

# Our continuing path & commitment to full accessibility

## 1925

Originally founded as the Hatch Library in 1886, the Cortland Free Library was chartered by the NYS Board of Education in 1925. Designed by renowned architect Carl W. Clark and erected in 1928 on the site of Cortland's first courthouse, the Georgian Revival-style library served the growing Cortland community for the next 40 years without need for substantive renovations or expansions. Moreover, even though societal norms of the time paid nominal regard for the challenges of those with disabilities, the Cortland Free Library staff was available to retrieve library materials upon request.



## 1963

The library's large basement was converted to a Youth Services Area, which would become an integral part of later accessibility improvements.

## 1975

The north mezzanine was constructed, adding significant capacity for titles, but also introducing an accessibility challenge.

## 1976

Just three years after the enactment of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which included some of the nation's first guaranteed protections for people with disabilities, the Cortland Free Library significantly altered the library's front facade and steps with construction of a formidable wheelchair ramp leading to the Main Reading Room. This ramp would provide access for patrons with disabilities for 30 years and preceded the ADA by 14 years.



## 1989

The south mezzanine was constructed, once again adding space for library collections but simultaneously introducing accessibility challenges.

## 1990

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law by George H.W. Bush. Notably this occurs 14 years after installation of the library's front-entrance wheelchair ramp.

## 2008

Cortland Free Library was added to the National Register of Historic Places, validating the building's importance from a historical and architectural standpoint while imposing constraints and scrutiny with regard to future renovations and alterations.

## 2007 -2011

Recognizing the need for a range of facility improvements, including upgrades to increase access for people with disabilities, the library secured a series of State and private-foundation grants and invested significant capital of its own. Foremost among the projects undertaken at this time were removal of the now-failing, 1976 front-entrance ramp -- and replacing it with an architecturally suitable elevator that connects and provides access to the Youth Services Area, lower-level restrooms, Periodicals Room, and Main Reading Room. While every option was investigated and considered, structural constraints prevented the new elevator from providing access to the library's mezzanines and art gallery. The project was nevertheless lauded by the executive director of Access to Independence (Cortland's non-profit agency dedicated to advocating for our county's citizens with disabilities), who said: *"The amount of time and troubleshooting it has taken your board to figure out the way to accomplish the task is really commendable..."*



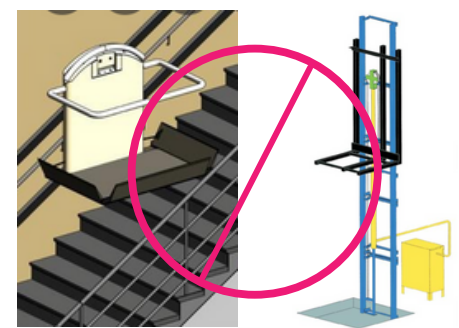
## 2012 -2015

During this period, grants and board-initiated investments continued to improve accessibility throughout the library, including: Construction of a ramp from the Youth Services area to the periodical room; restroom renovations to enable wheelchair access; raising of mezzanine guardrails for added safety; addition of an automatic door opener at the library's accessible Court Street entrance; enhanced exterior and interior lighting, of particular benefit to those with disabilities; installation of linoleum flooring in the Main Reading Room, to increase mobility; and addition of IT infrastructure to enable internet access and digital browsing of library and Finger Lakes Library System collections.



## 2018 -2021

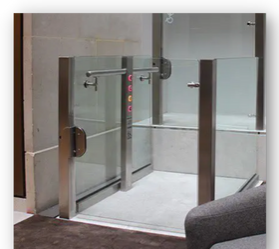
The library continued to seek and obtain funding for increased accessibility. Chief among the projects estimated at this time were methods for providing wheelchair access to the art gallery and north mezzanine. Unfortunately and after due consideration, railing-mounted chair lifts (estimated at \$119,000) were ruled structurally impractical and aesthetically unacceptable in view of the library's being listed on the National Registry of Historic Places. Similarly a LULA Lift alternative (estimated at \$59,000) also proved impossible due to lack of space needed for directly adjacent mechanical/hydraulic systems. The search for a solution continued with help from a local architect, as library Trustees codified their ongoing commitment by adding accessibility to these areas as goals in the library's Long-Range Plan (2021).



## 2022

To be continued!

Determined to complete recent efforts to provide access to the library's art gallery and north mezzanine, Trustees voted (March, 2022) to seek additional funding and commit matching dollars to design and install a platform lift (estimated at \$71,000). With a targeted funding date of 2023 and proceeding to construction immediately thereafter, it is noted that installation of this lift will provide direct physical access to 85% of the library's collections -- leaving access to the south mezzanine as the only remaining physical accessibility challenge. (Meantime, library staff will continue to retrieve materials for those with disabilities, upon request.)



Example of platform lift



# Current accessibility measures & accommodations



Online access to the library's catalog is available anywhere our patrons have internet access -- including from home or from any of our dedicated OPAC computers, or from public computers. (Speaking of which, we have seven desktop computers in our Main Reading Room and two more in our Youth Services Area... all of them wheelchair accessible.)



By design, the vast majority of our library's programs, activities, and services are conducted or provided in areas that are accessible -- and *all* children and teen programs (as well as our popular chess club!) are held in the Youth Services Area or Periodicals Room, both of which are accessible by our elevator, ramp, and automatic door.



Photo courtesy of the Cortland Standard

As has been the case since the library's founding, librarian assistance is available to obtain all library titles upon request. (Of note, the combination of electronic catalog searches and librarian assistance were described as "*appropriate accommodations*" by Cortland's Access to Independence in 2011.)



Because our library is a member of the Finger Lakes Library System, *all* patrons have access to more than 400,000 items and dozens of databases for health information, college searches, national newspapers, periodicals, reference books, encyclopedias, and many other resources -- including Heritage Quest software, a genealogy program of the U.S. Census records.



If you have difficulty getting to the library due to a disability or special circumstance, you may be eligible for our Mail-It service that delivers books to your home via the U.S. Postal Service. Patrons wishing to take advantage of this service can apply by contacting the library by phone or emailing [reference@cortlandfreelibrary.org](mailto:reference@cortlandfreelibrary.org)



In addition to a growing collection of digitized back-issues of The Cortland Standard, accessed on the web -- our library has copies of this preeminent local paper in microfilm format dating back to the paper's inception in 1867. These and other collections of 19th century local papers can be viewed on a microfilm reader located in the accessible Main Reading Room.



The New York State Talking Book and Braille Library (TBBL) lends Braille and recorded books and magazines (and necessary equipment) to residents of 55 upstate counties who are unable to read standard printed materials because of a physical disability. Ask one of our staff to sign you up, if interested. (Additional information on this program may also be found on our website.)



Our library's digital collection can also be accessed at home or on the go via OverDrive/Libby -- free platforms that offer access to thousands of popular and bestselling eBooks and eAudiobooks (including Kindle Books). Titles are available for all ages; there are many Spanish, Chinese, and Russian titles to choose from; eBooks and eAudiobooks can be returned automatically at the end of the loan period; and there are no late fees.

## OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS, ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY & RESOURCES OFFERED FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES:

- **Parking:** There are two handicapped parking spots located in the parking lot on the north side of the library.
- **Shelving units** are spaced with ADA clearances in mind everywhere the library's physical structure allows.
- **Wheelchair-accessible check in/out stations**, library catalogs, tables, computer stations, and study carrels and restrooms are available on both the main level (Main Reading Room) and Youth Services Area.
- **Headphones** can be checked out at the circulation desk.
- **Microsoft Windows** is installed on all library computers and features accessibility attributes found in the *Microsoft Ease of Access Center*: These include: Magnifier (enlarges parts of the screen), Narrator (reads on screen text), On-Screen Keyboard (can type with the mouse), and High Contrast (increases contrast to reduce eye strain).