

Caroline Maria Hewins

1846-1926 | Librarian

Do you like to visit the library? Have you ever borrowed books or gone to a program for kids? When Caroline Hewins started work as a librarian in Hartford in 1875, most libraries did not welcome children. You also had to pay to visit the library or take out books. Caroline did not think these were good ideas.

Caroline was born in 1846. Back then, most families did not have books at home. Luckily, Caroline's family had enough money to buy books and thought they were important. Caroline learned to read when she was four years old. When she finished school, she went to work in a library in Boston. In 1875, she moved to Hartford to become the librarian at the Young Men's Institute Library.

Caroline worked for 50 years to make the library better. In 1892, the library changed from a private library—where you paid \$3 a year to borrow books—to a free library, called Hartford Public Library. Caroline opened the library on Sunday afternoons, so that working people could visit on their day off. She encouraged schools and libraries to work together. She set up traveling libraries and a branch library, so that people did not have to travel so far to use the library. She led children's programs that inspired libraries around the country. She took children on nature walks, led story hours, and wrote plays



Caroline Maria Hewins with her sister, courtesy
Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library



Caroline Maria Hewins reading, courtesy
Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library

for children to perform. When she traveled, Caroline wrote letters to the young library visitors back in Hartford. She collected dolls from every country that she visited and hosted an annual doll party at the library.

Thanks to Caroline's hard work, the Hartford Children's Library—one of the first children's rooms in the United States—opened in 1904. It had kid-sized furniture, big windows, and lots of good books for kids. Caroline's own collection of 4,000 children's books is now at the Connecticut Historical Society and Hartford Public Library. You can see them there, or you can

visit your own public library and borrow a book. Be sure to think of Caroline Hewins when you do!

For more information, visit:

<https://www.cwhf.org/inductees/caroline-maria-hewins>

<https://connecticuthistory.org/the-public-library-movement-caroline-hewins-makes-room-for-young-readers/>

<https://www.ctexplored.org/caroline-hewins-hartfords-first-lady-of-the-library/>

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