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Florida Library History Project

North Miami Public Library

The first library services to area residents were offered in 1932, when the Biscayne Park Woman's Club established a library in the City Hall of the Town of North Miami. Club member E. May Avil, who eventually served 37 years as City Clerk for North Miami, was put in charge of overseeing the library's operation.

World War II brought about the close of the library as unessential to the war effort. However, the North Miami Community Library was reopened in September, 1945, in larger quarters at City Hall and again under the supervision of E. May Avil. Funding came largely from donations and membership fees.

In 1948, the Biscayne Park Woman's Club turned the library over to the Town of North Miami, with Mayor Ed Taigman accepting. A referendum, held in 1949, established a free public library under provisions of the Florida Statutes, setting up a Library Fund and a Library Board to administer the operation. Twin sisters Mrs. Edla Lunden and Mrs. Alma Anderson were appointed Librarian and Assistant Librarian respectively. The first Library Board appointees were Mr. Ed Constance, Mr. Sam Segal, Jr., Mr. D. W. Robbins, Mrs. Sally Taigman and Mrs. Edna Forbes.

In 1952, the Town Council deeded the present site to the Library Board. A \$54,000 air-conditioned building was constructed in 1953. With equipment and furnishing the total investment was \$70,000.

Mrs. Lunden and Mrs. Anderson retired in 1955 and they were replaced by the first professional librarian, Miss Phyllis Gray, who served until 1959. Mrs. Julia Wanner accepted the position at that time and directed the library's growth for 19 years, retiring in 1978.

The library grew steadily under Mrs. Wanner's guidance both in size and service. Primary to her accomplishments was the completion, in 1964, of an addition which doubled the size of the 1953 building. In answer to a growing number of young families, a branch was operated on the City's westside from 1957-1967.

In 1970, Miss E. May Avil was recognized for her years of service to the City and for her interest in the growth and well being of the library, when the City Council voted unanimously to rename the building to be known as the E. May Avil North Miami Public Library.

Upon Mrs. Wanner's retirement, Mrs. Gloria Zavish was promoted from Assistant Director to Director. Services and programs have grown to include a Books-By-Mail Homebound Service, the development of audio and video collections, the establishment of a literacy library and training site, and the addition of special print collections such as Stage and Studio, Bicentennial of the Constitution, and Parenting books. Again the library doubled in size with construction and furnishing of a \$1.3 million addition which was completed in 1991.

Work continues to introduce new information technology and automated library procedures into the library. In FY 1994, the City appropriated funds for Retrospective Conversion, the first phase of the Library's Automation Project. In subsequent years, financial support for this particular effort continued culminating in a Request for Proposals for an Integrated On-Line Library System in July 1997. In August 1997, a grant was secured from the State Library to provide Internet access to the public.

The years from 1991-1997 witnessed an explosive growth in the Library's audiobooks and Large Print titles. Deposit collections of Large Print books have been established in several local nursing homes and adult congregate living facilities.

The Children's Puppet Shows and Storytimes continue to be popular; some even have been videotaped and shown on local cable TV. Numerous young adults have fulfilled their Community Service Hour requirements by volunteering at the Library as tutors, artists, puppeteers, etc.

A Community Development Block Grant was secured by the Library in 1995 to purchase equipment which translates written materials into either speech or braille. More CDBG money became available in 1997 allowing the Library to furnish and equip a Lifelong Learning Center wherein patrons may pursue such personal goals as a GED (General Equivalency Diploma), English as a Second Language, etc.