In 1913 what we now call Maplewood was officially South Orange Township and had about four thousand residents. The area was still very rural, with farms, woodlands, and just a few main streets, but suburban and residential development was beginning in several areas. What is now the Village business area included Fraentzel’s Hardware Store, Garret Byrne’s Pharmacy, Cracco’s Shoe Store, and two grocery stores. Students attended the Ricalton School and the newly-built Seth Boyden School. Town Hall was on Maplewood Avenue near the railroad station. Maplewood residents had formed civic organizations such as the Maplewood Improvement Association, the Home and School Association, and the Maplewood Field Club on Baker Street. In the Hilton area, strawberries were being grown commercially and Olympic Park was a popular amusement park.
Formation of the Maplewood Library

In 1913, just prior to World War I, a group of women met at the home of Mrs. W. J. Morrison to discuss the formation of a public library. It was decided to hold a public meeting at the Ricalton School, under the auspices of the Home and School Association. At the meeting, a resolution was passed establishing the Maplewood Library Association, which held its first regular meeting on April 30, 1913.

The first home of the library was on the third floor of the old school building (now part of the Maplewood Middle School). Miss Grace I. Pollard was appointed librarian at a salary of two dollars per week.

In January 1922, the library changed from a subscription library to a municipal library, and the name was changed to the Free Public Library of the Township of Maplewood.
Formation of the Maplewood Library

Maplewood Avenue Location

In 1932, the Maplewood Free Public Library moved to the old Township Hall at 162 Maplewood Avenue where it stayed until 1956. This building, built in 1869, started out as Maplewood School before becoming Maplewood's Town Hall in 1904. After the library moved to its current location on Baker Street, the old building was used as an Annex by the post office. In March 1958, the old building was torn down and the current post office erected on the site.
The Hilton Branch began as a Reading Club, organized in March 1882. In 1889, the Reading Club established itself as the Hilton Public Library Association. Andrew J. Van Ness became the first librarian. Van Ness donated his personal collection of some 1,000 books. When the Township Library was incorporated in 1922, the Hilton Library became the Hilton Branch. Some of the original Van Ness collection can still be found at the library.

In 1922 the Hilton Branch Library moved into the Hilton Firehouse building built in 1911. Housed at first in the firemen’s first floor recreation room, it was later moved to the second floor hall.
On November 22, 1956, the Township Committee announced its decision to erect a new building for the Hilton Branch Library, at a cost of $220,000. Ray O. Peck, architect of the main library building, designed the Hilton Branch as well. Ground was broken on January 31, 1958 on its location by Maplecrest Park. Opening day for the new building was January 28, 1959.
The New Hilton Branch

Today's Hilton Branch

Hilton Branch interiors, 1970s
A Tradition of Outstanding Children’s Services

Services to children and youth are the cornerstone of the public library’s mission. The library nurtures young readers, inspires questioning minds, and creates engaged citizens. Maplewood Library is known for its outstanding children’s services, and has created many generations of life-long library users.

As We Build Today Our Children Will Build Tomorrow!

Maplewood Library won an award from the Junior Literary Guild for its 1938 ‘Traveling Caravan’ book exhibit.

Art and science in the Children’s Room
Maplewood Library's story programs have always been extraordinarily popular, captivating all ages – from babies up to grandparents. Their appeal has remained undiminished throughout the years.
Children’s love for books and stories is as strong today as it was when the library began.

During 1964, over 2,000 Maplewood youngsters scrambled through the Children’s Room ‘Secret Door’ into the magic world of books.

“Up the Reading Ladder with the Wise Old Owl”

Library Director Helen Winter and Miss Calletto celebrate the Summer Reading Program, 1958
The libraries have always been destinations for Maplewood's teenage population to hang out after school, learn, attend programs and socialize.
Children’s Programs
1980s and 1990s

The popular Summer Reading Program fills the library with activity and enthusiasm every year. Craft and holiday programs are educational and fun.
From its earliest years, the Maplewood Library published Annual Reports to keep the public informed of its programs and services.
The Annual Reports document the growth of the library’s membership and collections over time. Each one provides a snapshot of the concerns, and style, of its era.
Annual Reports from the 1960s show the dynamic growth and changing technology of that era, along with an emphasis on lively programming and excellent service.
Maplewood Library ceased publishing Annual Reports after 1974. In 2011 library decided to revive this tradition. Look for our Annual Reports every year from now on!
A Heritage of Community Support

From the very beginning, Maplewood has shown strong support for its library. In addition to providing funding through tax revenues and bond issues, the citizens of Maplewood contributed generously to build and improve the library facilities and collections, a tradition which continues to this day.
A Heritage of Community Support

“Maplewood Past and Present” calendar fundraiser for building fund
A Heritage of
Community Support

The libraries built in the 1950’s resulted from the efforts of civic groups such as the Friends of the Library and the League of Women Voters, as well as the Library Trustees, Township Committee, and the contributions of some 800 citizens and organizations.
A Heritage of Community Support

The Friends of the Maplewood Library, founded in 1942, are an unwavering source of financial and community support for the library.

The Friends of the Maplewood Library Foundation, founded in 2011, does major fundraising for the library.
Maplewood Library – The Idea Place

In 1970, Rosemary W. Terry described her concept of the library as “The Idea Place.” Forty-three years later, this still sums up the library’s special role in the community.

The Idea Place

By Rosemary W. Terry

In connection with this supplement, someone asked me the question: What is your idea of a library? I think I would say that, more than anything else, it is a place where you go to follow up an idea.

Where else can 100 or 1000 people turn to pursue their individual interests, so varied, so personal? No one knows what your ideas will be next month or next year, not even you yourself. But the library is working all the time to have material ready when you want it.

The books, records, pictures and magazines you find in a library are assembled by a process of continuous sorting and searching. The staff undertakes to explore all the sources of information, inspiration and recreation – weighing possible selections against one another in order to choose wisely. The library has to be a storehouse of incredible diversity. It must have what is very, very old and what is very, very new; what is conservative, and what is liberal. Since it belongs to everyone, it must have books for everyone. It tries to provide as much freedom of reading as possible within the limits of its resources and with special emphasis on the interests of its borrowers.

Our Library has been able to accumulate many fine books because the people of Maplewood know good books and want them. I say this with the best of intentions. In the past few years, nevertheless, in general, good books are appreciated. Readers go on quietly borrowing them long after the advertising has been forgotten.

It takes many years and many people to build a library. It is not empty rhetoric but the truth that a good library is a measure of the community which builds it.
The New Memorial Library

Over the years, the library building on Maplewood Avenue and the Hilton Branch in the old firehouse became increasingly crowded and outmoded. By the late 1940's it was clear that new libraries were needed to serve what was now a prosperous, bustling suburban community.

In 1949, the Township Committee approved a planning survey to locate a new building on Baker Street by Memorial Park. In April 1954, the Township Committee passed an ordinance issuing bonds to finance a Memorial Library. More than 20 architects were interviewed, and Ray O. Peck, AIA, of Westfield, was selected to design the building. Built at a cost of $265,000, Maplewood Memorial Library opened its doors on August 12, 1956.

From the 1940's onward, the desperate need for new library buildings was obvious, as attested to in this article from the Maplewood News, Feb 20, 1946.

**Books Jailed**

(Continued from page 11)

Hall Hilton branch of the library is new leased upstairs in the Fire House on Boyert and Springfield avenues.

Books which are on the lower shelves are seldom taken out, according to the librarian, because they are not easily accessible. When they were shifted in position several of them were taken out immediately. The chief, as it is called, because the shelves and tiers can be read. Last year 400 books were discarded and at present 3,000 to 4,000 books and magazines were in the basement.

Books that are seldom read are rarely taken out and, according to the librarian, because they are not easily accessible. When they are taken out, virtually everyone of them will be thrown out immediately.
The New Memorial Library

Maplewood Memorial Library dedication, August 12, 1956

Invitation to Memorial Library Dedication

Memorial Library dedication

Postcard of Maplewood Memorial Library

Studying in the upper stacks, 1959

Book stacks, 1959

Teen Center in Memorial Hall, 1959

Maplewood Memorial Library dedication, Mayor Thomas W Sweeney at microphone

War memorial plaques unveiled at new Maplewood Memorial Library, 1956 with Robert Grasmere and officials

Book stacks, 1959

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By 1967, the new building was already overcrowded, and planning began for an addition, designed by the architectural firm of William E. Lehman of Newark. The new addition was completed in December 1969, and dedicated on July 4, 1970.
The New Memorial Library

The new addition doubled the size of the building, providing room for more book shelving, more reference books, a teen area and a brand new children's room.
For most of the library's history, patrons used the card catalog to look up books. Cards were filed by author, title, and subject.

“'The catalog area compact in design, yet permitting free movement of patrons.'

The 'Recordak' microfilm machine was used to keep track of book circulation, 1956.

Microfilm reader, 1960's

First library photocopy machine, 1976
Library Technology through the years

The new library buildings contained record collections and listening stations.

The Library held a popular film festival series in the 1960's.

In 2001, the card catalog was replaced with the current online catalog. In preparing to computerize the library’s catalog, the collection was inventoried and a barcode was placed on each book.

The Friends of the Library purchased the library’s first computer in 1988.
A hallmark of the Maplewood Library has always been its excellent public service, provided by a dedicated and enthusiastic staff, many of whom lived in the community and served the library for many years. The Library has been led by a series of distinguished Library Directors.

**E. Carroll Trudeau**  
Librarian 1943-1948

Miss Trudeau, a graduate of the Library School at Pratt Institute, became Maplewood Library’s Librarian after nineteen years at the East Orange Public Library. Known for her friendly personality and her efficiency, she passed away in 1948.

**Helen Van Dyke Winter**  
Director 1949-1973

A graduate of Columbia University’s School of Library Service, Miss Winter came to the Maplewood Library after heading the Weequahic Branch of the Newark Public Library. Hired as Reference Librarian in 1945, she became the Library Director in 1949. A gifted speaker and a strong leader, she spearheaded the drive to replace Maplewood’s two inadequate library buildings and oversaw the construction of three major building projects, the Maplewood Memorial Library, current Hilton Branch, and an addition to Memorial Library that doubled its size.

**Rowland Bennett**  
Director 1974-2003

Rowland Bennett became Maplewood Library’s Director in 1974, after a stint as a Peace Corps volunteer in Malawi, a library degree from Case Western Reserve University, and seven years as Assistant Director at the Princeton Public Library. Under his leadership the library increased the diversity of its services and strengthened its role as a center of the community. He introduced computers to the library, established the library’s website, and implemented a full-scale computerization of its operations in 2001, as well as renovating the interiors of both buildings.
Jane Kennedy
Director 2003-2011

Jane Kennedy was appointed as Library Director in 2003. With a library science degree from Rutgers, she had extensive experience in libraries throughout New Jersey, and was previously the Director at the Bound Brook and Flemington Libraries. Mrs. Kennedy modernized the library in many ways, introducing new programming for adults and teens, making the libraries more accessible with new entryways and an elevator, and fostering new technologies such as the computer lab at the Hilton Branch, wireless network, eBooks, and social media.

Sarah Lester
Director 2012-present

Maplewood Library’s current director spent 16 years in the library field prior to her arrival, at major library systems in New York, San Francisco, and Marin County, and most recently as the Director of the Nutley Public Library. She has her master’s degree in library science from San Jose State University. In her brief time here, she has opened the library to more art, music, and literary programs, secured grant funding to digitize Maplewood’s hometown newspaper, and presided over a year-long celebration of Maplewood Library’s Centennial.
The Maplewood Library Staff


Staff in Main Library workroom, 1970s.

Library staff, 1957.

The Maplewood Library Staff in the 1990s
The Maplewood Library Staff in the 1990s
The Maplewood Library Staff
Today
After 100 years, the Library continues to be the heart of the community. Over 900 people visit the library every day to check out materials, attend programs, use the public computers and find quiet places to study.

Over the next 100 years, we look forward to building upon this tradition as we develop a 21st century library and embrace our role as a place to connect and learn, a hub for innovation and technology, an incubator for creativity, a sustainable community resource and a destination for community gathering that reflects the beauty, diversity and intellect of our town.