

History of the Howe Library, Hanover, NH

The story of the Howe Library begins with the life of Emily Hitchcock Howe. Emily was the fourth of five children born to Benjamin Darwin Howe of Pomfret, Vermont, and Eliza Hitchcock of Claremont, New Hampshire. Emily's three older siblings, Sarah (b. 1842), Caroline (b. 1847), and John (b. 1849), died in Claremont before Emily was born in Hanover in 1852. The last child, Charles, was born three years after Emily in 1856 but lived only to the age of 25. Emily and her mother were clearly the mainstays of the Howe family.

Little is known about Emily's early life. We do know that her mother, Eliza, experienced the death of four of her five children and outlived her husband, Benjamin, leaving her at a young age with the care of two small children. She and Emily, the two strongest members of the family, lived together under the same roof for 45 years. We can only suppose that their shared responsibilities, as well as their shared losses, brought them closer together.



At 47 years of age, and less than two years after her mother's death, Emily married her cousin, 67-year-old Hiram Hitchcock, becoming Emily Howe Hitchcock. This was Hiram's second marriage; his first was to Mary Maynard, in whose memory he built the original Mary Hitchcock Hospital. Hiram was well educated and had traveled widely when he returned to Hanover in 1866 due to ill health. In 1900, he married cousin Emily, after advising her to give her family home to the town of Hanover for a library. This Emily did "with the prayer that this library may prove a blessing to this community to the remotest generation". As chairman of the new Howe Library Corporation, Hiram accepted Emily's gift of her family home. Hiram died only months after his marriage to Emily, leaving her his sizable estate. In the following years as a wealthy widow, Emily gave generously to the Mary Hitchcock Hospital, Dartmouth College and the Pine Park Association. Howe Library clearly had a special place in her heart, however, and was made her residuary legatee in the amount of \$150,000.

The house which later became the Howe Library had a long history well before it was acquired by the Howe family. In 1773, Eleazar Wheelock, founder and president of Dartmouth College, commissioned a journeyman carpenter, Hezekiah Davenport, to build a home for his family. A two-story gambrel roof structure with four chimneys and a simple clapboard exterior was built on the present site of Reed Hall. The "Wheelock Mansion", as it was known, housed various members of the Wheelock family through the early part of the nineteenth century. This print of the mansion, on the far right of the drawing, was made by George Ticknor in 1803.



The building was sold and moved to its present site on West Wheelock Street (currently occupied by Roberts Flowers) in 1838, where it was rented to a series of tenants. Here, in its new location, the building was lowered to rest on a granite foundation, creating a more modest overall appearance. Subsequent owners changed the gambrel roof to a sharply pitched A shape and added a porch and bay windows. In 1851, half of the building was rented to Benjamin Howe and his family, and it was here that Emily was born and lived most of her life. In 1884 the widowed Mrs. Howe bought the entire house, and in 1900 Emily presented the deed to the house to her future husband, Hiram Hitchcock, chairman of the Howe Library Corporation, for use by the Town of Hanover as a public library.

Over the years the building continued to undergo change. A large veranda on the east side was added, later to become library stacks, and a garden led to an ell and an attached barn. In 1912, after Emily died, the interior was redecorated with regard to the 18th century period in which it was built. The drawing on the right suggests a pleasant residential tree-lined street, a lovely location for a town library.

The original Howe Library served the community well until the mid-1970s when it became clear that space constraints demanded a new and larger building be erected. The Boston architectural firm of Shepley Bulfinch Richardson & Abbott designed the current light and open building on the southeast corner of East South Street and Currier Place. The "new" library which continues to "prove a blessing to this community to the remotest generation" still bears Emily Howe's name.



In 2002, having outgrown the "new" Howe Library building, the Trustees launched a capital campaign to expand the facility and to renovate the existing building. The Howe Corporation was able to raise over \$4 million in private donations and borrowed the remainder. In October 2005, the completed library was dedicated to meet the needs of present and future generations.