

A Tale of Two Libraries

Repurposing Buildings in Bristol, NY

Installment #1

The **Bristol Library** building is currently one lot to the west of my desk, here in the Town Hall. A picture of the **Bristol Post Office** building in one of its many previous locations is 10 feet from my desk in the front hall of the Town Hall. The picture shows the Post Office building as it was from 1895-1900 in Baptist Hill when it also housed the library. The tiny building was first built as a **blacksmith's shop**. The idea of Bristol residents repurposing their buildings led me on a full day search just to document the location of the Bristol Library. It turns out that my confusion was not just advancing age, but the fact that there were TWO Bristol libraries in Bristol at the same time. Baptist Hill and Bristol Center have both been called just Bristol at times and BOTH libraries were for a time housed in buildings that used to be **blacksmith shops** which then were transformed into the **Post Offices** and housed the library as well. It turns out that this is not just a bizarre coincidence but a matter of great "re-purposing." As horse transportation turned into vehicle traffic, fewer blacksmith shops were needed and the buildings served the growing hamlets need for more space for the postmaster or postmistress. The library could easily share the space since there were not that many books and the postmistress could serve as the librarian too. This allowed the library to be open six days a week.

The Baptist Hill Library was started by William Doyle on January 15, 1900 as the Bristol Free Library and was housed on the second floor of his Baptist Hill Store. The Provisional Charter was granted by the University of the State of New York on December 20, 1900. The minutes of the Library Board of April 10, 1901 state that the board agreed to merge the Sunday School Library into the Bristol Free Library. They also voted to loan a library of fifty volumes to the library in Bristol Center. The first librarian in Baptist Hill was listed as Mrs. Carrie Hicks Perry, who was succeeded by Mrs. John Travis, then Anna Gilbert, **Mrs. Earl Marble** and then **Miss Barbara Marble**. Edson Parmelee managed the Baptist Hill store and library from 1912-1920 and during his ownership the **Post Office** was located in the store too, until 1917. In 1920 **Mr. and Mrs. Harry R. Marble** bought the store and operated it until 1949. The library moved eventually to the District #1 Schoolhouse just north of the intersection on the west side. It is now a private residence.

Meanwhile in Bristol Center, I'll give you one guess where the 50 volume library was located: the store. And it was a store run much later by Earl **Marble** for a time. Another Marble store and just as ironically, another **blacksmith shop** were located adjacent to the store to the south. The library was located upstairs from the **Post Office** boxes located at the bottom of the staircase in the store which is now Café' Sol. During the winter of 1913 when Bristol Valley residents decided they wanted a bigger library, they presented a home talent play entitled "Valley Farm" to raise money. It was a slow start. In 1914 Mr. Seamon's store where the few books were located burned. The library then shared space at the Rarity House with a barber shop and a private residence. Mrs. Florence Wheaton Jones was the first librarian. Next the library shifted to the home of Preston Case and Mrs. Case became librarian. Next door to the Case house on Route 64 across from the Methodist Episcopal Church now serving as the Bristol Historical Society Building was a **Blacksmith's shop** owned by Preston Case. The Library trustees finally agreed to buy the building from Case for \$175 and spent \$600 on renovations which they borrowed from Benjamin F. Case, a long-time trustee and library worker.

In 1977 the two libraries were facing extinction if municipal health codes were not addressed. This was in all likelihood the merger of the two Bristol libraries at last. On September 20, 1993 the blacksmith shop turned library made the journey around the corner from Route 64 to County Rd 32 to be placed on its new foundation. An addition has been added to the back of the building right about where the horses might have stood waiting to be shod.

I don't find it the least bit ironic that my husband's great-grandmother was a Marble and the librarian and the historian and the store owner for a while. Nor does it surprise me that as a retired English teacher I took my miniature horse to

the library/blacksmith's shop for a children's reading hour and I am now sitting in the historian's chair. With this many coincidences I would have to say it is just the way things are meant to be in Bristol. Long Live the Bristol Library!!

Beth Thomas

Bristol Historian

Backing into the New Home on 32



coming down County Road 32



Adding the Addition

Rounding the Corner at County Road 32