



Brookline Historical Society

Incorporated April 29, 1901

Winter, 1991 Newsletter

Winter Meeting: Brookline in the Civil War.
Readings from soldiers on the battle front and
families on the home front.

Date: Sunday, Feb. 10, 3 p.m. (Snowdate: March 3)

Place: Upstairs meeting room of the Main Library,
Washington Street. All members and their guests
invited to attend. Please mark your calendars.

President's Report

How, on January 15, 1991, to review the society's 1990 activities -- when August 2nd makes everything else trivial and, for those of us with loved ones already in the Middle East, almost obscene? But maybe, while our world is on hold, while we proclaim our will or simply wait, we need the small satisfactions and pleasures, the attainable victories in our own little bailiwick to help us carry on from day to day, to endure and ultimately to prevail.

It is in this spirit that I dare to report that your trustees, together with the society's officers, met 10 times in 1990, worked indefatigably throughout the year, and have, in our own small way, prevailed.

Work Done

If anything can preserve and protect our town-owned historic houses during this economic crisis, it's their daily maintenance and care by the resident curator at the Edward Devotion House and by the resident caretaker at the Widow Harris House and the Putterham School. Your society finally reached agreement with the town to institute annually renewable leases which will ensure adequate care of all three properties.

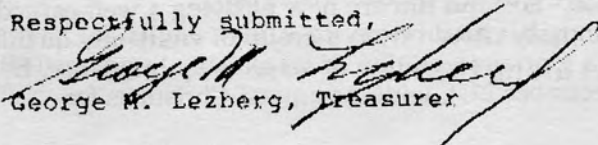
We're also happy to report that Helen McIntosh, the Devotion House's retiring curator, shared with her successor, Stephen Jerome, the materials, procedures, pleasure and pitfalls of their job. She and Jim are now enjoying a well-earned vacation in Florida. And Steve, unanimously chosen from a group of eminently qualified and eager candidates, is continuing Helen's glorious tradition of scholarship, guidance, hospitality and treasuring the house itself. On December 21st, with the annual Christmas tea

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BROOKLINE HISTORICAL SOCIETYTREASURER'S ANNUAL REPORT

	<u>1 9 9 0</u>	<u>1 9 8 9</u>
<u>Cash on hand, January 1:</u>		
Term deposit	\$ 28,194.28	\$ 25,822.12
Money market	1,607.40	1,493.03
Savings account	7,632.11	7,218.21
C. H. Blanchard Mem'l. Fund	1,507.41	1,425.68
Bank of N. E.	<u>5,989.40</u>	<u>1,787.63</u>
	\$ 44,930.60	\$ 37,746.67
<u>Income Year Ended December 31:</u>		
Dues & Contributions	\$ 2,450.00	\$ 2,400.00
Bequest - Estate of Abigail Washburn	1,474.70	3,473.00
Sale of books	135.00	30.00
Misc.	1.00	130.00
David Wallace Trust	239.23	1,592.30
Interest earned	<u>3,450.53</u>	<u>3,298.55</u>
	\$ 7,750.46	\$ 10,923.85
	\$ 52,681.06	\$ 48,670.52
<u>Payments:</u>		
Postage & mailings	\$ 245.14	\$ 500.05
Printing & Typing	1,205.50	1,436.87
Meeting expense	196.35	22.00
Insurance	1,650.00	1,611.00
Couch purchase	400.00	- 0 -
Dues	- 0 -	15.00
Filing & prof. fees	50.00	25.00
Vault	130.00	130.00
Books purchased	1,250.00	
Fuel advance	<u>200.00</u>	<u>3,739.92</u>
	\$ 5,326.99	
<u>Balance, December 31:</u>		
Term deposit	\$ 30,642.50	\$ 28,194.28
Money market	1,715.85	1,607.40
Savings account	8,069.77	7,632.11
C. H. Blanchard Mem'l. Fund	1,593.81	1,507.41
Bank of N. E.	5,022.91	5,989.40
Checks on hand	<u>309.23</u>	<u>- 0 -</u>
	\$ 47,354.07	\$ 44,930.60

Respectfully submitted,



George M. Lezberg, Treasurer

January 14, 1991

(continued from page 1)

for Brookline's senior citizens, the Devotion House was again officially open to visitors.

Ray Moreno, our trustee and member of the Brookline Building Department, reports that the Widow Harris House now has an entirely new cedar shake roof and new V gutters to simulate the original ones.

Deborah Abraham of the town library reports that the manuscript collection in the Brookline Room has been microfilmed and that the photo and picture file has been completed with photocopies of each.

Work in Progress

By lucky coincidence, Steve's curatorship ushers in the centenary of the renewal of the Devotion House. Already he is doing considerable research and we are planning to mark the anniversary with special events at the Devotion House and at one of our meetings.

Meanwhile, the Winthrop Chandler portraits of the Rev. Ebenezer Devotion and his wife Martha have been keeping us busy. Given to the society in 1921 by their descendant, Harriet Devotion Terry, they adorned the house and were on frequent loan for exhibitions, especially after Nina Fletcher's seminal research and publication in the 1947 Art in America issue on Winthrop Chandler. Thereafter the portraits were in demand for reproduction in books and exhibition catalogues, and they were on exhibit at major museums, but their home was the Devotion House. In 1981, for security reasons, they were removed and placed on temporary loan at the Museum of Our National Heritage in Lexington. Now escalating appraisals and insurance have become prohibitive for the museum, and through the intervention on our behalf of our own past president and trustee, S. Morton Vose II, they will shortly be transferred to the Worcester Art Museum on permanent loan.

Between April 6 and May 26 they will be at the Lyman Allyn Art Museum in New London, Connecticut. Together with other Devotion treasures from our house, they will be part of the museum's exhibition, The Devotion Family: The Lives and Possessions of Three Generations in Eighteenth Century Connecticut.

We hope to sponsor a day trip to New London to be guests of the museum, to enjoy the exhibit and to get to know each other better along the way. Please watch for

an announcement of the date, coming soon.

The schedule of lectures in connection with the exhibit: 4/13-- Small Town Family Life. 4/20-- Ledgers, Letters and Diaries. 4/27-- Ministers, Merchants and History. 5/4-- Devotion Family In Their Portraits and In Their Private Lives.

The Lyman Allyn Art Museum has regular hours Tuesdays through Sundays. Call 203-443-2618 for further information.

But before then, we urge you to call Stephen Jerome at 566-5747 and schedule an appointment so that you may meet our genial and knowledgeable Devotion House curator and prepare for our bus trip.

Meanwhile the color transparencies of our Chandler portraits have been used for reproduction in Hartford's Wadsworth Atheneum's exhibition catalogue "Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic," to be issued by Yale University Press in October, 1991.

This year we purchased 100 advance copies of the second printing of Jean Kramer's Brookline: A Pictorial History. Society members may buy these at a \$5 discount from the Main Library. Profits on sales will go to the library's Preservation Fund for the Brookline Room.

Other Work in Progress

Our most immediate task is updating inventories, appraisals and insurance of our holdings -- the first time in a decade for all but the Chandler paintings. Nancy and George Peabody's professional help have been invaluable.

Helen Ryan is making a thorough study of the mysteries of bulk mailing for our nonprofit organization. When you see the special stamps, hopefully on our next mailing, you'll know we're saving money.

Stephen Jerome has prepared a first draft of a comprehensive loan policy specifying procedures for handling loans from our collection.

Membership

We are pleased to report a steady voluntary upgrading of levels of membership. If you haven't already sent in your upgraded annual dues, please do so. And we'll be happy to acknowledge your gift membership honoring friends or relatives for any occasion throughout the year.

Officers, Trustees and Committees

This year Helen Ryan was elected vice-president; Ray Moreno and Michael Steinfeld were elected trustees. Jean Kramer resigned as clerk and was elected trustee. John Van Scoyoc resigned as president-emeritus and was elected trustee. At this winter's annual meeting on February 10th you will vote on an amendment to our by-laws making the curator of the Edward Devotion House clerk of the society, unless otherwise designated by the trustees. Meanwhile, Steve is doing yeoman service as clerk pro tem. Betsy DeWitt, Patsy Ostrander and Daniel Raff have joined our finance committee chaired by David England.

Meetings

As we entered the last decade of the 1900's, we decided to focus our 1990 meetings chiefly on this century in Brookline. In spite of our efforts to observe a traditional winter month for our annual meeting, we were snowed out on February 25th and met on April 4th in the Coolidge Corner Library for Jean Kramer's History in the Making, a slide presentation of the background for her Brookline: A Pictorial History. She stressed "this century, our century...with unexpected discoveries." On May 20th we met in the auditorium of St. Mary's Grammar School for David Coleman's illustrated talk, The Irish Presence in Brookline. Here again, through interviews, David emphasized this century in Brookline.

On November 4th we met in Hunneman Hall of the Main Library to celebrate the centennial of its Children's Room, reputedly the oldest in continuous operation in the country. Michael Steinfeld's mini-history is reproduced on page 6 of this newsletter. Copies of Doris Seale's survey of children's literature and Helen Ryan's dramatic readings from her childhood favorites will be available at our next meeting for all those interested. We could not possibly print here all the texts, which we treasure, but they are now part of the society's and the library's history, to be mined for their bicentennial, we hope.

As you read these papers, picture the setting: a background of haystacks, corn stalks, children's picnic table and benches laden with pumpkins and old children's books -- all courtesy of John Lee of Allandale Farm, who gallantly offered to deliver and remove same in his truck. On tables on either side of the lectern, toys from the attics of some of your trustees' and officers' attics: a huge teddy bear, shaded by a pink silk parasol, hugging a baby bear in her lap; a magnificent doll incongruously sporting

cowboy boots and ensconced in an old wicker rocker; a Peabody antique doll carriage luxuriating with stuffed animals; a child's well-used typewriter; another's amateur printing press; Jim McIntosh's huge railroad engine; more books, bears, dogs, clowns -- all scarred and battered veterans of much love. And behind all these antique treasures, the Children's Room's very own classics. And as you seek out some of the favorites Helen mentions, pause for a breath and hear the applause that punctuated each selection.

The success of November 4th made us decide to abandon our own century and exploit local interest in the Civil War generated by Ken Burns's history-making Civil War series on Channel 2. So on February 10th in Hunneman we will meet at 3 p.m. to enjoy a re-enactment of the writings of Brookline soldiers and their families from the war period. Local actor Larry Blumsack will be joined by other special guests for this unique performance.

As I conclude my first year as president of your society, I am grateful to all of you for your interest, help and friendliness. I want to thank the officers and trustees for their help and patience. But most of all, without the extraordinary talents and help of Irene Hartz, Helen McIntosh, Nancy Peabody, Helen Ryan and John Van Scoyoc, I couldn't have made it. Until I see you at our February 10th meeting, courage!

Cordially,
Miriam Sargon

1991 Brookline Historical Society officers and trustees

Officers

President: Miriam Sargon, 8 Hackensack Road, Chestnut Hill 02167, 232-0810.

Vice-President: Helen M. Ryan, 55 Wolcott Road, Chestnut Hill 02167, 566-3881.

Clerk: Stephen Jerome, 347 Harvard St., Brookline 02146, 566-5747.

Treasurer: George Lezberg, 11 Kent Street, Brookline 02146, 566-3645.

Trustees

Luster Delany, 965 Hammond Street, Chestnut Hill 02167, 566-7645.

Ruth Dorfman, 11 Lyon Road, Chestnut Hill 02167,⁵
232-1330.
David England, 20 White Place, Brookline 02146, 277-
2827.
Edward Hertz, 261 Tappan Street, Brookline 02146,
277-3508.
Jean Kramer, 63 Griggs Road, Brookline 02146, 566-
5911.
Leslie Larkin, 122 Thorndike Street, Brookline 02146,
734-0220.
Helen McIntosh.
Ray Moreno, 107 Chilton Road, Needham 02192, 730-
2103.
Nancy Peabody, 36 Upland Road, Brookline 02146,
277-5456.
Michael Steinfeld, 11 Gardner Road, Brookline 02146,
730-2360.
John VanScoyoc, 307 Reservoir Road, Chestnut Hill
02167, 731-3584.

Report on Devotion House

In 1990 I was on crutches until summer. Our daughters, Jean and Judy, and Jim did the cleaning of the yard and prepared the house for visitors.

We had eight visitors in January and February visitations from children in the local schools.

In March, Judy and her husband, Abdenour, had a wonderful time entertaining the members of the D.A.R. The members commented on the wonderful time they had at their luncheon and meeting.

School children visited in April, preparing for their studies of the American Revolution. On April 19th, William Dawes arrived a little late. There were approximately 150 to 200 people attending the flag raising. After William Dawes's visit, 64 people came into the house for coffee and donuts and to admire the interior of the house.

We had six children dressed in colonial costume who helped with the entertaining.

It was in April that we notified the trustees we would have to vacate the house because of health reasons. We notified them we would leave the end of August, first of September.

The summer months were very slow. We didn't have the tourists we normally have. The visitors were from Sweden, Denmark, Russia, Kuwait, New York, Georgia, Maine, New Hampshire and Cape Cod.

We moved to Cape Cod but continued watching and caring for the house. The end of September we came

back to rake and clean the yard, washed all the floors and cupboards and put up clean white curtains.

Jim and I used sleeping bags in order to stay in the house to protect it, especially for Halloween. We didn't like to see the house empty.

Stephen Jerome, the new curator, was finally able to complete his move in November.

In December, Steve, with the help of Jean Kramer, Nancy Peabody, Zippy MacDougal and our president, Miriam Sargon, held a very festive holiday tea for senior citizens. A lovely time it was, putting everyone into the holiday spirit.

This is a very difficult report to write, knowing it is my final report. I think you all know how much you people, the house, the town really mean to me and Jim. It was not an easy decision to move but a necessary one.

Being a trustee and curator you learn to appreciate the commitment made by the trustees and especially the president. We have been fortunate over the years to have had presidents devoted to the work of the society.

Our president, Miriam Sargon, and vice-president Helen Ryan have been outstanding leaders. They have put in hours way beyond the call of duty doing inventories of our properties -- Edward Devotion House, Widow Harris House and the Putterham School. They checked on repairs, took care of the written communication, planned meetings, worked with town officials and, most of all, gave support to the curator, me, and caretaker Glen Tanck.

We are most fortunate to have our president and vice-president.

Please visit the houses and school. See the holly trees, the rhododendrons and the flowers we have planted over the years.

Steve Jerome is anxious to meet you, have visitors, and he has a wealth of information you will enjoy.

You will realize how important the work of our society is if you get involved. The trustees are always open to suggestions.

Jim and I thank you for your gifts, support and especially your friendship.

Sincerely,

Helen C. McIntosh, Curator

The Founding of the Brookline Children's Room

By Michael Steinfeld

(Presented to the fall, 1990 meeting of the Brookline Historical Society)

Introduction

In Paul Dickson's book The Library in America: A Celebration in Words and Pictures, the following photo caption appears: "It was common in the 19th century to prohibit children under the age of 12 or 14 from public libraries, and children's reading rooms were unheard of until the first one opened in Brookline, Massachusetts, in 1890."

From this simple sentence grew a plan to celebrate 100 years of library service to Brookline's children and to learn more about the origins of Brookline's contribution to public library history.

My talk to the Brookline Historical Society on November 4, 1990, retraced the research steps I took and identified the sequence in which I discovered various "facts" about the "first" public library children's room in the United States. The method I used was to simulate a walk through the library and to show how each source consulted -- trustee records, the librarian's annual reports, various books and periodical articles on the history of children's libraries -- contributed to revealing a new element in the story behind the caption.

Because my presentation to the society was informal and involved showing and reading from many books and journals, I have submitted for publication a somewhat differently structured -- but equally compelling! -- retelling of this story, prepared for the Children's Room Centennial Celebration in cooperation with library trustee Dennis Geller.

The Children's Reading Room

It wasn't quite the first, and the motivation for its founding has been questioned. Brookline's Children's Room nevertheless marks a milestone in American public library history.

In April of its 34th year, 1890, the Public Library of Brookline, Massachusetts, opened a reading room devoted exclusively to children. The trustees' annual report for that year notes that "anyone having the curiosity to look in there, especially on a stormy afternoon, will find a room full of children very happily employed." Initially opened on a trial

basis, the room was an instant success. The very next trustees' report was exuberant: [It] "may with propriety be counted among the successes of the year and an established fact for the future."

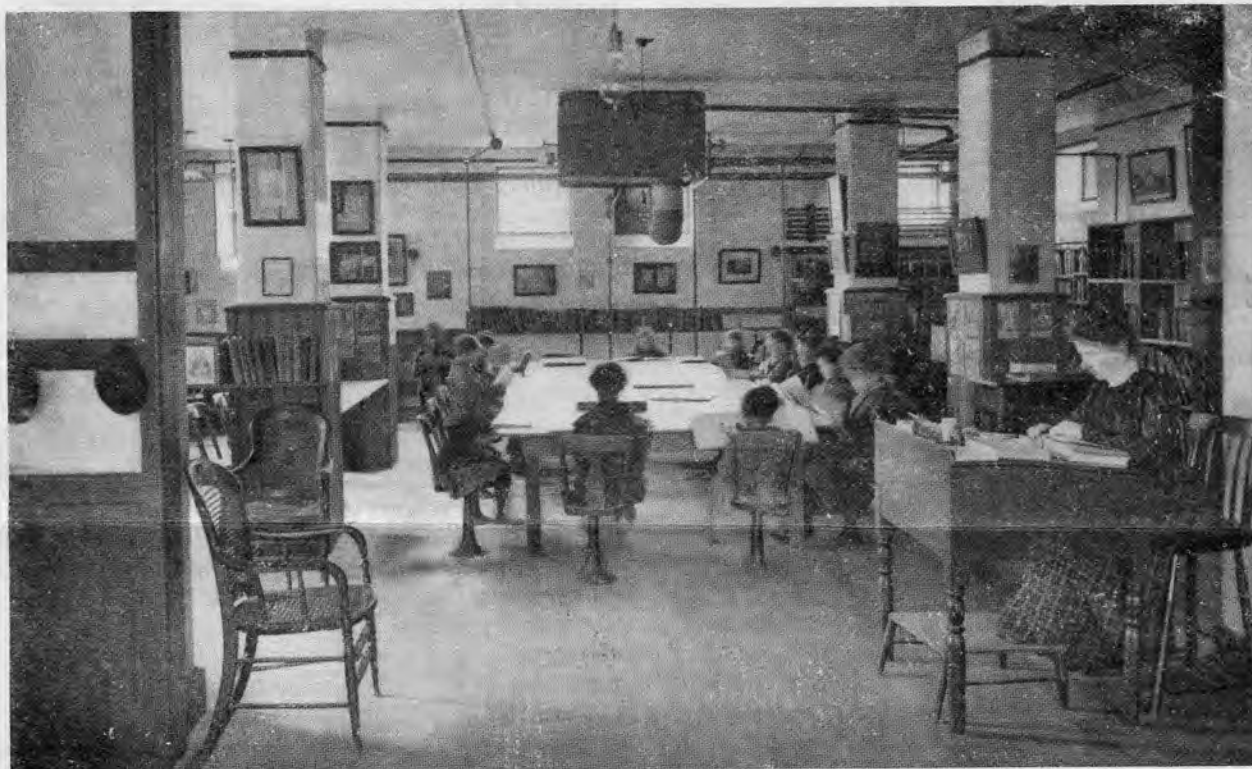
The room was furnished with a single large table, sufficient to accommodate 16 children "without crowding." There were also 11 inclined shelves on the front and side walls that provided additional space. Ordinary school chairs were provided at the table and shelves. Maintaining the library's reputation as a sanctuary of silence, the table and chairs were bolted firmly to the floor, "so that the possibilities of noise from movable furniture are reduced to a minimum." Settees and additional free-standing chairs raised the total capacity of the room to 40 children. Pictures were hung on the walls, and "light and warmth are abundant."

In its early years, the Children's Reading Room was not a separate department of the library. It did not have a librarian of its own or a fixed collection of books. Books selected from the "juvenile alcoves," and "pictorial books, from the alcoves of history and travel," were chosen by the head librarian and sent down on a rotating basis. The library also subscribed to popular children's magazines. Back issues were available from the stacks, and bound back issues of *Harpers Weekly*, *Youth's Companion* and *Soldiers of the Civil War* were shelved in the room itself. The trustees note dryly that the volumes were "loaned over and over to whomsoever asks -- provided the hands of the borrowers are clean."

A Tradition of Innovation

Brookline's library was well known as a major innovator in the developing public library movement. When many towns across the nation were first developing public libraries, Brookline was recognized as a leader among communities of its size. In the same year that it founded its children's room, the Brookline Library created a suggestion box for patrons to request books for purchase and began listing new acquisitions in the town's newspaper. Both of these innovations became traditions that have continued up to the present.

In the early days of the public library movement it was common for the founders and staff of new libraries to visit the more established ones to learn first-hand about the latest developments. Reports of these visits were later published in the *Library Journal*, the professional publication edited by Dr. Melvil Dewey, creator of the Dewey Decimal System and the leading spokesperson for public libraries. Brookline was a stop on some of these visits: The children's room is mentioned by visitors from



19th Century view of Children's Reading Room

Pittsburgh in the August, 1890 issue. "Recently a special juvenile department has been fitted up to which children as young as 10 years of age have free access and where they can be under less restriction than is necessary in the library and reading room proper."

Other Early Children's Rooms

Brookline's was the first children's room mentioned in the *Library Journal*. This led many scholars to assume that Brookline's was the first to be opened. The facts appear to be that Brookline's is the first *continuously operating* children's room in the country. There were earlier attempts to provide direct library service to children. In 1877 Mrs. Minerva Saunders, librarian at Pawtucket, Rhode Island, set aside a special corner for children and began lending them books. Emily Hanaway, principal at Grammar School 28 in New York City, established a small children's library in 1885; the library was moved to the third floor of the George Bruce Library, a branch of the New York Free Circulating system. Although not formally part of the Bruce Library, Emily Hanaway's creation became its *de facto* children's room. However, in 1899 the trustees of the Bruce Library requested that the children's library vacate its space on the grounds that

the children created a disturbance as they passed through the lower floors to reach it. A similar separate library was opened at the Aguilar Free Library in New York in 1886. Neither of these seems to have had the effect, as did Brookline's, of spurring other libraries to experiment with special services to children.

In 1896 Dewey published a list of libraries giving special attention to children. Separate rooms had been created and were being maintained in Brookline, as well as in Cambridge and Boston. Other separate facilities, such as tables, corners and alcoves, had been installed in libraries from Buffalo to Cleveland, and separate rooms were planned for a number of libraries. There were children's departments in Milwaukee, Detroit, San Francisco, New Haven, Omaha, Seattle and Denver.

Why Brookline?

What was it about Brookline that led it to develop this innovation in library services to children? The minutes of the trustees have been a primary source for the history of the room. They shed little light on the matter, reporting only on the initial creation of the room and its subsequent successes. They do note that the room was "under the charge of the janitor," and this clue led some scholars to allege the existence of deplorable motives. Salome Cutler Fairchild, vice-

director of the New York State Library School, spilled the beans at a meeting of a British association of librarians in 1903, although she was too polite to name names: "Children fell into the habit of frequenting a certain library which shall be nameless. The librarian could not bear to have them around. She did not like children. So she complained to the trustees, who hit upon the idea of setting apart a separate room for the children and putting it in charge of the janitor. Such is the history of the first children's room in America."

This sinister theory, however amusing it may seem today, does not accord with the general high regard in which the Brookline Public Library was held in the early days of the public library movement. In 1898, when the library trustees sought outside help in evaluating their library, Melvil Dewey responded: "You ask my unprejudiced opinion of the comparative standing of your library. There are few institutions of the country concerning which I should be willing to speak more frankly to one of their officials. The Brookline Public Library is commonly looked on by those familiar with library work of its type all through the country, as among the foremost in efficiency and influence. It has won a place where it is often quoted and referred to as the type of the best American public library."

New Rooms for Learning and Recreation

Recent research by the staff of the Brookline Public Library has uncovered new evidence that casts a different and much kinder light on the history of the children's room. The librarian, Mary A. Bean, appears as a devoted proponent of library services for children. She developed two separate spaces for them. One was the reading room. The second, opened in 1899, was a reference room designed especially for schoolchildren. This room was created with a special appropriation of \$2,500. The librarian states in her annual report, with evident pride, that "900 books, recommended by the school committee, together with a good collection of works of reference," were placed on its shelves, and a separate librarian, Harriet H. Stanley, was hired to take charge of the room. Her duties included supervision, explaining the use of reference books and helping the children, who were "referred to the room by their teachers to look up topics of study."

At the same time that the reference room was being developed, the reading room added 524 books and a typewritten catalogue. While this room was, as Ms. Fairchild revealed with horror, initially under the supervision of the janitor, it soon had its own staff: First Grace A. Roberts, then Mary Sanborne and Andrina L. Thompson. "Their endeavors have been

confined to one simple purpose -- to lead the children to read properly and continuously. Children in a room of this kind are apt to turn from book to book, glancing at a passage or picture here or there, but scarcely reading a single page connectedly. Miss Roberts and Miss Thompson, both having experience in teaching, have been singularly successful in reaching and interesting the children."

The Children's Reading Room appealed both to younger children and to their older siblings, especially after the room was opened during summer vacation. In 1900 there were 12,823 visitors to the room.

Also in 1900, as reported by the *Library Journal*, the library hosted lectures for children from first grade through high school. These lectures were given by the school librarian. At that time, and until fairly recently, the school libraries in Brookline were managed and staffed by the public library. The librarian's purpose was "to teach simple and elementary facts regarding books, which, while prerequisite to their intelligent use, unless systematically learned, are likely never to be acquired." These lectures served as one of the first library outreach programs. "Through the lectures each child is brought to the library at least twice in his life, given an idea of its value and methods of obtaining cards and drawing books, matters which otherwise some of them are too shy to inquire about."

Present and future

At present, the Brookline Public Library has a fully staffed children's room in its main library and both of its branches. The children's rooms circulated more than 63,000 volumes in 1989. The centennial year marks a significant change in the library's operations -- the inauguration of computer-based circulation and catalogue systems. Within a year all patrons, including children, will use computer terminals instead of card catalogues to look up books. The children's rooms are also beginning to experiment, in conjunction with the school libraries, with the use of computer-based encyclopedias. Without relaxing their commitment to traditional print media, the trustees expect to begin planning during the centennial year for the children's room of the 21st century.