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HISTORY OF THE FRIENDS OF SCHENECTADY COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY
IN CELEBRATION OF ITS 50TH ANNIVERSARY
1966-2016

THROUGH THE YEARS.....

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Photos in the 5th decade are from the Friends files.

THE FIRST DECADE- 1966-1976

The history of the Friends dates back to April 22, 1966, when the steering committee of the Committee for a New Central Library met to propose the organization of a Friends of the Library group. At that time a set of bylaws was adopted and a board of directors and slate of officers elected, with Mrs. T. A. Rich acting as first president. The expressed goal of the group was to “keep interest in libraries running high,” and the members hoped that “the new library would open in 1968.”

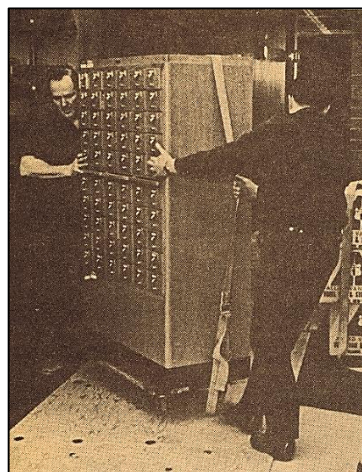
The first Friends Board began to implement these goals by organizing a membership campaign and publishing a newsletter for the 163 members who responded in September 1966. Noon book review programs were begun, although these were held at the YMCA because facilities at the old library, located at Union Street and Seward Place, were poorly designed for such meetings. Individual Friends also urged county officials to make staff salaries competitive with those of other area libraries and to consider construction of a more adequate library building.

Following this modest beginning the Friends movement gained rapid momentum. Memberships increased as the public became more aware of the library and its needs. Groundbreaking ceremonies for a new central library took place in May 1967.

In the areas of program, the Friends augmented their initial membership, newsletter, and book review activities with films prior to the noon YMCA “Table Talks on World Affairs,” which were then under the sponsorship of a number of area organizations. The first annual dinner meeting of the Friends took place on April 22, 1968. Friends funds were used for gifts to the library; staff members with long records of library service were honored, and the first volunteer of the year award was made.



Miss E. Lenore White, Director of SCPL, turns first shovel of dirt at site of future county library in May, 1967.



Workmen remove furnishings from the Union Street library in preparation for move to new building.

On February 25, 1969, the Friends received their charter from the New York State Board of Regents, and the long-awaited move to the new central library was completed by the end of March 1969. The Friends were certified as a tax-exempt organization on September 8 of the same year. Memberships increased rapidly, and many gifts of equipment not provided for in the county budget were made possible through Friends dues. To date these have included equipment for the meeting room kitchenette, a lighted podium and speaker system, improvements in lighting, a movie screen, a slide projector and table, an easel, a neck microphone, and extra speakers.

In other areas of the library, Friends gifts are apparent too. A portable display case and the lovely Beatrix Potter figurines in the Children's Room were among the first Friends gifts intended for the central library. The staff lounge is equipped with cups and saucers and a painting provided by the Friends. A magazine bin and shelves at the front of the reference desk were Friends gifts, in addition to a "Masterlens" which illumines and magnifies print for readers with limited vision.

The Friends have gradually become responsible for a growing number of activities in the meeting room. From mid-September through May, the book review programs known as "Books Sandwiched In" alternate with series of Table Talks almost every Monday noon. A film series has been underwritten financially by the Friends about once a year, and many excellent courses in adult literature have been sponsored over the past several years.

A long series of special programs has been planned and executed by the Friends. Some have focused on the use of library materials; others have been exhibits featuring unusual book collections belonging to Schenectadians, or books popular in a certain period. An institute on story-telling for children conducted by Augusta Baker was sponsored by the Friends, and the nationally known folksinger, Ella Jenkins, has twice delighted Schenectadians with her musical rhythms. A poetry reading by John Tagliabue was arranged by the Friends. Most recently they sponsored five evening bicentennial lectures on little-known facts about Schenectady history.

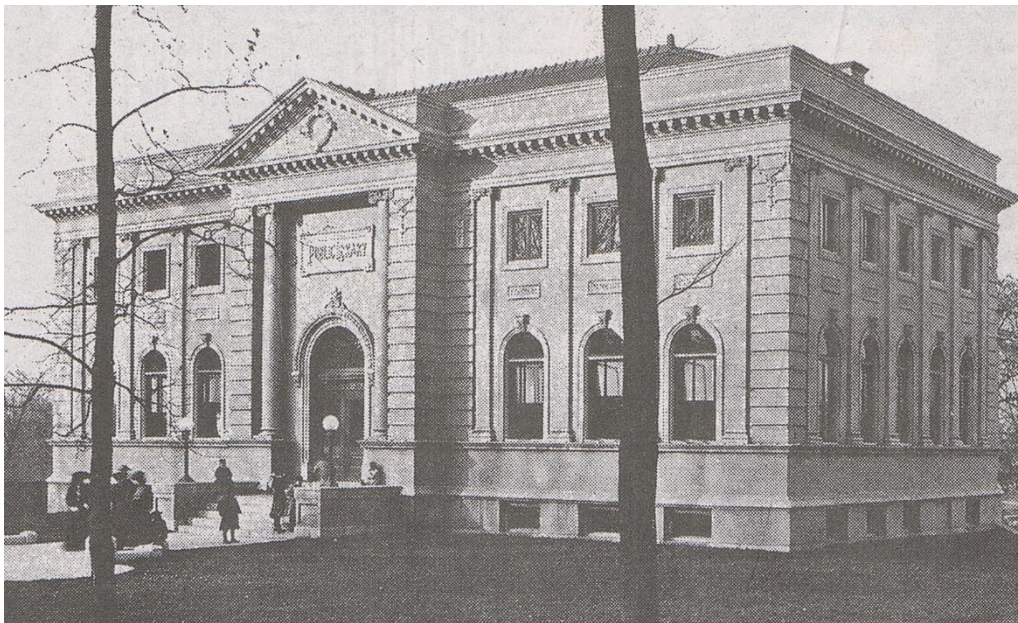
No account of Friends activities would be complete without some mention of their program of outreach. The Friends have sought to serve shut-ins, and have underwritten summer programs for the disadvantaged. A trial film series in the Hamilton Hill area was followed by the Friends peripatetic story-telling program for children known as the "Doorstep Project," which has been in operation since 1966. Friends also assisted staff in the establishment of a library for prisoners at the County Jail in 1970, and have been its chief source of funding since 1972. Several paperback book outlets have existed, one of which still remains at the Hamilton Hill Drop-In Arts and Crafts Center. A small book collection purchased by the Friends is also on loan at the Living Center at Washington Irving School. Friends funds were primarily responsible for the publication of the first Community Services Directory prepared by the library staff in 1972. A listing of books suitable for interracial day-care centers was the joint effort of Friends and staff in 1973. Because Friends believe strongly in continuing education for library staff, a small amount of funding has been provided since 1973 to help staff members attend professional conferences.



Looking over books to be offered at the 1975 fall book sale are, from left, Donna Sigsbee, Barbara Beverly and Phyllis Bornt

But no degree of professionalism can compensate for lack of adequate library resources. The new library serves not only Schenectady County but the entire Mohawk Valley Library System. Friends have tried to augment county funds for the purchase of records and books during a period when printing, publishing, and postal costs have risen at an astronomical rate. Books have been donated to the library in honor of retiring staff and library board members. Funds have been provided for the purchase of books for the Schenectady Collection, of special interest in this bicentennial year, and a microfilm copy of the *Citizen*, an early Schenectady newspaper, was presented to the library in 1974. In the past three years the annual fall book sale has been increasingly successful in providing funds for the purchase of new books.

The successful growth of the Friends organization over ten years has certainly validated vision and persistence of the group's charter members. It would be impossible to list all the individuals responsible, but much credit is due the past presidents: Mrs. T. A. Rich, Mrs. R. Hosmer Norris, Mrs. Charles Concordia, Mrs. John F. Blown Jr., Mrs. Lyman Johnson, Mrs. Peter Ipsen, and Mrs. Leonard Niedrach, as well as those named volunteer of the year: Mrs. E. MacDonald Stanton, Miss Louise Haughton, Mr. Fred McChesney, Mrs. R. Hosmer Norris, Mrs. Robert Burnett, Mrs. Harrison Beale, Mrs. Morrison Haviland, and Miss Lynn Cowden. It has been their privilege to assist a dedicated staff and an experienced and capable director, Miss E. Leonore White, in seeking to maintain the best in library service for Schenectady County and the Mohawk Valley Library System.



The Schenectady Free Public Library shortly after its opening on Union Street in 1903.

THE SECOND DECADE- 1976-1986

After Joan Ispen's information packed account of the first decade, it is hard to make the second sound anything but anti-climactic. In actuality, it was anything but this. Thanks to the superb job done in organizing the Friends and setting up a full and highly workable program, the second decade has been very active and worthwhile. It has been exceedingly difficult to make many improvements, which is ample proof that it was done right in the beginning.



Ronald Lagasse, right, is greeted by library officials upon his appointment to Library Director in 1977.

The decade began, in 1977, with the retirement of E. Leonore White as Director of SCPL, and the appointment of Ron Lagasse to succeed her. Mr. Lagasse was faced almost immediately with a \$225,000 budget cut. The Friends, under Donna Sigsbee as President, campaigned against the reduction, and their efforts succeeded in restoring one-third of the money. The Friends also raised-about \$3,400 in gifts and endowments, including an anonymous gift of \$2,500 for books for the branches.

This was also the year Marjorie Woods took over the running of the annual book sale, which we happily report she still does. In 1985 the book sale became semi-annual, and in that year earned over \$7,800, more than \$1,000 more than any previous one-year total.

In November 1977, Donna Sigsbee moved to California, and Chrys Fennimore was elected to replace her. Mrs. Fennimore was subsequently elected to serve an additional two years.

In 1978, the Friends Public Relations Chairman, Ann Stamm, arranged to invite the entire County Board of Representatives, along with their spouses and candidates for election to the Board, to a special open house to tour the library and meet Mr. Lagasse. The Board's enthusiastic reaction resulted in an increase in the budget, allowing restoration of hours at Central, and increase in hours for the branches, and raising of part-time aides to full-time.

In 1979, one of the few second-decade additions to the Friends program was initiated: Science Round the Table. Originally a Thursday noon program, in 1983 it was moved to Monday noon, in between the winter Books-Sandwiched-In and Table Talk series, where it remains. Also in 1979, under the leadership of Rufus Wheeler, the Friends underwrote a major addition to the lighting in the McChesney Room.

In 1981, under Ann Stamm's presidency, the first Staff Appreciation Coffee Party was held in January. As we continue to appreciate the staff, and they, the party, it has become another regular annual event.

In 1983, during Marty Wallender's presidency, the Friends doubled their contribution to the Doorstep Program. In eight summer weeks, Doorstep reached over 2,500 children. However, after one more year, Nancy Gifford, children's librarian in charge of Doorstep, proposed a replacement program called Library Link. Although similar to Doorstep, Library Link covers the entire county, and continues all year. The Friends have supported this enthusiastically, supplemented by a partial matching grant from the State Division for Youth.

In 1984, Marty Wallender and Membership Chairman Gloria Pettersen ran a new-member drive which resulted in a one-month increase of 138 and a total membership at the end of the fiscal year of 1,073. By the end of the decade the membership was approximately 1,101, an increase of about 45%.

The Friends are a separate group from the Library Volunteers, although the two are sometimes confused, and their memberships do tend to overlap. The Friends are always supportive of the volunteer jobs and frequently run a profile of a "Volunteer of the Month." In 1984 the Friends and the Library Trustees together underwrote a luncheon to recognize and honor all library volunteers, and this, too, has become an annual event.

Thus we start our third decade. As the times change, we modify our programs and activities to fit them, but always with the same purposes in mind. We cannot know what the future holds, but we hope another ten years will find us with a better library and even stronger Friends of the SCPL.



Librarian Serena Butch reads to neighborhood children in the summer of 1983 as part of the Doorstep Project

THE THIRD DECADE- 1986-1996

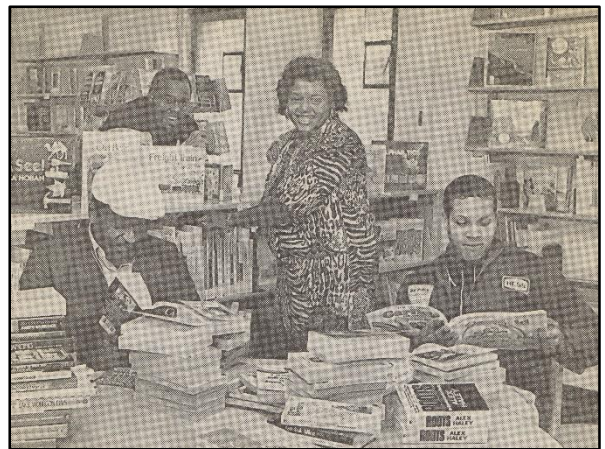
After 20 years of growth in numbers and activities, Friends of the SCPL entered its 3rd decade in full stride. 1986 was a banner year for change and improvement. Membership reached 981 and support for the library increased as well. The computer age was improved by gifts from Mrs. Ellis Auel and the Rotary Club allowed for purchase of software materials. Two book sales, April and September, brought in close to \$10,000.00. Friends programs continued to be strong attractions, with Books Sandwiched In, Table Talks, Science Round Tables and Literary Talks leading the way. Library Link program, an outreach to children in the neighborhoods, was in its 2nd year of operation.

The big news for 1986 was the opening of the Niskayuna Branch, with Friends hosting a celebration for the event. The Woodlawn Branch was also feted as it completed its first full year of operation. All of the expansion was facilitated by the conversion of library holdings in the county to machine-readable form.

Two major bequests in 1987 led to the forming of an endowment policy for continuation of support of the libraries for years to come. Book sales continued to be strong in 1987, with community service groups helping with the set-up and clean-up phases. Literacy Volunteers began its fundraising practice of selling coffee and baked goods during the sales. A staff appreciation party was held in January for central and branch staff members. Branch activity was growing in 1987. The Duane Branch was reopened at its original site (after the 1985 fire) and the Hamilton Hill Branch was opened in the Carver Community Center.

The Library Link program reached 823 children in the county that year. The Niskayuna Branch, after one year of operation, reported a circulation of 30,000 items. Membership in the Friends soared to 1049. Friends also assisted in the implementation of the Schenectady County Board resolution that illiteracy be eradicated in the county by 2000. Financial assistance was given for materials and programs to meet that goal.

Friends, in 1988, participated in the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the opening of the new Central Library. Friends board members joined library officials and other Friends groups from throughout the state to lobby legislators for an increase in state aid for libraries. The Library Link program continued in 1988 with Friends purchasing amplification equipment, puppets and material resources for the program. There were work sessions held where Friends volunteers helped to inventory and barcode books and other materials. At the annual meeting in April,



Looking over books at the newly opened Hamilton Hill Branch Library are, from left, Walter Woodard, Derek Adams, branch librarian Lynn Jarell and Archie Ross

members approved a hike to contributions to \$5.00 for individual and \$8.00 for family memberships.

The Glenville Branch was organized during 1989 with Friends helping with shelving of books and preparation for opening festivities. Assistance was also given for the Senior Day program at Central Library. A number of grants and purchases were made by the Friends during 1989-1990 for improvements in the library and to support literary programs. Jean Sampson ran the jail library and maintained hours from 9:30-11:30 AM on Thursdays. Materials are supplied by the Friends and the Mohawk Valley Library System. The Children's Department received 100 handmade puppets paid for by the Friends.



On hand in September, 1989 for the groundbreaking for the Glenville Branch were, from left, Dorothy Schell, Marion Grimes, Karen Bradley, Malinda Myers and Ronald Lagasse

The Glenville Branch opened in February 1990. Work by volunteers continued in preparation for automated circulation of materials. The Woodlawn Branch was the first to become automated with Scotia closely following. 121 volunteers donated 16,500 hours of service to bring the county libraries to full automation. The jail library recorded an increase in circulation from 1,967 in 1989 to 3,177 in 1990. Periodicals were the main attraction, with the post office donating undeliverable magazines to the cause. Library Link noted its 6th year of service to the community. Noontime programs were now taped for airing on the public access channel.

A boost in revenues came in 1990-1991 as the Friends became eligible for GE matching grants. Seventeen new tables were purchased to reduce the need for trucking for book sales. Book sales continue to bring in about \$10,000 for the year, which was especially important as there was a countywide freeze on expenditures. Friends joined in advocacy for funding by the state and county legislators. Donations were made for adult and children's books at Central and \$11,000 for books for the branches. Friends volunteers also helped relieve tight budget pressures. All noontime programs continued. \$2,000.00 was provided to Library Link for programs in daycare centers, camps and schools. Membership stayed around 1,060.

Advocacy continued in the early '90s as members of Friends joined with library staff to encourage county and state legislators to support budgets for libraries. In 1991-1992, Friends contributed \$3,000 for books for Central Library, \$3,000 for staff support and programs and \$13,000 for books for branches. A VCR was purchased for one of the branches. Noontime series continued to be popular and well-attended. The Piano Committee established a fundraising campaign to raise \$35,000 over 2 years for the purchase of a replacement grand piano for the McChesney Room. GE matching funds became available for the first time and an additional \$5,000 was added to support the libraries. Meetings were held with County Sheriff Barnes to improve library offerings at the jail. Access is still limited.

The 1993-94 years showed continuation of support for Literacy Volunteers, Library Link and other related programs. Cushions were purchased for the children's room and a landscaping program was established for the Central Library. A permanent jail library was approved and Friends budgeted \$300 to provide materials. Matching funds from the Mellon Foundation were provided to continue to receive American Classics from the Library of America Books series. Five branches were beneficiaries. After raising over \$32,000, the Piano Committee purchased a Steinway from Clark Music. Dedication was held on March 20, 1994. The old piano was donated to the Glendale Home. A program of computer education was established for teens during the summer.

1994 marked the centennial of the Schenectady County Public Library System. Along with regular Friends programs, over 20 special events were hosted. Funds were also provided to refurbish the kitchen in the McChesney Room. Special concerts given by Findley Cockrell and Juana Zayas highlighted the new piano and thanks were extended to Schenectady Foundation and the GE Foundation for matching funds. Two special projects for Friends volunteers were the moving of the Niskayuna Branch from Mohawk Mall to its permanent home on Nott Street and the barcoding of materials in the storage collection.

Library Link continued in 1995, reaching over 5,100 children in the community. Friends inaugurated poetry programs and summer reading clubs as well as continued support for children's puppet programs and Literacy Volunteers. Since the new piano was fully funded, a state legislative grant of \$5,000 was used to buy CDs, music scores and otherwise augment the music collection at the library. Prizes for children's writing contests and the summer reading program were provided by Friends donations. Newsletter publication was organized and Friends received news of programs and events on a bi-monthly basis. Long range library planning will be facilitated by a survey conducted by Friends volunteers.

At the end of its third decade, Friends of the Schenectady County Public Library is a strong vibrant organization, always willing to do what is necessary to improve the library offerings for the residents of the community.



Library trustee Esther Swanker and volunteer Emil Kraus try out a new computerized card catalog in 1988.

THE FOURTH DECADE- 1996-2006

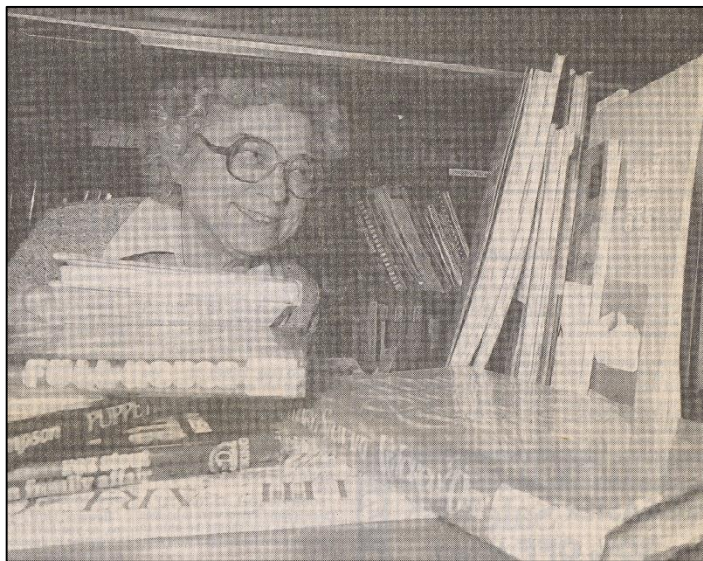
Leadership

Our fourth decade, 1996-2006, began in the second year of the 2-year term of President Valerie Catlin, who remained active with the Friends throughout the decade. She was succeeded in turn by Faith Donovan, Phyllis Bornt, Simon Weinstein, Ed Reilly, and John Karl. Our first eleven presidents were distinguished community women. Although there has been no conscious effort to attain gender balance, it so happens that since the election of our 12th president in 1984, Dick Sills, exactly six men and six women have served in that office.

Since it is the mission of the Friends to work hand in hand with the library and its Board of Trustees, the leadership of these organizations is also significant. During the decade, the Friends board had the pleasure of working with two dynamic library directors, Ron Lagasse who retired in 2000 after 27 years of service, and Andy Kulmatiski who succeeded him. The chairs of the Board of Trustees during the decade were Charles King, 1996-2000; Steve Fitz, 2001-2004; and, since 2005, Esther Swanker. In addition to Esther, three other trustees – Carol Raphael, Gloria Zampini, and Leah Leonard- work closely with the Friends and all four have at various times served on our Nominating Committee as representatives of our general membership, a requirement of our bylaws. Two former Friends presidents, Simon Weinstein and Ed Reilly, were appointed Trustees by the County Legislature in 2005.

To avoid confusion with Trustees of the Library, Friends Board members were called *Directors*. When the reference is made to *a* Director, it means a Friends Board member, whereas a reference to *the* Director means the Library Director. And throughout this history, “decade” does not have its usual meaning but rather refers to a period of ten years phased to the founding of the Friends.

Book Sales



Pat Whitney, who became director of Friends book sales in 1996, peers through the stacks of donated books.

The sale of used books, a mixture of library discards and contributions from both friends and Friends, has been the major fund raising activity of the organization since the fall of 1973. That first sale, then and by continuing tradition held in the McChesney Room library foyer, and the nearby areas outside, yielded about \$1,800. The proceeds were given to the Library to supplement books and other materials available to the children's rooms of the system's branch libraries (of which there are now nine). Library Trustee Marjorie Woods, who chaired that sale, died 25 years later in 1998.

In this decade, Pat Whitney, of whom more will be said in the next section, served as sales director in 1996. She was followed in 1997 by Peter Oldow, who served until his health began to fail in 2000. Peter died, far too young, in 2001. Bern Allanson served as director of sales in 2001, Ellie Rowland and Virginia Thompson in 2002, and then Ellie Rowland with continuing assistance from Ginny and Fred Thompson and Bern from 2003 through to this writing.

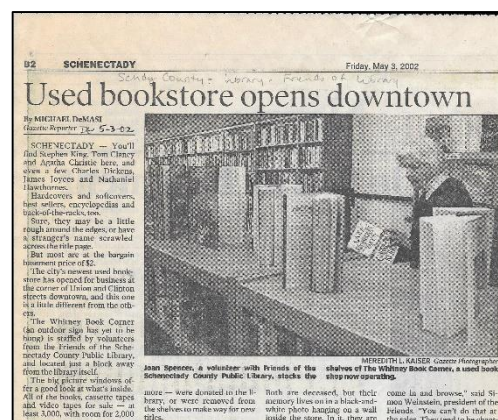
In 1985, two book sales were held, spring and fall, yielding \$7,800, more than four times that realized in 1973. Augmented by special additional sales, income rose to \$12,500 by the beginning of the decade and reached \$26,000 by its end.

Whitney Book Corner

The Friends desire to open and staff a year-round bookstore to raise additional funds for the library dates back many years. The plan began to take shape when the Friends received a generous grant from the estate of Patricia Whitney, who died in 1999. The goal that the funds be used to start a bookstore in her honor was kept alive by her sister, Library Trustee Leah Leonard. For logistical reasons, the Board wanted the store to be as close to the Central Library as possible.

In the early winter of 2002, President-Elect Ed Reilly and his wife Jean were turning around the corner from Clinton into Union Street, just a few yards from the library parking lot, when Jean remarked “Ed, the antique store on the corner is gone!” They hurried home, Ed looked up the owner of 600 Union Street on the Web, found that it was optician Charles Juracka whose business was right next to the vacant store, and called him to ask if he was receptive to having a new tenant. He was. Events unfolded rapidly; a Friends Board meeting was only a few days away. The proposal was made, President Simon Weinstein formed a delegation to work out a rental agreement, and the Board approved it unanimously and enthusiastically.

After renovations performed cooperatively by Mr. Juracka and Friends volunteers Phil Adams and George Gould, the store opened in May 2002 as the Whitney Book Corner. Ed Reilly created its website. George and Joyce Parry served as store managers from the opening until January 1, 2006, when management passed to Renie Federighi and Rich Holt. And from opening through to this writing, Ellie Rowland, in addition to her heavy workload as book sales manager, has served to recruit and coordinate the scheduling of the more than 100 volunteers who work in pairs to staff the store. In its very first year, the store grossed \$27,600, a figure that has grown steadily to over \$36,000 in 2005. By far, the establishment of the flourishing Whitney Book Corner, just steps away from the library, is the most significant Friends accomplishment of the decade.

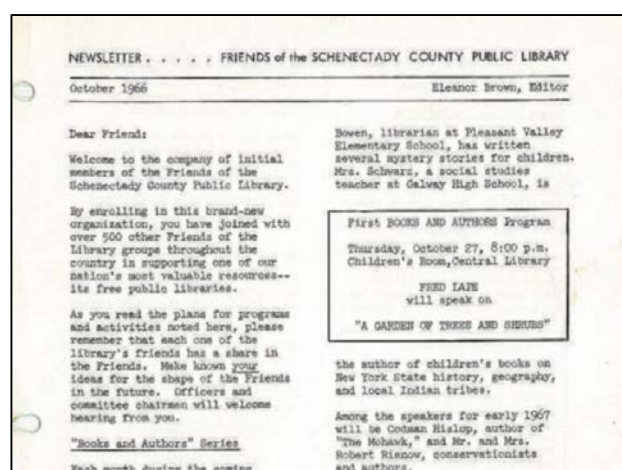


The opening of the Whitney Book Corner is noted in this May 2002 Gazette article.

Every Wednesday, a dedicated group of Friends sort through a week's accumulation of donated and discarded books, performing the triage necessary to stock the bookstore, the spring and fall sales, and special sales scheduled throughout the year. The best books are targeted for the store, others somewhat less suitable but nonetheless in good condition are saved for sales, and still others need to be disposed of because of their mustiness or poor physical condition. Throughout the decade, sorting was led by Phyllis Bornt, Simon and Sally Weinstein, and a supporting cast that includes Phil Adams, Bern Allanson, Sylvia Curley, Mary Dunham, George Gould, Dorothea Ham, Rich Holt, Jean Johnson, Don Leach, Leah Leonard, Kabby Lowe, Elsie Maddaus, Peter Oldow, Joyce Parry, Dorothea Potochnik, Lois Quillanen, Alice Reed, Eleanor Rowland, Fred Thompson, Trudy Thun, and Marty Wallender. Though operating behind the scenes, the group is a vital part of the success of our fundraising activities.

History and Archives

Through the painstaking work of Phyllis Bornt and Anne Yunick, our archives now contain a complete set of all 40 Annual Reports, most of the minutes of meetings ever held, and most of the approximately 200 newsletters ever distributed. The authors of our third and fourth decades of history are indebted to them for compiling the notes that made our jobs so much easier.



October 1966 saw the publication of the first issue of the Friends Newsletter (FOL archives)

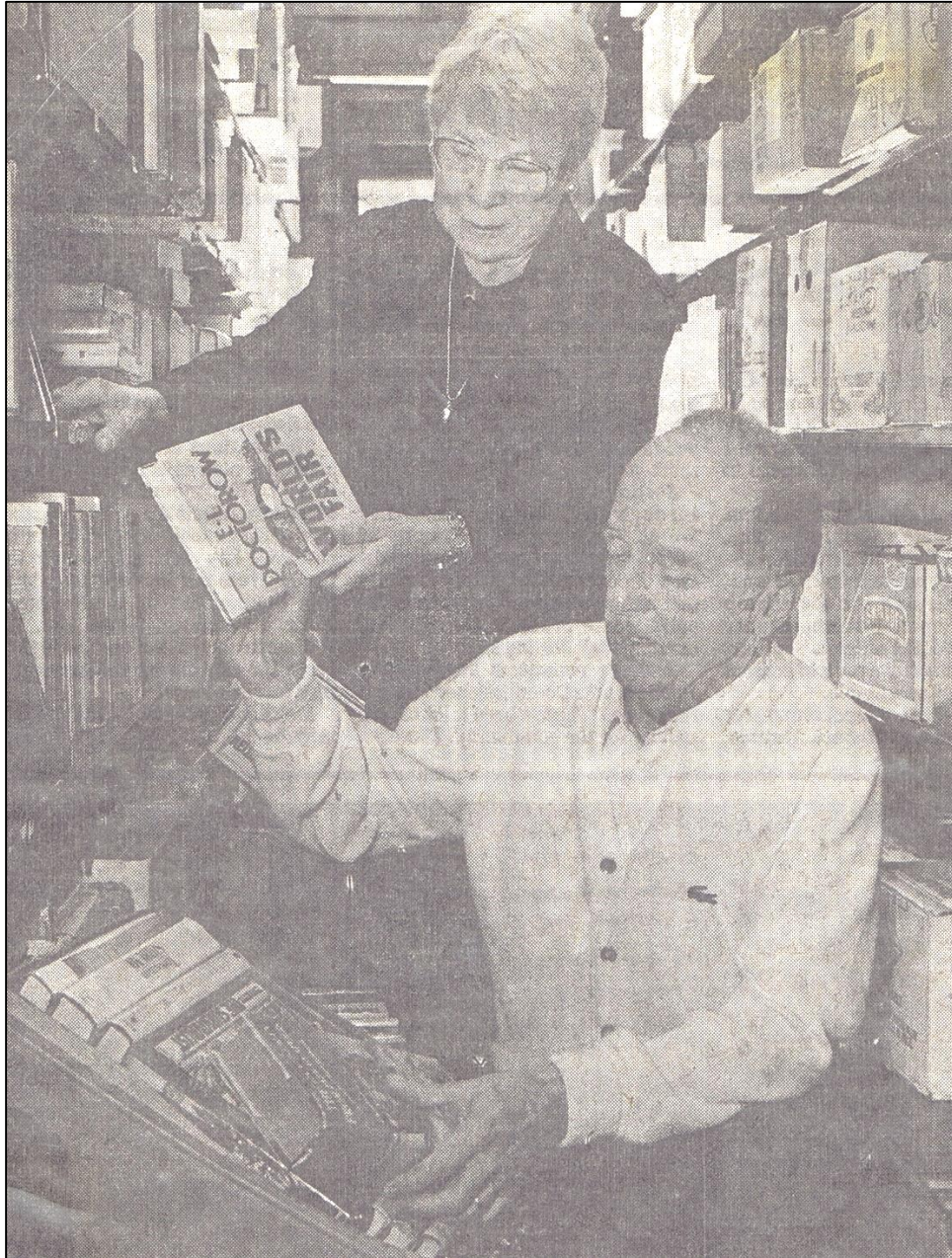
Finance

Our treasurer throughout the decade and for several years before has been Junice Wusterbarth. For this period, her section of the Annual Report has shown a steadily increasing year-end fund balance ranging from \$25,000 to \$99,000. This has been achieved even though the Friends were able to provide over \$300,000 of support to the library over the same time period.

From 1998 through 2001, the Friends received \$10,000 per year from the Lillian M. Slater Memorial Trust, a total of \$40,000. A recent bequest of \$97,682 from the estate of Charles Mahan has now been added to the available fund balance.

In 2003, the County Legislature, with the advice and encouragement of the Library Trustees, authorized a major expansion of Central Library, the goal being additional floor space of almost 8,000 square feet by 2008. More specifically, the Legislature moved to provide an initial two million dollars in county funds with the expectation that as much as possible of the additional five million needed would be raised from state funds, community foundations, and individual citizens of the county and its environs. To this end, a joint Trustee-Friends committee was formed consisting of Trustees Esther Swanker, Steve Fitz, Harold Wusterbarth, Ida Frisone, and Gloria Zampini; Friends Simon Weinstein, Ed Reilly, John Karl, and Walter Grattidge;

Legislator Vince DiCerbo; and Library Directory Andrew Kulmatiski and publicity coordinator Joanne DeVoe as ex-officio members. To date, contributions and multi-year pledges total about two million dollars. Of this sum, the Friends as an organization contributed \$50,000 over two years and an additional \$20,000 received in 2004 as a bequest from the estate of Charles Concorida, the husband of our third president, Frances Concordia, who had died in 2001.



Junice and Harold Wusterbarth sort items for the 1991 fall book sale.

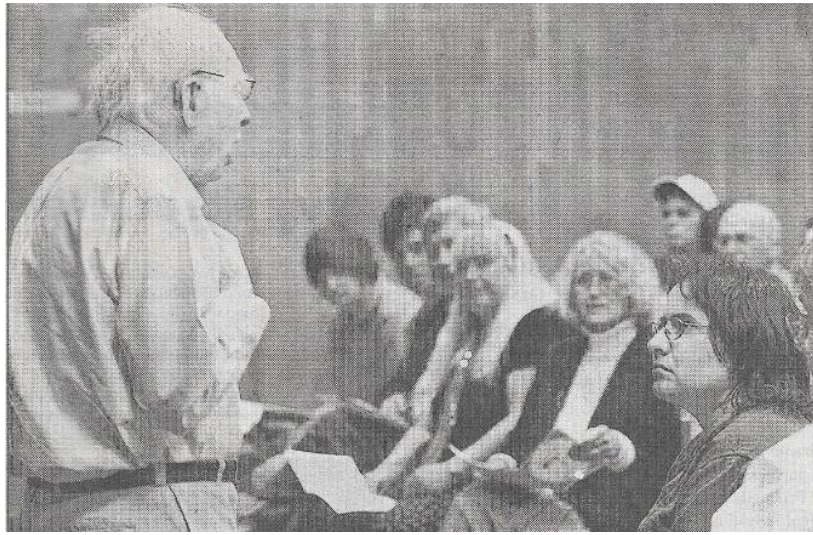
Monday Noon Programs

In the first year of the decade, the Friends sponsored nineteen Books-Sandwiched-In (BSI) reviews, seven Table Talks, and four each on science and literature. All were given at noon on Mondays in the McChesney Room. Talk dates are assigned by a program coordinator to those who recruit speakers for their subject areas and moderate their talks. For the first two years of the decade and several years before, Frank Steiner served as program coordinator. He was succeeded by Naomi Bristol, who became coordinator for the next six years, and Barbara Grasier for the last two. We mourned the loss of Frank Steiner in 2000.

The Annual Report for 1996-1997 credited many Friends who oversaw or helped with subject area programs: Dr. Robert Orr, Gene Zola, and John Meyer- all of whom died during the decade- Lillian Stern, Dorothy Meyer, Don Ackerman, Sally van Schaick, Faith Donovan, Dr. Walter Grattidge, and Gioia Ottaviano. Walter and Gioia were still coordinating the science and humanities talks respectively at the end of the decade. For the last several years, the BSI series was coordinated by the indefatigable Linda Witkowski and Table Talks by Ed Reilly. Some of the public figures who gave Table talks were Congressman Michael McNulty, Assemblyman Paul Tonko, Assistant U.S. Attorney General for Civil Rights Ralph Boyd Jr. of the (second) Bush administration, and Thomas Constantine, Director of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency under President Clinton. In spring 2005, even Eleanor Roosevelt came to speak, albeit in the person of author and actor Elena Dodd, who thrilled a large audience with the fidelity of her inspiring impersonation.

Poetry

Linda Witkowski, coordinator of Books-Sandwiched-In, organized our first Poetry Gala in 2000, an event that has been held annually on the first Sunday in April. The sixth gala was held on April 10, 2005, and the seventh is scheduled for April 2, 2006.



Poetry Gala coordinator Linda Witkowski, second from right, enjoys a reading at the annual spring event.

Music

In 1997, an anonymous donor presented a Steinway Grand B piano to the Friends for use at the Elizabeth Harriman Bean branch library in Niskayuna. Throughout the decade, the Friends Music Committee sponsored several music programs per year, all held in the McChesney Room of the central library. The prime mover for this endeavor has been Dr. Walter Grattidge, who was chair or co-chair of the Committee for the entire decade except for 2001 when Meme Pittman served in that capacity. His co-chair for the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 program years were, respectively, Marianne Pashler and Joan Ham. Others who worked on the committee during the decade were Jo Adams, Andy Kulmatiski, Kabby Lowe, Malinda Myers, Simon Weinstein, Nancy Waldron, and Junice Wusterbarth. Thanks to a very generous grant from Dr. Grattidge, funds for support of music are derived from interest on invested funds, making the music program financially self-sustaining.

Jail Outreach

What had been the County Jail is now officially the County Correctional Facility, but the name of our outreach committee has not yet been changed. The committee provides softcover books to the facility's library. Throughout the decade and for years before, the chair of the committee has been Maryde King and her principal assistant has been Howard Fiedler. For the last several years, Richard Mehan and Germaine Doremus have also been key assistants. Other volunteers have been Jean Sampson, Roland and Agnes Peteler, Roseann Jweid, Stephen Almasi, Althea Nelson, Ann Fox, Kay Dixon and Dorothy Krauss.

Membership

Four directors served as membership chair or co-chair during this 10-year period, Kabby Lowe for the first five, Ed Reilly for two, Ed & Renie Federighi for one, and Bill Beaulieu, who is still serving, for two. What had been a 3 x 5 card system for 35 years was converted to a computerized database in 2001. As a byproduct, this enabled the membership chair to produce mailing labels for newsletters and membership notices. This had been done as a separate process for many years by Wayne and Jane Somers. Because the Friends have a January to December fiscal year, a September to May program year, a July to June membership year, and elects directors and officers to terms that are not in phase with any of these, it is difficult to deduce membership levels from "Annual" Reports issued during Library Week in April. Through the decade, it appears that we service about 800 memberships (perhaps 1,200 people) of which about 650 are current at any given time. Money is easier to track; total contributions averaged \$15,000 for the first seven years and \$17,000 for the last three, the increase at least partly due to our first member contributions increase in 37 years. In 2003, individual contributions were raised from \$5 to \$10



Branch coordinator Wonja Brucker and Friends board member Fred Thompson look over items to be sold at the fall 1999 book sale.

and, so as to track the minimum contribution eligible for matching GE funds, the family member contribution was raised from \$15 to \$25. The GE match was typically about \$6,000 per year, but was as high as \$27,000 in 1999, the year a grand piano was donated to the Friends for use at the Niskayuna branch library.

Landscaping

In 2000, Friends volunteers participating in the Schenectady 2000 Task Force on civic improvement installed a sprinkling system, planted flower bulbs, and rearranged flower beds at the central library. Other related upkeep was performed periodically throughout the remainder of the decade. In 1995, the year the Niskayuna Branch opened, funds were donated to establish a restricted fund of about \$6,000 for landscaping there, funds that are continually expended and replenished for that purpose. Friends continue to work at both of these sites.



Volunteers work on the Niskayuna Branch Library garden. (Photos from Niskayuna archives)

Volunteer Picnic

Since 1984, the Friends and the Library Trustees have co-sponsored and shared the expense of a library and Friends staff and volunteer lunch or picnic, typically held in June. The opening of the Whitney Book Corner in 2002 added over a hundred new eligible volunteers and made the event a major and much anticipated happening that all attendees find highly enjoyable.

Newsletter

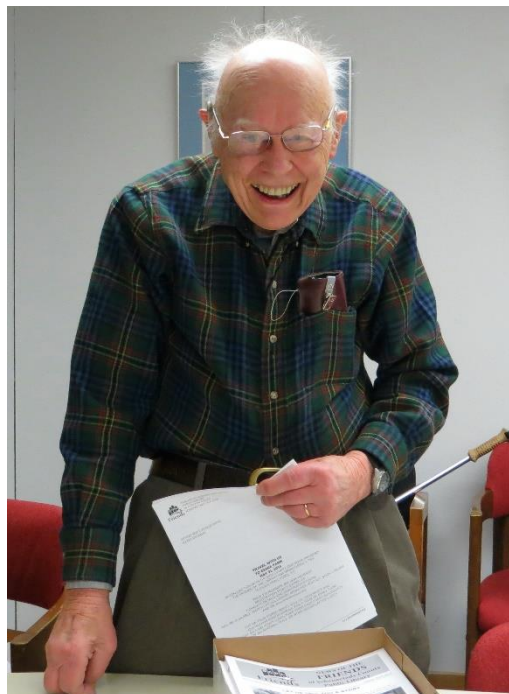
Without fail, the Friends issued five newsletters per year throughout the decade. For the first two of these years and some before, the newsletter editor was Alan Nelson. Valerie Catlin performed this function for the next five years, and Gene Rowland, the current editor, for the last three. For

the first eight years of the decade and for nine years before it, Mildred Neslin served as chair of the newsletter mailing committee. When Mildred retired and moved away shortly thereafter, Ed Reilly and Bill Beaulieu shared that duty, with Kathleen August doing so for the last year. The principal deputy throughout the decade and many years before has been Rudy Dehn. Bill and Lois Isles typically ran the electric stapler, and the labelers included Doris Clark, Dick Sills and Katherine Fritz, Helen Steiner, Lillian Stern, Trudy Carpenter, Flo Bigelow, Gert Schutz, Mary Jane Beaulieu, and Jean Reilly.

Annual Dinner

The principal event planned by the Friends Hospitality Committee is an annual dinner held during Library Week in April. This is a catered affair with a business section at which Friends officers and directors are elected by members who attend. Attendance varied from 66 to 85. The venue has traditionally been the McChesney Room, but because of the interest in our 40th year anniversary, the 2005-2006 event will be held in the Casola Room at Schenectady County Community College. During the decade, Carol Raphael chaired the committee for five years, followed by Jeanette Gerlaugh for two and Priti Irani for three. Principal speakers for the occasion were:

1996	Werner Feibes	2001	John Falco
1997	Margaret Buhrmaster	2002	Steve Fitz
1998	Janet Welch	2003	Kevin DeFebbo
1999	John Manning	2004	Ray Gillen
2000	Frank Taormina	2005	Don Rittner



Rudy Dehn helps with the distribution of the Friends newsletter. (Friends archives photo)

THE FIFTH DECADE- 2006-2016

One might think that the Friends of the Schenectady County Public Library, heretofore known as the Friends, would rest on their laurels after such success in the first four decades. Just the opposite happened during the fifth decade. The Friends are library advocates, fundraisers, program coordinators and presenters, book sellers and book sorters. They move thousands of donated books to sales at the library, at their own bookstore and online. They are literary trip planners and leaders on those journeys. They arrange for books to be purchased and reviewed. They plan and coordinate speakers and discussion leaders in science, medicine, education and current events. They've been gardeners, newsletter writers and distributors, publicists, photographers and concert planners. They create cooperation between their organization and the library and between other organizations and businesses in the area. They contribute to a sense of community in Schenectady.

Exciting Decade

In addition to the Friends regular programs and events, a number of new and exciting programs have taken place. Together with the library staff, the Friends supported the popular One County, One Book community read. A number of popular authors have been featured, beginning with Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Authors Jodi Picoult (*My Sister's Keeper*), Jamie Ford (*Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*), Robin Oliveira (*My Name is Mary Sutter*), Garth Stein (*The Art of Racing in the Rain*), Kristin Kimball (*The Dirty Life*) have come to Schenectady to speak about their books and participate in a number of related community events. Khaled Hosseini (*The Kite Runner*) and Sara Gruen (*Water for Elephants*) have also been featured.

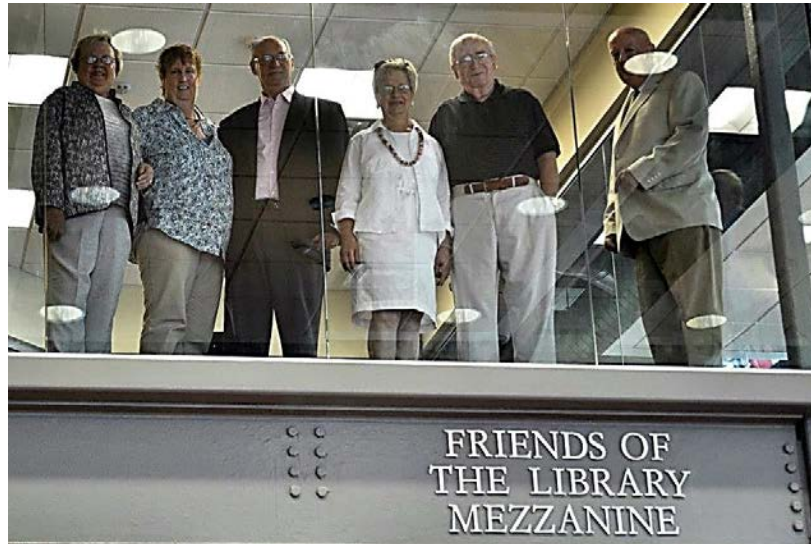
The Friends began the support of the Museum Pass Program whereby library patrons may receive discounts or free admission to many of the areas cultural venues. They continue to fund the free computer training classes given each month.

Another new and very popular offering has been the literary trips planned by the Friends. Inspired by the book *Novel Destinations*, day trips to the homes of noted authors Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Herman Melville and Washington Irving were offered. Historical sites, such as the Roosevelt Library and Museum at Hyde Park have also taken place. Led by John Goldsmith and endorsed by the Friend's, trips were taken to Ireland, Britain and the Provence area of France.



Friends traveled to Hartford, Conn. to visit homes of Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe in June 2009.

After several stops and starts, plans for the new children's addition to the Central Library were agreed upon in 2008. \$80,000 was contributed initially by the Friends for the project, which included refurbishment of carpeting and furnishings in the main areas of the library. When the county pulled back on the initial plan for a mezzanine for the new addition, the Friends provided \$250,000 to complete the construction. Once the addition was completed, Friends funded an additional \$50,000 to make the furnishings first class.



The new Phyllis Bornt Branch Library and Literacy Center in mid-city opened in 2016. Seed money was provided by a bequest from Ms. Bornt who, before passing away, worked for the library as branch coordinator and, later, as a dedicated volunteer for the Friends. The Friends will be deeply involved in making sure that this new facility will be first class for the residents of the city.

The Friends also funded the renovation of the kitchen in the McChesney Room, which hadn't been improved for almost 50 years.

Monday Noon Programs

The ever-popular Monday Noon programs continued through the decade. Books-Sandwiched-In has been a Friends offering since before the Central Library was built. Over 24 books are reviewed by community members each year. Additionally, a series of Table Talks presented by noted community personalities, a special topics series and a science series round out the offerings.

Music Programs

From January through March each year, the Music Committee has provided quality musical entertainment for the public's enjoyment in their *Beat the Snow* programs Sunday afternoons in the McChesney Room. Local talent of many types have been featured each year, from solo instrumental programs to presentations by the group Musicians of Ma'alwyck. Music programs featuring local talent are regularly held in the assembly room of the Niskayuna branch.

Poetry Gala

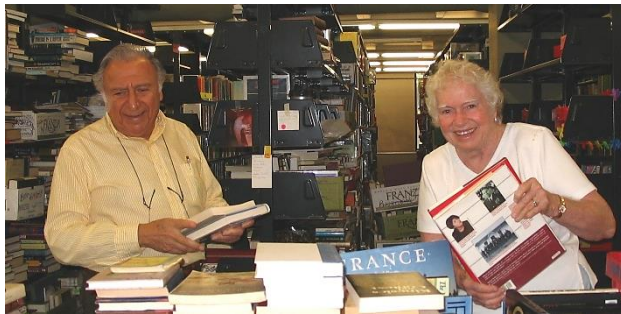
The annual poetry gala, which highlights members of the community reading their favorite poems, has been held in April on the kickoff Sunday of Library Week. Linda Witkowski was the coordinator for the first seven years of the 5th decade and, after she retired from that position, Deborah Noyes, a member of the library staff, stepped in and has been continuing the tradition.

Book Sales

Selling books (and other media) continues as the major source of Friends income. The large book sales in the spring and fall and the mini sale in February not only bring in needed funds for all the branches and the Central Library, but rally hundreds of volunteers to join in the efforts of setting up, clerking and cleanup. Every week, books and other media donated by the generous public and discards from the library branches are sorted, shelved and made ready for one or more of the sales venues. All work is volunteer and all proceeds, except for minimal operational expenses, go toward support of the library system. All of these efforts require a great deal of organization. The Friends has been fortunate to have dedicated members on the job.



*Volunteer Jean Johnson
works the winter 2013
book sale*



*Simon Weinstein and Ellie Rowland sort books in
preparation for the book sales.*

Whitney Book Corner

The Whitney Book Corner is celebrating its 14th anniversary in 2016. Since its opening, the store has augmented Friends funds and has become a major partner in the downtown Schenectady business district. Open 18 shifts per week, 52 weeks a year, the store “employs” over 100 volunteer clerks and shelvees. The store is enjoying a great deal of popularity in downtown Schenectady. Gail Karl took over as manager in 2008 followed by Charlene Roman in 2015. The store offers top quality books, CDs and DVDs at bargain basement prices. It has become a major participant in community events in the area. Monthly sales and special programs have helped maintain a healthy income and have encouraged a consistently growing clientele. As with all Friends activities, the management and staff are volunteers, with all net proceeds going to the library. The store’s website underwent a major facelift in 2012 and a Facebook page was created in 2009.

Online Book Sales

The third fundraising arm of the Friends is online book and media sales. Begun by George Gould and Joyce Parry after they retired from managing the bookstore, the online book sale function has grown steadily since its inception over 12 years ago.

Quality books, CDs and DVDs are scanned and those in greatest demand are put up on Amazon and eBay for sale. When George and Joyce retired, Shawn Marie Schultz took over and she has built a formidable team of book scanners, posters and shippers to raise significant funds for the library. Every week, team members explore and rate the donated books and media for value and then offer those items that would fetch more than \$10 on the online market. The proceeds are coming close to the proceeds of the large book sales and the WBC income.

Membership

Membership in the Friends has come a long way since 1966 but the current members are as dedicated as ever to keeping up support of the library. Numbers have held steady during the decade with around 700 current memberships and, taking into account the number of multi-person households, the grand total is around 1,100.

Member contributions have increased over the decade, with many members upgrading their commitment. Matching funds by the GE Foundation have consistently added to the income. Beginning several years ago, membership renewals are mailed out on a quarterly basis depending on the date that a member joined. This alleviates a major deluge of renewals all at one time. Record keeping is much improved with the new procedure.

Participation in community events and at all major library events brings in new members on a regular basis. Also, the popular literary trips attract new members.

The newest membership addition is the Junior Friends, a nationally recognized service organization providing area youth with an opportunity for community service for teens from 13-18. The Junior Friends volunteered through the summer of 2015 at online books as sorters, at the fall book sale and at Whitney Book Corner events.



Junior Friends, from left, Joe Giordano, Melissa and Emily Aucompaugh



Hospitality committee member Dottie Potochnik and her husband, Frank, at 2014 staff and volunteer picnic.

Hospitality

The Friends are not all work and no play. The annual Dinner Meeting is held during Library Week every year. The venue has usually been at the Schenectady County Community College with great dinners provided by the culinary department of the college. Another annual event is the Staff and Volunteer Picnic in June, where all who make the library great are recognized with a wonderful picnic, replete with prizes and accolades.

Finance

It is important to note that the finances of the Friends are in good hands. For many years, Junice Wusterbarth held the reins of Friends monies. After her retirement, Nancy Virkler, without skipping a beat, stepped in and has overseen Friends finances to this date.

According to the Friends bylaws, funds are not to be used for expenses normally provided by the county. Over the years, Friends have contributed to capital projects such as building additions, new branches and furnishings, all of which enhance the program offerings of the library and contribute to the literary health of the community. New opportunities for increasing funds may be explored in the years to come.

Communication

Never let it be said that the Friends is old fashioned and out-of-date. The print newsletter has been the major form of communication for the past 50 years but it is now joined by an array of modern methods to keep the public informed. A website, developed by Chris Witkowski, has been up and running for some time and Friends news is also published on Facebook. The Archives Committee scanned every copy of past newsletters and they can be found on the Friends website. In months when the newsletter is not published, email blasts of current information about events and issues are sent to members who have email. In 2016, opportunity to have the newsletter sent digitally via email was made available to members who desire that form. Every event will be publicized in all of the means available, now and in the future.

The Next 50 Years

To paraphrase Mark Twain, the report of the demise of libraries is greatly exaggerated. Because libraries will remain a major part of the community, albeit in different ways than we can even imagine now, there will always be a role for a supportive Friends organization. Changes in funding and changes in management will inevitably occur over the next 50 years, but the Friends will be there to help keep the Schenectady County Public Library a vibrant, up-to-date resource for the residents of Schenectady.

Friends of SCPL
Organizational Meeting
April 21, 1966

Officers

President	Mrs. T.A. Rich
1 st Vice President	Glenn Burrows
2 nd Vice President	Mrs. Donald Kerr
Recording Secretary	Mrs. Hebert Poller
Treasurer	Donald A. Titley

Board of Directors

Joseph Allen
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Ralph Bengtson
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Harold A. Dewhurst
Mrs. Paul A. Frank
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Walter Grattidge
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Mrs. Fred Luborsky
Miles J. Martin
Mrs. R.H. Norris
J.F.H. Robinson, Jr.
Mrs. James L. Walker

Presidents of the Friends
Of SCPL
1966-2016

1966-1967	Kathryn Rich
1967-1968	Elisabeth Norris
1968-1970	Frances Concordia
1970-1971	Eleanor Brown
1971-1973	Karen Johnson
1973-1974	Joan Ipsen
1974-1976	Alice Niedrach
1976-1977	Donna Sigsbee
1977-1980	Chrysoula Fenimore
1980-1982	Ann Stamm
1982-1984	Martha Wallender
1984-1986	Richard Sills
1986-1988	Kathryn McCary
1988-1990	Junice Wusterbarth
1990-1991	Frank Steiner
1991-1992	Jane Somers
1992-1995	Walter Grattidge
1995-1997	Valerie Catlin
1997-1999	Faith Donovan
1999-2001	Phyllis Bornt
2001-2003	Simon Weinstein
2003-2005	Edwin D. Reilly, Jr.
2005-2007	John Karl
2007-2009	Bern Allanson
2009-2013	Bill Leitch
2013-2016	John Karl

WITHOUT LIBRARIES WHAT HAVE WE?
WE HAVE NO PAST AND NO FUTURE.

-RAY BRADBURY



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