

## **\*\*Press Release\*\***

**\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\***

**\*\*The Levi Heywood Memorial Library Goes Fine Free: Fostering Equitable Access to Library Services\*\***

Gardner, MA, May 15, 2024 - The Levi Heywood Memorial Library is proud to announce that it is eliminating fines on overdue materials, effective immediately. This decision reflects a growing national trend towards promoting equitable access to library services and follows the lead of many public libraries across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

"Libraries are community resources designed to serve everyone, regardless of their economic status," remarked Stephanie Young, Director of the Levi Heywood Memorial Library. "By going fine free, we are removing barriers to access and ensuring that all members of our community can benefit from the resources and services the library provides."

The move to eliminate fines aligns with the mission of libraries as stated by James Lonergan, Director of the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC), who emphasized the importance of providing equitable access to services. Research indicates that fines can deter individuals, particularly those facing economic challenges, from utilizing library resources. Furthermore, fines do not consistently ensure the return of library materials and can be perceived as a barrier to usage.

"Our decision to go fine free is rooted in our commitment to increasing access to the library," stated Stephanie Young. "We want to create a welcoming environment where everyone feels encouraged to explore, learn, and grow without the fear of financial penalties."

While the Levi Heywood Memorial Library will no longer charge fines on overdue materials, patrons will still be responsible for paying for lost or damaged items. Additionally, certain special collections, such as Museum Passes, may accrue fines for late returns to ensure equitable access for all patrons.

The CW MARS Automated Library Network, comprising 161 member libraries, voted to become fine free in 2022, underscoring the collective commitment to fostering accessibility and inclusivity within library communities. Over 91% of CW MARS libraries are currently fine free.

"We recognize that overdue fines can create economic barriers and perpetuate social inequities," remarked Jeanette Lundgren, Executive Director of CW MARS. "By reaching this milestone of 90% fine free libraries, we are taking a significant step towards making library services accessible to all members of our community."

The Library encourages patrons to take advantage of this opportunity to clear any existing fines and continue to utilize the library's resources to their fullest extent.

For more information about the Levi Heywood Memorial Library's fine-free policy and services, please visit <https://www.leviheywoodmemlib.org> or contact Stephanie Young.

**\*\*Contact:\*\***

Stephanie Young  
Director  
Levi Heywood Memorial Library  
978-632-5298

[syoung@cwmars.org](mailto:syoung@cwmars.org)

55 West Lynde Street  
Gardner, MA 01440

<https://www.leviheywoodmemlib.org/>

### **\*About Levi Heywood Library:\***

The Levi Heywood Memorial Library has a rich history dating back to 1841 when the idea of a library in Gardner first emerged. In 1886, the Levi Heywood Memorial Library building was dedicated, marking the establishment of Gardner's first real free public library. Since then, the library has undergone numerous changes and expansions, culminating in the unveiling of a beautiful new 32,000 sq. ft. facility on West Lynde Street in 2004.

Today, the Levi Heywood Memorial Library offers a wide range of services and resources to its patrons, including computer access, art prints, museum passes, meeting rooms, and more. With a dedicated staff of 16 serving over 9,000 active library card holders, the library continues to play a vital role in the community.

As the library building celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2024, it remains committed to its mission of providing educational and recreational opportunities to the people of Gardner and beyond. The Levi Heywood Memorial Library stands as a testament to the enduring spirit of generosity and support within the community.

### **\*About CW MARS:\***

CWMARS is a diverse multi-type library consortium made up of over 100 member libraries primarily located in Central and Western Massachusetts. CW MARS is an acronym that stands for Central and Western Massachusetts Automated Resource Sharing.

They are the largest of nine library consortia in Massachusetts. Membership is made up of academic, public, and special libraries of all sizes, from tiny towns with populations under 500 to large urban libraries with many branches. CW MARS hosts and supports the hardware and software needed to power the shared online library catalog and library staff software. They provide technical support to member libraries.