

# A Library of Things: Non-Traditional Items to Borrow

July 04, 2022

It has been many years since libraries were only a place to borrow books. These days, many libraries across the state supplement their thousands of loanable books with “libraries of things” – that is, non-traditional materials, whose makeup grows and is modified in response to the needs of the community.

The Essex Free Library, for example, has nine ukuleles and 16 pairs of snowshoes to lend. If you’re searching for an e-bike, an Orion StarBlast 4.5" tabletop telescope, or an Epson LCD projector, you need look no further than the Ilsley Public Library in Middlebury. Brownell Library in Essex Junction has a tarot kit, a karaoke machine, walkie-talkies, and a round loom to loan. Prospectors hunting for placer gold in the occasional – that is, very occasional – glaciofluvial bench deposit along the White River may want to check out the Rochester Public Library’s gold panning equipment. The John G. McCullough Free Library in North Bennington lends fishing rods, and the Guilford Free Library loans dolls and teddy bears.

Last month, Brattleboro’s Brooks Memorial Library celebrated the grand opening of its “[Big Red Shed](#),” a tool cottage in the adjacent municipal parking lot that contains a library of garden and food preservation and preparation tools. Any item is available for loan to holders of library cards.

A random sampling of other libraries’ libraries of things reveals a host of items you never knew you needed to borrow. Until now: a Bee-Bot programmable floor robot; microscopes and metal detectors; a garment steamer; a Moog Theremini theremin and Otamatone; a light bulb changer and snow brick maker; tortilla presses, tennis rackets, and typewriters; neckties (the service is waggishly called a “tiebrary”); plus more culinary utensils than The Galloping Gourmet ever dreamt of having in his kitchen.

“These are the items you might really wish you had two or three times a year, but just can’t justify the expense or the space to purchase yourself,” says Ilsley Public Library Director

Dana Hart.

“Public libraries are uniquely suited to helping communities share resources – we’ve been doing it with books for over a hundred years!,” she continues. “The benefits of circulating non-book items are manifold. It is a sustainable and affordable option that ensures all community members can utilize a resource. As we move into the future, I anticipate significant growth in public libraries’ non-traditional collections.”

Speaking of growth, when I first began researching this article, the Rochester Public Library’s Library of Things featured a database of 180 items. Two weeks later, the number had grown to 191. And now? [See for yourself!](#) Says library director Jeannette Bair, “Per capita, I would guess we have the largest collection [of loanable ‘things’] in the country.”

When State Librarian and Commissioner of Libraries Cathy Delneo began to visit Vermont’s many libraries, she quickly realized “that there are a lot of cool things being lent to the community,” she says. “While I haven’t visited the Fletcher Free Library recently, I happened to notice a bundt pan listed in their ‘Library of Things’ page. Having just invested in a bundt pan recently myself (which I’m apt to use about twice a year), that particular item had jumped out from their list.”

The Vermont Library Association also maintains a [list of specialized collections](#) that are available in libraries throughout the state. “It is great to see such a diverse set of items being loaned!,” says Cathy. “Everything from snowshoes and bikes to sewing machines, telescopes, and STEM [science, technology, engineering, math] kits.”

The Department of Libraries has contributed in other ways to the libraries of things available to Vermonters at their local libraries. In 2018, they began a partnership with the Department of Environmental Conservation to furnish 63 public libraries throughout the state with hand-held [moisture meters](#), which test the moisture content of firewood. And in May, they launched a partnership with [Big Heavy World](#) and the [Fletcher Free Library](#) in Burlington to make USB microphones available to Vermonters through their libraries and through InterLibrary Loan, a nationwide service whereby a patron of one library can borrow things owned by another library. The project is funded by the Vermont Arts Council.

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of library cards, which are free to Brattleboro residents, property owners, and business owners. “Libraries are built on a model of mutual support and the sharing economy,” writes Library Director Starr LaTronica. “This new collection of objects is a natural fit with the Library’s mission to connect people and resources to inspire, inform and empower our diverse community.”

Vermont’s diverse communities deserve diverse selections of borrowable materials — materials that increasingly are part of our libraries’ ever-expanding libraries of things.

A Sample Library of Libraries of Things:

- [Brooks Memorial Library](#)
- [Brownell Library](#)
- [Essex Free Library](#)
- [Fletcher Free Library](#)
- [Ilisley Public Library](#)
- [Jeudevine Memorial Library](#)
- [Rochester Free Library](#)
- [Vermont Library Association’s Specialized Collections \(a.k.a. The Mother of All Libraries of Things\)](#)