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Woodbridge Project

Can you believe its been over 130 years since the Barron Library opened as the first Middlesex County public library in 1877? Wow! Then, in the 1900s, community groups volunteered to open libraries all throughout Woodbridge, and by 1964 the libraries were united as a municipal library system. The Woodbridge Library system will soon celebrate its 50th year serving the residents of our township! The 1960s were a time in which the libraries throughout the township of Woodbridge saw an increase in usage due to community activities, cooperative services with area schools, and expanding reference collections.

Organized community activities became popular throughout the library branches of Woodbridge Township in the 1960's. For example, according to the November 29, 1967 issue of the Leader Press, a chess program was proposed at the Henry Inman Library . This program would teach residents how to play chess, or provide them with a place to play against one another. A few months later, residents were treated to full-length feature films such as "Misadventures of Merlin Jones" at the Barron Library, as published by the Leader Press on January 31, 1968. Children's activities also became popular that year, such as a Halloween program and puppet shows at the Barron and Iselin libraries, as reported in the October 23, 1968 edition of the Leader Press. With so many quality programs for the community, the library system continued to rapidly expand in the 1960's leading to the need for a larger Main Library facility, eventually built in 1974.

As the public library system formed, it entered into cooperative sharing

opportunities with area schools. As early as 1963, students from Colonia schools were trained by Mrs. George P. Marks, III, a librarian at the Colonia Junior High School, to provide "a Saturday morning story hour for children at the Colonia Public Library and conducted programs for many schools and institutions in the community" (Independent Leader, October 31, 1963). This group of students were eventually awarded a national recognition from Parents Magazine for their efforts. Also, for a period of time in 1965, both Port Reading library and Hopelawn library were housed within schools #9 and #10 (Independent Leader, June 10, 1965). This added to the joint effort between the municipal library system and the school district. The libraries shared their resources with the public schools, but also with local parochial schools, too (Leader Press, October 23, 1968).

By the late 1960s, the municipal library system saw a rapid growth of reference services. In fact, the Leader Press reported on November 29, 1967, that due to increasing response from the public toward an expanding reference collection, Sunday and Holiday hours were extended. I would imagine the desire of these services would be similar to our needs in 2013. We reach for internet or cable TV to get our daily news or to research information for school, business, and pleasure. However, without technology, the residents of Woodbridge Township in the 1960s needed to utilize the reference resources available at the local libraries. Just like with today's society, the more knowledge people have, the more they want, which is probably why the reference collection was in such demand at the libraries during this time period.

In conclusion, not only did libraries provide educational and social resources, they were also the central hub for reference services. Now we rely on our technology to educate

and entertain us, but in the 1960s people had no choice but to visit a local library . These reasons clearly demonstrate why there was an increase in library usage in the 1960s. The residents of Woodbridge Township enjoyed having one large municipal library system that pooled together its resources and provided the community with many valuable programs and services.