



The Meteoric Rise & Fall of the Medford Scout Library: 1927-1930

2nd edition, comp. & ed. by Mark Rothenberg

Did you know...

...that in 1927 Medford had its own public library? Local Boy and Girl Scouts under scoutmasters **Hal B. Fullerton**, and his wife **Edith Loring Fullerton**, launched a scouting effort, that gathered an initial 300 books (interestingly, on topics that reflected the Fullertons' wide-ranging interests). In arriving at their selections, they apparently did a little creative weeding. Other contributors, within and beyond the State increased the pool of works to over 700, by opening day. The March 8, 1927 headline in the *Patchogue Advance* read, "*Medford Public Library Opens with 700 Books: Many People Contribute Toward Getting New Institution Started – Volumes Cover Great Variety of Subjects*" (p. 12). Following a list of contributors, the range of subjects covered was listed as:

"...literature, history, art, music, fiction, adventure, travel, languages, mechanics, construction, handicraft, scouting, astronomy, biology, biography, poetry, religion, agriculture, floriculture, horticulture, arboriculture, meteorology, geology, phrenology, entomology, palmistry, conservation, homemaking, juvenile, educational, sanitation, water supply, boat building, sports, athletics, dictionaries and encyclopedias, dietetics, and miscellaneous."

The new institution was named **Medford Scout Library**, to honor the boy and girl scouts' founding efforts. It was located in a Medford public school, opened as a *public library*, charging a 10 cent fee for a library card. Whether it was ever chartered seems quite doubtful, and it may have later faltered on that rock.

When the library opened on Saturday, March 5th, it was well attended, and only those books that had so far received dust covers were allowed to be checked out, by **Mrs. Fox**, the **librarian**, and her able **scout assistants**, **Ida Medeck**, **Anna Weber**, and **Wallace Rothe**. Though open to all, initial library hours were restricted to Weds. evenings between 7:00-8:30 P.M. and Sat. afternoons, between 3:00-5:00 P.M.

For a photo of Medford Girl Scout Troop # 1 (in 1928) click here:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/pmlib/4800166632/in/set-72157624260982621/> *Ida Medeck* is in the 1st row, on the left (holding the flag); *Anna Weber* is 3rd from the left in the back row.

Roughly seven decades later, Ida would serve as **President of the Patchogue-Medford Friends of the Library, from 1984 to 1990**. But, you might say, it all started here; and she probably caught the “bug” not just from her parents (who were contributors to the scout library) but from the contagious enthusiasms of Hal and Edith Fullerton. (So, Patchogue-Medford Library can claim a pretty solid link, directly to the Fullertons, the founders of modern Medford.)

When the Medford Scout Library was opened, the school made a point of stressing its openness to the *entire* local public; at the same time asserting that a *separate school library* (with no outside adult admission) was in the offing. We don’t presently know what happened to the public library, except that it did open and that before the month was out, Hal Fullerton had pulled a grand publicity stunt to put the library and Medford on the European map, at least in the eyes of his Medford readers:

“Medford Library Known in Europe.” **Patchogue Advance**, March 29, 1927:
p. 5. – Beautifully contorts the Library’s being placed on the *English Review*’s mailing list into Europe’s abiding in the village and its new library.*

*Hal Fullerton pioneer color photographer, creator, publicist, and early spin doctor of L.I.’s attractions, and of the three experimental agricultural stations of the Long Island Rail Road, that he ran, centered on his “Peace and Plenty Farm” in Medford, helped draw people to the Island and to Medford. Edith Fullerton’s role as “junior partner” (really his full partner) has since come to light, and been extolled. Both were very active in scouting groups.

Mrs. E.H. Theis was also active in scouting, a contributor to the scout library in 1927. The family’s ongoing commitment to libraries was evidenced decades later, when **Mrs. Martha Theis** (d. May 4, 1964), possibly her daughter, who had been active in 4-H affairs, left funds to go to an eagerly anticipated new Medford Public Library. When the vote to establish the latter failed, a bench in Memorial Park was dedicated to her memory, in 1965. But, the trustees of her estate were left in a quandary as to what to do with the library-designated funds. Eventually it was decided to donate them to establish a **homemaking collection in Martha Theis’ honor, at the then Patchogue Library**. Patchogue Library Director, Elaine Phipps, made careful selections over the course of a year, in areas related to Mrs. Theis’ interests. Memorial plates were placed in each volume selected, and the **collection was dedicated in June 1968**.

After initial, popular success, the onset soon after, in **late 1929**, of the **Great Depression**, left scouting reported as facing severe fundraising problems. Medford Scout Library, and by sometime in 1930, the only mention is of the Medford school library. So, it appear that the scout library collection may have been sold or transferred to the school library. Today the Medford scout library does have a sort of successor in Eagle Elementary School's **Neighborhood Center**, open to Medford residents, and whose hours bear a strong parallel to the institution of the Roaring Twenties. The **Neighborhood Center** is open on Weds., 5:00-8:00 P.M. and Sat., 11:00 AM-2:00 P.M. (between October and May).

Growth of the Patchogue-Medford connection: In **1950**, with the post-WW II population, housing, and baby booms in the area, Patchogue Library extended its services, by contract, to Medford residents. To meet the needs of the expanded community, an addition was eventually approved to the Carnegie Library, in **1958**, the first since it opened in 1908. In **1973**, when the school district formally changed its name and boundary to include Medford, the library followed suit, by state charter amendment, becoming the Patchogue-Medford Library, serving residents of the entire district. By **1981**, public demand for expanded, increasingly varied media collections and services, along with early automation demands of cataloging and microcomputer revolutions, outgrew the physical capacities of the building, and the Library was moved to its present Main Street location (formerly a W.T. Grant store and warehouse), where it continues to serve the Patchogue-Medford community.

Bibliography – Newspaper Articles

- “Medford Public Library Formed Through Efforts of Scouts: School Board Readily Sanctions Institution as Projected by the Fullertons; Will Be for Use of Whole Village – Many Books Contributed” (Section 2). **Patchogue Advance**, February 8, 1927: p. 2.
- “Medford Public Library Opens with 700 Books: Many People Contribute Toward Getting New Institution Started – Volumes Cover Great Variety of Subjects” **Patchogue Advance**, March 8, 1927: p. 12.
- “Medford to Have a Millinery Class.” **Patchogue Advance**, March 22, 1927: p. 8.
 - Short paragraph near bottom, 1st column, speaks of library growth & use.
- “Medford Library Known in Europe.” **Patchogue Advance**, March 29, 1927: p. 5.
- “Medford Fights Two Forest Fires: Women Study Arts of Home Through Bureau; *Library Continually Growing* – Other Items of Past Few Days Occurances.” **Patchogue Advance**, April 12, 1927. – See paragraph near bottom of article.
- “Medford” (Section 3). **Patchogue Advance**, October 11, 1927: p. 4.
- “Medford”. **Patchogue Advance**, October 11, 1927: p. 28. – See last paragraph
- “Special Evening School Classes are Well Attended: Members of Singing Society Visit Lynbrook – Firemen to Meet on Tuesday Night; *Public Library is Well Patronized* – Harvest Home Celebration Enjoyed by Many – Mothers’ Club has

Another Session – Personal and Social Items.” **Patchogue Advance**, December 2, 1927: p. 14.

- “Woman is Injured in Medford Crash: Cars Collide at Greenport Avenue; Carnival and Dance at Community Hall Draws Big Crowd – Bowden Sells Out His Bakery Business – Social Items of Interest.” **Patchogue Advance**, January 6, 1928: p. 12. – Includes brief coverage of Scout Library near bottom of article
- “Tennis Court at Medford School: Making Plans for Annual Field Day; Taxpayers Have Special Meeting Tonight to Consider Light District – Other Locals.” **Patchogue Advance**, May 4, 1928: p. 4. – Scout library in 2nd to last paragraph
- “Boy Survives Being Run Over by Car on Medford Road; Eighth Grade Dance Entertains Large Crowd; Taxpayers Gather More Petition Signatures – Mixup Over Home Bureau Dates.” **Patchogue Advance**, May 8, 1928: [Bellport page]. – 3rd paragraph indicates “Mrs. E.A. Theis and Mrs. William Hahn” attending New York Library Association conference representing “Medford Scouts Public Library”; perhaps one of the last hurrahs
- “Lightning Hits Medford House: New Building Operations Going On; *Scouts Running Library* – Athletic Club Gets New Suits – Other News Briefs.” **Patchogue Advance**, June 15, 1928: p. 12. – See short paragraph in middle of page
- “Medford Youth is Badly Injured in Fall Off Bicycle; *Library More Active as Summer Departs*; Republican Rally to Be Held October 23 – Dance This Saturday – Heating Plant in Poultry Farm Interesting – Personal Paragraphs.” **Patchogue Advance**, October 12, 1928: p. 2. – 5th paragraph down (left hand col.) -- My hunch is that Black Tuesday took all the wind out of the sails of the Scout Library
- “Medford.” **Patchogue Advance**, November 28, 1929: p. 9. – See last paragraph (reference to school library; silent on scout library)
- “Many New Books are Added to the Medford School Library.” **Patchogue Advance**, December 10, 1929: p. 11. – reference is to school library; silent on scout library
- “Miss Putz Elected Comm’r of Girl Scouts: Central Suffolk Council Holds Annual Meeting – Department Committeemen are Appointed – Rally for All Troops Planned.” **Patchogue Advance**, November 19, 1937: p. 1 – speaks of a Dec 3rd Meeting at Medford Ave. school; no mention of a scout library
- “New Library Books Honor Memory of Mrs. M. Theis.” **Long Island Advance**, June 6, 1968: p. 8.
 - The Martha Theis memorial collection included: *All About Upholstering: Applique Stitchery*. – *Arranging Church Flowers*. – *The Art of Casserole Cookery*. – *\$\$\$ and Sense*. – *Eat Yourself Full*. – *Embassy Cookbook*. – *Fell’s Guide to Mobile Home Living*. – *Flowers at the White House*. – *Gardening by the Sea*. – *Greenhouse: A Place of Magic*. – *Good Housekeeping’s Guide for Young Homemakers*. – *Leone’s Italian Cookbook*. – *Make Your Paycheck Pay Your Way*. – *Navy Wife*. – *Pleasures of Japanese Cooking*. – *Victoriana*. – *What Every Air Force Wife Should Know*. – *What Every Army Wife Should Know*.

For Further Reading

- Ferguson, Eleanor F. **My Long Island: Growing Up on Hal B. Fullerton's Blessed Isle, 1902-1942.** Las Vegas, NV: Scrub Oak Press, 1993. – LI REF B FERGUSON; Circ. Storage: B FERGUSON
- Ferguson, Eleanor Frances Fullerton. **As I Remember It.** Berryhenge, St. James, NY: The Author [typescript photocopy], 1978. [by the Fullerton's daughter] – LI REF B FULLERTON FER
- Fullerton, Hal B. **Gardener of Eden: The Wit and Wisdom of Hal B. Fullerton,** comp. and ed. by Anne Nauman. Las Vegas, NV: Scrub Oak Press, 1998. – LI REF 974.725 V-MEDF FUL
- Gombieski, Jane S. with Mallory Leoniak. **To Get the Vote: Woman Suffrage Leaders in Suffolk County.** Medford, NY: Town of Brookhaven, 1992. – LI REF & LI REF STOR 324.623 LEO
- Nauman, Anne. **The Junior Partner: Edith Loring Fullerton, Long Island Pioneer.** Las Vegas, NV: Scrub Oak Press, 1997. – LI REF B FULLERTON EDITH; Non-Fiction: B FULLERTON, EDITH NAU
- **Patchogue-Medford Area History** (Patchogue-Medford Library. Celia M. Hastings Local History Room) @ <http://www.pmlib.org/localpmhistory> -- scroll down slightly to “—Medford, NY” section (mainly links to Fullerton publications)
- Sachs, Charles L. **The Blessed Isle: Hal B. Fullerton and His Impage of Long Island, 1897-1927.** Interlaken, NY: Heart of the Lakes Pub., 1991. – LI REF & LI REF STOR 974.725 V-MEDF SAC; Q 974.721 SAC
- **Scouting in Suffolk, 1910-1986.** Medford, NY: Boy Scouts of America, Inc. Suffolk County Council. History Committee, 1987. – LI REF 369.4309 SCO; Q 369.4309 SCO