

The History of York Haven Library / Townhall / Borough Office Building.

In 1797, the first Pennsylvania canal was opened at York Haven, PA. Massive grist mills were built by the canal. The town of York Haven was laid out in 1814 under the direction of the York Haven Company. Famous people that stopped in York Haven included Gen LaFayette and Charles Dickens. In 1880, the York Haven Company purchased the mills and replaced them with the York Haven Paper Company. By 1899, it had grown to become the sixth largest factory employer in York County and was the largest ground pulp paper mill in the US. (Reference [Yorkblog](#) by Stephen H. Smith February 17, 2015.) In 1895, the paper company build the York Haven hydropower plant, which is still in operation today.

In the early 1900's, a person or community could apply to the State Library for assistance in starting a library. Andrew Carnegie was a significant philanthropist who provided funds for new libraries. The final library grants were issued in 1917. In January 1900, Mr. Carnegie offered Frank Geise, Mayor of York, \$50,000 for a building to have a library. However, the town had to provide the building site and promise to use public money to support the library's operation at a rate of 10% of the building's cost annually. It is estimated a tax of three-eighths of a mill would be required, which York's mayor did not want to do. (Reference [Universal York](#) by June Lloyd September 20, 2013.)

“On January 18, 1919, Dr. Anspach made an application to the State Department at Harrisburg for a public library, which if procured will be placed in Anspach's drug store in York Haven. A card bearing the names of 10 citizens, which is required to secure the library, has been forwarded to Harrisburg by the Rev. J H Schmitt, local United Brethren minister.” (The York Dispatch Jan 18, 1919) This application was not approved by the State.

A month later: “Preliminary steps toward the construction of a town hall in York Haven were taken yesterday, when Henry W. Stokes of Philadelphia president of the York Haven Paper Company viewed the site of the proposed building. The proposed site for the building is owned by the York Haven Paper Company. The paper company is taking more than ordinary interest in the proposed structure, and it is said, it will do a large part of the financing of its erection.” (The York Dispatch Feb 18, 1919)

The June 17, 1919, issue of The Gettysburg Times carried the announcement for the new building: “The contract for the town hall to be erected by the York Haven Paper Company, at Pennsylvania Avenue and Main Street, has been let to J. W. Hartley, a York contractor. Mantle Fielding, of Philadelphia, is the architect. It is said that the structure will be erected at a cost approximating \$50,000. A survey of the site was made Saturday.”

The Harrisburg Saturday, September 11, 1920: “The new hall was designed by Mantle Fielding, of Philadelphia. It is brick and colonial architecture and costs more than \$30,000. It has two stories and a basement. The interior is finished with natural wood. The Boy Scouts will use the basement; there is a library on the first floor, together with a committee room and a kitchen on the second, and the third story comprises an auditorium with seating capacity of 400. There are also a stage and a gallery.”

“The official opening of the York Haven community hall, which was built by the York Haven Paper Company and turned over to the borough will take place tomorrow with the appropriate exercises. ... Henry W. Stokes, president of the York Haven Paper Company will deliver the deed to the property and the keys of the building to the trustees. Thomas L Montgomery of the PA State Library Harrisburg will give an address. ...The new town hall was designed by Mantle Fielding, of Philadelphia, and it is a pleasing and imposing structure. It was built at a cost of more than \$30,000 by the York Haven Paper Company and tomorrow will be given to the borough.” (York Dispatch Sept 10, 1920) The paper company continued to provide the library / hall with free electricity and free coal for the furnace in the winter until the company closed 50 years later. (York Dispatch May 24, 1971)

The reason why the York Haven Paper Company agreed to donate the building is not recorded in historical accounts, but its motivation was likely tied to a combination of corporate good will and community engagement. However, unlike other donors, this building was not named in honor of the donor. In the same year the gifted building was constructed by the York Haven Paper Company, the company was sold to the Continental Paper and Bag Mill Corporation. The timing suggests the gift was a final act of community good will before the business changed hands. Then in December 1936, Southern Kraft Corporation, a subsidiary of International Paper Company, acquired the mill. The mill was totally closed in 1971. In 1972, Hurricane Agnes heavily damaged the vacant mill, and it was ultimately torn down. A portrait of Henry W. Stokes, pictures of the mill, and a desk from the mill are in the library entrance reminding guests of the story of the gifted building and the great industrial importance that the community had.

Even though being the president of the mill, Henry W. Stokes still resided in Philadelphia where Mantle Fielding also lived. Fielding was known for significant projects for the elite of the Philadelphia area. Designing structures outside that area was more than an exception rather than the rule for him. He was involved in many famous projects which are listed in the Philadelphia Architects and Buildings [database](#).) The York Haven Library building cannot be found in this database. The address below the Fielding name on the blueprint of the York Haven Library is not where his office was in Philadelphia. He did have others designing with him. It is not known how much Fielding was personally involved with this.

The building is of unusual design. It is constructed mainly of brick laid up in a Flemish bond pattern. The building is unique in that so much attention is paid to detail. Emulating a Greek temple design, there are wooden pilasters at the corners of the building. The gable roof is supported by a large, simple wooden cornice. Windows on the upper floor are 8/12, while those on the main floor are round headed sash. One of the most prominent features of the exterior is the Classical door surrounding the main entrance. The door is flanked by pilasters and surmounted by a pediment with dentils and Greek key design trim. Although the interior plan and layout have changed, the original wood trim and wainscoting are still found around the doors, windows and stairs. A [Pennsylvania Historical Resource Survey](#) of the building was done in July 1989 by Brad McDonald.

The York Haven Library is the second oldest public free library in York County. The first public free library in York County was the Hanover Public Library which opened in 1911 with 5,100 books. In 2001, Louis T. Guthrie made a significant donation, and the library was renamed to Guthrie Memorial Library. The Hanover Area Historical Society relocated its research collections to the library in 2024 to increase visitors to the library.

The York Library Company was established in 1818 but struggled with cash flow, as many residents could not afford the subscription fees. The Odd Fellow fraternal organization opened a subscription based public library in 1874, which ultimately failed in 1893. In 1920, the York High School library had 16,600 volumes which were open to public use. The Cassat library owned by the York Collegiate institute contained 6,000 volumes. The Wood library in St. John's Episcopal Church had 5,000 volumes. The Historical Society of York had 3,000 volumes. "The people of York are looking forward with eager interest to the time in the near future when we shall have a large city library...It would be a place where people of all ages and church interests could select books for reading at the library or in the home." (York Dispatch June 11, 1920) In 1916, the Martin Library Association was incorporated and finally opened the Martin Memorial Library to the York public in 1935. Again, the library was named in honor of the donor. The York County Libraries system was created in 1974. It combined all the public libraries in the County into a single coordinated organization.

When the York Haven library opened in 1920, the York Haven Paper Company donated technical books and helped with the purchase of others. "In 1921, 65 volumes, dwelling on philosophy, history, arts and literature, were added to the York Haven Library. The library now houses a total of 951 books." (York Dispatch Jan 13, 1921). In September 1926, "The York Haven Library planned to have an out-of-town speaker on the subject of "Benefits Derived from Public Libraries". (York Dispatch Sept 16, 1926) "The library helps the schools in your community by suppling a continuing education. It helps the factories by providing technical books. It helps business by supplying business information. And it works hand in hand with the churches, the arts, and science." Mrs. Mabel C. Wolcott. (The Evening Sun Oct 21, 1920)

For an undocumented reason, the York Haven Library closed in 1965. However, it reopened in October 1968 with several giving their time to the library which now had over 3,000 volumes. In 1971, the York Haven Library got a physical facelift from many community organizations. (York Dispatch July 30, 1971)

In 1974, York Haven Library joined the York County Libraries (YCL) system. Then in 1993, YCL announced that it would open a new library location between York Haven and Lewisberry and close the libraries in those boroughs. “Mrs. Owad, said that she and other will fight to keep the York Haven library open if the county system does pull the plug on its support... Now, even without county support, many say the small library of about 10,000 volumes and a circulation of 20,860 will once again stand on its own two feet.” (York Dispatch Aug 4, 1993) The YCL removed the books in the cover of darkness. Lewisberry sued the YCL. Both libraries got their books back. (York Dispatch June 7, 1995)

The library was eventually revived by community volunteers, though on a smaller, more independent scale, with private donations and fundraisers. However, by early 2010, the internet began to replace the need for books. The hours of operation were reduced to four per week with just one volunteer and no governing board. Computers were added which were used by the public until every home had one. The use of the second-floor community hall for entertainment and social gatherings became rare. During the summer, almost no one came to the building because it was not air-conditioned and the windows did not open.

In January 2024, North Eastern York County History In Preservation contacted the Borough of York Haven about opening a history center. Within a few months, NeyChip History Center opened using space inside the York Haven Library. Students from Northeastern York County High School came to set up the Center, clean the building and help with artifacts. The press did an article about the opening of the Center. ([York Sunday News March 10, 2024](#)) The operating hours of the library increased with the growing number of Center visitors. Besides artifact displays, the Center added a 400-volume history section. The Center began hosting guest speakers on the top floor. The Center was featured on [Fox43](#).

The 1920 York Haven Library / Townhall / Borough office building received several State recognitions in 2025. In August, the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission approved a [PA Historical Marker](#) for the Conewago Canal which was the first Pennsylvania operating canal located in York Haven. The marker will be placed in front of the library building in the fall of 2026. In September, NeyChip was asked to present a paper at the Pennsylvania State Historical Association conference on [the student participation](#) at the NeyChip History Center. In October, The [Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office](#) stated that the building was eligible for a listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

The building has served the local community for over 105 years. Its history is still going.

Charles Stambaugh NeyChip president 11/22/2025