

Keene Valley Library undergoes major renovation

By Lee Manchester, Lake Placid News, May 18, 2001

KEENE VALLEY — Patience is a virtue.

Book lovers in Keene Valley have been subjected to a minor inconvenience over the last couple of months, an inconvenience that will continue for another month or so — but which will give them a library building more capable than ever of serving them and their children well into the future.

The Keene Valley Library Association began a major renovation project in March to save the hamlet's 105-year-old library, which was listed on the National Historic Register last December. The project should be complete by the end of next month.

The oldest part of the building was erected in 1896. Since then, the library has had four additions built onto it in 1923, 1937, 1962 and 1985.

"The renovation project took shape around 1991," said Librarian Leslie A. Paul, who has been with the library for two years. "They (the board of trustees) noticed water leaking; bead board on the ceiling was opening, and water was coming in. The board took a really good look and had an engineer come in."

The problem?

"The beams originally used (in the 1896 building) were too small to support the roof," Paul said. "Over the years the roof had started settling, and the walls had started bowing out."

The solution?

West Branch General Contractors, of Saratoga Springs, a company that specializes in historic renovation, is placing steel beams in the corners of the 1896 building. To secure the roof and the row of windows beneath it that runs all the way around the room above the ground-floor walls — called the "lantern" — a steel collar is being fitted to hold the building together and provide a supporting framework to connect the roof to the new steel beams.

The 1896 building was not the only place where structural problems had to be solved, Paul said. In the 1923 addition, almost identical in appearance to the original structure, the roof had been improperly attached.

"By some miracle," the librarian said, "heavy snows over the years hadn't done anything to that."

And the supporting beams in the 1923 addition were even more precarious than the thin 1896 beams, Paul said.

"They were hollow!"

The old beams in the 1923 building are being replaced with solid wood or steel beams.

The library's exterior is also being refurbished, Paul said.

"The front of the building will be re-roofed in black shingles identical to the old ones," she said.

The "guts" of the building, its electrical wiring and ventilation ducts, are also being replaced.

“When the engineers were going through to inspect the plant, they found old wires with little teeth marks on the insulation,” Paul said.

The entire electrical system is being replaced with metal-coated wiring.

“It was quite a job for the electricians to drill holes through the joists and bring them down (to the breaker box in the basement) and make them make sense,” the librarian explained.

All the light fixtures are being replaced, too, Paul said.

“Before, we had industrial-type bare fluorescent tubes,” she said, walking with a reporter through the old reading room and pointing up to the ceiling.

“With the water getting in, all the ballasts were going — and the light was harsh and uneven, even without the damage.

“The board decided to take those out and put in beautiful pendant fixtures with brass trimming,” said Paul. “Those will reflect light up on the ceiling, and then downward.”

New lights will also be installed to display the Keene Valley Library’s collection of fine art to best advantage.

“We have fine art hung on every wall,” Paul said. “Some is on loan to us, and some belongs to the library. We also have several pieces of sculpture by Nina Winkel, who is fairly well known in the area; she has her own gallery at Plattsburgh State.

“The trustees decided to put in unobtrusive gallery lighting — cone-style light fixtures on tracks. The artwork used to be lost in the library’s shadows, but now they’ll really be lit up,” the librarian enthused. “It will be an art gallery as well as a library.”

The original library building, designed by William Hodge, the local Congregationalist minister, and constructed by George Luck and Arthur C. Trumbull in 1896, cost the library association a total of \$1,300 — and that included the price of the land.

The current renovation project will be somewhat more costly.

Budgeted at \$168,000, Paul says the bill is more likely to come in at something closer to \$200,000.

“The project has turned out to be more expensive than was originally thought,” she said. “When the building was ‘cracked open,’ they found a lot that they didn’t expect.”

To pay for the added expense without impairing future library programs, Paul says, the association needs donations.

“While we have the money to pay for the project, it would be nice if we didn’t have to spend it,” she said. “Things are going to be tight, so we will appreciate any donations we can get.”

Paul expects the Keene Valley Library renovation project to be completed by June 30. A grand re-opening event will be announced after the work is finished and everything is back in its place.

In the meantime, the library remains open for business and accessible through the rear entrance.

Winter hours are:

- Tuesday and Thursday from 9 a.m. to noon, 1 to 5 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m.; and
- Saturday from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m.

Summer hours are:

- Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., with
- evening hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 7 to 9 p.m.

For more information call the library at (518) 576-4335 or visit their Web site at www.kvvi.net/~library.