

History of the Morrisville Public Library

The house was built in the 1850's for the Kingman family. On October 16, 1861, 36 year old Morrisville druggist and merchant (and owner of the house), Lyman M. Kingman, enlisted in the Co. E. 81st NYS Volunteer Infantry. On May 31, 1862 at the battle of Fair Oaks in Virginia, Captain Kingman was killed. He left a widow, Caroline and two young children, Frankie and Amelia. Caroline sold the house to the Phelps family shortly after Lyman's death. Henry Phelps and his wife, Mary Austin Phelps, resided in this beautiful Victorian house until their deaths on May 20, 1891 and May 29, 1903, respectively.

While living in Morrisville, Mr. Phelps "took an active interest in measures for the public welfare, giving much time to the promotion of projects of general advantage to the village. For more than thirty years he was a consistent member of the Congregational Church of this village, and a liberal contributor to its financial requirements. As a neighbor, he was kind and obliging, and in all relations of life he was justly entitled to the encomium of being a good citizen."

Mary Austin Phelps' life was "not a public one". She loved to garden and took great pride in the gardens around her home. "Soon this love of hers was shared by many who never went away empty handed. Blossoms, slips, roots, were freely divided." She loved her children dearly and was very interested in education being that she was a teacher before she married.

After both Mr. and Mrs. Phelps passed away, their daughter, Susanna Phelps Gage, married to Professor Simon Henry Gage of Cornell University, presented her family home to the village for the use as a public library on June 11, 1903. "If this should prove to be too burdensome for the community, or it is not used, the project should be abandoned and the property sold."*

"Mr. and Mrs. Phelps, who in life took a deep interest in everything that, pertained to the welfare of the community. We presume as a memorial to her parents and a desire to do something for her native village that will be a lasting benefit, actuates Mrs. Gage in making this generous offer."*

In December 1903, Morrisville Public Library opened with 760 volumes on its shelves.

We have gone from being a village library to school district library with this occurring January 2003 when the voters of the Morrisville Eaton Central School District voted on this proposal. By doing this, we have been able to provide a much better service to our patrons (i.e.- extended hours, more items on the shelves, quality programming, public access computers, and paid staff to help each patron with their needs.)

In 2003, our operating budget was \$60,000 a year. In 2006, after another successful vote by the school district taxpayers it was increased to an operating budget of \$90,000. In 2010, it increased to \$120,000 after another proposal was brought before the taxpayers for a vote. In 2019 the budget was \$131,000. 2020 and 2021, our budget is \$135,753.

First Library Lending rules of 1903. They were:

1. The Library shall be open for the drawing of books on Friday afternoon of each week, between 4 and 5 o'clock.
2. No person shall draw more than one book at any time.
3. No person can draw a book until he has returned all Library books in his possession.
4. All books must be returned within two weeks from the time it was drawn.
5. Selection of books must be made from the Catalogue, and not from the book shelves.
6. A failure to comply with these rules will prevent a person from drawing books.

*taken from the Madison County Leader newspaper