

FLOOD CLEANUP

History Center rebuilds collection at library



Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

Norwalk historian Ralph Bloom points out valuable material in the Norwalk Library Main Branch's History Center on Tuesday following the flooding that closed the branch Thursday and damaged the records.

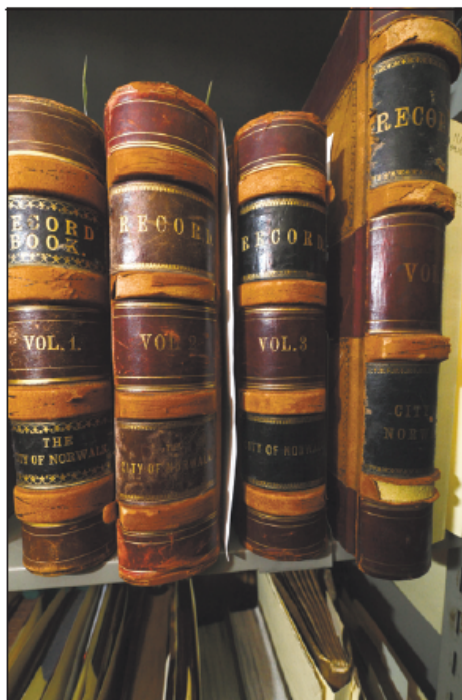
Local archives date to the late 18th century

By Robert Koch

NORWALK — Maps, microfilms, photographs, city directories and records dating to the late 18th century were among the items spared when water gushed through the ceiling tiles of the Norwalk Library History Center on Belden Avenue late last week.

“These are the Lockwood Company books. E. Lockwood & Sons were in business here. They didn’t cease until 1842 and we have 13 volumes of the early transactions,” said Norwalk historian Ralph C. Bloom, pointing at the bound books shelved in the center. “This involves their shipping. They were a general store plus they owned their ships. They had sloops and a schooner and they plied their trade on the eastern coast.”

Bloom described the company records as among the “one-of-a-kind items” in the 3,500-volume history collection that could not have been replaced.



Printed volumes of city records dating to the 18th century line the shelves in the Norwalk Library Main Branch's History Center on Tuesday.

Last Thursday morning, a pipe carrying condenser water broke as a contractor replaced an HVAC unit on the second floor of the Main Library on Belden Avenue. Water poured through two floors, threatening the History Center collection.

But several heavy, metal-covered bookshelves moved with great labor from the former Norwalk Museum on North Main Street in SoNo to the Main Library four years ago saved for the invaluable books, photographs and other historic records.

“The top layer kept water from coming down into anything and it splashed off instead,” said Bloom, who hadn’t envisioned the unique shelving units protecting against water. “To me, the tops had a nice big flat shelf you could put oversized objects on and it turned out to be a blessing in disguise.”

The temporary flood closed the library for the remainder of the day last Thursday. The building reopened Friday morning, but cleanup work has continued.

Library system Director Chris Bradley said she walked through the building

See History on A4





Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

Norwalk Public Library Archival Manager Paul Keroack, volunteer Gary Dwor-Frecault and archivist Lynn Hildenbrand work in the Norwalk Library Main Branch's History Center on Tuesday.

HISTORY

From page A1

Tuesday morning with the owner of Rainbow International, the company that performed the cleanup. The company shampooed all carpets over the weekend and they were dry by Tuesday, she said.

Officials are now focused on replacing and reshelving materials damaged by the flood.

"About 100 large-print books were damaged and have been re-ordered,"

Bradley said. "Reference librarians are reshelving titles in the 800s (literature) that weren't damaged because they pulled them off the shelf in the nick of time."

Bradley said the biggest loss was 25 cartons of used children's books that had been donated to Norwalk Reads!

Work remains to be done in the History Center. Shelves and cabinets remained separated from walls and baseboards to allow the spaces to fully dry and prevent mold from developing. Staff prepared

to test the computers, which were shut off and covered in plastic during the flood, and refile the map cabinet.

"We didn't sustain too much damage, but we did have to remove everything from the map case because the water started to seep in," said Lynn Hildenbrand, library archivist. "But they're all mixed so we now have to put this all in order."

Bloom said Tuesday that History Center staff are able to retrieve many, but not all items for patrons. He expects the center to be fully up in running in about 10 days.