

## Director interview with Woburn Historical Society, 2008

Kathleen O'Doherty, the Director of the Woburn Public Library since 1986, has over 40 years of library experience. She started her library career as a Northeastern University Co-op student at the Woburn Public Library. She has also served as the director of a private school library and a college library. Kathy is the author of "Images of America: Woburn" which was published in 2000. It is now out of print, but may be borrowed from the Woburn Public Library. Kathy has a Master of Science in Library Science from Simmons College. She is married to Dr. Shaheen Mozaffar and lives south of Woburn.

Q. Knowing that the Woburn Public Library has outgrown the Richardson building, would you briefly comment on the future addition and how it will blend architecturally with the original building? How it will improve functionality?

A. The Woburn Public Library opened 130 years ago for a village of approximately 13,000. It was not designed to serve children, young adults, the physically disabled, mothers with baby carriages, etc. Today's community expects a library which can serve everyone not just the able-bodied who can open the library's massive front door. In 2005, the Trustees and Staff applied successfully for a State grant which will give the library almost \$5M towards an addition/renovation. We still need to hire an architect so we don't know what the addition will look like yet or what it will cost. We recently held a competition to solicit ideas for an addition and were pleasantly surprised when we received over 100 entries from all over the world! The addition of nearly 25,000 square feet would help solve the library's pressing space needs, be accessible, and would include a wonderful, bright, above ground children's room. Just what Woburn's children deserve!

Q. How has the economic climate affected the library, both in how it is used and in its funding?

A. We have seen a dramatic increase in the use of the library. In fiscal year 2008, the number of people who visited the library more than doubled from the previous year, from 134,819 to 281,366! Staff report that more and more people are coming in and looking for information on resume writing, doing job searches on the computers, and so on. As is often the case with libraries, when times get tough, libraries lose funding. Our library has been level funded for a few years now and as is the case with other city departments, we have been unable to replace staff when positions become vacant. Because we have to be open at least 63 hours a week to maintain state aid and certification (along with other requirements), it is difficult to keep our public service desks fully manned all day.

Q. What are some of the better known and least known historical resources in the library?

A. Based on usage, one of the best known historical resources is our newspaper index and the newspaper microfilm. This is an incredibly valuable tool for researchers and not

all libraries have such an extensive resource in their collections. The newspaper index has been maintained for over 100 years by library reference staff (except for a brief period during the 20<sup>th</sup> century). This is a heavily used collection and we hope to be able to find the funding to have it digitized in the future. The newspapers covered by the index range from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. Unfortunately, due to staff shortages it has been difficult for the reference staff to keep the indexing up to date. It's really impossible to say what the least known historical resource is since we get asked so many questions on so many different subjects!

Q. Does the library offer special historical programs?

A. The library offered a series of special programs this past fall and spring on the history of the library and its architect. We also offer what we call our "Community Conversations". These programs are run by library volunteer Linda Olsson who screens unidentified photos from the 1940s and 1950s which were donated by Patrick Farino. It is an interactive program where we encourage the audience to "talk in the library" by helping us identify the people and places in the photos. This program is on hiatus right now but will return in the fall.

Q. What is one of the biggest misconceptions about libraries?

A. The biggest misconception about libraries in general right now is that we don't need them because of the internet. We hear that all the time and this despite the evidence that library use is on the rise! Two of my favorite responses to the question of whether or not libraries are still viable came from an edition of "Teacher Librarian" (April 2001, 28:4 pp 62-5

"The Internet is like a mountain of knowledge. Anyone can start climbing it. It's so much easier if you have a guide. Librarians are the mountain guides. They know some of the best routes to the top." And "Information on the Internet is not peer-reviewed - quality and credibility are variable".

The biggest local misconception about our library is that it used to be a church. It has always been a library!