

**Overdue, Returned, and Missing:  
The Changing Stories of Boston's Chinatown Branch Library**

By

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B.S. in Urban Studies  
Cornell University, 2006

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master in City Planning

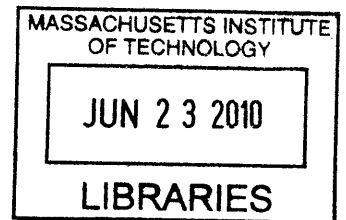
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## ABSTRACT

In 1896, the Boston Public Library (BPL) opened a reading room on Tyler Street in between the South End and Chinatown. Since then, the library has disappeared and reappeared in various forms in Chinatown for different reasons. In 1956, the City of Boston demolished the Tyler Street Branch Library and since 2000, community groups in Chinatown have been advocating for their own branch of the BPL. This thesis explores why the Chinatown community does not have a library in 2010 and why the movement to reclaim one has gained momentum in the past ten years. The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that the public library is a diagnostic window into society; the building, its operations, and the services it provides reflect the social, economic, and political contexts of time and place. This research demonstrates that the story of Boston's Chinatown Branch Library is more than just a historical account of a building or concept; it is actually a story about the development of a neighborhood, the preservation of culture and identity, as well as the growth of coalitions and divisions. At first, the addition or removal of the library in Chinatown was largely an extension of city policy, and eventually the presence of a library in the neighborhood became an extension of grassroots community movements. The history of the Chinatown Library mirrors the changing attitudes towards community development in the United States.

While reflecting on this chronology, this thesis aims to answer the following questions: What does the library mean to the Chinatown community? What do these meanings tell about the needs of this neighborhood? And, what is the role of a branch library in fulfilling these needs in the contemporary context? The Chinatown Library means different things to its various providers and users. Through archival research and interviews with city officials, library administrators, community members, and other stakeholders, this thesis theorizes that Boston's Chinatown Library has six meanings: 1) Assimilation Processing Center; 2) Gathering Place; 3) Economic Training Ground; 4) Ethnic Identity Assertion; 5) Turf Defense; and 6) Political Clout Building. This research analyzes the decision-making processes of the BPL in 2010 and discusses how and why stakeholders should incorporate library meanings into these processes. Lastly, this thesis provides recommendations and insights for moving forward to all the major players of the Chinatown Library movement.

Thesis Supervisor: Lawrence J. Vale, Ford Professor of Urban Design and Planning

Thesis Reader: Tunney Lee, Professor of Architecture and Urban Studies and Planning, Emeritus



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# Introduction

## How It All Began

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## INTRODUCTION

I first learned about the movement for a Chinatown Branch of the Boston Public Library (BPL) during the Spring 2009 semester in graduate school when I was participating in the Federal Home Loan Bank (FHLB) Affordable Housing Competition. My team partnered with the Asian Community Development Corporation (ACDC), a non-profit organization in Chinatown. While researching Chinatown's community needs, I found out that since 2001, a group of residents and stakeholders had been advocating for their own local library branch. The neighborhood once had a small reading room, but the City of Boston tore it down in 1956 while executing urban renewal and building a highway that barged through downtown Boston. The theme of our affordable housing project was to put back the homes that the highway took away, and the concept of a 'stolen' library branch became an integral part of our proposal. My group and I decided that our new mixed-income housing development should accommodate a Chinatown Branch Library on the ground floor, and our idea was well-received by both the FHLB judges and the members of Chinatown with whom we worked to put the project together. This idea was especially timely because a number of community groups in the neighborhood were preparing for the opening of the local Storefront Library in October 2009. The Storefront Library served as a temporary branch for three months in a donated vacant commercial space; it was completely envisioned, designed, and managed by Chinatown residents and other community members who felt the absence of an official BPL branch.

As I began to formulate ideas for my thesis research a few months later, I decided to focus my project on the Chinatown Library because I was intrigued by its history and the existing energy around the issue. Why did the neighborhood start fighting for this library now, and what sort of needs did this public space fulfill in immigrant communities such as Chinatown? In all neighborhoods, a public library provides people with resources to enhance their education, connect with fellow citizens, foster personal interests and enjoy safe meeting spaces. Public libraries are often referred to as "third places" in neighborhoods. (Oldenburg, 1990) "Third places" is a term coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg in his 1990 book *The Great Good Place*. They are informal gathering places between home and work, and provide an opportunity for creative interaction and civic engagement in a forum where all individuals are equal. Through my preliminary research, Chinatown definitely seemed to be lacking such multi-functional spaces, until the Storefront Library appeared. Boston Street Lab, a local non-profit, started the Storefront Library to loan books and do other cultural programming from inside a vacant commercial space in Chinatown. The experimental Storefront served as a living testimony to the City that its neighborhoods needed more "third places." People from inside and outside of Chinatown flocked to the small commercial space to reserve books, read, take advantage of the recreational opportunities, or simply socialize. The project demonstrated that there was in fact a demand for a

branch library in Chinatown, and it finished its three-month stint on Washington Street in January 2010.

When I began this thesis, I jumped into the project already an advocate, part activist myself, aimed at helping the community fight for this needed public facility. I thought that the purpose of my thesis was to advance this immigrant neighborhood's cause, to document its struggle, and to support its vision by extrapolating the public space's multiple meanings and functions in the community. However, as I interviewed more and more people in Chinatown, and those working for the City of Boston and the Boston Public Library, I began to realize that the story behind this missing branch was not so simple.

I saw that history is interpreted in different ways, and the narrative of this missing branch library has many sides. I learned that while the Chinatown community has unfulfilled needs that a branch library might satisfy, neighborhood leaders have different priorities and various solutions for the problems they perceive. Sometimes a library fits into the picture and sometimes it does not. For example, one organizer told me that affordable housing was Chinatown's biggest priority and that all resources and energy for the neighborhood should be dedicated to that cause, while other community members complained about the lack of gathering space and supported the idea of a library as providing that necessity. The movement to regain a library and the need for more affordable housing may seem mutually exclusive, but because of limited resources, community members tended to believe that if all the neighborhood's energy was focused on a main cause, there is more likelihood for success.<sup>1</sup> Also, city officials and library leaders gave very practical reasons for removing the original branch in 1956, noting the lack of residential population in Chinatown that would warrant a library and the need to maintain and service current branches. I began to ask myself: what did the concept of the Chinatown library mean to the community? Through my thesis interviews I was learning many different answers to this question.

As I continued researching and writing, it also became apparent that the economic downturn played a major role in this story: the City of Boston had to deal with financial realities and balance a municipal budget, while the Boston Public Library had to figure out how to best serve its constituents under constraints caused by the economic crisis. In February 2010, the Boston Globe began reporting on the possibility of shutting down ten of the City's twenty-six neighborhood branch libraries. On April 9th, 2010, the BPL board of trustees decided that four branches would ultimately close. Reading these articles and attending public meetings about the issue, I began to feel as if my thesis had lost its importance. What was the point of advocating for a new branch library if existing branches could no longer sustain themselves?

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<sup>1</sup> The 2009 FHLB Chinatown Crossings entry demonstrated that the neighborhood could gain affordable housing and a library in the same space.

Furthermore, I read that it was during times of recession that libraries receive most traffic as people use the facilities' various free resources to connect themselves with employment opportunities, job-training, and other benefits. And yet, ironically, in the middle of the recession, the City and the BPL were closing and consolidating branches because of funding gaps. I realized that my thesis was no longer about simply fighting a battle for a library in Chinatown. My thesis had to address the Boston Public Library's own pressing predicament, and I needed to use the Chinatown story to illuminate the meaning of libraries in the past, present, and future.

#### **RECESSION: THE LIBRARIANS' AXIOM**

During recessions, people buy fewer books, CDs, and DVDs. The number of museum, movie, theater, and concert tickets sold decreases. If people are not out buying books, movies, and music, or visiting cultural facilities, what exactly are they doing with their time instead? "Apparently: going to the library," reports the *New York Times*. (Dubner, 2007, July 10)

The downturn, which began in September 2008<sup>2</sup>, was also visible to public librarians across the country who noticed that circulation was increasing, while cities were cutting library budgets. (Dubner, 2007, July 10) For example, in 2009, approximately 300,000 Bostonians used library cards, including 40,000 residents who signed up for new cards, a 20 percent surge from the previous year. Circulation increased 31 percent over the last three years as the economy continued to decline. (Jackson, 2009, January 3)

Scholar Stephen E. James labeled this phenomenon "the Librarians' Axiom" asserting that "public libraries prosper whenever the country is experiencing economic stringency." (Lynch, 2002, p. 62-63) For over one hundred years, scholars have discussed this relationship between library use and economic conditions. James notes in his 1986 article in *The Public Library Quarterly* that one of the first references to this phenomenon was in the *1880 Annual Report* of the Chicago Public Library, and then James cites a later reference to the same idea in the 1949 volume of *The Library's Public*. (Lynch, 2002, p. 62-63) Furthermore, he states that evidence from the Great Depression era verifies the "linkage between business cycles and public library use." (Lynch, 2002, p. 62-63) More recently in 2002, a study commissioned by the American Library Association (ALA) found that circulation had increased significantly in all the months since March 2001, when the National Bureau of Economic Research pegged the beginning of the previous recession. (Lynch, 2002, p. 62-63) The ALA is currently aggregating national data regarding the 2008-2009 recession and library usage since then.

On February 16th, 2010 the *Boston Globe* reported that, "State assistance for Boston's libraries

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<sup>2</sup> The collapse of Lehman Brothers on September 18, 2008 marks the recession.

has dropped from \$8.9 million in 2009 to a proposed \$2.4 million in 2011.” (Ryan, 2010, February 16) Boston Public Library President Amy Ryan responded by stating, “But I owe it to the citizens of Boston to think about how we deliver their library services in a new, reduced funding environment. We have to find a balance.” (Ryan, 2010, February 16) How was the surrounding economic context going to affect Chinatown’s cause? I could not help but think about the Storefront Library, which could serve as a viable model for other neighborhoods that were either losing their branch or waiting for their own library, like Chinatown. I also looked back to history for solutions, and I was not the only one doing this. At one public meeting, a library trustee announced, “In the 1800s, when the library first opened, librarians needed to figure out how to provide their services outside of a building and did so through bookmobiles and delivery stations. Perhaps we need to explore these ideas now for neighborhoods who are not being served adequately by the BPL.” (Arana-Ortiz, 2010, April 9) The history of the Chinatown Library could help us understand how to approach the present.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

In order to accurately piece together and interpret the history of the Chinatown Branch Library and understand the multi-dimensional meaning of this space, I conducted archival research. I consulted newspaper articles, government reports, memos, and BPL board of library trustee meeting minutes from 1850 until present-day. Simultaneously, I visited the Storefront Library twice a month from October 2009 to January 2010 while it was running on Washington Street, and recorded my observations about the activity and users in the space. It is impossible to simply describe a neighborhood with words, so I also photographed the Storefront Library and other sections of Chinatown, particularly places that were relevant to the library movement. I collected old images of the neighborhood to extrapolate information about the development of the community over time. Additionally, I attended the monthly public meetings hosted by the Friends of the Chinatown Library group, an advocacy organization that has been working to bring a branch to Chinatown since 2005. Furthermore, I went to the public BPL trustee meetings in April 2011 concerning the branch closings.

Most importantly, I completed twenty-six interviews with Chinatown residents, neighborhood leaders and activists, city and state officials, academics, and others involved in the Chinatown Library movement. I began by speaking with Leslie and Sam Davol, the founders of the Storefront Library, as well as Marrikka Trotter, the designer of the Storefront Library and a project manager for the *2008 Chinatown Library Program and Siting Study*. These initial interviewees then suggested other individuals to contact, and as I conversed with more people, this pattern continued. I contacted all references that were mentioned to me by each participant, and allowed this snowball effect to dictate who I spoke with for my thesis research. Eventually, interview suggestions began repeating themselves, and then I realized I had talked to most of the main players in this story, each representing a different perspective.

## AIM OF THESIS

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that the public library is a diagnostic window into society: the building, its operations, and the services it provides reflect the social, economic, and political contexts of time and place. I show that the story of Boston's Chinatown Branch Library is more than just a historical account of a building or concept; it is actually a story about the development of a neighborhood, the preservation of culture and identity, as well as the growth of coalitions and divisions. While reflecting on these themes, I aim to answer the following questions: What does the library *mean* to the Chinatown community?<sup>3</sup> What do these *meanings* tell us about the needs of this neighborhood? And, what is the role of a branch library in fulfilling these needs in the contemporary context?

This story explores why the Chinatown community does not have a library today and why the movement to reclaim one has gained momentum in the past ten years. Lastly, by applying the lessons of history, this thesis aims to provide recommendations for accessing library services to the Chinatown community and other neighborhoods in similar situations. This thesis will also provide recommendations to the Boston Public Library and other establishments facing comparable financial challenges for moving forward and reinventing branches to fit the circumstances of time and place.

### **Chapter 1: The History & Changing Role of the Public Library**

What was the philosophy and history behind the founding of the public library in the United States and specifically in Boston, Massachusetts? After providing a brief account of the formation of the Boston Public Library, I demonstrate that the changing function and mission of the establishment is a direct testament to the value system or motives of those responsible for the provision of the library, such as city, state, federal government officials, and other benefactors. I also highlight the changing relationship between public libraries and immigrant communities over time. This section provides context for the rest of the thesis and will set the stage for the story of the Chinatown Library.

### **Chapter 2: The Story of the Chinatown Public Library**

By weaving together Chinatown neighborhood history with the narrative of a municipal-owned building on Tyler Street, this chapter tells the story of the Chinatown Public Library. Using archival research and interviews, I show that the same influential factors seen throughout the institution's past are also echoed on a micro-level in the story of one small branch library. I show that the story of the temporal Chinatown Library reflects the changing chronology of attitudes toward community development in Boston.

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<sup>3</sup> Chinatown community refers to the various individuals that, live, work, recreate, or visit regularly and / or have some sort of attachment to the neighborhood. There are multiple communities within Chinatown based on race, age, values, affiliations, etc.

### **Chapter 3: Reflections – What Does the Library Mean to the Chinatown Community?**

Through historical analysis and interview responses, this chapter concludes that the Chinatown Library *means* different things to its various providers and users. In this section, I theorize the six meanings of the Chinatown Library, which are: 1) Assimilation Processing Center; 2) Gathering Place; 3) Economic Training Ground; 4) Ethnic Identity Assertion; 5) Turf Defense; and 6) Political Clout Building. In this chapter, I reflect on these meanings.

### **Chapter 4: Branch Libraries in Chinatowns and other Boston Neighborhoods**

This section of the thesis explores, as well as compares and contrasts, relevant cases. How have other Chinatowns in the United States and other neighborhoods in Boston successfully lobbied to their local governments for the construction and programming of libraries? The cases show that the key to achieving this goal is political clout. Does the neighborhood have a champion in the community, city council, or local government to fight for the library cause?

### **Chapter 5: BPL Fiscal Crisis & Redefining the Branch**

The final chapter discusses the Boston Public Library's 2010 financial crisis and decision to close four branches. I analyze the decision-making processes of the BPL post-crisis with regard to the past and discuss how and why library meanings should be incorporated into these processes. I synthesize all the research – archival data, interviews, and case studies to analyze what should happen next in Boston's Chinatown. I provide recommendations and insights for moving forward to all the major players of the library movement, and show that the library's past meanings also inform its future.



# Chapter One

## The History and Changing Role of the Public Library

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**“The public library of today can do much to increase the earning power of the community and its members. Recent immigrants may be aided in becoming better Americans; the stranger may be made at home; the scholar, the inventor, the poet, the artist, can be helped toward creative work by the public library. It is all things to all men.”**

**- History of the Boston Public Library, 1896**

## **THE HISTORY AND CHANGING ROLE OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY**

Historian Lowell Martin writes, “We tend to think of history in terms of very visible and notable events – a war, a revolution, a new leader, a catastrophe. But the most important and durable currents may run below the surface, in the birth and growth of new goals, new values, new attitudes.” (Martin, 1998, p. VII) Both the visible events, as well as the more subtle shifts in societal ideals, have informed the role and function of the public library in America. (Martin, 1998, p. VII) Martin goes on to explain that two profound currents have characterized the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in America: democracy and capitalism, each of which has favored the public library. For example, democracy requires an agency of continuing education: a source for informed citizenship and individual development, so people can reach their full potential. This is important because capitalism requires “trained workers and responsive customers.” (Martin, 1998, p. VII) Meanwhile, libraries also need capitalism to produce wealth and government revenue in order to construct buildings and acquire inventory.

The public library is an agency with three characteristics: maintained by government, supported by tax money, and open to everybody free of cost. Libraries are a space welcoming to all – a place of lifelong learning and engagement. Since the founding of the public library system in the United States, the role of the institution in communities has been changing based on the social, political, and economic contexts of the specific location. This chapter explores how these contexts have informed the formation of the public library system, and its relationship with America’s changing and diverse populations.

### **THE FOUNDING OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY AND ITS EVOLUTION**

The early precursors of the public library include parish libraries, school district libraries, social libraries, and circulating libraries, which all existed before 1850. Parish libraries refer to churches acquiring books and making them available to not only the clergy and parishioners, but also the general public. School district libraries were collections of books available to public school systems. Horace Mann advocated for school libraries, and they were enacted into New York state law in 1835. A social library was a subscription model in which each member would make an up-front investment to buy stock and then provide annual subscriptions to maintain the collections. Lastly, circulating libraries were commercial ventures for booksellers and printers who rented books to individuals on a weekly or daily basis. (Martin, 1998, p. 9)

The urban public library is, for the most part, a Boston invention founded in 1852. Other important early public libraries include the Enoch Pratt Free Library of Baltimore (1882), the Free Library of Philadelphia (1891), and the New York Public Library (1895), but they were all founded after the Boston Public Library. (Battles, 2003) The foundation of the Boston Public Library was built upon uniquely American theories of the purpose of libraries: that they should serve as centers for community

education; and that they should be as open, accessible, and democratic as possible. (Battles, 2003)

In 1841, Alexandre Vattemare, a then-famous French ventriloquist turned intellectual missionary gave a speech to a crowd at the Boston Mercantile Library in which he outlined a plan for the international exchange of publications. Two prominent and extremely influential Bostonians took interest in this novel idea, which then led to the formation of a new institution. Edward Everett, formerly a professor at Harvard, Mayor of Boston, Governor of Massachusetts, and soon to be Secretary of State of the United States suggested in a letter to Mayor Bigelow of Boston that the new public library should provide access to the intelligent of all classes, but be principally a scholarly research library. George Ticknor, the leader of the Boston Brahmins argued that the library be aimed at the “common man” and should provide a wide range of popular and contemporary works to all of Boston’s citizens, including immigrants or low-income workers. (Harris, 1977)

In the middle of the nineteenth century, American cities were growing exponentially, in population and in wealth, and many port cities like Boston were overwhelmed with new immigrants fleeing lives of poverty, hunger, and oppression. Thousands of new immigrants arrived into Boston during the decades before and after the Civil War, the majority from Ireland, and others from Italy, Germany, Greece, China, Eastern Europe, and Russia. In 1800, the population of Boston was roughly at 25,000; in 1855, after the Irish Famine, it had reached 50,000 people, and in 1875, the population had grown to approximately 341,000.<sup>4</sup> Forty percent of the city’s population was Irish and more than two-thirds of the city’s population was foreign-born. (Vale, 2000, p. 51) Social reformers struggled to understand the needs of the new city inhabitants, many of whom came from rural backgrounds. As public servants and social workers worked to improve the lives of the poor, they also tried to prevent potential political unrest and instability. This was to be done through the provision of valuable services and institutions, such as the public library. This changing demographic history of Boston is significant because it highlights the motives behind the founding of the Boston Public Library. (Fichter, 2002, p. 30)

Through the visions of Everett and Ticknor, the Boston Public Library first opened on May 2nd, 1854, in two rooms on the ground floor of the Adams Schoolhouse on downtown Mason Street. Because of the library’s popularity and increased use, it soon became necessary to have a larger building. The City acquired a site on the Boylston Street lot now occupied by the Colonial Theatre, and constructed a new building, the first to be devoted entirely to public library use. Within ten years this structure also became inadequate and overcrowded. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Boston-area was home to Harvard University, the newly founded Massachusetts Institute of Technology, numerous bookstores, academic societies, and reading clubs. The elite

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<sup>4</sup> Boston began annexing neighborhoods around this time, so this accounts for population growth as well.

city “considered itself to be the literary capital of America.” (Fichter, 2002, p. 32) Accordingly, this context and cultural environment fostered the idea for a major public library. In 1878, efforts began to provide a new and more spacious structure. The State donated land on Dartmouth Street to the city, and in 1896 the present Central Library, first of the monumental public library buildings to be erected in America, was completed and opened. (*Boston’s Branch Library System Report*, 1955)

During this time period, Boston fell into economic stagnation, but still perceived itself as a hub of American intellectualism and innovation. The mass arrival of foreigners, unfamiliar with the traditions of Boston, the city’s values, American culture, and the English language was disconcerting. Fichter writes:

Ironically, if elite Boston was unprepared to accept the typically illiterate rural newcomers as urban citizens entitled to the privileges of native Bostonians, the long-standing tradition of progressive reform-minded philanthropy inclined a portion of the urban elite to approach the new immigrants as individuals in need of help, education, and betterment. The founding of the Boston Public Library, an institution designed to instruct and educate fits very clearly into this framework of Yankee concern and anxiety about the lives and morals of urban immigrants, immigrants who were understood to need uplifting public institutions to try to free them from the misery of their social and economic situation. (Fichter, 2002, p. 32)

While Bostonians promoted new social institutions, including public libraries, as a way to help new immigrants and the native working classes adjust and assimilate to urban American society, these civic institutions were also believed to be a tool in preventing crime and violence. (Fichter, 2002, p. 32) As mentioned earlier, the late nineteenth century was a time of civil and economic unrest<sup>5</sup>, and there was a general fear of potential rioting from the growing foreign-born underclass. Michael B. Katz writes in *The Shadow of the Poorhouse*: “As immigrants moved into old housing, cities increasingly fragmented into social and ethnic enclaves. These isolated, poor tracts within great cities became the new American wilderness, untamed, unknown, and subversive.” (Katz, 1996, p. 151) Furthermore, troublesome political ideologies such as anarchism and socialism were becoming common conversation topics among poor workers and city officials felt that public libraries offered the necessary education of traditional morals and values to suppress this potentially dangerous new way of thinking. (Fichter, 2002, p. 33)

The founding of the public library system not only linked to the need for maintaining social order in the growing city filled with immigrants, but also, served the crucial mission of these civic institutions to cultivate informed and responsible citizenship. Libraries offered every citizen the opportunity to educate him or herself about politics, economics, history, and culture, and to hopefully use that knowledge to “participate in democratic society through intelligent voting.” (Katz, 1996, p.151) An 1852 report authored by the early trustees of the Boston Public Library states,

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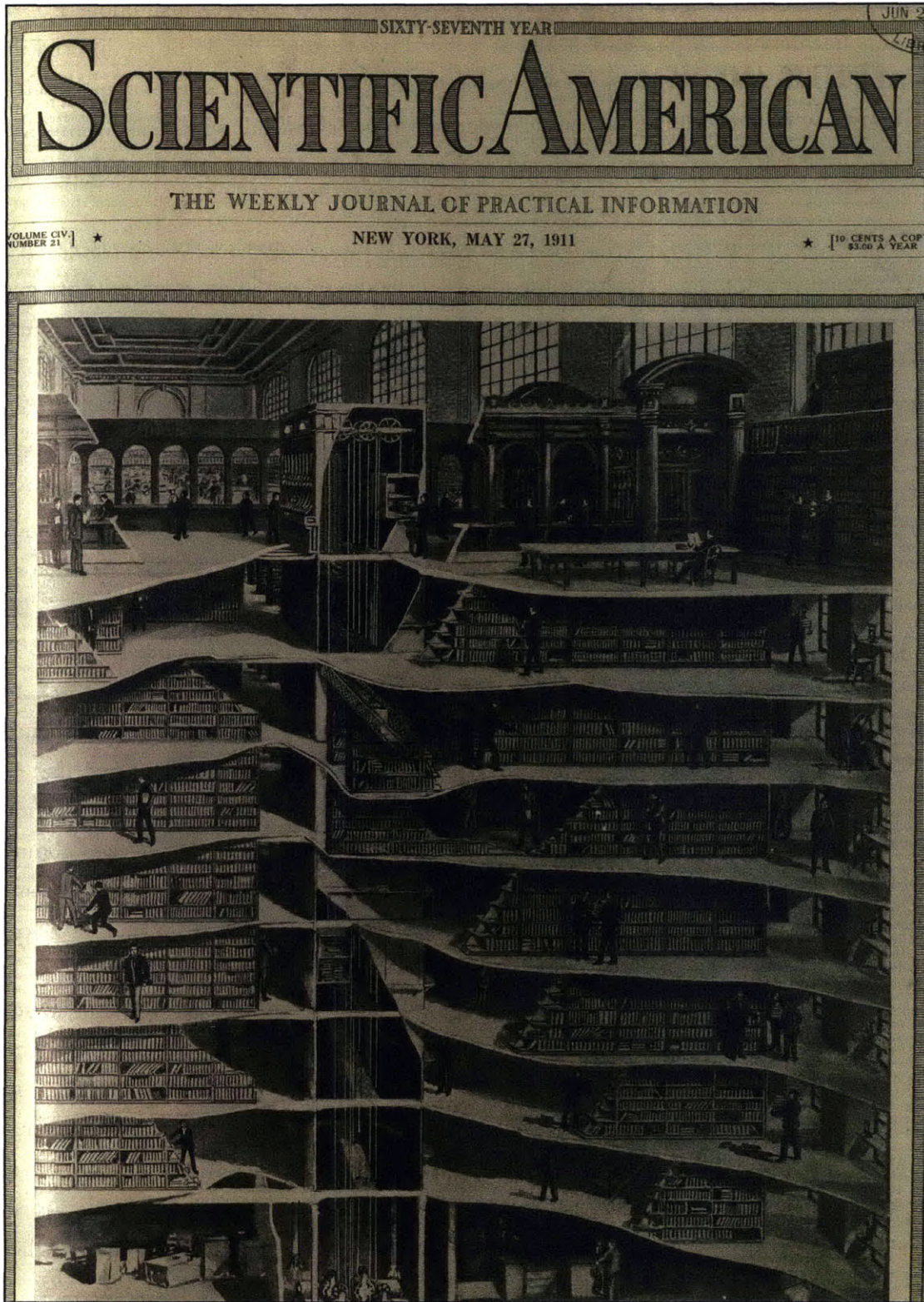
<sup>5</sup> This was highlighted by the financial panic of 1893.

“For it has been rightly judged that, - under political, social and religious institutions like ours, it is of paramount importance that the means of general information should be so diffused that the largest possible number of persons should be induced to read and understand questions going down to the very foundations of our social order which are constantly presenting themselves and which we, as a people, are constantly required to decide, and do decide, either ignorantly or wisely.”

In 1867, as the annexation of new neighborhoods into Boston was taking place, the Public Library Examining Committee presented the idea of extending the usefulness of the library via the development of branches and delivery stations throughout the City. This idea came from Great Britain’s public library system, which included such satellites. (Whitehill, 1956, p. 88) The concept of a delivery station started in Dorchester (Boston annexed the neighborhood in 1870), where a storekeeper offered to host a library attendant a few times a week during the late afternoon. The librarian would then issue library cards and take orders for books. S/he would return with the books to loan at a subsequent visit. (Whitehill, 1956, p. 88) The Committee collected data about how many residents from each neighborhood visited the main branch, and chose to place smaller branches and delivery stations in areas that had the least number of users, such as East Boston.

Furthermore, in *The American Public Library System*, Arthur Bostwick discusses mobile libraries that were offered in the urban setting during the turn of the century. A librarian would go into the neighborhoods with specific reading material about good citizenship and find a child to whom s/he could confidently lend them. The assumption was that the child would not only read the books, but also share them with family and friends in the ethnic, lower-class community. In a week or so, the librarian would return to the tenements to retrieve the books, discuss them with the children, and offer another collection for them to borrow. (Battles, 2003, p. 102)

Even though there is a fair amount of documentation about the library expanding its services through such experiments, the choice of Copley Square in 1896 as the location for the main branch of the Boston Public Library did not help advance the goals of the institution’s mission, as expressed by an anonymous letter to the editor of *The Boston Daily Globe* (1896). “Will someone give a good reason for removing the Public Library from its present location to the Back Bay? Those who have a voice in deciding this matter should remember that the library is for *all* the citizens of Boston, and not just for a chosen few who live in the aristocratic Back Bay quarter, and who wish to enhance the value of their real estate by beautifying the neighborhood at the expense of the masses.” (*The Boston Globe*, 1896) Given its elite surroundings, but expressed commitment to serve the city’s population as a whole, the main branch’s location sent an ambiguous message about the role of the library in urban society. (Fichter, 2002, p. 30-50) While the original Trustees were certainly motivated by the social goals of public



Source: *Scientific America Cover*

A Cross-Section of the New York Public Library, 1911

The administration fills the shelves with book as visitors read what is put in front of them.

education and advancement for immigrants, their choice for the main library location and reasons for providing opportunities to needy populations show that the civic institution may have been more about maintaining traditional power structures and creating a faster assimilation mechanism for immigrants.

According to Stephanie Fan of the Chinese Historical Society of New England, despite the elitist, unwelcoming location of the Copley Square main branch, the BPL did open reading rooms and other resource centers in immigrant neighborhoods all over Boston including Chinatown, or what was known in the later 1800s and early 1900s as South Cove. This occurred during the second half of the 19th century so that the library and its services could reach more people, especially the influx of immigrants who needed to be acculturated. (Fan, 2006) Fichter describes the situation clearly: “As illustrated by the tensions built into the identity of the library, Boston society of the second half of the nineteenth century was a society of contradictions, in which the wealthy and established classes were compelled by their moral beliefs to promote the perceived needs of the general public, an increasingly diverse and alien population which the wealthy both feared and disliked.” (Fichter, 2002, p. 40)

#### **MAINTAINING A MISSION; FINDING NEW PURPOSES**

The beginning of World War I in Europe intensified Americanization activities in public libraries in response to reports that twenty-five percent of the entire male population old enough to vote had been born abroad and that less than half of these foreigners had become citizens. Military personnel responsible for training foreign-born citizens for participation in the armed forces realized that many immigrant residents could neither speak English well enough to understand instructions nor follow orders. (Jones, 1999, p. 17) Thus, the American Library Association established the Committee on Work with Foreign Born (CWFB) to address the needs of immigrants for library services to help “Americanize” newcomers. (Jones, 1999, p. 17)

By 1917, philanthropist Andrew Carnegie had invested approximately \$41,000,000 for the erection of 1,679 public library buildings throughout the United States. Carnegie was a conservative and in his famous writings *Gospel of Wealth*, he stated that the main consideration of where to build a new library and provide access should be to help those who will help themselves and to provide part of the means by which “those who desire to improve may do so.” The idea was to give the “best and most aspiring poor the opportunity to improve; the not so good and less aspiring be damned!” (Harris, 1977) Martin writes in *A History of the Public Library in the United States in the Twentieth Century*, “A self-made millionaire, Andrew Carnegie saw in the public library an agency that would enable others to follow in his footsteps.” (Martin, 1998, p. 19)



Source: Jones, 1999, p. 1  
A Storytime Event at an Immigrant Branch of the Boston Public Library, 1915



Source: Jones, 1999, p. 68  
An Event at The New York Public Library during WW1, 1918

Librarians and other library leaders assumed that the most sensible way to entice the average classes into the library was to fill the shelves with popular, non-intellectual material, especially light fiction stories. The inclusion of light fiction in the library's collection started a debate during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. On one hand, some librarians argued that there was no justification for providing useless, non-enriching fiction at the public library. Most librarians, however, maintained that fiction was "to be the 'carrot' with which the librarian could catch his 'hare.' It was what you did with the 'hare' after you caught him that counted most." (Harris, 1977)

During the proliferation of his libraries, Carnegie insisted on collecting the statistical records of users and materials borrowed at these institutions seeking evidence of a general "elevation of the masses." (Harris, 1977) Librarians in turn were forced to analyze carefully, for the first time, the nature of their audience, and to assess their successes and failures in reaching the common man. According to scholar Michael Harris (1977), "This self-examination precipitated a serious professional crisis – a loss of confidence – as more and more public librarians began to compile the dismal facts about the extent and nature of public library use." It was found that few users were actually low-income or made efficient use of their local public library branches. Librarians were frustrated by data demonstrating that the "uplift theory" was proving itself useless and that people apparently did not progress from the reading of light fiction to more scholarly books. Studies of library circulation figures showed that from seventy to eighty percent of public library circulation in the 1920s and 1930s was made up of light fiction.

Librarians were discouraged by their inability to increase library use significantly, and on their seeming failure to "elevate" education or class levels of those who did use the library. American public librarians began to forget and abandon their mission of acculturating the masses, producing informed citizens, and maintaining order in a democratic society as originally defined by the founders. Thus, librarians began to define the functions of their establishments as providing recreational reading or informational service about how to find certain items. This change can be interpreted negatively or positively. For instance, according to Harris, "The American public library had become a bureaucracy; a social institution without a purpose except perhaps to preserve itself." However, Lowell writes: "The focus shifted from collections to readers, from preservation to use. Inventive and dedicated librarians came forward to build a structure of service. This aroused an increase in public esteem and an increase in financial support, which in turn would carry the public library through the coming depression. This shift of focus from book to reader brought the agency into the lives of people; from being a collection at a distance, catering to bookish individuals, it became a source of stimulation and guidance for a wider segment." (Martin, 1998, p. 48) In fact, during the 1920s, libraries started a young adult and children's service, as well as began working with schools.

The Great Depression cut library budgets, curtailed book purchases, and decreased library staff salaries and hours. Interestingly enough, the public library was able to endure because demand for its materials increased. People who had lost their jobs turned to the library for alternative options and to develop new skills required in a changing economy. Libraries provided citizens with information to cope with the circumstances, whether to learn about more economical meals or home vegetable gardens or automobile repairs. Libraries reported an increase in circulation of non-fiction books, although the statistics of actual usage did not increase, but remained about the same from before the Depression. “The public library added to the basic balance and stability of the American people that carried the country through hard times.” (Martin, 1998, p. 50)

Then, World War II and the events of the 1940s presented another major turning point for the library. The library became the guardian of “people’s right to know.” (Harris, 1977) Hitler’s propaganda machine was proving overwhelmingly successful in Germany, and Mussolini was burning books and suppressing libraries all over Italy. In the light of these developments across the Atlantic Ocean, the free access to information on social and political matters became of utmost importance in American democratic society. The library now portrayed itself as an institution, which could play a vital role in promoting and preserving democracy in America by assisting the successful working of self-government. This was to be done by providing all with free and convenient access to the nation’s cultural heritage as well as domestic and international current events. In accepting this new mission for the public library, the institution tried to facilitate democratic process by making the whole spectrum of human knowledge readily available to all who might seek it out. No one could be excluded from a library’s resources and the user had the right to interpret information for him or her self, without any biases. This mission seemed viable, and the principle task for librarians was to obtain and organize information on all sides of social, political, and economic issues. (Harris, 1977)

At the end of World War II, the American Library Association requested the Social Science Research Council to study the effectiveness of the public library. The Carnegie Corporation, which has promoted public libraries for many years, dating back to the aforementioned Carnegie building grants funded “The Public Library Inquiry.” The research project was “an appraisal in sociological, cultural and human terms of the extent to which librarians are achieving their objectives” and “an assessment of the public library’s actual and potential contribution to American society.” (Martin, 1998, p. 100-105) Aside from assessing the services provided by the library, book selection, and business operations, the Inquiry also evaluated amount of usage and collected data about types of users. Until the mid-century, no agency had a detailed record of information about public library users (ex. how many there are, what they come for, who they are, and how satisfied they are) at the national, state, or regional level. The one statistic that libraries usually kept was the figures regarding book circulation,

but this does not measure all use, access to users, or satisfaction levels. (Martin, 1998, p. 100-105)

The report discusses the great disparity in size and service of public libraries: 2 percent of the nations' units were serving over 100,000 people and 65 percent of establishments were serving less than 5,000 people, with corresponding differences in financial support. The Public Library Inquiry found that, "the United States has a multitude of libraries, but no library system. On this basis, the Inquiry proposed a concerted move toward larger and combined units, whether by consolidation or by coordinated programs." This was also the main recommendation of the National Plan released two years before the Public Library Inquiry. The Inquiry goes on to discuss the services provided by public libraries. The materials and guidance is termed as "an impressive achievement." With regard to adult education, "the public library has not become a major center or formally organized adult education under its own initiative." The reference function was not given a positive rating, and from a poll that the Inquiry commissioned, it concludes that, "for many people their library had little significance as a source of information." (Martin, 1998, p. 103)

#### **HISTORICAL SKETCH OF IMMIGRANTS AND THE LIBRARY**

Given the lack of reliable data on the micro-scale, it is difficult to make any generalizations about the immigrant experience with libraries in America during the institution's first one hundred year (1852-1950s). As discussed, in the early 1900s, librarians attempted to assimilate the influx of immigrants by luring in the "lower-class common man" to a gateway of resources and opportunities via mobile libraries, branch locations, or advertising. The Americanization of the immigrant remained a patriotic duty as it had during World War I, and it reached its height during the 1920s. Hundreds of cities and more than thirty states had adopted acculturation measures. For example, some of this legislation simply provided for the establishment of night classes in the public schools where immigrants could learn English. Other initiatives were more penalizing, such as banning the use of foreign languages in public places or barring immigrants, who had not been naturalized, from gaining employment. (Jones, 2004, p. 18) In line with this societal attitude, Jones states that, "throughout the 1920s, librarians began to view the Americanization process increasingly as an integral part of the newly identified adult education movement." (Jones, 2004, p. 19) While there are accounts of the public library being immensely helpful to newcomers in the later 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, some research from the era also confirms that the library did not reach as many individuals as it intended to when established. Scholar Sondra Cuban explains that, "Today's immigrants perceive the American public library as a helper and a 'passport to a better life.'" (Cuban, 2007, p. 10) Libraries have assisted immigrants in sharing their stories with a broader audience, becoming citizens of the U.S., and connecting with social service agencies and schools. Additionally, libraries of course provide literary services and material to build knowledge and facilitate acculturation. (Cuban,

2007, p. 10) Immigrants have relied on this secular and free institution for adult community-based education necessary for their cultural adjustment, and even for preservation of their own cultures.

The relationship between immigrants and libraries continues to be paradoxical into the late twentieth century, varying from “Anglo-conformity” to “sympathetic cultural pluralism.” For example, at the Anglo-conformity end, social reformers emphasized “melting pot assimilation” and librarians followed along with their Americanization efforts, which were discussed previously. On the other end of the spectrum is “sympathetic cultural pluralism”, in which leaders of the movement emphasized librarians’ active roles in engaging with new immigrants in a substantive manner to help their process of acculturation. Under this perspective, library services should include foreign collections, comfortable environments that allowed for the varied dress codes and manners of different cultures, community needs assessments, staff who spoke different languages, personalized contacts, and a stimulation to read as well as gather practical information for day-to-day living. (Cuban, 2007, p. 10) Jones writes, “After World War II, the ALA Committee on Work with Foreign-Born began to address the needs of Filipino and Mexican immigrants, as well as European refugees and displaced persons. A fundamental transformation was occurring. The movement to Americanize the immigrant community, which has been subsumed by the adult education movement of the 1920s, was overshadowed by the movement to empower citizens and aliens alike to become full participants in the dynamics of pluralist society.” (Jones, 1999, p. 22)

Yet, this change was taking place slowly. While the Public Library Inquiry from 1950 did not explore the availability of library services to minorities, the American Library Association in collaboration with International Research Associates was making progress during the 1960s. They carried out an important research project. The study found that public libraries in cities across the United States practiced indirect discrimination. “This referred to unequal provision, with fewer outlets provided in the low-income and minority areas of cities, and with fewer books and other resources when they were provided.” (Jones, 1999, p. 108)

### **Civil Rights and the 1960s**

The relationship between libraries and immigrants really took a new form during the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. After the Public Library Inquiry pointed out that libraries failed to serve 75-85 percent of the population in their communities, the institution was encouraged to emphasize service to the few who actually used their services, rather than to seek all members of the community. This was accepted until the urban turnaround of the the 1960s, when the creation of ghettos and white flight to the suburbs eliminated traditional patrons. Librarians were forced to address these new characteristics, as well as immigration in the 1960s, which was now dominated by populations from non-European countries. This trend posed challenging issues for the types of services and advocacy libraries could offer.

Librarians served minority populations called “the disadvantaged” in the context of an “opportunity library.” Librarians viewed their jobs as a social responsibility to empower communities. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Immigration Reform Act of 1965 reinforced the national War on Poverty Campaign and promoted libraries as elevating the “public good” and fostering democratic ideals. (Jones, 1999, p. 168) The availability of grants at the federal and state level prompted the development and implementation of library services to disadvantaged persons. Disadvantaged persons were defined as “those with a need for special library services resulting from poverty, neglect, delinquency, and / or from cultural, linguistic, or other isolation from the community at large.” (Jones, 2004, p. 59)

The Civil Rights Movement marks the clear change in the purpose of the public library from “Anglo-conformity” to “sympathetic cultural pluralism,” from acculturation to accommodation. Plummer Jones’s framework outlines post-1965 immigrant library services and their development from the 1970s to the present reveals the paradox that has historically characterized the relationship between libraries and immigrant groups. (Jones, 2004, Introduction) His framework usefully divides the contemporary period into concepts that highlight trends in library services for immigrant communities as it relates to the broader social, political, and economic contexts.

### **Jones’s Framework**

#### *1970s: Racial and Ethnic Awareness*

During this decade, many Southeast Asian refugees came to the West Coast; and the East Coast saw an increase in Caribbean populations, such as Jamaicans and Dominicans. Libraries responded as neighborhood information centers, providing resource referral services for immigrants. Perhaps the biggest development was the Queens Borough Public Library’s New Americans Program in 1977, with its focus being to “expand library services to immigrants whose primary language is not English and to attract newcomers to the library and assist them in adjusting to their new surroundings through acquisition of appropriate materials and creation of self-training programs, workshops, and services while fostering an appreciation for their unique cultural makeup.” (Cuban, 2007, p. 16) During this decade, libraries acknowledged the rapidly changing diverse population they were set out to serve.

#### *1980s: Multicultural Purpose*

In the 1980s, public libraries began to realize that in order to help immigrants, special projects or programs for growing ethnic communities such as an English class or citizenship workshops were not enough. The library also needed to institutionalize these efforts to address fully the needs and expectations of immigrants through all library policies, programs, and services. Thus, libraries created formalized policies for encompassing ethnic diversity. Various task forces emerged in the American Library Association both to promote multicultural and multilingual services as necessary and to assert the

need to understand ethnic minorities in order to develop more positive attitudes toward services for them.

These efforts had limited effects, however, under the conservative Reagan administration, which placed new restrictions on the number of refugees and immigrants who could enter the United States and reduced federal funding for immigrant public services in general. While more Southeast Asian, Irish, and Soviet immigrants and refugees, as well as Mexican, Filipino, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese groups, entered the country during this period, thousands of Central Americans – many Salvadorians fleeing from civil war – were deported. A movement to reduce undocumented immigration emerged at this time; and the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 instituted new prohibitions on the employment. A government-sponsored White House Conference on Library and Information Services in Washington DC made recommendations for multicultural and multilingual services in 1988. (Jones, 1999, p. 22)

*1990s: Responding to the Growth and Mobility of New Immigrant Communities (Globalization)*

Globalization and the economic boom caused the U.S. population to change and grow more rapidly than at any previous time. Fourteen million immigrants entered the country between 1900 and 2000. Yet, at the same time, a new nativist movement developed, focusing on the issue of illegal immigration (in 1990 and 1995), with measures such as Proposition 187, “save our state” in California. “Fewer immigrants applied for citizenship during this time, mobility between countries increased, and bilingual education was reduced.” (Cuban, 2007, p. 14)

In general, immigrant services declined during the 1990s, and libraries devoted a smaller proportion of library budgets to minorities relative to their growth in population nationally. With the shift in library location policy in 1996, projects and funding were distributed according to a population-based formula, which was managed at the state level. Ultimately, this policy had damaging effects in minority communities with smaller populations, inhibiting permanent services. For example, one study found that although 50 percent of library literacy programs served immigrants, only 9 percent of such programs were doing this through the more broadly based lifelong learning services. (Cuban, 2007, p. 14)

**THE TAKE-AWAY: THE LIBRARY TODAY**

The history of the public library and its changing relationship to immigrants in the United States informs the status, purpose, and meaning of the institution today. By tracing the evolution of the library’s establishment – from its founding until present-day – key themes emerge. I began this chapter by discussing two of these common threads: democracy and capitalism, which lie at the crux of American society. History has shown that these macro agents have played integral roles in forming the library’s mission and implementing its purpose. This

thesis will demonstrate that the same influential factors seen throughout the institution's past are also reflected on a micro-level in the story of one small branch library in Boston's Chinatown.

<b>Time Period</b>	<b>Framework for Interpreting the Public Library's History</b>
1850s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Idea for the Public Library is formulated in Boston</li> <li>- The institution is seen as an agent that can assimilate immigrants, acculturate the masses, create good citizens, and maintain social order and democracy</li> </ul>
1860-1900s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Main BPL Branch is built in Copley Square</li> <li>- Delivery stations and branches gain momentum</li> <li>- Debate ensues about what materials should be in the library and how to lure in common man</li> </ul>
1900-1920s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Beginning of WWI intensified Americanization activities in libraries</li> <li>- Andrew Carnegie funds the construction of 1,679 new public libraries</li> </ul>
1920s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Carnegie funded research finds that library is not luring in or serving the "common man"</li> <li>- Library begins to search for new purpose and focus shifts from maintenance of esteemed collections to identifying interests of patrons</li> </ul>
1930s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Great Depression cut budgets for library, but the institution's popularity rose as people used its resources for survival during difficult economic times</li> </ul>
1940s -1950s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- World War II gives library a new purpose of providing access to all information and supporting a people's "right to know"</li> </ul>
1960s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Right to know" sentiment carried over and libraries have social obligation to help the disadvantaged</li> <li>- This decade marks the clear change in the purpose of the public library from "Anglo-conformity" to "sympathetic cultural pluralism"</li> </ul>
1970s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Libraries become more accommodating to immigrants and realize their services need to change to function in a multicultural society</li> </ul>
1980s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conservative government and little funding makes it difficult to implement programs and services that are needed in minority communities</li> </ul>
1990s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Populations in American cities became even more diverse, but library services did not address this adequately on national-level</li> </ul>
<b>Present-Day</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public libraries are suffering from financial crises and the role of the branch library is in the process of being re-invented</li> </ul>



## Chapter Two

### The Chinatown Public Library

**“The Chinatown community is one of the few Boston neighborhood without a branch library of its own. With a large immigrant, low-income population, and a lower average level of education than that of the Boston population as a whole, as a neighborhood struggling to maintain its residential population and its identity in the face of multiples waves of gentrification, along with the scarcity of public gathering space and the merchants straining to adjust to a decrease in local business,**

**Chinatown is in critical need of this important public facility.”**

**- Chinatown Library Program and Siting Study, 2008**

## THE CHINATOWN PUBLIC LIBRARY

At my first Friends of the Chinatown Library public meeting, an elderly resident of the neighborhood said to me with passion, “The city needs to be continually reminded that Chinatown has been waiting for over 50 years for the return of their library!” To me, this statement indicated that there was once a Chinatown Branch of the Boston Public Library in the neighborhood, that it was removed unfairly, and when it was taken away, the city left the community and library advocacy groups with false promises of its return. In fact, through this one statement, I constructed an entire story in my head of what had happened to the missing library branch. As I have read through numerous newspaper articles, memos, meeting minutes, and other archival sources, I have uncovered the complexities of the library’s narrative, and discovered that some of these initial assumptions were true, but also that some were incorrect.

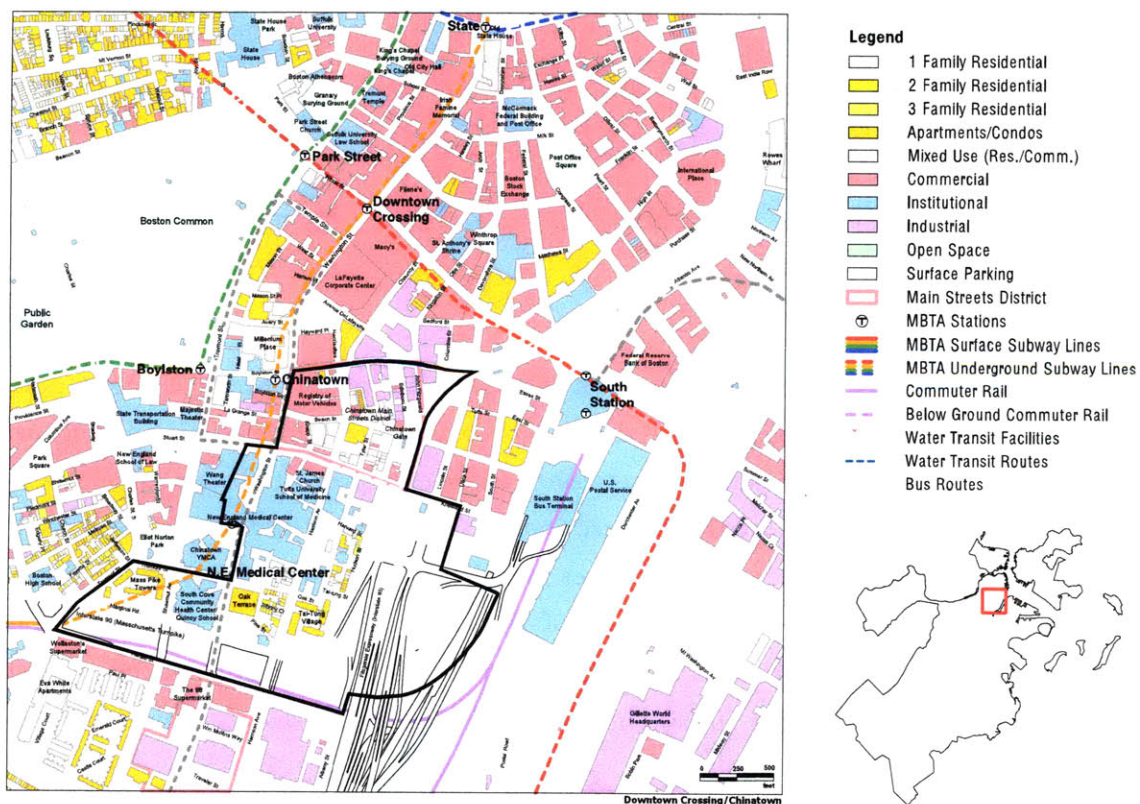
The hypothetical story that the resident’s statement unleashed in my head was in some sense an intended effect. The best method for the group to gain supporters was to start by having history on their side. This concept of a struggling community persecuted in the past, and therefore deserving of their requests in the future, is a very convincing and moving story to the public. As I continued my research, I learned that in 2005, the Friends of the Chinatown Library group met with at-large City Councilor Felix Arroyo to convince him that Chinatown needed a library. He said, “This is the re-building of the library, more than anything else.” (Emphasis Added) He advised the group to avoid pitching the project to city officials as a plan for a new library. “You have been without a library that had existed there... I’m telling you, that’s what I would say.” (Smith, 2006, March 17) The statement that the determined woman shared with me at that public meeting illustrates this exact strategy.

The purpose of this section is to present an unadulterated account of the Chinatown Library’s past in order to understand why the neighborhood still does not have its own branch. Who decided if and when a library was needed in the community, and how have these power dynamics changed over time? This chapter will show that at first, the addition or removal of the library in Chinatown was largely an extension of city policy, and eventually the presence of a library in the neighborhood became an extension of grassroots community movements. Through the lens of the Chinatown library, we see the shift from the City wanting to develop the community to the community wanting to develop itself. This transformation takes shape incrementally over time, and also mirrors the changing attitudes towards community development in the United States. The chapter begins by describing Boston’s Chinatown. Then, I tell the story of the Chinatown Library through five main time-periods:

- 1850-1938: The Library as an Assimilation Processing Center
- 1939-1950s: The Library Revisited as an Extension of City Policy
- 1960-1980s: The Library Lost: Reversing the Decision-Making Model in Chinatown
- 1990-2008: The Library Reborn as an Extension of Community Movements
- 2009-2010: The Storefront Library and Closings

### THE SETTING: AN OVERVIEW OF BOSTON'S CHINATOWN

Boston's Chinatown is the third largest Chinese neighborhood in the United States and one of the oldest. It is located on a landfill, as is much of Boston, created in the early 1800s to house middle-class families. In the 1840s, however, these families began moving out of the area and were replaced by Chinese, Irish, Italian, Jewish, and Syrian immigrants who resided mostly in multi-unit tenements. Two main developments in U.S. history led to Chinese immigrants settling in Boston. The first was the anti-Chinese sentiment that began to emerge in California during the 1860s, and the second is the completion of the transcontinental railroad, the product of Chinese labor itself, in the 1870s. This meant that Chinese people had a way to migrate to eastern cities and find employment in the booming industrial economy. Boston's Chinese arrived at South Station and settled nearby in an area known as South Cove. The Chinese railroad workers set up tents on Ping On Alley. (*Chinatown Library Program and Siting Study*, 2008, p. 20-28)

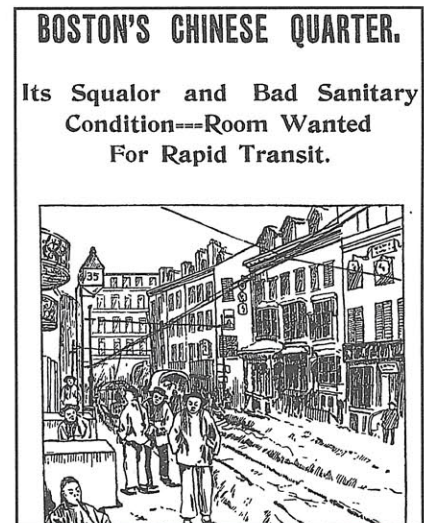


Source: Boston Redevelopment Authority

Boston's first Chinatown was located in the area bounded by Essex, Harrison, and Oxford Streets. Despite expansions, these boundaries are still considered the heart of Chinatown today. The ethnic enclave quickly expanded to include a six-block area around the original settlement. In 1882, the federal government halted further expansion when it passed the first of four "Chinese Exclusion Laws." These laws banned Chinese immigration and required that all Chinese carry proof of residency, and failure of any Chinese to show residential proof to authorities resulted in deportation. Then, in 1941, the start of U.S. involvement in World War II created a demand for more laborers, leading the federal government to allow Asian immigrants to enter the country once again. Expansion of Boston's Chinatown gained momentum in the 1960s, and the Immigration Reform of 1965 permitted even more immigrants to enter the United States from Asia, and reunite with family members in Boston.



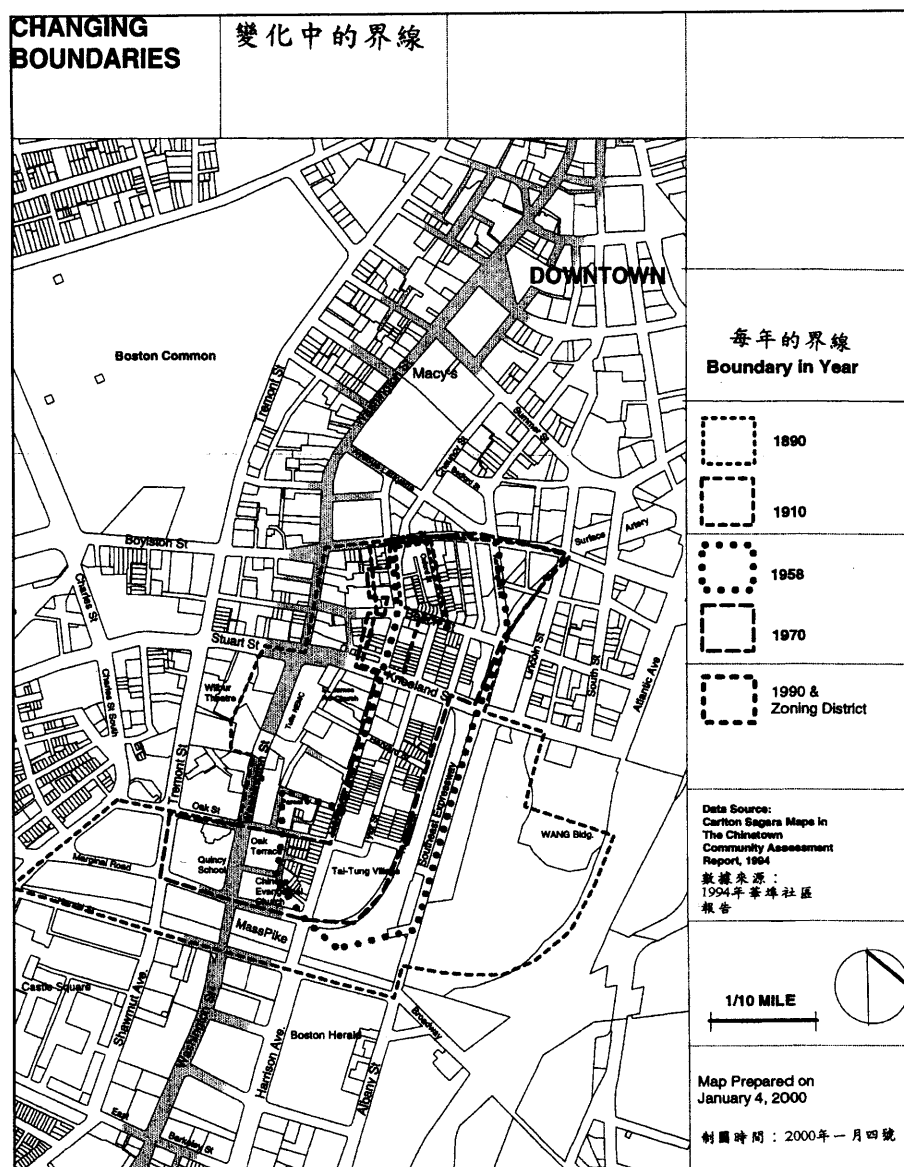
Source: To, Wing Kai and CHSNE  
Harrison Avenue in Chinatown, 1900



Source: *The Boston Globe*

Throughout its history, Boston's Chinatown has undergone radical physical changes. Nearly a third of the neighborhood's housing stock was destroyed between 1950-1980 because building owners found it less expensive to demolish buildings rather than to pay taxes on property that was of little financial value. After 1980s, real estate in the area appreciated and thus became unaffordable for many residents. Also, the community struggled with land-use issues including the construction of the highway and urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s, the expansion of Tufts Medical Center in the 1990s, as well as the Big Dig construction project, and the recent addition of expensive condominium buildings. (*Chinatown Library Program and Siting Study*, 2008, p. 20-28) These events also inform the story of Chinatown's library.

Today, Chinatown serves as a cultural and social hub in the Boston metropolitan area for people of both Asian and non-Asian ancestry. It is also a nexus of social service agencies, businesses, restaurants, bakeries, organizations, and political activism for Chinese throughout Eastern Massachusetts. Suzanne Lee, former principal of the Josiah Quincy School in Chinatown and the founding member of the Chinese Progressive Association stated, “Chinatown is a concept, not a geography. It is an anchor neighborhood and place for people with a shared background and experience. You can’t just ask who lives here what they want because a lot more people would like to live here, but they can’t because of the lack of affordable housing.” Chinatown is a place for newcomers to learn and adjust. Unlike other ethnic neighborhoods of Boston such as the North End, Chinatown is a neighborhood with continued immigration. (Kim, 2010, February 24)



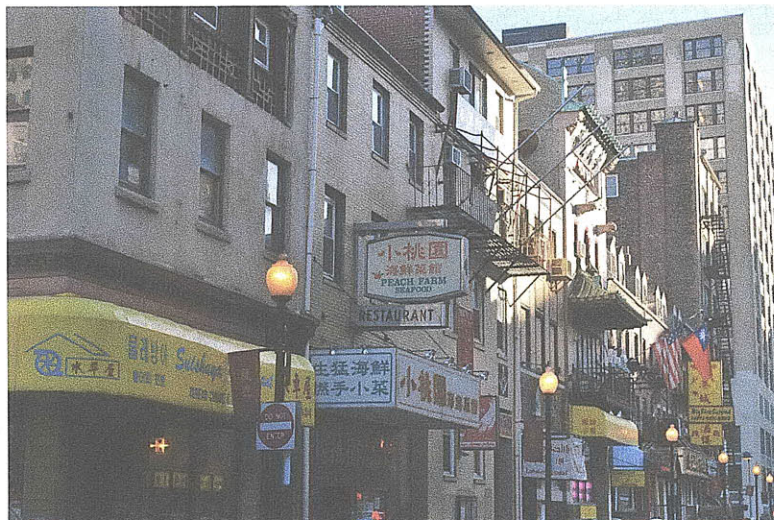
Source: Chinatown Gateway Coalition  
 There is still confusion about how the exact boundaries of Chinatown have changed.

## THE CHINATOWN LIBRARY'S STORY<sup>6</sup>

The story of the Chinatown Library is in some ways a microcosm for the neighborhood's own story. Using the historical framework of the public library's mission presented in chapter one, this section will follow Chinatown's branch library and advocacy movement from its inception until present-day. For each period, I describe the status of the neighborhood, reflect upon the role of libraries at that time, tell the history of the branch, and illustrate the neighborhood's relationship to community development by showing how the voices of decision-makers in Chinatown continue to change. This story will show how the Chinatown community found and established itself in the way the field of planning evolved.



Source: To, Wing Kai and CHSNE  
Tyler Street in Chinatown, 1925



Source: Aditi Mehta  
Tyler Street in Chinatown, 2009

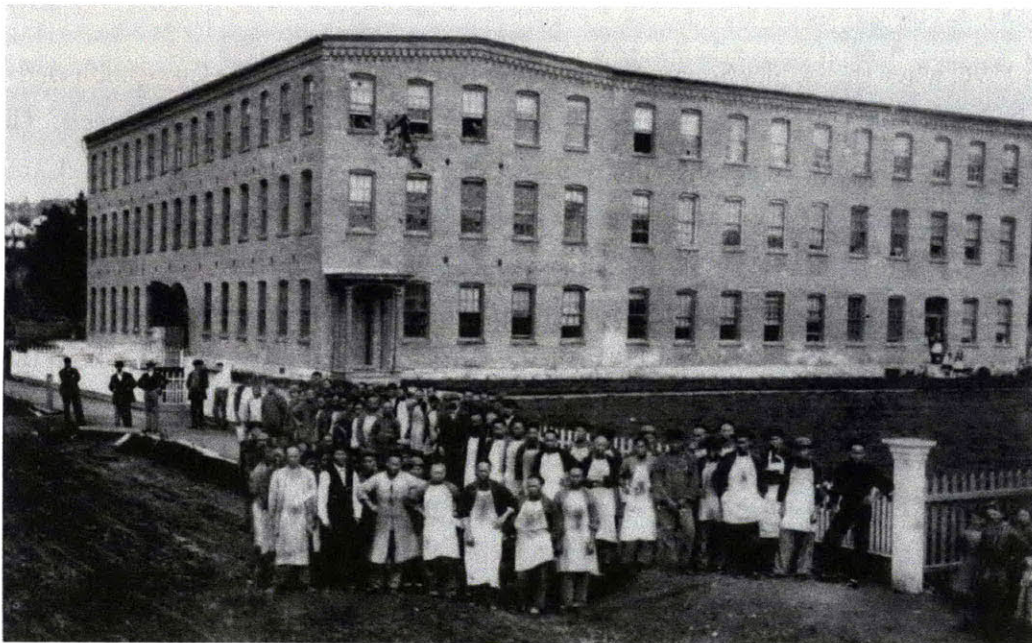
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<sup>6</sup> The library that existed in Chinatown was not known as the Chinatown Library, but was named the Tyler Street Branch. In this thesis, I use the term Chinatown Library to refer to a concept.

## **The Library as an Assimilation Processing Center**

*Time Period: 1850 – 1938*

One of the first recorded arrivals of Chinese immigrants in Massachusetts is from 1870, when a train from California arrived in North Adams with 75 young men hired to replace striking workers in Sampson's shoe factory. The Chinese proved to be both cheaper and more efficient than the union workers they replaced. Just ten days after the Chinese arrived in North Adams, workers on strike against other shoe factories voted to return to their jobs with a ten percent cut in pay. Manufacturers used the threat of Chinese laborers both to prevent strikes and to end them. Thus, many citizens hated Chinese immigrants, blaming them for stealing jobs. Sampson's new labor practices pushed Chinese immigration on to the national agenda. (Wing-kai To, 2008, p. 9) In 1876, both major political parties included Chinese immigration exclusion in their campaign platforms, and Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1883. For 60 years, this legislation barred all Chinese from entering the United States, except for wives and children of the laborers who already settled here. Later, the Immigration Act of 1924 flatly denied citizenship to "alien Orientals." (Neighborhood Series, 1976)



Source: To, Wing Kai and the Chinese Historical Society of New England  
Chinese Workers Outside of Sampson Shoe Factory, North Adams, 1870

A census figure from 1890 approximated that 250 Chinese residents were in Boston, and at least 200 lived in Chinatown. Chinatown's population increased slowly because of growing anti-foreign sentiment and legal ramifications. Before World War I, there were very few Chinese families living in Chinatown and rarely any Chinese women. The community was relatively small and

predominantly male. Many of these men worked in the laundry business and in factories. Family life was practically non-existent, and since there were few children to send to schools where students would learn English, acculturation into American society was minimal. Racial discrimination and the language barriers encouraged the Chinese immigrants to cluster together, restricted housing and employment opportunities, and limited economic mobility. “They sought inconspicuousness and chose occupations that minimized economic competitions with other groups, and they clung to the values of rural China, which further isolated the community.” (Neighborhood Series, 1976)

By the 1920s, those who were able to bring their wives established families. The few Chinese families that lived in Chinatown, including those with surnames such as Moy, Yee, Chin, Wong, and Lee formed their own family associations around this time. Because many earlier settlers were single men or had left their wives behind in China, these associations provided an extended kinship structure for the “bachelor society” similar to that of a fraternity. (Wing-kai To, 2008, p. 8) Between World War I and World War II when the U.S. government repealed immigration restrictions, Chinatown began to change from a “bachelor society”, and the number of families and children began to grow. (Lee, T. 2010, March 17)

In 1896, when the Copley Square Public Library location opened, the City established a delivery station at the corner of Harrison Avenue and Broadway (now known as Marginal Street). The motive behind a delivery station, especially in immigrant neighborhoods, was to help educate and Americanize foreigners by providing them convenient access to reading materials. The Trustees, in their 1874 report, stated that “a book never accomplishes the object of its production unless in the hands of someone,” (Whitehill, 1956, p. 88) and it was this sentiment within the BPL administration that led to the proliferation of delivery stations throughout Boston. Overall, very little information is available about the delivery station. From the photograph (p.34), it seems that very few Chinese patrons visited the facility and that it was more popular among the European immigrants.<sup>7</sup> This was probably because of the small number of Chinese men in the area, as well as the presence of language barriers and discrimination that prevented them from accessing the delivery station’s services. In 1915, the delivery station moved to a municipal building on Tyler Street, and it became an actual branch library.

The Tyler Street Branch Library and the former delivery station could not necessarily be referred to as just Chinatown’s facility because of the diverse group of immigrants that lived in the surrounding area. Fanny Goldstein was the Tyler Street branch librarian, and in an annual BPL report from 1922, she shared how she recruited patrons for the library from the Quincy Evening School. She saw it as her mission to help these immigrants assimilate into society. The school offered adult foreigners, which included Syrians, Greeks, Jews, Italians, French, and Chinese, a variety of English

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<sup>7</sup> It is hard to generalize from one photograph. I am simply presenting my observations.



Source: Boston Public Library  
Outside Tyler Street Delivery Station, 1896-1915



Source: Boston Public Library  
Inside Tyler Street Delivery Station, 1896-1915

language courses. The Tyler Street Branch Library provided valuable services and information such as citizenship coaching, reading material in several languages, and recreational community events. Apparently, the library workers were bilingual.<sup>8</sup> Goldstein expressed that “the staff was proud of the diversity of its patrons and having the library serve as the most democratic meeting place in the district.” (Fan, 2006, p. 14-16) As described in chapter one, public libraries across America were working to identify the needs and interests of their patrons, rather than simply focusing on maintaining esteemed collections.

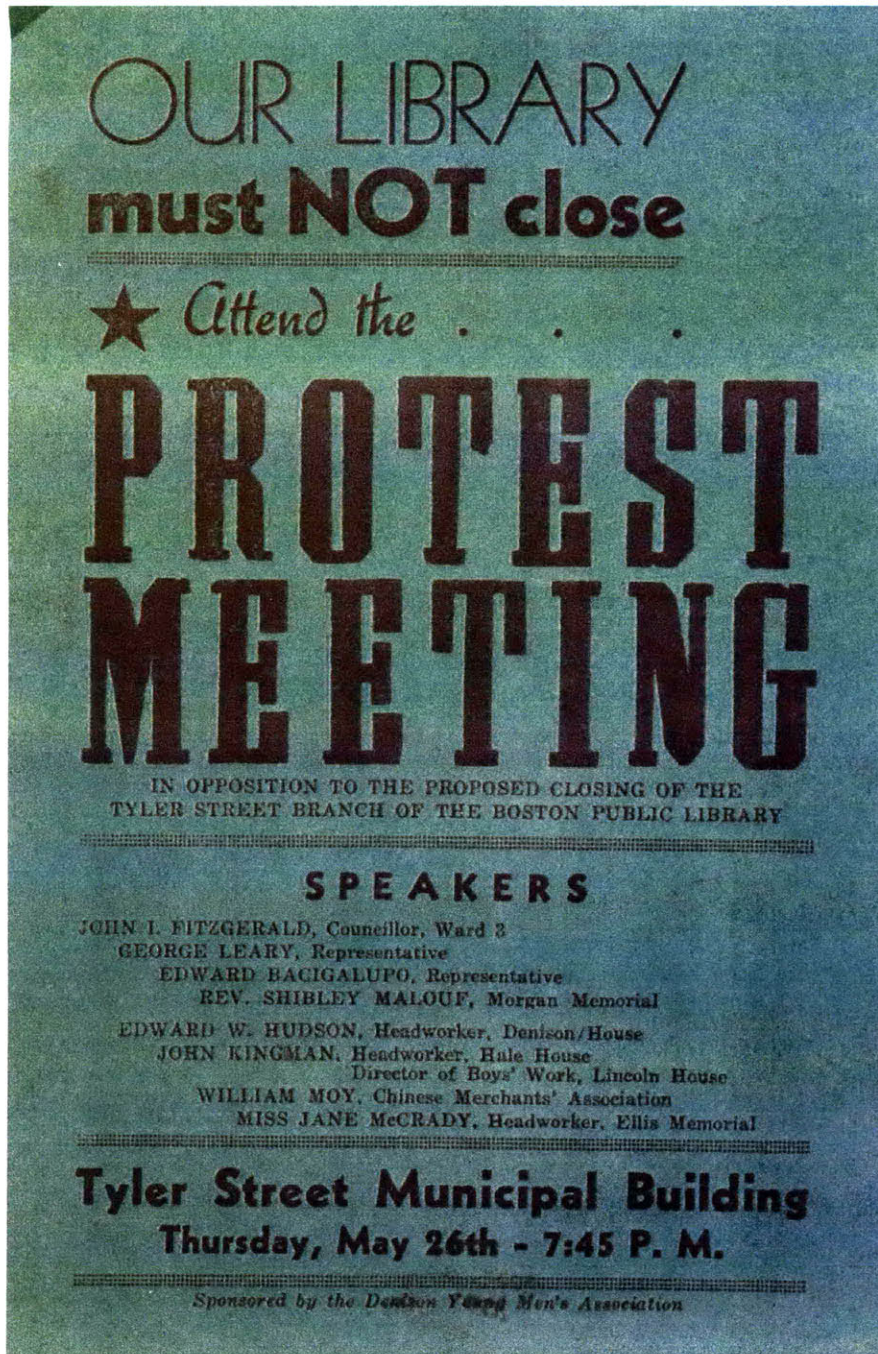


Source: Boston Public Library  
Storytime at Tyler Street Branch Library, 1916-1930s

Unfortunately, the BPL administration shut down the Tyler Street branch in 1938 for budgeting reasons. Historian Walter Muir Whitehill explains, “The 1929 crash brought simultaneously the need for stringent economy in municipal government and a vastly increased use of the library by victims of the depression who had no other means of passing their days.” (Whitehill, 1954, p. 222) The City felt the backwash of the Great Depression for several years in the municipal budget, and public institutions such as libraries were taking the hardest hits during and after the Depression. In Boston, it was of utmost importance to maintain the prestige of the Copley collections during these hard times. (Whitehill, 1954, p. 222) When the BPL trustees announced that the Tyler Street Branch would be no more, a protest was organized by city councilor John Fitzgerald, Shibley Malouf of Morgan Memorial, John Kingman of Hale and Lincoln House, Edward Hudson of Dennison Settlement House on Tyler Street, and William Moy of the Chinese Merchants’ Association. It is evident from the diversity of the protest organizers that a varied group of residents used the library. Additionally, more than 200 children from the area carried signs that read “No Library – No School” and “Closed Library – Closed Minds.” (Fan, 2006, p. 16-18)

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<sup>8</sup> I could not determine whether or not the librarians spoke Chinese.



Source: Boston Public Library  
Protest Flier, 1938

Library Trustee meeting minutes from June 1938 to October 1938 shed light on reasons for and reactions against the Tyler Street Branch closing. Branch closings are initiated for one of two reasons: lack of funding to provide services and maintain the building or lack of usage by patrons. On June 10, 1938, the trustees held a special meeting to discuss consolidating branches in Boston. The Mt. Bowdoin

Branch, the South Boston Branch Library, as well as the Tyler Street Branch Library were all protesting their closings, and via letters and public testimonies at trustee hearings, committees on behalf of each branch were presenting reasons to remain open. According to the June 10, 1938 meeting minutes:

Following discussion of the needs of these several communities as revealed in the hearings, it was agreed to request Father Lord and Mr. Sedgwick [library trustees] to confer with His Honor the Mayor relative to the desirability of meeting the community needs of the Mt. Bowdoin and the South Boston districts by keeping the Mt. Bowdoin Branch Library and the South Boston Branch Library open, if possible. It was agreed also that there should be presented to the Mayor the desirability of setting up in the Tyler Street Municipal Building, in the quarters now occupied by the Tyler Street Branch Library, a school center for extension work to the schools in those districts in which branch libraries are about to be closed, namely the Tyler Street district and the Roxbury Crossing district. It was therefore

VOTED UNANIMOUSLY: that the Mt. Bowdoin and the South Boston Branch Library be kept open, subject to the approval of His Honor the Mayor.

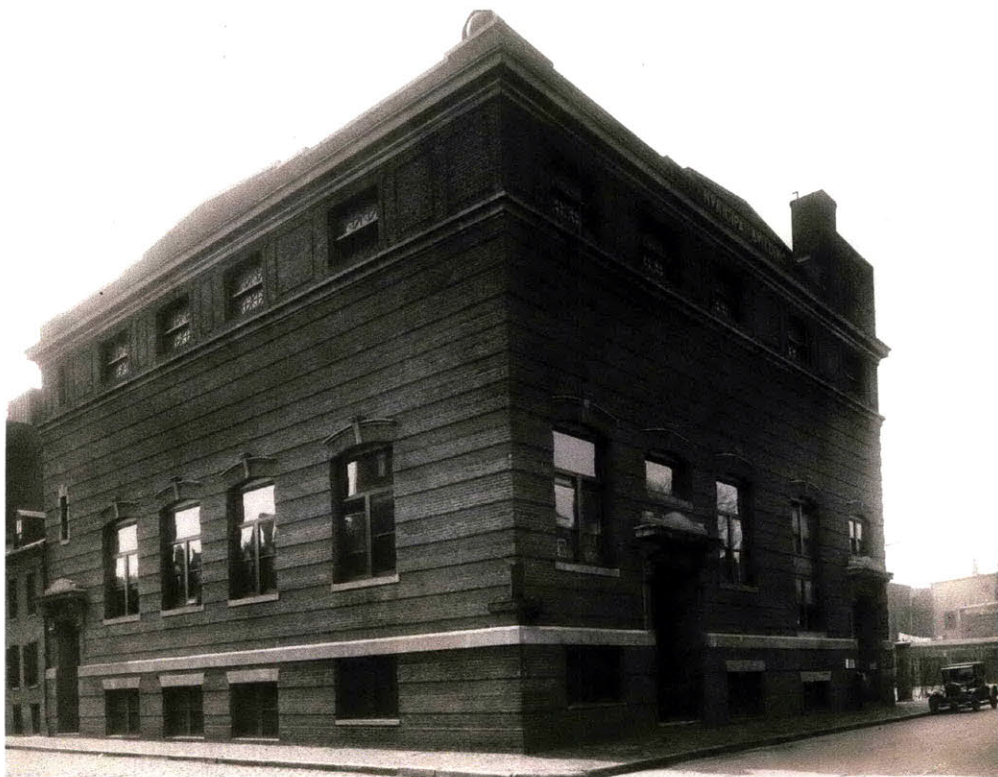


Source: Boston Public Library  
Inside Tyler Street Branch Library, 1916-1930s

After the Trustees agreed to keep the Mt. Bowdoin and South Boston Branch Library open, they brainstormed how to effectively use the Tyler Street municipal building. In a letter dated June 15, 1938 from BPL Trustee Reverend Robert H. Lord to the BPL Comptroller, it was stated that:

On June 14th, library trustees conferred with the Mayor on the matters above. At the close of a full and friendly discussion, His Honor stated that he did not want to embarrass the Trustees in any way and was quite willing that they should act as their knowledge and judgment of the circumstances led them to think best. The only limitation set was that the budget figures for the year should not be exceeded.

On this basis, the Library should now proceed, first, to rescind arrangement to close the Mr. Bowdoin and South Boston Branch Libraries, and secondly, to complete arrangements for closing the Roxbury Crossing and Tyler Street Branch libraries as of July 1, and thirdly, to prepare for the setting up of the Tyler Street school center.



Source: Boston Public Library  
Tyler Street Municipal Building, 1930s

The Tyler Street school center was supposed to serve as a book coordination office among schools in the area that did not have access to libraries. The building would store a certain number

of books, and schools could then request to borrow them for an extended period of time. Mostly immigrant children attended the few schools in the Tyler Street and Roxbury Crossing area, and it was important to the City to “Americanize” these young people. After asking elders in Chinatown whether or not this center existed, most stated they did not recall it, but that they may have forgotten.

An article from the *Christian Science Monitor* dated May 19, 1938 explains that the BPL chose to close four other branches in South Boston, Dorchester, Roxbury Crossing, and Chinatown-South End. In 1938, South Boston was comprised of Polish, Lithuanian, and Irish immigrants, Dorchester was populated with mostly Irish immigrants, Roxbury Crossing had a large Jewish and African-American population, and the Chinatown-South End area was home to mostly Chinese and Syrian immigrants. (Lee, T. 2010, March 17) The article reads: “Arrangements would be made to supply books once a week to school children desiring them in the districts affected, by sending a library employee to the local school. The trustees explained that they were forced to proceed in this way because of the absolute need of cutting down expenses to keep within their budget.” (*Christian Science Monitor*, 1938) The last mention of the Tyler Street Branch Library from trustee meeting minutes occurred in October 1938:

The Director presented a communication forwarded by the Mayor’s Office inclosing a petition of residents of the Tyler Street section of the City requesting the re-opening of the Tyler Street Branch Library. The Director was requested to reply to His Honor that the reasons of economy, which forced the closing of the Tyler Street Branch Library still hold.”

When the delivery station first opened in 1896, it was the city officials and public library administration (these individuals certainly overlapped) that decided who in Boston was in need of library services. The priority of these wealthy, upper class white men was to acculturate newcomers into American society, but the Chinese comprised a very small fraction of the foreigners. Narratives from the Tyler Street Branch show that by the 1920s, the public library mission shifted a bit, and while librarians still saw it as their role to assimilate immigrants, they were also interested into accommodating them with different language materials and bilingual library staff. The closing of the Tyler Street Branch in 1938 was also a result of the decision-making of those who were in the highest seats of power. Even though city councilors and small community groups helped to organize protests against the closing, the trustees’ decisions were based on their own priorities. When there was ample funding, providing services to immigrant neighborhoods was a priority, but once budgets were cut, services to educated patrons proved to be more important.



Source: Boston Public Library

A Mobile Book Van in Chinatown on Harrison Avenue, 1900s

Notice the sign and shelved books at the back of the car. The sign reads: "Why Read Good Books? Learn More" and is accompanied by a series of flags representing all the immigrants that lived in the neighborhood.

## **The Library Revisited as an Extension of City Policy**

*Time Period: 1939 – 1950s*

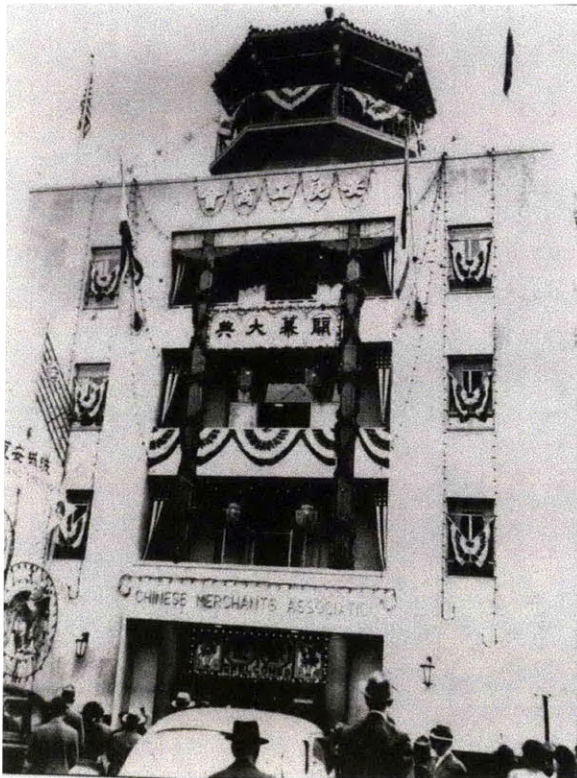
The Second World War was a major turning point in the evolution of the Chinese community in America. The federal government repealed the exclusionary laws in 1943 and other less restrictive legislation followed because the country was in need of more workers to prepare for the war and military personnel. In the next few years, a large number of Chinese immigrant men enlisted or were drafted into the armed forces. Congress granted legal residence status to these men and exempted their wives and children in China from immigration quotas after the war. The War Brides Act enabled more Chinese women to come to Boston and brought about a 1,000 percent increase in Chinatown's female population during the late 1940s. (Chu, 1987)

By the end of World War II, there was a substantial Chinatown community in Boston, and a couple hundred families that were committed to staying in the area. (Lee, T. 2010, March 17) The remaining single men who had regarded their stay as temporary realized that returning to China was no longer an option. Beverly Wing, a member of the Chinatown Coalition and former residents says, "Many people intended to go back to China and didn't feel attached to the neighborhood [before the 1940s]." It was not until after WWII when the communists took over China, and restricted travel, that these Chinese men in the U.S. realized they were going to have to stay in this country. (Neighborhood Series, 1976) Wing-kai To writes, "Chinese in Boston were politically active in the late 1930s and early 1940s primarily in response to the turmoil in China. They often expressed their nationalism toward China through street parades and demonstrations." (To, 2008, p. 8) Furthermore, suburbanization was occurring, and Syrian and other European neighbors were moving to areas further out such as Roslindale.

The mid-1950s marked another major turning point for Boston's Chinese. Following WWII, and continuing into the early 1970s, "Chinese American community life in Boston was characterized by the threatening impact of urban redevelopment and expanding opportunities for interaction outside of Chinatown." (To, 2008, p. 8) Urban renewal, or "public efforts to revitalize aging and decaying inner cities (City Reader, 1996)," began in the 1950s. The process involved massive demolition, slum clearance, and building rehabilitation, and in Boston this is when New York Streets and the West End were completely removed. When recapping history, many former Chinatown residents and elders blame urban renewal for challenges the neighborhood has faced, such as diminishing land area. However, urban renewal actually helped Chinatown more than hurt it because the City built approximately 150 units of affordable housing units in the neighborhood. (Lee, T. 2010, March 17)

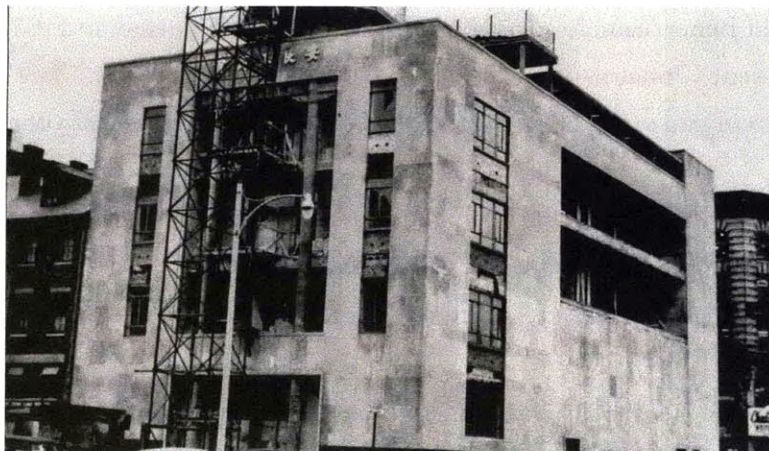
It was the construction of the Central Artery and the extension of the Massachusetts Turnpike highways in the 1950s and 1960s that displaced hundreds of Chinese-American and immigrant families

on Hudson Street and Albany Street. (Lee, 2010, March 17) In 1951, the Chinese Merchants Association building on Hudson Street was opened for community use. However, within a decade, almost half of the building was torn down to make way for the Southeast Expressway. Other institutions joined the Chinatown land takings: the Boston Redevelopment Authority for the South Cove Urban Renewal Project and the Tufts-New England Medical Center for expansion of its healthcare and teaching facilities.



Source: To, Wing Kai and CHSNE  
Chinese Merchants Association Building, 1951

Since 1875, when outsiders recognized Chinatown as an official neighborhood, until the Civil Rights Era, the City made neighborhood development decisions in and for Chinatown through a very top-down approach, with little comprehensive community involvement. A small group of rich and influential Chinese businessmen worked with city officials and the Mayor to prioritize what they thought were the most necessary needs in the neighborhood. As Chinese merchants and workers settled in Boston, they developed organizations based in Chinatown for recreation, information, and support. “The first groups were tongs – clan associations with the dubious image of engaging in illicit activities such as gambling, opium smoking, and extortion.” (Wing-kai To, 2008, p. 8) By the



Source: To, Wing Kai and CHSNE  
Chinese Merchants Association Building post- Highway Construction,  
1956



Source: To, Wing Kai and CHSNE  
Protest Against Central Artery Project, 1954

1920s, aside from the aforementioned family associations, some well-to-do businessmen established the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) of New England and the Chinese Merchants Association to represent Chinatown (Wing-kai To, 2008, p. 8) to the City. The Chinese Merchants Association helped to organize the library closing protests in 1938, as well as other demonstrations.

Community development and urban planning were considered sciences that technical experts dealt with in the field. Properly designed research and other metrics informed the City's decisions. Bish Sanyal describes planning culture during this time in his book *Comparative Planning Cultures*:

In the years after World War II, planning flourished in both industrialized and industrializing countries. What made it “golden” was the optimism among planners – urban, regional, as well as national – that planning efforts did not have to be based on intuitive and aesthetic sensibilities of architects and urban designers of

the past. In contrast, planning culture could be scientific and rational, based on accurate observations of statistically valid samples of reality, followed by dispassionate and value-neutral analysis of socio-economic trends. Such analyses would lead to professionally crafted recommendations formulated through rigorous and objective assessment methodologies, such as cost-benefit analysis, planning-programming and budgeting systems, that has proven useful in conducting World War II. The rational comprehensive model (RCM) of planning...reflected the aspirations of the postwar period. (Sanyal, 1995, p. 5)

The fate of the Tyler Street branch in the 1950s demonstrates that this culture of planning was inherent in the decision-making concerning the library.

## Curley Urged To Open South End Library

Citizens of Boston's Chinatown and bordering areas, where numerous Syrian, Greek, and Italian families live, have petitioned Mayor Curley to reopen the Branch Library in their district at Oak and Tyler Streets.

Clergymen and civic representatives of the section, spurred on by George D. Homs, Boston businessman, have made their request on grounds it would be an aid toward reducing juvenile delinquency and toward reducing traffic hazards during nonschool hours, since the children must walk 1½ miles to the Main Library at Copley Square to get books.

The representatives, in their statement to the Mayor, said there are 1,000 children in the immediate neighborhood, and that the population of the area has no civic center where American ideals may be encouraged.

Among those signing the petition to the Mayor, who promised during his campaign to have the library reopened, are the Rev. A. M. Deeba of St. Mary's Orthodox Church, Nicholas Bezreh, Chairman of St. Mary's Antiochan Society, Yee Pok Chai of the Chinese Benevolent Association, M. H. Lahan, Chairman of the Civic Committee of St. George's Orthodox Church; the Rev. Daniel J. Donovan, Rector of St. James Roman Catholic Church; Ralph J. Khouri, Chairman of the Civic Committee of St. John Damascene's Syrian Orthodox Church, and John P. Maloney, Principal of the Quincy School.

Despite the moderately strong community protests in 1938, the library did not reopen, and residents of the area demanded that their community facility return for years after its closing. For example, in a 1946 newspaper article from the *Christian Science Monitor*, the headline reads, "Curley Urged to Open South End Library", and the reporter states, "Citizens of Boston's Chinatown and bordering areas, where numerous Syrian, Greek, and Italian families live have petitioned to Mayor Curley to reopen the Branch Library in their district at Oak and Tyler Streets." (*Christian Science Monitor*, 1946) The article also goes on to show that the mission of libraries after WWII was to promote American values such as freedom and democracy. It states: "The representatives, in their statement to the Mayor, said there are 1,000 children in the immediate neighborhood, and that the population of the area has no civic center where American ideals may be encouraged (*Christian Science Monitor*, 1946)." Two years later in 1948, the *Christian Science Monitor* published an article titled "Boston Plans Widespread Branch Library Expansion."

Source: *Christian Science Monitor*, 1946

It reads:

Encouraged by 'spontaneous demands' for new branch public libraries, the Boston Library Department is earnestly and hopefully displaying long-range plans for expansion. The branch library program is beyond the paper stage in one instance – the reopening of the Tyler Street branch slated for September... Under these conditions, the Tyler Street area will be the first to benefit, apparently because of the small expense involved. The Department already has space in the municipal building on Tyler Street. Until 1938 a Tyler Street branch was a full-fledged library. However, it was closed down then because the population trend was away from that section... it is an underprivileged area... There has been some demand to have the Tyler Street branch library reopened... No reading rooms or sub-branches are now part of the system. (Sheldon, 1948, March 27)

It took another two years for the reading room to open. The article confirms that the School Issue Department of the library system used the space in the interim after the 1938 closing until 1951. (*Christian Science Monitor*, 1948) Reading rooms had small collection of their own, and also functioned as delivery stations, where residents could still request material from the main branch. In the 1950s, Boston's population peaked, the economy was booming after the war, and librarians felt it was their mission to help spread the lessons democracy by giving people the right to public education. All of these reasons, along with the *Christian Science Monitor* article's rationale, explain why the Tyler Street reading room opened in 1951.

Frank Chin, a well-known neighborhood leader in Chinatown, also known as "Uncle Frank", describes his experience with this reading room. "Even though I was born here [Boston], I lived in China during my childhood and came back to Boston when I was 15. I did not know English. I quit school because this embarrassed me, and I went to the library on Tyler Street and studied there

## Boston Plans Widespread Branch Library Expansion

By Courtney B. Sheldon

Staff Writer of The Christian Science Monitor

Encouraged by "spontaneous demands" for new branch public libraries, the Boston Library Department is earnestly and hopefully displaying long-range plans for expansion.

This branch library program is beyond the paper stage in one instance—the reopening of the Tyler Street branch slated for September, Milton Lord, Director of the Department, reported today.

Also, Mayor Curley has said he would approve any City Council action this year to appropriate money for a library building in Neponset.

The remainder of the Library Department's project list also has the mayor's approval, but no time schedule. It includes library service for these areas: Aberdeen section of Brighton, Egleston Square, Forest Hills, Franklin Park, Germantown section of West Roxbury, North Dorchester, and Roxbury Crossing.

Obtaining the initial appropriations for construction of the libraries is the major obstacle to be overcome, according to Mr. Lord. Operation of the libraries could be handled with ease, he indicated.

Under these conditions, the Tyler Street area will be the first to benefit, apparently because of the small expense involved. The Department already has space in the municipal building on Tyler Street.

Until 1938 a Tyler Street branch was a full-fledged library. However, it was closed down then because the population trend was away from that section, Mr. Lord explained. It is in an underprivileged area, he added.

Recently, he continued, "there has been some demand to have the Tyler Street branch library reopened."

Therefore, the space in the municipal building now used by the School Issue Department of the library system will be reconditioned and adapted to library needs.

The Tyler Street library will not, however, be opened from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., as formerly, it will open at 2 p.m. or 3 p.m.

At present, Neponset has a library, he noted, but it is temporarily housed in a building constructed for store use. Frequent

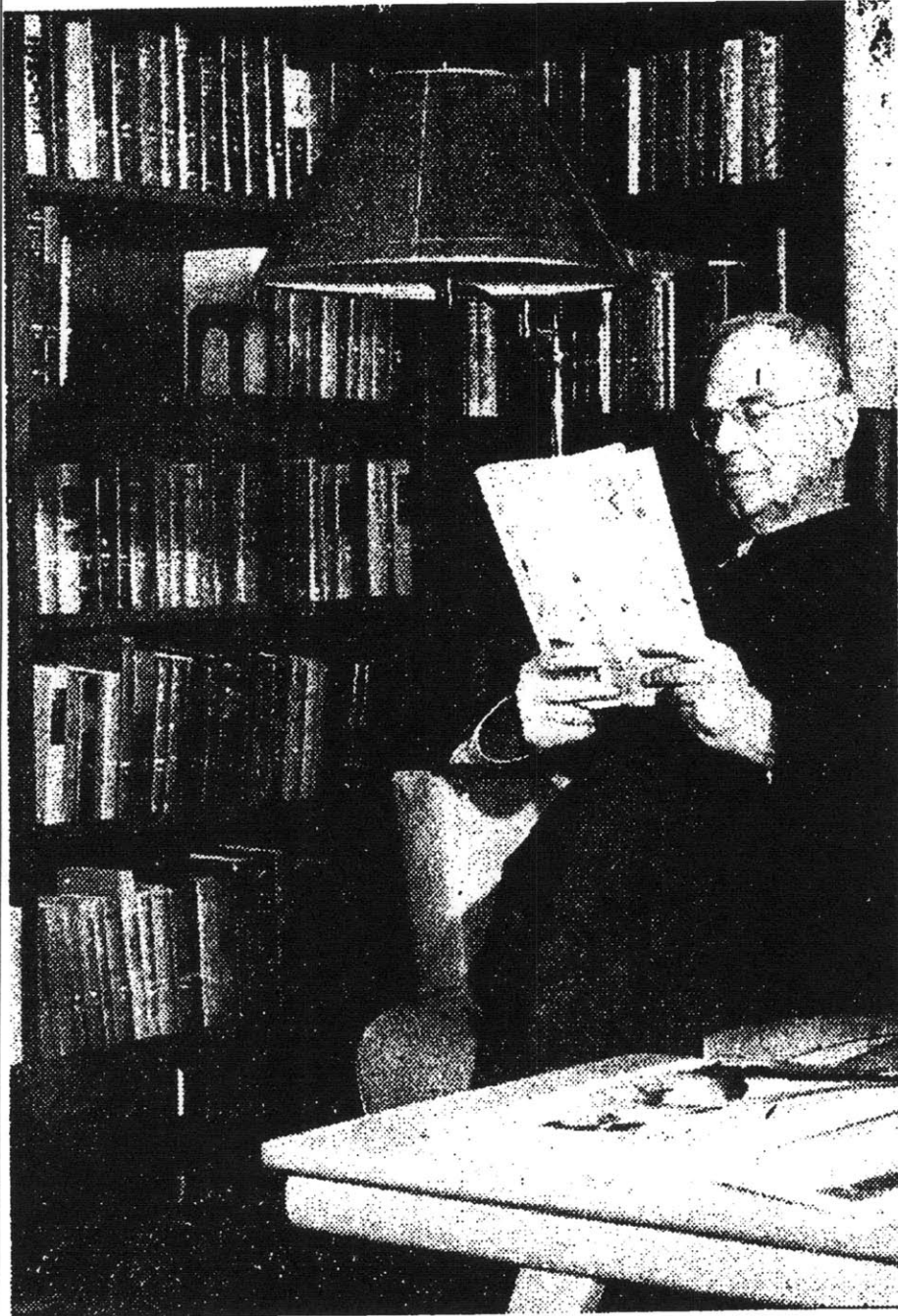
changes of location have had to be made in recent years.

As for the other sections of the city "clamoring for branch library coverage," Mr. Lord pointed out that there is "obviously need in outlying areas," as well as in Franklin Park and Egleston Square.

The Library Department now operates 30 general branch libraries and one business library. No reading rooms or subbranches are now a part of the system, Mr. Lord said.

Source: *Christian Science Monitor*, 1948

## Hub Branch Library Opened



By a Staff Photographer

Lee M. Friedman, president of the Boston Public Library board of trustees, is shown at the new Tyler Street reading room at its formal opening recently. The rooms, occupying the same quarters at the corner of Oak and Tyler Streets as the Tyler Street branch, closed in 1938 as an economy measure, are now colorful in modern finishes, with plastics, blond mahogany used in tables and chairs, and with attractive lamps placed for relaxed reading.

Source: *Christian Science Monitor*, 1951

for eight hours a day to learn English. I think it was this self-education that got me the position as Purchasing Agent for Mayor White's administration [later in 1975]." Chin goes on to explain that reading room served more than just Chinese residents, but was also popular with the Syrian tenants in the area.

Just five years after its opening in 1956, however, the City demolished the reading room at 130 Tyler Street in order to make way for the presumed path of the Boston Central Artery and because of other urban renewal efforts. Most research materials about the Chinatown Library movement state this fact. However, the Central Artery actually does not run through the parcel. While the City originally slated this land for the highway, Tai Tung Village, an affordable housing development, now stands on the former library site. Originally, the Central Artery was supposed to make its way south from Fort Hill Square through the city's leather district and Chinatown as an elevated structure. (Tsipis, 2001, p. 5) When residents in the proposed path saw the effect that the elevated structure would have on the North End, the public supported putting the remainder of the highway underground. After brainstorming various designs, the City decided to construct the thruway underground from Congress Street to Chinatown's Kneeland Street. (Tsipis, 2001, p. 5)

In 1954, Boston's branch library system consisted of thirty-three branch libraries and two bookmobiles. The Boston Planning Commission published a report evaluating Boston's existing branch libraries with the purpose of making a long-range plan for the location and construction of future branches. Accordingly, this report came after the huge study, *The Public Library Inquiry* discussed in chapter one, which set forth many recommendations for improving library systems. "The effectuation of this plan will allow Boston to maintain a useful and economically efficient branch library system, one that will provide maximum benefit at minimum cost." The plan is also an example of the rational comprehensive model of planning (RCM). The report states:

During the course of the next 20 or 25 years, many of our branch facilities will require reconstruction and replacement. The opportunity now exists to plan this expected construction activity so that the best possible branch library system evolves as the final product. On the one hand, recognition must be given to the value, and indeed the necessity, of having a good public library accessible to every citizen of Boston. On the other hand lies the inescapable fact that public expenditures must be kept within proper bounds. (p. 5)

The report only refers to the Tyler Street Reading Room twice, and makes a clear case for its removal. To evaluate the adequacy and efficiency of the existing physical plan of the Boston Public Library System, and to guide the preparation of a development plan, planners utilized a series of widely accepted standards. These include statistical metrics and other quantitative measurements, which the RCM advocates such as population, distance, and density. For example:

#### Service and Area Population

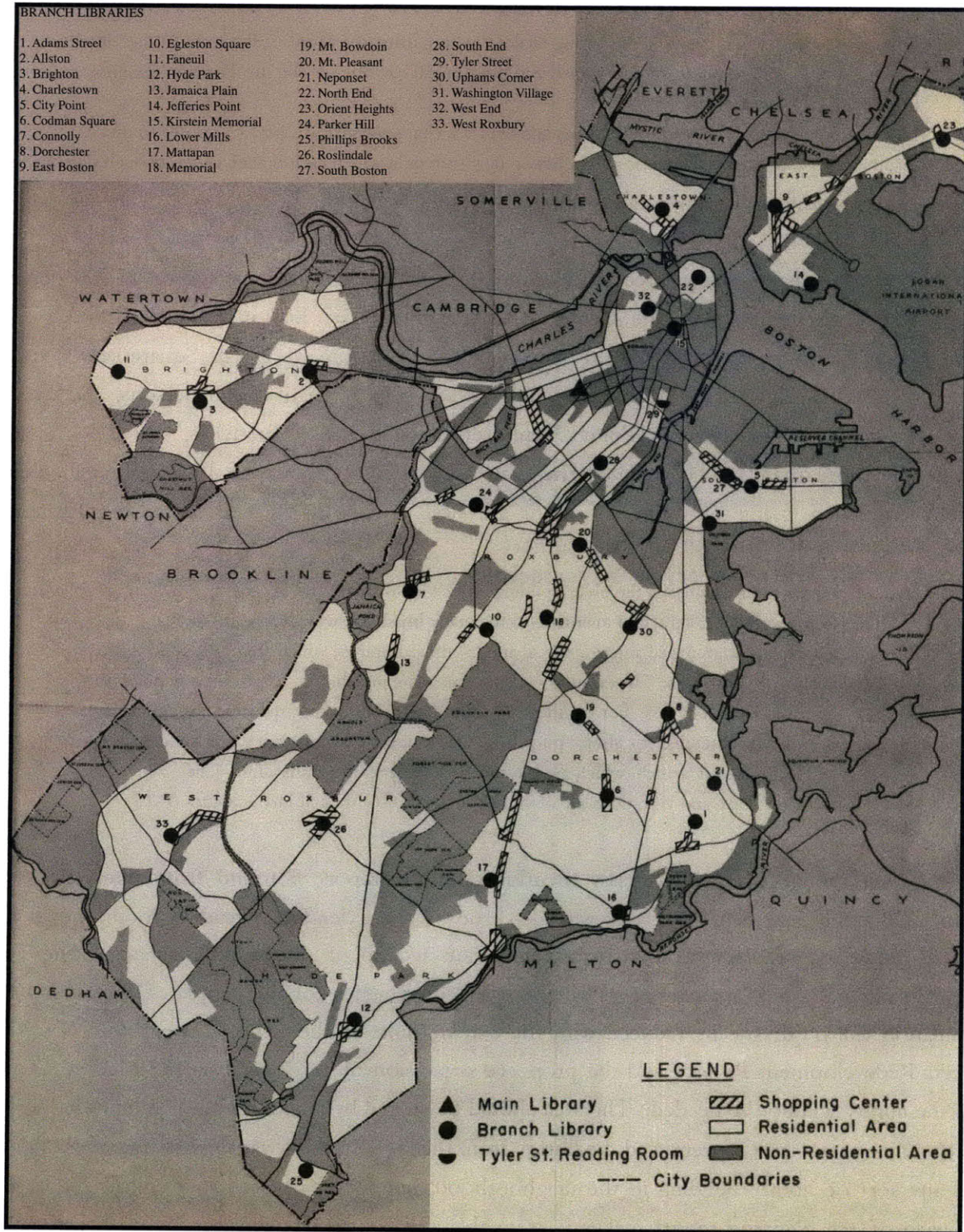
- Each branch library should serve an area within a radius of a mile to a mile and one half, and minimum population of 25,000 to 50,000.
- Library use can be encouraged by supplying facilities within distances people will travel. At the same time, facilities are to be justified on an operational and economical basis by serving the aforesaid minimum number of people.
- In Boston, due to high population densities and land use characteristics, the problem is not so much maintaining proper travel distances as it is providing a system in which each branch serves enough persons to justify its maintenance and operational cost.” (p. 9)

Boston’s existing thirty-three branch libraries served a citywide average of 25,000 persons each. Six of these branches (the Brighton, Charlestown, East Boston, Mattapan, South End, and Uphams Corner) potentially served over 30,000 persons; the Roslindale Square served nearly 40,000. However, eleven of the branches did not serve more than 20,000 persons, and five of these (the Lower Mills, Jefferies Point, Neponset, Phillips Brook Branches, and Tyler Street.) served not more than 10,000 people. The plan also discussed how the Boston branch library system contained many examples of poor physical conditions that deserved improvement.

“Outstanding were: (1) the older buildings which are difficult and expensive to properly heat, light, and maintain (2) the many buildings, which have grossly inadequate amounts of interior space; and (3) those libraries, which are not located in separate buildings. The existing system contains many libraries located in buildings housing other activities. For the most part these branches occupy quarters not designed or originally intended for library purposes. Outstanding examples are the Roslindale and Mt. Pleasant branch, which are located directly beneath gymnasiums. The resultant noise and vibrations are obviously incompatible with library activities (P. 15).”

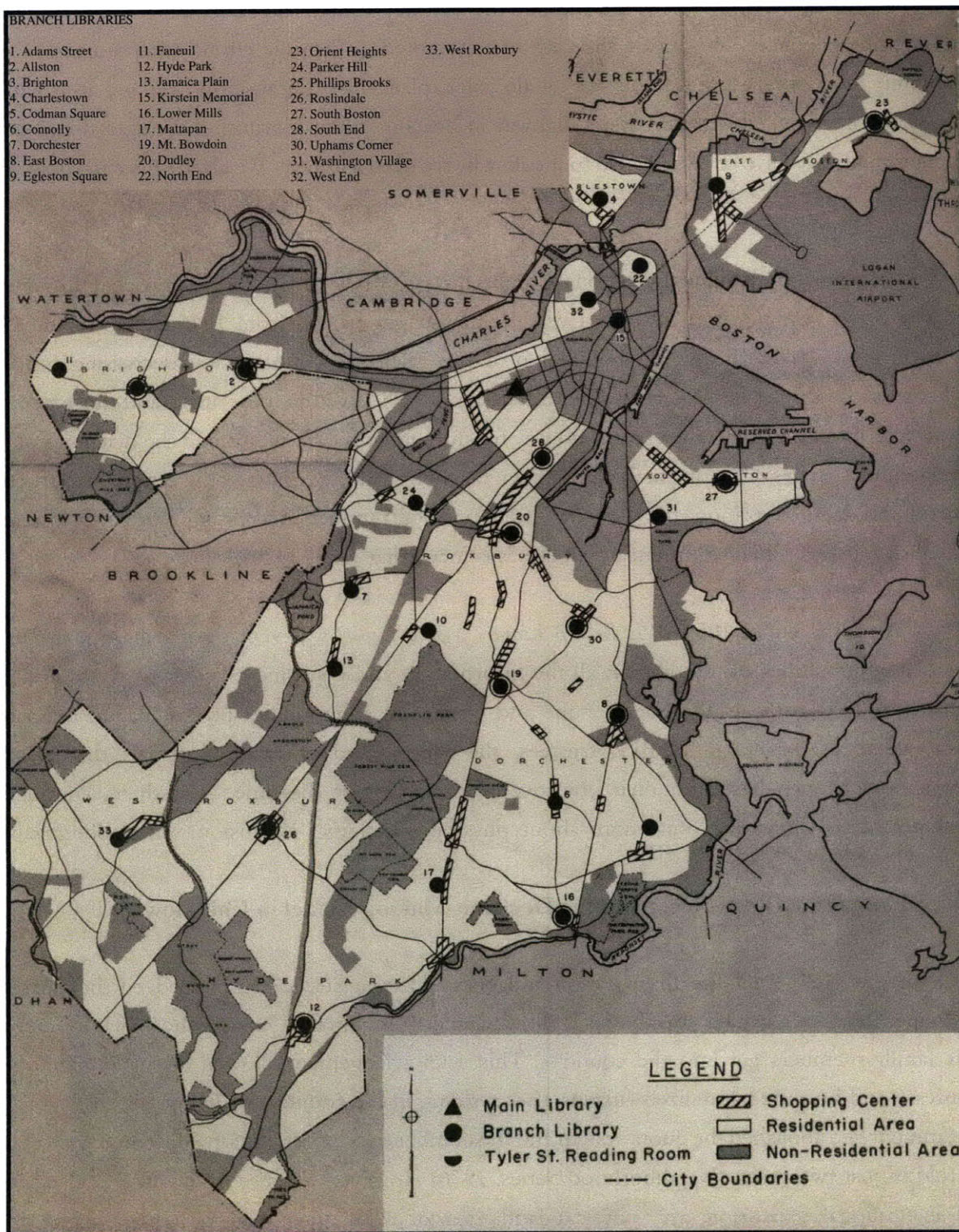
Even though it is not directly mentioned in the report, I found from interviews with former Chinatown residents that this was also true of the Tyler Street reading room, which was located below a gym. In the final recommendation section of the report, it states: “The Tyler Street Reading Room is maintained as a temporary convenience for the people of that area. The population will be drastically reduced with the construction of the Central Artery, the New York Streets Redevelopment Project, and the proposed expansion of the New England Medical Center, and the library will not be needed. The area should be served by a bookmobile.” (Emphasis Added, p. 18) Once again, the City removed the library from the area, and this was the last time the residents had any sort of library building in the neighborhood, temporary or permanent, until 2009. The language of the planning report makes it seem that the community did not matter because they were being replaced by higher priority uses. Also, it is important to note that the newspaper articles announcing the opening of the reading room never indicated that it was a “temporary convenience.”

## EXISTING BRANCHES, 1955



Source: *Boston's Branch Library System Report, 1955*  
Existing Library Locations

## PROPOSED BRANCHES, 1955



Source: *Boston's Branch Library System Report, 1955*  
Proposed Library Locations

Suzanne Lee, the former principal at the Josiah Quincy School, who grew up in Chinatown says, “They tore down the library to use the land the way they wanted and to build highways. Highways were to bring people in and out of the City. They wanted to disperse ethnic communities. Every community has a library and we don’t. How do you explain this? Because they can get away with it. They would never take land and build a highway in Beacon Hill or Newton. Like everything else in our community, we have always needed to justify why we need a library. We always have to show what we need and why.”

The philosophy behind the Rational Comprehensive Model of Planning is prevalent throughout the Tyler Street reading room’s story. Even the newspaper articles from 1946 explained the 1938 closing in a very practical way: the population of the Tyler Street District was decreasing and thus the library closed, yet there was no further discussion of who lived in these areas, and those people’s perspective about the library. There was no way for the City to see or understand the dynamics of the demographic changes occurring in the Chinatown neighborhood. Because of the various construction projects and suburbanization, the City saw the population numbers decreasing, but failed to realize that the number of Chinese-American families was increasing. (Lee, T. 2010, March 17)

Also, the entire 1954 *BPL Branch Library System Report* was very detached from the users or actual communities of the library; all the information and assessments concerned physical and spatial aspects. Lastly, as the library came and went, and communities protested, but ultimately, it was those in power – the BPL trustees, the Mayor, and other city officials that decided what should happen based on their objectives for the City at the time. For them, community development in Chinatown was more about physical rebuilding, expansion, and modernization.

### **The Library Lost: Reversing the Decision-Making Model in Chinatown**

*Time Period: 1960s-1980s*

In the late 1950s, the Immigration and Naturalization Service acknowledged the existence of “paper families”, which was basically how Chinese immigrants helped those who were not their family members get into the country. This acknowledgement allowed illegal immigrants to “confess” and become naturalized citizens after residing in the country for five years. By 1965, the government had abolished the quota system and the number of Chinese entering the country increased fivefold in just two years. (Neighborhood Series, 1976) However, because of highway construction and institutional expansion, the physical land area of Chinatown had decreased significantly, while its population was increasing more than double. (Neighborhood Series, 1976) Boston ‘s physical landscape had dramatically in the 1950s from highway construction and slum clearance.

In 1960, reacting to the West End demolition, the voters elect Mayor John Collins, who ran on the platform against mass clearance. In his administration, Edward Logue created a new Boston Redevelopment Authority and pledged “planning with the people.” When the Chinatown community learned of Tufts University’s expansion into the South Cove, the established Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), Tufts New England Medical Center (TNEMC), and Mayor John Collins reached a “memorandum of understanding” (MOU). Denny Moy, the president of CCBA negotiated the memorandum. (Lee, T. 2010, March 17) It stated that “Chinatown was the area from Essex Street to Kneeland Street, part of the Central Business District, and the area from Kneeland to Tai Tung Village. To protect the neighborhood from further land taking, the memorandum gave the community veto power to any outside developers.” (Neighborhood Series, 1976) Together, these parties also put together the South Cove Urban Renewal Plan which changed the street pattern, created parcels for affordable housing, and established boundaries for TNEMC.

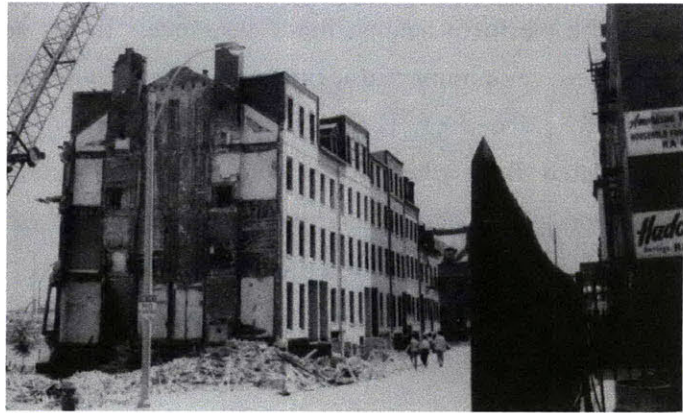
Logue and Mayor Collins “epitomized a new style of planning, which stressed government action primarily to stimulate private-sector investment.” (Kennedy, 1992, p. 9) However, communities began to demand greater involvement in the planning process as demonstrated with the South Cove MOU. By the late 1960s and 1970s, neighborhood and community groups began to demand a role in the process of shaping Boston, often halting or altering government plans. Kennedy writes, “No longer could planning be done exclusively in corporate boardrooms and government offices; it now had to take into account the wishes of ordinary citizens.” (Kennedy, 1992, p. 9) Understanding the requests of citizens, Logue asserted that planning with neighborhoods and people was as important as with businesses and institutions. (O’Connor, 1993, p. 202)

Meanwhile, Frank and Billy Chin, successful businessmen who owned twelve restaurants in Chinatown and greater Boston, were the neighborhood’s gateway to City Hall and beyond in the late 1960s and 1970s. As the *Boston Globe* (2005) put it: “Need Chinatown residents to vote for you? Want to build support for a new development? Trying to get your restaurant license sorted out? Getting things done in Chinatown meant going through Frank “Uncle Frank” Chin and his brother Billy, the patriarchs and all-around fixers who controlled almost everything that happened in a corner of the city that was a mystery to most outsiders.” (Abraham, 2007, June 25)

The decreasing land area of Chinatown was not the only challenge the neighborhood confronted. The language barrier has always been an obstacle for adult Chinese immigrants. Many immigrants searched for jobs that did not require fluency in English, and since there was no need and few opportunities to learn English in Chinatown, many found themselves locked in menial positions. The language barrier led to underemployment in a community with doctors, physicists, mechanics,



Source: To, Wing Kai and CHSNE  
Hudson Street, 1953  
This photo was taken prior to the demolition of Hudson. The Eastern side was torn down to build an entrance ramp for the Turnpike.



Source: To, Wing Kai and CHSNE  
Hudson Street, 1963  
The City demolished the street to make room for the Turnpike Extension. “The demolition of Hudson Street added fuel to a growing antihighway movement as the public began to question the price exacted on neighborhoods and inhabitants (To, 2008, p. 111).”

and teachers working in restaurants or other service occupations. These employment limitations only increased Chinatown’s economic isolation from the rest of Boston. Neighborhood Series, 1976) Such undesirable conditions, as well as the shift in planning culture incited action in Chinatown at the grassroots level.

Cynthia Yee, former teacher at the Josiah Quincy School in Chinatown explains the changes in neighborhood power, which occurred in Chinatown from 1960 to 1980. She says, “It was during this Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Peace Corps era that the Chinese community, especially in Boston, hopped on to the tail end of the Civil Rights movement. The youth of this generation became empowered by learning the language of America [through public school], and that is when the Chinese community grew a louder voice. The Chinese Progressive Association, the key player in the Chinatown Library movement came out of this 1960s political work, and they always represented the people.” There was a parallel phenomenon of the growing younger generation, as well as growth in youth programming and youth workers. This was not the case just fifteen years ago. “Youth started questioning their identity. There became a more conscious awareness in the history of communities,” stated Peter Kiang, Asian American Studies Professor at University of Massachusetts, Boston.

In line with these sentiments, the Chinese American Civic Association formed in 1967 and the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) was founded in 1977 out of a series of community organizing campaigns around issues such as Chinese parents' input into the Boston school desegregation process, police brutality against Chinese-Americans, living wage for garment factory workers, and community control over land development in Chinatown. CPA opposed the expansion of the New England Medical Center in the 1970s. The membership was (and still is) made up of predominantly Chinese-speaking immigrants which comprise working families and low-income elderly; most are workers in low-wage industries. (Chinese Progressive Association) Organizations such as the CPA were replacing the old decision-making ways of Chinatown, and were growing more powerful than business leaders such as Frank Chin because of the constituency they were building. There was undoubtedly a growing power tension in the neighborhood. (Personal Interview, 2010)

The Chinese Progressive Association's ascendancy reflects a larger shift in Chinatown, and also the beginning of the contemporary library movement. For years, Frank Chin and his brother managed the neighborhood's political power by delivering blocs of voters for particular candidates in return for city services. Groups such as the CPA have focused on "educating voters to make their own decisions and to speak up for themselves." (Abraham, 2007, June 25) For this reason, politicians had to begin campaigning to Chinatown residents the way they might campaign to South Boston and West Roxbury residents, courting individual voters, rather than simply making deals with key brokers. (Abraham, 2007, June 25) The rise of organizations such as the Chinese Progressive Association also illustrates the change in societal attitudes toward community development. Sanyal explains,

"Attributes of planning that had been viewed as strengths during the golden years were now seen as major drawbacks. Planning was now considered too technocratic, elitist, centralized, bureaucratic, pseudoscientific, hegemonic, and so on. In industrializing countries the criticism of planning had been the major hindrance to such change. Drawing on criticisms of planning from both the right and left of the ideological spectrum, an eclectic argument was made that top-down, state-centered planning was inflexible, unresponsive to the needs of the people, and alien to local culture. According to the new paradigm, planning practice was to be "bottom-up" and "people-centered," relying no longer on economists, engineers, and statisticians, but on anthropologists, sociologists, and scholars of cultural studies, and grassroots activists who were closer to the people." (Sanyal, 2005, p. 8)

David Moy, who served as the Executive Director of the Chinatown Neighborhood Center for seventeen years, says that "Frank Chin is part of an older generation and undoubtedly brought resources into the neighborhood, but the politics were more autocratic and old style

than the way the younger generation wanted to engage. Frank Chin and his constituents had a very top-down approach. The new politics developed by the younger generations was much more democratic and participatory - let's come together, talk about what we need, and then prioritize those needs. This is a very different process. It builds engagement.”

The change from autocratic politics to participatory planning informs the story of the Chinatown Library as well. A similar shift was taking place in library culture. By the 1960s and 1970s, libraries became more accommodating to immigrants, rather than forcing assimilation. Also, branch libraries believed they had a social obligation to help to the disadvantaged. Unfortunately, Chinatown could never experience this shift in practice first-hand because of the lack of library services in the neighborhood. Since the closing of the reading room in the mid-1950s, the only type of library in the neighborhood was an assortment of book vans that visited the community on and off from 1960 to 1980.<sup>9</sup> Beverly Wing stated: “It was a large van that brought books. It came to the same location everyday, and you could pick up what you ordered.” The bookmobile came to Chinatown once a week, but according to many of the residents that remember, the van was also very inconsistent and did not seem to adhere to a proper schedule. Parents and kids found it unreliable. (Boston City Council Hearing, 2006, June 13)

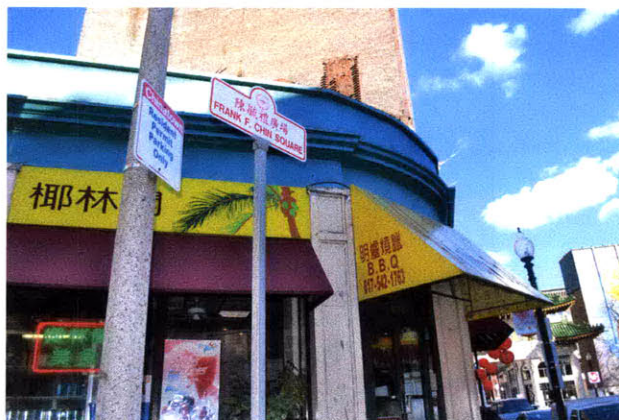
With a sizeable portion of Chinatown residents forced to move during the 1950s and 1960s because of land takings, along with the other social justice issues discussed, the library movement lost momentum and the neighborhood was more focused on solving other problems. For some, living in Chinatown was a necessity and for others it is a choice. This may influence how one views the need for a library. (Wing, 2010, March 8) For example, if basic amenities such as affordable housing or education and employment access are not in order, then residents forget about needing libraries. However, if living in a neighborhood because of choice and preference, then residents are more likely to demand services that would improve their quality of life such as branch libraries. (Wing, 2010, March 8) In fact, David Moy recalls how when he was a child back in the 1960s, he always used the Copley Main Branch. “There was never any talk of getting our own library. You don't miss what you don't know about - I never thought that we should have our own branch.” (Moy D. 2010, March 12)

Another reason why the lack of library was of little significance to the neighborhood is because it was not a priority for established organizations and individuals such as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, the Chinese Merchant's Association, or Frank Chin and the other business leaders of Chinatown. “There has always been a lack of transparency when it comes to politics

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<sup>9</sup> The Boston Public Library stopped operating its bookmobile in 1980.

in Chinatown. A few elite people have always made the decisions for the neighborhood. In most recent times, these leaders include the Chin Brothers. They used to run the community, but now their power has diminished. CPA is largely responsible for taking them down. Menino and City of Boston do not like CPA because they fight for transparency. What has impeded the library movement is that the people behind the movement are disliked by the City of Boston.” (Personal Interview, 2010) There was a shift in decision-making power because the new civic groups could access the Boston Redevelopment Authority without going through the Chin Brothers. (Lee, T. 2010, March 17) Even though Frank Chin used the library for his own betterment to learn English; he did not see it as a priority for the neighborhood. When interviewing Frank Chin, he stated, “Libraries do not have teachers and classrooms that actually help to increase people’s incomes.”



Source: Aditi Mehta  
Frank Chin Square in Chinatown, 2010

When I asked Frank Chin why he thought Chinatown still did not have its own branch library. He answered, “Seven years ago, I asked the mayor if we could put a library in Chinatown. He said it would cost approximately \$1.5 million to build, but there was no money in the budget for sustaining the operations. That is why we do not have a library. Mayor Menino is good to the Chinatown community because of friendship and loyalty. I talk to him all the time and if there were money for the library, he would build it for us.” (Chin, 2010, February 18)

### **The Library Reborn as an Extension of Community Movements**

*Time Period: 1990 - 2010*

The early 1990s mark the beginning of an important community planning process in Chinatown. The Chinatown Master Plan project has occurred every ten years since 1990, where grassroots organizations, residents, city officials, and other stakeholder come together to develop the vision for their neighborhood and strategize implementation steps to achieve these goals through future neighborhood development and preservation. Discussion about the need for a neighborhood library in a large community setting first began in these meetings. There was a desire for a geographic and linguistically accessible space. (Moy, D. 2010, March 12)

The themes of the Chinatown Master Plans reflect the many conversations and priorities of the neighborhood. In 1990, the main focus of the Plan was to stop institutional encroachment upon the neighborhood by entities such as Tufts and the New England



Source: *Boston Metro Newspaper*  
Newspaper Cover, November 2009

Medical Center. In 2000, the theme of the plan was to prevent gentrification and preserve the affordability of housing and commercial space in the neighborhood, and in 2010 the plan discussed maintaining an authentic identity for Chinatown. (Liang, 2010, February 18)

The Chinatown Blog accompanied the Chinatown Master Plan project in 2007. The Blog is a public forum on the Internet where community members can connect with one another, discuss ideas, and solve problems together through digital communication. The purpose of the blog is to disseminate information to residents and the community and about Chinatown land development and planning issues. The Chinatown Gateway Coalition manages and owns the Chinatown Blog, and the mission of this group is to advocate for land developments in the interest of Chinatown through community planning processes. The blog has also evolved to cover other subjects such as culture, sociology, and history. (The Chinatown Blog) These projects represent the post-1980s “communicative turn” among the planning theorists. (Sanyal, 2005, p. 10) The approach to community development now was to share, debate, and advocate for ideas in open discussions and collectively arrive at solutions that benefited as many people as possible. (Sanyal, 2005, p. 10)

In this decade, the power of leaders such as the Chin Brothers began to fade not only because of the rise of organizations such as the Chinese Progressive Association, but also because of outreach and deliberative processes initiated by community groups. The *Boston Globe* reports: “A measure of the neighborhood’s new political diversity could be seen in the May 2007 special

election to replace the late city councilor, James Kelly: The Chin brothers backed the ultimate winner, Bill Linehan. But in Chinatown, Linehan narrowly lost out to Susan Passoni, supported by Lydia Lowe, director of the Chinese Progressive Association.” (Abraham, 2007, June 25)

There were two main events taking place during this decade that were relevant to the story of the Chinatown Library. In 2007, a disagreement occurred between Mayor Menino and the former head of the Boston Public Library, Bernie Margolis. Menino blamed Margolis for diverting money away from the branch system, and investing too much in Copley. (Strangely enough, under Margolis, the Allston, Mattapan, and West Roxbury branch libraries were all conceived. More information about these branches are provided in the next chapter). Thus, Menino fired Margolis and with approval from the BPL trustees hired Amy Ryan, the current head of the Boston Public Library, in 2008.

Under Margolis, the board of trustees established the Neighborhood Services Committee in the Fall of 2006, and the group began its work in August 2007. The committees spent some of their time reviewing Boston Public Library historic branch documents, Boston Redevelopment Authority demographic reports, professional library association reports on branch libraries, and strategic plans for other urban branch systems across the country to develop the *Neighborhood Initiatives Service Report*. This document outlines goals for the future of each neighborhood branch, and marks phase one of a multi-faceted planning effort. Starting in the Fall of 2008, phase 2 of the initiative began. Further defined next steps, an implementation plan based on the needs described in the initiatives is forthcoming, but the timing is unknown because of budget cuts. (BPL & Arana-Ortiz, 2010, March 12) Thus far, the report is reminiscent of the 1955 branch library planning document, emphasizing quantitative information, but failing to tease out qualitative data or understanding the patrons’ experience or specific neighborhood needs.

The second significant event that occurred previously during this decade was when the youth of CPA administered a large-scale survey about the absence of a library in Chinatown to 349 Chinatown residents and stakeholders in 2001. The Chinese Progressive Association runs the Chinese Youth Initiative (CYI) to teach young Asian-Americans about their identity, roots, and community organizing. The goal of the program was to help young people gain a sense of ownership over their neighborhood. Professor Kiang explained that “the first generation of Chinese-American youth, those who were born in America, but raised in Asian enclaves, began questioning their past and identity, interested in better understanding how and why things were the way they were.” A portion of the CYI curriculum included history lessons about Chinatown and Asian immigration into Boston. It was through Stephanie Fan of the Chinese Historic Society of New England that the students learned about the former library. “If we had one before, why can’t we have one now?” the students began

asking. Through informal conversations and discussion with residents, the students solidified the community's need for a library, which included a demand for meeting space, resources for students, and a nearby facility for the neighborhood's elderly residents. Next, the group designed the survey to see if a larger group of Chinatown community members also felt that their neighborhood needed a library.

Of the 349 people surveyed, 100 percent wanted a library, 62 percent already had a library card, 34 percent lacked English proficiency, and 29 percent had difficulties accessing the South End Branch or Copley (Boston City Council Hearing, 2006, June 13). Suzanne Lee stated, "The youth group from the CPA marked the beginning of the library movement. The mission of CPA is how to help people come together in an organized way to fight for equal treatment and equal opportunity for all aspects of life. CPA brought the library issue out into the light and helped form the Friends of the Chinatown Library." The CPA renewed the Chinatown Public Library movement by garnering support from community members to campaign the cause to the City, and helped form an organization known as Friends of the Chinatown Public Library in 2005.

Four graduate students from the Department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning at Tufts University developed a report for the CPA titled *Bringing a Library to Chinatown: Next Steps to Building a Political Will* in 2005 to help the activists reach out to the City. The report recommends that CPA develop a 10-year advocacy plan, and provides an organizing strategy for the library campaign through political, institutional, and community partnerships. It indicates that the necessary step to getting the library reinstated is the support of city council and the mayor. The Friends of the Chinatown Library group started a letter writing campaign and met with several city councilors to push their cause. In fact, in the 2005 election, the candidates for the city council election used the library as a tool to gain support for votes. Lisette Le, Civic Action Coordinator for the CPA says, "It [the library] was an important platform to stand on for galvanizing the residents to cast their vote."

On June 13, 2006, the Boston City Council convened a hearing to set aside funds in the City capital budget for a Chinatown Library feasibility study. Councilor Mike Flaherty and Councilor-At-Large Sam Yoon (the first Asian-American to serve on City Council) sponsored the hearing and the Committee on City & Neighborhood Services hosted the hearing. District 2 Councilor Kelly, representing Chinatown, also sponsored the hearing, but was not present. When the meeting first began, Sam Yoon announced that he noticed that Chinatown was the only neighborhood in the budget that did not have funds allocated in the upcoming 2008 fiscal year's capital budget. For that reason, he felt he needed to expedite the hearing for the feasibility study because Chinatown deserved some sort of capital investment.

Participants of the CPA Youth Initiative gave a presentation about their survey efforts and stated that they had six hundred signed postcards from Chinatown community members and other residents in support of the library. In this way, the Chinatown neighborhood was more comprehensively involved in this community development effort. In the presentation, they explained that while it seemed that Chinatown might not need their own library because of the proximity to Copley and the South End branch, there were several barriers preventing residents from utilizing these establishments. These included language barriers, the distance for elderly and young children, as well as lack of desired Asian materials. Over thirty different stakeholders testified at the hearing explaining why the neighborhood needed a library.<sup>10</sup> For example, Suzanne Lee, former principal of the Josiah Quincy School explained that the 800 students in her institution were only allowed to check out one book every three weeks because of space and material constraints. Richard Chin, Director of Community Development at the YMCA, asserted that Boston's Chinatown would not be able to compete with other Chinatowns in the U.S. without its own branch library. "We hear about public schools not doing well, but we don't give up on them, we try to improve them. Why should we give up on the library? Why should we give up on our public infrastructure?" asked David Moy, who was Director of Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center in 2006. He went on to say, "We [Chinatown Neighborhood Center] serve 4,000 residents a year. The first thing we do when people visit our Center is take them to Copley and get them a library card because libraries are the most important resource for immigrants."

After this hearing, in July 2007, Mayor Menino granted funds to the architectural firm Miller Dyer Spears to conduct a feasibility study examining where the proposed library might be located in Chinatown. Marrikka Trotter was an architect at Miller Dyer Spears (MDS) working on the library project, at the time. At the City Council hearing, she encouraged the audience and the Mayor to look at the Chinatown Library not just as a restorative measure, but also as an opportunity to build a new branch library for the future and create a model for other cities. Trotter explained to me that the reason MDS was selected to complete the study was because of her links to the community. She had learned about the library movement when she was completing her Bachelors of Architecture thesis project about Chinatown at the Boston Architectural College in 2005. Since then, she remained involved in the advocacy efforts while employed as an architect for MDS, and even worked on the Chinatown Library initiative through her pro-bono hours. When the City released a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for the feasibility study, Trotter was determined to stay involved and be staffed on the project. Even though her architecture firm had no library design experience, she was able to secure the contract for MDS by emphasizing her intimate knowledge of the neighborhood and connections in Chinatown. Miller Dyer Spears competed with sixteen other architectural firms, all of which had library planning and design in their portfolios. The City valued this criterion more than

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<sup>10</sup> Many of these individuals are also people who were interviewed for this thesis.

the relevant technical experience, another indication of the shift in planning culture from the Rational Comprehensive Model to the “bottom-up” and the communicative style of community development.

Miller Dyer Spears in conjunction with the City conducted the feasibility study in a transparent, inclusive manner; with members of the neighborhood incorporated from the outset. The final publication is written in both English and Chinese. The Advisory Council for the feasibility study included community leaders as well as representatives from the City of Boston Property & Construction Management Department, the Boston Public Library, The Mayor’s Office, the Boston Redevelopment Authority, and the City of Boston’s Office of Budget. Maureen Anderson of the Property & Construction Management Department called the process iterative and inclusive. The report was developed through six advisory council meetings and two public meetings. Based upon these meetings, the main priorities of the library were identified as the following:

*(Chinatown Library Program and Siting Study, 2007 p. 27)*

- Create a new, forward-thinking vision of what a public library and community space can be
- Celebrate multi-cultural and multi-lingual interchange
- Incorporate new technology in an adaptable, responsive way
- Establish public access to community educational, historical, and cultural resources
- Provide a meeting place for the community
- Expand the existing exterior, passive recreation space in Chinatown (this includes areas such as gardens and parks which are meant for respite and dialogue as opposed to movement and interchange)
- Locate the library centrally in a dense, pedestrian-oriented urban context, with special regard towards favorable adjacencies with existing community programs and facilities
- Provide a beacon for the larger Asian-American population of New England
- Establish a unique identity for this library, reflecting the unique population it will serve
- Identify realistic sites suitable for a timely implementation of library construction
- Build sustainable strategies into both the library program and the library site options

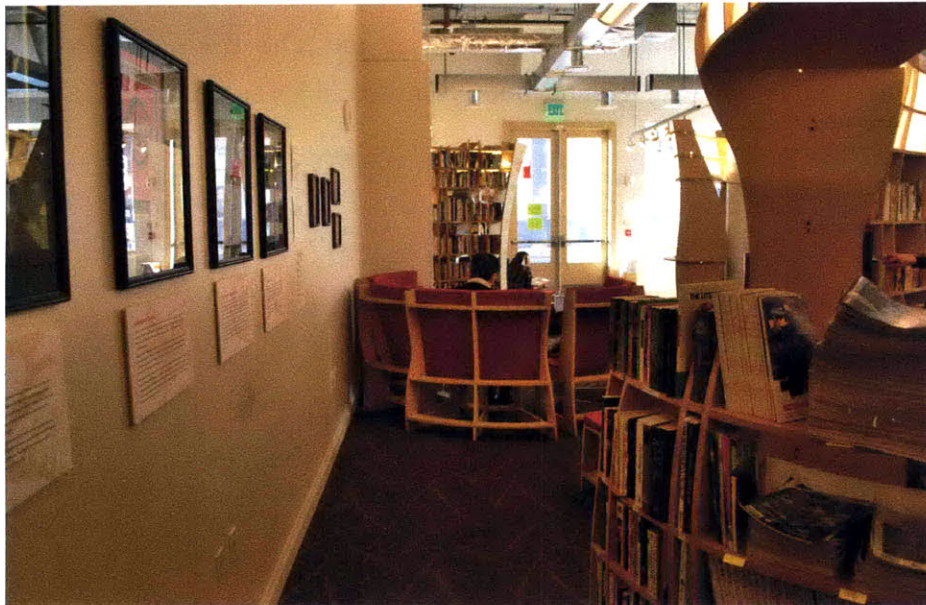
The report also laid out potential locations for the library, emphasizing that it would need to be in a mixed-use facility due to the area’s high density. Unfortunately, this feasibility study coincided with city budget cuts as the economy began to sink in 2008, and hence forward movement with this branch stopped once the report was completed. However, even during good economic times, the needs of Chinatown were set aside while Allston, Mattapan, Hyde Park, and Dorchester got new branches or ambitious renovations. The Boston Globe stated in an editorial article, “If there were a fine system for overdue library branches, the Menino administration would be heavily fined.” (Ryan, 2009, September 25)

## The Storefront Library and Closings

*Time: 2009-2010*

In 2010, the main theme of the Chinatown Master Plan was about maintaining the neighborhood's cultural identity into the future. Kye Liang, Project Coordinator of the Chinatown Master Plan, states, "The residents are afraid that Chinatown will lose its importance as a historic center and as a place for residents." The 2010 draft Master Plan reads:

The discussions generally concluded that as the number of Asian Americans continues to increase at dramatic rates and land uses and population changes occur in the adjacent areas, there is a need to make a conscious effort to define and actively protect the role of Chinatown as a regional hub of an ever expanding network of satellite communities. There was some concern the neighborhood could disappear altogether if care is not taken to protect it. Generally there is much affection for Chinatown on the part of residents and visitors alike. It serves many purposes. On a practical level it provides culturally and linguistically competent services to an increasing Asian population. At the same time, it also provides cultural familiarity and serves as a symbolic center for second and third generation Asian Americans who live outside of Chinatown. (Chinatown Master Plan 2010)



Source: Aditi Mehta  
Inside Storefront Library, 2010

Ironically, it is Chinatown's "new" residents that spurred next phase of the library story. Sam and Leslie Davol, both originally from Boston, moved to Chinatown in 2005 from New York City. In 2008 the couple founded Boston Street Lab, a non-profit organization. Boston Street Lab "finds ways to pilot cultural and civic programs in dense, urban environments (Boston

Street Lab).” “It is important to bring cultural activity down to a scale where it is accessible to people in their every day lives,” explains Leslie. People in cities treat cultural institutions such as museums or even libraries as planned expeditions rather than daily activities because of their massive scale. Before formalizing Boston Street Lab, the couple worked closely with Asian Community Development Corporation to do this through programs such as outdoor film screenings.

Professor Tunney Lee at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology refers to Sam and Leslie as the “new type of gentrifier.” Gentrification is thought of as the process of renewal accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into areas that often displace existing residents of lower-incomes, changing neighborhood fabric. Chinatown has been experiencing this as developers construct luxurious apartment buildings throughout the neighborhood. However, while these “new gentrifiers” are indeed residents that don’t fit the typical Chinatown member profile, they care about the contextual fabric of the neighborhood and the existing community’s causes. For example, since she moved to Chinatown, Leslie began attending neighborhood meetings such as the ones hosted by the Friends of the Chinatown Library group.

The idea for the Storefront Library stemmed out of several brainstorming sessions among members of the Friends of the Chinatown Library, and The Boston Street Lab opened the Storefront Library in Archstone’s<sup>11</sup> ground floor commercial space on lower Washington Street in



Source: Aditi Mehta  
Amy Cheung, Program Manager at Storefront Library, 2010

<sup>11</sup> Archstone is an apartment company that owns buildings throughout the City.

October 2009. Archstone donated the space because they had difficulty leasing it, and the establishment could only operate until January 2010. The temporary library offered Chinese and English books, newspapers, and magazines, as well as Internet access, a children's reading area, and a mix of programs and activities. Most of the books were donated. The Storefront Library was not a branch of the Boston Public Library, nor was it intended to be a substitute for a permanent branch. The project's purpose was to activate street-level space as a multi-media testimony that would demonstrate the demand for and potential impact of a library in the neighborhood.

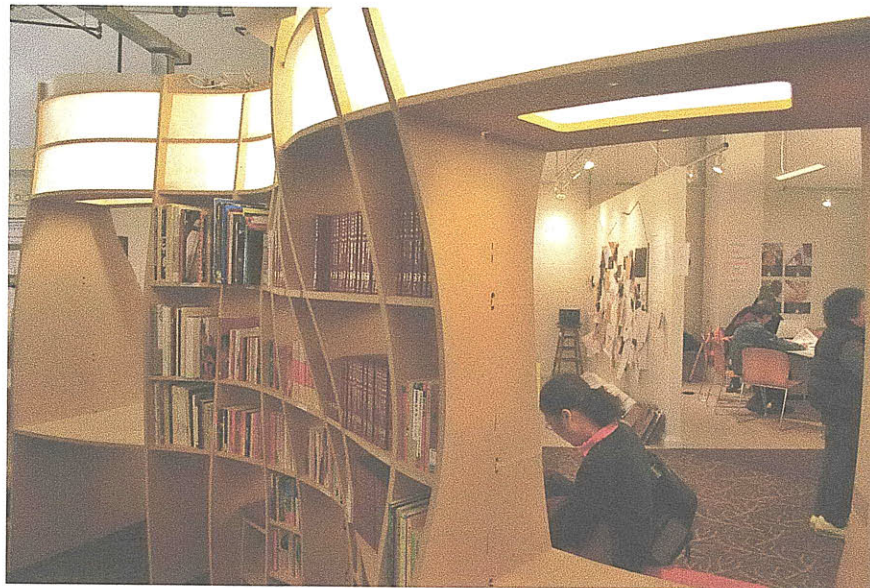


Source: Aditi Mehta  
Afternoon at Storefront Library, 2010

WBUR reported, “The library will only be open for three months. Why? Because it’s an experiment. And a demonstration project. It’s meant to illustrate the political, civic and creative will it takes to make something like this happen in a city like Boston. It also shows how short-term solutions can be pulled off much more quickly than going through normal bureaucratic channels.” (Shea, 2010, October 15) Several individuals and organizations were necessary to realize the Storefront Library. The budget for the project was approximately \$30,000, where programming and materials cost \$10,000 and the interior design cost \$20,000. Sam and Leslie Davol were able to leverage their connections to fundraise all the money, and it was especially important to them to avoid competing with other Chinatown organizations for resources. The Boston Street Lab secured the space, and

took responsibility for all programming and related materials. Marrikka Trotter, who was no longer with MDS, but a student at Harvard's Graduate School of Design (GSD) was still involved in the movement, and was responsible for managing the interior design. She organized a group of volunteer architecture students for the GSD to design and fabricate the inside of the Storefront Library. They based their designs on ideas generated at public community meetings as well as their own visions.

Staff members of the Boston Public Library served as advisors for the Storefront Project. "I call it the guerilla library," said BPL President Amy Ryan, "because the artists behind the temporary library were nimble. They operated 'off-the-grid,' broke the rules and bypassed the red tape that comes with building a real, permanent library. What they artfully did was create a facility to fill an intellectual need, or a cultural need, and that's what's so exciting about the complex thinking of the group that they pulled



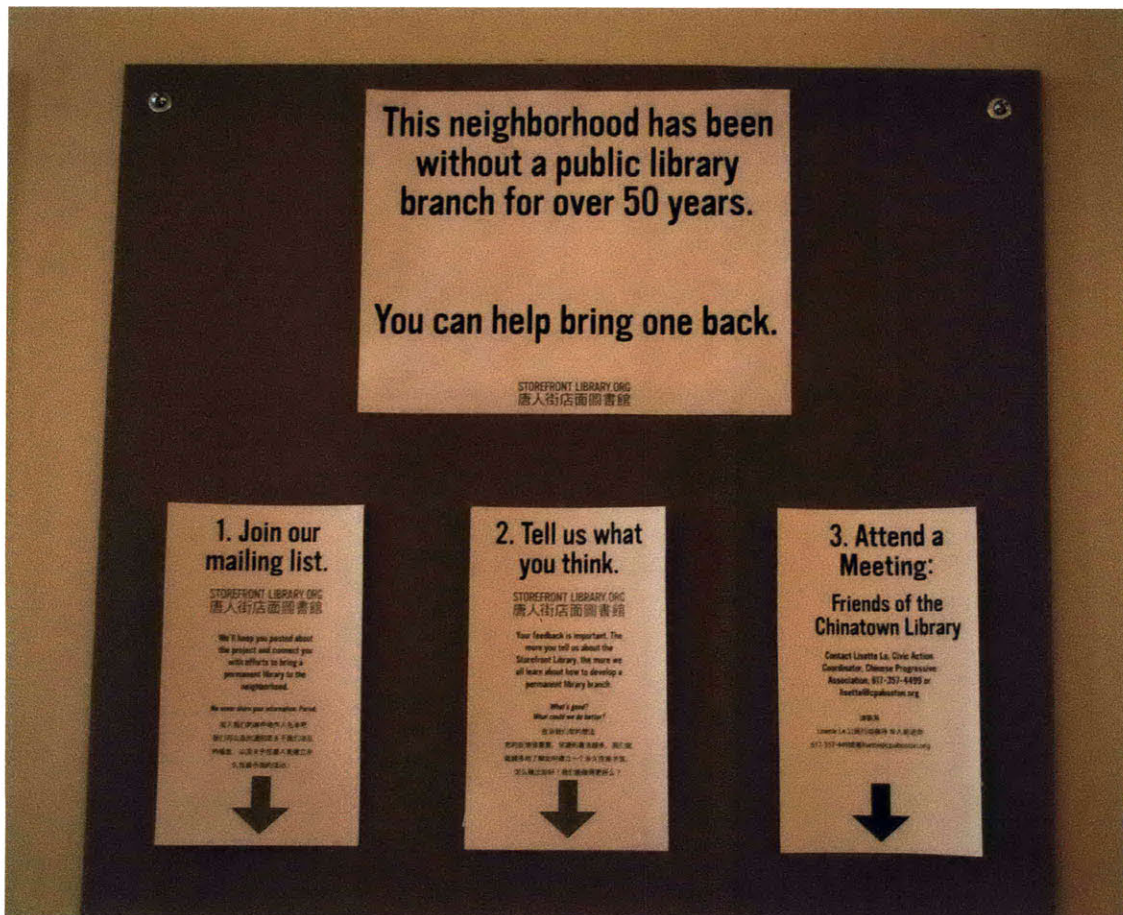
Source: Aditi Mehta  
Interior of Storefront Library, 2010

together." (Shea, 2010, October 15) The Boston StreetLab invited several organizations to host numerous workshops in the space throughout the day from storytelling to art projects to lectures to film-screenings to language classes. Overall, the Storefront hosted 110 events. (Chinatown Blog) Amy Cheung, who previously worked for Asian Community Development Corporation, was the program manager of the Storefront and supervised over thirty volunteers. A large number of these volunteers were students from Simmons College of Library Science, and were instrumental in maintaining the circulation system.

The Storefront also kept a blog of its daily activities, which served as a calendar tool for patrons, and as an important record of the entire project. Each day, the blog would update the number of library

cards issued, books circulated, as well as add to a map, which portrayed patrons' hometowns, the majority of users from Chinatown. Students from Tufts University's photojournalism program Exposure spent several hours per week recording the space, its users, and activities with their cameras. They shared their work on the Storefront Blog. Most importantly, the Storefront Library was able to collect data about its users. In three months, the Chinatown Storefront Library issued 540 library cards, collected 5,000 books through donations, and circulated 1,374 books among patrons (half of the books were Chinese). This was all accomplished with 39 volunteers and 2 paid staff. (Chinatown Blog & Cheung, 2010, February 3)

As Leslie Davol has envisioned, the Storefront Library made "culture" accessible to a group of people who may not have the time, money, or resources to seek it out. In this case, culture is defined as recreation and educational enrichment opportunities. The Storefront served as the true community space that did not exist in the neighborhood – it was a place for everyone from elderly to toddlers, and immigrant communities, especially Asian ones hold on to multi-generational spaces. (Daval, 2010,



Source: Aditi Mehta  
Sign at Storefront Library, 2010

February 1) Davol said, “While the Storefront model is a good option, we need to acknowledge that it is not a full service library if the community group is providing library services, but that might still be okay.”

I asked several members of the Chinatown community about their experience with the Storefront Library – the planning process, the actual space, as well as the programming – and everyone I spoke with had nothing but praise for the project, and for Sam and Leslie Davol. “Without them, we would not have gotten this far,” said a participant of the Friends of the Chinatown Library group. Residents indicated that it served as the missing public space in the neighborhood and volunteers noted that there were about thirty regulars that spent time at the Storefront daily. (Belanger, 2010, March 14)

With the Storefront project completed, The Friends of the Chinatown Public Library continue to brainstorm their next steps: should the organization keep advocating for a permanent branch or explore other temporary solutions? “What happens next in Chinatown is up to all the people who live there. This project should convince people to bring civic and cultural space to this small scale. It would be great to have another permanent space like this in Chinatown. Cities and communities need to realize that there should be a wide array of ways to solve problems, and sometimes resident needs to act themselves.” (Davol, 2010, February 1) As the group moves forward, they must also keep the economic situation in mind.

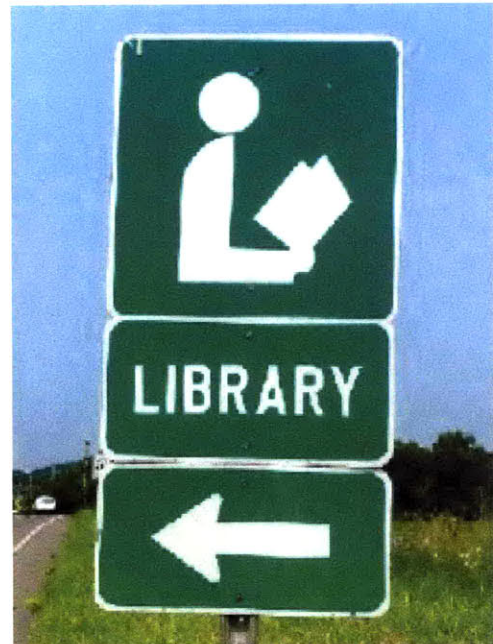


Source: Storefront Library Blog  
Outside of Storefront Library, 2010

On April 9, 2010, the Boston Public Library announced that they would be forced to shut down four branches in September 2010 because of the institution's own financial crisis. After three weeks of analysis and deliberation, the trustees decided to close the Fanueil Branch in Brighton, the Orient Heights Branch in East Boston, the Lower Mills Branch in Dorchester, and the Washington Mills Branch in South Boston. Members of the Chinatown Library movement wondered: where does Chinatown fit into this complicated picture, and what will happen to the momentum created by the Storefront Library? Peter Kiang responded to the news about branch closings by saying, "It may be true that demographics and 'pragmatism' were reasons for no [Chinatown] branch library in the past, but there is still no solid reason as to why one does not exist today.



Source: Chinatown Blog  
The Chinatown Gate, 2010



Source: Storefront Library Blog  
Typical Library Sign, 2010



## Chapter Three

### Reflections - What Does the Library Mean to the Chinatown Community?

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**“Chinatown is the only neighborhood in Boston without  
its own branch library; it is not a complete place.”**

**– Lisette Le, 2010**

## WHAT DOES THE LIBRARY MEAN TO THE CHINATOWN COMMUNITY?

The Chinatown community in Boston refers to a group of people linked together by geography - they all live, work, attend school, or recreate within the same boundaries. It also refers to a group of people linked together by a common Asian-American identity and shared experience in Massachusetts; all of whom feel connected to and care about the preservation and improvement of Chinatown. Accordingly, the Chinatown Library - both as a building and as a concept - has been a constant symbol of community development in the neighborhood from 1896 to 2010. Phillips and Pittman state that, "Community development can be a process, result, action, or outcome." (Phillips and Pittman, 2009, p. 6) For example, it can be a process to improve the delivery of neighborhood services through "the strengthening of the community's pattern of human and institutional relationships." (Phillips and Pittman, 2009, p. 6) It can be local-decision-making about certain social service programs that result in healthier places to live and work; it can be a group of people inciting action to change their economic situation; or it can also be an outcome of physical design and the built environment. In these ways, the Chinatown Library has been a process, result, action, and outcome. The historic overview of the library demonstrates that over time, the meanings or roles of the public space with regard to community development have either remained constant, changed, or disappeared and reappeared.

In order to answer the question: what does the library mean to the Chinatown community, I not only conducted a historical analysis, but I also interviewed several people involved in the contemporary movement to regain a library. I divided these individuals into three categories based on their perspectives. The classifications include the City of Boston, the Chinatown community, and the Boston Public Library administration. I had each participant explain his/her relationship to Chinatown and involvement with the library movement and the Storefront project. From these responses and from stories of the library's past, I conclude that that Chinatown Library *means* different things to its various providers and users. In this section, I reflect on six of these physical, social, economic, political, and cultural meanings.

<b>Chinatown Library's Meanings</b>	<b>1850-1938</b>	<b>1939-1950s</b>	<b>1960-1980s</b>	<b>1990-2008</b>	<b>2009-2010</b>
Assimilation Processing Center	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■			
Gathering Place	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■
Economic Training Ground	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■
Ethnic Identity Assertion			■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■
Turf Defense			■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■
Political Clout Building	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■

City of Boston	■
Boston Public Library	■
Chinatown Community	■

### ASSIMILATION PROCESSING CENTER

“The founding of the Boston Public Library, an institution designed to instruct and educate, fits very clearly into the framework of Yankee concern and anxiety about the lives and morals of urban immigrants, immigrants who were understood to need uplifting public institutions to try to free them from the misery of their social and economic situation.”  
- Kate Fichter, 2002

<b>Chinatown Library's Meanings</b>	<b>1850-1938</b>	<b>1939-1950s</b>	<b>1960-1980s</b>	<b>1990-2008</b>	<b>2009-2010</b>
Assimilation Processing Center	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■			

City officials and the BPL administration promoted social institutions such as public libraries as a way to help new immigrants and the native working classes adjust and assimilate to urban American society from the very start. They also believed that the civic institutions could prevent crime and violence by educating foreigners about democratic values and ideals. Branch libraries such as the Tyler Street facility opened specifically to provide access to lower-class populations that may not venture to the main library to borrow materials. The library’s purpose was to acculturate the masses and to Americanize. This remained a primary purpose of the Chinatown Library until the branch itself disappeared in the 1950s. The Storefront Library also provided resources for immigrants, but in a more culturally sensitive, non-imposing way. In the contemporary setting, the function of a branch with respect to immigrant communities is to accommodate rather than assimilate, and to respond to those in need, as well as help newcomers preserve their culture.

## GATHERING PLACE

“The library is not just a place to check out books. It is an intellectual center where you can hold intergenerational cultural events and gatherings.” - Suzanne Lee, 2010

Chinatown Library's Meanings	1850-1938	1939-1950s	1960-1980s	1990-2008	2009-2010
Gathering Place					

City of Boston	
Boston Public Library	
Chinatown Community	

In reviewing literature about the early days of the Boston Public Library and its branches, there is little to no mention of its function as a public space. It was originally designed to be a center of learning and resources. The stereotypical image of a library is a completely silent room with stacks of books and a stern librarian saying “shhh!” to anyone who made noise. (Cronin, 2010, March 2) This does not mean it did not serve as a gathering place initially; it was just not the intent of the BPL administration. This function became more crucial to the mission of neighborhood libraries by the 1920s and during the Depression. The design of new branch libraries even included meeting rooms in the post-Depression Era. (Whitehill, 1956, p. 102)

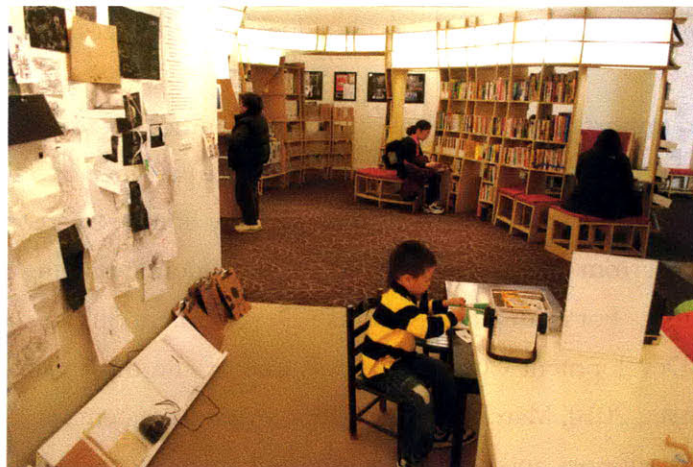
In Chinatown, by 1938, when the Tyler Street Branch announced its closing, residents and stakeholders of the surrounding neighborhoods made it clear in their protests that the library was an important gathering space. (*Christian Science Monitor*, 1938) Because the BPL trustees decided to reopen the Tyler Street branch as a reading room in 1951, it can be assumed that the BPL administration supported the neighborhood’s vision for a civic center in the municipal building. Of course, after urban renewal and the various highway construction projects, the library, along with several other buildings disappeared. The BPL made no effort to provide a replacement gathering space after the Tyler Street reading room closed, but perhaps this was because the institution did not see this as one of their civic responsibilities.

Beverly Wing explained, “And during urban renewal, there was also a lot of push to save the Chinese Merchant’s Association building, which was another important gathering space for the Chinese community.” Professor Tunney Lee clarified that this building was not a place that welcomed everybody in the same way as a library, but was a meeting spot for the neighborhood’s business leaders. The City built and opened the Quincy Community School in 1976, which served as a gathering place in the neighborhood initially in the same way as a public library. It was open in the evenings and weekends, which was convenient to adults, the elderly, and children, and still operates as a

community school. On any day after school or on weekends, people are using the cafeteria for various meetings. Yet, this is still not enough gathering space for the community. (Lee, T. 2010, March 17)

The Storefront Library has emphasized the importance of gathering space in Chinatown, and providing this to the neighborhood was a key goal of its founders. “In Chinatown, there is no shared cultural space aside from the park on the greenway, but that is outdoors,” says Leslie Davol. “The scene through the Chinatown Storefront Library’s front plate glass window would be unexpected for any traditional library. A swirl of commotion on the weekends, the space was filled one Saturday afternoon with a collection of buzzing children, volunteer storytellers, teenagers on computers and elderly newspaper-readers, not to mention a few slugs and worms inhabiting a tank of shredded newspaper on the conference table.” (Chayka and Ross, 2009, November 20) The library, especially in Chinatown, is not just a place to check out books. It is an intellectual center where you can hold intergenerational cultural events and gatherings. (Lee, S. 2010, March 8) Also, given that the Chinatown community is not just a geographic concept, the library can serve as an anchor for the spread out community. Stephanie Fan explains, “Some people may not live here [in Chinatown], but relate to it. For example, many patrons who use the Storefront Library were not residents of Chinatown, but made it into the neighborhood because they feel some sense of belonging to the space.”

This intergenerational quality of the gathering space is also something that is unique to Chinatown. When the neighborhood first formed in the late 1800s, it was comprised of mostly working single men who had no time to visit a branch library, and since then has evolved into a place with elders, families, and children. Many elders remain in Chinatown, while their grown children, grandchildren, and other relatives move to suburbs. When these younger family members come to visit Chinatown, a neighborhood library branch would serve as a welcoming recreational space for all age groups. (Wing, 2010, March 8)



Source: Aditi Mehta  
All Ages at Storefront,  
2010

## ECONOMIC TRAINING GROUND

“The priorities in the Chinatown neighborhood are educational and economic attainment. If the library helps achieve that, it has meaning.” – David Moy, 2010

Chinatown Library's Meanings	1850-1938	1939-1950s	1960-1980s	1990-2008	2009-2010
Economic Training Ground					

City of Boston	
Boston Public Library	
Chinatown Community	

From the start, the public library has served as an economic training ground. Its founding was based on the City’s desire to “civilize” the influx of low-skill immigrants and maintain social order. Andrew Carnegie, the benefactor of thousands of libraries across the country believed it was a place that would allow people to move upward economically. Additionally, the library has been most useful to low to moderate-income users who may not have access to resources during rough economic times. (Donahue, 2010, March 1) The librarian from the Tyler Street branch describes her experience helping people learn English and obtain citizenship in order to make stable lives for themselves in America, and even successful immigrants such as Frank Chin credit the library for their educational attainment. Ironically, even during urban renewal when the City decided to knock down the library, it was because the local government saw the land that the library sat on as an economic training ground in another sense. The Tyler Street municipal building sat empty and that land could bring money into Boston if it were used for more important purposes such as an efficient highway or affordable housing for the City’s workers. After the City took away the Tyler Street Branch, the BPL administration acknowledged the importance of library services in immigrant neighborhoods and sent a bookmobile to Chinatown. However, post-1980, neither the City nor the BPL provided Chinatown-specific educational services in a neighborhood branch.

“Education is so important to new immigrant communities because resources are limited and they [immigrants] came here for their children to succeed. The presence of a library means that there is opportunity,” Stephanie Fan told me when I asked her why libraries were important in immigrant neighborhoods. The Storefront Library also served as an economic training ground for Chinatown residents and other visitors. For example, the Human Development Studio run by Alex Zhang from the Asian Community Development Corporation was one of the most valuable services inside the temporary space. (Belanger, 2010, March 14) The Studio offered residents and small business-owners assistance in gaining skills, support, and knowledge to help them improve their lives by taking advantage



Source: Aditi Mehta  
One of Many Activities at Storefront, 2010



Source: Aditi Mehta  
Human Development Studio Sign, 2010

of development opportunities. Visitors were able to browse through Chinatown maps and official planning documents, as well as receive referrals to services such as business planning or childcare. The goal of the project was “to help Chinatown families, individuals, and small businesses understand, anticipate, and adapt to changes in the area generated by high-impact, large-scale developments.” (Zhang, 2010, March 4) Alex Zhang explained, “Branch libraries in immigrant communities should always function as a broader resource provider.”

During my interviews, an overwhelming number of Chinatown community members expressed that education and economic opportunities were the most important function of the Chinatown Library. Beverly Wing discussed how Asians value education and literacy and Lisette Le expressed that the Storefront Library was about convenient, needed access for educational and economic attainment. Cynthia Yee, a former teacher at the Quincy School said, “Every kid who has lived in Chinatown has used Copley extensively for school. She asked, “Shouldn’t they have access to something closer to home?”

However, not everybody in the Chinatown community had the same perspective on the library. While mostly everyone agrees that education and economic attainment are important, some neighborhood leaders do not feel that libraries provide the best way for immigrants to achieve this. Frank Chin echoed this sentiment, as did the President of the Chinatown Residents Council, Bill Moy. He stated, “Right now, the library doesn’t mean anything. Housing is the biggest need and we need better jobs. Right now the community is mostly supported by the restaurant business and those jobs don’t provide benefits to residents.” Even though building a library and building affordable housing or creating more jobs may seem mutually exclusive because all of these are important aspects of community development, some believe that if there is unity among main causes, success is more likely.

## ETHNIC IDENTITY ASSERTION

“Not having a library in Chinatown is a sign of discrimination. A sign of discrimination is when a City or authority figure does not allow you to have space. By space, I mean space in curriculum, space in the media, space in neighborhoods, etc. We weren’t and aren’t given a library space. This is discrimination.” - Cynthia Yee, 2010

Chinatown Library's Meanings	1850-1938	1939-1950s	1960-1980s	1990-2008	2009-2010
Ethnic Identity Assertion					

City of Boston	
Boston Public Library	
Chinatown Community	

At the June 13th, 2006 city council hearing about the Chinatown Library feasibility study, Professor Peter Kiang announced that June 13th was also the anniversary of the day when seventy-five Chinese men were brought to Massachusetts to work in Sampson’s shoe factory. He explained that this day marks the beginning of the development of Boston’s Chinatown. He went on to say, “And yet, no one knows about this historic event. Perhaps a library in the neighborhood would have highlighted this.” The Chinatown Library symbolizes the community’s past and would serve as a memorial and living history. Marrikka Trotter has extensively researched the development of the neighborhood for her previous coursework and for the *Chinatown Library Program and Siting Study*. She stated, “In Chinatown specifically, a library is important because the history of Chinatown has been erased from the history of the City. There needs to be a place for this history.” Similarly, another community member explained, “A library in immigrant communities and Chinatown are about preserving place and identity. A lot of the elders in the neighborhood are going to retire. These elders have worked hard to make Chinatown what it is today and a library would leave a footprint that everyone embraces.”

It is evident that preserving the community’s memories – individual and collective – are an important component of the library’s role, and these memories can also come in the form of “victimhood.” When I began chapter two, I discussed a common campaign method used among minorities to convince others of their cause. The message is based around this concept: because the community experienced past discrimination, they are entitled to reparations. “You will hear a lot of people saying: We deserve a library. They tore it down and they should give it back.” (Chuang, 2010, February 3) While talking with neighborhood leaders, this is a perspective that many people had. They feel the City treated Chinatown unfairly and therefore the City is obliged to respond to neighborhood needs. Yet, residents are also aware of the presence of this attitude in their neighborhood and recognize and reject it. For example, one community member shared his opinion: “If there were such a dire need for it, community groups could build a library as well. ACDC had the option to advocate for this with

Parcel 24.” It is important to note that building the library was discussed informally on Parcel 24, but quickly set aside when physical space proved to be a challenge and limitation. (Lee, T. 2010, March 17) Beverly Wing agreed and voiced her thoughts: “I don’t think it is necessary for people in Chinatown to feel slighted by the City. Urban Renewal was progress - it was updating our cities. The library was taken away for good reason and we did have the Copley Branch. Neighborhoods have life cycles.”

Lastly, the library stands for ethnic identity assertion in very practical ways. In the 1970s, many Chinatown organizations had just emerged from the civil rights movement with a large amount of documents, articles, and documentation of their work with no place to store it. “Chinatown needs a repository for the community’s archives,” explained Professor Kiang. The library would also allow immigrant users to maintain connection with their roots and host countries. The Tyler Street Branch served this function as well. Trustee meeting minutes from the 1920s indicate that there was Chinese material available for Chinatown residents at the Tyler Street Library. “Immigrant communities are big newspaper communities. Immigrants love to read newspapers from their native countries.” (Le, 2010, December 16) Even though the Copley Library tries to accommodate Chinese-Americans through events such as their Chinese New Year celebration, they are not successful. “Only Caucasians attend those events,” explained Brianna Belanger, a volunteer from the Storefront Library.



Source: Aditi Mehta  
Shadow of Bilingual Storefront Sign & Wishing Tree, 2010

## TURF DEFENSE

“The Storefront Library is a microcosm of where the community is going. It is much more diverse than people realize.” - Kye Liang, 2010

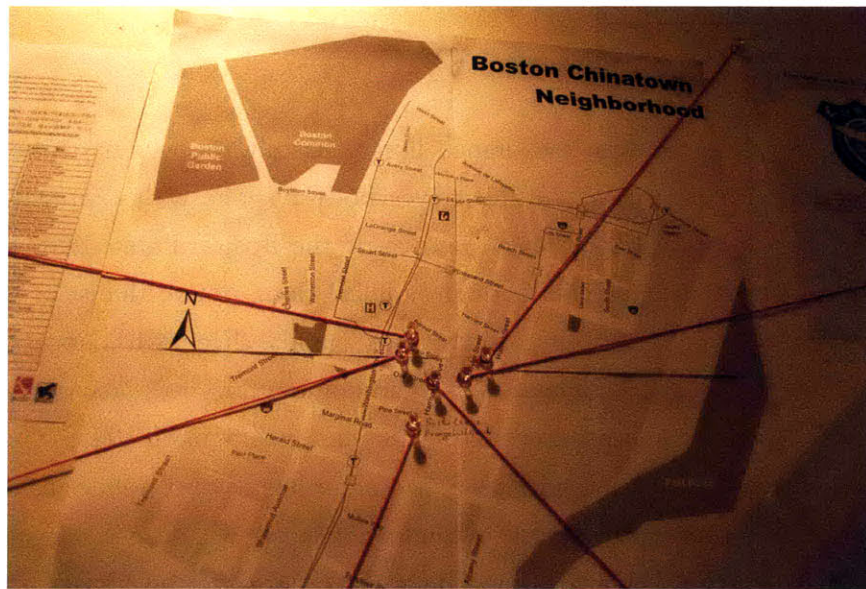
Chinatown Library's Meanings	1850-1938	1939-1950s	1960-1980s	1990-2008	2009-2010
Turf Defense					

City of Boston	
Boston Public Library	
Chinatown Community	

Turf defense refers to the idea of retaining ownership of land, property, or a geographic area. When the Tyler Street branch first opened, the City and the BPL very consciously chose locations that they thought were in need of the facility. By providing library service in a certain area, the City and the BPL administration have a small amount of control over that environment. However, when the service was taken away in 1938, the community tried to demand for what they saw as *their* neighborhood facility to return. Even though the library was reinstated during the 1950s, the City once again claimed it soon after, and tore through the Chinatown neighborhood to develop the land for purposes it perceived to be important. The City justified its actions by citing the area’s decreasing population, which indicated that people in the Tyler Street district were moving to suburbs. The City did not go beyond the hard facts to see that the fabric of Chinatown was actually changing, and while Syrian and other immigrants were leaving, the number of Chinese-American families was actually increasing.

Since the 1950s, Chinatown has been struggling to keep its neighborhood and land, and the library symbolizes this struggle. “What is it about the idea of having a public library that makes you feel like a legitimate space?” (Fichter, 2010, February 9) The library movement is a lot about how an ethnic enclave can preserve its neighborhood, which is an overall theme of the 2010 Chinatown Master Plan. (Fan, 2010, January 11) From the 1960s onward, turf defense in Chinatown concerned institutional encroachment, but since the 1990s, it has become about luxury versus affordable housing. In the last decade, developers have built over 1,000 units of high-end housing. These are not homes constructed for “traditional” Chinatown residents or community members. What does that mean for the demand of services in Chinatown? (Liang, 2010, February 18) In order to be worthwhile and add net public value to a community, libraries require high patronage. Thus, the establishment would have to serve not only “traditional” Chinatown, but new neighbors as well, which the Storefront Library did successfully.
















Who does Chinatown belong to and who decides this? Is it the existing and old-time residents who know every corner of the place; is the community groups that serve residents' needs; is it the City that continues to maintain, develop, and reshape the area; is it the big institutions willing to pump money into physical property; or is it the new residents that pay expensive rents and provide revenue to the local businesses? "I think it is very interesting that it took newcomers of Chinatown to help realize the library vision. What does that mean?" asked Beverly Wing. In some ways, the Storefront Library legitimized the physicality of the Chinatown, but at the same time, it also highlighted the tensions among the varied populations that feel ownership of the neighborhood.






Source: Aditi Mehta  
Chinatown Neighborhood Exhibition at Storefront, 2010

## POLITICAL CLOUT BUILDING

“The reading room was one of many things lost during urban renewal. The neighborhood had no political clout. The library story parallels the community’s need to get political clout. We will never get what we want unless we galvanize around what we want.” - David Moy, 2010

Chinatown Library's Meanings	1850-1938	1939-1950s	1960-1980s	1990-2008	2009-2010
Political Clout Building	  	  	  	  	  

City of Boston	
Boston Public Library	
Chinatown Community	

For the Chinatown community, the branch library has always been a symbol for the ethnic enclave’s need to build political clout. Almost everybody I spoke with expressed that the main reason that Chinatown does not have its own branch of the Boston Public Library is because the neighborhood has not been able to build enough political clout around the issue and thus has not succeeded in making the library a priority on the City’s agenda. (Fan, 2010, January 11) Lisette Le said, “There has always been the mentality that Asian communities will take care of themselves.” Because Asian-Americans were not allowed to gain citizenship until 1943, when the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed, the community really had no influence over politicians’ decisions. Even after this, because of language barriers and discrimination, many Chinese-Americans saw no point in voting. (Lee, 2010, March 17) David Moy stated: “You can never be socially and economically integrated, unless you are politically integrated and the story of the library shows that. If you talk to new immigrants, political engagement is not top of their list, but it should be because that is how they will get what they need. If you don’t have political clout in these demanding times, you will be cut out. The neighborhood gets political clout by registering as many voters as possible.”

Post-1965, the number of registered voters in Chinatown began to increase. Frank Chin explained that in 1970, there were only 300 registered voters in Chinatown. He personally went around the whole neighborhood knocking on doors and by 1977 his organizing efforts increased the number of voters to 3,600. (Chin, 2010, February 18) This marks the beginning of Chinatown gaining political power. As the Asian-American Civic Association, Chinese Progressive Association, the Boston Neighborhood Center, and other grassroots organization became more involved in local politics, the number of registered voters continued to increase. In fact, by the new millennium, for every city council race, the candidates would campaign around one specific issue to galvanize voters in Chinatown. In 2005, District Councilor James Kelly ran on the Chinatown Library platform. (Le, 2010,

December 16) This shows that the library also turned into a symbol for local politicians' need to gain community buy-in. "Councilman Linnehan needs to champion the cause. His base is in South Boston, but now he has to pay attention to Chinatown because the vote there is significant," said David Moy.

The issue of the library is also representative of neighborhood divisions. In order for the library movement to be successful, there needs to be unity within the Chinatown community on the issue. (Zhang, 2010, March 4) Councilman Linnehan stressed this point too when he met with the Friends of the Chinatown Library group in March 2010. "There are so many other groups around here such as the Chinatown Neighborhood Council, Chinatown Residents Association, and Chinatown Main Streets, and so on. Not everyone in the community agrees on what they think the neighborhood needs, but it is not a good idea to let people outside the neighborhood see the factions around here." (Personal Interview, 2010)

#### **THE IMPORTANCE OF MEANINGS**

The six meanings of the Chinatown Library – assimilation processing center, gathering place, economic training ground, ethnic identity assertion, turf defense, and political clout building – relay valuable information about the history and future of the neighborhood, as well as the needs of its community members. These meanings are an attempt to go beyond the purely practical function of a branch library and to understand the symbolic roles these spaces play in community development throughout time. As cities and neighborhoods continue to grow, shrink, and change, the survival or resurrection of a branch library depends on its ability to have meaning.



## Chapter Four

### Branch Libraries in Chinatowns and other Boston Neighborhoods

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## BRANCH LIBRARIES IN CHINATOWNS & OTHER BOSTON NEIGHBORHOODS

By surveying other Asian branch libraries in cities throughout the United States, it is evident that the six meanings of the Chinatown Library in Boston – assimilation processing center, gathering place, economic training ground, ethnic identity assertion, turf defense, and political clout building – extend to other branches in comparable neighborhoods. Also, in order to understand how new libraries are developed and built in Boston, this chapter analyzes the politics behind allocating funds and constructing the recent Allston-Honan Branch and the Mattapan Branch.<sup>12</sup> What lessons can the Friends of the Chinatown Library apply to their campaign from the models and experiences of other branch libraries across America, and in particular, the City of Boston? Similarly, what lessons can the Boston Public Library administration and city officials take away from these same models and experiences?

### ASIAN BRANCHES

Chinese immigrants in New York City began receiving library services during the early 1900s. This was during the same time when the Tyler Street Delivery Station was present in Boston's Chinatown, providing material for immigrants of several countries. It was not until approximately sixty years later that several Chinatown communities in other cities, especially on the West coast, began advocating for their own branches. From the 1940s to the 1970s, a series of national policies and international events spurred major demographic, socio-economic, and cultural changes in Chinatown communities across the United States. For example, in 1943, Asians gained the right to become citizens, and thus vote. (American Civil Liberties Union) In 1962, the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act increased the number of immigrants permitted to enter the U.S. Similarly, the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 increased the amount of immigration into America from Hong Kong and China; the 1974 Supreme Court decision of *Lau v. Nichols* ruled that school districts were obligated to accommodate the needs of limited English speakers; the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 resulted in the dramatic influx of Southeast Asian refugees into the country; and the normalization of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and China in 1979 also welcomed a new flow of immigrants into East and West coast cities. (*Tufts University Report*, 2005, p. 17)

Community leaders and activists in Chinatowns nationwide worked to accommodate their neighborhoods' growing needs for English literacy, acculturation, preservation of cultural identity, and access to education and other informational resources. In order to fulfill these needs during the 1970s and 1980s, established Chinatowns in cities such as Chicago, Oakland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles prioritized the addition of neighborhood branch libraries for their communities, and built the political clout to realize these visions. Most recently, Seattle completed the International District / Chinatown Branch Library in 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Refer to Appendix to understand library finance, decision-making, and management.

## New York City

New York City can trace its Chinatown Library roots back to 1908. When the Chatham Square Branch first opened in 1903, it was the second Carnegie-funded library in the nation and did not cater to Asian residents. On March 13, 1908, the *New York Times* read, “Within a few weeks, the Chinese of this city will have a circulating library containing modern European works translated into their native tongue. At the same time, the YMCA...will establish the only [facility] in the United States designed for the exclusive use of Chinamen.” (*New York Times*, 1908, p. 6) Dr. F. F. Tong, an influential resident of Chinatown brought up the issue with Edward W. Gaillard, Supervisor of Work with Schools for the New York Public Library. “Twenty men prominent in Chinatown affairs created an organization known as the Chinese Literary Club that would oversee the library. The Commercial Press of Shanghai, the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist Missions will be supplying the books. (New York Times, 1908, p. 6)

Three years later, a *NY Times* (1911) headline stated, “Library for Chinese Opened Downtown.” Miss Ernestine Rose, the head librarian in charge of the Chatham Square Branch then, added 300 Chinese books to the library’s collection. This branch was located in the middle of several immigrant neighborhoods, and carried books in German, French, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Yiddish, Greek, and Arabic. However, the library provided no literature for the nearby Chinese neighborhood and thus Miss Rose convinced the board of trustees to allow her to spend money on Chinese books. With help from Mr. Gaillard and Kwai Fong Pang, a merchant who had been living in the U.S. for several years, she was able to order Chinese books from abroad and from California. (*The New York Times*, 1911, p. 7) Miss Rose told the *NY Times*, “The books for which we have the most call are the ones dealing with Western civilization. The educated Chinaman is greedy for knowledge and for what is going on this country and in Europe.” “The desire of the Chinese to learn our ways,” she continued, “is shown by the large number of calls for *Etiquette of Western Countries*.” (*The New York Times*, 1911, p. 7) Miss Rose’s statements are a product of the broader societal attitude towards immigrants and assimilation during this time period, and shows that librarians saw it as their mission to Americanize foreigners.

Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, the residents of the NYC has referred to the Chatham Square Branch as New York City’s Chinatown Branch Library because of its neighborhood location and its responsiveness to the Asian users. By this point, the library’s mission had changed from assimilation and Americanization to minority empowerment. Similar to the Tyler Street Branch in Boston, it began by serving a variety of immigrants, with the Chinese being the smallest population. Even though the origins of this library serving an Asian community are more than one hundred years old, it is important to note that it was through the dedication of one librarian that the first step of this mission was accomplished.

## Chicago

The Chinatown branch began in a 1,500 square foot storefront facility in 1972 by the Chicago Public Library administration because of requests from the community. The small commercial space was always packed with visitors, and demonstrated to the City that a full-service branch was needed. “It wasn’t a real library. There were only about three or four shelves of books. All the other libraries were a lot better,” said Gene Kong, who used to do his homework in the small storefront library that has since been turned into an herb store (Johnson, 1990, p. 30). It outgrew its small location shortly after it was opened because of the large number of visitors and demand for more books and services. In 1988, the Chicago Public Library Board of Trustees approved \$5.9 million for a 20-year lease to rent space for the Chinatown Branch Library. The construction of a branch would normally cost \$2.4 million, but the board was unable to find land to buy in a central location in Chinatown. The rental site, which is 11,750 square feet, is part of a shopping complex, which was under development in the late 1980s. The facility opened its doors to the public in 1990. The main entrance is flanked by two Tibetan marble lions, which the People’s Republic of China (PRC) donated. The PRC also provided the funds to build a Chinese garden behind the library property. (Kiernan, 1993, p. 1)

The Chicago Public Library received a \$50,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to help pay for the \$750,000 design competition used to solicit and choose an architect for the project. While it is not the largest of Chicago’s eighty-two branches, it was by far the busiest in 1991, just one year after its opening. (Kiernan, 1993, p. 1) In 1993, The Chicago Tribune reported, “Only some of the patrons who crowd the 2353 S. Wentworth branch of the Chicago Public Library actually go there for books. Others get their utility bills translated at the front desk. Or write messages to family back home on computers using Chinese-language software. Or teach their children the traditional art of kite-making after a luncheon of dim sum at a neighborhood restaurant.” (Kiernan, 1993, p. 1)

As of 2010, the Chinatown branch has been in operation for just under twenty years, and the community is labeling the library as inadequate. This is because it receives 1,000 visitors daily, and is so packed with people, that oftentimes, Chinese immigrant students end up completing their homework assignments on the floor. Senior citizens are always waiting for available seats in the adult area. (Kiernan, 1993, p. 1) “It’s so overcrowded and unbearably noisy that I don’t want to come here, but I have no choice,” said Genny Han, who studies English at the library. (Kiernan, 1993, p. 1)

For this reason, community activists are working very hard to ensure that the Census 2010 count as many people in the neighborhood as possible. Census data helps determine where resources are allocated. Each federal agency employs its own formula to figure out how much money to distribute to a given state. Then each state uses the census data to determine which areas require resources. Chinatown community

leaders believe that a full census count will increase the overall funding the city has for new libraries, and “will give Chinatown more political leverage in where and how money is spent.” (Olivo, 2010, March 31)

### **Oakland**

With the support of the Federal Library Services Construction Act grant, The Asian Branch Library in Oakland was founded in 1975. When the grant ended in 1978, the Oakland Public Library continued funding the branch because of the high user rates, but moved all services into the main library building to keep maintenance costs low. In 1980, another federal grant enabled the Asian Branch to move into its own building, which became too small and inadequate by 1995, when the library moved yet again to its current address at 9th Street and Broadway. Oakland’s Asian Branch Library’s collection is 70 percent non-English. It carries items in eight Asian languages including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai, Cambodian, Tagalog, and Laotian. (Oakland Asian Branch Library). Even through three different moves to different locations, the Asian branch found a way to serve its constituents.

### **San Francisco**

The San Francisco Chinatown Branch Library was originally named the North Beach Branch and built in 1921 by architect G. Albert Lansburgh with a \$67,589 Carnegie grant. In 1958, the branch name was changed to reflect the community it continues to serve and the surrounding neighborhood.<sup>13</sup> The City used the Community Block Development Grant in the early 1980s to create a garden behind the branch. Similar to the Oakland Asian Branch, the popularity of the library required expansion. With a unique combination of public and private funds, the City and the San Francisco public library administration launched a major renovation project and the branch was expanded to twice its original size. The grand reopening of the Chinatown Branch Library occurred on June 15, 1996 (San Francisco Public Library Chinatown Branch).

### **Los Angeles**

A social worker named Dolores Wong and her friend Ruby Ling Louie launched the initiative to open a branch library in Los Angeles’ Chinatown in 1971. (Loper, 1078, p. H8) The Los Angeles Times reports, “The odds really were against them. For instance, the nearest library (the downtown main unit) was too close to justify a Chinatown branch. No funds were available.” (Loper, 1978, p. H8) Wong led the efforts for six years by circulating petitions and by lobbying to nine of LA’s twelve councilmen. When the City agreed to provide a library in Chinatown, the movement encountered challenges when the Los Angeles Public Library administration suggested a site that was too small for a library branch. According to the Los Angeles Times (1978), potential sites were either unavailable,

<sup>13</sup> There is also another branch of the San Francisco Public Library named the North Beach Branch Library located on 2000 Mason Street and the Chinatown Branch is located on 1135 Powell Street. They are located approximately one mile apart. The North Beach Library also has a Chinese-speaking staff.

owners were not willing to lease their property to the City, or the property would require high, prohibitive costs for repairs and rehabilitation. Wong and Louie persisted, mobilized the community, and formed a Chinatown Library Ad Hoc Committee. The committee included residents from Chinatown and the greater Los Angeles area. Together, the committee was able to recruit a key player in the building of the Chinatown Library – Dr. William Chun-Hoon, principal of the local Castelar School.

The committee and Dr. Chun-Hoon agreed to convert the vacant Castelar school auditorium into a new public library to serve both the community and the school. The vision gained support from the school district, public library system, and the City. Library administrators saw the community school library as an experiment to prove that there was in fact a demand for a library in the area. “At the dedication ceremony on February 7, 1977, the Mayor called this invention ‘a first breakthrough and represents the first such joint sharing of school and public library facilities in Southern California.’” (Tufts University Report, 2005, p. 18) “When we first opened in 1977, we were designated as an experimental library for two years to demonstrate a need. The library administrators said we would have to circulate 30,000 books to justify our existence. Everyone was concerned, but we’ve exceeded our goal more than seven times,” said Wong. (Loper, 1978, p. H8)

Wong and Louie also organized the “Friends of the Chinatown Library” in 1976 to better facilitate their library movement, and it was incorporated in 1977 as a 501c(3) non-profit. Demand for Chinese library services kept growing, and the Chinatown Branch Library experienced two expansions in the 1980s. This added a total of 11,812 square feet to the original 2,600 square feet facility. “The 1998 city election allowed residents to vote for the designation of a 12,500 square feet site for a new, stand-alone Chinatown Branch Library,” states the Tufts University Report. (2005, p. 18)

The Chinatown Branch Library is one of the largest and the second busiest branch in the Los Angeles Public Library system. Aside from books, movies, and music, the library offers other resources and activities such as an English Conversation Center and a Homework Center. “By developing a relationship for the mutual benefit of the local school and the community, the two entities were able to establish a library for the neighborhood, thereby contributing to the vitality of the community’s culture, raising student achievement, and serving as a model for Chinatown communities nationwide.” (Tufts University Report, 2005, p. 18)

## Seattle

The new International District/Chinatown Branch Library in Seattle opened on June 11, 2005.<sup>14</sup> It was the 16th project completed under the “Libraries for All” program. Seattle voters approved \$196.4 million in “Libraries for All” bonds in 1998. The plan included \$119 million for a new central library on the existing downtown site. It also included improving, expanding, or replacing twenty-two existing neighborhood libraries and constructing three new branches including the Chinatown Branch. (Eskenazi, 2008, September 12)

In 1994, voters actually rejected the bonds for new libraries, but in 1997, librarian Deborah Jacobs headed a comprehensive community review that led to the successful 1998 vote. She attended 100 community meetings in four months to build that public support. Jacobs recounts: “We asked people: ‘What do you want in your new library?’ And we asked that question in every single neighborhood.” (Eskenazi, 2008, September 12) Because no community was left out, everybody felt they had something to gain from the “Libraries for All” program and thus the political strategy was successful. The Library Foundation pledged to raise another \$83 million for the citywide project, and Bill and Melinda Gates gave a \$20 million gift. (Eskenazi, 2008, September 12)

## The Six Meanings

The six meanings of the Chinatown Library in Boston emerge in the brief stories of other Asian branches across the United States. I was not able to trace the intricate details of each library branch’s founding and evolution, but that research would suggest even more or slightly nuanced meanings for each branch. In New York City, the Chatham Square Branch was also an assimilation processing center as described by head librarian Miss Ernestine Rose, who was eager to provide the Chinese immigrants with literature about Western civilization at the turn of the century. Similarly, in Chicago, the services provided at the Chinatown branch such as homework help and translation assistance demonstrate how the facility is an economic training ground for immigrants working to adjust to and advance in their new environments. The San Francisco and Oakland branches are living memorials, holding the histories of the neighborhoods’ past, but also commemorating its present and future by carrying contemporary foreign language material and hosting cultural events. The story of Los Angeles’ Chinatown branch library shows the need for political clout building and the support of city councilors in order to realize a civic goal. Citizens of Seattle supported the new Chinatown branch in their city because the “Libraries for All” program provided an incentive for every neighborhood and every individual. The presence of a branch legitimized every community’s turf in Seattle, and the Chinatown branch allowed residents of that neighborhood and other Asian-Americans in Seattle to assert their ethnic identity.

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<sup>14</sup> The Central Library in Seattle opened one year earlier on May 23, 2004.

## **BOSTON BRANCHES**

In the beginning of 2010, the Boston Public Library (BPL) included 26 branches, each with its own history. However, the number of branches will decrease to 22 by September 2011. New libraries are important symbols for mayors. A community organizer from Allston noted: “Any mayor would like to have his name on a library. That plaque is always going to be there, saying it was Menino who built it. It’s a great legacy to have.”<sup>15</sup> (*Tufts University Report*, 2005, p. 30)

In 2005, a group of graduate students from Tufts University’s Urban and Environmental Planning Department completed a report about building political will to bring a library to Chinatown. As part of their report, they analyzed the power dynamics that led to recent library projects in Boston. This section will build upon the report’s findings to present common themes from these communities’ stories and compare these trends with Chinatown neighborhood’s movement for a library. This chapter discusses the Honan-Allston Branch Library and the Mattapan Branch Library because they are the most recent new facilities in Boston. While Dorchester constructed a new branch library in 2009, it was part of a renovated high school building development, and is therefore not comparable to Chinatown.

### **Honan-Allston Branch Library**

The history of library services in Allston dates back to 1889 when the BPL opened a delivery station in Frank Howe’s drugstore at 26 Franklin Street. In response to a growing residential population and an increased demand for books, the BPL opened a reading room at 354 Cambridge Street in 1905 and by 1924 it became a full-service branch. The branch operated in the rented space until 1981, when it was closed down due to budget cuts (Boston Public Library). Since the closing, Allston residents and city representatives argued for the replacement of the library without success.

In 1984, Brian McLaughlin, who had protested with signs at the main BPL Copley Square building to fight the closing of the library in 1981, was elected to the city council where he consistently advocated for the reinstatement of a branch library in Allston. Eventually, in 1992, he asked for a \$3.5 million bond issue by the city to fund construction of a branch library building, as well as greater local educational institutional support through payments in lieu of taxes from Boston College, Boston University, and Harvard University. (*Tufts University Report*, 2005, p. 30-33)

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<sup>15</sup> According to Alice Hennessy, the Mayor’s Liaison to Public Libraries, Menino has substantially renovated every single branch with new roofs and heating systems. The mayor added a new wing to the Hyde Park Branch, and built new libraries in Allston, Mattapan, and Dorchester.

When Mayor Thomas Menino was newly elected in 1994, he publicly supported building a library in Allston, and finally the city administration recognized neighborhood's appeal. Menino had served on the City Council with McLaughlin, and during his first term, declared his commitment to set aside funding in the city's capital and operational budget. By 1997, Menino was able to include the cost of building a library in the city's capital budget and "published a 5-year capital plan which amounted to \$1.2 billion spending on capital projects, including \$3.5 million to build a library in Allston. The site for the library was obtained through a land swap with a private developer later revealed to be representing Harvard University in 1997." (*Tufts University Report*, 2005, p. 30-33) The groundbreaking occurred in 2000, and the library opened in June 2001.

### *Community Context*

The 2002 *Allston-Brighton Community Needs & Assets Assessment Report*<sup>16</sup> states that "Both residents and elected officials commented on the fact that the area is not seen as a 'voting district.' Because of this, there is a perception that Allston-Brighton is ignored by City government, and that it does not carry the political clout of other neighborhoods in the City." (Allston-Brighton Healthy Boston Coalition) Accordingly, the report shows the low voter turnout of the neighborhood. For example, in the November 6, 2001 City of Boston election, (the same year the Honan-Allston library opened its doors), the Allston-Brighton neighborhood produced the lowest voter turnout of 26 percent of Boston neighborhood residents. In the 1980s and 1990s, the neighborhood also had close to the lowest turnout compared to other Boston communities. (*New Bostonians Demographic Report*) This trend can be attributed to the large number of immigrant and student residents, both transient populations. "Such a sense of under-representation and inability to leverage the city's political support may have contributed to the lack of response on the part of the City to reinstate a library in Allston after its closing in 1981." (*Tufts University Report*, 2005, p. 30-33) According to the *Bringing A Library to Chinatown Report*, while there was "a lot of talk" among residents and consistent demand at community meetings for a return of a library from the community, there was no organized community lobbying for a library. Unlike Chinatown, there was no official Friends of the Public Library group or dedicated non-profit such as the Chinese Progressive Association to lobby for the issue.

### *Local Government Perspective*

The fact that there was no organized community group around the library demonstrates the importance of City Councilor Brian McLaughlin and Mayor Menino, who played crucial roles in getting the library built in Allston. Paul Berkley, President of the Allston Civic Association in 2001 and an Allston resident for 55 years, highlighted Brian McLaughlin's instrumental role, "I give a lot of credit to Brian McLaughlin, he really made it happen. I tip my hat to him. There was a lot talk among

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<sup>16</sup> This report is published by the Allston-Brighton Healthy Boston Coalition.

residents, but he was leading the charge. He is a great reader himself and really wanted a library.” (*Tufts University Report*, 2005, p. 30-33) Many believe that McLaughlin most likely sought Menino’s support for a library in Allston before he was elected mayor in 1993. (*Tufts University Report*, 2005, p. 30-33)

### *Implementation*

Just one year after his election in 1994, Mayor Menino publicly announced his commitment to the new public library cause in Allston. The funds for the design and construction of a library were designated in the 1995 capital budget, but a significant challenge lay in identifying a suitable site for the facility. In 1995, Brian Honan was elected to city council. While McLaughlin laid the groundwork for the library, Councilor Honan remained dedicated to the cause and managed the library’s construction and implementation process.<sup>17</sup> As soon he was elected, there was discussion of buying a parcel of land to accommodate the new library, and specific location possibilities included along Harvard Avenue or in a retail space adjacent to I-90.

A half-acre library site was secured through a negotiated land swap between the Menino Administration and developer Robert Beal, later revealed to have been representing Harvard University. The 57,000 square-foot parcel at 308 North Harvard Street was slated as the site for a library. At the time of the land swap, the Menino Administration was unaware that Harvard was giving the parcel of land in exchange for a piece of City property that was adjacent to other parcels they had acquired through Beal. In 1998, Harvard University revealed that it had owned the parcel of land that Beal gave to the city for a library. A complicated series of events unfolded between Harvard University and the City of Boston when it was uncovered that the university had secretly obtained 52 acres of land in Allston through Beal. This resulted in a commitment from the university to develop an institutional plan with a community process component. (*Tufts University Report*, 2005, p. 30-33)

Once the land was identified and the library location was secured, Mayor Menino appointed a Library Advisory Committee. The committee included Councilman Brian Honan, residents of Allston and neighborhood leaders including Paul Berkeley, and members of different city agencies such as the Boston Public Library and the Department of Neighborhood Development. The committee worked with the architectural firm, Machado and Silvetti Associates, Inc., which is led by Harvard professors, to develop a library design that would meet community needs while fitting budgetary constraints. The committee originally hoped to design a two-story building, but the cost factor limited the design to one story. After going through a community process and obtaining majority approval for both interior and exterior building design, ground was broken for the library on January 19, 2000. (*Tufts University Report*, 2005, p. 30-33)

<sup>17</sup> Councilor Honan was elected to city council three times, but passed away in 2002. The library was named in honor of him. When was name decided?

## **Mattapan Branch Library**

Increase S. Smith founded the Mattapan Library Association on December 18, 1849 because the community believed the residents of the area needed accessible library services. The Boston Public Library did not even open until 1854, and in 1870, Dorchester and Mattapan were annexed into Boston. The Mattapan branch began as a reading room attached to a delivery station in the Oakland Hall Building with a book collection of 98 volumes in 1898. In the early to mid 1920s, Mattapan's population was increasing because Jewish immigrants were moving out of Central Boston. From 1924 to 1926, the annual circulation grew significantly – from 20,000 volumes to 75,00 and thus, in 1923, the BPL granted the reading room branch status and integrated into the Boston Public Library system. As demand for library services grew in correspondence with the growing population, Mattapan residents requested a new library in 1926. More and more citizens wrote letters and signed petitions, and the community activism came through: a branch library on 10 Hazelton Street was opened on June 22, 1931. (Boston Public Library) By the 1980s, there was growing community support for a new library and in 1983, City Councilor Charles Yancey advocated for this capital project.

### *Community Context*

*The Boston Globe* stated in a November 11th 2001 editorial, “Even Mayor Menino has stated publicly that the Mattapan branch is outdated and inadequate (*The Boston Globe*, Nov. 11, 2001).” The article also noted that the existing branch was located on a residential street with no off-street parking, was set back, hidden, easy to miss, not pedestrian-friendly and difficult to access using public transportation. At the time, Boston City Councilor Yancey was very vocal in City Hall about Mattapan's need for a new facility. He expressed that in 1936, the Mattapan Library branch location met the needs of the community. However, the neighborhood evolved from a “streetcar suburb” into a densely populated community with a diverse ethnic fabric. Mattapan's population has expanded immensely since 1936 and the largely Haitian and Hispanic residents would benefit from a new library that would meet their cultural needs.

While Mattapan residents overwhelmingly supported the idea to build a new library for the Mattapan neighborhood beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, no formalized library advocacy group was developed to lead the efforts. The Tufts report found in an interview with Mattapan's Director of Neighborhood Services, Lillie Searcy, that in the 1990s, there were two community meetings that focused on the process of gaining support for the construction of the new library. Even though a structured Mattapan Branch Library advocacy group did not form to advance the cause, it is evident that Mattapan residents expressed their support in different community meetings and through the election and reelection of City Councilor Yancey, who made the library a priority in his campaign platforms. (Boston Public Library)

### *Local Government Perspective*

City Councilor Yancey was elected into office in 1983 and was responsible for bringing not only a new branch library to Mattapan, but also a community center and economic development plan. In 1997, he garnered the political support of four other Boston city councilors to block the passage of Mayor Menino's Capital Budget in a five to four vote. This action enabled him to ask for three additions to the Mayor's capital budget: 1) Loan authorization for the construction of a new Mattapan branch library, 2) Loan authorization for the construction of a new Mattapan community center, and 3) Creation of an economic development plan for the Mattapan community. The mayor agreed to these additions to the 1997 capital budget, and the city council approved the amended budget that included a loan authorization of \$10.2 million dollars for the construction of a new Mattapan branch library. (*Tufts University Report*, 2005, p. 38-41)

### *Implementation*

The changing state of the economy since 1997 and the prioritization of other capital projects has certainly impacted the rate at which the Mattapan Library project has moved forward. The Mattapan and Allston facilities, along with the Grove Hall Branch are the only three new construction libraries that have been built in the last twenty-five years. (*Tufts University Report*, 2005, p. 38-41)

The City of Boston took the first step toward constructing a new library by commissioning a programming and siting study for the new Mattapan Branch Library in 1997, four years after the loan authorization. This is a procedure for all neighborhood branch libraries (Chinatown had such a study completed in 2008). This two-volume study was especially time consuming as the technical details for the new facility were sorted out. "The Office of the Mayor of the City of Boston, the City of Boston Public Facilities Department, and the Boston Public Library initiated the study to establish a building program and select a site for a new library for the Mattapan neighborhood. A Mattapan Advisory Committee (MAC) consisting of Councilor Charles Yancey and several dedicated members of the Mattapan community aided the development of this study." (*Tufts University Report*, 2005, p. 38-41) On February 28, 2009 the Mattapan community celebrated the beautiful, technologically enhanced, and service-rich new branch library at 1350 Blue Hill Avenue designed by William Rawn Associates. (Boston Public Library)

### **Conclusion: Lessons Learned**

The six meanings of the Chinatown Library cannot necessarily be transferred to the Honan-Allston Branch and the Mattapan Branch because this particular research only focuses on the required processes to build a library in other Boston neighborhoods, rather than the experience of users and intention of providers. However, these Boston case studies, as well as the previous Chinatown branch examples do show that the different meanings of libraries also highlight the diverse needs of a neighborhood. In order to fulfill certain types of needs, specific types of leadership and perseverance are required. For example, it is apparent from all the case studies that to ultimately realize civic goals such as the construction of a new library, support from a city councilman and / or mayor is pertinent. However, the stories also show that neighborhood leaders, library patrons, or librarians themselves can largely influence the role of the library in community development by either initiating grassroots projects and / or lobbying to city officials and library trustees.



## Chapter Five

### BPL Fiscal Crisis and Redefining the Branch

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**“Libraries really are the life of a neighborhood. It gives kids a place to go after school. It’s the nucleus of what’s going on. It’s the place where community groups meet. We have very strong neighborhoods. We have very strong libraries.”**

**– Mayor Thomas Menino, June 29, 2009**

## BPL FISCAL CRISIS AND REDEFINING THE BRANCH

I wrote this thesis during a sad time for public libraries in Boston. While I was trying to extrapolate the several meanings of the Chinatown Library, the Boston Public Library was struggling to balance a constrained budget. This concluding section of the thesis describes the 2010 Boston Public Library fiscal crisis; reflects on the decision-making processes of the BPL post-crisis with regard to the past; discusses how and why library meanings should be incorporated into these processes; and lastly aims to understand how Boston's Chinatown experience can help the BPL redefine the role of a branch and improve their overall system. Ultimately, I provide recommendations for the Chinatown community, the Boston Public Library, and the City of Boston.

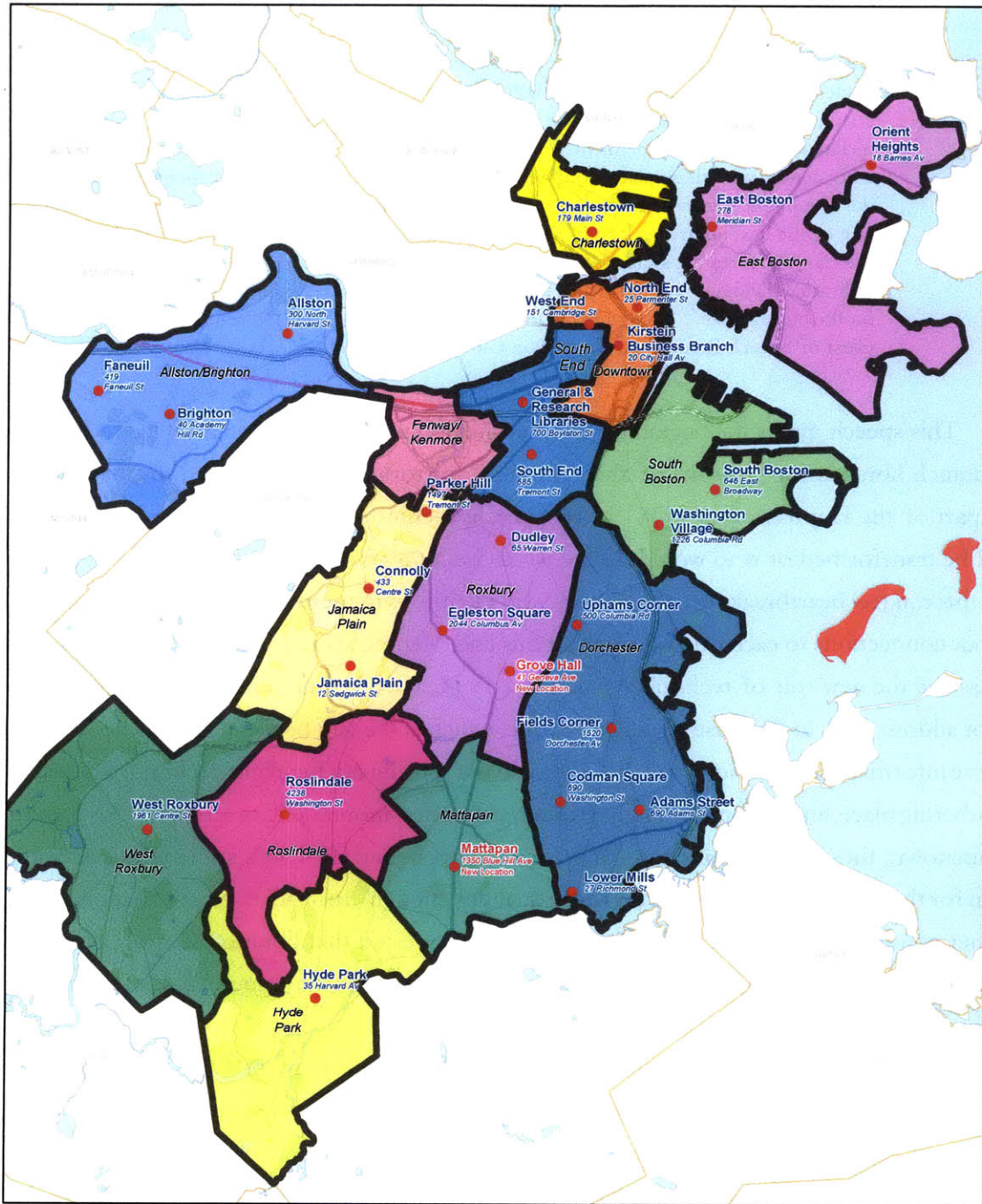
### CURRENT CRISIS

On February 17th, 2010, the library board of trustees called a special meeting to discuss the \$3.6 million dollar gap in funding for fiscal year 2011. The BPL blamed this shortage of funds on the decisions of the state legislature. According to the *Boston Globe*, state assistance for the BPL decreased by 73 percent. It dropped from \$8.9 million in 2009 to a proposed \$2.4 million in 2011. (Ryan, 2010, February 17) City funding for the library was cut by 1% or \$300,000 for fiscal year 2011. However, the state's response was that the dollars were cut from the Library of Last Recourse funds, which should not affect the status or activities of the City's branch libraries because these funds cannot be used toward branch operating expenses. It is the City's responsibility to fund branch libraries. (Quezada, 2010, March 5) The purpose of the Library of Last Recourse program "is to provide access for all residents of the Commonwealth to the resources of a public research library by supporting the development and maintenance of the Boston Public Library's research collections." (Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners)

For several weeks after the initial BPL funding crisis announcement to the public, the news reported that up to 10 of the 26 existing branches would have to close. The crisis was creating divisions: between the city and the state, and among Boston neighborhoods as each community began competing for limited resources, voicing why their branches need not shut down. In his annual speech to the Boston Municipal Bureau on March 4th, 2010, Mayor Menino stated:

"Now, let's look at our public libraries. How has the context changed and how do we change with it? People increasingly get their information electronically. The numbers tell a powerful story. If there was an official 'digital branch' of the Boston Public Library, it would have the sixth highest circulation among the 26 branches. People seek this information at all times of the day and night and in all places -- in their living rooms and kitchens, in parks and community centers. And our neighbors often share and gather information from each other instead of from a research shelf -- the days of the old encyclopedia are long gone. So we need to build a 21st century system that takes account of this shift and serves people even better. We will make sure that our branch libraries

## LOCATIONS OF BPL BRANCHES (2008)



**Boston Public Library  
Locations**

• Boston Public Libraries

0 0.5 1 Miles  
November, 2008



Source: Boston Public Library

In 2009, the Kirstein Business Branch moved inside of Copley. Grove Hall and Mattapan are the newest branches. Grove Hall is a joint library and high school facility.

provide world-class spaces in which people can learn and meet and share. We will provide more convenient hours for working families, more resources online, bridge the digital divide, have enriching out-of-school programs in libraries and the community, and look to send librarians to community events and senior centers. The Boston public libraries are staying in the neighborhoods. However, it's clear the system as currently constructed is stretched too thin. For example, the BPL has had to turn down partnerships because staffing is so tight. We need to close some buildings that are not offering the highest quality service to the residents of Boston. I know this can feel heartbreaking to neighbors who identify with these places. But buildings don't define us -- our connections to each other do. The public library was born in Boston, and we must lead its rebirth too. Amy Ryan is one of the best library leaders in the nation. Under Amy and her team, we can do this. We can transform the system. But we can't limit the discussion to an individual budget or individual buildings. We can't shirk from the tough decisions. We have to keep our eyes on the bigger prize -- strengthening the branch libraries for the 21st Century.”  
(Text of Speech Retrieved from Boston Globe, 2010, March 4)

This speech marks the beginning of an evaluation process that ultimately led to the closing of four branch libraries for “reasons of the economy” mirroring what happened in Boston during the latter part of the Depression in 1938. In his speech, Menino did not elaborate as to how the system would be transformed or who would decide which buildings would have to close. He simply said, “I know this can feel heartbreaking to neighbors who identify with these places. But buildings don't define us -- our connections to each other do.” With this line, Menino set the stage for what was to come. He emphasized the new role of technology and placed a great deal of emphasis on the digital age, but he did not address how to decrease the digital divide, which is the gap between those who have access to effective information technology and those who do not. He did not highlight the importance of libraries as a gathering place, an economic training ground, a historical monument, or an anchor for communities. In Chinatown, these are the functions of a branch library, and the City's approach to revamping the system for the digital age does not stress those qualities enough. Instead, the mayor highlighted the role of other community centers in neighborhoods, and suggested that libraries do more to reach out to people outside of a building, rather than each branch adapt itself to the unique needs of a neighborhood.

Menino framed the decision to close library branches as part of the BPL transformation for future sustainability, but he did not mention replacing, renovating or building new branches. The Boston Public Library system was last transformed in 1955 under Mayor Hynes when the City Planning Board assessed the BPL system and developed a plan to construct thirteen new branches and demolish seven facilities throughout the City. It was not until fifty-one years later, in 2006, that the board of trustees began to reevaluate the system. An anonymous person notified the *Boston Globe* of an internal BPL study that allegedly recommended closing some branch libraries because of budgeting issues. “Former BPL President Bernard Margolis later told the *[Jamaica] Gazette* that the study was flawed and had been leaked by someone at City Hall for unknown reasons.” (Ruch, 2010, March 5) Then in 2008, the BPL completed *The Neighborhood Services Initiative* (discussed in chapter

two), and in 2009, another master plan, the *BPL Compass*, began taking route. (Ruch, 2010, March 5)

While the processes of reassessing the branch system began in 2006 and the economic downturn began in 2008, it was not until February 2010 that the public was even aware that the BPL was experiencing a financial crisis that called for such an evaluation. On March 9th, 2010, the BPL Trustees held a public meeting to share the news and discuss the dilemma with Boston’s residents and other stakeholders. The day after the meeting, the *Globe* reported, “Passions ran high yesterday as nearly 400 people packed a lecture hall at the Boston Public Library in Copley Square for an emotional and at times raucous public meeting about the fate of the constellation of library branches that dot the city.” (Ryan, 2010, March 11)

As part of my research, I attended two BPL board of trustee meetings on April 7th and April 9th, 2010, to better understand the inner-working of the Boston Public Library system, and to see what the future looked like for a Chinatown Branch Library and overall BPL with the budget shortfall. The purpose of these meetings was for the board to decide the fate of the branch libraries. On April 7th, Amy Ryan presented research and data, which her staff collected over the previous month. Next, she described three options for the board and audience to deliberate. *The Boston Globe* reported, “She is determined to be fair and outlined at the meeting the statistical criteria she will use to decide which branches could be closed. But numbers will never tell the whole story, as Ryan admitted. ‘Those are the facts, and then there’s the truth,’ Ryan said. ‘What are the community assets in a particular neighborhood? We’re going to look behind the numbers.’” (Ryan, 2010, February 17)

The BPL assessment framework included public use measures, operational measures, and geographical measures. (For more information about the criteria, refer to the Appendix.)

<b>Public Use Measures</b>	<b>Operational Measures</b>	<b>Geographical Measures</b>	<b>Other Considerations</b>
Books and audiovisual materials borrowed (Circulation)	Accessibility	Proximity to lead library (20,000+ square feet; new / recently renovated building)	Program attendance
Foot traffic	Technology expansion	Proximity to other library	Number of public programs
Computer sessions	Meeting room	MBTA Stations & Bus Routes	Public feedback
Public wireless Internet sessions	Parking lot with or adjacent to library	Proximity to Boston Public School	Capital projects
		Proximity to Boston Center for Youth and Families	Partnerships and community assets

Based on this framework, President Ryan presented three options to the board of trustees. The first scenario kept all branches open: nine lead branches would maintain normal operating hours, but the other 17 branches would have reduced service hours. The second option kept 22 branches open at their current hours and would close 4 branches. Lastly, the third option would expand the hours at 19 branches and close 7 branches. (For more details on these options, refer to the Appendix.) All of these circumstances would eliminate approximately 25 jobs. President Amy Ryan recommended the second scenario, but those who attended the meeting were not pleased with any of them. Most people did not seem to understand why the City nor trustees could not simply raise \$3.6 million. “It is really not much money,” said one audience member. When I later wrote to Sean Nelson, the BPL’s Chief Financial Officer about this point, he explained:

As to the \$3.6 million gap not being that large, I respectfully disagree. What that number doesn’t reflect is the structural gap from FY10 as a result of using one-time sources to close the gap (unrestricted monies, etc). The \$3.6M gap also doesn’t address the lack of adequate staffing that existed in the branches before we had a funding crisis. And that’s a difficult concept to convey to the public. Additionally, if we could support our operations with a one-time cash infusion for FY11, what do we do in FY12, or FY13? And how much can we eviscerate the other parts of the system (administrative services and the Copley Library) in the hopes of saving the branches? We’ve lost over \$9M - 25% of our entire budget in just two years and only now have we had to close branches. (Nelson, 2010)

Boston residents, librarians, community members, and other stakeholders advised the trustees not to close any branches, and at the end of this first meeting, BPL trustee Evelyn Arana-Ortiz told the audience, “I urge the communities to rally up and contact their state legislators. I would love to see the community raising enough funds not only to keep all the libraries open, but also with enough money to improve them. Let’s see who rallies for these branches.” Trustee Ortiz’s point emphasizes one of the Chinatown Library’s meanings: the need for building political clout in neighborhoods. Her statement is also in line with the findings from the case studies: strong leaders bring libraries to neighborhoods. Nine of the 13 city councilors sent a letter to the library president urging her to slow the evaluation process. The letter stated: “We cannot make a decision that will affect the lives of Bostonians for years to come in only a few short months.” (Ryan, 2010, February 24) The letter made no difference – the BPL continued to move forward.



Source: Aditi Mehta  
Audience Waving “No” Signs at BPL Trustee Meeting, April 2010



Source: Aditi Mehta  
Protesters and the Media Preparing for Trustees’ Decision, 2010

On April 9th, city councilors and state representatives spoke on behalf of their communities at the trustee meeting. Councilor-at-Large Felix Arroyo and Councilor of District 6, John Tobin were present, among others. I noted that Councilor Linnehan of District 2, where Chinatown is located, was not at the meeting. “To close a library is an act of intellectual vandalism,” exclaimed one politician. “Public spaces that preserve and protect community need to happen more,” expressed city councilors. “If you close a library, you will need to open a jail,” yelled someone else from the audience.

What did these statements indicate about branch libraries beyond their practical purposes of providing books and Internet free of charge? How were the trustees incorporating these thoughts into their solutions? The BPL assessment criteria did not seem to clearly measure or assess the importance and meanings of each branch in the way that these statements were articulated. To me, these statements expressed that the destruction of free knowledge and education would not only eliminate community centers with supportive social networks, but branch closings would also indirectly influence more people in society to engage in criminal activity. While the latter comment may sound dramatic, it highlights the profound effects that a library can have upon certain neighborhoods, and even reflects the way Boston Brahmins thought about libraries in 1896. When the BPL was founded, city officials thought the presence of a library would “civilize the masses” and prevent riots. A lot has changed since then but, in 2010, these public spaces in some neighborhoods still provide the Boston residents with a safe place to stay out of trouble.

The board made some attempts to quantify this information in order to use a rational basis to allocate scarce resources and figure out which branches to close. For example, throughout their discussion, the trustees made reference to the after-school programs in some of the branches, and calculated the number of children that would be affected by the closing of a particular of library.



Source: Aditi Mehta  
BPL Trustees, April 2010

However, there is not enough quantitatively-measurable data to adequately assess a branch's importance. After hours of deliberation among the trustees and conversations with the audience members, the BPL administration made a decision. They would close four branches: the Faneuil Branch in Brighton, Orient Heights in East Boston, Lower Mills in Dorchester, and Washington Village in South Boston. The proposal just needed to be approved by the mayor and city council.

The crowd was very clearly upset, waving "No" signs and booing at the decision. The trustees, too, seemed pained by their recommendations, and some of them even began to tear up on the stage where they presided over the room. One trustee asked his colleagues, "Can we make particular commitments to neighborhoods that are losing their branches? What can the BPL do that could make up for the burden that the community might bear?" Amy Ryan responded, "Yes, through support from other organizations." The trustees were most torn about closing the Orient Heights branch, which is located in the immigrant neighborhood of East Boston and is eight miles away from a lead library.<sup>18</sup> Because of this, the trustees agreed that the next capital project they would endorse is the construction of a brand new library in this neighborhood.<sup>19</sup> Nobody at the meeting – trustees, city officials, residents, or other audience members mentioned Chinatown.

#### **PUBLIC INPUT OVER THE YEARS**

In telling the Chinatown Library's story, I also explored the community development decision-making processes in Boston throughout history. As the BPL and Chinatown community move forward in trying to implement their visions for libraries in Boston, it is evident that the planning process is informed by "continual, social, political, and technological changes." (Sanyal, 2005) These changes in the planning process, as seen in 1896, 1938, 1955, 2000, and 2010 also mold library branch functions and meanings.

The 2010 branch library system is a direct product of the physical plan that the City Planning Board created for the BPL in 1955. Since then, some branches have been replaced or renovated such as Honan-Allston or Mattapan, but no library has been completely removed from a neighborhood except the Kirstein Business Branch.<sup>20</sup> This collection was relocated to Copley in 2009 to save money. As shown from the table (p. 116), Dorchester, South Boston, and East Boston have lost branches permanently on more than one occasion. It is important to note that in the past and / or currently, all three of these neighborhoods have been home to largely minority, immigrant, or lower-income populations. This demographic characteristic certainly holds true for when each neighborhood's library was closed as well.

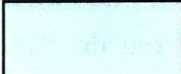
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18 A lead library is a new or recently renovated 20,000+ square foot building.

19 The East Boston Library Feasibility Study was already completed in 2009.

20 This branch library was not located in a residential area, but in a business district. Therefore, its closing was not as contentious as other branch closings.

1938		1955		2010	
372 Broadway	South Boston	Jefferies Point Branch	East Boston	Faneuil Branch	Brighton
275 Washington Street	Dorchester	Phillip Brooks Branch	Hyde Park	Orient Heights	East Boston
115 Tremont Street	Roxbury Crossing	Neponset Branch	Dorchester	Lower Mills	Dorchester
130 Tyler Street	Chinatown / South End	Tyler Street Branch	Chinatown / South End	Washington Vilage	South Boston

 Neighborhood has experienced branch closing without replacement more than once

In each branch-closing year, the factors used to make this assessment are reminiscent of the rational comprehensive model of planning (RCM). In 1938, even though it was difficult to locate a clear set of criteria used to select the libraries for closing, the reasons given in the trustee meeting minutes indicate that the rationale was based on population counts and material circulation numbers. Again, in 1955, during the rise of the RCM, the city used similar, easily measurable data to justify their recommendations. The 2010 criteria are also based on a set of defined quantitative metrics. The public reacted to the trustees' decisions through petitions, letters, and protests in all three eras. However, in 1938 and 1955, there was no formal incorporation of this information into the trustees' judgments.

President Ryan even expressed how important it was to delve deeper behind the numbers to understand the importance or meaning of each branch. While public input was supposed to be integrated into the 2010 decision-making process, it is not clear to what extent. The 2010 criteria includes "public feedback," which is defined as "a review of public comments received via [www.bpl.org/budget](http://www.bpl.org/budget), [feedback@bpl.org](mailto:feedback@bpl.org), letters, emails, phone calls, Twitter, and Facebook. The Library will gather common themes of the services and programs that are important, as well as the ways in which the public feels the library is essential." (Boston Public Library) Another public input criterion is "partnerships and community assets," which is defined as "the ability for the Library to extend services beyond buildings [through] partnerships with community agencies to provide services in the community. Examples include story time at a day care center or community center, or a book club at a senior center. From my observations at the April 2010 trustee meetings, there was no standard system or procedure to account for this sort of attitudinal or psychological data. It seemed to be processed and considered in an ad-hoc way. Through all the aforementioned outlets and at the public meetings, stakeholders presented this type of information to the board of trustees, but there was no overall public document or summary of the themes, requests or, needs that emerged from this commentary. The trustee meeting minutes do not aggregate people's responses over time.

## REDEFINING BRANCHES BY FINDING MEANINGS

Public testimonies and this sort of qualitative data are significant because such information helps to define the meanings of branch libraries across the City, and these meanings highlight the needs in a neighborhood. It is these meanings that can aid the BPL in redefining the role and purpose of each branch in Boston's neighborhoods as the institution works to transform the system to be more effective and sustainable for the future. However, meanings cannot always be counted or quantified, making it difficult to seriously consider them during complicated decision-making processes such as the branch closings or branch system upgrades. I asked one of the BPL trustees, Evelyn Arana-Ortiz, what a library meant to her, and she answered: "I am an immigrant to this country and I used the library for all the milestones in my life. I used it to find my first job, to buy my first house, to fix my house, and now I take my children there. It serves as a resource center. To me, a library means assistance." I also asked Kerry Cronin, the Director of the Concord Free Public Library and a former BPL employee what a library meant to her, and she answered, "Libraries have to keep up with the role of communication. With the Internet, there has been a long-term evolution. I don't know the long-term effects, but it means something." These meanings are not only crucial in determining the library's functions and services, but also in lobbying for a the facility altogether. As city council members, community organizers, and other leaders champion the cause for neighborhood libraries, they can persuade others by leveraging the meaning of the space and by explaining that a library is more than just a place to check-out books, but that it is symbolic for neighborhood legitimacy in many ways.

The Chinatown Storefront Library achieved this by serving as a visual testimony of meanings, and created awareness about Chinatown's movement to regain a library to insiders and outsiders of the neighborhood. Through the daily blog, the Storefront recorded via various mediums – photos, personal testimonies, reporting, and statistics, what the library meant to users. It made people stop and listen. This project demonstrated that when communities themselves find methods to actually count or show meanings, they are then capable of catalyzing other types of support to fulfill a neighborhood goal. This was true in the Chinatowns of Chicago and Los Angeles, each of which had to use similar demonstration projects to finally get their branches from their respective municipal governments.

Chicago also had a Storefront Library, which proved to be insufficient as more and more people kept borrowing books and visiting for translation help. In this case, the space meant a place of learning, reading, and adjusting, and it was overcrowded because it was not big enough to fulfill the neighborhood's need. Similarly, in Los Angeles, the Chinatown Library began in an old school auditorium, and the community proved that there was a demand for the services such as reading material in Asian languages and repository for the neighborhood's history. The City agreed to provide them with their own building. Leslie Davol mentioned that Boston Street Lab was looking to open

another Storefront Library in Chinatown after the success of the first one. The Davols, along with the rest of the Chinatown community learned that even a small commercial space has the potential to fulfill neighborhood needs. The success of the temporary library was not about having access to hundreds of books, but rather a neutral resource center and gathering space where people could get information, exchange ideas, meet one another, learn about various happenings in the neighborhood, or simply take a break from the day. Such a realization is an example of “redefining the branch.”

The Chinatown Blog reads: “What the Chinatown Storefront Library demonstrated is that there is high demand and interest for a library in Chinatown, whether it is run by the BPL or by Storefront volunteers. Perhaps what is needed are new ideas and re-evaluation of the role of the City’s public libraries. These new ideas can include a ‘hybrid’ model. In the traditional model, the City pays for everything from the building down to hiring staff. If the community really wants a library, a hybrid model would share the responsibility in running and operating a library - the City could designate a site and provide the capital expenditures with assistance from grassroots fundraising, and the community could share the operating costs and similar to the Storefront Library, organize volunteers to assist with the operation.” (The Chinatown Blog, 2010) Chinatown’s movement for their own branch and this thesis research demonstrates how differently people perceive branch libraries, depending on their backgrounds and ages, level of community engagement, employment status, affiliation to the BPL, or election to city government. The Storefront Library revealed an entire set of unmet community needs and showed that a branch library could effectively fulfill these needs. The BPL can apply this lesson and model it in other neighborhoods.

Depending on where the resources are coming from and who is heading the initiative, either communities without branches that want them should view the Storefront Library as a campaigning method or the Boston Public Library should consider the Chinatown Storefront model as a solution for neighborhoods lacking branches. Aside from cost-savings, the Storefront Library intimately involved the community and library patrons in the visioning and planning process of the facility. Because of this, the library space and services were truly *meaningful* because they were designed, informed, and provided in part by the patrons. One author writes, “America’s public libraries are, by design, democratic and based on the principle of universal access. But how far does this right to access extend? Does it simply mean that citizens cannot be denied entry to the library building? Or does accessibility imply that every citizen had a right to contribute to the institution’s ideological development and participate in determining how that institution is designed and built [and programmed]?” (Mattern, 2000, p. 2)

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR KEY PLAYERS

I began this thesis by stating that my aim was to address the Boston Public Library's own pressing predicament by using the Chinatown Library story to shed light on the importance and meaning of libraries in the past, present, and future. Through my research and historic analysis, I was able to theorize six meanings for the Chinatown Library; however, these exact meanings cannot necessarily transpose themselves upon Boston's other branches. Meaning is specifically linked to the social, political, physical, cultural, and economic contexts of time, place, and the individual. By completing this sort of analysis for every branch in Boston, the BPL can work to address neighborhood needs in a truly comprehensive and contextual way. For example, the BPL discusses developing programs to provide library services outside of the building to cut costs, but if a branch means an intergenerational gathering place to community members as it does in Chinatown, then removing the library is a big loss for the neighborhood. In the BPL *Neighborhood Services Initiative*, the report lays out broad goals for the BPL system, but does not recognize how differently each branch needs to be treated. As the Boston Public Library works to transform their system to effectively serve Boston residents, the BPL administration should not forget to ask: What does this library branch mean to its community?

By interpreting the past, observing the present, and hypothesizing about the future, I end this thesis by providing recommendations to the Chinatown community as certain groups within that neighborhood continue to advocate for a branch, to the Boston Public Library as they work to transform the branch system to fulfill the needs of the Boston's varied population, and to the City of Boston as they continue to try to serve the residents of the City in an equitable and effective way.

### **Chinatown Community**

As the Friends of the Chinatown Library continue to lobby for their cause, they need to leverage some of the meanings I have theorized in this thesis or formulate their own meanings to share with the public. Because these meanings go beyond defining the purely practical function of a branch library and actually help characterize a neighborhood and tell its story, decision-makers may become more convinced that the facility is actually needed. The various case studies, and the branch's own history demonstrate the importance of political clout in realizing the library. The group needs to reach out to the BPL board of trustees, city councilmen, and other city officials, making them aware of the library campaign. This can be done through individual meetings, high-profile community events, and media attention. Most importantly, the group needs to demonstrate to those in power that the Chinatown community does have the ability to influence local elections, and if a branch library is what the majority of the neighborhood wants, then elected officials will have to deliver.

The recent Storefront Library shows how successful a community can be at attracting outside attention and fulfilling its own needs by uniting together and leveraging assets and good ideas. The Friends of the Chinatown Library group should market this project as a potential solution to other neighborhoods lacking branches and work with the Boston Public Library to institutionalize the model and garner funds for future, similar projects.

Summary:

- Leverage the meanings of the Chinatown Library that highlight unquantifiable needs
- Facilitate unity among community members over the library cause
- Reach out to BPL trustees and city council members.
- Send vocal Chinatown representatives to all public meetings concerning the library
- Contribute articles to local papers to get more media attention
- Market storefront library project as a low-cost solution for everyone
- Partner with other neighborhoods in similar situations

**Boston Public Library**

As the Boston Public Library works to transform the branch system for the digital age, the institution needs to deeply understand the different meanings of libraries in every Boston neighborhood. This is the only way the BPL can truly fulfill the needs of the city's varied residents. Also, the BPL has to think beyond the "traditional branch," as well as beyond the "digital branch." These are two extremes that may be useful and convenient to a specific population, but not everybody. Branch libraries can come in many forms, as defined by their meaning, depending on who is it serving and where it will be located. Solutions from history such as bookmobiles and delivery stations should be reevaluated by the BPL administration. If such concepts are appropriate to the neighborhood context, they may be affordable ways to provide library services.

Summary:

- Work closely with neighborhood groups to understand what a branch library means to them to truly fulfill needs
- Redefine the vision and role of a neighborhood branch and acknowledge that the vision will be different for each Boston community
- Evaluate whether lower-cost solutions from the past may work today:
  1. Bookmobiles
  2. Delivery Stations
  3. Storefront Library and Public-Private Partnerships

## **City of Boston**

The City of Boston includes the mayor, city council, and other relevant agencies such as the Boston Redevelopment Authority. The City needs to help facilitate the interaction between communities and the Boston Public Library by providing the funds or mini-grants to host planning meetings. While the BPL and neighborhood residents brainstorm new library models, the City should be flexible with municipal space to support experimental projects such as the Storefront Library. Most importantly, the City needs to acknowledge how crucial branch libraries are as tools of community development.

### Summary:

- Help connect BPL to the communities they serve
- Give small library planning grants to neighborhoods to allow residents to vision their own branch libraries
- Be flexible with space, land, and resources; Allow communities to utilize vacant public space for neighborhood activities

The American public library system is timeless. While it may grow and change, it will never disappear from any city. This thesis has demonstrated that different forms of leadership shape the library's mission, determine the physical and conceptual form the library takes, or even establish its actual existence. The history of Boston's Chinatown Library is a changing story about the development of a neighborhood, as well as an exploration of community and city politics. This story shows us that the branch library is a complex public space representative of so much more than its practical function of providing books. The Chinatown Library is filled with physical, social, economic, political, and cultural meanings about the past, present, and future, and it means differently to its users and to its providers. By understanding these meanings, the BPL and the City can understand the many layers of a place. Uncovering these complex layers is the first step in "redefining a branch" to effectively meet neighborhood needs.



# **Appendix**

## **The Business of the Library**

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## THE BUSINESS OF A LIBRARY

Boston has more public libraries per capita than any other City. (American Library Association) Several public agencies work together to fund, maintain, and continually innovate the Boston Public Library (BPL) system. It is important to note that the construction of a new library is a capital project, meaning it is completely financed through the City's overall municipal budget or state grants, and does not come out of the BPL's own budget. Programming and other internal operations at the BPL and its branches are funded through the library's budget, which is comprised of city, state, and private sources. (Donahue, 2010, March 1)

### LIBRARY FINANCE

During the 1850s in Massachusetts, library building construction was financed through taxes authorized for this specific purpose and programming funds came from private donors. Additional library buildings were financed through Andrew Carnegie's philanthropic support during the next two decades. Presently, there is no specific tax designated for libraries in Massachusetts or Boston. Funding for the BPL and its branch libraries come from the City of Boston overall municipal budget (72.2%), the State, which receives money from tax revenue, as well as the federal government (9.8%), and other sources such as private donations, trust funds, among others (18%). Even though the federal government contributes the smallest percentage of funds for the operation of the BPL, according to Sean Nelson, the Chief Financial Officer of the BPL, this amount is still crucial for operating costs.

Since the 1980s, federal funding for libraries has decreased. Congress enacted the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) in 1964. The legislation provided federal assistance to libraries for the purpose of improving and/or implementing services or undertaking construction projects. Influenced by the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the aim of the LSCA was to provide funding for disadvantaged communities in need of library service. While changes to the LSCA have sought to keep this piece of legislation current, many have voiced opposition to certain aspects of this act since the 1980s. People were opposed to the idea of federal funds allocated specifically for the construction of local libraries. In 1995, the LSCA was replaced by the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), which essentially provides funding for technology and information access programs, but removed construction as a use of funds.

State Senator William Bulger sponsored the first state acts for supporting libraries in Massachusetts. In 1989, he created the Library of Last Recourse funding pool, which is state money reserved for Boston to expand access to BPL services and research collections for residents all over the state.<sup>21</sup> Also in 1989, Senator Bulger had \$200 million appropriated for library building renovation and construction, which are given out as grants. Prior to this time, either cities paid for library

21 This is the funding that has decreased sharply. Thus, the City is blaming the state for branch closings.

construction or fundraising had to take place at the local level to build libraries. Up to forty percent of a library building's construction cost can be covered by these state grants. (Donahue, 2010, March 1)

User departments such as the Boston Public Library, The Boston Public School System, the Boston Police Department, among others put together a capital plan. The City has a 5-year capital budget plan for each user department. The capital plan is paid for by long-term municipal bonds and the operating plan is paid for through tax revenue. The city council has budget hearings, votes on the budget plans in June, and the new fiscal year begins July 1<sup>st</sup>. (Anderson, 2010, March 3) The City council cannot increase the budget plans, just decrease the amount of overall funding or reject them altogether. (Hennessey, 2010, April 5)

### **MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF LIBRARY COMMISSIONERS**

The Board of Library Commissioners was established in 1890 to encourage towns to build public libraries in towns across Massachusetts. The agency has the responsibility to organize, develop, coordinate and improve library services throughout the Commonwealth. There are nine commissioners, each of whom are appointed by the governor. By 1920, every city or town in the state had a library. The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners has no authority like the Department of Education; they are an agency that allocates funds, administers grants, and lobbies for policies and programs. The four major sources of grant funding that the state administers are: 1) State Aid to Public Libraries 2) Public Libraries Fund 3) Library Services and Technology Aid Direct Grants, and 4) Massachusetts Public Library Construction Grant. Selection for these grants are competitive and criteria ranges from year to year. Aside from these grants, each city and town receives a certain amount of state aid for their library operations based on a formula. The Boston Public Library in particular also receives Library of Last Recourse Funding. As mentioned previously, the purpose of the Library of Last Recourse is to provide access for all residents of the Commonwealth to the resources of a public research library by supporting the development and maintenance of the Boston Public Library's research collections. The Board of Library Commissioners submits a budget to the governor to request a certain amount of funding for a fiscal year. (Donahue, 2010, March 1) The governor sends a proposed budget to the Massachusetts House of Representatives and State Senate to vote on the budget. (Hennessey, 2010, April 5)

### **BPL BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

The Board of Trustees is a corporation created to manage the business of the library, and they have been in existence since the opening of the very first public library in Boston. Together, the Board and the mayor select the President of the institution. In short, the BPL President, Amy Ryan, and her staff make recommendations to the Library Board of Trustees about improvements,

changes, and any spending with regard to capital projects and internal programming. The Board of Trustees then makes decisions about all internal operations and program funding. If requesting more funds, then City council and the Mayor must approve the appeal. The Board also provides recommendations to City council and the Mayor about any library capital projects.

In Boston, Mayor Menino appoints the nine library trustees to five-year terms. They are selected in different ways, but recommendations from present and past trustees, as well as other city officials are important guides for the mayor. According to Alice Hennessey, the Mayor's Liaison on Public Libraries, the mayor tries to craft a diverse board with people from different parts of Boston, with varying skills and strengths from knowledge of finance to organizational behavior to literature. In other cities, the library trustees are elected. As of April 2010, there are no Asians on the board and two trustee seats remain open.<sup>22</sup> The board consists of three white men, two Latina women, one white woman, and one black woman. The board itself cannot meet in private because the Trustees are required to discuss the legal and financial issues of the library in public. Issues can be as simple as purchasing a new carpet or as complicated as deciding which branches need to shut down. The President and her staff makes recommendations to the board of trustees and then the Board decides whether to go forward with those recommendations. (Arana-Ortiz, 2010, March 12) Trustee Arana-Ortiz states, "We are responsible to advocate the community at large and establish a vision for the library and its entire branch system."

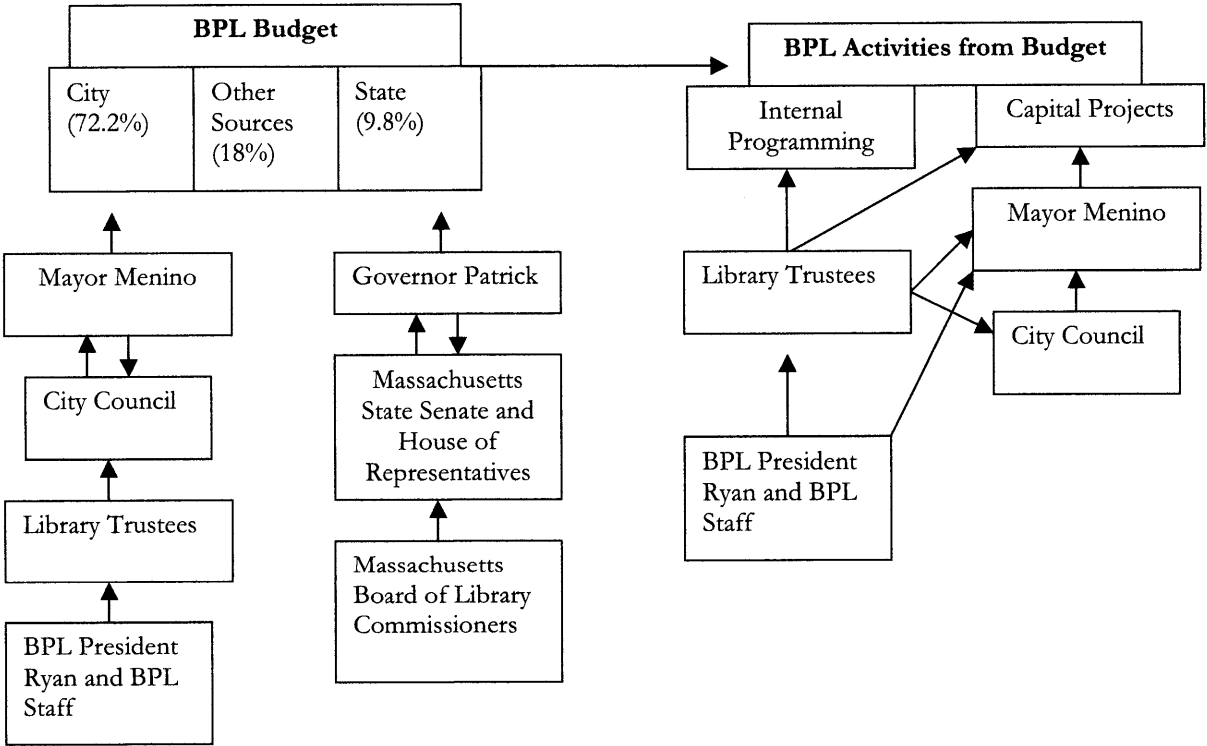
#### **THE ROLE OF CITY COUNCIL AND THE MAYOR**

As seen from chapter 3, Boston city council seems to have the most say in deciding if and when new libraries are built by voting on the municipal budget and specific line items, but the mayor can also override the vote. The *Tufts Report* (2005) states, "It is clear that Mayoral support, which translates into capital funding allocation, is one of the critical tipping points of the entire library building process. The support of the mayor translates into a commitment to set aside both capital funding to build the library as well as annual operational funding to manage the branch. Ultimately, the mayor's support serves as a promise that the city will take the project on." (p. 58) Hennessey believes it is communities that have the most power in the City, and through their organizing, libraries gets built. Meanwhile, agencies such the Boston Redevelopment Authority have jurisdiction over land parcels and buildings that may house a library and the Construction Management Department is responsible for overseeing the process and maintaining the property. These two agencies also have an understanding of the capital needs in neighborhoods. Sue Kim, a planner at the Boston Redevelopment Authority explains, "It (library construction or renovation) is really the decision of city council and the Mayor. They then work with the BRA and Property & Construction Management Department to implement any physical plans. The BPL provides services and programming."

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<sup>22</sup> There have never been any Asians on the Library Board of Trustees.

**BPL Budget Decision-Making Flow Chart**



This chart shows the hierarchy in decision-making power when it comes to developing a budget for the library, and figuring out how that money is spent. BPL President Amy Ryan and her staff provide recommendations to the Board of Trustees, who then submit their requests to city council. City council and the mayor confer with one another, as well as the Board of Trustees in order to finalize the budget or capital plans.



## Library Scenarios: A Summary

Option	Description	Personnel Impact	Hours & Service Impact
<p><b>1</b></p> <p>All Branches Open/Hours Reduction</p>	<p>18 branches paired and service hours reduced</p> <p>No buildings are closed</p> <p>9 Lead branch library hours remain at current level</p>	<p>23-25 positions eliminated</p> <p>Staff in paired branches could work at up to 3 different locations</p> <p>Short staffing continues</p> <p>City will bargain impact of hours reductions</p>	<p>Hours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hours reduced by 50-85%</li> <li>Approximately 470 fewer hours per week at paired branches</li> <li>Loss of Saturday hours</li> </ul> <p>Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New service improvements difficult</li> <li>No pick-up of reserved materials at paired branches</li> <li>Inconsistent homework assistance and summer reading activities for youth</li> <li>Full facility maintenance costs required, but facility use minimal</li> <li>Programming reduced due to decreased staff capacity</li> </ul>
<p><b>2</b></p> <p>Four Branch Closures/ Twenty-two Branches Remain Open</p> <p>Faneuil Lower Mills Orient Heights Washington Village</p>	<p>4 buildings are closed</p> <p>22 branches keep current hours</p>	<p>23-25 positions eliminated</p> <p>Library is able to fill key selected vacant positions</p>	<p>Hours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approximately 175 fewer hours per week</li> </ul> <p>Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New service improvements will be possible with additional resources</li> <li>More consistent homework and summer reading activities for youth</li> <li>BPL will explore potential partnerships with community organizations</li> </ul>

Option	Description	Personnel Impact	Hours & Service Impact
<p><b>3</b></p> <p>Seven Branch Closures/ Nineteen Branches Remain Open</p> <p>Egleston Square Faneuil Jamaica Plain Lower Mills Orient Heights Uphams Corner Washington Village</p>	<p>19 branches expand hours</p> <p>7 buildings are closed</p>	<p>23-25 positions are eliminated</p> <p>Fully staffed branches</p> <p>14 positions (est.) redeployed to expand services and launch transformation of library service delivery to community</p>	<p>Hours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Night and Saturday hours are expanded at all remaining locations</li> <li>• Adds approximately 85 evening and Saturday hours each week</li> <li>• Approximately 225 fewer hours per week</li> </ul> <p>Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transformation of library service delivery launched</li> </ul> <p>Potential Activities for Expansion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early literacy services for families</li> <li>• More public computers and training</li> <li>• Outreach services to community organizations &amp; people</li> <li>• Exhibitions and educational programs for branches/schools</li> <li>• Reading Readiness program</li> <li>• Partnership with Read Boston (and outside partners such as Reach Out and Read) to deploy early literacy programs at branches, daycare centers, health centers, and housing developments</li> <li>• Out of school time programs to support school curriculum</li> <li>• Literacy services for new Bostonians</li> <li>• Strengthened ties with area schools</li> <li>• Book club activities for all ages</li> <li>• Deposit collections of books in the community</li> </ul>

<b>Option</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Personnel Impact</b>	<b>Hours &amp; Service Impact</b>
<b>Administrative and System-wide Support</b>	Reductions to administrative and system-wide support services and activities	28-31 positions eliminated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce and eliminate contracts</li> <li>• Reduce funds for staff development/training</li> <li>• Continue streamlining of ordering, cataloging, processing</li> <li>• Reduce public programming expenditures</li> <li>• Reduce facilities maintenance and cleaning system-wide</li> <li>• Consolidate administrative and system-wide support activities in all library divisions</li> <li>• Continue implementation of energy conservation measures to reduce utility costs system-wide</li> </ul>
<b>Central Library in Copley Square</b>	<p>Reduce number of public service points from 20 to 14</p> <p>Close 5 Sundays before Monday holidays and the Sundays following Christmas Day and New Year's Day</p>	35-38 positions eliminated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consolidate service points for streamlined access to services and materials</li> <li>• Unify complementary subject departments and establish collections of distinction to guide future materials budget allocations</li> <li>• Review location and staffing model of the public computer center to enhance customer service</li> <li>• Relocation and/or assign staff to the City of Boston Archives center</li> </ul>



### ***Public Use Measures***

- Books and audiovisual materials borrowed (Circulation)\* – this measure is defined as the number of books, CDs, DVDs, and other materials borrowed from or renewed at an individual library location. Data comes from Horizon, the library's Integrated Library System.
- Foot traffic\* – Libraries have gates with counters that keep track of the number of individuals entering and leaving the library daily. This number is divided by two (as each customer enters and leaves) and reported monthly.
- Computer sessions\* – The Library uses Pharos, a computer reservation software program, to keep track of the number of user sessions (from logon to logoff) throughout the system. Users log in using their library card and receive one hour time increments.
- Public wireless Internet sessions\* – The number of Internet sessions used by customers using the library's wireless Internet service. A wireless session is counted each time a user connects to the wireless access point at each location.

### ***Operational Measures***

- Accessibility – An accessible location is defined as having the following:
  - Push-button door
  - Accessible public restroom
  - Accessible building interior (including elevators/lifts)
- Technology expansion – Three factors go into determining if a facility has adequate technology expansion possibilities:
  - Ease with which electrical capacity can be added to the facility
  - Ease with which telephone-data capacity can be added to the facility
  - The physical space needed for additional computing stations
- Meeting room – A meeting room is defined as a dedicated space that can seat at least 30 individuals, and can be utilized without impeding access to library collections and services.
- Parking lot with or adjacent to library – Availability of free parking at the library or adjacent to it.

### ***Geographical Measures***

- Geographical proximity to lead library – This measure is the distance from a library to the nearest lead library (see definition below).
- Geographical proximity to other libraries – This refers to the number of BPL locations within 3 square miles of each library.
- MBTA Stations and Bus Routes: This measure was added as a result of community feedback. This refers to the nearest MBTA T Stations and bus routes that pass by BPL locations.
- Geographical Proximity to Boston Public School: This measure is the distance from a library to the nearest Boston Public School. This measure was added at the request of the Trustees.
- Geographical Proximity to BCYF: This measure is the distance from a library to the nearest Boston Center for Youth and Families. This measure was added at the request of the Trustees.

## **Other Considerations**

- **Program attendance\*** – Library staff count the number of attendees for each public program. Attendance numbers for all programs are submitted as part of monthly statistical reports.
- **Number of public programs\*** – Library staff keep count of the number of public programs offered in their locations. These programs include programs by library staff (such as story hours or book discussion groups), contracted performers (musicians and others hired to perform at the library), and outside groups who use the library as a venue for public programs (theatre workshops sponsored by the Citi Performing Arts Center or tax assistance/small business workshops offered by outside entities).
- **Public Feedback** – A review of public comments received via [www.bpl.org/budget](http://www.bpl.org/budget), [feedback@bpl.org](mailto:feedback@bpl.org), letters, emails, phone calls, Twitter, and Facebook. The Library will gather the common themes of the services and programs that are important, as well as the ways in which the public feels the library is essential.
- **Capital Projects** – The library will take into consideration current, pending, or likely capital projects
- **Partnerships and Community Assets** – The ability for the Library to extend services beyond buildings. Partnerships with community agencies to provide services in the community. Examples include story time at a daycare center or community center, a book club at a senior center or cultural center, deposits of book collections at community or cultural centers.
- **Information and data from other urban library systems** – An examination of the national library landscape including data, branches, and budgets.

## **Additional Definitions**

### **Lead Library**

- 20,000+ square foot buildings
- New or recently renovated building
- Higher levels of energy efficiency
- Current electrical and data systems with ability to expand
- Readily accessible via public transportation
- Parking lot with library or public parking adjacent to library
- ADA accessible
- Adjacent to existing/expanding commercial service areas
- Strong school-age services with potential for expanded services

**Digital Branch** (this is a new measure for FY09 that rolls up several measures that were previously reported in other locations, for example: digital downloads were previously measured in circulation)

- Downloadable books, music, videos, and games (OverDrive – available to BPL cardholders)
- Database searches (BPL provides access to 125 databases (count from our A-Z list of Databases available online – available to BPL cardholders)
- Flickr page views of BPL holdings (no card necessary). Flickr is an online photo management and sharing site that can be accessed from anywhere in the world
- Page views of out of print, public domain books, images, and documents (Internet Archive – no card necessary). The Internet Archive is a non-profit digital library that offers universal access to books, movies, music and archives of over 150 billion web pages

### ***\*Boston About Results (BAR)***

The Boston Public Library performance data are collected monthly and submitted to the City of Boston through Boston About Results (BAR) – the City's performance data and management system. A quarterly report of some of the Boston Public Library's key measures (including Books and Audiovisual Materials Borrowed or Downloaded, Public Computer Sessions, Public Wireless Internet Sessions) is available on the City's website: <http://www.cityofboston.gov/bar/>.



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