

The Past Meets The Future As Newspaper Archives Move Online

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by *Gabriella Cuzzola*

WOODBIDGE—The Woodbridge Public Library unveiled the online archive of a historical newspaper collection last week. Mayor John E. McCormac, Library Director John Hurley, Councilwoman Brenda Velasco, Local History Librarian Wendi Rottweiler, and other library staff were present for the ribbon cutting.

The archives cover nearly 100 years of Woodbridge Township history. The newspapers include The Independent Hour (1877), The Weekly Register (1898-1902), The Woodbridge News (1899-1902), Woodbridge Independent (1919-1938), The Carteret Press (1925-1965), Woodbridge Leader (1926-1939), Fords Beacon (1936-1961), Independent Leader (1940), Leader Press (1967-1970), and The News Tribune (1967-1995).

“We have The Independent Hour from its very first issue in April of 1876, through its first full year,” said Wendi Rottweiler, “I think this is the most exciting thing that has ever happened for researchers of Woodbridge history!” Rottweiler has been working on this project for about 15 years. Over the course of the last eight months, Innovative Document Imaging in East Brunswick (Marty Tannenbaum) digitized and OCR’d the newspapers and created the on line access to successfully complete the project.

“Of course, there are gaps, particularly early on,” Rottweiler said, “We’re hoping that maybe people will discover an issue they have somewhere in the attic and donate it to the collection.” Indeed, the library is still looking for ways to build the collection and fill in the missing pieces.

“This is a very interesting and very neat project for the town,” McCormac said. “It’s great for us to be able to work with the library and bring history to the average citizen. We’re the oldest township in New Jersey and there’s a lot of history here.”

Councilwoman Brenda Velasco has been stressing the importance of Woodbridge Township history for years. “I know that the supervisor of social studies for Woodbridge Township is here and this is a big deal for the students!” Velasco said, “It’s something great for kids doing research projects or people chasing after their roots.”

Rottweiler gave a demonstration of the way the system works. “You can click on the local history and genealogy link on the website,” Rottweiler explained, “Then you can search by decade and keyword.”

The archive will be available to search online from your home and will even appear in Google searches. However, due to copyright issues, which the library is hoping to sort out, some of the

newspapers will not be available for public internet access.

Although the project has been in the works for a long time, it wasn't until recently that it really got moving. "We were cleaning out a storage space about two years ago," said Library Director John Hurley, "And we discovered the Independent Hour and that really gave us the push." Since then, the project has gained support from the township and is now finally ready to be released.

"This is utterly unique," Rottweiler said, "If the township didn't support this project, Woodbridge Township and New Jersey would be losing so much history."