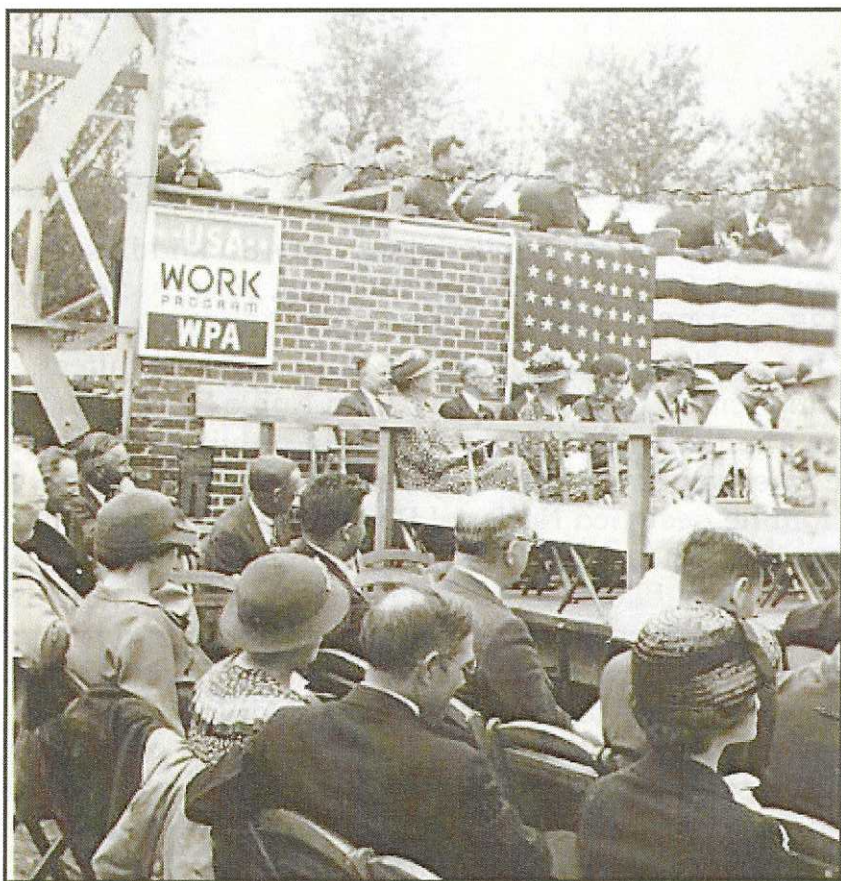


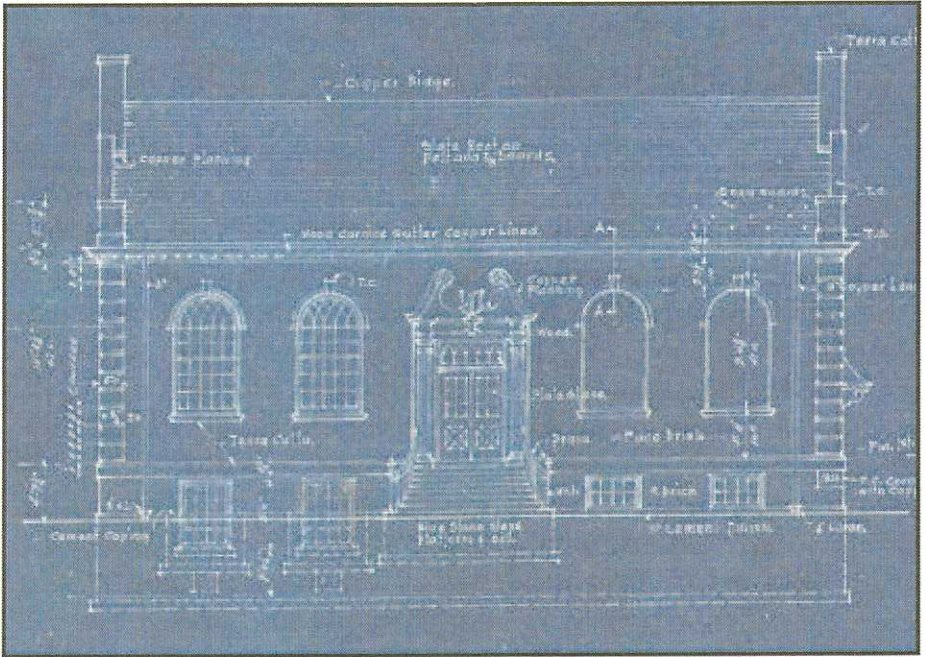
METUCHEN PUBLIC LIBRARY



The Metuchen Public Library at 480 Middlesex Avenue is a Colonial Revival building, constructed from 1935 to 1937, using a combination of funds from the W.P.A. and donations from the public. The architect, Aylin Pierson (1886-1955) of John Noble Pierson & Son, was a noted and prolific designer of public buildings. He was eventually joined by John MacWilliam, with whom he designed National Register-listed Roosevelt Hospital in nearby Edison Township, in addition to nearly 70 public schools and additions throughout the region. In the early 1970s, a modern addition designed by architect Charles Fitch was constructed, set back on the west side of the building. This addition was constructed with the direction of Metuchen resident and Poet Laureate John Ciardi, who lived nearby on Middlesex Avenue and was very involved with the Library operations at the time.

The library is considered a Key Contributing site in the Middlesex Avenue-Woodwild Park Historic District, as listed in the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places in 2017. This historic district, the first in the municipality, meets National Register Criteria A and C for its association with the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century development of Metuchen into an attractive suburban railroad town and its representation of the period's major American architectural influences, including Italianate, Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Craftsman, Tudor Revival, and Foursquare. It was during this time period that Metuchen incorporated as an independent borough and fully developed its local cultural institutions while attracting business, artistic, and literary persons that earned it the "Brainy Borough" nickname.





The Library serves as the western boundary of the historic district on Middlesex Avenue, along with the Old Franklin Schoolhouse, and is Key Contributing Site in the district. In addition, like the Metuchen Post Office on Main Street at Woodbridge Avenue (which is also listed in the New Jersey and National Registers), the Library is significant as an excellent example of a federally-sponsored construction project intended to relieve the widespread unemployment brought on by the Great Depression. The public works programs of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, such as this, were a major vehicle for rescuing the construction industry from oblivion and keeping construction workers from joining the ranks of the unemployed on relief.

Images

- Front page: A current view of the library.
- Left: Cornerstone laying ceremony in 1936.
- Above: Excerpt of the original architectural plans.

WAIT, SO THERE WAS NO LIBRARY IN METUCHEN BEFORE THE 1930S?

Yes, there certainly was! And from it's humble beginnings it has grown into an important mainstay of our community!

Metuchen's library 'movement' began in 1870 when "The Order of the Sons of Temperance" opened a reading-room in the First Presbyterian Church, and later grew with the founding of the Metuchen Book Club in 1879. Rev. J.G. Mason, a pastor and politician noted nationally for his advocacy for Prohibition, helped found the "Metuchen Library Association" in 1884 with Henry Mills Alden, long-time editor of Harper's Magazine. In 1889, a small library building was erected on Hillside Avenue near Main Street (see postcard image below) and in 1901, shortly after Metuchen separated from Raritan Township to become its own municipality, it was able to begin lending books for free to the public.

As Metuchen grew, so grew the library. It's first move was to three small rooms over the National Bank Building on Main Street. Soon afterwards, a move was made to the second floor of the Commonwealth Bank Building, also on Main Street. In 1924, Metuchen's Borough Hall was built and the library was again moved, this time to the second floor of that new building. In 1928, the library was municipally designated and has been supported by the Borough since January 1, 1929.

