

Bethlehem Moment 8: Operation Book Move

The Bethlehem Gadfly Bethlehem Moments, Fun Stuff April 2, 2019

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Bethlehem Moment 8

Ed and Eleanor Beighe

City Council

March 19, 2019

Barbara Diamond, 425 Center Street

A Bethlehem Moment: November 11, 1967

For 43 years Bethlehem’s Public Library served the community from its location on the corner of Market and New Streets

(currently occupied by Moravian Academy

Middle School), but by the mid-1960’s the library had outgrown this

circa 1860s home. With the potential for a \$500,000 federal library construction grant, *Bethlehem Globe-Times* publisher Rolland Adams

offered a gift of \$250,000 provided it was matched by private

contributions. City Council also pledged \$500,000 if the gifts and other funds were forthcoming. With that the city launched a fundraising drive,

and within one month the citizens of Bethlehem pledged over \$292,000.

Construction of the new library commenced on August 17, 1965, and was completed two years and three months later.



At 9:00 am on Saturday, November 11, 1967, a singular event of civic participation occurred when the community again stepped up to support their library. “Operation Book Move” was a massive effort to physically move 80,000 books and hundreds of periodicals from the old library at the corner of Market and New Streets to our current library on Church Street.



Students enjoying carrying the books!

The move was planned and coordinated by librarian Amy Preston and the Jaycees under the leadership of committee chairs Ed Beighe and John Horvath. A call went out for volunteers to assist in this massive task; the response was overwhelming. Seven hundred members of the community answered, among them boy scouts and girl scouts, high school students, Lehigh fraternities, Beta Sigma Phi Sorority, Trinity Church Youth, the Bethlehem Woman's, Sertoma, Key, and MORA Clubs, the Junior League, AAUW, Lehigh and Bethlehem Steel's Libraries, and many private individuals. Seven crews working four three-hour shifts were planned with the expectation that the move would take 12 hours, but by 4:00 the job was done.

Volunteers, some as young as 12, packed books into cartons. Another crew formed a line to move the cartons down a waxed ramp over the steps into large hampers and then onto a flatbed truck for transport to the new library. Another human chain of Lehigh fraternity men moved

cartons of bound periodicals from the basement of the old library to the second floor of the new library. According to librarian Preston, all 30,000 books in the children's library were moved in two hours, many by the children themselves. "We chose to send the heavy encyclopedias and oversize books, the odd sizes and shapes with the walking groups. Some could carry only one or two books at the most. But everyone was in good humor about it."

By all accounts, Operation Book Move was an enormous success and a wonderful tribute to the people of Bethlehem who stepped up to support their library. This proud moment of civic engagement says a lot about Bethlehem of that day. When people care about their community they are motivated to participate; to give their time, attention and other support for its benefit. That so many people stepped up to perform this important community task suggests a high level of community cohesion. The nature of the project itself motivated public support. Institutions like the library that broadly benefit the community are unifying forces that can bring people together and enhance cohesion and civic engagement. In this time of partisanship and disengagement, we could use more such opportunities.

Many thanks to Bethlehem Area Public Library for access to resources used in this Bethlehem Moment.



VANGUARD OF BOY SCOUTS moves down New Street, books in hand, during moving day operation. Hundreds of volunteers turned out to

(Globe-Times Photo)
help transfer volumes from the old Market Street library to the new City Center building.



BOOK MOVE — Mrs. Doris Schmidt (left), of Bethlehem and Mrs. Ethel Albee of Allentown, pack books at the

Bethlehem Public Library on Market Street in preparation for the move to the City Center.



PLACING BOOKS into proper categories at the new City Center Library is Mrs. Phillip Wyser.

(Globe-Times Photo)



BUSY PLACE — Book borrowers line up at check-out counter of Bethlehem's new public library, as

a couple of youngsters make use of the floor space in the building.

“Library Move Planned to the Last Book,” *Morning Call*, November 1, 1967.

“Shelves of Public Library are Bare,” *Morning Call*, November 9, 1967.

“Volunteers Put Muscle into Library Moving Day,” *Bethlehem Globe-Times*, November 11, 1967.

“Bethlehem Library Ends 43-Year Location,” *Morning Call*, November 13, 1967.

“Hill to Hill,” *Morning Call*, November 13, 1967.

“Book Moving Project Ends, More Volunteers Needed,” *Bethlehem Globe-Times*, November 13, 1967.

“Bethlehem Library Opened for Public,” *Morning Call*, November 21, 1967.

“Bethlehem’s New Library Ready For Public,” *Morning Call*, November 24, 1967.

(Beighe photo credit, Douglas Graves, Bethlehem Press)

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