



HELEN POTTER BILLERICA CIVIC HALL OF FAME INAUGURAL CLASS OF 2022



A lifelong Billerica resident, Helen (Lee) Potter has dedicated her time and efforts to numerous cultural arts projects throughout the town. Since the beginning of her career as an art educator, Helen's primary concern has always been Billerica's youth. With them in mind, as the 1970s were dawning, her primary concern for the children was that the library gifted by Eleanor Bennett in 1880 was too small for such a burgeoning community.

The 30-year Billerica Public Schools teacher asked her father-in-law, Stuart Potter Sr., a town selectman, "Why haven't the selectmen built a larger town library?" He stated, "In a democracy, YOU are responsible for things that need to be done." So, for the next decade, summoning the help of U.S. Senator Paul Tsongas, Billerica Selectman Thomas Conway, and her father-in-law, to name just a few:

- Helen led a building committee that successfully secured the \$1.1 million in funding so that a new public library could be constructed at no cost to the town. She even assisted in the design of the building.
- Her committee raised \$143,000 in funds through generous donations from local businesses and citizens to furnish the new library.
- She also arranged for another significant donator, fire department Capt. Paul Hayes, to provide all the landscaping for the library at no cost.
- A committee of devoted citizens helped Helen to organize a unique 300-person human chain to transfer 38,000 volumes of books, records, video tapes, and historical material from the Bennett building to the new library.

This first town-owned library opened in 1980, serving the town for 20 years before transitioning into the Billerica Senior Center. At the time, the selectmen were asked to name the new library after her father-in-law, Stuart Potter Sr. However, Helen objected, believing the town's first official public library should be simply named the Billerica Public Library.



It was no coincidence that Helen devoted her life to creative artistry. In both her mother's parents and grandparents' ancestry, you will find artistic influences in history. Helen's great grandfather, Newton Timothy Hartshorn, was a very famous Civil War artist and diary writer for President Ulysses S. Grant, whose work can be found at Dartmouth College, Princeton University, and several private collections. He created the best likeness of President Grant, which was used to design the plate for the U.S. 50-dollar bill. Meanwhile, Helen's other great grandfather, Carl August Tholander, has several pieces of artwork in museums in many countries as well as private collections.

With such descendants, Helen naturally earned a degree from the Massachusetts College of Arts and Design and has since completed several master's courses in the creative disciplines, earning additional degrees in art therapy from both Leslie University and Simmons College. Her inspiring work can be found in many forms throughout Billerica:

- Sculptured "Mother" statue for the Mother's BEAM Memorial Garden in front of the Howe School building.
- Her latest creation, a Minuteman statue, is to be bronzed and placed at the Billerica town common to honor our original freedom fighters.
- As an elementary school art teacher, composed the gravestone book of rubbings "So once was I; So, you will be" with local historian Margaret Ingraham and Billerica students.
- Co-wrote a play based with on Billerica's presence at the Salem Witch Trials titled "Save the Likes of Me" with Jean Coppinger.
- By way of interviewing military veterans for a special Billerica Access Television production, she was blessed to share the wonderful stories of local heroes, reminding all of us of the sacrifices they have made.

A Town Meeting member for more than 25 years, Helen graduated in 1955 as a member of the final class of Howe High School. She served as the public schools' art supervisor for 15 years until her retirement in 2003, having inspired a legion of school children for three decades. A member of the BATV Board of Directors, Helen is a long-time Lions Club member and former volunteer for the Yankee Doodle Homecoming parade committee and Billerica Scholarship Foundation.



Helen and her late husband, Stuart “Skip” Potter, raised five children in North Billerica. Art remains in her family blood as well, as Helen’s children and three grandchildren are also talented artists.