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Lakeland Public Library

Florida Library History Project

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Florida Library History Project

Lakeland Public Library

1912 The Woman's Club of Lakeland organized on March 14. The club maintained the only local library accessible to the citizens of this community.

1923 The Woman's Club urged the City to purchase land from Herbert Munn as a site for the city library. The recommended site, on Lake Morton between Massachusetts Avenue and Iowa Avenue, had been a campground for Spanish-American War soldiers and later a park.

On August 23 the city purchased the land with a bond issue of \$25,000.

1924 By a Vote of 461-122 Lakeland citizens approved a bond issue of \$75,000 to build and equip the city library. The architect was Franklin Adams, Jr. The building was categorized as Mediterranean Revival with stucco walls and terra cotta tile roof. The interior had a steel circular staircase from the ground floor to the top floor. The lobby was decorated with a twelve-inch frieze.

1927 The library opened its doors to the public on January 6. Construction costs reached \$55,000 and there was an expenditure of \$14,914 for equipment. Eunice Coston was appointed Librarian. About 5,000 volumes stocked the shelves.

Through the influence of Lakeland Congressman Herbert Drane, the library became a partial depository for government documents, the first depository in a public library in Florida and the second depository in the state (the first was the University of Florida).

In October Otye Brown replaced Miss Coston, who had resigned to take a position at a library in Atlanta. At that time the Lakeland Public Library had 5,800 volumes. The circulation figure for the first year was 53,055 (the city's population was 28,000).

1928 The Florida Library Association held its annual conference April 4-5 in Lakeland with the public library and Florida Southern College as co-hosts.

1928 Almost 6,100 books were circulated during March and a total of 4,533 residents had library cards.

Eva Chisholm, a teacher with the Child's Garden of Learning, a private school, hosted story hour on Saturdays.

1929 In April Otye Brown (Bly) retired to join her husband at Florida Southern and devote more time to her family. George Burnham served as acting librarian for six weeks. On June 7, Serena C. Bailey was selected as the new director.

1937 During the summer city employees planted a cotton patch on the grounds of the Library. Within a short time, the cotton fell victim to boll weevil.

On October 4, a branch library opened at 1042 North Virginia Avenue in a bungalow renovated by the WPA. Elsie Dunbar was named librarian. She had received her library training at Hampton Institute and Atlanta University. Later she became the first person to receive a master's degree from Florida A&M College in Tallahassee.

1938 Library activities included a weekly story hour for children, a nature club, and a fifteen-minute broadcast once a week over WLAK radio. In this year the library answered 5,339 reference questions, and 28,000 people used the library.

1940 On September 20, Mrs. Park Trammell presented to the library the papers, letters, photographs, speeches and scrapbooks of her late husband, who died in 1936. Park Trammell had been Mayor of Lakeland, President of the Florida Senate, Attorney General of Florida, Governor of Florida, and U.S. Senator.

1952 Serena Bailey became Mrs. Edwin Perry Ross in December.

Dr. William C. Webster's estate bequeathed \$15,000 in federal securities to be used for the purchase of non-fiction books. Dr. Webster was a teacher of history and music, and received his doctorate from Columbia University. He had lived in Lakeland from 1928 until his death at the age of 85 on June 1, 1951. The interest on the gift amounted to \$375 a year and was used to buy special books for the Webster Book Collection.

The library budget for 1951-1952 was \$15,720 with a payroll of \$1,200 for one head librarian and two assistants. By 1952 the circulation figures had climbed to 57,200.

1953 On September 22 the Junior Welfare League donated \$5,000 to buy a sidewalk book return, Broadman "Auto-Page," and a Gerstenlager Bookmobile. The new bookmobile began service February 15, 1954. By November 1957 it was making fourteen school stops and two community stops -- Munn Park and South Florida Avenue Publix -- and had circulated 29,793 items during the previous fiscal year.

The interior of the Northwest Branch Library was remodeled, with asphalt tile flooring, new book shelves, and new light fixtures.

The hours for the main library were extended from 9:30 am to 9 pm on Monday and Thursday, and from 9:30 to 6pm the other days of the week. The library remained closed on Sunday. The staff consisted of 11 people.

1955 On February 22 the City Commission took action to honor the late Park Trammell by naming the public library after him. Trammell served successively as mayor of Lakeland, a member of the Florida House of Representatives, president of the Florida Senate, Attorney General of Florida, Governor and United States Senator.

In August the library closed for repainting, redecorating and repairs. The general renovation also included varnishing the furniture and installing new Venetian blinds. The library reopened the next month. At that time the staff consisted of 10 people. Employees included City Librarian Serena Bailey Ross; Assistant City Librarian June O. Haschka; full-time assistants Elizabeth Durfee and Barbara Ridlebaugh; part-time assistants Gladys W. Register and Leo W. Haymans; student assistants Jimmy Malone and Roy Williamson; Elizabeth York, bookmobile librarian; and Lillie Mae Jordan, acting librarian for the African-American branch located on Virginia Avenue. The library contained 35,000 books on its shelves.

1957 In the winter, Lois Lenski, author of the Newberry-Award-winning Strawberry Girl, a book about the Lakeland community's strawberry farms, visited

the library.

A financial report printed November 3 in The Lakeland Ledger stated that the library cost each person in the city about 74 cents per year. The library had circulated a total of 115,639 books, pamphlets, and periodicals. The budget for fiscal year 1956-57 was \$31,560. More than 50,000 people in the Lakeland area were served. Approximately 20 percent of the citizens were library borrowers.

1958 On June 9 a record 607 books circulated.

1959 In April the Lakeland Planning Department proposed an addition to the library building, with a separate children's reading room and more shelf space to be added in 1962-63.

Serena Bailey Ross died July 15, having served as City Librarian nearly 30 years. From July 1959 until June 1960 the city had no library director.

1960 Walter Murphy was appointed director in June. He came from the Kansas City, Missouri Public Library system, where he had been Administrative Assistant to the Chief Librarian.

In October plans were approved to add two new staff members, a Children's Librarian and a Chief of Technical Processes. The library also planned to add 4,000 books a year, an average of 360 books a month, in order to reach standards established by national library committees. A circulating phonograph record collection was also begun that year.

1961 The new children's unit opened in the basement of the library. There were 5,300 volumes of juvenile literature and seating space for 17 people.

A Smokey Bear Summer Vacation Reading Program was begun on June 19 by the acting Children's Librarian, Mrs. Marilyn Openbrow. The program included nature book reading, movies, and a story hour. More than 100 young readers earned certificates in the reading club that summer.

The "Great Books Discussion Group" was formed on October 24 with Mrs. Freda Levy and Mrs. April Bevis as co-leaders.

Mrs. Gladys W. Register, Assistant Librarian, died August 24.

1962 Mayor Morris Pritchard announced April 29 that he had asked City Manager Robert Youkey to include funds for a new library in the 1962-63 fiscal budget.

The first meeting of the "Friends of the Library" was held on May 15 at First Federal Savings and Loan, in Grove Park. As principal speaker, Walter Murphy discussed ideas for the new library and asked the Friends to assist in planning the new facility.

Patron use of the library increased by approximately nineteen percent from September 1961 to August 1962. 180,332 books and materials circulated, and the library holdings totaled 38,827 volumes, 12,241 of which had been added in the previous two years. The library was opened two more nights per week.

1963 Elsie Dunbar, former librarian at the Northwest Branch, retired as principal of Rochelle Junior High School June 3.

James H. Renz, formerly of William and Mary College, in Williamsburg, joined the staff as Chief of Technical Processes in January.

The City Commission decided in July to replace the Park Trammell Building with a modern, new building at a cost of \$350,000, including fixtures and furniture. The library contained over 40,000 volumes and over 500 phonograph records. Book circulation was expected to reach 200,000 by year's end and there were over 15,000 registered borrowers. The staff consisted of nineteen full-time workers.

In August the library became the first in the state to install a book charger. The machine was purchased from the Fort Lauderdale firm of Duple-Chek of Florida, Inc.

In September sketches were shown of the new \$500,000 public library to be built on the site of the old Park Trammell Building. The basement fronting Lake Morton was to be the children's department, and an auditorium seating 130 was to be built on the west side. The ground-level entrance, facing Lime Street, was to serve as the Adult department, and the Administration offices and conference and

local history rooms were to be located on the third floor.

The first Park Trammell Library Music Appreciation Program was held at the Tuesday Music Club. The music program was organized by Mrs. Freda Levy.

The Park Trammell Library became the first in the state to install a Vico-Matic, a coin-operated photocopy machine.

On December 17 the City Commission voted six-to-one to approve the plans for the new library at the Park Trammell Library site. Dr. West gave the dissenting vote, arguing instead for a different Lake Morton site.

1964 When the new City Commission met on January 20, another vote was taken concerning the location of the new library, and the Lake Morton School site was chosen. Two reasons for the change were advanced. First was the desire to avoid razing the beautiful Park Trammell Building. The second concerned the problem of parking and traffic congestion. The formal vote was taken on March 2, and Lois Searl was the only commissioner to vote against the Lake Morton School site. She favored the Mayhall Auditorium site.

During National Library Week, April 13-18, the library displayed its newly acquired book trailer at Munn Park. This trailer, and one purchased the next month, were cheaper and more economical than the bookmobile. The trailers were air-conditioned and had a capacity of 3,500 books.

In August Ruth Kierstead of La Grande, Oregon, was appointed children's services librarian.

On December 8, J. Everett Allen of Lakeland, as executor of an estate, announced that Mrs. Floy M. Baldwin had given \$10,000 as a permanent trust for the library to use to purchase science and "wholesome" fiction books.

1965 On February 3 the library offered to secure Canadian Travel films to show to groups during the winter. This activity became an annual offer.

On April 5 the City Commission approved plans for the new library and voted to select a contractor in May. The initial bids were considered too high. On June 25,

P.J. Callaghan Construction, of St. Petersburg, submitted a low bid of \$300,085. The Commission voted July 7 to award a contract of \$317,716 to the firm, ending three years of discussion and planning.

By August 23 construction crews began pouring the foundation of the new building. The Groundbreaking ceremony was held September 21 with Walter Murphy presiding and Lakeland Mayor Lois Searl representing the citizens of Lakeland.

Two new appointments were announced in November. Mrs. Kierstead, with Children's Services, transferred to Adult services, and Mary Wolter, a graduate of Jacksonville University, became Children's Librarian.

A "Library Regiscope Book-Charger Printer," considered the most efficient method of book charging, was installed.

1966 City employees began the transfer of books from the Park Trammell Building to the new library on April 20. On May 2, the library opened its doors to the public. The dedication ceremony took place May 29, with an address from William Summers, State Librarian of Florida.

In June, Walter Murphy announced his resignation as City Librarian. He accepted the position of Director of the Flint, Georgia, Regional Library System. Robert Moore, Technical Services Librarian, was appointed Acting Librarian. Moore, from Baytown, Texas, had joined the staff in 1961.

Mrs. Deane Costner became Children's Services Librarian in August. Although she came from the Atlanta Public Library, Polk County was originally her home. She initiated three new programs: "Teen Talks," story hour for elementary school children, and a pre-school children's program.

A painting collection circulated in September. Patrons could check out paintings for a month in what became a popular service.

Robert Moore died on September 9.

Mrs. T.N. Weiskirch became assistant in the Adult Department. She received her

library certification at Florida State University.

1967 Cecil Cleveland, Director of the James Pendergust Library in Jamestown, New York, was appointed City Librarian.

Jean Finlaw became Librarian on the Blue Book Mobile in February.

The library began presenting exhibits by prominent local painters: Jose Forns, Fonchen Lord, Gregory Jones, C.H. Thomas, and Stephen Lloyd Smith.

The new building attracted large numbers of users. New services and programs were offered. Circulation, reference requests, and general usage steadily increased each year.

1968 Mrs. Ralph Birchfield became Librarian on the Red Trailer in March. Shirley Husby was appointed Children's Librarian. A native of Michigan, she received her graduate library degree at the University of Wisconsin.

In the spring the Friends of the Library scheduled a series of cultural programs entitled "Sundays in the Library." It featured local speakers. Robert Zimmerman spoke on the American novel. Downing Barnitz, an art instructor at Florida Southern, spoke on "Classic versus Romantic Art" and displayed his paintings. The Youth Group and Lakeland Symphony Orchestra also performed.

On October 22 the City Commission voted to open the library on Sunday afternoons.

In July the library borrowed from the Library of Congress a new record player for the blind. It had a speed setting in Braille and records for the blind as well as for children too young to read.

Adult Services offered a collection of large print books for the visually handicapped. An 8mm, black-and-white, silent film collection also circulated.

1970 By February more than 73,000 books were available to the public, as well as 200 magazines and 11 newspapers. For the year 1969-1970, library circulation totaled 282,318 items. Of these more than 50,000 were through the bookmobile,

and over 12,500 were in the Northwest Branch.

On June 4, Dr. R.H. Akerman dedicated the "Freedom Shrine," a collection of 28 documents, including copies of the Mayflower Compact and the Declaration of Independence. They were presented by the Exchange Club and were placed on permanent display.

1971 On May 17 a rock from the moon was displayed at the library through the efforts of Henri Landwith, owner of Lakeland Holiday Inn. It was about three billion years old and weighed 42 grams. Over 3,000 patrons viewed the rock.

1975 A 28-foot, van-type bookmobile replaced one of the two stationary book trailers on March 23. It made eleven stops per week, as opposed to five by the trailer.

To celebrate the American Bicentennial, Children's Services held a program every third Saturday. People dressed in colonial attire and told stories about the events of 1775-1776.

1980 Due to theft of library books, the city was forced to install an electronic book detection system at the library doors. Nearly one-quarter of the yearly budget (or \$10,000 a year) was being lost on books. The guard was installed in April.

1982 City Librarian Cecil Cleveland died September 30, following a long illness. City Manager Gene Strickland said of his work: "Mr. Cleveland was open and forthright with the City Commission, and always turned in a good, tight budget. The number of books in the library nearly doubled in almost fifteen years from 60,000 to 110,000 and the number checked out in the last year rose to 300,000 items."

1983 On January 19 David L. Reich, former Commissioner of Chicago's Public Library System and a native of Orlando, became the new City Librarian. At that time the library had 20 full-time employees and the budget was \$403,865.

A new Friends of the Library organization was formed by Mr. Reich. The organization began to plan the annual book sale and contributed equipment and volunteer services to the library.

In May city officials hired a local architectural firm to study expansion plans for the library. The large number of users (46 percent increase in ten years) had created the need for more space. National guidelines suggested an increase of at least 14,000 square feet.

The library and the Polk Museum decided to launch a joint expansion plan, combining parking lots and relocating the museum. In August the authorities discussed the problems and suggested new plans.

1984 On January 20 the Friends held a reception honoring Corinne "Toddy" Sherwood on the occasion of her retirement after 20 years of service to the library.

The Friends had their first spring book sale on May 12. More than 5,000 books were donated for the activity. It took place on the lawn along Morton Drive.

After 20 years of lending artwork to patrons, the library decided to end the practice and sell its 250 prints. On June 1 the prints were checked out for the last time. A successful auction of the prints was held in front of the library; Lakeland Police Captain Larry Alexander acted as auctioneer.

Morrisk Construction Company of Tampa was awarded the contract for expanding the library. Groundbreaking was held October 10. Among those in attendance were Mayor Peggy Brown; Frances McCranie, President of the Friends; Jo Ann Ellington, Assistant State Librarian; and Dr. John McCrossan, President of the Florida Library Association.

Actual Construction began October 15. The completed structure of 36,674 square feet with new furnishings and equipment cost \$2,010,386. A \$200,000 public library construction grant, from Title II of the Federal Library Services and Construction Act through the State Library of Florida, assisted the construction program.

In December, 1984, as the first event of the celebration of Lakeland's Centennial in 1985, the library exhibited prints of artist Kent Hagerman. Many scenes of Lakeland were featured. Hagerman was born in 1893 and studied art in the Cleveland School of Art. As a child he visited Lakeland and moved to the city in 1933. He died in 1978.

1986 Library renovation was completed in July 1986.

In September the library was awarded an LSCA Title II grant of \$7,268 to join the SOLINET/OCLC interlibrary loan system.

1987 The Special Collections Unit (the Lakeland Room) was opened in January 1987.

1988 In August the library joined the Bartow Public Library and the Auburndale Public Library in a Reciprocal Borrowing program. Patrons with valid resident or non-resident cards from any of the libraries could receive free cards and borrowing privileges from any or all of the other participating libraries. The Haines City Public Library joined the program in December.

1989 Lakeland Public Library and the Bartow Public Library's joint Young Adult Services program was honored by the Florida Library Association as the outstanding youth services program in Florida.

In July the Lake Wales Public Library joined the Reciprocal Borrowing Program Cooperative Agreement.

Lucille Moss, Library Secretary, retired after twenty-two years with the city.

Shirley Husby, Children's Librarian for twenty-two years, died at her home in Lakeland on December 3. Miss Husby, known affectionately to the children who visited the Children's Room in the library as "Miss Shirley," was a native of Escanaba, Michigan.

1990 In January Yvonne Roberts, Librarian at the Northwest Branch, retired. She began her employment in September 1958.

In June the library acquired its new bookmobile. Custom-built by the Ohio Bus Company of Canton, Ohio, it cost \$76,963.25, including equipment. Its book capacity is between 3,500 and 3,600 volumes.

In the summer, Dan Sanborn, Ledger photographer in the late 1930's, owner of

Sanborn Advertising Agency and later radio announcer for WONN, donated his entire photographic collection to the library. This collection spans thirty years and is one of the most significant local-history photographic collections in the state.

In September the Library hosted a reception for former cadets and instructors of Lakeland's Lodwick School of Aeronautics and Avon Park's Lodwick Aviation Military Academy. The occasion marked the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Lakeland primary flight-training school.

In November the voters of Polk County defeated a straw ballot to establish a countywide library system.

1991 In September five war bonds, purchased by students of Lakeland High School and Washington Park High School in 1943, were donated to the Lakeland Room by a vote of the Polk County School Board. The bonds matured in 1955 but had been tucked away in a closet at the Polk Opportunity School (formerly Lakeland High School) for more than forty years. They were discovered early in the summer of 1991.

British Royal Air Force pilots, who trained at Lakeland's Lodwick School of Aeronautics in 1941, returned to Lakeland in October to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of their memorable experience. As part of their visit, they viewed Lodwick School photographs in the Special Collections Room.

Hal Hubener, Special Collections Librarian, was named Library Employee of the Year by the Florida Public Library Association at its annual meeting in Winter Park, November 8.

In December, Children's Services, in cooperation with The Ledger and the Ledger Kids Critic Club, sponsored a cookie decorating contest. Four adults, including Ledger Publisher Don Whitworth and Children's Services Librarian Diane Fasano frosted ready-made gingerbread men.

The Friends of the Library held a holiday sale in December. The sale featured a variety of holiday gift items, including cookbooks, first editions, and paperbacks.

1992 In January, Art Buchwald, author, columnist and humorist, signed copies of

his new book at the Library.

"Willa Cather Speaks," a one-woman dramatization of the Pulitzer Prize-winning writer, was presented at the Library by Betty Jean Steinshouer.

Jeanne Corbett, former president of the Friends of the Library, died April 13.

In May an infrared Assistive Listening System (ALS) was installed in the library's Meeting Room. The ALS is designed to help hearing-impaired people to hear better and understand more in the Meeting Room. Lakeland's ALS is used with the room's sound system. The hearing-impaired wear receivers that pick up the signal contained within the Meeting Room; the receivers convert the signal into sound. The local SHHH (Self Help for the Hard of Hearing) group has donated additional receivers to the library. The library's ALS is the first in a City of Lakeland facility.

In September the library went online with the BiblioFile Intelligent Catalog, a CD-ROM system that replaced the traditional card catalogs in both the main library and the northwest branch. Patrons used PAC's (Patron Access Catalogs) to find books.

The Lakeland City Commission voted in September to allocate \$125,000 in the 1992-1993 budget for design of a new 10,000 square-foot facility to replace the Coleman-Bush Reading Room. The estimated cost of construction for the new Northwest Branch Library was \$1,300,000, including equipment and an opening day collection.

1993 In March U.S. Representative Charles Canady visited the LPL to familiarize himself with the Library's Federal Documents Depository collection.

Special Collections Librarian Hal Hubener was elected president of the Society of Florida Archivists for the 1993-1994 year. He was the first public librarian elected to the office.

In July architects Ernie Straughn and Jerry Trout presented their site plan, layout, rendering and cost estimates for the new branch library to the City Commission. The site selected for the branch was the corner of Modest Street and Florida Avenue North, at Simpson Park. Morrisk Construction was the contractor.

By the summer the LPL had added to its automation capacity. In addition to the circulation system COLLIS, a BiblioFile Intelligent Catalog and PAC's were added.

In November, Marilyn Peterson received the Florida Public Library Association's Volunteer of the Year Award at the FPLA annual conference.

1994 In January the Friends of the Library presented LPL with a Sanyo LCD color video projector.

In the same month a new curbside book return was delivered and installed. It was larger, more attractive, and an improvement over the old one.

In February ground-breaking ceremonies for the new 13,144 square-foot Lakeland Branch Library were held. The facility cost \$1,600,000. Worden library furniture and Estey shelving were selected for the interior.

In March the Society of Florida Archivists held its annual meeting in Lakeland. The Friends of the Lakeland Public Library hosted a reception for members.

In November the Northwest Branch Library (the Reading Room in the Coleman-Bush Building) closed permanently, and staff began the move into the new Lakeland Branch Library.

1995 The new Lakeland Branch Library officially opened Saturday, January 14. Following welcome remarks by Mayor "Buddy" Fletcher, Gloria Brooke, President of the Friends of the Library, along with attorney Larry Jackson, the Mayor and City Commissioners, cut the ribbon. Several local businesses and organizations provided refreshments for the crowd, which despite inclement weather, poured into the new facility from 10 in the morning until 2 in the afternoon. Entertainment came in the form of clowns, balloons, story telling, and musical groups.

In January the LPL installed a FAX machine.

In the same month the Depository Library Inspector from the United States

Government Printing Office, in Washington, DC, inspected the LPL's Selective Depository Library. The Library passed the inspection in all categories.

In May an information kiosk became operational in the Library. It was operated by volunteers and library staff.

Rivanne Chasteen-Futch assumed the responsibilities of Librarian Supervisor at the Lakeland Branch Library in November.

1996 In March Time-Warner and the Friends of the Library hosted a reception at the Main Library for the opening of It's US: A Celebration of Who We Are in American Today, a photographic essay by Time-Warner.

Hal Hubener, Special Collections Librarian, was awarded the 1996 Award of Excellence by the Society of Florida Archivists. The award was presented at the annual conference, held in Tallahassee, in April.

Twenty-five librarians from around the state participated in the State Library of Florida's Assessing the World Around You: Evaluation Methods That Work workshop at the Main Library, in May.

At its Annual Conference in November in Winter Park, the Florida Public Library Association named Lakeland City Librarian David Reich "President Emeritus."

In September Lisa Broadhead joined the staff as Assistant City Librarian.

In February Mary Anne Murphy, Technical Services Librarian, retired after 32 years with the Library.

City Commissioners voted in August to rename the Northwest Branch Library the Larry R. Jackson Branch Library. Mr. Jackson was a community leader and was instrumental in persuading Commissioners to construct the branch.

In September Lakeland City Commissioners voted to participate in the new Polk County Library Cooperative.

At its Annual Conference in November in Tampa, the Florida Public Library

Association awarded a "Library Volunteer of the Year" to Lakeland Public Library Volunteer Ruth Snyder.

James Dowdy, former treasurer for the Friends of the Library and long-time member, died in Winter Haven. He had recently retired from the Polk Community College Library.