

Hi and thanks for having me. I'll be talking about Vermont's libraries and my quest to see them all. Nearly all the photographs in this talk were taken by me. If you'd like to see my other photographs or just learn more about Vermont's libraries, this web address will get you there. This is the Fletcher Memorial Library in Ludlow, started in 1894, finished in 1901.

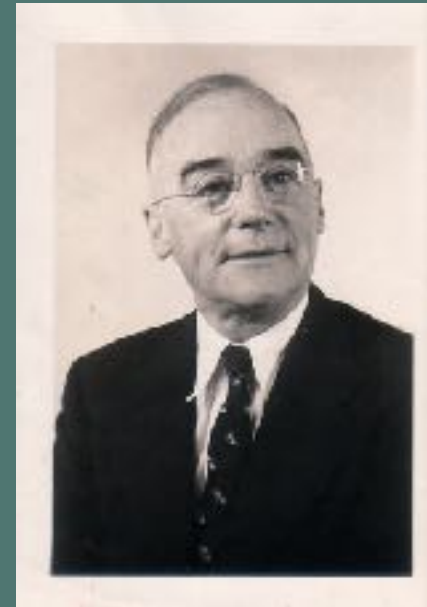


**Kimball Library - Randolph**

I'm a librarian from Randolph Vermont and I like to visit libraries. Professionally, I am a librarian without a library. I went to library school at the University of Washington in the last century. I work with the adult education program in Randolph Vermont and help people learn to use computers. I work for the Vermont Library Association which is the professional association for librarians in this state and I write and speak locally and nationally about topics related to libraries and technology. I'm on the board of the VT Humanities Council. Lately I talk a lot about online privacy and also how to avoid online scams. This is a picture of the library in my town. I fill in here when someone is sick or on vacation and get to work at the reference desk. The upstairs is lovely and regal, the downstairs is the youth department. Before it was renovated the basement (or lower level) was used as the historical society, overflow for the grade school across the street, and even for band practice!

**I propose to organize a 251 Club to be made up of Vermonters and others who can show that they have visited, not merely driven through, the 251 towns in the state.**

**—Dr. Arthur Wallace Peach**



I moved to Vermont in 1997 (from Massachusetts, where I was from, via Seattle where I got my library degree). I lived in a small town (West Topsham a town with no library) on the side of a highway, and needed an excuse to go exploring. I am an organized list-making person. I was vaguely familiar with the Vermont 251 Club, founded by the late Arthur Peach while he was working at (the late) Vermont Life magazine in 1954. I liked his idea of the 251 Club, an informal "do it however you want, but just get outside and do it" sort of club. And I wanted to learn more about my chosen home, the state where my great-grandfather lived. I got my Gazetteer and started visiting places....



Ten+ years and a lot of driving later. I finished it, in Somerset a town without a library and also without a population (one of the five unincorporated towns in the state). So the question becomes with self-directed projects like this one.... what do you do for an encore?





Everyone has to have a hobby right? As I said, I am organized and the idea of "completionist" tasks where you go visit all the thises or thats has always appealed to me. So in addition to making moss terrariums and doing a lot of reading, I decided to try to visit all of Vermont's public libraries. And photograph them. (I'm also going back through my 251 trips to make sure I have a photo of every town). I informally call this my 183 quest for Vermont's 183 public libraries.

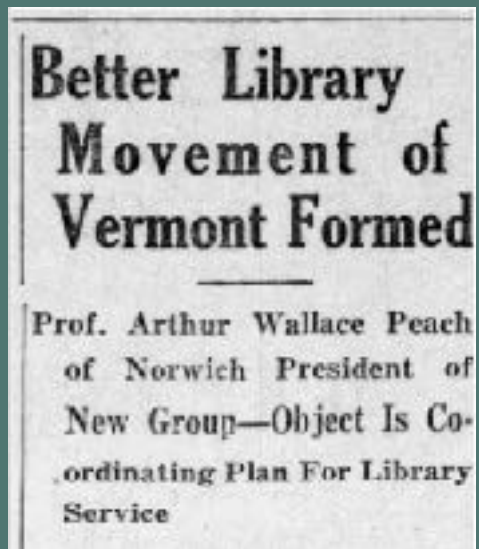
**Where the Books Are**  
**Pat Belding (author)**



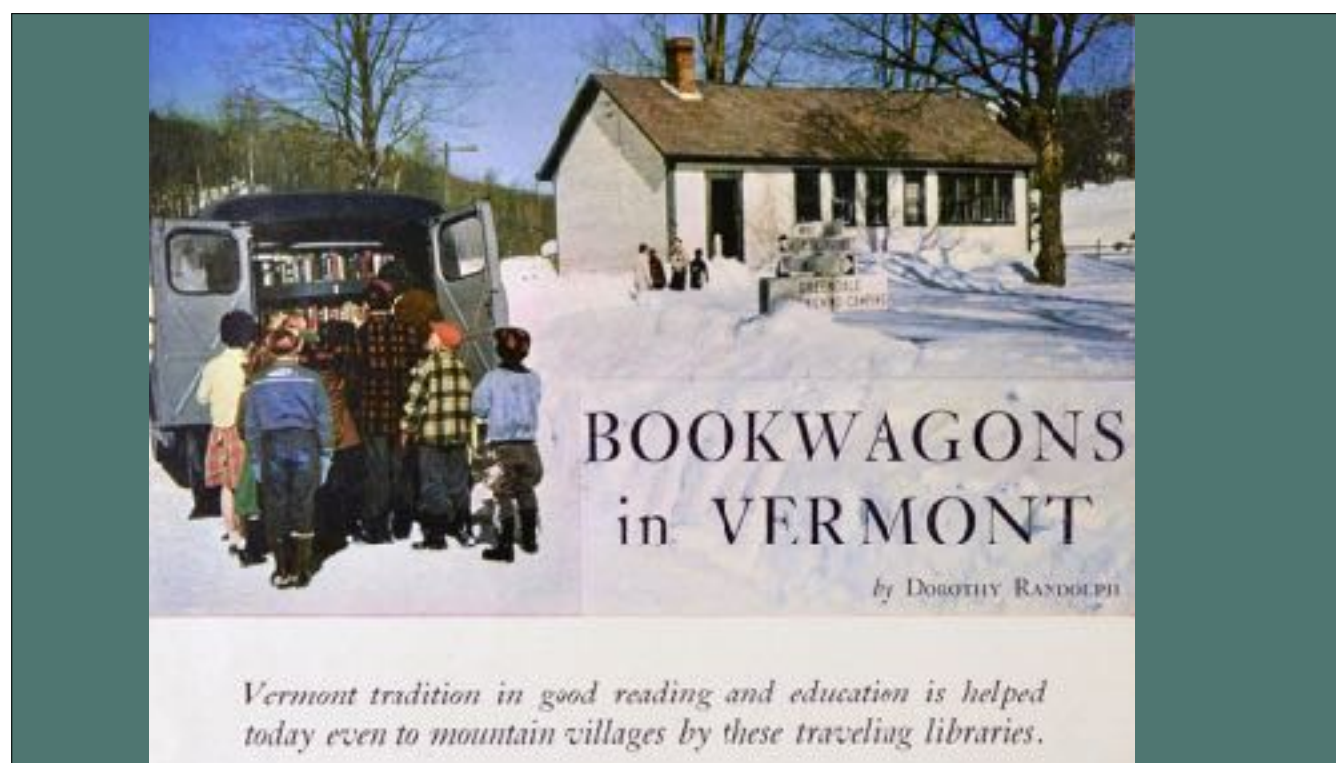
I was not the first to do this or even to try. This is Pat Belding a librarian who worked at the Aldrich Public Library in Barre from 1967 through 1993. She passed in 2018. In the 90s in her retirement, she and her son travelled all over Vermont visiting every public library and wrote a book about the 201 libraries (at the time) that they visited, their history and architecture. That book is called Where the Books Are

**The cause of libraries is one of  
the finest in our modern world**

**—Dr. Arthur Wallace Peach**

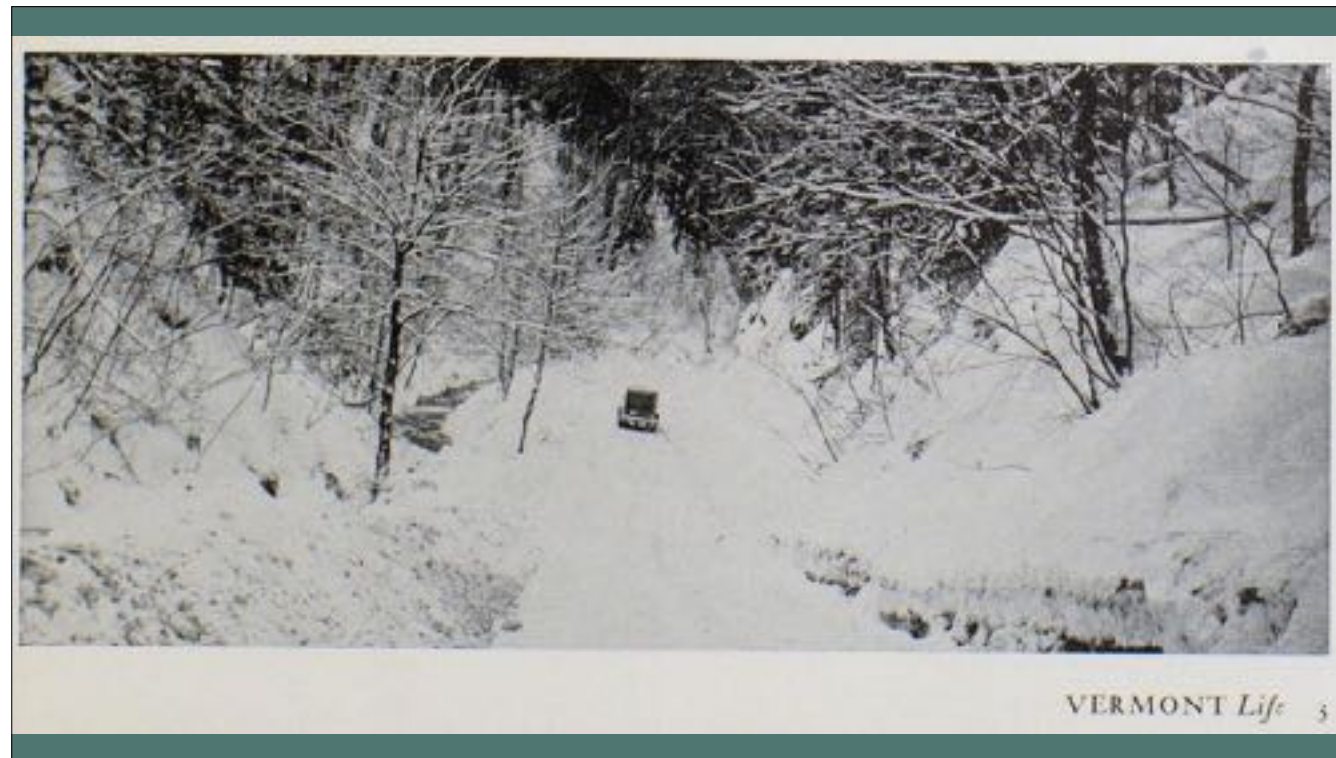


What I did not know, when I started this plan, was that in 1934 Dr. Peach had also been one of the founders of the Better Library Movement in Vermont addressing the post-Depression paucity of good library services. At that time, Vermont had 227 libraries (many in schools) BUT over half of them were only open 2-4 hours a week and some not at all in the wintertime. Peach's 251 Club ideas and his strong support for libraries was somewhat coincidental for me, but I took it as a sign.

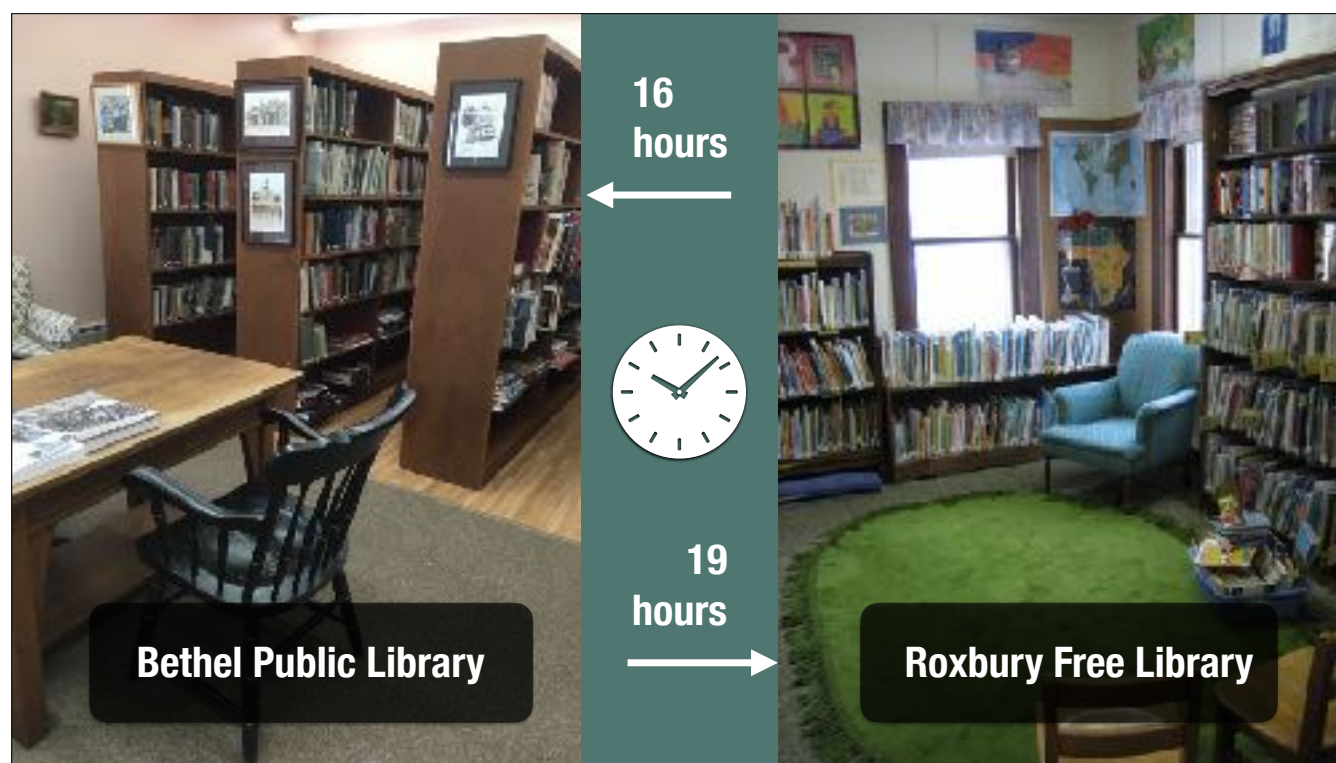


One of the things the Better Library Movement did was organized Book Wagons (this was before the term "Bookmobiles" was in regular use) to bring books to the 689 rural one and two room schoolhouses in the state. This is an article from Vermont Life magazine in their 1952-53 Winter issue. And I'd be remiss as a librarian if I didn't tell you that you can access EVERY Vermont Life magazine for free online (or to download and read offline)

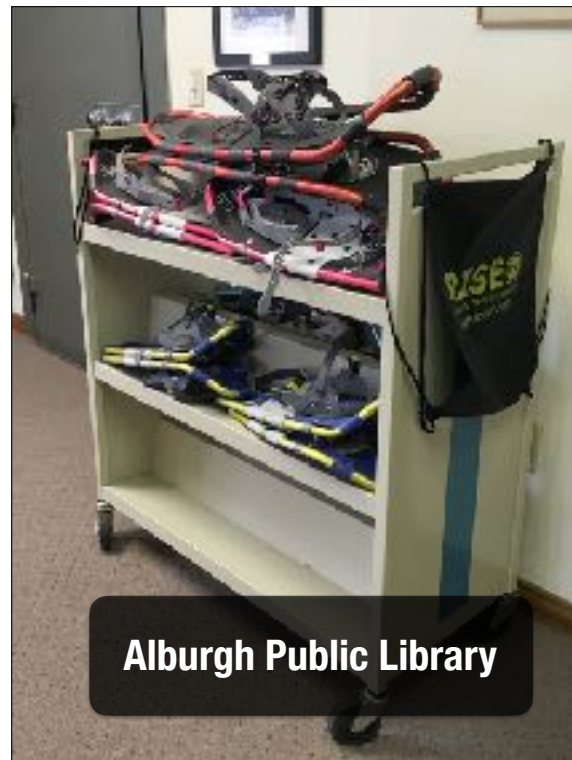




I don't know if any of you know my part of the state, but this is a book wagon navigating the Granville Gap (now Route 12a I believe). This book wagoning was tough work!



In fact one of the trickier parts of visiting libraries nowadays isn't traffic but time. Many of these smaller libraries are still only open a few days a week, and almost never on Sundays which is one of my prime travel days.



**Alburgh Public Library**



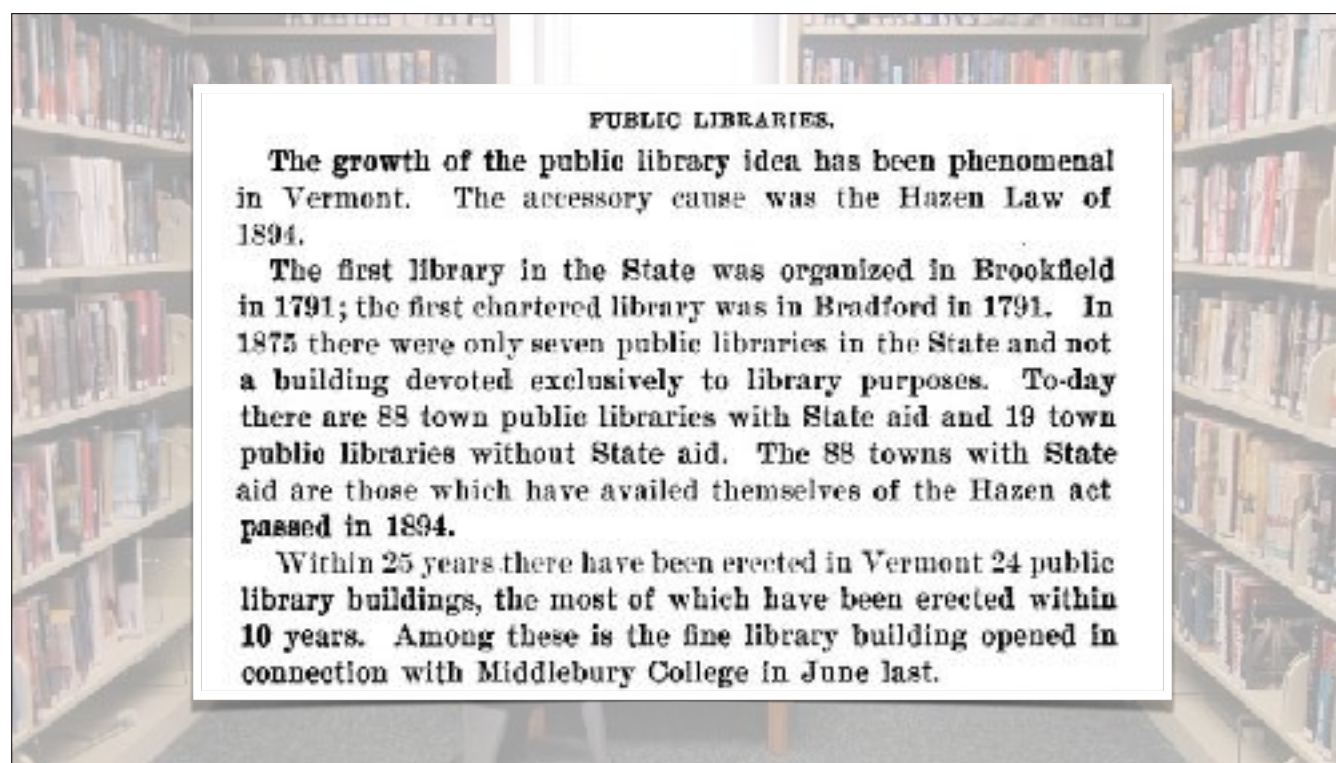
**Carpenter-Carse - Hinesburg**

Snow is not an issue. Or if it is, some libraries lend snowshoes. Likewise finding your way is easy when some libraries lend telescopes.



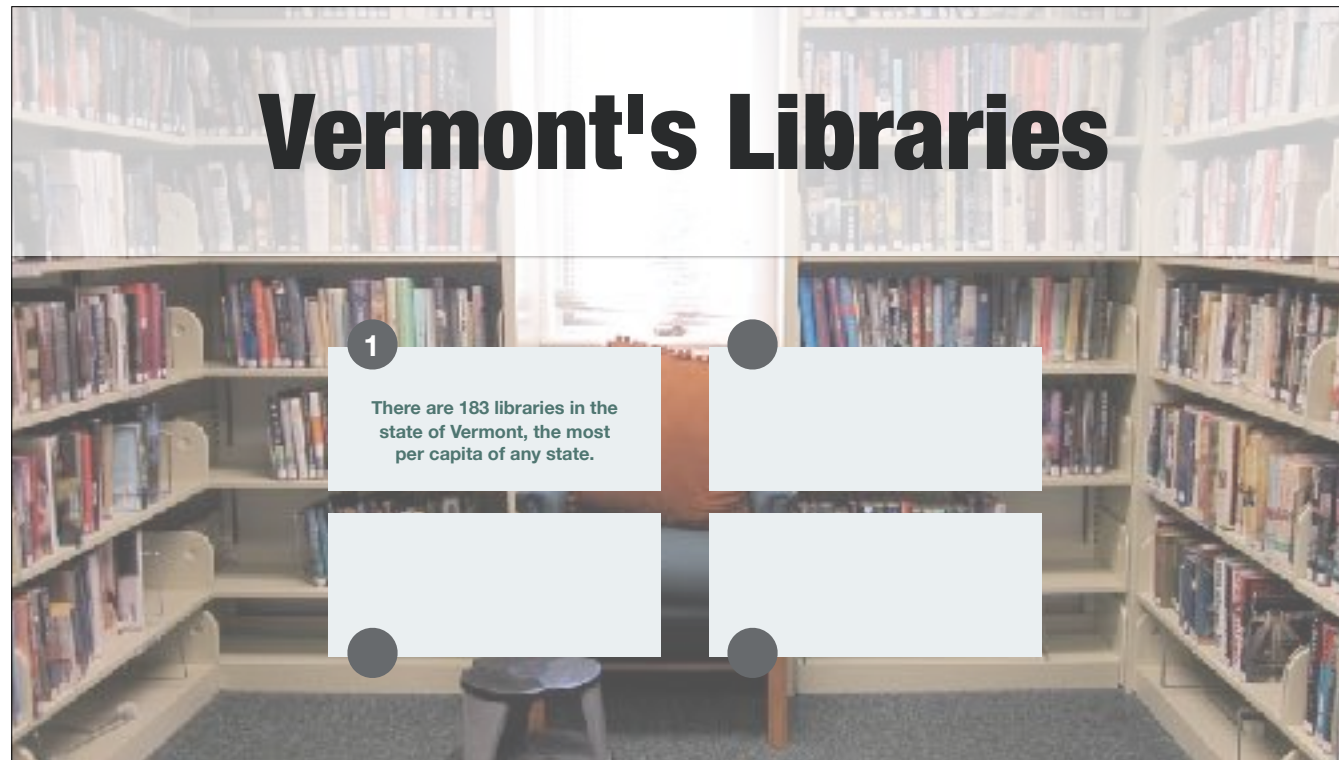


It's pretty easy to take a photo of a library that looks like any other library. This is a photo from when I was starting out. The Pierson Library is great, right in Shelburne, has a great history, originally was 100 books circulating from the post office but the books got shabby and, the library website mentions, many "were not returned." In 1894, they got some \*\*money from the state\*\* to start an actual public library and began a series of building and renovation projects with a new one going on right now. The library circulates over 100,000 books a year, in a town of 7000 people. Vermonters love their libraries. We have more per capita than any other state. However as many people would point out, per capita records are easy if you have as small a population as we do. You might enjoy the Per Capita Index compiled by people at VPR of some other records. Things like second most diners per capita, or strongest dislike of spray cheese.

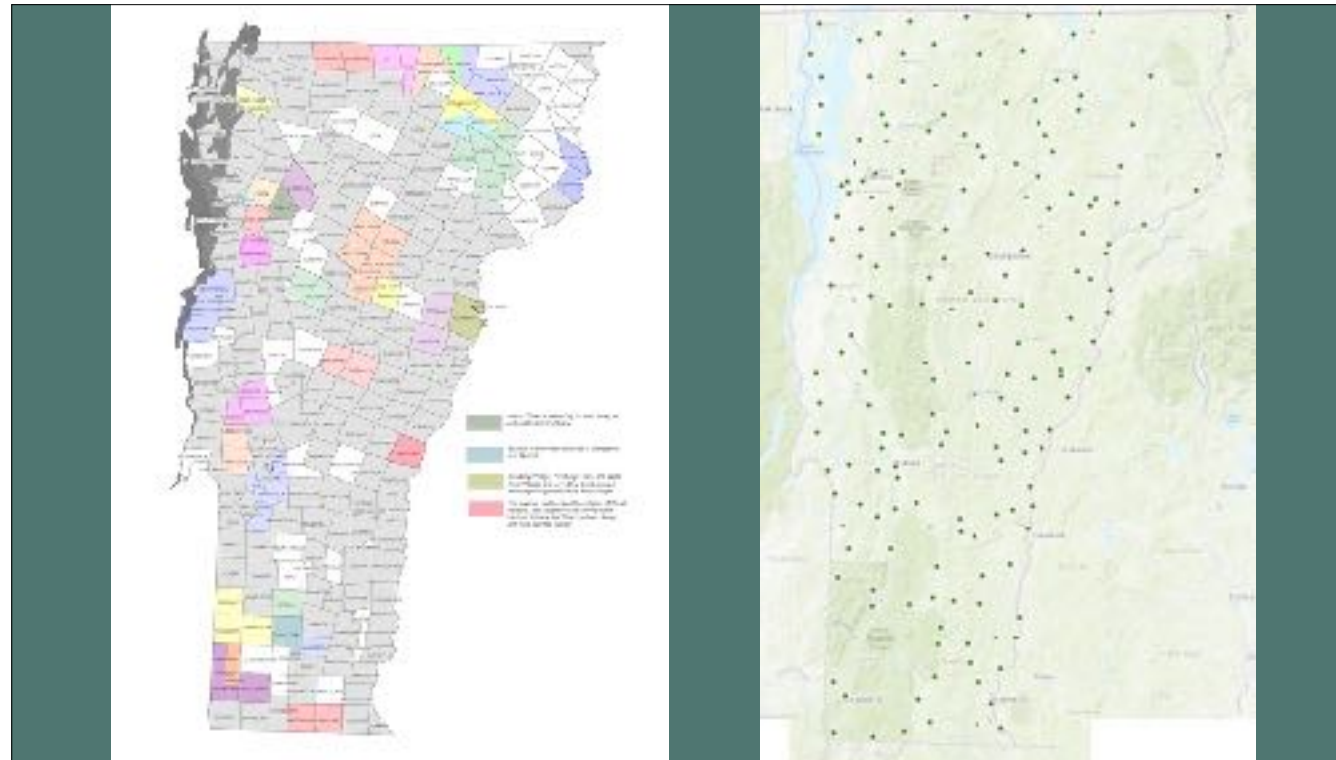


Back to that money from the state. Vermont is one of eight states that doesn't actually fund their libraries at a state level. While the state pays for things like design and implementation of a summer reading program, and some bookmobile and courier services, all funding for Vermont's public libraries is local, either from property taxes or endowments. Here's a copy of the Vermont School report from 1900 talking about Vermont's library history. First library in 1791, but nearly 100 years later there were only seven public libraries in the state. The Hazen Law in 1894 gave \$100 (about \$3000 in today's money) for materials to any town wanting to build a public library. By 1900 the state had over 100 free public libraries. As of now, 97 percent of Vermont's population has public library service available and the state library is working on that last three percent. Here are a few interesting facts about them....





Right now the number of Vermont's libraries hovers around 183. We may have just gotten another one: the town of Pittsfield voted at their town meeting last year to allocate some money for their formerly all-volunteer library. This is great news! But I'll have to change the name of my quest :D



There are some visualizations that can help you imagine this. Our rectangularish state is the wrong sized rectangle for viewing on slides. These maps are available at the state library website. The library with the largest collection is Fletcher Free with 172,522 items  
There are almost 300,000 library cards in Vermont (some people have cards at multiple libraries)  
The library with the smallest service population is Hancock Vermont (near me) serving 326 people....



**Orange = been to**  
**Yellow = no library**  
**Green = worked there**

I have my own version which hangs on the wall of my place next to a map of the Long Trail



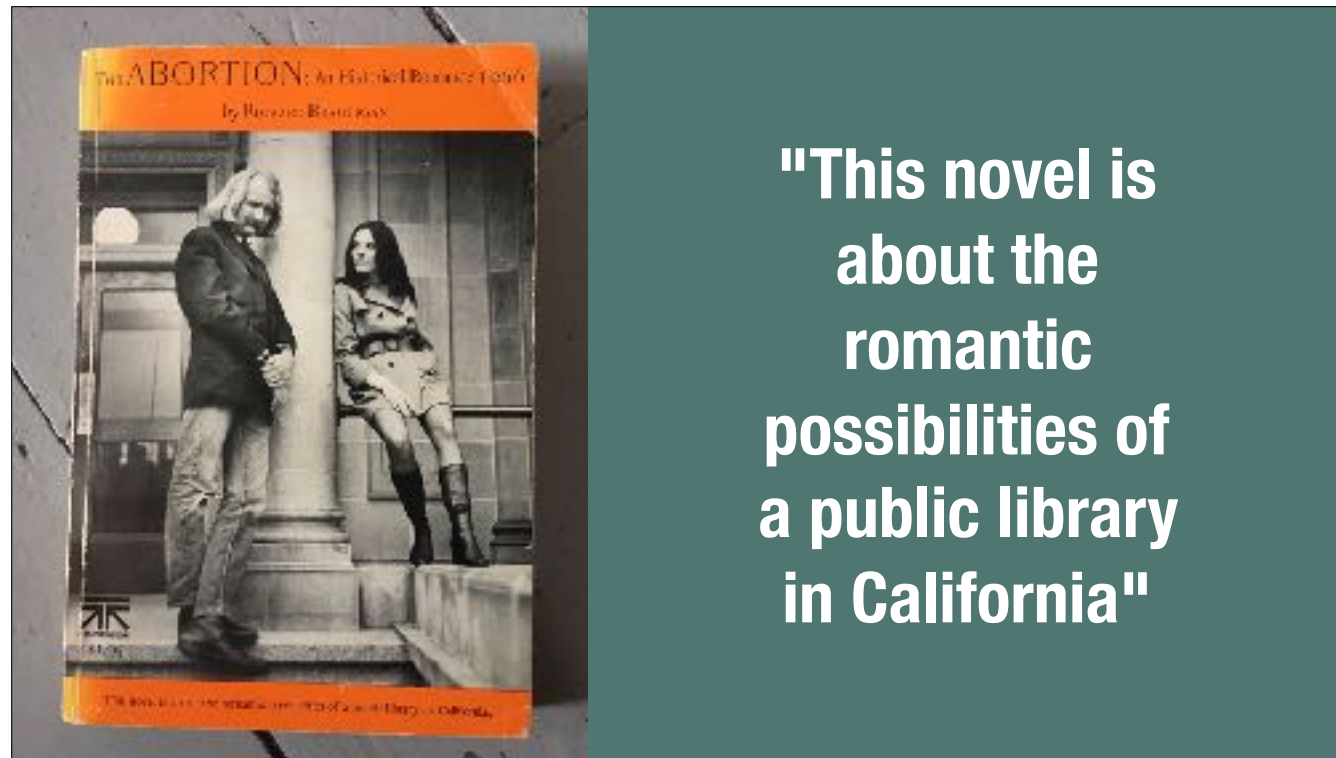
**Hancock Public Library**

The Hancock library was recently renovated and built into the town's old schoolhouse, a building it shares with the town clerk. I hear if you are really nice they will let you ring the bell. It runs on a budget of \$15,500 per year.



I have always been fascinated by libraries you could potentially live in ever since learning about the caretaker apartments that were in some New York Public Library branches when I was in library school. Imagine!





**"This novel is  
about the  
romantic  
possibilities of  
a public library  
in California"**

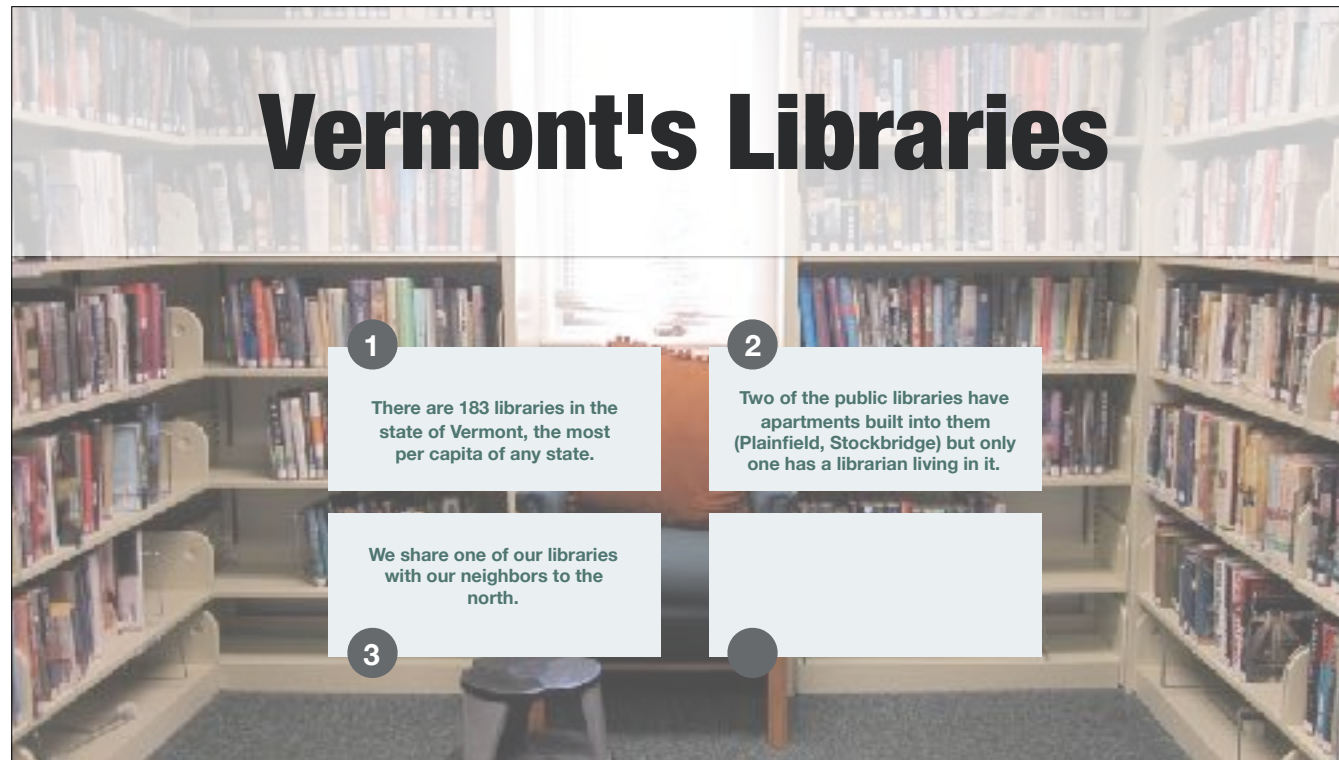
Minor digression, one of the books that inspired me to become a librarian was Richard Brautigan's oddly-named book *The Abortion*. It's mostly not about an abortion it's about the romantic possibilities of a public library in California. And also about a guy who is a librarian who lives in a library in San Francisco California, that is always open and which can hold anyone's books. If you have written a book, you can go to this library day or night and place your book on the shelves. I fell in love with that democratic ideal (and that great job). After library school one of my jobs was caretaking an Odd Fellows Hall in Seattle that I did live in, in the caretakers apartment. It remains my favorite non-library job of all time.



**Belcher Library - Stockbridge**

In Vermont, there are two libraries with apartments. The front part of this building is the Belcher Library, in Stockbridge, one of the few classic buildings in the small town that was left standing after the flood of 1927. The front part is the library, the back part is the librarian's apartment. When I visited, I asked if she got to live there for free, she said that her rent actually pays most of the library's operating expenses! The inside of the library has a great library table, a pump organ, and photos of some of the old-timer notables from the town.





While many towns share a library—my library is shared with the town of Braintree next door—only one library possibly in the entire country, is shared with another country. That's the Haskell Free Library and Opera House up in Derby Line.

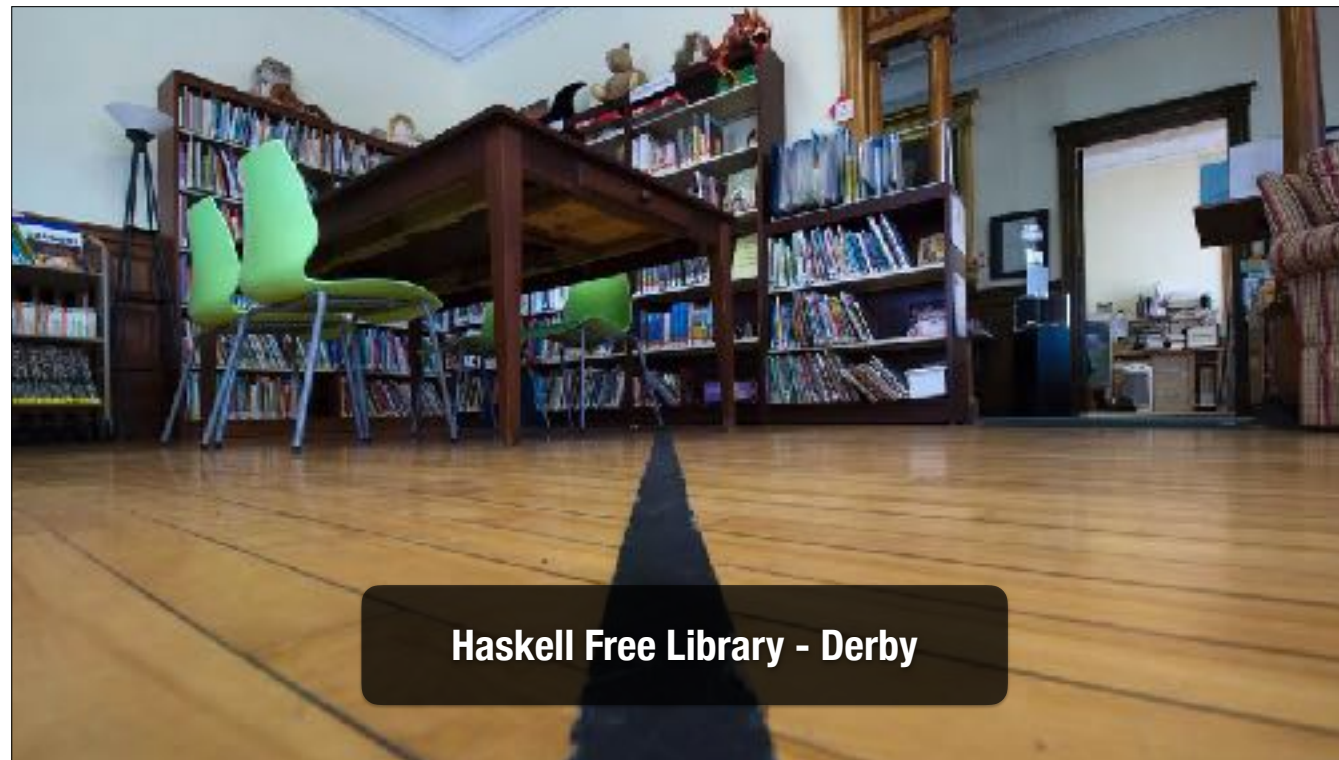




**Haskell Free Library - Derby**

It's really worth a visit if you haven't been. Cool old building. Very nice staff. Multilingual collection, open 38 hours a week.

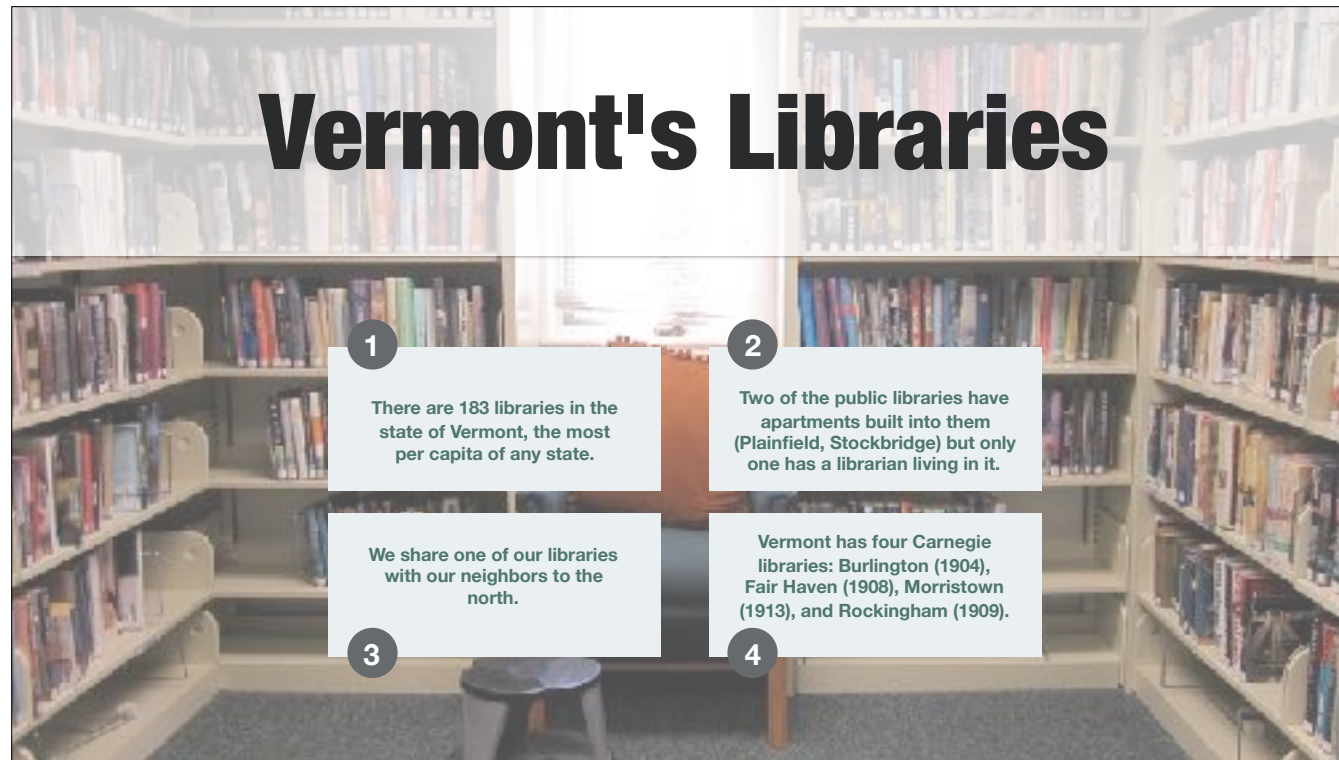




**Haskell Free Library - Derby**



You may have read about this library in the news. First there was the negative news about the smuggler who was caught bringing guns into the US via the library (they picked him out because he was "too well-dressed") but then this story about families who could not get entry visas into the US still being able to see each other, briefly, inside the library. I've been told recently that border patrol has been cracking down on these types of reunions which is a darned shame.



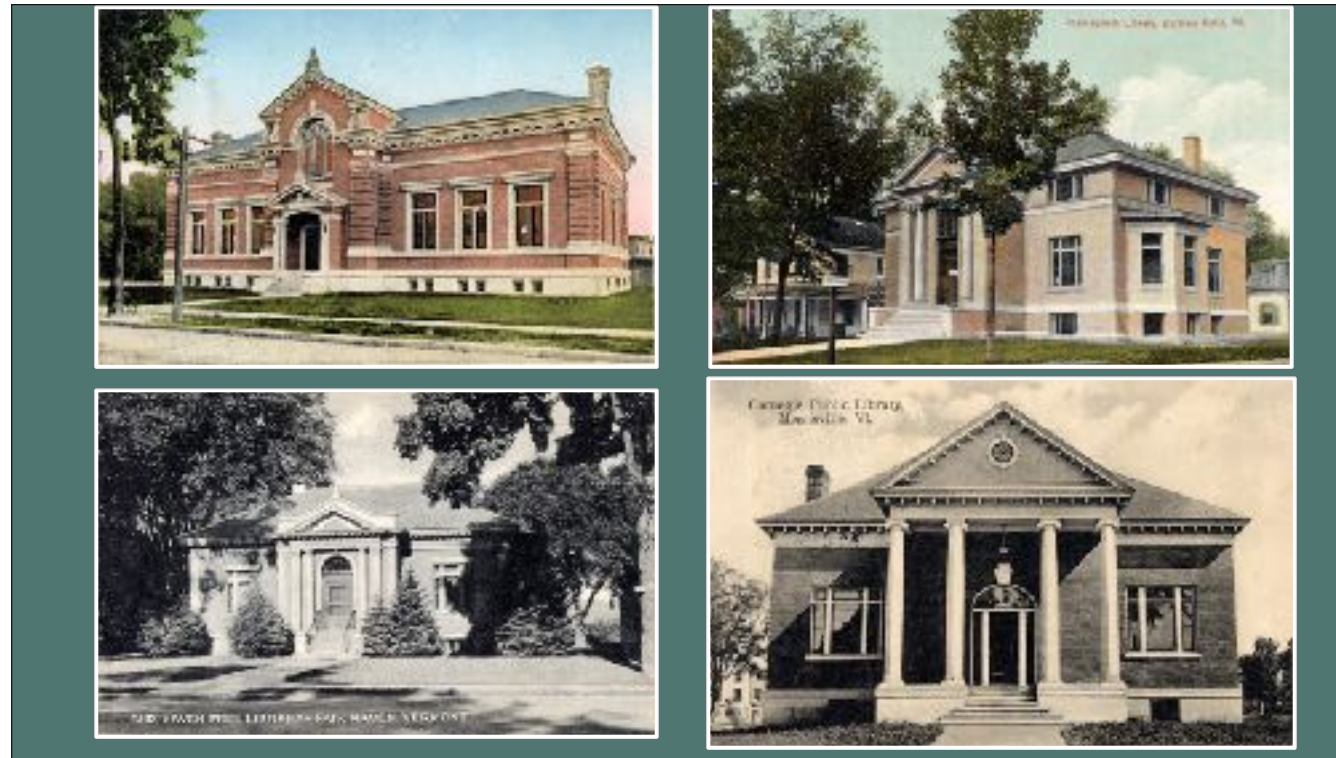
And even though many of our libraries in the state were built during the Carnegie period, only four public libraries are actual "got money from Andrew Carnegie to build them" libraries. Burlington, Fair Haven, Morristown and Rockingham.



**Shoes in wall: 1913, and 2013**

I heard from the Morristown Librarian who told me that "As was the custom, one of the builders buried some old shoes, toes down, in the wall for luck's sake.... the renovators decided to continue the 100-year custom with a pair of modern kicks "





Norwich also had a Carnegie Library which was a library until 1991 and is now the School of Art and Architecture (it was vacant for two years and then there was a student contest at the architecture school to renovate the building to house the new architecture school)







And of course the NEK has its own local treasure of a library. National Historic Landmark, noted architect (and funder), nationally known initial bibliographer, unrivaled art collection for public libraries in the state. I probably don't have to explain the appeal. St. J's was one of the first libraries I visited regularly when I moved here, right up there with the library in Barre. And as a result of poking around and talking to librarians, I've learned that two U.S. Presidents have visited the Athenaeum: Benjamin Harrison (1891) and William Howard Taft (1912). (not my photo) A few more facts I've learned....



Kellogg-Hubbard has one of the seven high water marks posted around Montpelier from the Nov 3, 1927 flood.



Windsor Library was designed by the same person, Henry Bacon, who designed the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. They also have an active seed library.

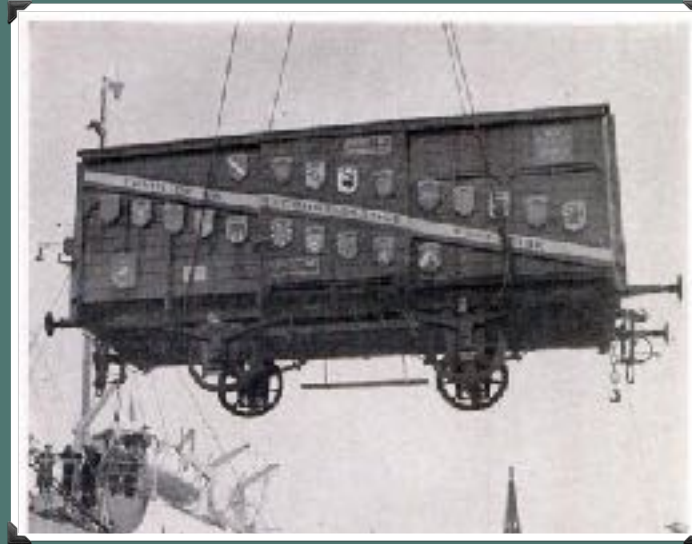




**"Gift to Chelsea  
from the Merci Train  
from France"**

**Chelsea Library**

Sometimes just one thing in a library will open up a whole story... I fill in sometimes in the Chelsea Library. One day I was tidying up and I looked at the little piece of paper by the wall sconce. It was a note... I did not know what a Merci Train was, and so I looked it up online



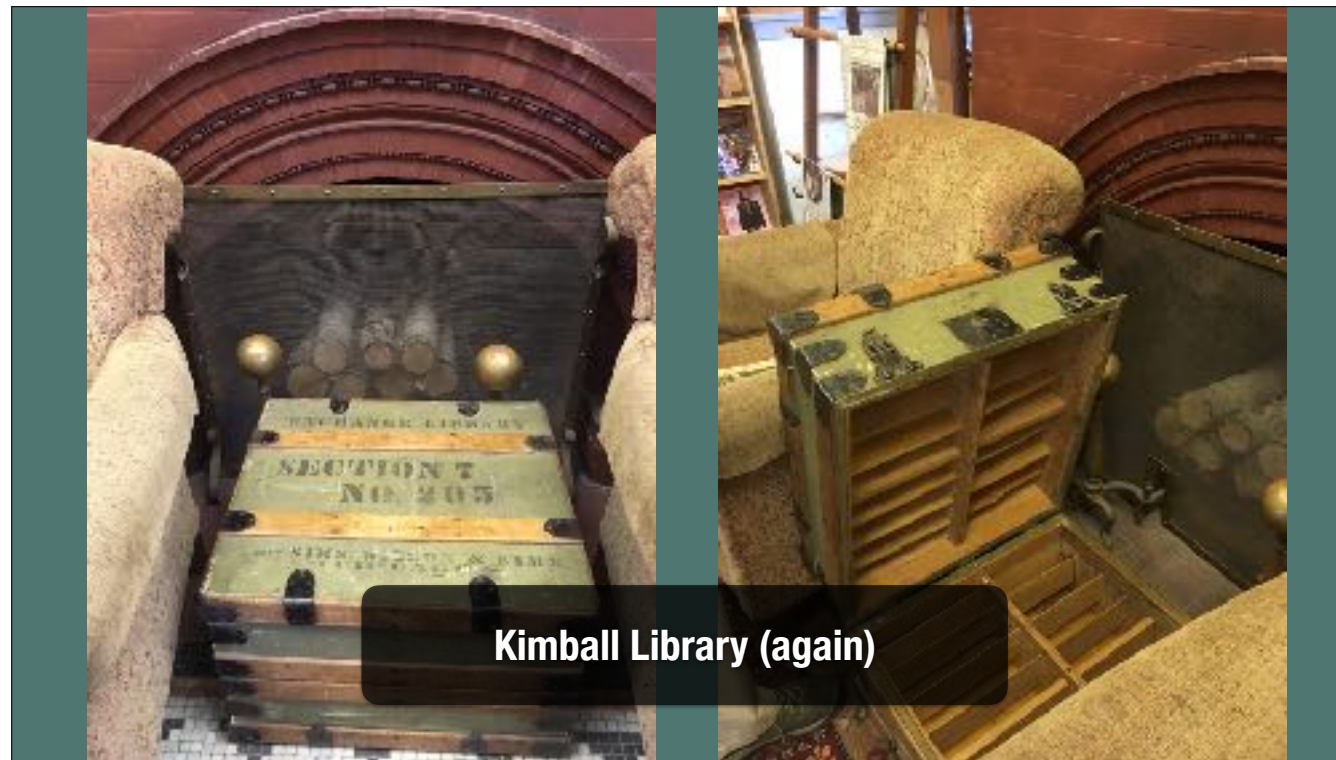
**"49 French railroad boxcars filled thousands of gifts of gratitude from French citizens sent to the US in 1949... in appreciation for the 700+ American boxcars of relief goods sent to them by Americans in 1948"**

and I learned about an entire post-WWII historical event I hadn't known about, all because I'd read a little sign on a wall of a library.



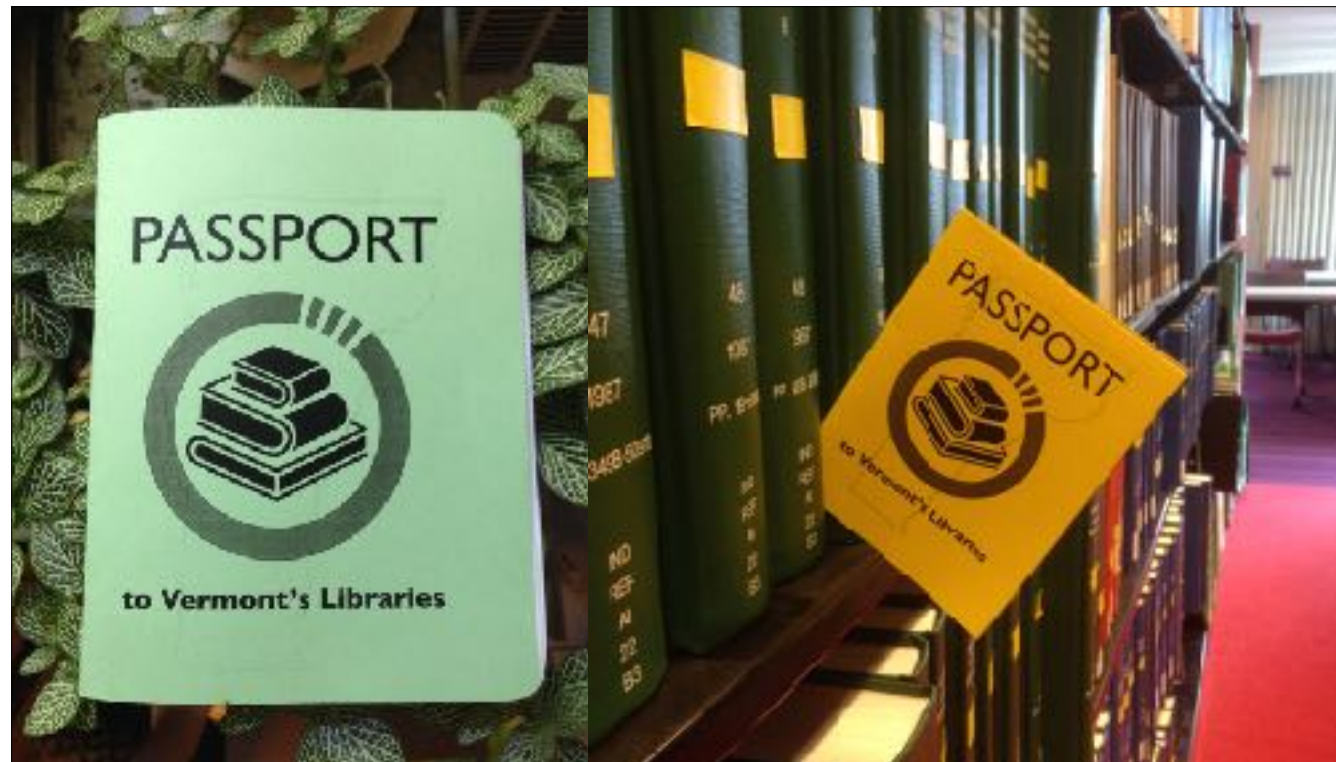
**Charles D. Brainerd Library - West Danville**

At 10' x 17' this is the smallest library in the state. It re-opened last year and I haven't been there yet! (not my photo)

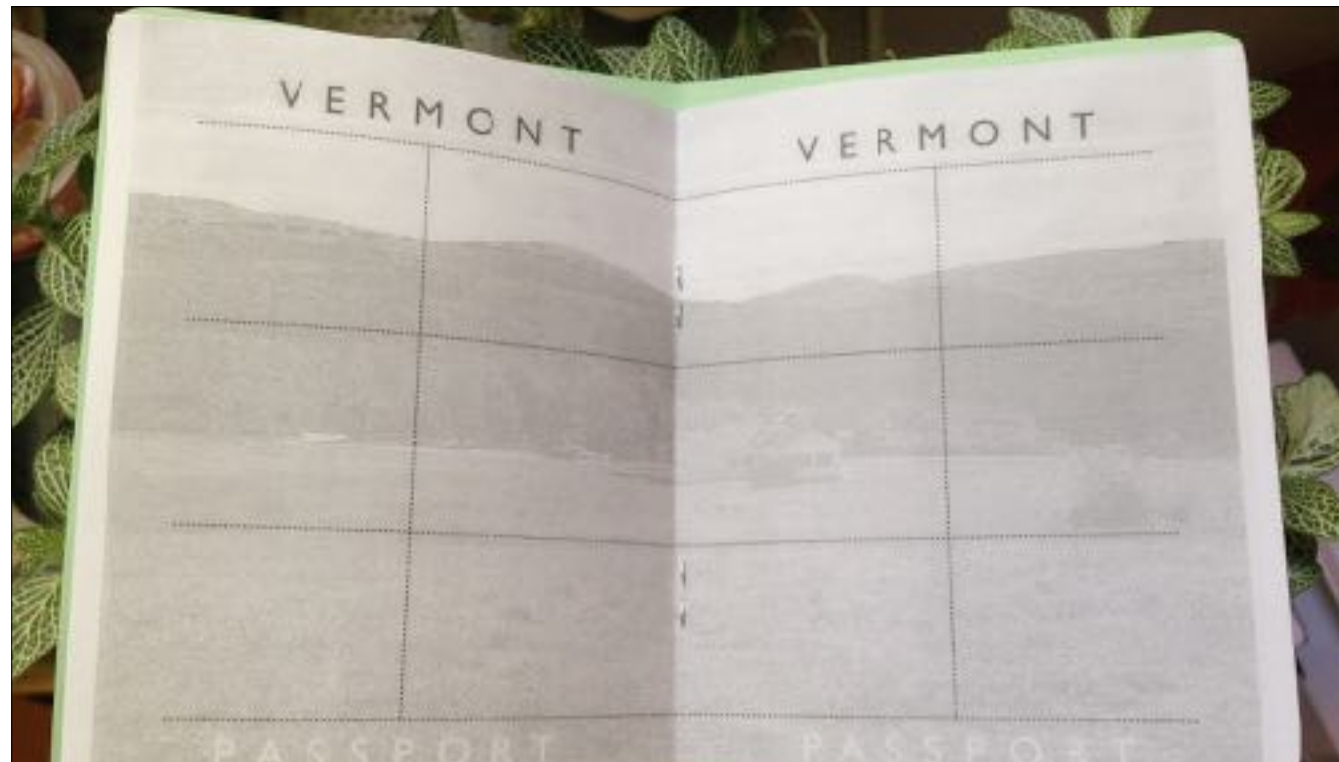


As I was talking to the librarians I work with in Randolph about this talk, they revealed to me that the little end table trunk we had in the library was, in a previous life, one of the boxes used for early Vermont traveling libraries! I felt my life had come full circle.





But of course one of the things that motivates many librarians is getting to share what they know and what they love, so in 2015 I got together with some other members of the Vermont Library Association and we started the Passport to Vermont Libraries program. It was a great DIY program that ran for four of the last five years. We made little passports that we handed out at libraries and the object was to see as many libraries as you could between June 1 and September 1. We had small prizes.



Hundreds of people participated from all over the state. Similar to the 251 Club, all you had to do was get your passport stamped and it was all honor system. We had prizes for adults, teens, kids, librarians and a wild card. Local businesses gave us donations for prizes (thank you Morse Farm! Green Mountain Coffee! Ben & Jerry's!) and of course we gave away plenty of books.

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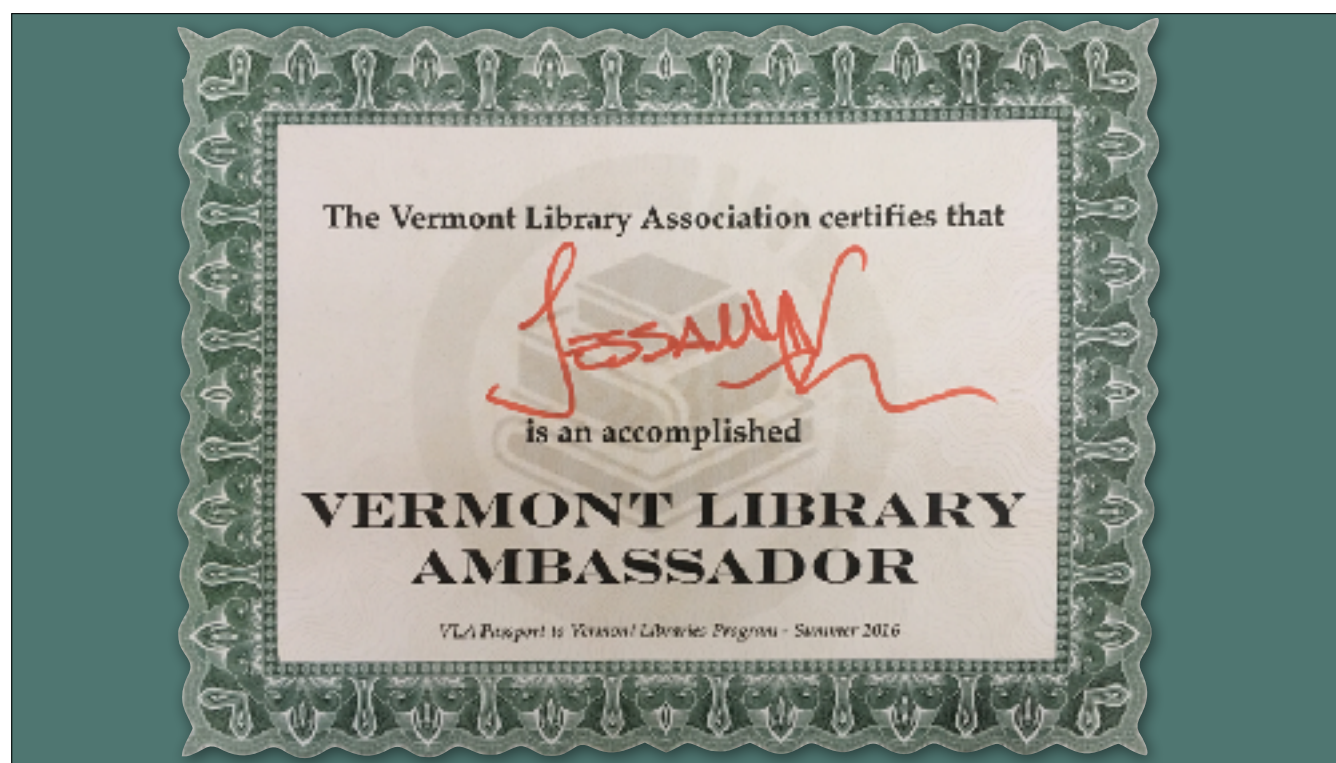
Quechee Library  
PO Box 384  
Quechee, VT 05059



THIS BOOK BELONGS TO  
ROXBURY FREE LIBRARY  
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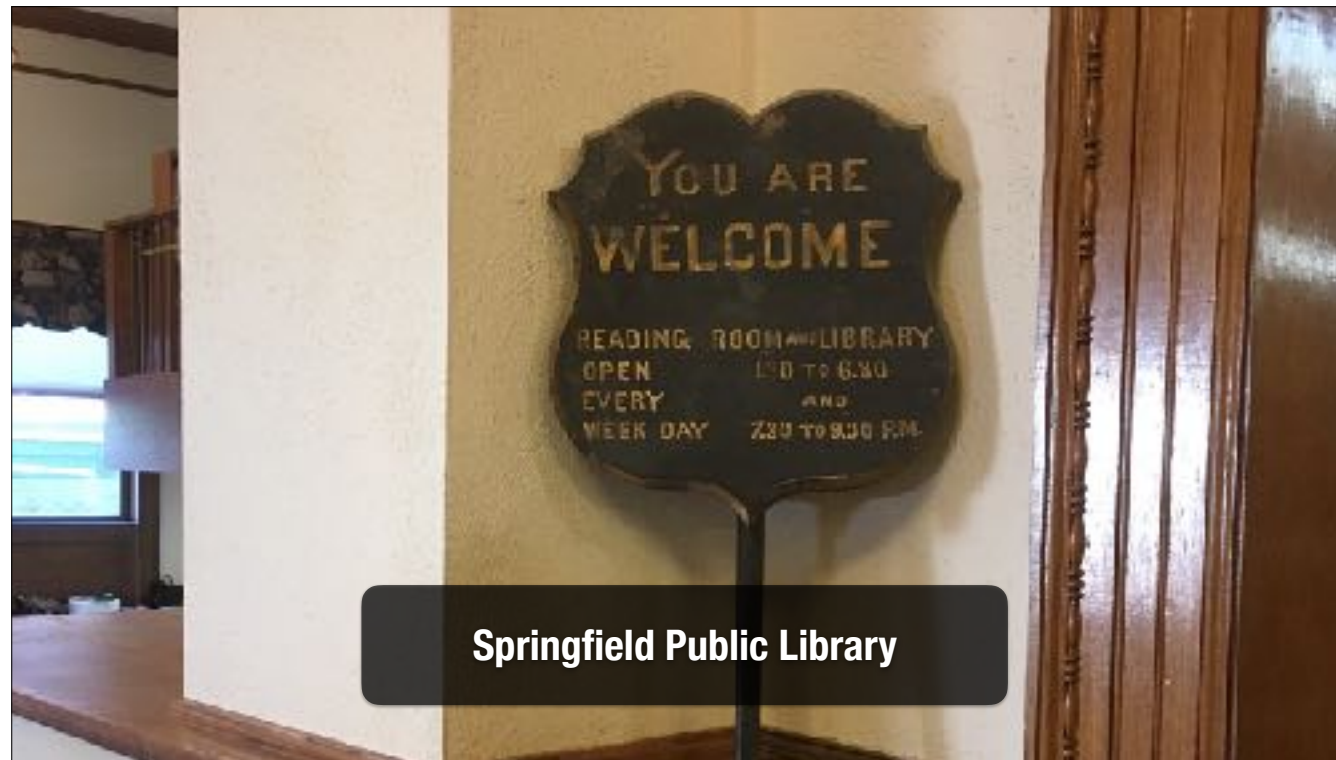
430 1/2 Main Street  
Windsor, VT 05673

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We encouraged people to share their experiences on facebook and many did. Everyone who participated got a certificate as an official library ambassador. Because of course, to me, that's what it's all about. A library is a public space, for the entire public. Sure there's probably a clean bathroom and maybe a comfy chair, but public libraries are also places you can go where you can learn about whatever YOU want, where no one is trying to sell you something. Even though I've been working in libraries since the 90s I used to be a little shy talking to librarians when I'd walk in visiting. 50+ libraries later I learned that they're often MORE than excited to share their space, their stories, and what makes their community special, with someone else who wants to know about it. Libraries are a central part to having a democracy—how can you know how to vote if you don't have access to unbiased information—in an increasingly complex world. And as we've recently learned "Visiting the library is the most common cultural activity Americans engage in"





**Springfield Public Library**

As the sign in this library says "You are welcome" we all are welcome, in all of the libraries in this state. The State Library teamed up with the Vermont Library Association last year to revive the passport program, and help everyone enjoy all of the wonderful, quirky, fascinating stories and communities that make up our Vermont library ecosystem.



thank you for your time. Please let me know if you have any questions or library facts for me!