

Dear Director Board of Trustees,

I urge you to include a dedicated local history space at Bethlehem Public Library as you look toward finalizing your facility's Master Plan.

Please consider how such an asset would support your guiding principle to ensure that the proposed facility will meet the needs of the multiple demographics you serve. Local libraries are frequently the best resource for local history researchers. The prospect of having such an asset right here in town would win enthusiastic support from a key constituency as there is proven great interest in history.

In addition to the research opportunities currently in the library, the Bethlehem Historical Association has a rich collection, including primary source material that includes scrapbooks, handwritten letters, diaries, a wide variety of documents and a large collection of photographs.

*As this material is housed in the small 1859 Cedar Hill Schoolhouse in Selkirk, these sensitive documents are at risk.* Storage space is reaching capacity, and of necessity, materials are stored in an unsecured public room. Uneven climate conditions exist related to the age of building and periodic flooding in the basement during heavy rains.

In addition, the museum's public hours are very limited due to reliance on a small staff of volunteers. Professional oversight of the material is lacking due to the frequent turnover of untrained volunteers, and there is no safe, practical procedure for the public to have regular access to the material.

I hope that the library and BHA will work together to provide the Town of Bethlehem a secure space dedicated to its unique history. Such an asset would also serve as a testament to the ongoing legacy of the Delmar Progress Club, which chartered the first library in town almost 110 years ago. Sadly, the Progress Club's own history has been lost to the town, as the club, having no option in Bethlehem, was forced to place its records – unprocessed – at SUNY Albany's Department of Special Records and Archives.

Sincerely,

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