



# *Centennial Celebration*

**Sadie Pope Dowdell Library  
South Amboy, New Jersey  
1914 - 2014**

*The Honorable Fred Henry, Mayor*

# Dowdell Library of South Amboy

Celebrating 100 Years of Serving  
the South Amboy Community



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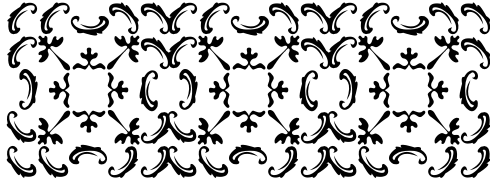
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# *Congratulations!*

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We'd like to recognize and express appreciation to all who have served as Library Directors, Trustees, and staff members, and acknowledge the Friends of the Library, the Library Foundation and the City of South Amboy for supporting and contributing to this amazing library for 100 years! We're an "in demand" destination for the community due to those joint efforts and contributions.

We are proud to be part of this remarkable institution and pleased to provide leadership and valuable services to the residents of South Amboy.

*Elaine R. Gaber, Director*

## **A Brief History of the South Amboy Library**

In 1913, the women of South Amboy decided that they should get together to improve the city. Like any idea whose time has come, the Woman's Club of South Amboy was quickly a success. At their first effort at civic improvements, the membership decided to start a public library. There had never been one in South Amboy before, though an 1861 map showed a reading room located at the southwest corner of Broadway and Second Street.

Meeting during the winter of 1913-14, committees were formed, and tasks delegated. The work came to fruition on March 17, 1914, the doors opened on the South Amboy Public Library. The Library was located on the second floor of the **South Amboy Post Office** at Broadway and David Street, and by year's end boasted 2,186 Volumes. **Helen Perrine** was the first Librarian, and supervised volunteers who staffed the library from 2 - 5pm and 7 pm - 9 pm every day except Sunday.

The library was successful enough that the campaign to have the city support it began in 1915. The question was placed on the ballot in November 1916, and passed. On January 1, 1917, the library became a municipal agency. Miss Perrine resigned in late 1916 and was replaced by **Connie Boswick**. The library moved to other quarters at that time, relocating to the top floor of the **South Amboy Trust Company** (later known as the **First Fidelity Bank**) at the corner of Broadway and Augusta Street.

Records and stories for those years are in short supply. It appears that the library was popular and received adequate funding. Perhaps the biggest change was when Miss Boswick resigned. In 1923, the Trustees hired her assistant, **Sadie Pope Dowdell**, to be the new Librarian.

Some of the early supporters and Library Trustees were Harold Hoffman, who served as secretary of the association from 1915 through 1916; O.O. Barr, Superintendent of schools; Richard C. Stevenson; George W. Crane; and Katherine Nichols; who served as Chair of the Library Committee of the Women's Club during its early years.

The Depression hit hard. Early members of the Board of Trustees retired, and Mayors did not always replace them. The Budget stagnated; between 1931 and 1947 it remained essentially the same, about \$1,800 annually. The Board dwindled to three faithful women and the faithful Librarian, Sadie Pope Dowdell.

After World War II, interest in the library picked up again. A growing number of children started to use the facilities for school assignments. New trustees joined the Board and Miss Dowdell continued her fine work. Having been the librarian for over twenty-five years, she had become an institution in South Amboy. Her personalized service and attention to the children were well known. She was also known to open the library on Sunday for a visiting college student, and kept in close contact with the school teachers, some of whom would volunteer in the summer for story hours. About 300 new books were added a year, carefully chosen to make the most of the library collection.

After the 1950 explosion in South Amboy, those involved with the library turned their thoughts to better quarters. When the Fourth Street School was torn down as a result of the explosion, it was proposed that 2,800 sq. ft. library be built on the site. That was discarded in favor of including the library in a city hall complex on the Stevens Avenue site of the old city hall. Both proposals were serious enough that sketches and architect's renderings were produced, but neither idea came to fruition.

Nevertheless, the library was increasingly busy. Circulation was up over 15,000 by the early 1960's; a paid part time assistant was added to the staff for the first time, and the two rooms over the bank were opened for 35 hours each week. Miss Dowdell continued to serve every man, woman, and child who squeeze into the library. Local newspapers frequently ran pictures, articles and editorials pointing out the cramped quarters, and the need for more space.

After much discussion, the City Council finally acted in late 1963 and purchased the vacant **Calvary Methodist Church** (built 1866) at the corner of Second Street and Stevens Avenue for \$18,000. Renovations were made over the next year, costing over \$32,000; more than fifty volunteers, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and Trustees pitched in to help move books. On Monday, January 31, 1966, the library reopened in its new quarters.

The collection now totaled close to 10,000 volumes and circulation was more than 20,000 annually. With the new library operating and over forty years of service, Sadie Dowdell informed the Trustees that she would like to retire. The Board demurred, unwilling to call a close to an era. Accepting her retirement would almost seem like closing the library. Miss Dowdell insisted, and finally ill health forced the Library Board to accept her retirement as of January 1, 1970. In grateful recognition of her services, the Board renamed the library for her in 1972, and retained her as a consultant until her passing in 1979.

While library assistants Frances Clark and Katherine Margaretta kept the library operational (as they would while in between Directors in 1985), the Board proceeded to look for a new Librarian. The goal was to hire someone with a Masters degree. In May 1971, the Board appointed **Joyce Brookman**,

a former School Librarian, as the new Director. It was the signal of another era in library service in South Amboy.

Mrs. Brookman was both energetic and outspoken, and quickly made many friends in South Amboy. Among her new ideas were pets in the Children's Room, and the establishment of the South Amboy Historical Society. The budget grew, as did the book collection and circulation. The Library increased its hours from 39 in 1970 to 53 hours per week five years later.

By the late 1970's, growing pains were being felt again. With the help of federal money, the Children's Room was completely re-done in 1979; it was still very crowded. The collection, which had doubled between 1955 and 1969, doubled again by 1977 to 20,000 volumes, and then grew to 25,000 by the early 1980's. Concerned with being caught in another untenable situation, the Board commissioned a building survey from Edward Beckerman. His report estimated that 10,000 sq. ft. of space was needed for a new library; in place of the existing 3,500 sq. ft., and that the greatest drawback to library service in South Amboy was its facility.

When Joyce Brookman retired in early 1985, the Library Board searched the region for a new Director. Their goal was threefold: automation of the library functions, active Friends of the Library, and a new building. On October 1, 1985, the Board appointed **W. Keith McCoy** as the fifth Director. McCoy brought with him many years of experience, the most recent as Head of the Reference Services at the Plainfield Public Library.

The Dowdell Library continued to make great strides. Library observers in the county point out that support for the library was as high, after adjustment for economic differences, as that

of East Brunswick and other communities recognized for their excellence. Support for cooperation, particularly the county-wide automation project, extended even to the City Council, which was among the first to approve the legal agreements. New programs for children were started, and circulation, after flattening out for a few years, was again on the rise. The Friends of the Dowdell Library had over twenty members, and automated circulation was planned for 1989. Support for a new building was growing, and that goal, while difficult, seemed attainable.

When W. Keith McCoy left for another position in 1993, **Phil Israel** became Director and assisted the Library Board in joining with the City of South Amboy to include the library within the new **South Amboy High School complex** off John T. O'Leary Boulevard. A new era began. The larger facility had a Meeting Room, a good-sized Children's Room and a comfortable Adult Room. Additionally, the library automated its circulation system by obtaining Winnebago software.

In 2003, Phil Israel left for another position and **Elaine R. Gaber** became the new Director. Previously, she was the Head of Music and Media Services at the Morris County Library. Ms. Gaber brought the library forward by establishing a virtual library branch with an online presence; partnering with city officials; offering lifelong learning opportunities, entertainment and cultural programs; and energetically advocating library services. Her goal was to entice all age groups to the library, particularly children and teens, which she did. The library is a destination for the community. Children and young adults drop in after school to participate in the Homework Center, online SAT prep courses, E-game competitions, Storytime programs, and use the appealing early literacy stations. A grant was obtained for new children's computers, which the Library Foundation, Friends of the Library, and others supported. A local dog,

Thor, is now the library's Book Buddy mascot; Sadie's Studio, named after Sadie Pope Dowdell, is the library's new Makerspace, a make-it-yourself program. Also, free downloadable eBooks, eAudio books and magazines are available. This year, Ms. Gaber obtained an Energy Grant, which will allow the library to run much more economically. Just recently, the library joined the Libraries of Middlesex Consortium and the community will have numerous benefits including a shared online catalog and additional online services.

**CHARTING THE COURSE AHEAD:** As we transform the library for a digital future, we will honor the values and traditions of the past and strive to best serve the community to contribute to an even better future. We envision that one hundred years from now, our commitment to responsible planning will enhance the library's role as a vital community hub for learning, growing and enjoying the expanding opportunities of our changing world. We will ensure the library's sustainability and continue to evolve to best serve the residents of our "pleasant little city by the bay."



**Libraries in the United States:** The first library in this country dates back to 1638. A Puritan minister in the Massachusetts Bay Colony bequeathed four hundred books and a small sum of money to the college neighboring Cambridge. The legislature, grateful for the gift, responded by naming the college after the Rev. John Harvard.

Most libraries were in the northeast and were Subscription Libraries. A person paid a membership which allowed a vote on purchases, and to check books out indefinitely. Many Subscription libraries went defunct because members refused to return books, or because the purchases were so specialized that no one else was interested in becoming a member.

Some of the Subscription Libraries which survived are the Library of Philadelphia, founded by Benjamin Franklin, and the Boston Athenaeum. Today, these are known for their rare books and other treasures. Membership is still available to those persons who need to use their collections or support their goals.

Similar to these libraries is the Library of Congress, which was established by an act of congress in 1800. During the War of 1812, the library was burned by the British when they torched Washington. Congress responded by purchasing the personal library of Thomas Jefferson in 1815 to start anew with.

The first “free” or tax-supported, library was founded in 1833 in Peterborough, New Hampshire. From there the idea spread. In 1852, Boston was the first large city to open a public library. The concept of a publicly supported collection of books became so popular that, in 1876, a number of librarians formed the American Library Association. Five years later, Andrew Carnegie started a program of building public libraries in communities that would donate the land and pledge

to keep the library open. More than 1,700 Carnegie libraries were built before the program ended in 1919.

**Libraries in New Jersey:** Libraries were late coming to New Jersey, but were soon seen as a community essential by residents. It was the early eighteenth century when the first library of any significance was developed. The site was St. Mary's Episcopal Church, in Burlington, and the books were for the use of parishioners. By 1791, the inventory had reached a grand total of 343 titles.

Following on the lead of Philadelphia, Trenton citizens began a library company in 1750. It was probably located in a rented room, and perhaps only opened for certain hours on particular days. The British destroyed it 1776, and the company was not revived until five years later. By 1797, however, it was open every Wednesday and Saturday from 11 am to 4 pm, and voting shares were available for \$1.00. Loan periods depend on the size of the book and how far away the reader lived from the library. Having fallen on hard times in the early nineteenth century, the company merged with the Trenton Library Association in 1855, which went out of business ten years later.

Other communities in New Jersey which founded early libraries were Elizabeth (1755), Burlington (1758), Shrewsbury (1763), Haddonfield, Mount Holly, and Newark (1765), New Brunswick (1768), Swedesboro (1783), Morristown (1792), Orange (1793), and Woodbury (1794). Many of these libraries did not survive, but all have public libraries today.

The nearest library to South Amboy was the New Brunswick/Perth Amboy Library, which had a library in 1824.

### **South Amboy Library Directors (Librarians)**

Helen V. Perrine.....	1914-1916
Connie Boswick.....	1916-1923
Sadie Pope Dowdell.....	1923-1970
Joyce G. Brookman.....	1971-1985
W. Keith McCoy.....	1985-1993
Phil Israel.....	1993-2003
Elaine R. Gaber.....	2003 -

### **Presidents of the Library Board of Trustees**

Crane, George W.....	1914-1930
Holman, Emma.....	1931-?
Housel, James.....	1932-?
Brower, Edgar.....	1933-1937
O'Connor, Katherine.....	1938-1949
Birmingham, Elizabeth G.....	1950-1952
Reese, Fredrick.....	1953-1957
Spina, Mafalda.....	1958-1961
Hardy, John.....	1962-1971
Purcell, Philip.....	1972-1974
Lenahan, James.....	1974-1975

Kupper, Alice.....	1976-1977
Gleason, Evelyn.....	1978-1981
Beaudry, Fred P.....	1987-1988
Charmello, Catherine.....	1988-

**Trustees of the South Amboy Library Assoc. 1914-1916**

Bown, Helen.....	1914-1915
Croan, John A.....	1914-1916
Crane, G.W.....	1914-1916
Emiliussen, Mrs. John.....	1915-1916
Eulner, E.H.....	1914-1916
Fulton, J.F., Sr.....	1914-1916
Gundrum, George.....	1915-1916
Hoffman, Harold.....	1915-1916
Mack, Mrs. Richard M.....	1914-1916
Parker, Mrs. J. M.....	1914-1916
Perrine, Frances.....	1914-1916
Safran, Charles.....	1914-1916
Scully, Frank.....	1914-1916
Stephenson, Richard C. ....	1914-1916
Stewart, Mrs. Charles.....	1914-1916

### **Trustees of the South Amboy Public Library Since 1916**

Agan, Edna.....	1934-1950
Alexander, Samuel.....	1960-1966
Alpine, Morris.....	1930-1932
Bar, O.....	1916-1937
Bastedo, Mary.....	1929-1938
Beaudry, Fredrick S.....	1976-1988
Birmingham, Elizabeth.....	1946-1956
Brower, Edgar.....	1933-1937
Charmello, Catherine.....	1983-
Chase.....	(see Grey)
Coan, Francis P. ....	1916-1919?
Connors, Helen.....	1957-1968
Crane, G.W.....	1919-1930
Cross, Barbara.....	1981-1982
Dato, Zusette.....	2003-2012
Dey, William.....	1917-?
Dooling, Charles.....	1987-1993
Emiliussen, Mrs. John.....	1917-?
Gleason, Evelyn.....	1973-1990

Gleason, John.....	1968-1971
Gomolk, Marion, Jr.....	1957-1958
Grabowski, Elizabeth.....	1993-2003
Gray, Joseph.....	1990-1993
Green, Martin.....	1980-1986
Grey, Edna.....	1980-1986
Grover, Patricia.....	1982-1992
Gundrum, George, Sr.....	1916-?
Halmi, Joseph.....	1976-?
Hardy, John.....	1958-1973
Harrigan, Joseph.....	1977-1982
Hoffman, Harold G.....	1917-?
Holman, Emma.....	1929-1933
House, Irving.....	1956-?
Housel, James.....	1931-1938
Hughes, Raymond.....	1989-2004
Johnson, John J. ....	1916-1918
Kelly, John.....	1957-1968
Kupper, Alice.....	1974-1981
Lenahan, James.....	1971-1976

Marinin, Joseph.....	1974-1975
Mason.....	1934-?
McGonigle, Mary C.....	1938-1943
McNeal, Hannah.....	1949-1955
Moran, Patricia.....	1976-1987
Nichols, Katherine E.....	1917-?
O'Brien, Thomas.....	1977-?
O'Connor, David.....	2011-
O'Connor, Katherine.....	1934-1949
O'Grady, Kathleen.....	1987-2011
Orriols.....	(see Kupper)
Parker, Mrs. J.M.....	1917-?
Pichey, Mimi.....	2004-
Purcell, Philip.....	1969-1974
Rager, Mary.....	1993-
Reed, Helen.....	1946-1956
Reese, Fredrick.....	1951-1959
Rehn, Millicent.....	1971-1976
Spina, Mafalda.....	1957-1969
Sten, Oscar.....	1952-1956

Stevenson, R.C.....	1916-1921
Tustin, James.....	1946-1948
Walsh, Kevin.....	1993-2010
Weezorak, Father Dennis.....	2012-
Welden, F.....	1930-1932
Zamorski, Chester.....	1971-1986
Zera, Rosemary.....	1986-

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*The Dowdell Library would like  
to thank the community for  
supporting the Centennial  
commemoration!*



*Thank you for making a  
difference in so many lives!*

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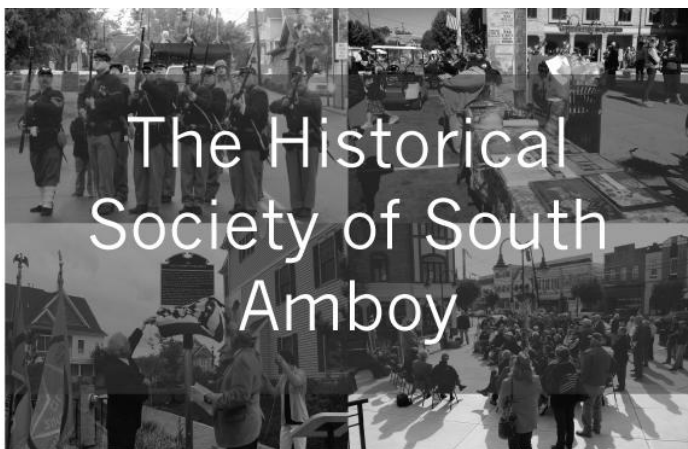
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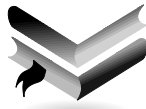
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The Historical Society of South Amboy is a 501c3 non-profit organization

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Your contributions enable us to increase library capabilities, resources and services for the South Amboy community. The Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, and all gifts are tax deductible and qualify for matching grants from many employers.

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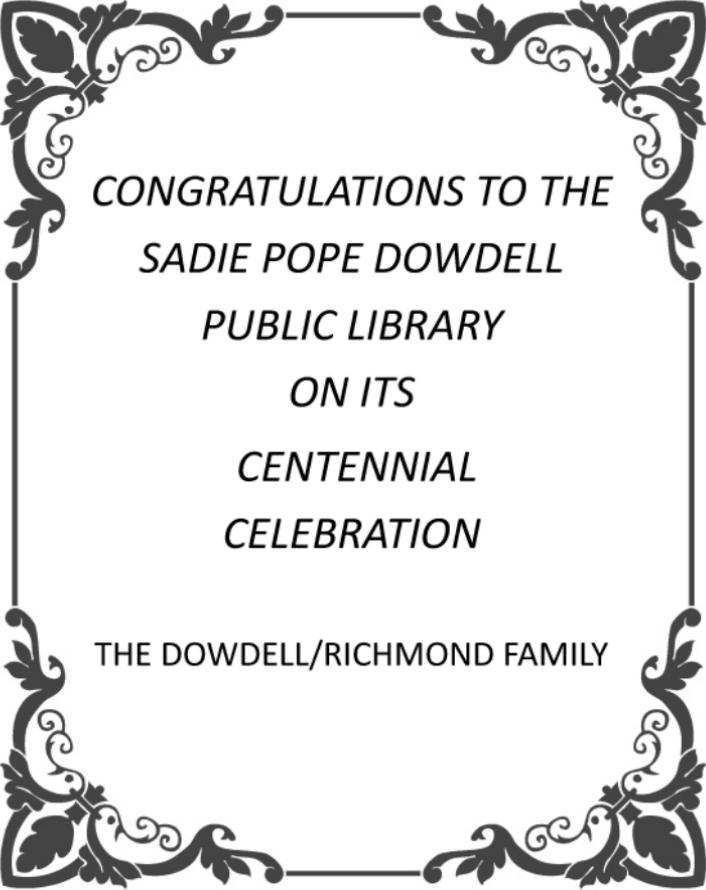




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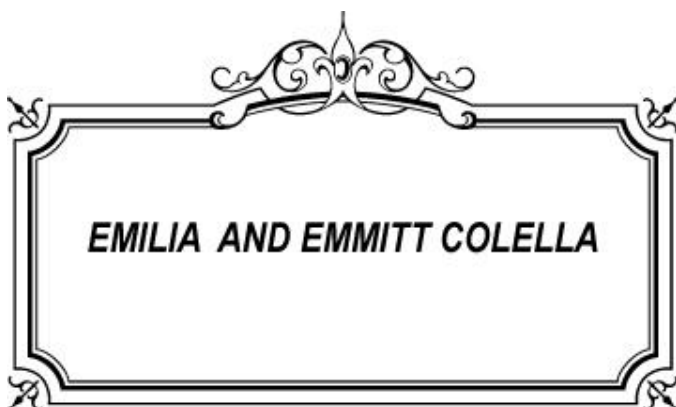


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## DYK: *the last one hundred years*

- 1914 South Amboy Public Library was established
- 1917 Congregation Beth Israel Mordecai Formed
- 1918 Morgan Explosion - Gillespie Shell Loading Plant
- 1919 First public high school was erected
- 1921 Progressive Fire Company
- 1924 South Amboy Hospital was built
- 1925 Harold G. Hoffman becomes South Amboy Mayor
- 1927 Victory Bridge was built
- 1931 First Aid Squad was formed
- 1950 Four munitions barges exploded in Raritan Bay
- 1954 Harold G. Hoffman Died
- 1972 Sadie Pope Dowdell Public Library re-dedication
- 1984 Purple rose of Cairo was filmed at the Raritan Diner
- 1986 Friends of the Dowdell Library established
- 1991 South Amboy Sayreville Times newspaper started
- 1993 Amboy Beacon newspaper started
- 1998 Raritan Bay Waterfront Park Opening day
- 1999 Movie "Coyote Ugly" was filmed
- 2002 SAND - Neighborhood Preservation Program Started
- 2002 Seastreak Ferry Service started
- 2002 South Amboy Business Association was founded
- 2004 Train Station Addition opened on Broadway
- 2004 NJ Commissioner designates the Main Street Program
- 2005 B. Judith Lecki Bridge dedication
- 2006 Railroad crossing dedication
- 2009 Memorial to Army Sgt. First Class Benjamin Sebban
- 2009 Dowdell Library Foundation established
- 2010 YMCA / Senior Center opening
- 2010 "Mercy" episode was filmed (television series)
- 2010 Movie "Crackers" was filmed
- 2011 Fred Henry elected Mayor
- 2012 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first air mail flight - July 4, 1912
- 2013 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Amboy National Bank
- 2014 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the South Amboy Fire Department

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