North Merrick Library.¹⁰⁰ Mr. William Lewi, chairman, gave the following reasons for this decision:

Many persons have suggested to the committee that it investigate the possibility of merging with Merrick, but after consulting with Mrs. Wilfred Morin and Henry G. Shearhouse, library representatives from the New York State Department of Education, we found that such a merger would be legally impossible because it would involve the union of 2 separate school districts, each one a municipality with the power to levy taxes and allocate funds. In these cases the public library is superimposed on the school district and it follows that you cannot merge one without the other.¹⁰¹

He went on to explain that District #29 could ask District #25 to service North Merrick for an annual fee but that a contract such as this and the amount of annual expenditure would have to be voted upon at each school district budget meeting. It was, therefore, the opinion of the Library Lommittee that there would be a small saving at best to the North Merrick taxpayer under such an arrangement since District #25 would still have to charge them for all the costs of establishing a branch library, for buying additional books, cataloging and processing them, and paying for the staff needed to operate the library. Mrs. Morin and Mr. Shearhouse concluded that the only savings would be in being able to process the books at a cheaper rate in the “main branch.” They also indicated that North Merrick would be eligible for state assistance if they had a separate library. In this case, the state would loan the district 10,000 books on a six month basis with bi-annual extensions. The books would be selected by a qualified librarian appointed by the elected trustees.¹⁰² Mr. Lewi pointed out that the establishment of a library district and the election of a library district and the election of trustees would have to precede either the contractual agreement with another library or the establishment of a separate one in North Merrick.¹⁰³

Merrick Life of February 7 printed a “Letter to the Editor” signed by Marjorie Miller in which she exhorts everyone in North Merrick to support the drive for a community library. She felt that it was a shame that a community the size of North Merrick should be lacking such a basic cultural feature.

As the mother of a pre-schooler without a car, I need a library I can walk to...by evening, I have neither the inclination nor energy to make the trip to the Merrick Library. In the meantime...my neighbors and myself subscribe to costly book clubs and magazines in order to obtain current reading material.¹⁰⁴

On February 11 at the North Merrick Library Committee meeting, Mrs. Martin Waters and Dr. Stanley Erlitz submitted a report on library facilities currently available to District #29 residents. It showed that children of the district could use the Camp Avenue School library with 4,500 books; the Old Mill Road School library, 350 books; and the North School with 3,300 books but that these were all curriculum books, and further, that at Old Mill Road the books were for teachers to use within the classrooms only. At Camp Avenue the library was open only during school hours and Old Mill Road was “open when necessary.” Students from the Merrick Avenue Junior High School are permitted to use the North School library when it is open, from 12:30 P.M. through 6:00 P.M.. The 4,000 books of the junior high library were used to meet the demands of 1,400 students who received library passes according to scholarship ratings. Mephram High School’s 7,000 books are of high school level and serve 1,600 students from 8:15 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. Adults from North Merrick can pay \$4.00 annually at the Merrick Library or pay varying fees at Freeport, East Meadow, or North Bellmore.¹⁰⁵

On February 12, Marvin Christenfeld wrote to the Board of Education of District #29 inquiring as to the exact procedure necessary for having a proposition to establish a library district brought before the next budget meeting. He listed fifteen specific questions, among them whether or not the establishment of the district, the budget, and the trustees can be voted upon separately, and if so, on separate nights; if a new building

and the purchase of land can be voted into the budget or if a referendum must be held; who may vote at a budget meeting and what percentage is needed to carry the vote; if a library building can be constructed as part of a school so that state aid may be obtained; if an existing school library can be made into a public library; and finally he asks whether or not a school district could sell or give property which it owns for a library.¹⁰⁶ The Board of Education advised him that the establishment and the budget can be done as one; the trustees must be voted upon separately; that they can be voted upon on separate nights; that a new building and purchase of land can be voted into the budget unless bonds are to be issued; that any qualified voter of the School District could vote and that a majority is a decision; that a library could be constructed as part of a school building; that an existing school library could be expanded into a public library; and that a school district could give or sell property to a library district if voted upon and accepted by the voters of the district.¹⁰⁷

Merrick Life's issue of February 21, 1957 headlined the committee's decision to place a proposal for a separate library district at a cost of less than 20 cents per \$100.00 of assessed valuation before the voters at the May budget meeting. This figure was arrived at after consultation with Mrs. MacFarland of the Merrick Library, comparison studies of budget in surrounding communities, and estimates from Remington Rand on the cost of equipment. The figure also included the cost of either renting space or building a library that the state considered adequate. Mr. Lewi announced that the tentative budget for the first year would be \$31,830 to \$38,500. The final budget figure would be available when the committee decided it was getting the "best library facilities at the least cost."¹⁰⁸

In "Letters to the Editor," Mrs. Martin Fleischer, President of the Camp Avenue PTA, urged all North Merrick residents to vote for the library as both adults and children need it for diversion, entertainment, and relaxation as well as for reference by both children and adults and, finally, for adult education.¹⁰⁹

During the last week of February, Mrs. Patricia Vecchione, investigating prospective locations for the library, reported that a number of persons had suggested the location of the former Hills Supermarket site but that the committee had investigated same and had decided that it was not centrally enough located. She announced that at this point the committee would prefer to rent rather than build should this prove economically sound.¹¹⁰

The February 28 issue of Merrick Life contained a "Letter to the Editor" written by William Lewi, chairman of the North Merrick Library Committee thanking the Editor for his support and his generous offer to collect and store books for the future North Merrick Public Library.¹¹¹

Early in March the committee took an option on a site at Merrick Avenue and Cedar Street. This location had a frontage of 100 feet on one street and 150 feet on the other. It was almost the exact geographical center of North Merrick and the owner cooperated with the committee by not requiring any down payment. The site was to cost the very modest sum of \$10,500 pending the outcome of the vote.¹¹² The committee announced that they proposed to erect a building to cost \$100,000.00. The cost to the voters the first year would be \$24,000 which would mean an increase in the tax rate of 12 cents per \$100 of valuation, or \$6.00 per average home per year. The \$24,000 would include all costs for the year including operating expenses and the payments on a bond

issue. Acting chairman John Lange, said that the reason for the change in opinion regarding rental versus purchase was due to the fact that the committee found that the cost differential would be negligible, and the proposed building would accommodate a reading area and space for 40,000 books which was the recommended ultimate size for the district's present and future needs.¹¹³

At this point, the "Letters to the Editor" began to express the opposition's point of view. A Mr. Frank Nausbaum still urged consolidation with Merrick "which is also overcrowded. Consolidation would mean that both areas can have adequate facilities rather than have two libraries, both with shortcomings." "Furthermore," he argued, "a library is only convenient to that small proportion of people who live within 6 to 8 blocks from it. Farther than that, one must use a car so it does not really matter just how much farther it is."¹¹⁴ A Mrs. P. Rosen disagreed. With children in both the Camp Avenue and Merrick Avenue Junior High Schools, she was very much aware of the lack of facilities for them and was pleased to see a concrete movement toward a library.¹¹⁵

The following week's issue of Merrick Life carried William Lewi's reply to Mr. Nausbaum in which he compared the proposed North Merrick Library with the existing one in Merrick. The Merrick Library has a total floor space of 2,200 square feet; North Merrick proposed 5,000 square feet. Merrick has 20,000 books; North Merrick proposed to start with 19,000 books and bring the collection up to a total of 40,000, as the State Library Division advised that 40,000 books were adequate reading facilities for a population of 15,000. Mr. Lewi pointed out that the proposed site was not only in the exact geographic center of the district but was also within easy walking distance of three public schools, the junior high school, and the two high schools. Furthermore, he stated that combining with Merrick is against the law as District #25 and District #29 cannot be joined into one school district or into one library district. The Merrick Library, he advised Mr. Nausbaum, had a registration of 500 from North Merrick out of a total registration of 4,950. He closed with an inquiry as to whether this meant that the people of North Merrick were only one-tenth as literate as those of South Merrick.¹¹⁶

In the meantime, Marvin Christenfeld had written to the Board of Education advising that the committee preferred that May 15 be set as the date for bringing the library proposition to the taxpayers for a vote. He further requested that the following items be voted upon: the establishment of a Public Library, the election of trustees, the purchase of a land site for \$10,500, and the erection of a building through a bond issue that will include the cost of the land. He suggested that the first item might include the first annual budget of \$24,000 and inquired as to whether a bond issue required a two-thirds majority for passage.¹¹⁷

Mr. Frank Visone, answering for the Board of Education, advised that his source of information was Mr. Jehu of Mr. Brind's office, legal department of the Board of Education in Albany. He informed Mr. Christenfeld that a public library can be established by a majority vote at any election, that the establishment, election of trustees, and purchase of land may be combined in one proposition; and that the first annual budget may be inserted in the budget under a separate proposition which would condition this item upon the successful subsequent adoption of a proposition to establish a library. He advised that the bond issue would require only a majority vote since the total indebtedness would be less than 10 percent of the assessed valuation.¹¹⁸ On March 18, Marvin Christenfeld sent the Board of Education petitions consisting of forty-one pages

and approximately 700 names formally requesting establishment of a library and the purchase of land and erection of a library building.

By March 21 Merrick Life had advised the residents of the Merricks of the “North Merrick library vote set for May 15 election.” The proposal would include the establishment of a library district, election of trustees, a first annual budget, and a bond issue to cover cost of a site and building.¹¹⁹ Mr. Lewi is quoted as explaining that the committee felt that the taxpayers would have an opportunity to see a more complete tax picture by having the vote on the 15th instead of at the annual budget meeting on May 7. A first year increase of \$6.00 per average North Merrick home is anticipated.¹²⁰ The proposed library tax of 12 cents per \$100 assessment would appear on tax bills as part of the school tax but the money allocated to library expenditures would subsequently be turned over to the library trustees by the district treasurer. The first year’s budget included monies for the purchase of 4,000 books. These, plus the 10,000 to 15,000 more that could be borrowed from the state library would provide an adequate nucleus for a North Merrick library.¹²¹ Persons interested in submitting their names for the Board of Trustees for the Library Board of District #29 were asked to submit petitions with the signatures of twenty-five qualified voters to the district clerk.¹²² An announcement in the same issue advised that the North Merrick PTA had voted to endorse the program of the library committee.¹²³

The Editorial in this issue is entitled, “Fertile soil for Errors” and reveals that all was not going as well beneath the surface as would appear from the endorsements and co-operation only received by the committee up to this point:

Everything with regard to budgets and seats to be filled in District #25 and #29 seems to be going routinely but not many people will campaign openly against the library, yet there is some pretty determined opposition to it and it seems to come from determined sources. We resolve that Merrick wash its dirty linen in public. We heard that when the committee working for the library had requested permission to distribute pamphlet material through the Merrick Avenue Junior High School...Permission was denied and we further heard that this was because Mr. Sanford Calhoun, the high school district principal was against the library. We checked and found that the facts are that the request was passed on to the school board which concluded that the library committee is actually an “extra school group” and should it be allowed to use the school as a distribution point, the opponents of the library could reasonably demand that anti-library literature be distributed through the school too. For this reason the board decided to say “no,” perhaps regretfully, perhaps not, to the committee.

How many hushed dawns have been passed along Merrick over this? And what a beautiful sound...if they had all been lumped together and expressed publicly.¹²⁴

On April 8 Marvin Christenfeld appeared before the Board of Education on behalf of the Library Committee and advised that several people had asked the committee

whether the proposed library could be handled as a joint project by North Merrick and Merrick. He said several letters had been written to Dr. Jahu in Albany to obtain a ruling on this, but no reply had been received, and the Library Committee was anxious to have an answer on official letterhead stating the exact ruling on this matter so that it would be shown to the people.¹²⁵

Mr. Visone advised Mr. Christenfeld that he would obtain an official ruling on this in writing and that he would also handle the necessary details in connection with the proposition for the erection of a library. The Board unanimously approved a motion made by Mrs. Scott and seconded by Mrs. Clough that a Special Meeting of the voters of UFSD #29 be held on May 15, 1957 from 2:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M. at which time the library proposition in its entirety would be submitted.¹²⁶

In the beginning of April the Committee began to publicize the fact that they had arranged to broadcast a panel discussion regarding the library proposal on WKIT on Saturday, May 11 from 10:15 A.M. to 10:30 A.M. John Frogge, newsman from WKIT was to act as moderator and four members of the committee would participate. The committee urged that any person who had questions concerning the library that they wanted answered on the air, mail their queries to Mrs. Howard Phanstiel.¹²⁷

With hindsight, one can begin to see the pattern of opposition to the library appear, although some of it was not obvious to the committee at that time. The aircraft plants, upon whom many North Merokians depended either directly or indirectly for their living, were beginning to lay off employees.¹²⁸ At the same time, salary increments were given to the teachers in districts #25 and #29 and by April 18, the Central #3 teachers were voicing their dissatisfaction in print and asking the voters to support a new salary schedule for them also, as they were unhappy with the 1957-1958 schedule adopted by the Board of Central #3.¹²⁹

Some of the Roman Catholic Church members of the community were beginning to feel an additional economic squeeze. Those parents who had desired parochial school educations for their children had traditionally sent them into Merrick to the Cure of Ars School, and had financially supported that school. Now, with the new Sacred Heart Church in North Merrick, plans for a new parochial school affiliated with that church were being made. This meant that North Merrick parishioners were going to be called upon to build and support this new parochial school, rather than to continue to be able to send their children to the established Cure of Ars in Merrick. Thus, while Father Jeremiah Reilly of Sacred Heart was very anxious to see the new library established and was particularly pleased about its proposed location directly across from the church, it was rumored that many of his parishioners were anxious about the financial drain of supporting two new institutions at once.

The committee was working very hard to obtain the cooperation of all the local religious and civic organizations. On April 10, the three PTAs of North Merrick met jointly and William Lewi explained the details of the proposed library to the membership.¹³⁰ Church groups were called upon and cooperation was promised by their religious leaders.¹³¹ At the same time, the necessary legal steps were being taken. Public notice of the Special Meeting was carried in Merrick Life on April 18.¹³²

One of the most active groups at this point was the one that handles publicity. On April 25, in an open letter in Merrick Life signed by Josephine Phanstiel, it is possible to

see the honest confusion this committee was trying to combat on the one hand, and the innuendo and name-calling it was attempting to handle on the other hand:

As publicity chairman, I recently solicited questions concerning the proposed library to be included in a radio script for a program on May 11th. The response indicated a genuine confusion in the minds of a few people and something a little harder to define in the minds of several others. I choose to talk to both groups...

The first year's budget will be \$23,500. The Bond Issue will be \$127,000.00. Both figures appear in the legal notice in Merrick Life. A majority vote will mean a cost of 12 cents per \$100 for the first year, or \$6.00 per average homeowner. The projected cost for the second year is listed at \$8.00 per homeowner. This figure is expected to be fairly stable. The first year's budget is not a characteristic one but since the library budget is voted annually, it will be the taxpayer himself who will decide if library taxes will go up or down. The established \$6.00-\$8.00 annual cost will cover interest and amortization of the bond issue in addition to operating expenses.

In answer to other questions. One day the Parent Education Chairman of the Camp Avenue PTA received 400 responses to questionnaires indicating that 400 persons were interested in talking about library facilities in North Merrick. A meeting with the State Library Consultant as guest speaker was arranged. After that meeting, the Library Committee was formed. We are not a "pressure group." We are now really "a certain group of persons who call themselves the North Merrick Library Committee." We were a group of strangers who came together because we had an interest in common—a desire to investigate the possibility for library facilities in our community. We are volunteer workers; a registered architect, a lawyer, an engineer who runs his company, a cost analyst who is well-paid to save his company money, an insurance consultant, a few trained educators, and other persons long associated with Merrick civic projects...

To the best of my knowledge nobody from the committee has any money invested in the proposed library except that which he has donated so that a printed brochure could be delivered to every family in North Merrick before the vote on May 15th...The cost of labor and paper involved in sending leaflets have been absorbed by the district #29 PTAs...the District School Board is not responsible for making up the library budget...we will send our representative to any organization or interested group desiring additional information.

If the library proposal passes, hiring an architect and supervising building details rests with the school board. The library committee is not spending "the confused taxpayer's money" and never will. Library funds will be administered by a board of library trustees elected by the voters of the district.

Let's stay with the issue. Let those opposed stand up and shout, not whisper, but shout, "I'm paying as much in taxes as I can possibly afford"... Let the will of the majority decide the issue for us without any of the petty community squabbling which is now receiving so much publicity in the Long Island daily papers.¹³³

This long letter speaks for itself, but its appearance indicated the strong feelings behind the ridiculous accusations, the one based upon the implied charge that anyone who would want to read or spread knowledge must be a communist, and the other that anyone who donated free time and energy must have an ulterior purpose.

Despite the whispered name-calling, by May 2 eight candidates filed for trusteeship of the proposed library: Mrs. Marvin Waters, Marvin Christenfeld, John Lange, Albert J. Lieberman, Harris Lefrak, John Boblander, Martin Fleischer, and John Zimmerman.¹³⁴ The following week, Raymond Concannon, Thomas J. Fitzgerald, and Maurice McCollum also became candidates.¹³⁵

The temper of the community was volatile. The School Board elections in the Merricks were most acrimonious, as is witnessed by "Letters to the Editor in Merrick Life which constantly refer to "mud slinging," "do-gooders," and voting "to prevent a minority from electing an unqualified candidate." Further, the letters were filled with complaints about school taxes going up in most Nassau communities; and although the voters of North Merrick had been told that if they voted for the entire school construction program in November, that State Aid would pay enough so that there would be no increase in taxes, the rumor was evidently rife that taxes would go up and that they had been hoodwinked.

Nevertheless, only sixty people voted at the annual budget meeting in North Merrick on May 7.¹³⁶ One week later, on May 15, 2,351 residents went to the polls to express themselves as to whether or not the district would have a library. Two thousand four hundred fifty-five ballots were used, 100 of them were voided, and four lost, making a total of 2,351 cast, certified by the tellers and recorded by the District Clerk. Ballots in favor of the library numbered 546, while 1,805 were cast opposed to the library. Since the proposition was defeated, the votes cast for the trustees were not counted.¹³⁷ The proposition was defeated by more than a three to one vote. Since no prior registration was required, and while there were several groups working for the proposal and several against it, the size of the vote appeared to be a surprise to most of those involved in the pre-election activities, especially when one considers that a scant three score voters turned out to approve the North Merrick School District Budget and less than 200 residents cast votes in the election of the school trustees.¹³⁸

A committee member recalls standing in front of the polling place with one of the old-time residents who, after observing the traffic for awhile informed him, "You are going to lose by two to one... all the clam-diggers are coming out." The old-timer was right about his fellow old-timers—the "clam diggers."

William Lewi, committee chairman, believes that it was a matter of economics; that the defeat was a result of the simple fact that it was cheaper to obtain a membership at Freeport or Merrick than to build a library in North Merrick. He recalls that his committee was an excellent one, and that all the local religious organizations officially supported the committee as did all the civic groups with only one exception.¹³⁹ (One

local civic organization did send out post cards to the entire community about a week before the vote asking the electorate to defeat the proposition.)

Harris Lefrak feels that the tax increase was simply too large for the voters to accept at that particular time when many incomes in this area were a little shaky. Also, despite the fact that the library property was in the exact center of the district and could be obtained at a very advantageous price, the residents of the Wenshaw Park area of North Merrick felt that it was not convenient for their children, as it would be necessary for Wenshaw Park residents to cross main thoroughfares in order to get to the library. Further, he feels, in retrospect, that the School Board of that time did not help by being so passive in the entire matter. Their attitudes of let the voters decide, and complete insistence on noninvolvement almost seemed to infer disinterest.¹⁴⁰

Merrick Life commented in its issue of June 24 on the defeat. The editors did not believe that it was the \$6.00 per year that caused it, for if the residents of the district were so concerned about \$6.00 per year, two hundred of them could have done anything they wanted to do about it at the School Board budget meeting. They went on to say that there are many reasons for defeating library proposals. For one thing,

...they aren't sold the way public relations magnates sell public schools, by listing the financial returns of a good education...as a means to two cars and a healthy bank account, as a way to outsmart the Russians. Library proposals don't seem to have caught on. Now we are thinking that if we were to organize a campaign to sell libraries, we'd come up with a statistic that real estate values go up when there's a library district surrounding the house; that in Quedunk, joovnile-dalinkwancy [sic] decreased a significant percentage after the town built a library, that people started cleaning up their streets, attending school board meetings... We would say that the President likes libraries and we'd ask people if they hadn't stopped in front of the big lions on Fifth Avenue and thought how nice it would be to have something like that back home.

We might sneak in a few clichés like...a library is a legacy that is demanded of the human race. It's one of the few ways there is to hand down information from one generation to the next...

We would say that about every insight that man has ever had and believe worth preserving has been recorded in books, and books are found in libraries.

After we'd have said all that, the library proposal would probably have been defeated anyway.¹⁴¹

A "Letter to the Editor" the following week, signed by Mrs. E. Parker Yutzler, congratulates the editor on his views as expressed in the editorial, and attempts to describe the reasons for the defeat, while agreeing with the editor that it was not the \$6.00 per year that was the real issue. Mrs. Yutzler feels that those who could least afford it probably voted favorably, "since books and magazines are wonderful substitutes for luxuries some people cannot afford." Perhaps, she suggests, it was just the wrong season, considering the federal taxes, the state taxes, and the school taxes. She notes that it

would have cost the taxpayer 50 cents per month which could be waived by the elimination of a few hundred unnecessary calories that broaden the waist but not the mind, the turning off of an unnecessary light, etc. Perhaps, she suggests “the committee could have gone from door to door and said, ‘For 1.7 cents per day you and everyone in your home can have access to hundreds of books and magazines.’” She goes on to ask that those who voted against the proposal should write in stating their reasons as it would be most helpful to hear from them since it might then be possible for the two groups to join forces with plans that were altered or revised.¹⁴² No one replied to Mrs. Yutzler, and an active proponent of the library proposal when contacted said, “there are no present plans for bringing the proposal up for another vote.”¹⁴³

CHAPTER IV

THE SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN TO ESTABLISH A LIBRARY

In 1958, Len Kirsch, whose capabilities in both public relations and organizational administration were to make a victorious library proposal possible some six years later, was still a resident of West Hempstead. Would-be library patrons of North Merrick still had no library of their own and so 440 of them paid an annual fee of \$4.00 to become nonresident members of the Merrick Library.¹⁴⁴ By 1959, overcrowding in the library reached such proportions that the Library Board notified the School Board of District #25 of this situation many times during the course of the year. Finally, a joint meeting of the District #25 School Board and the Merrick Library Board was held on October 20, 1959, and the poor conditions in the library were discussed as well as the cost of services to members as well as non-residents.¹⁴⁵ A probable result of this meeting was the Board's decision, once again, to stop issuing children's cards to nonresidents beginning January 1, 1960.¹⁴⁶

The following year, card holders outside of District #25 were required to pay a \$5.00 annual fee in order to belong to the Merrick Library and a committee for a New Merrick Library building was formed.¹⁴⁷ With the possibility of a new building in Merrick and the twice defeated library proposal in North Merrick, Merrick Life once again raised the question of a possible Merrick-North Merrick Library program in their Editorial of July 7, 1960.¹⁴⁸ Mr. Don Weller, chairman of the committee for a New Merrick Library Building replied in print that the committee had given this a great deal of study and had decided that it was impractical for three reasons. Legally, under state law, before North Merrick could join Merrick in a library program, they would have to establish a going library district themselves, and two referendums seeking to establish a library district in #29 had already failed. Furthermore, even if a district were established, permission to merge would have to be granted by the State Education Department which would only consider such a move after a referendum making the request was passed by the voters in each of the districts voting separately as a district. Secondly, Merrick already had library assets in excess of \$100,000.00 which belong to the taxpayers of District #25, whereas North Merrick, at best, would be starting from scratch financially. Thirdly, the committee did not feel that they could delay solving Merrick Library's physical problems any longer, as they felt that the overcrowded facilities in Merrick endangered not only the physical facilities but the lives of all who used the present building. They concluded that it would be better to solve today's problems today than to wait until tomorrow for something which conceivably might never occur.¹⁴⁹

The Editorial reply to this acknowledged the careful study of the question made by the committee but suggested that a larger, better equipped library would be more

beneficial to both school districts than two smaller libraries would. However, it went on to state that the question might be entirely academic as there may be a lack of interest on the part of the people of North Merrick. In conclusion, the Editorial reiterates,

Again we don't know whether people in North Merrick want to join in. If not, there is not any point in going further. If they do, we hope the matter is not closed.¹⁵⁰

On October 22, 1960, the proposal to construct a new library building for District #25 was approved. In December of that year the fees to nonresidents were again raised to \$10.00 per annum and by 1961 the number of nonresident members went down to 166.¹⁵¹ On November 25, 1962 the new Merrick Memorial Library was dedicated. The fees to nonresidents were stable through 1962, but effective July 1, 1963, the nonresident fee was raised to \$15.00 per year. This raise, according to Merrick Life, was made necessary by a proportionate rise in the library tax rate for residents of District #25.¹⁵²

On November 18, 1963, a special meeting of the Merrick Library Board was held to discuss the improvement of library services to students of Central High School District #3, of which North Merrick is a part. Representatives of Central District #3 as well as Trustees of the North Bellmore and Bellmore libraries were present. North Merrick, libraryless, was not directly represented. It was proposed at this meeting that a permanent liaison committee to further cooperation between school and public library facilities in District #3 should be formed. The libraries involved agreed to exchange information about their respective collections. Mr. Ippolito, successor to Mrs. MacFarland as Director of the Merrick Library, initiated the first meeting of this committee and it has become a continuing program.¹⁵³

At the close of 1963, the Merrick Library announced that, as of July 1, 1964, the nonresident fee would be raised from \$15.00 to \$18.00 per year. This was a reflection of the increase in the 1964-1965 library budget. By the end of the first full year in their new building, the Merrick Library had registered 215 North Merrickians as borrowers.¹⁵⁴

On February 6, 1964, Merrick Life ran a three column article entitled, "Library Will Weigh Barring Non-Residents." A statement from the Board of the Library followed:

...in justice to the residents and taxpayers of District #25, we must seriously consider the possibility of limiting or barring non-resident use of the library in the near future.¹⁵⁵

It then went on to say that the first responsibility of the Merrick Library was to District #25 taxpayers and that while it was regrettable to have to deny access to District #29 residents who had no library of their own, a survey showed that nonresident card holders represented only a small fraction of the actual use being made of the library by nonresident students, "who fill the chairs in the reference and reading rooms and line up for assistance from the reference librarian."¹⁵⁶ Further, the Board deplored the use of the nonresident card by people other than those to whom the card was actually issued, noting "The nonresident card has often been used as a pass, rather than representing books actually loaned to one individual."¹⁵⁷

The article closed with the admonition that this library was never intended to serve, not could it, more than the taxpayers of District #25 who now numbered approximately 16,000. The Board felt that it would be doing a disservice to the residents of District #29 if it did not point out that it was not likely that an equitable basis would ever be found either contractually or on any other basis which would obligate Merrick Library to serve both communities. Finally, they mentioned that when other districts closed their doors to nonresidents, it had often resulted not only in improved services to their own taxpayers, but also had encouraged unserved areas to “recognize and implement their own needs for library facilities.”¹⁵⁸

In 1960, North Merrick had approximately one-half as much occupied acreage as Merrick.¹⁵⁹ The population of North Merrick was 12,976 in comparison with Merrick’s 18,789.¹⁶⁰ Within the next five years, however, North Merrick’s population was to grow to 13,827 and Merrick to 24,449.¹⁶¹ The median age of a typical North Merokian was approximately thirty years with 44.6 percent of the population under twenty-one years old and only 5.1 percent over sixty-five years, and the median income per family was \$8,835.00. Only 5.4 percent of these families had lived in North Merrick before 1939, most of them having moved there in the 1940-1953 period, with a continuing influx from 1953 on. Most of the families had moved from the New York metropolitan area, and of those who were over twenty-five years old, the median of school years completed was 12.1 years. The largest groups by occupation were professional, managers, clerical, craftsman, or foreman, and operatives and sales, in that order. Slightly more than half of them worked in Nassau County while 41.9 percent commuted to New York City. Their dwelling units were almost completely owner occupied and worth a median value of \$17,900.00 with 47 percent of them built within the past ten years. The dominant religious groups were: Jewish, with 38.5 percent of the population, Roman Catholic with 38.4 percent, while 20.9 percent were Protestants, and 2.2 percent were members of other religions.¹⁶²

Merrick’s population, while 6,000 larger, had a median age of 30.6 years with 41.8 percent under twenty-one and 5.8 percent over sixty-five. The median income per family was slightly higher, \$9,258.00, and they boasted more “old time” families, 10.2 percent having lived there before 1939, but the largest percentage arrived in the 1940-1953 period in south Merrick also. The average citizen of south Merrick was slightly more educated, a median of 12.3 school years completed, but their occupations were almost identical with their neighbors to the north. Only slight differences occur in their general life style, 51.8 percent worked in Nassau and 40.6 percent commuted to New York, their homes were 91.8 percent owner occupied with a median value of \$18,500.00, and 45.4 percent of them were less than ten years old. The biggest difference appears in the religious breakdown; 47.9 percent Jewish, 26.6 percent Roman Catholic, 23.3 percent Protestant, and the same 2.2 percent members of other religions.¹⁶³

Merrick, the older, larger, more populous community also boasted of one of the oldest libraries in the county; North Merrick on the other hand had the dubious distinction of being one out of four districts in Nassau County in 1964 without library facilities. No one was in a better position to know these facts than Mr. Johannes Laursen, Editor of Merrick Life and long time advocate of a library for North Merrick. When the newspaper ran an article about the Meadowbrook Road School in North Merrick being closed as it was no longer necessary to the school system, various interested people from North

Merrick such as Judith Butt wrote to “Letters to the Editor” suggesting that this building might be used as a library. Mr. Laursen forwarded these letters to Robert F. Zakary, supervising principal of District #29, who subsequently wrote to each correspondent asking them to attend a meeting of interested citizens that he, Zakary, would call.¹⁶⁴ In the meantime, Mr. Laursen while on a trip to Albany, talked with Miss Jean L. Connor, of the New York State Department of Education, Division of Library Services, concerning the federally funded Library Services Construction Act.¹⁶⁵ She advised him that it provided money to state agencies for a plan of service designed to promote improved library service to “areas in the state with inadequate service”¹⁶⁶ and that another part of the law provided money for construction of public library buildings, but that while the bill had been signed by the President, appropriations had not yet been voted upon so the amount of funds available was in doubt. However, she went on to say, “I would encourage your community to pursue its movement to establish a library. I would suggest that your logical unit of government to appropriate tax in support of such a new library would be the North Merrick School District.”¹⁶⁷

Upon his return from Albany and his receipt of this letter, Mr. Laursen editorialized in Merrick Life about a library filling an elementary need in a community and that sooner or later North Merrick must get one just as all its neighboring communities had. He acknowledged that library proponents were naturally discouraged because the last try was so roundly defeated, but he felt that times had changed and that a different proposal might now win favor with the voters. He noted that the occasion for the recurrence of library interest was the availability of the Meadowbrook Road School which had just been temporarily leased to the Central High School District and suggested that with this in mind it might not be necessary to start out with a building proposition as it was in 1957. He suggested that a citizens committee look into the matter, as well as into all the other possibilities such as store rental, space in a more centrally located school or the acquisition of a house. He closed the article with a plea that when a committee had found all the answers that another appeal be made to the voters, who he believed, would support it.¹⁶⁸

On March 16 more than 250 residents of North Merrick met to discuss ways and means for establishing a library. The meeting was arranged by the Board of Education of UFSD #29 in response to the numerous letters from local taxpayers. Richard Irwin, President of the School Board, opened the meeting and explained that residents would have to form a citizens committee as the first step in organizing a library program. Fifty-seven persons volunteered to serve and were registered by Mrs Jerome Hyams who agreed to serve as temporary secretary for the group. Len Kirsch volunteered to direct the meeting as temporary chairman and presided for the balance of the evening. Robert F. Zakary suggested that committees begin working promptly and agreed to assist in making a meeting place available at the Old Mill Road School as well as contacting professional library consultants from the New York State Library Department to advise the group. It was pointed out from the floor that North Merrick residents were paying for the Nassau County Library System in their taxes and could, therefore, take advantage of whatever facilities and benefits it could offer. It was also indicated that State and Federal funds were available for new libraries, the latter under terms of the Library Services and Construction Act which provides for an expanded three year, \$135 million program of

federal aid for public libraries. The date for the following meeting was set and anyone interested in joining the committee was advised to contact Mrs. Hyams.¹⁶⁹

After the meeting, Merrick Life's Editorial urged the committee to "do its homework carefully" considering the defeat of eight years past and suggested that a new building costing several hundred thousand dollars should not be proposed as it would be doubtful that such a proposition would pass. The Editor again suggested rental or the addition to an existing building and reminded the committee that a reasonable proposal, adequately explained, would pass as did the new North Merrick Firehall which met with only token opposition.¹⁷⁰ In the same issue, in a news article describing the March 16 meeting, representatives from each PTA as well as members from the 1957 committee were urged to contact Mrs. Hyams.¹⁷¹

In the meantime, a flurry of correspondence from Robert F. Zakary's office to both Robert J. Flores and Dr. James Flick at the Library Division of the State Education Department finally resulted in a firm commitment by Flores, Associate Library Supervisor, to attend a committee meeting on April 6,¹⁷² a fact duly noted in the newspaper.¹⁷³

At the first official meeting of the committee on March 23, the sixty-one people attending elected the following officers:¹⁷⁴

President.....	Len Kirsch
First Vice President.....	Mrs. Judith Kassover
Second Vice President.....	Robert Karasik
Recording Secretary.....	Mrs. Shirley Hyams
Corresponding Secretary.....	Mrs. Judith Butt
Treasurer.....	Fred Grossman
Publicity Committee.....	Mrs. Grace Anton and William Berman

It is interesting to note that Len Kirsch, President of the committee was a new resident to North Merrick, having moved there on July 1, 1963. He later explained that he became interested in the project because "my dear wife roped me in initially" and that he volunteered to take over the temporary chairmanship of the initial meeting "simply because no one else spoke up." This was the first time Kirsch had tackled a community project of this sort, but he was a journalism graduate from New York University and the Director of Public Relations for a large New York based corporation since 1953. Before that, he had been on the editorial staffs of Look and Quick.¹⁷⁵ This background was to stand the committee in excellent stead in the months to come.

During the meeting, a letter was read from Richard Irwin, the President of the District #29 School Board expressing the Board's pleasure at the formation of a library committee and stating that possibilities existed of using some part of a school for a public library. It was agreed to contact the district's PTAs to send representatives; Harris Lefrak advised those present of some of the problems faced by the previous library committee; John Martin of the School Board advised them that the Meadowbrook Road School would be unavailable for the next two years because of a previous lease out that there were good possibilities of facilities in other schools; it was decided that the Executive

Board should meet with Sophie Silberberg, Public Relations Director of the Nassau Library System; and the first meeting was adjourned.¹⁷⁶

On March 24, a Newsday article was headlined, "North Merrick Offered Space for Library"¹⁷⁷ and on March 26, Merrick Life headed an article which carried the entire text of the letter from Richard Irwin, "District #29 Board Offers School for Library Use."¹⁷⁸

Iona Musa, Chairman of the Unserved Areas Committee of the Nassau Library System, met with the committee of April 1 as did Sophie Silberberg, Lillian C. Van Meter, and Andrew Geddes. Mrs. Silberberg explained the importance of an intensive public relations program and the broad base of community representatives need to work together to inform the entire community of the importance of library service in the area. Mrs. Van Meter outlined the services of the System which would be available in the establishment of the library. At the request of Len Kirsch, a proposed minimum budget was discussed and an estimated figure for the first year's budget of \$56,000.00 was set as a minimum.¹⁷⁹

The spate of news articles in Newsday, The Beacon, and Merrick Life continued, and the second meeting of the committee on April 8 was well publicized and attended by approximately seventy-five persons. Robert Flores spoke about the methods of establishing a library, a budget, and a board of trustees and explained that 51 percent of those who voted had to vote affirmatively for the proposition to pass. A question and answer session followed and forms were given to the audience to determine on which committees they would like to serve.¹⁸⁰ As a result of these forms, by April 27 when the third general meeting was held, chairmen had been chosen for the committees on Site, Books, and Library Services, Publicity, Fund Raising, Area, Organization Liaison, Speaker's Bureau, Literature Preparation, Literature Distribution, and Secretarial Pool. The School Board had suggested either the dates of November 14 or 21 for the library vote as the weather would still be good, and these dates fell between the Presidential election and Thanksgiving. The November 21 date was chosen. The Nassau Library System movie, Working Together, was shown and it was decided to show it to all groups and organizations in North Merrick throughout the fall months.¹⁸¹

At the following meeting in May, the membership was shown the Booster Kit they would subsequently carry on their house-to-house calls. It consisted of a booster sticker to put on their windows, receipt books for money received, name sheets to list names of donors, and literature explaining what the Library Committee hoped to gain in the way of a library. June 2 was chosen as Booster Day and it was decided that all literature should use the figure of \$2.00 per \$1,000 assessed valuation for tax rate rather than \$10.00 to \$12.00 per year.¹⁸²

The amount of newspaper coverage received by the committee was exceeded only by the amount of correspondence that flowed from the committee to the School Board, the various PTA groups, and civic organizations such as the Kiwanis. At the same time there was a constant flow of letters, memos, and notes from Len Kirsch to his committee chairmen, while every issue of Merrick Life carried one or two articles and a picture of some aspect of the committee's work.

At the fifth meeting, held on July 22, it was announced tht 1,703 homes had been visited during the Booster Campaign and a total of \$929.22 had been collected. During the previous month a letter had gone out to all organizations in Merrick to which North

Merokians might belong, offering to send speakers to acquaint their membership with the facts about the library.¹⁸³ The budget breakdown was read as follows:¹⁸⁴

Books and library materials	\$28,300.
Operating expenses, rent, etc.	8,000.
Salaries: Director, part-time clerks	11,000.
Fixed charges	3,200.
Capital Expenses	<u>2,200.</u>
Total Budget:	\$56,000.

It was noted that the State would loan the library 1,000 books, and the Nassau Library System would loan 500, and the book budget allowed for the purchase of 7,200 books, so the library would start out with 8,700 books. A decision was made to present the petitions for the library proposal and trustee election to the School Board at their August 10 meeting and a discussion about the organization of a get-out-the-vote campaign with poster space and booster stickers in as many stores as possible ensued.¹⁸⁵

The library proposal was unanimously endorsed by the Board of Education at their meeting in August,¹⁸⁶ which augured well for the committee as neither of the previous proposals had been so endorsed.

Newsday of September 23 offers an amusing sidelight to events in North Merrick. A 120 member committee seeking the establishment of a public library in Jericho asked their school board to hold a referendum on November 21. This date was chosen, the chairman explained, “because North Merrick is holding a vote for a library on that day and the issue will be at fever pitch by that time.”¹⁸⁷

At the September 23 meeting of the committee, the first two candidates for the position of Library Trustee were announced, both members of the committee, Mrs. Clifford Butt and Mrs. Bernard Kassover. The booster campaign had been completed with one thousand names and it was decided to send a general mailing to the community with three pieces of literature. The first mailing would go out during the first week of October and would be a “Fact Sheet” about the proposed library with details of location and cost. The second piece would be “The Advantages of Having a Library” and would be accompanied by a copy of the budget; and the third mailing would be a public service piece giving a brief sketch of the persons running for Trustee position.¹⁸⁸

The speakers’ bureau had been very active, according to a report by its chairman, and one of the results had been an endorsement by the Salem Park Civic Association. A suggestion was made to hold meetings in private homes with members of the bureau present.¹⁸⁹

Other matters that were discussed included a call for volunteers to paste mailing labels on literature, drivers to transport voters to the polls, people to make phone calls a few days before the election, and again on election day to get out the vote, and Senior Girl Scouts to act as baby sitters where needed.¹⁹⁰

It was decided not to use a loud speaker through the streets and to utilize any monies left over in the budget when the mailing was finished to place advertisements in Merrick Life with endorsement photographs and the names of the organizations endorsing the library.¹⁹¹

During September, with school re-opening, the PTAs reactivated and their bulletins reflected their concern with the proposed library. At Old Mill Road School, the September issue of the PTA newspaper asked its membership if they are “tired of chauffeuring the children to libraries out of district and paying high library fees”¹⁹² and suggests that they “BE SURE”¹⁹³ to vote for their very own North Merrick Library. The October issue devotes a full page to the Library, explaining the budget, the Nassau Library System, and the fact that the committee hopes to have a “completely staffed and adequate library operating six to eight months after the budget is passed.”¹⁹⁴ They urge all those eligible to vote for this “much needed project.”¹⁹⁵

Merrick Life of October 1 announced the candidacy of Mrs. Clifford Butt, and Mrs. Bernard Kassover, as well as Robert F. Karasik. It was interesting to read in the biographies that accompanied the announcement that all three candidates had earned Master’s degrees in Education, and that Judith Kassover had further earned a second Master’s degree in Library Science.¹⁹⁶ The same issue noted that The Rosary Society of Sacred Heart Church was to hold a reception at which a member of the Library Committee would speak.¹⁹⁷ The following issue of Merrick Life not only mentioned that the Lutheran Church Women were to hear a speaker from the Library Committee,¹⁹⁸ but also announced two more candidates for the Board, Arthur H. Slogett and Joseph Ognibene, both of whom were active members of the Library Committee.¹⁹⁹ Before the month was over a sixth candidate, William F. Gallagher entered the race²⁰⁰ and in November, Francis R. Meyer and Charles E. Atkins filed petitions of candidacy, making a total of eight persons running for a five-man board of trustees.²⁰¹

Articles concerning some aspect of the library proposal, often accompanied with photographs, appeared in almost every issue of Merrick Life and The Beacon, as well as in most issues of Newsday.

Endorsements by John Bohlander, member of the Board of Education of UFSD #29, Dr. Julius C. Braun, District Principal of Central High School District #3; Richard Irwin, President of the Board of Education of UFSD #29; Reverend Ronald S. Law of Merrick Methodist Church; District Court Judge John S. Lockman, Reverend Charles D. Moser of St. John’s Lutheran Church, Father Jeremiah Reilly of Sacred Heart Church; Rabbi Sanford Saperstein of the Reform Jewish Congregation of Merrick; and others appeared in Merrick Life on November 12 and November 19.²⁰²

The electorate was informed; the only question that remained was whether the affirmative voters would go to the polls in sufficient numbers. An Editorial in Merrick Life on November 19 commends the committee for their assiduity and reminds its readers that while the paper did not receive a single communication against the proposal, nevertheless the battle would not be won until the votes were counted. It urged those in favor to go to the polls as apathy could permit a relatively small number of determined opponents to defeat a proposal.²⁰³

On November 21, 1,623 yes votes and 564 no votes were cast for the proposal. The trustees elected were Mrs. Bernard Kassover, Mrs. Judith Butt, Charles Atkins, William Gallagher, and Arthur Sloggatt. Two nights later the seventh and final meeting of the committee was held at which time a “deep debt of gratitude was acknowledged to Mr. Johannes Laursen, owner of Merrick Life, for his support...his advice and his counsel.”²⁰⁴ It was decided to form a Friends of the North Merrick Library and to turn over the \$253.82 remaining in the committee treasury to them, while all memorandums

and charter information would be given to the newly elected trustees. A standing ovation for Len Kirsch was the last thing the committee did before voting to disband.²⁰⁵ It had taken fourteen years and countless hours of labor by three separate groups of public spirited citizens, but North Merrick was finally to have a library.

When Kirsch was interviewed and questioned about his overall campaign strategy, he said that it was based upon the premise that it is almost impossible to change the mind of a person who has decided to vote negatively. Therefore, the important thing was to concentrate all efforts in getting out those people who would vote affirmatively. Remembering the adage of letting sleeping dogs lie, it was decided to do as little as possible to awaken the negative voter who, left alone, might not get disturbed enough to go to the polls.²⁰⁶

At the same time, it was important, according to Kirsch, to find public spirited citizens with the capabilities, time, and energy to run the myriad committees necessary to a successful campaign. This problem was readily solved when a questionnaire prepared by him and handed out at the second general meeting was filled out by all who attended. "It turned up a whole lot of very talented, capable people who had excellent backgrounds."²⁰⁷ These people, who were very representative of the community personality, were then appointed to chair committees and were asked to involve as many volunteers on each committee as possible, thus insuring a core number of "yes" voters.

A door-to-door campaign was then carefully mapped out with each block covered by a volunteer who not only distributed library literature in person, but who asked for a donation to defray the cost of publicity for the forthcoming proposal. A very careful record was kept of each of these person-to-person confrontations for many reasons; the first of which was that all the manes of "no" voters were immediately winnowed out from all future mailing lists. Secondly, since people tend to remember that someone came in person to visit and speak with them, this method of door-to-door canvassing was important. Furthermore, it was deemed critical to have people contribute, no matter how small the amount might be, since those who have made a financial contribution tend to feel paternalistic about the cause to which they donated. In any case, the money was needed to defray expenses for mailings and newspaper advertisements. Another important result was that the very fact that so much money was raised persuaded many of the hitherto disinterested civic leaders that a large number of voters felt strongly about a library. As a result, they jumped on the library bandwagon.²⁰⁸

Thus, armed with complete rosters of names, addresses, and telephone numbers, a group of thirty to forty core workers, with excellent communications to various telephone squads, typing pools, etc., were able to send out several mailings of from 3,000 to 4,000 pieces each time, as well as make a number of telephone reminders to each potential "yes" voter.²⁰⁹

When questioned as to why he had not run for the Library Board at that time, Kirsch replied that having spent eight months working on the library campaign and having completed the job, he felt that he had done his share and wished to have some spare time for his other interests.²¹⁰

Approximately two months later the "Annual Report" of the Merrick Library for 1964 was published. It states, "Non-resident registration declined from 215 to 93 in response to the decision of North Merrick voters to support a library of their own."²¹¹ Implicit in the report is a sigh of relief on the part of the Merrick Library.

CHAPTER V

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

The newly elected Library Board held its first meeting on November 23, 1964 and drew lots to determine the length of time each trustee would serve so that each term would terminate in a different year. Judith Kassover was elected President; William Gallagher was Vice-President, and Judith Butt, Secretary. Len Kirsch handed over all the Library Committee records and advised the Board of the possibility of building an addition to an office building on the corner of Camp and Merrick Avenues to house the library.²¹² The owner of the building informed the Board that a variance would have to be obtained before the extension could be made, but that he was reasonably sure this would not present a problem.

The possible use of a vacant store at 1148 Merrick Avenue was also discussed, but since there was only 960 square feet of floor space, the quarters would have been smaller than desirable. Thus, the decision was made to plan for a 35 feet by 70 feet extension to the building at Camp Avenue. A rough plan was subsequently drawn and sent to a builder for an estimate. In the meantime, the Board asked the Board of Education if they would provide a room in which a librarian could work until other space was found, as well as providing storage space for books.²¹³ The Board offered space in the Camp Avenue School, which was used until a library location was found.

The next few meetings were very busy ones for the fledgling board; interviewing prospective librarians, attempting to find a way to obtain monies with which to operate until July first since a change in the wording of the legal notice made by the Board of Education had made the normal Anticipatory Tax Note unavailable to the library and planning for the Camp Avenue building program.²¹⁴ In the meantime, the Board elected to join the Nassau Library System²¹⁵ and subsequently authorized them to begin ordering books for the library.²¹⁶

By March, a plan for the proposed addition to the building at Camp Avenue was completed which called for 1,763 square feet on the main level and 940 square feet on a mezzanine level. The main level was to be rented at \$4.00 per square foot and the mezzanine at \$2.00 per square foot.²¹⁷ At the same time the Board of Education made a “possible offer of two rooms at the Camp Avenue School in the kindergarten wing with a possibility of space at the Meadowbrook Road School next year.”²¹⁸ The Board decided to turn down the offer of 1,800 square feet at the Camp Avenue School as being

inadequate²¹⁹ and signed a lease for the proposed addition to the building at Camp and Merrick Avenues instead. The necessary papers for a variance were filed and the hearing was scheduled for May 26, later changed to June 16.²²⁰ The required notifications were sent out to the sixteen residents who lived adjacent to the area for the addition.²²¹

In the meantime, another milestone was passed when the Board appointed Roland Carlton Director of the Library to begin work on June 1.²²² Carlton, a lawyer, had received his library degree from the Graduate Library School at the C.W. Post campus of Long Island University, a year previously. He had worked at the Levittown Public Library, and while there had obtained his Junior Librarian Certificate from New York State.

The board meeting on May 13 dispensed with the usual business in order to hear arguments from the residents of Anding Avenue who felt that they would be adversely affected by the variance. Their representative argued that the traffic was too heavy at that corner for children who wished to use the library, while completely ignoring the fact that a grade school located directly across the street faced exactly the same traffic hazard. He further argued that the variance was unnecessary as he had been informed that the Meadowbrook Road School would have four rooms available for library use as of July, 1966. The misinformation about the definite offer of space in the Meadowbrook Road School was corrected by the Board, which also informed the citizens present that the school site in any case was a poor one, since it was on the very fringe of the district, in an area without any kind of public transportation, and consisting of four separate rooms with no possibility of breaking down the dividing walls.²²³

Len Kirsch, who had been asked to consult with the Board regarding public relations for the variance, made the following suggestions:

1. Mimeograph petitions in favor of the location and have as many people as possible sign them.
2. Have as many citizens and organizations representatives who favor the variance as possible at the meeting.
3. Obtain a letter from the police as to the safety record of the corner in question and the possibility of further police protection if needed.²²⁴

The Board wrote a release for Merrick Life, listing their reasons for choosing the Camp Avenue site and answering the objections of the Anding Avenue residents. A letter was also written to the Board of Education asking for the whereabouts of the letter they had promised to write to the Town Board of Zoning Appeals endorsing the site.²²⁵

The next Board meeting, for a change, brought some welcome news. Andrew Geddes, Director of the Nassau Library System, advised that the North Merrick Public Library would be eligible for matching funds on a dollar for dollar basis up to \$2.00 per capita based upon the 1960 census for the money spent in the coming fiscal year on books. This grant was to be handled through the Nassau Library System.²²⁶ It was decided, therefore, to spend as much as possible for books during the coming year.

The Board finally received a copy of the letter that had been sent by the Board of Education to the Zoning Board. The letter was dated May 29, two days after the date

originally scheduled for the meeting.²²⁷ The School Board later apologized for sending the letter in late.²²⁸

It was decided to present the following materials at the hearing in addition to the petitions; a letter from the Merrick Library stating that their proximity to a firehouse was not a problem to them, a bus schedule, a letter from the police department stating that the traffic on the corner in question was not hazardous, and a parking diagram showing over two hundred off the street parking spaces.²²⁹

The Board of Education requested a letter for their records from the Library Board refusing the use of the Meadowbrook Road School, and at the same time tendered a copy to the library of the letter they had sent to the Anding Avenue residents. In it they expressed their interest in the library and its location and said they would consider the library as having priority over Central District #3 if the library desired space at the Meadowbrook Road School. The letter advised that should the library desire that space which would be available as of June, 1966, they would have to pay a proportionate amount of the amortization plus heating and custodial care but a specific commitment on it had to be made by the first of the year.²³⁰

On August 5, the Board of Zoning Appeals disapproved the application for the variances by a vote of four to zero. It noted all the testimony pro and con, including the testimony elicited from a library trustee-witness that if the addition were to be built and the library budget for the following year were to be defeated, the library would then have to close. There is no record of this misinformation being rectified by later testimony, and this incorrect statement was subsequently listed by the Zoning Board as one of the reasons the variance was not permitted. Furthermore, a practicing internist whose house was within twenty feet of the proposed building testified that “the chief of the North Merrick Fire Department unofficially advised him that he personally believed this location to be a poor site for a library.” In conclusion, the Board found that the variance “would have an adverse effect on the safety, health, and welfare of the community,” and therefore denied the application.²³¹

After looking into the possibility of renting an empty house or purchasing a prefabricated building,²³² the Board finally decided to rent the empty store still available at 1148 Merrick Avenue with a two year lease at \$275.00 monthly.²³³ This was the same location they had rejected as too small earlier in the year but the decision was made to open at all costs. It was also decided to approach the School Board with respect the Meadowbrook Road School and get all the information about costs and remodeling, despite the fact that this location was in the extreme western corner of the district, not easily accessible by bus, nor convenient to a shopping area, because it did provide three times the space for twice the money being paid for the store and also had more adequate parking.²³⁴

December 5, 1965 was targeted as opening day in the store front location on Merrick Avenue with thirty-five hours of service a week.²³⁵

Monday	11-6
Tuesday	11-6
Wednesday	closed
Thursday	11-6
Friday	2-9

Books were to circulate for a period of two weeks with a one week loan period for best sellers. Two week books could be renewed for one, two week period while best sellers could not be renewed at all. Magazines could circulate for one week with no renewals and each patron could circulate three books and two periodicals at a time.²³⁶ Two types of cards would be issued, a children's card would be used until completion of grade eight, and an adult card for all other patrons. An adult book could be refused to the holder of a children's card at the discretion of the librarian.²³⁷

After a lengthy discussion by the Board, "It was decided to offer Len Kirsch library card #1 for his outstanding services to the library, both during the campaign for its establishment and since its inception.²³⁸ Pre-registration was opened in November with advance publicity in the newspapers and PTA bulletins, and an opening preview was held on Sunday, December 4, attended by invited guests and hosted by the Friends of the Library."²³⁹

In the following weeks, for reasons of public relations it was decided to:

1. Accept all donations of books, leaving the Director with the prerogative of adding them to the collection or not.
2. Accept all applications for employment in any capacity whether or not positions were available.
3. Find work for any person or organization who wanted to serve voluntarily.

The Board also unanimously agreed to direct Roland Carlton to hold up indefinitely the order of a set McKinneys Consolidated Laws of New York State costing approximately \$400.00 as they felt that this expenditure could not be justified in this community.²⁴⁰ Less than a month later, the Board advised the Director that The New York Times Index was also unnecessary. In this instance the fact that it had not been purchased for use in the local junior high school library was the reason cited. The New York Times Index and McKinneys Consolidated Laws are still unavailable at the library.

When 1965 drew to a close, 3,700 cards had already been issued and total circulation was 3,734.²⁴¹ For a community that had resisted a library for so long, it appeared that they had every intention of using that which they had finally created. However, despite letters from both the Library Board and the Old Mill Road elementary school requesting a crossing guard on heavily trafficked Merrick Avenue for after school hours when the library was open, the police department denied the request.²⁴²

The new year began with the provisional charter being granted to the library on January 30, 1965, and a reply from the School Board granting the library the space in the Meadowbrook Road School. With regard to the lease just signed at 1148 Merrick Avenue, it was decided to attempt to sublet the property, or request the owner for a release if another tenant could be found, or buy a release from the owner if possible.²⁴³ Plans to move, the purchase of additional stacks, lighting fixtures, etc. occupied the Board during the next six months while the Director and the half-time trainees used every moment to order books in order to take advantage of the matching funds available to them. By July, near panic had set in among the trainees for fear that the total amount of matching funds would not be spent. They, therefore, decided to place multiple orders for the complete "Modern Library Catalog" for all Vista Travel Books and for four copies of each Caldecott and Newberry winner and runner-up. Furthermore, they hired

an additional part-time librarian to work for approximately one hundred hours to do book ordering.

Voting for the 1966 budget came at a time when taxes were again being raised on every level of government. Elementary and high school budgets in this district were both requesting budget increases and the library budget did too. A "Budget News" sheet was handed out to each patron checking out books for two weeks prior to the budget vote and members of the Board as well as members of the Friends of the Library made telephone calls to those who had served during the library campaign in order to once again get out the "yes" voters. The number of registered patrons had already climbed to 5,100, circulation was approximately 1,200 weekly, and the budget was passed by a resounding eight to one majority.²⁴⁴

The move to Meadowbrook Road School was scheduled and the Merrick Avenue location was closed to the public as of September 19, 1966.²⁴⁵ It had been used for a ten month period at a cost of approximately \$1,000.00 of capital outlay for non-transferable items. Furthermore, the library still had a lease with a full year or more to run. Although a newspaper advertisement did finally bring a few offers to sublet the premises,²⁴⁶ they all fell through and the store remained vacant while the library continued to pay \$275.00 monthly until the lease finally ran out.²⁴⁷

On Sunday, October 2, a reception for the general public was held at the new site and the actual opening took place a day later.²⁴⁸ A trainee instituted a regular story hour for both the younger group and the older children and the circulation rose rapidly. In the three months of 1966 at the new location, 1,400 books circulated²⁴⁹ while the total for the preceding nine months at the old location had been 1,037.²⁵⁰

With the constantly increasing book stock supplemented by the rental of new books from McNaughton Book Service, Inc., the library soon had enough 7-day books on hand to permit each patron to borrow two new books at one time.²⁵¹ The "Minutes" show no record of a rental book collection ever being discussed, and to date the library circulates all its new books, both purchased and rented, on a free basis, in contrast to many libraries in the area which have rental collections and charge a daily fee for books on the best seller lists.

By April the Board was finally able to end its constant worry over the possibility that all available matching funds would not be used up, this amount having been completely expended as of March 23, 1967.²⁵² A total of \$28,000 had been spent by the library out of its book budget and a matching amount from the federal government's Library Services Construction Act program.

During this hectic year of adjustments, important decisions were made on every level. Many personnel changes took place on the nonprofessional staff, the staffing problem finally being successfully resolved by hiring five part-time clerks; Mrs. Ruth Kirsch, Mrs. Lillian Sussman, Mrs. Marie Trapp, Miss Andrea Koweek, and Mrs. Muriel Maloney, and three pages who, together with the two half-time trainees, Mrs. Debe Lutrín and Mrs. Muriel Levine, and the Director, comprised the entire library staff.

Other problems occurred. A patron complained to the Board about the content of a book in the Young Adult collection²⁵³ and the Board unanimously concluded that in conformance with the ALA's Library Bill of Rights as well as its "Freedom to Read" statement, book selection would be handled completely by the professional staff, with no review by either the Board or the patrons.²⁵⁴ This enlightened attitude did not extend to

neighboring library operations, for when, a few months later, the Director requested the Board to express its feelings to the Farmingdale Library Board in connection with the censorship of a magazine by a trustee-elect, no action was taken.²⁵⁵ Two months later, however, when the Nassau County Library Association requested that all libraries in the county endorse the Association's criticism of Mr. George Gorton, the Farmingdale trustee-elect, the Board did authorize a letter to the Director of the Farmingdale Library expressing concern over the confiscation of a periodical by a trustee-elect on the grounds of obscenity and offered, should the threat of legal action be carried through, their support in court of the Library's right to select materials in accordance with the "Library Bill of Rights" and the "Freedom to Read" statement of the American Library Association.²⁵⁶

When Arthur Slogatt decided not to run for the Board again in the May, 1967 election, the first change in the composition of the original Board took place. Len Kirsch was prevailed upon to try for the seat being vacated by Slogatt. He reluctantly agreed to do so, but flatly refused to campaign as he "was curious to see how much of a memory span the community had"²⁵⁷ and in any case, he had "neither the time nor the desire to campaign."²⁵⁸ Soon afterward John Biss, President of the St. George Association, active in the Salem Park Civic Association and Chairman of the Retirement Committee of the Town of Hempstead's Older Americans Advisory and Action Committee²⁵⁹ announced his candidacy for trustee as did William Stouges, an electronics test engineer, who filed just prior to the closing date on April 26. At the budget hearing held on May 2, less than forty people attended although a school budget of over two million dollars and a library budget of \$62,400 had been submitted.²⁶⁰ On May 3, the voting took place and the school budget was defeated by 484 votes to 380 votes. The library budget had passed by 462 to 402 and John Biss had won the trustee seat with 351 votes against Len Kirsch with 271 and William Stouges with 154.²⁶¹

Circulation continued to increase, class visits multiplied, and a second half-time trainee was hired to start June 1.²⁶² Special summer reading programs, film programs, and holiday programs were instituted in the children's department and all were filled to capacity. An investment firm attempted to host a series of lectures for adult patrons but the attendance was so poor that it was discontinued, although, a lecture series for adults sponsored by the Henry George School of Economics the following year was very well received.²⁶³

As the library continued to grow, book stacks were added in every department, additional equipment such as a movie projector and a duplicating machine were purchased, and circulation policies both as to number and loan period were liberalized.²⁶⁴ Air-conditioning was installed during July and August of 1968 and an internal silent alarm system was also installed after two successive break-ins, during which the library suffered from both theft and damage.²⁶⁵ By the close of the year, 76,346 books had circulated, an increase of 2,000 or 4 percent over 1967. The book stock had been increased by 3,593 books making a grand total of 23,557. There were 5,097 adult patrons registered as were 3,886 children. This constituted 63 percent of the population.²⁶⁶

At the first Board meeting in 1969, it was decided to exercise the library's option to renew their lease on the premises they occupied at Meadowbrook Road School for an additional three years and to ask whether there was the possibility of additional space in

the building.²⁶⁷ By May, another change had taken place in the character of the Board when Judith Kassover resigned, pending her imminent move to New York City, and Herbert Boykin was elected.

In response to patron complaints, a book depository was purchased, as was a display case later in the year. By July 1, 66 percent of the population had library cards, and the total book collection was 25,048.²⁶⁸ The summer reading program found 104 children registered with forty-four children completing the required ten books.²⁶⁹ A paperback book collection was begun with donations of used paperbacks from members of the community. These books were not catalogued, simply marked to indicate whether they were juvenile, young adult or adult material and placed into the paperback rack.²⁷⁰

The Board decided to look into the possibility of instituting a record collection and the first program specifically geared to the young adults of the community was held.²⁷¹ Semi-monthly film programs for elementary school children were continued, story hour programs were expanded with three pre-school classes and one for the six to eight year old group. The latter was dropped in mid-year because of lack of attendance due to competition with the Saturday Workshop. The library played host during many visits by classes from the elementary and nursery schools as well as from two special classes from the Junior high school. A separate children's card catalog was purchased and the young children's collection was reorganized to separate picture books from easy readers. These books were also color coded alphabetically by author to make it easier to find a specific title or author.²⁷²

On November 29, 1969, Roland Carlton, Director of the library since its inception, offered his resignation as of December 31, 1969, having accepted the position of Director at the Mineola Public Library.²⁷³

When the library first opened its doors to the public in December, 1965, its collection numbered approximately 4,500 volumes of which 2,000 were on loan. These borrowed books have since been returned and at the end of five years, the library houses 28,598 books and 127 periodicals. The circulation for the year 1969 was 80,751 and cards have been issued to 9,738 residents out of a total population of 16,391, for a percentage of 59 percent. This contrasts with a national average for library membership of roughly 33 percent and a Nassau County average of about 50 percent.²⁷⁴

Regular story hours attract more avid youngsters than can be served and there is always a waiting list. Periodic visits from guest storytellers, illustrators, puppeteers, magicians, and other specialized performers always draw more children than the fifty seat all-purpose room can hold. Photographic exhibits and art and sculpture displays as well as community organization displays placed in the circulation room help somewhat to detract from the fact that this high ceilinged room was once a gymnasium. With the recent addition of a display case, more items of interest to the community can, and no doubt will, be sought and presented.

The reference collection is regularly used by many of the students in the district, a special collection of foreign language books is on loan from the Nassau Library System, and a good sized collection of large-type books have been purchased, while talking books, for physically and visually handicapped patrons obtained from the federal program through the Nassau Library System, circulate in ever increasing numbers. Best sellers can be obtained free by North Merrick residents, as the library rents additional copies of major best sellers on a rotating basis and absorbs the cost of this rental while

making multiple copies available to patrons during the period of heaviest demand for the title.²⁷⁵

The 1966-1967 budget called for a total amount of \$61,900 to be raised by taxes,²⁷⁶ the 1967-1968 total was \$62,400,²⁷⁷ the 1968-1969 was \$68,070,²⁷⁸ and the 1969-1970 figure was \$71,103.²⁷⁹ These figures, while conservative, passed easily in this community which was for so long anti-library while many library budgets in the surrounding communities have gone down to resounding defeats in recent years.

When assessed against the "Library Yardstick"²⁸⁰ the library falls short in many areas; in the size of its book collection, in its facilities for both the public and the staff, in its library-community relations, in the amount of personnel employed and in the lack of both a vertical file and a record collection. Plans have already been made to remedy some of these problems within the next budget year, specifically those concerning personnel, vertical file, and record collection. An attempt will be made to revive the defunct Friends of the Library group as one of many steps planned to aid in community relations.

In conclusion, it must be kept in mind that the standards against which the library is being measured are applicable to established libraries and do not always constitute a fair assessment for a library just celebrating its fifth birthday. When its youth is taken into consideration, as well as its past history as heretofore defined, it is more clearly evident that the library, in all of its aspects, reflects the community which it serves and the Director who served it throughout its growing-up years.

FOOTNOTES

FOOTNOTES

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