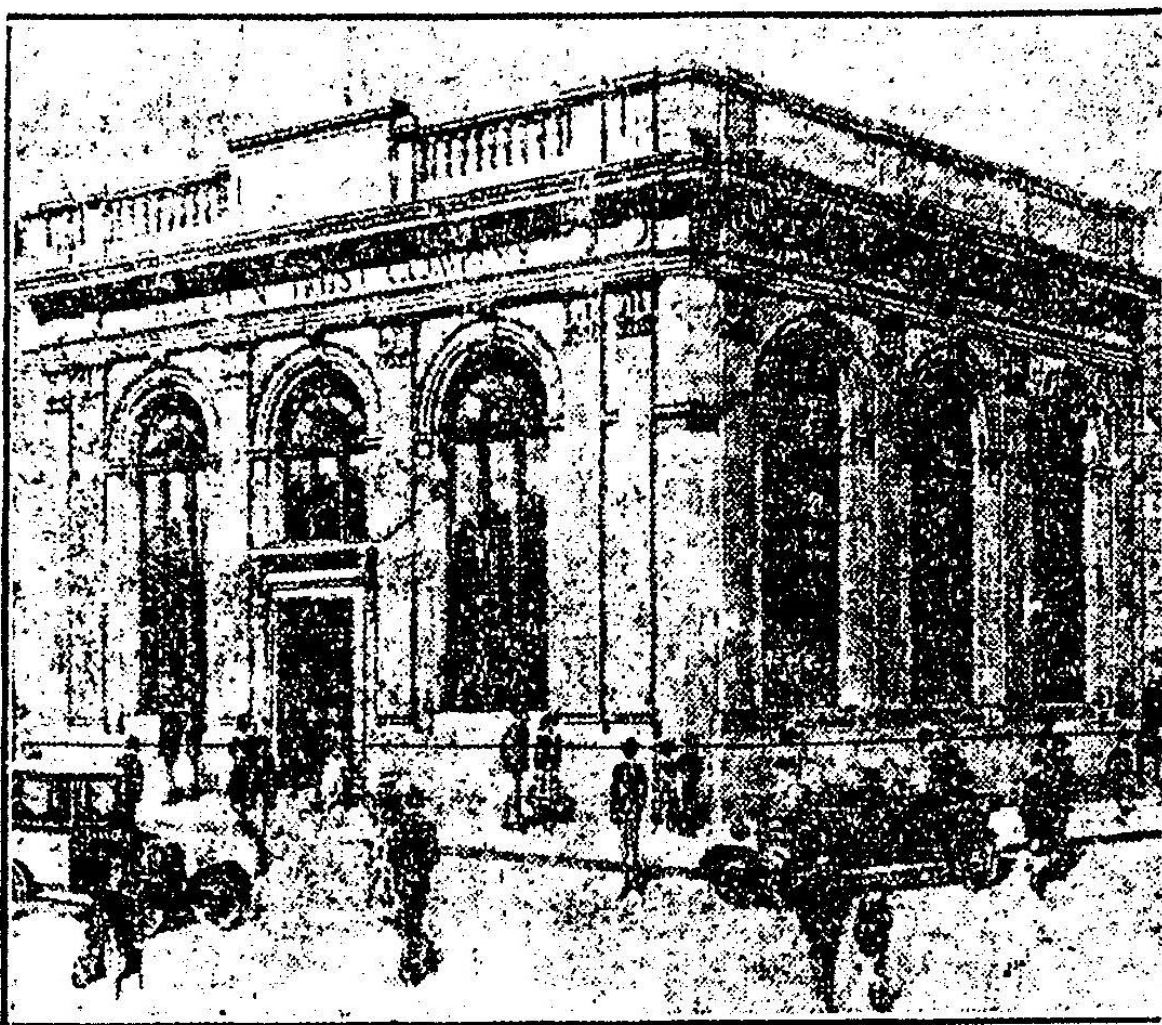


First Ward Branch Library

The establishment and history of the Paterson
Free Public Library's First Ward Branch



Architect's Drawing of New North Main Street Banking
Institution.

A Brief History of the Paterson Free Public Library System

Various libraries and reading rooms for public use existed in Paterson as early as 1828, although most required patrons to pay subscription fees.¹ In 1874, the Paterson Board of Trade discussed the creation of a permanent public library in the City and in 1876 appointed a Library Committee to investigate libraries in other cities. In 1884, Assemblyman William Prall, one of the most ardent supporters of a public library in Paterson, introduced the New Jersey General Library Act in the State Legislature. This Act authorized the establishment of free public libraries in New Jersey's cities and counties, if supported by popular vote in a local referendum.² In 1885, Paterson citizens voted in favor of such a referendum, making Paterson the first city in the state to establish a free public library under the provisions of the Act.

The first library building was located at 54 Church Street and opened to the public on January 13, 1886. In 1890, the library was re-located to the former home of Charles Danforth, one of Paterson's leading railroad industrialists, after it was given to the City by Mary Danforth Ryle in memory of her late father. Soon after Mary Ryle financed an expansion of this library at the corner of Market and Church Streets, the building was destroyed by the Great Fire of 1902. By 1905, the Danforth Memorial Library was reconstructed at a new location, 250 Broadway; funds for the new building and its property, designed by architect Henry Bacon, were once again donated by Mary Danforth Ryle as a memorial to her father. During the early decades of the twentieth century, a total of seven branch libraries were added to the library system.

The Library acquired two former bank buildings at 54-56 North Main Street and 504 Union Avenue in 1941 as part of an expansion program designed to "further the library interests of the community."³ After various interior changes, the new First Ward Branch building was opened to the public on February 16, 1942. In 1969, the building underwent extensive renovations, including the installation of new ceilings, lighting systems, windows, and repairs and improvements to exterior walls. The First Ward Branch was again closed to the public for another round of renovations in 1992 and did not reopen until April 20, 1996. In 1995, during this period of the First Ward Branch's four-year closure, the Paterson Public Library system was consolidated and the number of branches reduced from seven to three: First Ward, Totowa, and Southside. Hurricane Irene caused substantial damage to the First Ward Branch building and its collection in 2011. Since then, the original building has been closed to the public and the Northside Branch moved to the Christopher Hope Center at 60 Temple Street.

First Ward Branch at North Main Street

The First Ward Branch of the Paterson Free Public Library System was established in 1927 at 98 North Main Street. This commercial building was leased for approximately ten years and was remodeled for purposes more suited to a library. Rather than renewal of the lease, in 1940 the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and the New Jersey Court of Chancery gave approval to

¹ For more information on Paterson's earliest libraries, see: Janes, Irene. *Early History of Libraries in Paterson*. Paterson, NJ 1949.

² An amendment in 1890 provided the same for towns and townships.

³ City of Paterson Free Public Library, *Fifty-Seventh Annual Report of the Free Public Library of the City of Paterson, NJ: 1942*. Paterson, New Jersey: 1943, p. 10.

the City to purchase two branch bank buildings of the defunct Hamilton Trust Company, located at 54-56 North Main Street and 504 Union Avenue, for \$20,000.⁴ The First Ward Branch and Totowa Branch libraries, previously established in 1927 and 1910, respectively, relocated to these two buildings purchased by the City.

Construction of the Hamilton Trust Company Bank Buildings

The Totowa branch bank of the Hamilton Trust Company, at 504 Union Avenue, was opened to the public in March 1930. Construction of the Hamilton Trust's other branch bank at 54 North Main Street occurred much earlier, in the spring of 1922, and was completed by December of that year. This building replaced the bank branch that, for ten years, was located at 20 North Main Street. The exterior of the building was designed of pressed buff brick and Indiana limestone and the inside was outfitted with marble counters, mahogany woodwork, and "fittings in bronze and marble."⁵ Articles of agreement between the Hamilton Trust Company and Fred T. Ley & Co., Inc. for the construction of the building were filed in March 1922 and ground was broken soon after. The cornerstone was laid during a ceremony on Saturday, July 1, 1922 and was filled with the minutes of the "recent" organization meeting of the Northside Building and Loan association along with the minutes of the organization meeting of the North Main Street Business Men's Association.⁶ Issues of local newspapers, a list of the officials of the City and boards (including those of Prospect Park), examples of all coins in use, samples of silk, and a collection of photographs of the building and its vicinity, among other items, were also placed in the copper box within the cornerstone.

⁴ *The Morning Call*, (Paterson, NJ), Aug. 1, 1940, p. 23.

⁵ *The Morning Call*, (Paterson, NJ), Jan. 21, 1922, p. 9.

⁶ *The Morning Call*, June 17, 1922, p. 10.

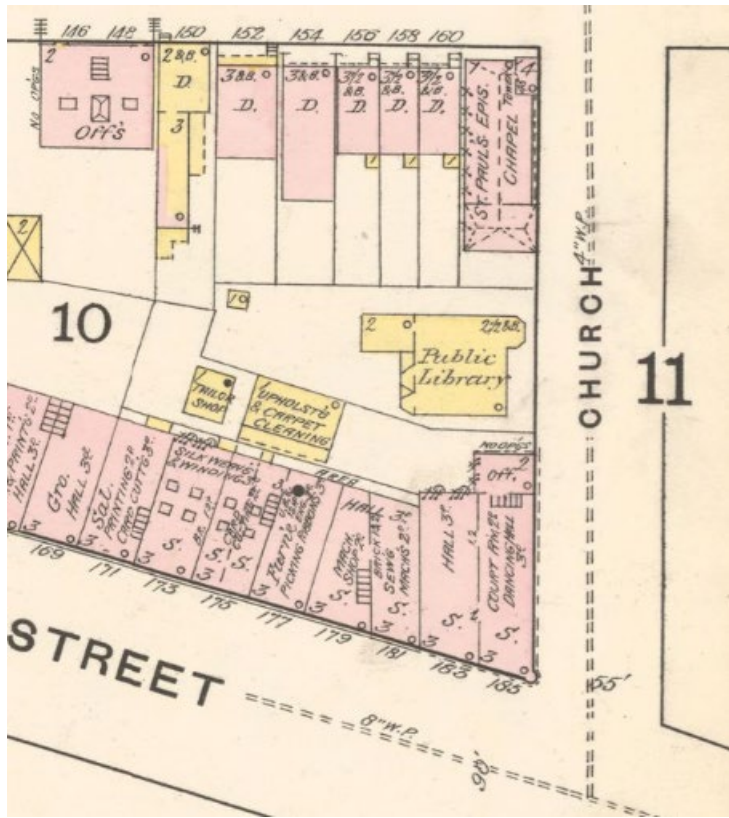


Figure 1. First location of the Paterson Free Public Library at 54 Church Street (Source: 1887 Sanborn Map, sheet 1).

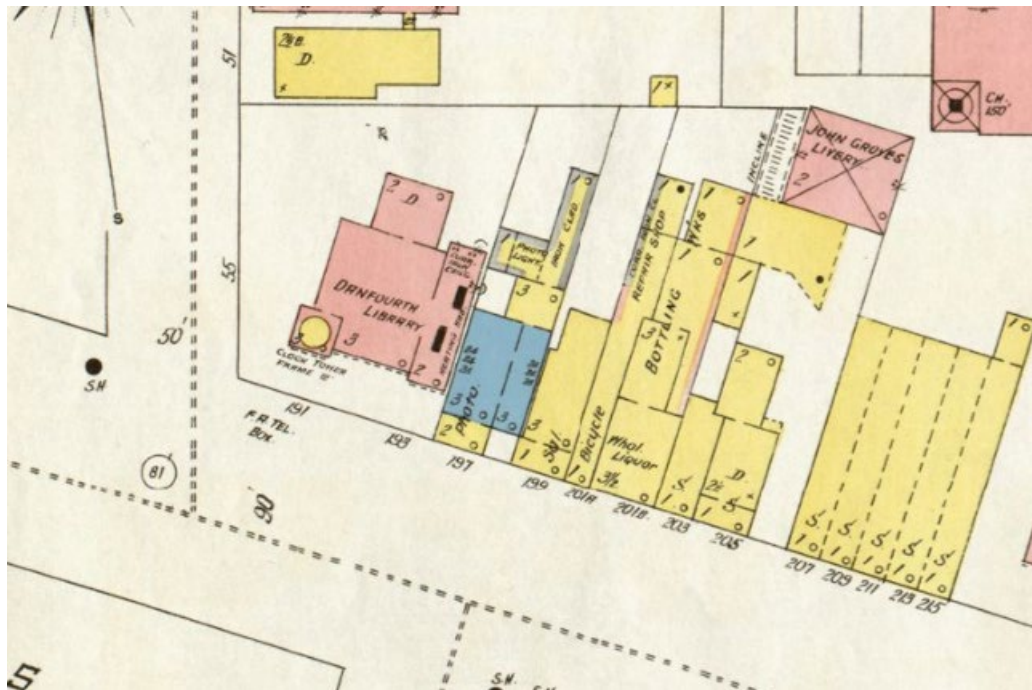


Figure 2. Second location of the Paterson Free Public Library. In 1890, the library was moved to the former home of Charles Danforth at the corner of Church and Market Streets (Source: 1899 Sanborn Map, Vol. 1 sheet 3)



Figure 3. First Ward Library Branch located at the corner of North Main and Arch Streets (Source: 1951 Sanborn Map, Vol. 2 sheet 136)