THE BREWER PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE 1950s

Mary Haskell personified the title librarian. Her shoes were sturdy, her attire practical and I doubt that she wore little, if any, make up but she always smiled. She walked with somewhat of a limp and I always noticed the uncomfortable way she held a pencil.

And, by the way, she was **Miss** Haskell to everyone, including this 10-year-old patron.

The Brewer Public Library was a small but certainly an adequate place in the mid-1950s. More importantly, the safe, small-town atmosphere allowed me to ride my bike, a hand-me-down from an older cousin, to the library every week or two, about three miles from my house on Elm Street.

Almost every week or so on Saturdays in good weather I would return my three borrowed books and carefully select three new titles to pile in my bike basket for the ride home. Miss Haskell made the rules and rule number one was no more than three books. I never asked if I could borrow four books but I learned to use a card catalog and understood the basics of the Dewey Decimal System, thanks to her.

My library card was some shade of orange, as I recall, with my name, a column for the due date of each book with a column to right labeled returned, allowing for a more or less permanent record of any transgressions such as late returns or, heaven forbid, a lost book. My motivation to return books on time was not quite as compelling as Abraham Lincoln's but it was rare, if ever, that I had an overdue book.

My trips to the library started to wind down a few years later as I became more involved with school, sports and other activities. When I started high school in 1960 and walked into the Brewer High School library, there was Miss Haskell at the librarian's desk, exactly where she should be.

I still go to my local library every week or so – but I don't ride my bike.

As an aside, Miss Haskell's father, Ernest Haskell, was my senior English teacher.