



The Story of the  
**WALLINGFORD  
PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
EST. 1881



WALLINGFORD, CT  
1670-2020  
CELEBRATING 350 YEARS OF LOCAL HISTORY

# CHAPTER ONE:

## The Ladies' Library and Reading Room

The Wallingford Public Library was organized on October 4, 1881, with a fund of \$1,000 and a book stock of 1,384 volumes, some of which had come from an earlier social library, "The Old Town Library," which operated in Wallingford from 1833 to 1867. That first annual meeting was held in the Congregational Church parlors and the first president was Mrs. H.M. Tenney, wife of the Congregational minister.

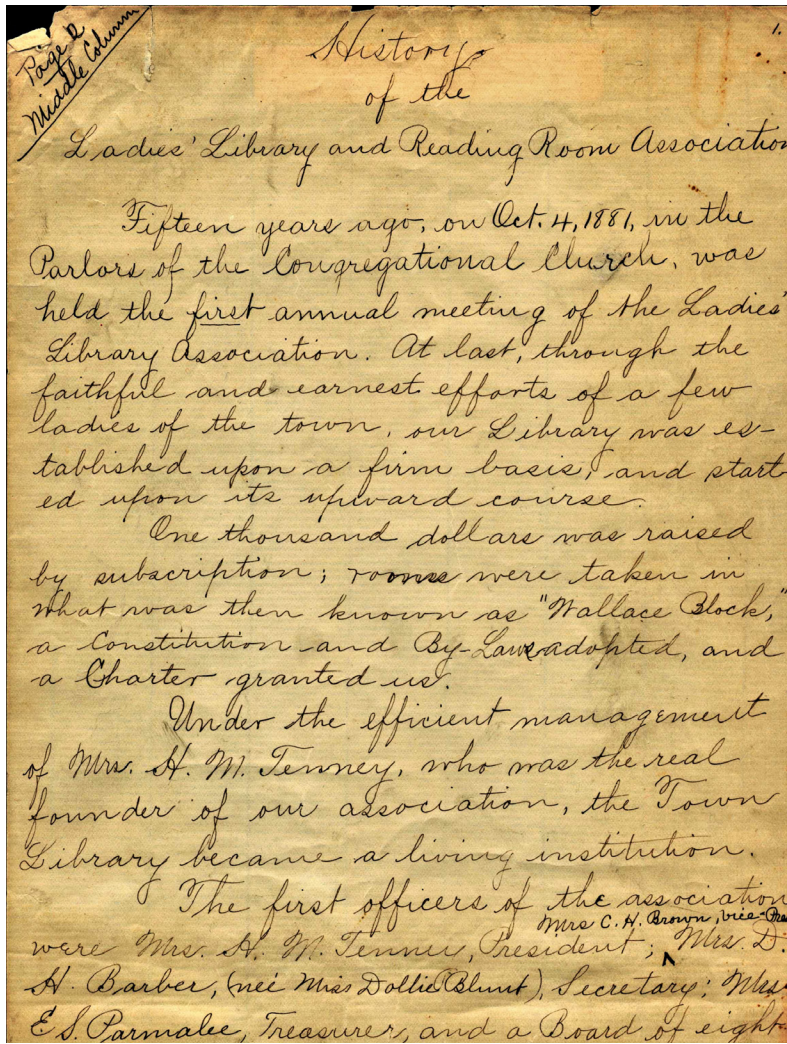
The Library's original name was The Ladies' Library and Reading Room Association, and it was incorporated by a Special Act of the State Legislature, dated March 15, 1882. The objectives of the Association were to advance civilization through the cultivation of the intellect; to stimulate a thirst for scientific and useful knowledge; to promote the interests of education in general; and to encourage the more educating and refining influence of society.

The Library had various locations. The Wallace Block and the Simpson Block were early homes. The Association required an annual membership fee for borrowing privileges. It did, however, maintain a free reading room. Financial support came from dues and from money raised through such projects as food sales, lectures and amateur theatricals.

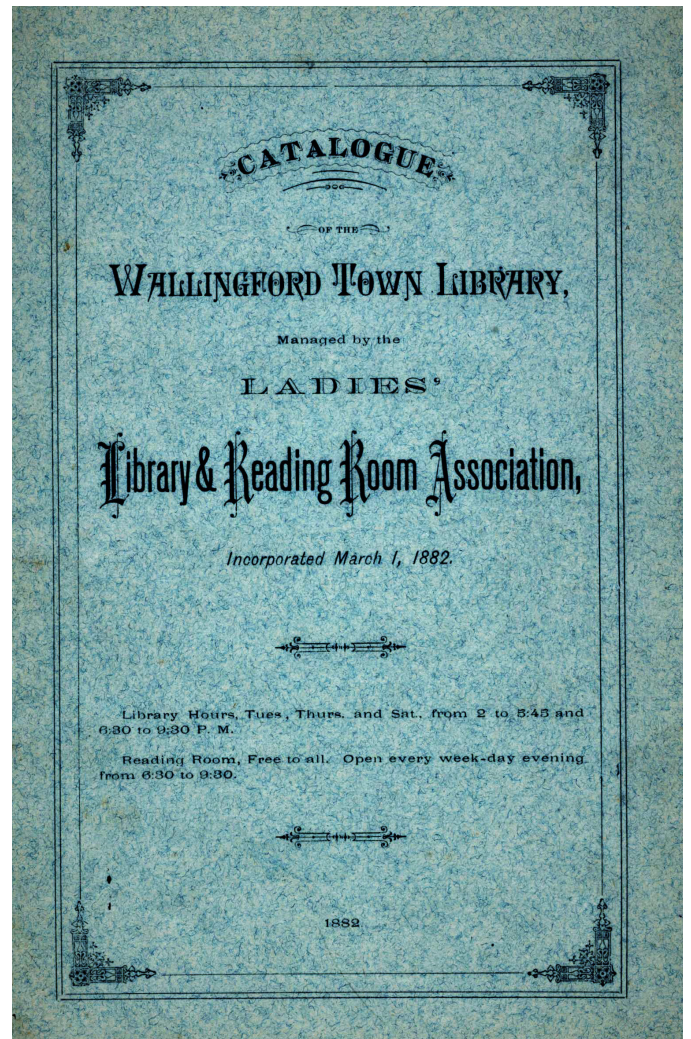
There is a brief record of an early librarian, Miss Emma Lewis, described by some as a martinet who would not let young people under sixteen borrow books. Others, however, complimented her on the cheerful, careful manner in which she recommended books for students and credited her with making the Library a great promoter of education in the Borough.



Above: Portrait of Emma Lewis, the first librarian for the Ladies' Library and Reading Room.



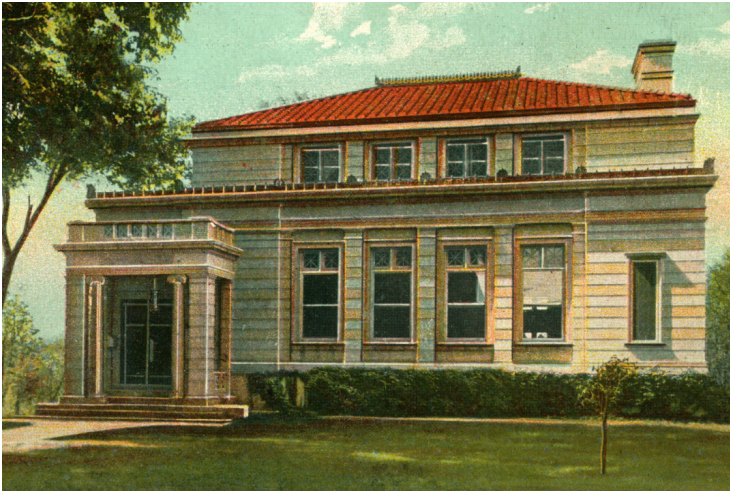
Above: History of the Ladies' Library and Reading Room Association chronicled in 1896.



Above: Catalog of the Library collection from 1882.

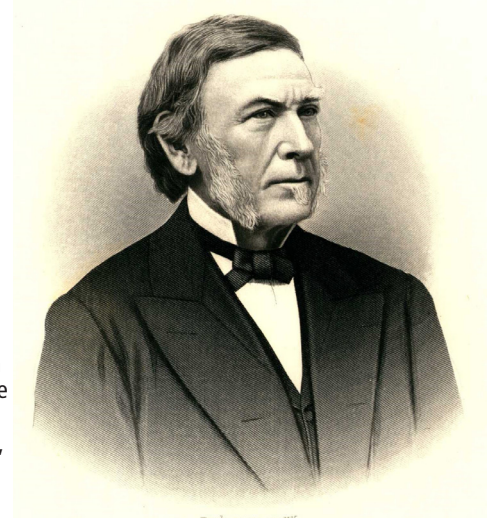
# CHAPTER TWO:

## Our First Permanent Door



**Above:** The first library building at 60 North Main Street, now houses *The Library Wine Bar and Bistro*.

Martha Simpson, daughter of Samuel Simpson, wealthy local industrialist and benefactor, was a member of the Association. She predeceased her father, and in 1894 he bequeathed in her memory land at 60 North Main Street along with \$25,000 for a building and \$20,000 for an endowment fund. Little Miss Margaret Tibbits, great-granddaughter of Samuel Simpson, laid the cornerstone on September 21, 1899. Eighty-three years later on September 12, 1982, the same Margaret Tibbits, now Mrs. Herschel Taber, laid the cornerstone for the present Library.



**Above:** Portrait of Samuel L. Simpson which currently hangs in the Children's Room.

In 1899, under Board President, B.F. Harrison, the Library became a free public library when the Town passed the first appropriation of funds. The Town stipulated that funding would continue as long as the Library was maintained as a free public institution, and the Association stipulated that the Library would remain free as long as the Town continued its support. Among the consultants who recommended that the Library be made free was Addison Van Name, Librarian of Yale University.

The laudable, public-spirited purpose of the founders, the Library's transition from an essentially private, dues-paying Association to a free, tax-supported public library, and the substantial part played by a local benefactor, are typical steps in the evolution of the American free public library as pointed out by the late Jesse H. Shera in his classic book, *Foundations of the Public Library*.



**Above:** Margaret Tibbits at eight years old and the silver trowel she used to lay the cornerstone at 60 North Main Street in 1899 and again at 200 North Main Street in 1982.



**Above:** Board president, B.F. Harrison.

Wallingford, Conn., Sept. 26.—Undoubtedly action will be taken at the annual town meeting to be held next month for the rescinding of a vote passed at a special town meeting held several years ago. At a special meeting on the evening of November 15, 1899, the sum of \$500 was appropriated for the public library. In addition to the above vote the following was also passed:

“Voted, That the following by-law of the town is hereby adopted to be known as the public library by-law:

“The town treasurer of said town is directed to pay to any person authorized by the manager of the Ladies' Library and Reading Room association to receive the same, annually such sum as would be realized from one-fourth of a one mill tax upon the grand list of said town annually in December so long as and no longer than the Ladies' Library and Reading Room association shall maintain a public library, free to all the inhabitants of this town.”

**Above:** Newspaper article discussing the new relationship between the town and the Library association.

# CHAPTER THREE: The Wallingford Public Library

## Library Addition Formally Thrown Open To Public

### Long Effort For Children's Wing Happily Ended-- Prof. Snow's Address

Formal opening exercises for the new wing of the public library costing \$23,000 took place last evening in library hall, which had been beautified with handsome bouquets.

Above: Newspaper article announcing the Children's addition to the Library at 60 North Main Street

The first professional librarian, Caroline Jones, was hired in 1923, and a revision in techniques and procedures took place. An addition was completed in 1931 providing additional stack space, a cataloging department and a Children's Room; and in 1935 a branch library was built in Yalesville on land provided by that community.

During the Depression, World War II, and the postwar years, the Library was in a period of low salaries, inadequate book stock, and generally poor financial support. In 1958 the name was legally changed to the Wallingford Public Library Association and membership was opened to men as well as women.

In 1962, under Library director Florence Brown, a thorough reorganization was carried out. The building was extensively renovated, and services and administration were modernized. Increased financial support from the Town made it possible to improve and enlarge the book stock and employ a well-trained staff with improved salary schedule and fringe benefits.

The original building, with the 1931 addition, served as the Town Library until 1982. The problem of insufficient space had become so acute by 1976 that it was necessary to transfer the juvenile collection to Yalesville, making that branch into a Children's Library.



Above: Library Director, Florence Brown (second from right) and library volunteers review selection development policies in 1966.

190 Mansion Rd.  
Wallingford, Conn. 06492  
July 17, 1975

Mayor Rocco Vumbaco  
Town Hall  
Wallingford, Conn.

In re: Library

Dear Sir:

For the last 25 years, I have been a constant user of the Library service, and spent many happy minutes browsing on the fiction shelves. I could find an author I hadn't known before, and then keep going back until I had read all of his books.

With this new system of closed stacks -- which I understand is due to the town not supplying sufficient funds for needed staff -- one must have their own list, so they can tell the desk what they want, and then the runner gets it!

How many people would have such a list, plus have the time to request and then wait.

In my case, I always have my invalid husband in the car, and cannot leave him alone more than five minutes.

Last week I made a list from some book club advertisements, and the two I got were definitely not to my enjoyment, which I would have known if I had time to glance thru them -- this meant I was without a book until I could get to town again.

I am a firm believer that ONE PERSON can do something about a situation if they want to badly enough.

So - I hope you will see fit to re-evaluate the next budget in favor of the Library.

Thank you,  
*Belle M Frenier*  
Mrs. Paul R. Frenier

Above: A letter to the mayor from a disgruntled patron about the lack of space and funding for the Library in 1975.



Above: The Reference Room at 60 North Main Street.

# CHAPTER FOUR:

## A Few Doors Down

In the late 1970s, Margaret Tibbits Taber donated her family's plot on 200 North Main Street to the town for use as a public library, which opened in 1982. Her house was later moved to Scard Road in Wallingford. A few remnants of her residence remain on-site including a grandfather clock, currently in the Library's Reading Room as well as a wrought iron fence in front of the library building. Despite suggestions to name the new library after Mrs. Taber, the Taber estate agreed to name the Children's Room after her.

The new library, which cost \$3,200,000 opened in June 1982 and was enthusiastically received by the public. The increased space made possible a whole new range of community activities as well as a significant expansion of printed materials.



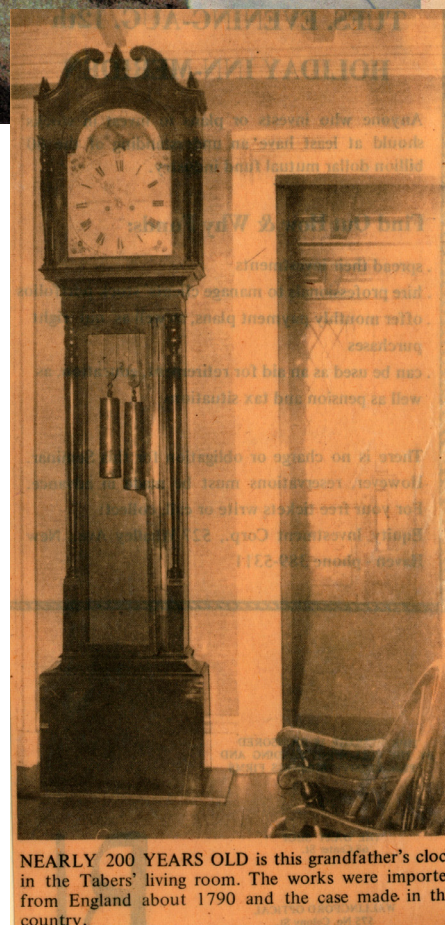
**Above:** Margaret Tibbits Taber lays the cornerstone at 200 North Main Street in 1982.



**Above:** The *Record-Journal* covers the opening of the new library building on 200 North Main Street in 1982.



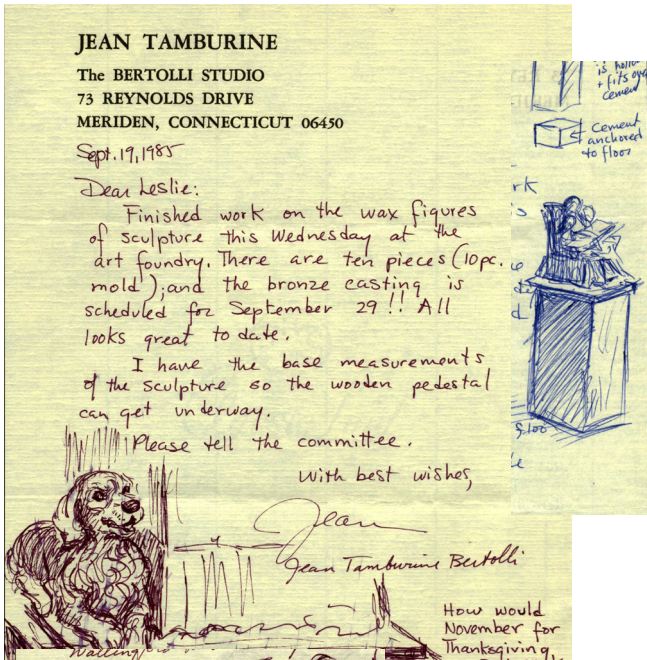
**Left:** The Taber House at 200 North Main Street before construction of the second library building.



**Right:** Grandfather clock from the Taber residence now located in the Library's Reading Room.

# CHAPTER FIVE:

## Opening New Doors



The 1982 building was designed with an open and flexible floor plan that would accommodate many changes in its 25 year life span. As part of a grant to introduce fine art into the new library building, in 1982 a competition was held to design a mobile to hang over the stairwell with the winning design being made from jade and aluminum by artist Arnold Austad. In addition, a bronze sculpture was commissioned by local artist Jean Tamburine Bertolli. The sculpture, titled "Heritage" features a gentle grandfather, a child, and a spaniel and is meant to symbolize the sharing of the written word.

Shortly after, the Wallingford Public Library joined with the Meriden Public Library, the Russell Library in Middletown, the Guilford Free Library, the Public Library of New London, and the Otis Library in Norwich to form Libraries Online (LION) a library consortium that has grown to 30+ members, to share resources and support technology for its members.

There were no computers for either staff or public use when the building opened in 1982. Media including VHS, CD, and DVD formats became increasingly important library services throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The growing importance of the Internet and the need for public access to this vital information source greatly impacted library services for the new century. In 1994 the Library closed its card catalog, and in 1995 WPL introduced its first website.

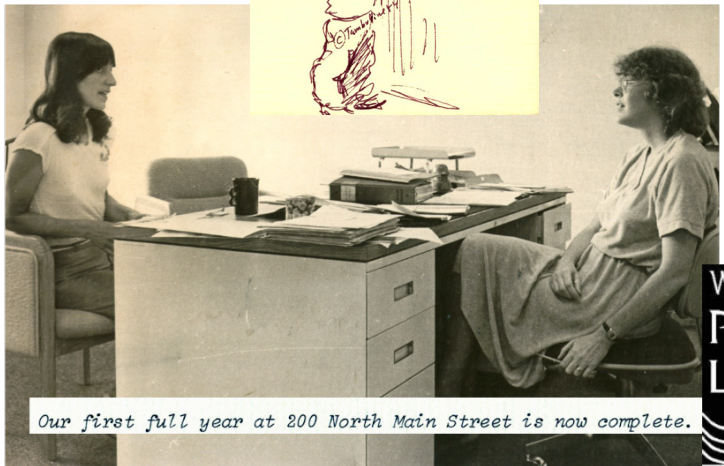
In rededicating the Children's Library to the memory of Margaret Tibbits Taber we honor her deep interest in children and the joy she found in the literature written for them. When, rather late in life, she opened her *Homestead Book and Copper Shop*, she created a magical place, keenly remembered by a whole generation of children. In later years her love for children and books continued.

Margaret Taber rejoiced as she watched this library being built on the site of her shady and beckoning garden. On September 12, 1982, she laid the cornerstone of this library as she had, at the age of 8, laid the cornerstone of the original library on September 21, 1899.

Children, it is fitting that this room be named for her.

April 12, 1986

**Left and Top:** Correspondence and Illustrations from artist Jean Tamburine Bertolli.



**Left:** From 1982 to 2007 the Library instituted a unique management structure featuring co-directors, Leslie Scherer (right) and Karen Roesler (left), both of whom oversaw the Library's 2008 remodel and expansion.

**Above:** Correspondence with the Taber Estate regarding naming the Library after Margaret Taber. Ultimately, the Children's Room was named after Mrs. Taber from 1983-2007.

# CHAPTER SIX: A Future-Proof Transformation



In 2000, the Library's Board of Managers identified space as the most important priority for improving and maintaining service, and in 2005 the Town of Wallingford agreed to fund a \$12,065,000 expansion of the library building at 200 North Main Street. The 67,000 square foot renovated and expanded building was dedicated in May 2008 with beautifully expanded areas for children, teens, adults, computer users, and readers. To help raise funds for the expansion, the Library commissioned "The Story of Wallingford" tile mural from artist Marion Grebow with local individuals, organizations, and businesses each contributing money for a handcrafted ceramic tile showcasing Wallingford history.

Recognizing that technology would be critical for keeping public libraries relevant for their communities, co-directors Leslie Scherer and Karen Roesler designed a future-proof library with personal computers, Macs, 3D printers, and WiFi. The collection also evolved over time. Films on VHS gave way to DVDs, and by 2019, Library patrons were enjoying a growing selection of downloadable e-books and e-audiobooks, as well as options for streaming music and movies onto their personal devices.

Continuing a tradition of art installations, over the summer of 2016, local residents contributed personal photos of Wallingford to a community art project, "The Wallingford Townscape," and were facilitated by artist and Wallingford resident, Rashmi Talpade in organizing them onto a four panel collage for the front lobby.

**Left:** The 2008 Children's Room features a faux tree archway as its centerpiece.



**Below:** Library Assistant Director, Amy Humphries shows off the long-arm quilting machine at the grand opening celebration of the Collaboratory.

**Above:** The 2008 library building was designed to be future-proof. With an open floor layout, areas could be transformed to meet the needs of the community. In 2016 the media collection was reduced in size as the Library phased out VHS tapes. The space was re-imagined as the Collaboratory makerspace.



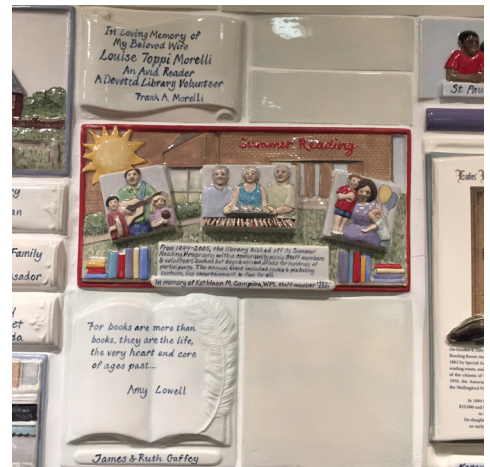
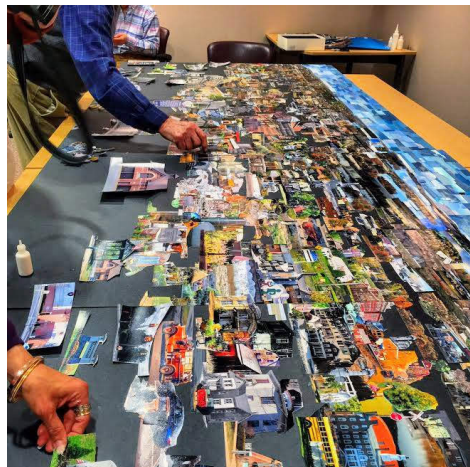
In September 2016, under new leadership from library director Jane Fisher, the Library opened "the Collaboratory," a 2,400 square foot makerspace, digital media lab, and co-working space. The Collaboratory contains a variety of state-of-the-art technology including photo and video editing, digitization, a pop-up photography/video studio, a laser cutter, a long-arm quilting machine, sewing and embroidery machines, and robotics. It also has a bookbinding machine, a bicycle repair station, and traditional handcrafting tools. In addition to its vast collection of books, the Library also began to offer nontraditional materials to borrow including tech devices, puzzles, games, and sewing machines — and in 2019, a seed library was opened thanks to Eagle Scout candidate Matthew Mowerson. That's right—library users could bring home seeds to grow flowers, vegetables, and herbs.

Three years after the launch of the Collaboratory, the Library recognized the need for a different kind of program space for children and in September 2019, it celebrated the opening of the Wonder Room within the existing Children's Room. The Wonder Room offers opportunities for children to learn about science, technology, engineering, and mathematics through special programs and gadgets. The room is also used for collaborative learning. The days of librarians "shushing" children has shifted to an environment that encourages group learning and activities. Programs like the Break-It Make-It Lab, Reading to Rover, Happy Feet, Kindness Club, and Tech Takeover are as popular as our traditional story times.

# Our Doors Open To... THE NEXT CHAPTER

In 2020, the Wallingford Public Library will adopt its next strategic plan. The Library will no doubt continue to evolve to meet the needs of the community by connecting people with ideas, experiences, and with each other to inspire, enrich, and inform. Moving forward, the Library will aspire to serve the community by being a hub where all are welcome; an educator through its programs, services, and collections; a leader evolving with the changing needs and interests of our community; and a convener collaborating with partners to collectively serve and maximize resources.

"Our Doors Open to Endless Possibilities" has become the motto of the Wallingford Public Library. Feedback from community surveys tells us that patrons value the Library and see it as one of the "gems" of the Town of Wallingford. Others tell us that our library has become Wallingford's "happy factory." We hope that you will continue to find kindness and joy every time you visit the Wallingford Public Library and we invite you to stay tuned for our next chapter!



**Clockwise from Top Left:** Laser wood cut-outs in the Collaboratory; "Heritage" bronze sculpture; A handprint collage made during the opening celebration of the Wonder Room; A card catalog repurposed to house the Seed Library; Library patrons placing photos to create "The Wallingford Townscape" collage; A tile on "The Story of Wallingford" tile mural paying homage to the Library's Summer Reading program and former Library staff and supporters.