

Introduction

IT IS very difficult for people of today, when wages are high and money is plentiful, actually to realize the financial situation of nearly sixty years ago when the Granville Library Club was organized. In those days, for a small group of women to set themselves to raise enough money to build and equip a library was an almost unheard-of undertaking. It was a task far harder than it would now be to raise five times the same amount.

To commemorate the work of these courageous women, this short paper, most of which was written in 1906, with a few additions to include some of the later work of the Club, is now presented as an Addendum to the History of Granville.

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The Story of a Village Library

WE ARE all more or less familiar with present-day workings of the Granville Library, but not so much so with the struggles to get it started—and they were indeed very real struggles. It is of these struggles that this paper tells.

Nowadays we are apt to take the Library for granted, much as we do our schools; but in my girlhood, it was quite different. Then the nearest approach to a public library was the very limited collection of books in the Sunday Schools; in fact, one of the attractions of Sunday School was that you could get a book to take home and read during the week.

So imagine yourself, if you will, to be looking at the pink and green map of New England in your old school geography. On the boundary line between the Nutmeg State and the Old Bay State, just west of the Connecticut River, you will see the pink of Massachusetts jutting down into the green of Connecticut. The little Massachusetts town which occupies the section just northwest of this jog is Granville.

Like a good many New England towns in the hill districts, the scanty population is scattered over an area of about forty square miles with three small villages as centers, Granville, Granville Center and West Granville, each one once having its own schoolhouse, store, post office and church, and a farming population living along the outlying country roads. The two western villages are distinctly farming communities, but Granville proper, formerly called the Corners, with not over 300 souls all told, is a manufacturing community although now nearly twenty miles from the nearest railroad center.

As one might expect, there are some families who, though perhaps not rich in the modern sense of the word, are really well-to-do; but life for the most means daily work. Naturally, too, there are some who enter deeply into the problems of the day and the intellectual treasures of past and present; but they, too, belong to the few, and there is no literary club, even so-called. The boys and girls, as they

grow up, either go away to school and then into business or professional life elsewhere; or, without completing the excellent school course furnished by the town, enter the factories, work on the farm, or do odd jobs here and there. And in the latter case, they are very apt to drift.

Such, then, were conditions in 1896 when the wife of one of our leading business men, a woman of the noblest ideals, saw primarily the needs of the boys and girls; and out of her efforts to help them grew our Library, one of the most beautiful and best equipped in any town of comparable size. Coming from one of our great cities where church, Young Men's Christian Association, and other organizations do so much to provide social life distinctly for young people and to afford them a common meeting-place which shall be not only thoroughly desirable, but open to them at any time, Mrs. Ralph B. Cooley realized the lack of exactly that element and thought she might help Granville most in that particular way. The Town, in compliance with the Library Act of 1890, had appropriated a small amount of money and had then received one hundred dollars' worth of books from the State. All these were placed in the chapels in Granville and Granville Center, in charge of the ministers or some interested person and were accessible to the public one afternoon a week. Accommodations were lamentably insufficient and neither books nor people could be properly cared for.

So, on February 11, 1896, Mrs. Cooley invited to her home twelve women and laid before them her hopes. The Granville Library Club, with Mrs. Cooley as its President, was immediately organized and its purpose distinctly stated: "To erect a library building containing a library and reading-room and also a room provided with suitable attractions and amusements for both young men and young women." The original members were:

Mrs. Ralph B. Cooley, President
Miss Nellie C. Noble, Vice-President
Miss Cora A. Noble, Secretary
and Treasurer
Mrs. Orville R. Noble
Mrs. Silas B. Root
Mrs. Cattie Huddleston

Mrs. Mary Gill
Mrs. Emma Barlow
Mrs. Milo E. Seymour
Mrs. E. N. Henry
Mrs. Nell Gibbons
Mrs. Alice Carpenter
Miss Clara E. Wilcox

Of these thirteen charter members, only two are now living, Mrs. Cattie Huddleston and Miss Clara Wilcox. Some years ago when Mrs. Huddleston moved away from Granville, she resigned from the Club though still showing her interest in it. So now the only remaining member of the Club who was one of the original members is Miss Clara E. Wilcox.

Next came the all-important question of finance, not "*How should it be done?*", but "*How could it be done?*". The personnel of the Club then came to the front. The members had been chosen not because of their financial or literary qualifications, though these were well represented, but for their personal qualities. Some were women of independent means; some earned their own living by working in the factory; there were some whose husbands had an average daily wage, one whose husband received only one dollar a day; and one who had absolutely no pin-money to call her own. Clearly, then, it was not a question of writing checks for the desired amount. The money must be earned, and to this very fact is due in great measure the wholesome interest which the Club aroused. Each member pledged ten dollars a year which she should earn, and more if possible. In addition to this individual effort, they were to work as a Club. Now recall, please, the situation, population and environment of the town. Consider, too, that with the exception of two generous gifts, practically all the money was raised in the one small village of Granville, that the Club was started only in 1896, that in November, 1901, the building was completed at a total cost of more than \$13,000—and you will have some idea of the zeal and self-denial with which those few women worked.

To get a true picture of conditions then, we should remember that a pound of cheese cost only 16¢; a quart of the best milk, 5¢; an excellent and substantial three course dinner in one of Westfield's best restaurants, only 25¢. This dinner consisted of a large plate of soup—not a few spoonfuls in a cup—, a very generous serving of roast beef or pork with potatoes and two other vegetables, plenty of bread and butter, a large piece of pie, and coffee or tea. Twenty-five cents! Think of it! Then for fifty cents, you could have a really deluxe dinner in one of Springfield's best hotels. So when these

women pledged themselves to earn ten dollars a year, apiece, it really *was* something.

Immediately after the adjournment of its first meeting, the Club resolved itself into individual committees of ways and means, and many an hour was spent in careful thought, for one of the first principles was that for whatever was done, only the current commercial value should be asked; that every article sold should be not simply attractive, but useful and fully worth its price. In short, that buyers were always to receive their money's worth and that no one should feel that, since it was for a good cause, one was expected to pay double price for what was not wanted.

The record of the first two or three years shows the common sense ideas which the members had, as well as the business insight which saw what could be most advantageously turned into dollars and cents. One woman who lived upon a farm where arbutus ran riot gathered and sent to a neighboring city enough to bring her six of the necessary ten dollars. Later in the year, she herself picked and sold the fruit from some of their cherry trees; and during winter evenings she knitted many a pair of mittens. This was Mrs. Alice Carpenter.

Growing along some of the tiny brooks were quantities of sweet flag. One member hired a boy to gather the roots for her at intervals during the summer. After being cleaned, sliced and sugared, they were sold in five-cent packets. This proved not only very attractive, but very profitable. It was Clara Wilcox who did this. She also knitted bed socks and mittens.

The Club President, Mrs. Ralph B. Cooley, who had a garden noted for its delicious strawberries, sold those which were not wanted for home use and always found an eager market. Then, a little later, being a shrewd business woman, she exchanged a thoroughly good but cast-off overcoat of her husband's for the year's yield of a neighbor's crab-apple tree. These crab apples she had picked and sent to a dealer in New York, so commanding the best price, and realized a little over thirteen dollars from that venture alone.

Two other Club members, Mrs. Ann Noble and Mrs. Nell Gibbons, joined forces and on every Saturday afternoon during the

summer sold ice-cream. This proved to be especially attractive since there was at that time no place in town where it could be bought, and many an order was taken for the Sunday-dinner supply. They also made lemonade for the Saturday ball games and so earned the gratitude, as well as nickels, of a thirsty public.

Mrs. Cattie Huddleston made pop corn balls for Saturday sale and so delighted the hearts of the small boys. She also made hulled corn—an old-time dish which we now seldom see.

Mrs. Silas Root, near whose home was a small unused field, had this land plowed and sowed to turnips. A good yield resulted and much more than the required amount was easily earned. Being an excellent cook, she also made and sold doughnuts.

Miss Nellie Noble, who had a gift for painting, took orders for calendars and the like at Christmas time, and so solved her problem. Her sister, Miss Cora Noble, laundered fine lace curtains and sold specially prepared jellies.

Mrs. Emma Barlow earned her ten dollars by doing housework for a neighbor.

Mrs. Hattie Oysler, who joined the Club not long after it was started, made and sold carpenter's aprons, something which at that time happened to be specially needed. Then on one day each week, for a certain length of time, she sold clam chowder to the men from the factory—not an easy way of earning her share, but a very practical one.

Mrs. Emma Holcomb, another woman not a charter member, made her money by doing her own washing and ironing and, most significant of all, by "going without things." In that lies the key to the whole situation. It meant self-denial in the sense that one gave up present personal wishes for future general good.

Then, to speak briefly of the work of the Club as a whole: in November, 1896, a fair was held, the first in twenty-five years, if you can credit such a seemingly impossible statement. This brought in nearly \$500.00. The chief interest in this fair centered around a beautifully dressed French doll given by the Club President. A great many tickets had been sold allowing purchasers to guess its name, the doll to go, of course, to the one guessing correctly. The name proved to be Celia; and through a fortunate chain of circumstances,

the doll was immediately given back to the Club to be sold again that evening. She was put up at auction, sold and again returned for selling, and so for the third time brought a good price. All told, she netted the Club just \$112.00. The name "Celia" was chosen because that was the name of Mr. Ralph Cooley's mother.

Following this came a package sale, an auction, a birthday social, and a strawberry festival; but these were soon discontinued and all efforts concentrated upon the November fair which came to be an annual event looked forward to with great interest. Not only do townspeople go, but there is a good representation from nearby towns. Westfield merchants, who draw considerable trade from the Granville people, have remembered us very kindly, some by a barrel of flour or the like, or a money equivalent. At the fair, there is always a fancy work booth where one can buy really beautiful embroideries and other hand-work. However, most of the attention is given to distinctly useful articles and many a thrifty housewife plans to get there her yearly supply of aprons for they are of various styles, home-made, of the best materials, and at a price only a little more than the actual cost of the gingham or lawn. The same thing is done in the line of handkerchiefs and, while there are some not home-made, most are dainty hem-stitched affairs with a touch of lace or embroidery at about the cost of bare materials. A candy table and fish-pond for the children and a flower table for the grown-ups also help to please, as well as a very generous booth where one can buy vegetables, fruits, home-made jellies, pickles and relishes, or even fowls. In connection with the fair, a very unusual chicken-pie supper is always served at a moderate price and there are few who do not take advantage of it. Because the fair and supper are distinctly practical, they are always well attended and ordinarily net about \$500.00.

At the end of their third year, the Club had banked nearly \$3,000.00. Then Mr. Milton B. Whitney of Westfield, a native of Granville, offered to give \$5,000.00 for a Library if the Town would give a like amount, the entire sum to go only into the building and its furnishings. After this offer had been made, the Club decided to raise as much money as possible among the citizens by subscription, and in this way secured \$1,800.00 in amounts varying from fifty

cents to two hundred dollars. Former residents of the town, who still felt an interest, as well as their descendants, subscribed a like amount, \$1,300.00 of which was given by Mr. Francis B. Cooley of Hartford, Connecticut and Mr. Foote of New York City pledged fifty dollars a year during his lifetime for the reading room. So Mr. Whitney's offer of \$5,000.00 was more than paired by the Club and what had been a remote possibility was now nearing reality.

Next came the question of location, and in order to secure the most desirable spot, it became necessary to move two houses and take down several buildings. This meant an unexpected expense of more than \$1,500.00. But the amount was raised, in 1900 the building was started, completed the following year and opened for use on February 22, 1902.

It would be interesting to know how many now remember the Library corner as it was before that building was started. There was the house on the corner, facing west, where the George Gaines family lived and a huge butternut tree just north of the house. In the rear, and a little to one side, was a large two-story building in the northwest corner of which was the well which now supplies the Library. Farther toward the east were the barns and a large early-apple tree, the delight of all the children. Between the Gaines' house and what is now the Grange Hall stood another house, occupied by the Bruch family and later on by the Charles Thompson family. This was back in 1900 when the automobile was still a curiosity.

In their plans, the architects had to provide for the two-fold use of the building, that of the library proper and the rooms for social purposes. It was desired to have the two features closely connected and, at the same time, arranged so that they could be used independently. This was most happily accomplished and, in addition, provision was made in the basement for a commodious kitchen, pantry and supper room. The building itself, on a foundation of native field stone, is of buff brick with brown stone trimmings, is heated by steam and was originally lighted by a separate acetylene gas plant. This lighting system was changed to electricity when that became available.

Upon its completion, the Library was presented by the Club to the Town which, in return, gave the Club certain privileges. The

Library is open for the taking of books two days each week in the afternoon and every evening except Sunday, as is the reading room. The amusement room at first was open four evenings a week but, with changed conditions, it is now used for other things. Branch libraries were established in the schoolhouses of the outlying districts with the teachers as custodians, but school consolidation has brought changes. For a time, there were also branch libraries in the village stores in the western part of the town. The annual expense was met about equally by Town and Club until World War II made it impossible to hold the annual fair and supper.

From its beginning, the Club has worked as a unit and although there have been strong individual preferences, they have been subordinated to bring about the greatest final good. There is one regret—that the first Vice-President, Miss Nellie C. Noble, a woman who was untiring in her efforts at a most critical time, one whom all loved for her enthusiastic support, did not live to see the building completed. The work was long and at times disheartening; yet throughout, there was never for an instant the thought of giving up. It was a labor of love which roused interest among young and old alike and is, we hope, but the start of a continuing work of village improvement.

As to the later work of the Club, these are only a few of its more important activities: Since the death of Mr. Foote, the Club has bought and placed in the Library for public use the leading magazines and one daily paper. It has also bought various encyclopedias and books of reference especially useful to children in the Grades and in the High School, as well as hundreds of books of general interest.

In 1923, when the lighting was changed from acetylene gas to electricity, more than half the bill was paid by the Club. In 1927, the original roof of wooden shingles leaked so badly that it was replaced by one of slate at a cost of more than \$1,300.00, entirely paid for by the Club. From time to time, other repairs have been needed and for these the Club has paid its full share. Also, the Club gave and placed on the Library lawn a steel flag-pole and a large United States flag to fly therefrom.

In 1945, Mr. William B. Bailey of West Hartford, Connecticut, established a fund of \$1,000.00 in memory of his mother, Ellen Bacon Bailey, a Granville woman, the income to be used to purchase books of historical and genealogical interest. This gave the Club the idea of using the former amusement room, which had ceased to be used as such, for an historical exhibit. Granville residents were enthusiastic and either gave or loaned many valuable and interesting articles, which are now on view. The special attendant is paid by the Club.

In June, 1950, the Club celebrated the start of the actual building of the Library by an "open house" for the Town, held at the Library. Refreshments were served and in the evening there was dancing on the lawn, which was made gay with Japanese lanterns. Members of the Club, dressed in costumes of fifty years before, acted as hostesses.

Two years later, in 1952, the Club and the Town joined in a celebration at the Library, honoring Mrs. Mable Root Henry for fifty years of devoted and efficient service as Librarian. The Club presented to her a gold wrist watch and the Town, by individual subscriptions, a substantial cash gift. Also in 1952, the Club placed and lighted a Community Christmas Tree upon the Library lawn—something which it hopes to continue as an annual event.

With the rationing of both food and gasoline in World War II, the Club was forced to discontinue the annual chicken pie supper and fair by which it raised the largest part of its expense money. In consequence, since then the Town has had to pay most of the bills. However, two suppers and fairs have been held, one in 1950 and one in 1952, the money raised being used strictly for Library purposes.

In the days to come, as in the past, the Club hopes to continue its work for the Community, which was the reason for its coming into being and has been its one aim throughout the years.