

**Celebration of the Written Word**  
**October 17, 2010**  
**Westhampton Congregational United Church of Christ**

For untold millennia, early humans gathered together to share stories around fires in their simple dwellings. Sometimes people gathered in family groups, and sometimes in larger community gatherings. And they did what people have always done. They told stories. Stories about how we got here, what life means, and of course the everyday kinds of tales. Not unlike gathering around campfires, or in front of the woodstove today.

These early stories were told and retold and took on new meanings, changing and expanding over time. Eventually the stories got to be so good, people wanted to tell them just the same way each time. They also had other concerns. How to settle property claims, and remember how to make certain foods? What could we do to keep all these things clear?

And so, many thousands of years ago it began, in clay...

**SIGN:           ANCIENT SUMERIA**

(Enter two Sumerian family members holding tablets of clay; one with a stylus. They are wearing cotton tunics. – Ian and Callum)

S#1: This is a very good story you've written! I can't wait for the last chapter! (Ian)

S#2: Well, it's been written, but it took quite awhile to cut it out of the clay, and I have to wait my turn to have it baked! All the records have to be sent to Ur this month. (Callum)

S#1: I guess money matters come first...(big sigh.) (Ian)

S#2: Yes... and you know how secretive they are! So they have to cut out and bake all those envelopes to put them in, too! (Callum)

S#1: One more thing about your book...There's got to be a better way to write it! All those pointy triangles to make one word. I had to build a new room on my house just for the book! (Ian)

S#2: Just wait for the last chapter! (Callum)

**SIGN:           ANCIENT EGYPT**

Another early form of writing started in Egypt some years later. It was called hieroglyphics—which literally meant sacred symbols. There were hundreds or even thousands of distinctive forms which could be put in different combinations to convey different meanings. Unlike cuneiform, which could be scratched into wet clay, hieroglyphics were carved into rock!

(Enter two Egyptian stone carvers. Prop set up—white oaktag or Styrofoam with 3 hieroglyphs representing “life, prosperity, and health.” One of the carvers is “finishing up” the carving. – Hannah Weiss and Jonathan)

Carver #1: There, how does that look? (Hannah W)  
Carver #2: Ummm.... (Jonathan)  
Carver #1: Um?! (Hannah W)  
Carver #2: Well, that says ankh, wedja, seneb: life, prosperity, health. (Jonathan)  
Carver #1: So, what's wrong? (Hannah W)  
Carver #2: Pharaoh wanted ankh, seneb, wedja...life, health, prosperity. (Jonathan)  
Carver #1: Uh oh...well, it's a little difficult to change it now. (Hannah W)  
Carver #2: There has to be a better way to do this. Let's break for lunch, maybe something will come to us. (Jonathan)

**SIGN: ASIA MINOR**

Over time, humans slowly began writing on more flexible materials. Animal skins, parchment and vellum became the standards instead of rock and clay within a thousand years or so....

(Enter two Asia Minor "residents" carrying a rolled up skin. They visit each of the other vignettes briefly and then sit to write on the skin with charcoal. – Holly and \_\_\_\_\_)

AM#1: (To the Sumerians) See what we have? This is much more portable and doesn't take up so much room!

Sumerians: That looks great! (I&C)

AM #2: (To the Egyptians) Look what we have made! When we write with charcoal, if we make a mistake we can wash it. (Holly)

Carver#1: It doesn't look very permanent... (Hannah W)

AM#1: We have discovered the "rough draft!"

Carver#2: Oh! We can make sure it's right before it is written in stone! Great! (Jonathan)

**SIGN: PHOENICIA & THE MEDITERRANEAN**

By the time writing had been around for almost two thousand years, the Phoenicians created the first alphabet. It evolved out of pictograms, but took on a life of its own as a 22 character alphabet without a single vowel. Other cultures were quick to adopt it.

(Enter two Phoenicians with parchment scrolls with large letters, writing left to right. The other groups gather around them – Danielle and Sheila)

P#1: We bring you...the alphabet! (Danielle)

All: Oooh! What does it do?

P#2: Its letters are symbols for the sounds we make. You put them together to make words. It is much more efficient than pictographs or cuneiform writing. (Sheila)

All: That's great, What a good idea, Yes! Wow!( Things like that.)

P#1: It can be written on tablets of clay, stone, or parchment. (Danielle)

P#2: We suggest that it be written left to right and then everyone can read and understand the letters. (Sheila)

P#1: If you sew the pages of parchment together, you can make books or scrolls. (Danielle)

Sumerian#1: This is much better! (Ian)

Egyptian#1: The stone work can be for ceremonies, but now everyone can read and write! (Hannah)

AM#2: We all had a part in making this happen! (Exeunt) (Holly)

### **SIGN: LEAVING BABYLONIA**

About the time that the Jewish people returned from their exile in Babylon, they began putting together what became the Jewish Scriptures. They probably began writing these stories much earlier, but having been captives in a foreign land compelled them to collect them all together to build their sense of identity. The first two letters of the Hebrew alphabet—aleph and bet—are thought to be the source for the *word* alphabet, even though theirs was not the *first* alphabet.

(Enter two Jewish villagers walking through and carrying parcels – Victoria and Hannah Weiss.)

V#1: Let's stop and rest a moment! (Victoria)

V#2: No, I want to get as far away from Babylonia as quickly as possible! (Hannah W)

V#1: Come, rest, a little food would be good and I want to write about the Last Days. (Victoria)

V#2: Let me see...(they unwrap a scroll) What is this?! You are writing left to right! We ALWAYS write right to left! (Hannah W)

V#1: Well, I saw some of the villagers trying it and I thought... (Victoria)

V#2: NO! NO! NO! We need to keep these writings the same! One day they will be a great book! (Hannah W)

V#1: But what's the big deal? Left to right, right to left? (Victoria)

V#2: Tradition! (Exunt) (Hannah W)

### **SIGN: THROUGHOUT THE ANCIENT WORLD**

One marvel of the ancient world was the Library at Alexandria. It was established by Ptolemy I Soter and the orator Demetrios Phalereus, who was a former governor of Athens. Let's hear a little about their motivation for this enormous undertaking...

(Enter Ptolemy and Demitrios – Jonathan and Tessa)

P: Writing abounds through the civilized world! (Jonathan)

D: Leaned people are turning out thousands of works and treatises in philosophy, history, rhetoric... (Tessa)

P: There are manuscripts containing plays, poetry, prose...(Jonathan)

D: We must somehow gather these together and build a place to house them. (Tessa)

P: That way everyone can read them! (Jonathan)

Letters were sent to kings throughout the world seeking out great works. Agents were sent out to scout the cities of Asia, North Africa, and Europe. Foreign vessels arriving at Alexandria were searched routinely for scrolls and manuscripts. A total of up to 700, 000 volumes were collected by hook or by crook to build up this great library.

(Enter learned traveler – Hannah Tracey)

LT: I have noticed that we are all becoming closer in this civilized part of the world, but our languages still are somewhat different. I have carved this stone with Greek, Egyptian words and Egyptian hieroglyphics so that people can compare these languages and begin to learn the others through their own. (Hannah T.)

(Enter the Sumerians and Asia Minor residents holding clay tablets and parchment or skins. Person from China enters holding paper scroll- Callum, Ian, Holly, \_\_\_\_\_, Sheila).

Paper maker: Look what we have made! We call it “paper!” (Sheila)

S#2: How do you make it? (Callum)

PM: You soak hemp or cotton or wood fibers until they are soft and then mash them up and soak them some more and roll them out. (Sheila)

AM#1: This is a lot easier than curing animal skins. Thanks!

S#1: This will mean much smaller houses! (Ian)

Julius Caesar began the eventual downfall of the Alexandrian Library. He burned 40,000 of the books in the year 47 CE. His grim work was made complete through civil wars and the Archbishop Theophilus of Antioch, who destroyed it completely by 391 of the Common Era.

During the life and demise of this one great library, others were founded and flourished. The Ulpia Library was founded by Emperor Trajan and by 370 CE, there were as many as 28 public libraries in Rome.

About three hundred years later Islamic scholars began translating Greek, Indian and Persian texts. Their study helped to further advances in algebra, mathematics, science, astronomy, economics and medicine. The Renaissance and Scientific Revolution in Europe eventually drew upon a number of their earlier discoveries.

Muslims also developed some patterns for later public libraries. They were called "halls of Science," and they promoted Islam as well as secular knowledge. They lent books out and created library catalogues for organizing texts.

**SIGN EUROPE**

Meanwhile, in medieval Europe...

(Enter two monks Tessa and Jonathan)

Monk #1: How's your project going? (Tessa)

Monk #2: I'm almost done with my prayer book; it's taken seven years, but I think it will be approved. How is your illumination coming along? (Jonathan)

Monk #1: It is done, praise be. The tome is due to be sent to the library near week's end. I start work on another soon. (Tessa)

Monk #2: How long do you think this will take to complete. (Jonathan)

Monk#1: I believe it will be shorter this time; maybe only ten years. (Tessa)

(Enter Johann Gutenberg – Tad Weiss)

Gutenberg: Good news! I have invented to make your lives easier! It is called the movable type printing press! (Tad)

Monk #2: Good news, indeed!

(Enter Korean) (Danielle)

Korean: Excuse me... (Danielle)

Gutenberg: Yes? (Tad)

Korean: I hate to take away from your excitement and all, but we invented the moveable type printing press 400 years earlier and have been printing books in Korea and China since then. (Danielle)

Others: (A little deflated) Ohhh...(All but Danielle)

Korean: Cheer up! It's a great invention. Just wait until you see how much time you save and how many people will start to read. (Danielle)

Others: (Cheered) Huzzah! (All but Danielle)

The printing press made it possible to print and distribute books at previously unthinkable rates. Calendars, written works of all sorts and Bibles moved into the hands of the public—in their own languages, no less, which planted seeds for Martin Luther's Protestant revolution.

## **SIGN INTERMISSION**

Literacy Anthem

Prayers

Lord's Prayer

## **SIGN 1620**

Martin Luther's reformation is well under way. Religious groups begin to seek out new places to practice their faith. In Holland, a congregation first founded in Scrooby England sets out for Plimoth Plantation. Their pastor, John Robinson, sends them on with a farewell sermon. In it

he says “the Lord has more truth and light yet to break forth out of his holy word”—revealing their shared faith in the importance of education and learning to read.

(Enter two pilgrims) (Sheila and Holly)

P#1: The winters are harsh here, but with help we will survive. (Sheila)

P#2: Our group will be the forebears of Congregationalism and evolve into the United Church of Christ, and we will survive to teach our children our values. (Holly)

P#1: Education, learning, reading and writing are important to us. We must make sure to ensure that these values survive as well. (Sheila)

P#2: Who would believe that in nine years from when we first landed in this new place to us, we would form a college named Harvard that would exist to the present day. (Holly)

### **SIGN COLCONIAL AMERICA**

Harvard is followed by other prominent American schools. The other six Ivy League schools are established by the Civil War. By that time four of the Five Colleges in our area were established, Hampshire came in 1970.

In addition to universities, libraries began to take root in American soil as well. Not at first as we know them today. Prior to the 18th century, public libraries frequently chained their books to desks, and were not always open to the public. At the same time subscription libraries, both private and commercial, provided the middle through upper classes with books for moderate fees. Benjamin Franklin and friends operated the Library Company of Philadelphia as one. This was partly as a means to settle arguments and partly as a means to advance themselves through sharing information.

There are many competing claims as to which of the American public libraries actually came first. One claim is that it is the Franklin library in Massachusetts. The story goes that a town in Massachusetts wanted to name itself “Franklin” in honor of the famous Pennsylvanian, and in return, Benjamin Franklin was to donate a bell for their church tower.

(Enter Town of Franklin residents and Benjamin Franklin) (Townspeople and Bob Miller)

BF: (reading letter) “...and so with appreciation for your great work and wisdom, we petition from you a donation, that being a bell for our new church tower.” Hmmm...(Bob)

Res#1: (Reading letter while others crowd around...) “...and so, on the basis that ‘sense’ is preferable to ‘sound,’ I am donating books instead of a bell.” (Ann)

Res#2: Makes sense to me...(All agree, Exunt)

### **SIGN WESTHAMPTON! 1778**

The earliest settlers in what would become Westhampton arrived in 1762. By 1778 the settlers had petitioned the General Court to be organized as a separate town, rather than remain a part of Northampton. It became so on September 29, 1778.

(Enter Enoch hale, carrying a diary) (Ralph H.)

EH: The first meeting of our new town of Westhampton was held at the home of Nathan Clark on November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1778. We chose town officers, selectmen. In those days, a town was not considered incorporated by the state unless there was a “meeting,” that is, a church and a settled minister to preach. I was asked to be the minister and accepted the call. Indeed, I served in that capacity for fifty years. The first library in Westhampton was housed in our church!

(Opens diary and reads)

“April 9, 1787—Cloudy and warm, several small showers. Ride to Mrs. Higgens ae. Evening several of the Library Company here. Appointed a Committee to draft and propose articles of agreement and to call a meeting.”

(Closes diary and looks up)

Selectmen, a Church and a library. Now we have a community! (Exit) (Ralph H.)

**SIGN            WESTHAMPTON!**  
**1866**

A move to create a more formal library came in 1866. At a reunion of Westhampton natives, Erastus Bridgman suggested that a library be established and encouraged the people there to donate books. For his part, he offered \$100.00 toward the library. His act of surprising generosity was duplicated by four other town natives!

At Town Meeting the following year it was voted to accept the donated books and to use the South Lobby in the town hall for a library. A committee was elected to draft rules and appoint a librarian. Charles N. Loud was the first to so serve. The management and care of the library was assigned to the Congregational Church Parish. Many years later the library was housed in the Ladies’ Parlor, perhaps for better access. It remained there until 1931.

**SIGN            WESTHAMPTON!**  
**1928-1931**

(Enter Westhampton townsfolk, Sumerians, Leaned traveler during the above speech.) (Patricia, Lillian, Susan, Ian, Callum, Hannah T., Tessa, Sheila, Danielle, Tad, Victoria, Bill, Don, Ann)

Emma: I am Emma Edwards Thayer, and I bequeath \$10,000.00 to be used specifically for building a town library. (Hands paper to Vera). (Patricia)

Vera: I am Vera Chapman Clapp and I am donating a deed for the property on which to build it. (Hands key to Marion). (Lillian)

Marion: I am Marion Mascho, the Librarian of the first public town library. I still have grandchildren living in Westhampton! (Susan)

Townsperson #1: Throughout the years, there has been so much progress surrounding the spread and availability of the written word! (Bill).

Townsperson #2: Yes, like the Braille system! (Don).

Townsperson #3: And typewriters! (Ann)

Sumerian#2: I bet that fellow Gutenberg was surprised! (Callum)

Townsperson #4: Not to mention paperbacks! (Tad)

Sumerian#1: Yes! No more being crushed while reading in bed! (Ian)

Sumerian#2: What do you mean? My books WERE my bed! (Callum)

Townsperson #5 (or1): Did you hear about the discovery of the Rosetta Stone? Three ancient languages in one place! We can learn more about ancient history! (Victoria)

LT: They found it right where I left it! (Hannah)

Sumerian#1: Now they can figure out what we were talking about all this time! (Ian)

Sumerian#2: Good thing we hadn't discovered paper yet! (Callum)

**SIGN: RED Drape VEIL!**

(As Tadd speaks townspeople move together and face away from the congregation. Sumerians and LT leave, shaking their heads).

Book berating, banning or burning have been with us almost as long as writing itself.

Throughout history tyrants and demagogues from all countries, backgrounds and faiths have sought to denounce or destroy works which challenged their ways of seeing things.

Chinese emperor Shih Huang Ti supposedly buried alive 460 Confucian scholars to control the way history was written. He also destroyed all the books in his country.

English and German translations of the Bible were destroyed under Protestant and Catholic directions—both kept the Bible translated in Latin, and out of the hands of laypeople.

Pope Paul IV established a list of forbidden books, which stayed in place for over 400 years.

Among the works to join the list were Galileo's solar systems theories, Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables*, and anything written by a Protestant!

Darwin's *Origin of Species*, outlining the theory of evolution, was banned from the library of Trinity College, Cambridge. It was the school from which he had graduated!

In 1933, a series of massive bonfires began in Nazi Germany burning thousands of books, including works by Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Ernest Hemingway, Helen Keller, Lenin, Jack London, Thomas Mann, Karl Marx, Stalin, and Leon Trotsky.

Four years later the Quebec government passed an act which allowed the attorney general to confiscate and destroy any publication propagating communism or bolshevism.

In the late 1950s, the White Citizens' Council protested *The Rabbits' Wedding*, a picture book for children because it was thought to promote racial integration in pre-Civil rights Alabama.

Up into the 1960s, the city of Boston banned books, plays or other art forms for so-called objectionable content.

In London, England Beatrix Potter's *Tale of Peter Rabbit* and *Benjamin Bunny* were banned from schools because the stories portrayed only "middle-class rabbits." The year? 1980! In Kenya, just twelve years ago, the government banned 30 books and publications for "sedition and immorality," including works of Chairman Mao and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. And *just weeks ago*, a man calling himself a Christian pastor tried to rally people to burn the Qu'ran as a work of the Devil.

### **REMOVE VEIL, TAKE AWAY RED**

Despite all this resistance, from ancient times to the present, different ideas and books survive and flourish!

(Townspeople face outward)

### **SIGN 1973, 1983**

**(Tadd point with yardstick to 73)**

Townsperson: So many things have happened in recent history surrounding the written word and our town library! (Pat)

Townsperson: Evelyn Montague donated funds to develop the library attic into a children's room in 1973.

**(Tadd point with yardstick to 83)**

Townsperson: In 1983, the Westhampton Congregational Church gave the deed to the library building, land books and trust fund to the Town of Westhampton. (Tad)

Townsperson: The library was then formally named the Westhampton Memorial Library. (Lillian)

(Enter as many ancient people who are not townspeople) (Holly, Hannah W, Jonathan, Ian, Callum, Hannah T.)

Townsperson: In 1986, Sidney and Jessie Cole donated funds for a two story addition to provide meeting and collection space. (Bill)

Townsperson: David and Letitia Cole donated the resources necessary to complete and furnish the children's room. (Judee)

Sumerian#1: We cannot believe the progress we have seen since words were first written. (Ian)

Sumerian#2: It seems like just yesterday we were lugging clay tablets from one place to another! (Callum)

AP#1: Now we've gone from clay to paper to books to kindles! (Holly)

AP#2: And from triangles in wet clay to carving to charcoal to writing; from writing to the printing press to typing and Xeroxing and now printing and scanning! (Hannah)

AP#3: Information can be sent almost instantly!

AP#4: I still don't get all this Internet, Facebook, Twitter, texting... (Jonathan).

LT: Let me help...(They forma circle as LT takes out a cell phone, etc...)(Hannah T.)

### **SIGN 1987-1990s**

As the 1980s gave way to the 1990s, more people in Westhampton felt the need for an expanded library here in town.

Four Townspeople: We have noticed increased usage of the library and some building deficiencies. (Tessa, Danielle, Ann, Tad)

Townsperson: Let's send a survey out to the people of Westhampton. (Pat)

Townsperson: From our survey and study, we have found that the present building is inadequate and impossible to sufficiently upgrade at the current location. (Bob)

Townsperson: Many goals of a long range plan were completed, with the exception of space needs. (Tessa)

## **SIGN                      2000s**

Townsperson: A Planning and Design Grant application was completed and submitted to the MBLC (the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners). (Patricia)

## **BANG GAVEL**

All Townspeople: We authorize the Library to apply for an MBLC planning and design grant. (All)

All Townspeople: We were appointed by the select board. (All)

Townsperson: Director (Lillian)

Townsperson: Trustee. (Don)

Townsperson: Staff Member (Judee).

All Townspeople: Seven community members. We researched building options. (All)

At about that same time the church decided to sell the parsonage at the corner of North and Stage roads. A parsonage was not the draw it had once been to potential pastors, and keeping it up was not exactly free. The building committee, with assistance from Hilltown Community Development Corporation developed a plan for the town to purchase the property and develop it into a new library. It would even include open space for public use.

Townsperson: A State grant of \$20,000 and a town appropriation of \$20,000 provided funds for architectural plans. (Danielle)

Townsperson: A Grant Proposal was submitted to the MBLC for almost 2 million dollars to purchase the property and build the new library. (Bill)

## **BANG GAVEL**

Townspeople: We approve the project by a near unanimous vote. (All)

Townsperson: In July, 2005, the State awarded a \$900,000 grant—60% of the proposed project cost. (Victoria)

Townsperson: In September, 2005, a special town meeting vote approved the plan, but a subsequent ballot Debt Exclusion vote failed. (Tad)

## **BANG GAVEL**

Townsperson: (holds up sign: 57% positive) (Don)

Townsperson: (holds up sign: 43% negative) (Lillian)

Townsperson: It fell short of the required 2/3 vote needed for the town to borrow money. (Sheila)

Townsperson: In Fall, 2006, residents petitioned the Selectboard with over 400 signatures for another vote on funding the project after some funds are raised through private sources. (Pat)

## **BANG GAVEL**

Townsperson: (holds up sign: 60% positive) (Bob)

Townsperson: (holds up sign: 40% negative) (Danielle)

Townsperson: The vote falls short of reaching the required 2/3 majority. (Ann)

3 Townspeople: After defeat, a subgroup brainstormed ways to make the project happen. (Judee, Patricia, Bill)

Townsperson: Friends of the Library agreed to purchase the parsonage building from the church. (Tessa)

Townsperson: The Westhampton Congregational Church held the mortgage, interest only, until it was paid off, and then the Friends gave the property to the town of Westhampton. (Bob)

Townsperson: A leadership team was formed to help fundraise privately. (Lillian)

Townsperson: There have been many mailings, presentations and grant requests. (Don).

Townsperson: Some materials have been sold to the Library at significantly reduced costs, or even donated! (Victoria)

Townsperson: And there have been events! (Bill)

Townsperson: Yes! Events! And these too have brought us together as a community! (Pat)

Townsperson: Lounging for Literacy! (Tad)

Townsperson: Flock to the Library! (Danielle)

(Enter Enoch Hale—Ralph H.)

Townsperson: And our wonderful annual Fall Festivals with the trebuchet launches and the great pumpkin roll! People who voted for and against the building of the library come to these events and even donate their time and services! (Patricia)

Enoch Hale: Well, even in our day we had our disagreements about town matters, for instance, people were downright contentious about where we should build the church! But, I can see that Westhampton has remained a thriving community and you have a beautiful new library to celebrate. I congratulate you!

## **SIGN 2010**

Even though the written word is more portable than it has ever been, it remains an essential expression of being human. We human beings are story tellers, and we all live inside stories that we make with others as well. What makes us human is that sharing of them—face to face, not

just remotely or electronically. Sure, we can download whole books now, and we really don't even need paper anymore!

But there is something *right* about the feel of a book. And there is something just as *right* about meeting with other people. And we can all do that in the new Library. There we can all build community—even if we go to different schools, places of employment or houses of worship. And we can all celebrate all the wonderful ways that we are human there. We can learn more about science and literature, art and mechanics, languages, and maybe even faith, too. And we can make recommendations to each other about a really great read while we are at it. Or share a book with a child or two...

This morning we have a lot to celebrate together! We are all part of the great human story which has been written down and read through the ages. We all have a relationship with this town, and all the good work that has been done here for the love of it. And we can all celebrate the written word and how it defines and describes our human lives.

One way we can do so is to help fill up the shelves at the Library. Half of this morning's loose plate offering will be donated directly to that cause. The rest of the offering will go to helping this church keep on keeping on.