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Fort Meade Public Library, part of the Polk County Library Cooperative

Florida Library History Project

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Florida Library History Project

Fort Meade Public Library, part of the Polk County Library Cooperative.

In 1934 the Fort Meade's Woman Club realized the need of a public library in their small town of approximately 2500 people.

The Woman's Clubhouse was too small to accommodate a library. A committee from the Club contacted Mr. Ben Johnson, a real estate broker with an office at 212 West Broadway. Mr. Johnson had a vacant room behind his office which he gave them permission to use, free of charge for the library.

The Club members gave their own books and magazines and solicited other citizens to donate books, magazines or other materials. A very small library was created. It was open several hours each week with Club members donating their time. Over the years, purchases by Club members and donations helped the library outgrow its small space.

The resourceful Club ladies looked for a larger place. These women should be remembered for their efforts because they are responsible for Fort Mead's library. They are:

Mrs. Charles Speight
Mrs. Frank Dampies
Mrs. George Bell
Mrs. O.E. Loadholtes
Mrs. M.M. Loadholtes
Mrs. K.O. Varn
Mrs. R.O. Meek
Mrs. V.O. Woodward
Mrs. Howard Manning
Mrs. B.M. Sherertz

Mrs. T.K. White became a very active member after the library was established and gave much of her time to managing the library. She was often assisted by her

husband.

The City Commissioners gave this group permission to use a room on the second floor of the City Hall for use as a library. Mrs. T.K. White kept this open fifteen hours a week with little or no help. This space, too, became too small after a few years and it was necessary to find another location.

The Chamber of Commerce built a building on City Property at 75 East Broadway. This was a concrete block building. Most of the blocks and labor was donated by the Chamber of Commerce and was used for this as well as other community functions.

After a few years this group of Commerce members disbanded, leaving the building vacant. This building was built in the shape of a Fort and very well done. It was 700 square feet, with two restrooms.

The City Father gladly gave this active group of Woman's Club members permission to use it for the public library. Mrs. White kept this open fifteen hours a week with some volunteer help until about 1967. Miss Betty Hicks kept the library alone for the next year.

In 1964, Mrs. Cody J. Shirley was president of the Woman's Club. Through a friend who worked at the State Library, Mrs. Shirley learned that the Federal Government gave the State Library \$1,333,000 to the State Library to be pro-rated throughout the State of Florida for the use of grants for building new libraries, matching the cities dollar for dollar. Mr. William Bevis, who lived in Fort Meade and was an elected representative to the Florida Legislature, was asked by the Woman's Club to help host a meeting with the City and County Commissioners. Mr. Bevis did his best to get a grant through for the library, but all efforts failed.

Mr. Grady Courtney who was City Manager, called a meeting of this group to discuss the City taking over the responsibility of the library. This was brought before the City Commissioners and they voted unanimously to support a public library. Mrs. Cody Shirley was asked to take the management and set up a library property, implementing the Dewey Decimal System. This was started May 1, 1965. At this time the library had 4,000 books, a few more were donated, some 200 from Bartow Public Library and some from individuals.

A library board was appointed by the City to govern its functions. They were as follows:

Mrs. B.O. Woodward
Miss Mattye Perle Spier
Mrs. Monroe Polk
Mr. William Bevis
Mr. William J. Loadholtes
Mrs. W.P. Campas
Mrs. K.O. Varn

These appointments were made to extend from one to three years. Mrs. Melvin White taking Mrs. Polks place the first year. Mrs. Lealan Lastinger was employed as a substitute for Mrs. Shirley.

In 1966 with the help of tow college students, Canter Brown, Jr. and Stephen Prine and Mr. Jack Coulter processed and shelved 4,035 books. Mr. Coulter, a former school librarian, was most helpful in classifying all nonfiction books.

In 1970, Mrs. Lastinger moved from Fort Meade and Mrs. Herman Stephens was employed in her place. In 1975, Mrs. Eugene Jackson was employed as a full-time clerk to help Mrs. Shirley. Kareen proved to be very efficient as well as much loved by all patrons. Few changes being made until 1974, the Board was compose of:

Mr. Robert Wade Loadholtes, Chairman
Mr. George Miles, Vice Chairman
Mr. John J. Campas, Treasurer, co-signing with Mrs. Shirley to pay bills
Mrs. Carrie Dotson, Secretary
Mr. Joe Davis
Mr. Carl Brewington
Mr. William J. Loadholtes

This group of Board members became interested in a new building, as the present one was filled to capacity. Mr. Everett B. Howe, City Manager, City Commissioners as named, Mr. Joe Hymerling, Mr. Jim Marsh, Mr. William

Gunter, Mr. Charles Cooley, and Mr. Joe Davis. All of these gentlemen were in full agreement with plans for a new building. Through Mr. Joe Hymerling's friend in Tallahassee, Mr. Cecil Beach, who was State Librarian, we learned we could receive a grant from the State of Florida, matching dollar for dollar. The City could furnish \$60,000 and the balance would be used for furnishings.

Bids were let out for Architect, when the bids came in, Greenleaf, Telesca, of Clearwater, Florida were awarded the contract. Mr. Bently was the Architect who drew the designs for the library. Mrs. Mary Shirley wrote the building program as well as the narrative description plans. Mr. Everett B. Howe was most helpful in every way. The library board worked long and hard each and every one of them. The old building was demolished and the new building was built on the same site. Mr. George Miles, a designer, had the capsule made that these documents are enclosed in. The Rotary Club of Fort Meade have plans to landscape the grounds when the new building is completed.

--Mrs. Mary M. Shirley August 3, 1976

1998 UPDATE

The new building was completed in 1976. Kay Jackson is Head Librarian, June Gillis is Assistant Librarian and Interlibrary Loan Librarian, Lela Bass, Library Clerk and Judith Hancock is our part-time Library Clerk. Our library Board consists of seven members:

R.W. Loadlotes, President
Jim Baggett, Vice-President
Lorraine Young, Secretary
Diane Conley
Arwyn Maker
Thelma Sturgis, and
our Commissioner Representative is Betty Bowers Johnson.

The library is a member of the Florida Public Library Association, the Florida Library Association, the Polk County Library Association and the first library to become a member of the Polk County Library Cooperative.

The library contains 30,868 books and materials for adults, young adults, and children. We offer records, pamphlet files, picture files, and cameras for check-out. We have one computer for public use. We received a Forinet Grant and this year we will add three computers and will also go on the Internet. We provide large print materials and talking books for the handicapped. We also have Homebound Service for the sick and elderly.

We recycle newspapers and aluminum. The proceeds help build our reference and handicapped sections.

We provide two story-times every other week for pre-school children on Thursday mornings at 9:15 a.m. and 10:00 a.m.

Each summer we participate in the statewide Summer Reading Program for children ages preschool through fifth graders. We have one program a week for six weeks.

We have had a space needs assessment study done and we plan to expand within the next five years.