



History of the Friends of the Jamestown Philomenian Library, 1968-2025

The Friends of the Jamestown Philomenian Library evolved from a need determined in 1968 for a community organization to lead a town-wide initiative to plan and raise funds for a new library. Once that mission was accomplished, with the opening of the new library in 1971, the Friends continued to operate for the purpose of broad-based support of the library – a role the group carries on today.

RECOGNITION OF THE NEED FOR A “FRIENDS” ORGANIZATION¹

On a Sunday morning in the Fall of 1968, the four trustees of Jamestown’s Philomenian Library met at the library, then housed in the current Historical Society Museum, at the intersection of Narragansett Avenue and North Road/Southwest Avenue. The library consisted of two rooms, encompassing 800 square feet. The small footprint held approximately 12,500 volumes in floor-to-ceiling stacks spaced just 23” apart, which required a ladder to reach upper shelves and blocked out most natural light.

The building was erected in 1885 as a one-room primary school on Southwest Avenue. It was moved to its current location circa 1898. It was converted to the town library, upon the opening of the Clarke School on North Road (at the location of the current library) in 1923. While most town residents were content with the library, it barely provided space for the trustees’ meeting. That group recognized the need for a larger, more modern facility, particularly considering a recent R.I. Development Council projection that Jamestown’s population would double in 20 years.

The library was staffed by two librarians. The Jamestown Women’s Club provided very active support, including sorting, shelving, and repairing books. The club appointed one of their members, Mary McGaughan, who was also a library trustee, to chair the library service.

With the perspective provided by her two roles, Mrs. McGaughan recognized the need for community action that would lead to a new library. She felt the scope of such a project was outside the capabilities of the Women’s Club. She had heard that other towns had established “Friends of the Library” organizations, which might serve her vision. She consulted with another Jamestown resident, Richard Waters, who was Chief of the East Providence Public Library system. He supported the concept and suggested that Mrs. McGaughan contact the Friends organization in Newport.

Two members of the Newport group met with Mrs. McGaughan and eight other Jamestown residents² in December 1968. The meeting led to a unanimous decision to establish a “Friends of the Jamestown Philomenian Library,” the selection of officers³, and draft by-laws based on Newport’s example.

FIRST FRIENDS’ INITIATIVE - PURSUING A NEW LIBRARY

With seed money from the Women’s Club the newly established group sent out a mailing which brought in over \$2,000 and 350 memberships. The Friends’ board immediately initiated the effort to pursue construction of a new library. They turned for advice to Mr. Fran Costa, a local legislator, for help. He identified the need for the group to first obtain approval from the town’s Planning Board and then from

¹ McGaughan, Mary S., Jamestown Press, October 31, 1969, Jamestown Historical Society Archive A2015.901.041. Please note that community members’ names cited in this history respect naming conventions used in the source materials, e.g., the use of “Mr., Mrs., and Miss”.

² Mrs. Lenore MacLeish, Miss Elizabeth Clarke, Dr. Wheeler Sweeney, Richard Queern, Karl Smith, Terrence F. McGaughan, Ed Olsen, and Richard Waters.

³ Mrs. Theodore E. Waterbury, President, Mrs. Lenore MacLeish, Vice President, Mr. Terrence McGaughan, Treasurer, Mrs. Fred C. Clark, Secretary, Mr. Karl B. Smith, Membership Chair. Mr. Edgar Olsen and Mrs. Robert McMaster were non-officer directors.

the Town Council.⁴ These approvals would require basic plans for the new library, including approximate size, cost, and location. Once again, Mr. Waters proved a valuable resource.

The most important decisions related to the location of the new library and whether it would be in a converted or new structure. After considering available options, the group settled on a new building at 26 North Road, the former location of the Clarke School, which had closed in 1955 upon the opening of the Lawn Avenue School. The Planning Board and Town Council approved the proposal. The Council agreed to set aside the parcel for two years, during which the Friends would seek needed funds.

SECOND FRIENDS' INITIATIVE - RAISING THE NECESSARY FUNDS

The first projected cost of the library was \$100,000, with \$50,000 to come from federal and state funds. The Friends decided to seek \$25,000 from the Rhode Island Foundation and the remaining \$25,000 from public subscription. The group received commitments for the federal, state and Rhode Island Foundation by late Spring 1969, contingent (in the case of the Foundation) on successfully raising the remaining \$25,000 from the public.

Local fundraising formally began on April 1, 1970. The Friends published a fundraising pamphlet that compared the present and proposed building, including more than a quadrupling of space, from 800 to 3,312 square feet, and inclusion of dedicated children's, periodicals, exhibition, and librarians' spaces. The pamphlet projected the cost of the library had risen to \$132,000, with \$66,000 to come from the RI State Department of Library Services and the U.S. Office of Education, and \$66,000 through Friends' fundraising, from foundations and local solicitation. It also noted that to qualify for the state and federal grants, the Friends must reach their \$66,000 goal in just three months!⁵

A Newport paper (June 30, 1970) reported that the Friends exceeded this first fundraising goal by \$5,000, to meet a challenge to match an added \$5,000 in funds available from the state, raising the total from all sources to \$142,000. The bidding and contracting processes began promptly, allowing a ceremony to lay a cornerstone and dedicate the new library on July 25, 1971.

REFOCUSING THE FRIENDS' MISSION

With their first purpose complete in 1970, the Friends were able to refocus their efforts on the longer-term mission of continuing support and use of the library. Over the ensuing 55 years, those efforts have fallen under a broad range of categories, including continuing sponsoring special activities, staff support, resource needs, and other library-related purposes.

The Friend's budget for the current fiscal year, July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025, illustrates how the mission has evolved. It covers expenditures in the following primary areas:

- Administrative Expenses (e.g., board and activity-related liability insurance): \$1,300
- Adult Programming: \$4,500
- Youth Programming: \$5,000
- Music Programming: \$4,500
- Movie Programming: \$500
- Museum Pass Purchases: \$1,500
- Solicitation Expense (e.g., printing and mailing): \$1,200
- RI Foundation Grant-Supported Expenditures: \$10,000⁶
- Library Director Discretionary Funds: \$1,500 (petty cash support for minor expenses)
- Miscellaneous Expense: \$500

⁴ Mr. Costa served as a state senator, chair of the Rhode Island Democratic Party, and president of the Jamestown Town Council. He and his wife Lily owned and operated the Jamestown Country Club for more than 40 years.

⁵ Two Friends' board members, Mrs. John F. Cotton (Vice President) and Mrs. Robert L. McMaster (Secretary), led the solicitation. A non-board-member, Elwood E. Leonard, Jr., oversaw "special gifts." Other board members at the time were Mrs. Theodore E. Waterbury, President; Richard E. Queern, secretary; and Gordon T. Neale, Treasurer.

⁶ The Friends apply to the RI Foundation each year for grants supported by Jamestown and Newport County oriented funds. Recent grant applications have addressed needs for a new outdoor book return "drop box," soft furniture for the new young children's area, folding tables for meeting spaces, moveable room dividers, and more.

Income comes primarily from memberships, grants, and bank interest. In FY 2024-2025, these three categories contributed approximately \$15,000, \$10,000, and \$750, respectively.

In fiscal year 2024-2025, the Friends sponsored over ninety events, in the following primary categories, including estimated attendance at upcoming events:

#	Adult	Youth	Movie	Music	Total
Events	26	45	4	16	91
Attendees	1,450	850	200	300	2,800

Specific examples of recent events and programs sponsored by the Friends include:

- Paula Clare and Friends Afternoon of American Jazz Standards and Brazilian Bossa Nova
- Atwater Donnelly Traditional American Folk Music and Dance performance
- Yanni Pandelidis and Friends Greek Music Performance
- Music at the Blissful performance by Evan Haller
- Black Flags, Blue Waters talk by best-selling author Eric Jay Dolan
- Common and Uncommon Backyard Birds of Rhode Island with Geoff Dennis
- Effective Conservation Through Birding Tourism by Charles Clarkson, Audubon Society of RI
- Apples, Art, and Spirit: Growing an Organic Apple by author, artist, and orchardist Linda Hoffman
- Silvermoon Mars LaRose presentation on the Tomaquag Museum
- World premiere screening of the documentary Beyond Bucha: Finding the Spirit in Ukraine
- Poetry Reading and Dialogue by RI Poet Laureate Colin Channer
- Mushroom Hunting with “Ryan the Mushroom Hunter”
- Atlantic Shark Institute conservation presentation by Jon Dodd
- Spanish Bilingual Story Time sessions throughout the year for preschool youth
- Youth chess classes throughout the year
- Summer Reading Program and Winter Reading Challenge activities for all age groups
- Book clubs, movies, and craft events for all age groups throughout the year
- School vacation and holiday programs for preschool, elementary, and middle school age groups
- Three annual electronic waste collections (free for most items)
- New addition by popular demand: free paper-shredding event

The Friends continue to seek community input on library patrons’ programming interests. A recent survey showed that the most requested topics (cited by at least one-third of respondents) are:

- Music performances
- Movies / film series
- Author readings and talks
- Historical presentations
- Marine biology, oceanography, and fisheries
- Sustainable gardening
- Environmental protection
- Wildlife protection and observation
- Coastal resiliency
- Creative writing and literature
- Nutrition, health, and wellness

The Friends will use this guidance to schedule and arrange future activities.

FORMAL ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY

On May 24, 1969, nine Jamestown residents⁷ filed “articles of association” with the State of Rhode Island⁸ to formally establish a domestic non-profit, non-business corporation named “Friends of the

⁷ Harriet C. Gravdahl, Leonore McCall MacLeish, Dorothy B. A. Lyon, Edith F. McMaster, Dorothy H. Waterbury, Elizabeth J. Cotton, G. Lucille Shields, Richard E. Queern, and Gordon T. Neale.

⁸ At the time, the “State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.”

Jamestown Philomenian Library”. Article 3 of the original articles of association defined the purpose of the “Friends” as follows:

The purpose of this organization shall be to maintain an association of persons interested in libraries; to focus public attention on the library; to stimulate the use of the library’s resources and services; to receive and encourage gifts, endowments and bequests to the library; to support and cooperate with the library in developing library services and facilities for the community; to lend legislative support where needed; and to support the freedom to read as expressed in the American Library Association Bill of Rights; and from time to time to distribute any and all of the assets for the purpose of carrying into effect the foregoing provision of this Article Third.⁹

At this or a later date, the Friends received certification from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt charitable organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954.

The founders’ original purpose has served the organization, library, and community very well to this date, with one adjustment to comply with IRS limits on lobbying by 501(c)(3) organizations. An amendment to the articles of incorporation, filed with the RI Secretary of State on April 27, 2020, cut the phrase “to lend legislative support”, since the IRS defines lobbying as “attempting to influence legislation”.

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RI requires corporations to have a “registered agent.” Registered agents recorded on the Secretary of State website include:

- Sheila M. Nixon, President, 10/31/1984 – 7/1/1987
- Friends of the Jamestown Philomenian Library, 7/1/1987 – 11/10/2003
- Judith Bell, Library Director, 11/10/2003 – 7/13/2011
- Donna Fogarty, Library Director, 7/13/2011 – 5/26/2021
- Lisa Sheley, Library Director, 5/26/2021 –

The Friends Board of Directors for the 2024-2025 fiscal year include:

- | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------|---|
| • Ted Baldwin, President | • Joan Breakell | • Jane Gilgun |
| • Brenda Williams, Treasurer | • Karin Coulter | • Cassie West |
| • Suzanne Gagnon, Secretary | • Sue Cronin | • Ex-Officio: Lisa Sheley, Library Director |
| • Sarah Baines | • Peter Elsworth | |

MISSION STATEMENT

It is reasonable to assume the Friends will continue to support the library so long as there is community support of the level demonstrated in Jamestown since the organization’s establishment in 1968, under its mission statement as currently stated, or as it may evolve:

The Friends of the Library support quality library services in the community through fundraising, volunteerism, and serving as advocates for the library’s programs.

⁹ The original articles of association and all other filings with the RI Secretary of State are available for public review on the Secretary of State Business Portal at:
https://business.sos.ri.gov/CorpWeb/CorpSearch/CorpSearchFormList.aspx?SEARCH_TYPE=0