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Title: CDL Celebrates 65 Years of Service in the Historic McKune House

There's something about some buildings that makes you want to learn more about them. I feel that way about the McKune building. The first time I saw it, I thought, "What's this building's story?" So I began digging and was not disappointed!

Up until the late 1950s, the Chelsea Library did not have a true home. Between 1932 and 1947, it moved locations four times occupying the Palmer-Raftrey Building at 110 East Middle Street, the Chelsea State Bank at 104 East Middle Street, the Kemp Bank Building at South Main and Middle Street, and the Municipal Building at East Middle Street.

In 1958, Catherine McKune granted the Village of Chelsea ownership of the McKune House for use as a public library upon her death. After renovations, the library opened in this new home in early 1959 and was named the McKune Memorial Library.

Before that, the McKune House had an illustrious history. Elisha Congdon along with his brother James first settled Chelsea in the 1830s. Elisha Congdon built the elegant mansion, complete with a fireplace in the parlor and carved woodwork, in 1860 atop a hill on Main Street after his family's log home burned down there in 1849. Looking to avoid that same calamity in the future, he wanted a house "as strong as a fortress and immune to devastation" (Grace Shackman, 1997, *McKune Memorial Library*, [Community Observer](#)).

Congdon died in 1867, and in 1870, Timothy McKune bought the house and converted it to a fashionable inn, christening it the McKune House Hotel. The hotel saw robust business due to its proximity to the railroad station that served both train and stagecoach travelers. McKune's son Edward took possession of the property in 1909, but changes in travel – most notably the automobile – saw a decline in the hotel's business. Eventually the McKune House Hotel became a boarding house. (I have heard rumors that the ghost of one of the boarders haunts the Ugly Dog to this day!)

We can thank the Friends of the Chelsea District Library for overseeing the renovation of the building into a functioning library that opened to the public in 1959. The McKune Memorial Library witnessed the Chelsea Library's growth into a cozy facility that expanded with the addition of a wing in 1961. I can only imagine the delighted faces of the many patrons, young and old, who climbed those front steps into their very own permanent public library. I am tickled and honored to hear the fond memories from those patrons who visited that space!

The Chelsea District Library settled into its current "forever home" in November 2006. This spectacular space was designed to maintain and honor the McKune House as a program space for the library. We are proud to continue the story of the McKune House by hosting exhibits, storytimes, meetings, and programs within its cherished walls. It strikes me, as I think about the story of McKune, that its one constant is "home." Throughout its storied life it has served as a place of comfort, rest, fellowship, and strength. It began as home for the Congdon family, grew into a home for travelers and boarders, and evolved, finally, into a home where all may gather to relax, recreate, learn, and explore.

Join us as we celebrate library history on June 1 from 1–2:45pm in the McKune Room, followed by our popular Music in the Air concert in the library's reading garden.

About Us: Chelsea District Library (CDL) is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to engage, inspire, and equip through evolving services and resources. CDL currently serves 16,126 residents in the Chelsea library district—City of Chelsea, Lyndon and Sylvan Townships, and the portions of Lima and Dexter Townships within the Chelsea School District. For more information visit chelseadistrictlibrary.org.

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