



CONCORD FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY  
Corporation

**The Charles Williams Scholarships**  
**And**  
**The Concord Free Public Library Corporation**

**History of the Scholarship:**

Among the duties of Trustees of The Concord Free Public Library Corporation is the administration of a very special endowed fund, The Charles Williams Fund, who provides an annual stipend for scholarships awarded to college-bound Concord students who demonstrate an interest and aptitude in the Studio Arts and in Music. The Williams Fund is an ancient fund, dating to the Reconstruction era just after the end of The Civil War. The Fund is named for Library benefactor Charles Williams, a contemporary of the Library's Founder, Williams Munroe, as well as of leading Concord literary figures of the time, including Louisa May Alcott and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Charles H.S. Williams was born in Buffalo, N.Y. in October, 1838. He lived in California until he was 13 years old. Charles was the scion of an illustrious and learned family--his father was Attorney General of a young California, the California of the Gold Rush era. Charles came East to attend college, first at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, then transferring to Union College in Schenectady, New York. He studied law, and went into practice in Poughkeepsie, New York. He married the former Miss. Sterling in Poughkeepsie. After practicing for some years, Charles changed course and studied Theology. He also relocated to New England, settling in Concord. He was ordained as a Congregational Minister and served as Pastor of the Trinitarian Church in Concord from about 1868 to 1870. He underwent a change in his theological views, and stepped away from the church, going back to the practice of law. He returned to New York and practiced there for a few years, before eventually moving his practice to Boston, and settling once again in Concord. Here in Concord, he was a member of the School Board, and was well-regarded for his abilities as a speaker and a thinker.

Sadly, Mr. Williams' life ended prematurely. On Friday, December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1880, just after the Christmas holiday, Mr. Williams set out from his home to go ice-skating. It was 3:30 in the afternoon, and the winter sun must have already been very low in the sky. He was supposed to be joined by a friend, who at the last minute was unable to join him, so he was skating alone near Nine Acre Corner when it was later surmised that he must have fallen through very thin ice. A general alarm was raised by his wife when he did not return home at the appointed hour, and many Concordians went out into the night to try to find him. Tragically, he was claimed by the icy river and the winter night. In his obituary (which ran multiple columns in the local

newspaper), he was hailed as a leading citizen of Concord, and a friend to all. The article went on to describe Mr. Williams as someone who *“possessed a mind richly stored with knowledge from many sources, to which had been added a culture which fitted him to any sphere which he chose to occupy.”*

Mr. and Mrs. Williams were childless. Having no children of his own to inherit his wealth, Mr. Williams, working through the structure of The Library Corporation, created a fund that would benefit children of his fellow Concordians for generations to come. It is interesting that although the Concord Free Public Library was literally in its infancy at the time of his death, he chose the Library Trustees to carry out his plan of providing scholarship funds to promising young students. The Williams bequest, which then became The Williams Fund, was notable and certainly ahead of its time in that Mr. Williams specifically indicated that scholarship funds should be equally available to young men and to young women.

The text of the Williams bequest is framed very much in the context of a time when instruction in music and the studio arts—drawing, painting, and sculpture—was a universally accepted dimension of the cultivation of a life of the mind, and the education of young persons. Mr. Williams’ bequest speaks of funds made available in the form of a prize or scholarship, and even refers to support for study in America or Europe, following the tradition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century “European Tour” described in the novels of Henry James and Edith Wharton.

For many years and up until the 2016 grant year, The Williams Scholarship was run as an “affiliate fund” of The Concord-Carlisle Scholarship Fund (CCSF) which enabled the mechanics of scholarship administration to be managed in concert with other CCSF affiliate funds. During that era, the Library Corporation through The Williams Fund provided financial support to Williams Scholars who attended universities and colleges all over the United States.

In 2018, The Williams Scholarship entered a new era. The Scholarship has been restructured to create two distinct awards, **The Charles Williams Scholarship for Excellence in Music**, and **The Charles Williams Scholarship for Excellence in Visual Arts**, both of which will be awarded by the Trustees of The Concord Free Public Library on an annual basis. Assisting the Library Trustees will be The Williams Scholarship Committee, appointed by the Trustees from the Concord community. Committee members, working with a Corporation Trustee Chair, will review scholarship applications, and will make recommendations as to award recipients. The Scholarship application, applications guidelines, and information about members of The Williams Scholarship Committee, will be available on the Library’s website.