

The Hartford Public Library was founded on August 25, 1904 through the efforts of the Hartford Free Library Association and was housed in two upstairs rooms in the old city hall. The association's board set policy, books were donated, the Wisconsin Free Library Commission was involved with the organizational and planning and cataloging of the materials. Juno Goetz agreed to serve as the volunteer librarian. At this time the library was open 10 hours a week. Monthly dues, fines and donations were the sole sources of revenue for the library.

Across the next few years, the library encountered some growing pains. The first issue was non-resident borrowers. Many felt the library was developed for city residents only but the Library Association voted to allow people from rural areas to become members for \$1.20 per year, the same fee paid by city residents. Students were exempted but they had to use materials in-house.

The second issue was money. The Association sent a formal request to the city asking for monetary support in addition to the providing the room in City Hall. In 1906, the City gave the first contribution to the public library: \$100. With this money, the library was now able to afford to pay Juno Goetz for her duties as a librarian.

In 1907, space was the main topic as library usage and the collection had outgrown the space provided.

In 1908, the city agreed to give the library \$300 plus an additional room not being used by the clerk. The money was used to expand the library into two rooms of City Hall and increase the librarian's salary.

The first major change to library operations came with the building of the new Hartford High School in 1914. The library association felt that its operations in city hall had become too crowded. An agreement was reached with the School Board to move the public library to the new school where students could have easier access to the collection. The school would provide a room, janitorial services and cover the cost of utilities. The library moved from city hall and down the block to the High School located on Mill Streets (where we are standing today).

By 1917, the Library Association had requested a special reading room area in the school to accommodate those who desired a quieter environment. The association promised to increase library hours as an incentive to both the school and the city to support larger library quarters.

In 1918, the City agreed to provide an additional \$400 in library funding the help cover the cost of developing a reading room at the high school. Hours were increased from 10 per week to 15.5 hours per week.

Between 1917 and 1922, meetings were held with representatives from the Wisconsin Free Library Commission and City government to see if a city library could be formed. The City was still considering this request when a formal request from to transfer the operation of the Hartford Public Library to the City of Hartford on July 1, 1922. No official action was taken until the City agreed to formally accept ownership and liabilities for the library on March 3, 1925.

Keep in mind the Library was still located in the High School in 1925 which created some challenges over the next five years as there was increased demand for improving public library services. The actual building was not owned nor maintained by the City. This conflict of interest came up when the City was considering a major renovation and addition to City Hall. Planning for the new building began with the City Council's approval of the project on 9/10/1929 and included space for a library.

Construction on the new city hall continued through 1930, Juno Goetz retired after 26 years as the director of the library. Martha Portz became the second director and was tasked with moving the library from the High School on Mill Street to the new city hall location. The library had 1,500 square feet with a separate entrance off of main street. The Grand opening of the new library was 1/20/1931 and weekly hours increased from 15.5 to 18. The Library settled into this location for the next few decades.

Tragedy struck the library pm 1/3/1940 when Ms. Portz unexpectedly passed away from a heart attack. Evelyn Luttropp became the library's third director. After the world war two, the library experienced a 35% increase in circulation as the troops returned home. The library served as the place for both pleasure reading as well as locating information on jobs, vocational training or colleges.

At the end of 1952, Evelyn Luttropp resigned as Director to take a library position in CA. Elizabeth Olson took over as the fourth Director on January 1, 1953.

Between 1955 and 1964, the City Hartford experienced growth and development – Lincoln Elementary opened in 1955, a new high school opened in 1960, Woodlawn park opened in 1961; the post office started using zip codes in 1963. As the community grew so did the demands on the Hartford Public Library. The 1500 square foot space the library had at this time was crowded by this time. Work was taking place to expand space within the City Hall building and an agreement was reached in 1959 to use part of the gymnasium space in the lower level of city hall for a children's library. Elizabeth Olson resigned as director to become the new children's librarian and Natalie O'Neil was promoted from Assistant Director to become the library's fifth director on March 1, 1959.

In October of 1961, the Hartford Fire Department left City Hall for a new fire station. City Hall was remodeled and tripled the space available to the library. On May 27, 1962, the library settled into an expanded space after having occupied one room for over 30 years. It would 1977 before another move was considered.

At the end of 1971, Natalie O'neil retired as Director and Betty Wenzel became the Director in January of 1972.

With the library approaching it's 75th birthday, space was truly at a premium in 1975. The Library Board requested the City consider adding space for staff workroom in the gymnasium of City Hall. This was met with mixed reviews and the question as to expand was put to a referendum in April of 1976. It was defeated. After the vote, the City agreed to remodel the lower level of city hall (now the council chambers) for a youth library. In November of 1976, the library took over this space for a children's library.

In May of 1983, Betty Wenzel announced her retirement. On October 31, 1983 Mike Gelhausen took over as the 7th director of the library. By this time, plans were underway to once again renovate the city hall built in 1930. It was decided the most cost effective way was to not only renovate but expand the existing building and keep all departments under one roof. The library was provided with the entire top floor of the new building consolidating all services to one level and expanding the space to 14,500 square feet. Hours were increased to 56.5 hours per week. This space opened to the public on June 3, 1985.

When the library moved into the top floor of city hall in 1985, it was intended to be a 15 year answer to ongoing space needs. Over the course of the next 26 years, traditional library services were changing at the request of patrons and that technology would be playing a larger role in future years. On Friday, May

1, 1994 the Hartford Public Library's first online catalog went live and the traditional card catalog was no longer updated.

From 1994 until present day the library went from a standalone online catalog to a single county operation, a five county operation, then back to a three county operation, then down to two counties and currently is connected with 33 public libraries in four counties through the Monarch Library System.

During the 1990's, there were two other issues the library was faced with: space and funding. Projecting future need, the board purchased two acres of land adjacent to the Hartford Mill Pond in 2002 to construct a new facility.

In early 2007, the Library received an anonymous donation of \$2 million to be used to build a new library with a caveat: if the City did not make use of the money for a new library in five years, the donation would not be made.

In the summer of 2007, the firm of Plunket Raysich Architects was hired to conduct a needs assessment to review library space and service needs for the future. State standards for public library service were analyzed and evaluated to address the current and forecasted population trends for Hartford.

Simultaneous to the development of the Library's planning process, the City Administrator and a group of City department heads were preparing a long-term Management Facilities Study for City Hall, completed in September 2007. The study provided several options to the City Council to address growth needs and the development of several of its departments. After reviewing these options, the Hartford City Council selected the scenario that supported the construction of a new stand-alone Library and the relocation of various departments into the vacated Library space.

Plans called for the Police Department to occupy the majority of the lower and main floors, with the Engineering Department, the Planning and Zoning Departments and the Community Development Authority into the vacated Library space.

Upon conclusion of the planning process, the Library Board presented the Common Council with its findings for a new library. On October 25, 2007 the Common Council approved the request for a two story facility adjacent to the Mill Pond that more than doubled the size of the facility on the top floor of City Hall and provided Downtown with 100 parking spaces.

After approval by the Common Council, the name of the anonymous donor was revealed as Geraldine Russell. She made the donation in memory of her late husband, Jack, a public school teacher in Milwaukee until 1978 who passed away in 2005. As teachers, they spent their lifetime using books to impart knowledge and wisdom to children. Gerry thought it only fitting that a library be named after Jack.

"I wanted to do something special, and they had been talking about a new library for a long time so this seemed like a good idea." – Gerry Russell, quoted on November 18, 2007

With an inheritance Gerry had and shrewd investing, the Russell's accumulated enough wealth to support causes such as the Schauer Center, the Chandler Ballroom restoration and the Hartford Hospital Foundation.

The total cost to build the Jack Russell Memorial Library was \$10.2 million. The money came from the following sources:

\$2 million – Gerry Russell

\$1 million – Library Trust Fund

\$5 million – City of Hartford

\$2.25 million – fundraised through a capital campaign called “Your Library....Your Doorway to Discovery”. Donations came from individuals and local businesses in Hartford.

On Saturday, March 13, 2010, a ground breaking ceremony was held for the public. A month after the ceremony was held, Gerry passed away from cancer.

The Jack Russell Memorial Library building is a two-story 35,500 square facility topped with angled wood beams, an architectural nod to the mills that used to line the Rubicon River. It sits where the Old Hartford High School once was, northeast of Mill Street and Park Avenue.

In January of 2015, Mike Gelhausen retired after 31 years of services. On April 1, 2015, Jennifer Einwalter was hired as the Library Director. During her short time, the focus has been on improving the services provided to the community and embracing the potential of this beautiful library.