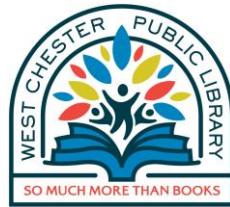


West Chester Public Library
wcpl@ccls.org EMAIL

415 North Church Street
West Chester, PA 19380



History – West Chester Public Library

The West Chester Public Library was, from its inception, a true community library and remains so. Its community has grown tremendously over the years—where once the vast majority of the library's patrons were residents of the borough of West Chester, library users now come from the surrounding municipalities in ever increasing numbers. Many of them come to the library because of its character, because it is part of a small town, and because they have formed an attachment to the physical aspect of the library—its building.

It's a beautiful structure, a cover within which library patrons can enjoy the treasure of its books. They didn't always have that luxury. Founded in 1872, the West Chester Library Association housed its collection at various addresses in the borough of West Chester during its first 16 years.



Then Hannah Darlington of 411 North Church Street donated a corner of her property to the association as a site for a library building. The cornerstone was laid in July of 1887. The building was finished in early 1888, and dedicated in February of that year.

It was well designed and well built. The bricks were locally made. The foundation and windowsill stone was from Avondale. Designed by local architect T. Roney Williamson, the building, especially its arched windows and tower, reflects the influences of noted architect Henry Hobson Richardson. The Tiffany-style stained-glass windows on the west side of the first floor, given by Hannah Darlington in memory of Bayard Taylor, were installed just before the library opened in March 1888.



Originally, the building housed the library collection of some 4,000 books on the main floor, while a public meeting room and auditorium took up the second floor. In 1916 a wing was added to the building to house the growing children's collection and services. The room remained the department's home until the early 1960s, and many life-long West Chester residents remember it from regular school visits. In the early 1960s, using a large contribution from Gilbert Talbot in memory of his mother, Helen Thatcher Talbot (a long-time board member), the second floor was renovated as a children's library.

In the early days, funding for the library was a piecemeal proposition with funds coming from donations and “entertainments.” Not until the early 1900s did the borough of West Chester agree to contribute a set amount of money to the library’s operating funds. The borough’s contribution still forms the largest share of the library’s income. Regular state funding for the library became a reality in the early 1960s. Funds from Chester County later augmented the public funding. The balance of the library’s operating budget was and is still made up of fines, fees, and donations from individuals and trust funds.

