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# Florida Library History Project

## Dunedin Public Library

The year 1895 saw many remarkable events: The Sino-Japanese War ended. A German scientist named Wilhelm Roentgen discovered x-rays. In France, the Lumi?re brothers gave the world its first public showing of motion pictures. H.G. Wells wrote The Time Machine. Baseball great Babe Ruth was born, and volleyball was invented by a Massachusetts YMCA director.

Closer to home, Florida celebrated its 50th year of statehood. In February, the Big Freeze, coming hard upon the heels of another freeze 6 weeks earlier, damaged citrus groves and caused many farmers to abandon their land and return north. And on April 25, the Dunedin Public Library was created--the first library in Pinellas County.

The library owes its beginnings to a group of wealthy midwestern yachting enthusiasts who regularly spent their winters in Dunedin. Christopher B. Bouton of Chicago decided that Dunedin needed a library and graciously donated some 200 books from his personal collection for that purpose. Finding a home for the fledgling library presented little problem inasmuch as Mr. Bouton's brother, Nathaniel Sherman Bouton, owned a building which had been erected in the 1880's in Edgewater Park and which housed the Dunedin Yacht and Skating Club. The first floor of the building contained the Club's meeting room and private apartments; the second floor housed a large room which was used for dances, parties, and roller skating.

On April 25, 1895, Nathaniel S. Bouton deeded the building to be used as a public library and free reading room. These facilities would be located on the main floor, with plans for a school room to serve the winter residents' children. The second floor would continue to be used for lectures and entertainment, Mr. Bouton stipulating that "no use of the Hall or building shall be permitted inconsistent with the moral and social good of the community." The building soon became commonly known as Library Hall and was the site of an annual community Christmas party for many years in the early part of the 1900's. Dunedin residents would later fondly remember the huge Christmas tree which graced the Hall and

the presents given to each child, as well as the square dances held there each Fourth of July.

The Dunedin Library Association was duly formed and charged with the responsibility of running the library; volunteers staffed it on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. Charlotte (Mrs. Henry) Grant supervised the library. During World War I, supervision fell to Mrs. Clarence B. Collins and her daughter, Miss Louise C. Collins.

In 1920, when the collection had grown from the original 200 books to over 2000 volumes, the Dunedin Woman's Club took over the running of the library and installed Belle Carlton (Mrs. S. Arthur) Davies as the first librarian, in which capacity she served until 1936.

The 1927 land bust, coupled with the Great Depression, eventually made it too costly for the Woman's Club to continue overseeing the library, and in late 1934 representatives of the Club approached the Dunedin City Commission with the proposal that the city take over library operations. On February 19, 1935, the Commission voted to assume responsibility for the library. Library Hall was deeded to the city and on April 1 the library officially became a part of the City of Dunedin. Mary (Mrs. William Lovett) Douglas was appointed librarian to oversee the collection of 7000 books. The book budget was a whopping \$100 per year!

The library continued to be housed in Library Hall for another 20 years with very few changes. In 1941, a large tower was added to the Hall so that Civil Defense League volunteers could provide 24-hour watches for war planes and submarines during World War II. Spotters were expected to phone in descriptions of every plane which flew over.

By the mid-1950's, even with a staff of just one full-time librarian and one part-time assistant, it became apparent that the collection was outgrowing its snug home in Library Hall. After much discussion, the city set aside \$11,000 toward the construction of a new facility. As head librarian, Mrs. Douglas was joined by her husband in spear-heading a highly successful fund-raising drive which garnered an additional \$10,000 in public contributions, and in 1956 a new library was built at the corner of Virginia Street and Loudon Avenue, on the grounds of what had formerly been the Dunedin Elementary School. Sadly, the old Library Hall was demolished not long after.

Mrs. Douglas retired in 1957 and was succeeded by Annie Elizabeth (Mrs. W. Dwight) Niven, who served as supervisor until 1959, when she was officially appointed library director. The library's collection continued to grow steadily and to attract the interest and use of more and more of the community. As a direct result of this, the Junior Service League of Dunedin (then called the Dunedin Community League) became the driving force behind the creation of the group known as the Dunedin Friends of the Library, Inc., in February 1962. The Friends, whose purposes include financial support and promoting the library's interests in the community, produced a history of the library in 1964 and have remained a strongly active group to this day.

1962 also saw the library become a "thoroughly modern" enterprise with the installation of an electric charging system. No more hand-written checkout ledgers and book cards, and no more date stamps attached to the end of a pencil! The electric charging system, which was quite sophisticated for its time, ensured that fewer errors occurred at checkout and sped up the entire process.

It was at about this same time that it once again became apparent that the library and its collection of 18,000 books was outgrowing its quarters. Earnest discussions commenced regarding the necessary funding and possible sites. In the end, the Dunedin City Commission pledged \$55,000 toward the building of a new library, and the Friends organized a fund-raising drive which netted an additional \$10,000. In May 1964, the new library opened at the corner of Main and Grant Streets.

Mrs. Niven retired as director in late 1972 and was slated to be succeeded by Mrs. Elizabeth Bradley in January 1973. However, the appointment of Mrs. Bradley never took place, and in February 1973, Mrs. Lucy Eddy was named library director. She served in that capacity until July 1974, when she was replaced by Miss Sydniciel Shinn.

One of Miss Shinn's first priorities was to find a new home for the ever-growing library. In just 10 years at the Main Street site, the collection had grown to 38,000 volumes; the staff now consisted of 12 full-time and 5 part-time employees.

After intense negotiation with the Publix supermarket chain, the City of Dunedin

was able to lease space for the library in the Publix-owned Douglas Shopping Center on Douglas Avenue. Interestingly, this same site had been considered more than 10 years earlier, but had been rejected as unsuitable, and the Main Street site had been chosen instead. Now the library would move into a leased space recently vacated by a W.T. Grant store (the city would eventually purchase the entire shopping center in 1986 for one million dollars). Over 100 people attended the grand opening on December 13, 1976. The former library on Main Street would eventually house Dunedin City Hall.

Two years after moving into its latest home, the library became the fortunate recipient of a special collection, courtesy of the late Dr. John A. Mease, Jr. Dr. Mease, a well-known and much-beloved Dunedin physician, was active in the local chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution and had a deep interest in family history. At his death, he bequeathed his collection of genealogical books and records to the library, and on September 11, 1978, the Mease Memorial Genealogy Collection was formally dedicated. Members of the Caladesi Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution lent their support to the maintenance of the collection and continue to offer genealogical help to library patrons.

During the next decade, the library was able to expand both its collection and its services. The children's department became much more active, offering story times, puppet shows, and other family programs. A weekly film series was offered, and the Great Books and Great Decisions discussion groups began meeting at the library. Circulating art prints were added to the collection. In 1985, the library began lending videotapes, a service which has become increasingly popular over the years. A security system was installed in 1988. By the end of the decade, the collection had expanded to almost 90,000 volumes--a far cry from the original 200!

A change of command occurred in March 1988 with the retirement of Miss Shinn. The following July, Julia J. (Mrs. Raymond L.) Noah, a 10-year library employee, was appointed library director.

The 1990's have so far seen tremendous changes and challenges for the Dunedin Library. In 1990, the library became the sole beneficiary of the estate of Franklin Chase Milliken. Mr. Milliken, a retired lawyer who passed away in May 1989, was described as an "education buff" who used the Dunedin Library often, spending many hours reading and browsing. At his death he generously left \$1.3

million to the City of Dunedin to be used for the benefit of the library. Concern over the disbursement of the estate led to the formation of the Library Advisory Committee later that same year, the Committee being charged with the task of recommending to the City Commission how the monies involved should be spent. The board continues to act as a liaison between the library, the City Commission, and the community, and advises the Commission on all library matters.

Another significant event occurred on October 1, 1990, with the establishment of the Pinellas Public Library Cooperative. The Co-op had long been a dream of many librarians throughout the county who sought to promote true interlibrary cooperation and equal free access to library materials for all citizens of Pinellas County, especially those living in unincorporated areas of the county who had hitherto been without library service. Initially, 12 county libraries including Dunedin participated in the Co-op, with Clearwater joining in October 1994. Cardholders from any of the Co-op libraries may use any member library and its materials at no charge.

On October 1, 1992, the library entered the age of automation. Book cards and electric charging machines vanished, to be replaced by flashing computer terminals and gleaming light pens. Eventually the entire library--card catalog, checkout, reference, and technical services--went online. Through SUNLINE (the Suncoast Library Network), patrons were able to check on the holdings of 15 member libraries throughout the area, including public, academic, and corporate institutions. An increasing number of CD-ROM reference products were also added to the library's collection, enabling patrons to research such diverse topics as telephone numbers, poetry, maps, and periodical articles of every description.

In July 1994, the reins of command were exchanged again when Mrs. Noah retired and was replaced in October by Wendy (Mrs. James P.) Foley.

Growth, a constant theme in the library's history, has once again necessitated new facilities. As we reach its centennial year, Dunedin Library holds nearly 98,000 volumes, circulating over 427,000 items annually. Plans are under way for a new library consisting of 38,000 square feet, to be built at the existing site on Douglas Avenue; completion of the \$3.5 million facility is targeted for late 1996 or early 1997.

The passage of a century brings growth and change in any era, but perhaps never

more so than in the one hundred years since the founding of Dunedin Library. Since 1895, we have seen a multitude of innovations in our world--progress from the horse and buggy to the automobile, from the first shaky flight at Kitty Hawk to the first steps of man upon the moon, from the printed page to the laptop computer screen. And beginning with that small collection of 200 books, the library has seen its share of changes as well, as both staff and patrons have come and gone over the years and advancing technology has changed the way we think of libraries. The names and faces may have changed, but over the past century, one thing has remained constant: the vision. From the time Christopher Bouton first shared his private collection with the citizens of Dunedin, to the present day, the Dunedin Library has sought to educate, to entertain, to enlighten, and to inform. May that spirit of dedication remain unwavering as the oldest library in Pinellas County enters its second century of service.

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