



RELEASE DATE: June 6, 2023

OLD YORK OPENS NEW LIBRARY & ARCHIVE BUILDING

York, Maine—On June 6, the Old York Historical Society (OYHS) officially opens the Old York Research Center at 96 Beech Ridge Road in York. The 13,000-square-foot building, formerly an Assemblies of God church, accommodates the organization’s library and archive collection, a public reading room, and storage for object collections.

OYHS purchased the building in 2022, and spent a year renovating the facility to house some 20,000 objects, and 50,000 books and archival pieces. The project caps a ten-year initiative to establish a permanent home in York for OYHS’s collections. Having desperately outgrown its 2,000-square-foot storage building at the former York Beach Post Office, and an old bank building in the heart of York Village, OYHS temporarily consolidated its collections in a facility on Shapleigh Road in Kittery beginning in 2014.

When the building on Beech Ridge Road became available in late 2021, OYHS jumped at the opportunity. The Shapleigh Road building was sold to Fair Tide, a Kittery-based organization that finds long-term solutions for homeless individuals and families, and OYHS immediately began renovations to transform the church into a modern museum collections facility.

Old York has been collecting for almost 125 years, preserving the ephemeral and visual records of our region, including a full run of York High School yearbooks, hundreds of photos of York Beach and its grand hotels, and lists of early 20th-century cottages of York Harbor. The collection also contains primary documents related to early York families—a collection that continues to grow through gifts and purchases. Perhaps the single rarest item is a 1597 parchment from Devon, England, signed by Ferdinando Gorges, Proprietor of Maine and the founder of York. The Gorges document was purchased in 1958 for \$100 from Goodspeed’s Book Shop of Boston, and is now preserved at the new Research Center for the decades to come.

THE BEECH RIDGE CHURCH BUILDING

The original church building, located at the corner of Beech Ridge Road and Betty Welch Road, was built in 1867 as the York and Kittery Christian Society. By the 1920s, the congregation had dwindled, and in 1963 the structure housed the First Pentecostal Church of York-Four Square Gospel Association, later renamed the Beech Ridge Road Assemblies

of God. In 1985 a large new sanctuary and fellowship hall were constructed to the southeast of the original building.

Few of the original architectural elements of the 1867 building survive, but those that do were retained in course of renovations. The wide plank pine flooring of the original sanctuary was discovered under later carpeting, and the gingerbread trim above the main entrance doors continue to grace the exterior.

Renovations to the interior included the removal of walls from the 1980s addition to create secure storage rooms; fire suppression and security systems; upgraded climate control systems; wiring for an integrated computer system; and new floor coverings in much of the building.

READING ROOM NAMED IN HONOR OF FORMER LIBRARIAN

The new public reading room has been named The Virginia and Dexter Spiller Reading Room, to honor librarian emerita, Virginia Spiller, and her husband Dexter. Ginny was a dedicated librarian and genealogist at OYHS from 1990 to her retirement in 2013 at age 77. Her husband Dexter Spiller worked alongside her, volunteering countless hours researching historic York land transactions and identifying historic area photographs. Ginny passed away April 26, 2022, and Dexter on May 11, 2023. "Ginny and Dexter were incredibly dedicated to local history," said Lefever, "and I hope that recognizing the Spillers in this way will inspire future generations of historians."

OPEN HOURS AND EVENTS

The reading room is open for research appointments on Tuesdays from 1 to 4 pm. To make an appointment please contact the OYHS librarian and archivist, Marlene Bottino at research@oldyork.org. Special events and programs at the Research Center, including research presentations, behind-the-scenes tours, and members' afternoons, are offered throughout the year. For more information, please visit oldyork.org.

ABOUT OLD YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

OYHS is a vital part of the York, Maine, community. The organization maintains 16 buildings and 20 properties including the 17-acre Steedman Woods; employs 2 full-time and 25 part-time employees; houses more than 70,000 artifacts, books, and archival objects; and serves thousands of people throughout the year with tours, educational programs, and special events. OYHS receives no Federal, State, or Municipal support, and relies on funding provided through private donations, a modest endowment, and a trust established by Elizabeth Perkins, as well as earned income from ticket sales, programs, memberships.

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