History of the Auburn Public Library

1778
The town of Ward was incorporated, but because of its similarity in spelling to nearby Ware, the town was renamed Auburn in 1837. The Merriam family, who had emigrated from England, settled in the area of Auburn now known as Merriam Street and Merriam Terrace, off Bryn Mawr Avenue.

1830
Town Clerk Joseph Stone devised a system for loaning books to his neighbors. Much of Stone's collection, along with those belonging to several area schools, was donated to the Free Public Library upon its founding.
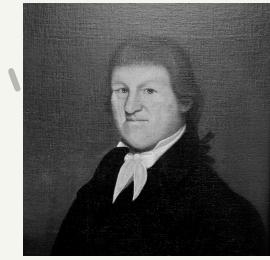
1872
A committee was formed to create a town library. Initially, space was provided in individuals' homes and a room at the First Congregational Church. In 1897, two rooms in the new Town Hall were designated to house the Library.
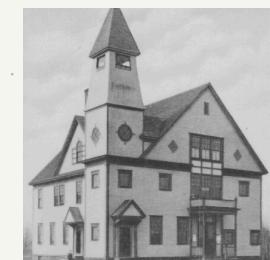
1907
Abby Shute, one of Auburn's first librarians, established a card catalog, and the Dewey Decimal System was implemented for better sorting of books. The Library's collection contained about 3,000 books and its annual circulation was around 5,500.

1911
Leander Merriam donated $8,000 to the town of Auburn so a public library could be built in memory of his parents and sister. His only stipulation was that the building was "to be free to all religious sects, all nationalities, rich and poor alike." In 1929, the town voted to rename of the Library to the Merriam Public Library.

1954
The town allocated $5,000 for a bookmobile, with an additional $1,000 donated by the Phillips Fund. Service was provided at 17 locations throughout Auburn. The Library also began circulating records and films during this time.
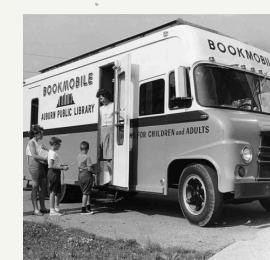
1968
Auburn's population grew to over 14,000, more than doubling in 20 years. The Library's collection exceeded 27,000 books, and circulation increased to over 90,000 per year. A new library building opened at 369 Southbridge Street, including a children's room and a public meeting space named the Merriam Room. It also reverted to its original name—the Auburn Free Public Library.

1985
The Auburn Public Library joined other libraries in central and western Massachusetts in the C/W MARS network, significantly expanding patrons' borrowing options. In 1999, the card catalog was replaced with Public Access Catalog (PAC) computers.

2011
Longtime Auburn resident and Library patron Norma Card bequeathed $120,000 to the Library. These funds were used to establish a trust, overseen by the Board of Trustees, that provides supplemental funding for Library programs. Norma liked to say, "If the Auburn Library can't find a book, it doesn't exist!"