

Sargent Memorial Library Strategic Plan FY23-FY27

Appendix A. Community and Library Profile 2022

Community Overview

Boxborough is a small town of about 10 square miles that sits on the westerly edge of Middlesex County. It was incorporated as a district on February 24, 1783, so the residents could establish their place of public worship. The town’s population ebbed and flowed between 400 and 700 in the subsequent 175 years, remaining as “...a small farming-town, somewhat hilly and of a passably good soil”, with its people being “nearly all farmers, who earn their living...by the sweat of the face.”¹ Boxborough had the reputation of being the largest hop-growing town of its size in New England in the early 19th century.

Then came the 1960s during which highways 128 and 495 were built, connecting outlying towns to the booming technology sector outside of Boston. Boxborough’s location between the highways and the reputation of the Acton-Boxborough school district appealed to commuters and families with school-age children. The farming town suburbanized and grew. In the ensuing five decades, Boxborough’s population increased 7-fold and finally stabilized at around 5,000 in the 2000s. Even with a much larger population, Boxborough’s sense of community can be felt at the annual Fifer’s Day celebration that is held on every 3rd Saturday of June, the Christmas Tree Lighting, the Winterfest, the Annual Town Meetings, the FreeBee Market, and at other events and activities organized by local organizations. The Town also retains its rural charm with woods and walking trails throughout the area.

Since its founding, the Town has been largely run by volunteer-formed boards and committees. In 2016, the Town approved a 10-year master plan setting the Town’s vision to be: A Rural, Engaged Community for All, Boxborough shall maintain its traditional values of rural open space, a first-rate educational system, agricultural and conservation lands, and historical roots, while fostering a balanced economic environment and enhancing a close-knit sense of community for all generations.

Library Overview

Boxborough has always been a reading town. The earliest iteration of a town library appeared in 1845 in the form of a small bookcase in a store at the main crossroad. After 1879, those more literary-minded could join a Magazine Club to share periodical subscriptions with other



Celebrating our diverse community

¹ An Elementary Geography for Massachusetts Children by William Bentley Fowle and Asa Fitz, 1845.

members. Young readers had a Juvenile Club that was started in 1880, where members took turns receiving curated juvenile literature collected and overseen by a Miss Minnie Burroughs. Finally, following the establishment of the Massachusetts Library Association and the Massachusetts Free Library Commission in 1890, the Town voted to elect its first Board of Library Trustees. The Trustees started a public library in the large front parlor of Mr. J. Harry Orendorff's home. His wife, Lucy A. Orendorff, served as a librarian without pay to oversee the collection of 186 books. The Library opened every Saturday from 2 pm to 4:30 pm and from 6 pm to 8 pm.

When the Orendorffs moved away to Concord, the collection, which had grown to 615 books, had to look for a new home and found it in the front parlor of Mr. Henry L. Priest. His niece, Mabel Priest, took over the role of the librarian. The collection eventually outgrew the space in the early 1900s, but the Town did not appropriate a new space for the Library until 1908 when the old Town Hall that was falling into disrepair was renovated by volunteers to house the 1,849 books in the old selectmen's office. The "small bookcase" that had been circulating books since 1845 also was moved in to display historical items. However, within a few years, the collection again outgrew the space and was finally moved into the large hall, later referred to as the "Library Hall," in 1914. In 1940, then Librarian Mrs. Lucy Gates spent almost six months single-handedly re-cataloging the Library collection to follow the "new, totally modern" Dewey Decimal System. The collection had reached 6,524 books when a fire broke out on the night of January 9, 1953, and the old Town Hall, along with the Library Hall, burned to the ground.

News of the devastating loss of the Library spread throughout the country, and book donations poured in. Six hundred books were received and served to restart the Library in one of the town's vacant one-room schoolhouses (School House #2). The Library reopened five months later to serve town residents every Wednesday, 3 pm to 5 pm and 7 pm to 9 pm.

The little schoolhouse Library was small but friendly; it lacked space but was pleasant. It had no plumbing, and "the only source of heat was the old wood stove and the warmth of [then librarian] Reita's smile."² The little house was supposed to be a temporary location, but the road to a new, permanent library building proved to be a trying thirteen years long. During this period, the librarian, Reita Bean, continued to grow the Library a few books and a few extra opening hours at a time. By 1965, it had a collection of 5,500 books and was open 12 hours a week.

In 1963, long-time Boxborough resident Mr. Albert J Sargent passed away, bequeathing \$50,000 to the Town to use for "the purchase of a site and erection of a public library."³ This gift and a generous donation of a \$4,000 parcel of land by two anonymous benefactors laid the foundation for building a new library. In early January 1966, the new building was ready. On January 23rd, with the help of the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and residents with cars, the books were moved from the schoolhouse into the brand-new Albert J Sargent Memorial Library.

² Katherine Talmadge et al., *Boxborough: A Portrait of a Town* (Boxborough, MA: Boxborough Bicentennial Commission, 1983), 213.

³ *Ibid*, 214.

The new building served the community of 1,000 wonderfully. However, as Boxborough's population expanded to 5,000, so did the community's needs and the demand for resources. The Town needed more from the Library than the building could offer. In 2001, the Town approved allocating \$3.6 million to "design, equip and construct" a new Library with State Aid supplementing the rest of the construction cost. Ground breaking at the new location took place in 2003, and the 12,000 square feet building was completed in 2004. The new Sargent Memorial Library opened its doors to the public in 2005 and has since been much used and loved by the community.

Existing Library Services

The Sargent Memorial Library is a municipal library funded by the Town of Boxborough and governed by an elected Library Board of Trustees consisting of six members. The current building has 12,000 square feet, including a large meeting room, 54 parking spaces, and a back patio. The current operating hours are Monday through Thursday, 10 am to 8 pm, and Saturdays from 10 am to 3 pm in September through June.



The Sargent Memorial Library serves a diverse and engaged population. The Library closely follows national and local events and trends and develops collections and programs accordingly. The Library has been thoughtfully curating a diverse collection to meet the community's needs. The Library added read-along books and playaways that assist in literacy development, expanded the world language collection in response to the demographic change, and continued to add to the Library of Things collection.



The lively Youth Services department holds weekly storytimes, craft times, Dungeon and Dragon sessions, and a monthly Lego club. In addition to these regular events, there are special programs and extra workshops on holidays and during school vacations. For adults, the Library held a variety of workshops and talks, such as a presentation on Native American basketry and Scottish music performance, to educate and entertain. These programs are sometimes offered in partnership

with other local organizations or other libraries. The Library also serves as the community meeting space, lending the meeting room to non-profit organizations for meetings and events.