

# Her legacy blossoms

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GROTON — Sunlight dances through the leaves as the branches sway in the wind in the back of the Groton Public Library.

The tall trees provide cool shade with just enough lighting for those who want to read under them. If they need quieter spots to indulge in the world of fiction, there are thicker layers of greeneries further in the back.

Then, there is the “circle,” the flat stones that double as low-rise benches circling around beach pebbles placed in whirling patterns. Lorayne Black, who designed the garden, says she can easily imagine children jumping from rock to rock. And she knows blooming witch hazel right outside of the children’s reading room in February will herald the approaching spring.

Library Director Owen Smith Shuman calls the garden the “outdoor reading room.” Reading books and being outdoors are the two things the late Katherine Madigan loved to do. And “Katie’s Garden” will remind people for decades to come about the ardent reader who devoted herself to improving the library as its board member of 30 years.

“It’s exactly what she would have wanted,” Madigan’s son, John Madigan, said of the garden.

The Groton Public Library recently opened Katie’s Garden, which was created in memory of Katherine Madigan, a former library trustee who died July 26, 2010, at age 90. A Groton resident of six decades, Madigan was the driving force behind the major library renovation and expansion in 1999 and pushed for various library-related projects, including the establishment of the Groton Public Library Endowment Fund.

“She would do anything” to benefit the library, Smith Shuman said of Madigan, who served on the board of trustees from 1975 to 2005.

When Madigan died last summer, her family asked that donations be made to the Groton Public Library Gift Fund. The library staff then discussed a way to honor Madigan. Knowing she loved to garden and walk with her dogs, they decided to create an outdoor reading room, Smith Shuman said. Madigan’s family supplemented the fund to pay for the cost of the project.

Measuring 140 feet by 70 feet, the garden that spreads along the side of the library’s parking lot features a wide range of plants that bloom at different times of the year, such as flowering crabapple, silver bells, hydrangea, viburnum and fothergilla. Black, a landscape architect from Groton, strategically planted red-twig dogwood to the western edge of the garden so people could see sunset through the red bushes. She also planted evergreens to create a border

between the parking/sidewalks and the garden and used low bush blueberry as a natural ground cover.

The stone-made circle is intended to provide an intimate setting for people wanting some conversation. When snow covers the ground in the winter, people looking down on it through the library window would see the pebble stone pattern, Black said.

For Black, the key was to create a connection between the indoors and the outdoors. She also tried to create a sense of simplicity in honor of Madigan's lifestyle.

Madigan believed in the importance of a free public library where people from all socio-economic backgrounds can come together, Smith Shuman said.

"She was extremely independent," her youngest son, John Madigan, said of her mother, who ran a bed-and-breakfast out of her home.

A graduate of Wheelock College and Boston University, Madigan taught at elementary schools in her hometown, Lexington, for several years. After marrying the late Joseph Madigan in 1946, she moved to Groton and worked as a substitute teacher at Groton Elementary School and raised five children.

John, who runs Groton Market, a liquor store on Main Street, across the street from where his mother used to live, said reading was her second nature.

"She always had five to six books going," John Madigan said. "Her biggest fear was not having things to read."

Library staff often met in Madigan's kitchen and talked about things while tasting her home-baked cookies. Madigan knew how to take care of business and move on to the next project, Smith Shuman said.

"She was a doer, not a talker," Smith Shuman said.

Madigan's accomplishments make a long list. In addition to the library board, she was involved in the Friends of Nashoba Valley Medical Center, the Groton Garden Club and Sacred Heart Church and founded a private group, "The Book Club," in Groton. She was also a recipient of the "Citizen of the Year" award.