

Thomas L. Jenks Biography
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The Conway Public Library was built in 1900 as a memorial to Dr. Thomas L. Jenks.

Thomas Leighton Jenks was born June 10, 1829 in Conway, New Hampshire. The Jenks family moved to Dover in 1834, when he was five years old. There Thomas Jenks attended the public schools. Disliking farm work, he went to Lowell, Massachusetts, where his sister lived, and found employment in a drug store. From there he moved to Boston and worked in a pharmacy. During the war with Mexico in 1846, he enlisted in the navy and served on the Frigate "United States", where he was assigned to pharmaceutical work and received training from the ship's surgeon.

He entered Harvard Medical College and graduated with honors in 1855. He practiced medicine and continued a pharmacy business for many years. He became a trustee of Boston City hospital and president of the Boston College of Pharmacy. He was also interested in the study of common law and acquired a large law library.

Dr. Jenks was a member of the Common Council, of the Board of Aldermen, and of the Massachusetts House of Representatives. He was chairman of the Board of Directors of public instruction, of the police commission, and of The East Boston Ferries. He was director in turn of several of the city banks, and at the time of his death was president of the North End Savings Bank in Boston.

It was his intention to make provision in his will for the erection of a public library in the town in which he had been born, and he had discussed his plans with his architect, T.W. Silloway. However, Dr. Jenks died suddenly of a heart attack on October 31, 1899, without having made a will. His wife and Mr. Silloway became administrators of his estate, and both took action to carry out his wishes.

With the advice of Conway Selectman, E.B. Carlton, most of the land, which had belonged to Christopher Wilder, was purchased and the present library building constructed near the site of the house in which Dr. Jenks had been born. A committee consisting of A.C. Kennett, E.B. Carlton, and S.M. Hobson procured the monetary contributions for the land from local townspeople, obtained a deed of the land, and assisted in the project. The foundation stones were cut from the Washington Boulder, which used to be a tourist attraction on the southeast side of Pine Hill. Photographs of this process may be seen on the wall above the fireplace in the main reading room of the library. The building was completed before the end of the year 1900, and cost about \$45,000.

When the cornerstone was laid on June 13, 1900, a list of 38 names of subscribers to the fund for the land was placed in the copper box. The concluding words of the architect were, "May the walls of this edifice rise from these foundations, continuing to a good completion. May these premises be a vantage-ground for all who would have good knowledge prevail and a high, righteous civilization cover the earth as waters cover the sea."