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Fort Walton Beach Library

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Florida Library History Project

Fort Walton Beach Library

In 1927, the Women's Club, organized in 1921, established a public library in the old Masonic building on the waterfront. Members kept the library open by rotating service hours during the days of the week chosen for its operation. Approximately one thousand books were donated to the library. A few years later the library was reestablished in the clubhouse of the Women's Club. In 1936, when the Fort Walton Beach High School needed additional books for accreditation, the Women's Club donated the library books to give the school the quota needed. This ended the first public library until June 1, 1954, when the Business and Professional Women's Club, assisted by the Women's Club, established the Fort Walton Beach Public Library in the Community Center, the land for which was donated by Library Board President, Mrs. Liza (L.M.) Jackson. Miss Lucile Woodward, a member of one of the first families of this city, served as librarian. Miss Woodward was given accolades for the splendid growth during her two and one-half year directorship of the library.

On Friday, February 15, 1957, the big news was that for the first time Fort Walton Beach and the Playground area would offer full time library service with a full time professional librarian, Miss Dorothy Raymond. The city-supported library was open from 10 until 5:30 o'clock Tuesday through Saturday. Mrs. Liza Jackson, Library Board President, was quoted "The board is happy to announce this full time schedule so the hours will be convenient for both office workers and housewives." The new professional director, Miss Raymond, was quoted, "I was horrified when I learned the library I was to help build was founded on donations. I had never seen any donations which were any good. But you'd be surprised what the people here gave-they are excellent additions to the library." The Playground Daily News of February 28, 1957, also said "...so pleased was Miss Raymond with what she found to work with at the Fort Walton Beach Library, that she complimented Mrs. Jackson and her board on their 'extremely good selection of books.'"

The present City of Fort Walton Beach Library, located at 105 Miracle Strip Parkway SW, Fort Walton Beach 32548-6614, opened on April 23, 1963, staffed

by Mrs. Lee Drake, Library Director, and seven assistants. The library size increased to its current 5700 square feet when an addition was opened in May, 1970. A news article from 1969 said, "In 1963, the entire collection of its reference department consisted of two sets of encyclopedias and a copy of the World Almanac. The children's department was no better off. It, too, had but two sets of junior encyclopedias. About the best that could be said about the adult and children's reference resources was that all four sets of encyclopedias were very good ones and that the World Almanac was a fairly good account of the past year's events throughout the world."

Automation of the city-supported library's collection was completed in July, 1995. Today, in 1998, patrons can access the collection from 3 patron Online Patron Access Terminals (OPACs). The collection consists of about 45,000 items, including books, CDs, videos, books on tape, and machine-readable materials. Hundreds of current reference materials are enhanced by Internet Access, Microfiche and Microfilm machines, InfoTrac CD periodical/newspaper articles, and 180+ newspapers and periodicals. A book leasing service adds to the availability of the newest best-selling titles.

--Carol Hill, Library Director
January 1998