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The Miami-Dade Public Library System traces its origin to the late nineteenth century. In 1894 libraries were organized in the communities of Cocoanut Grove and Lemon City. In 1902 the Cocoanut Grove Library Association provided a structure, and that same year the Lemon City Library and Improvement Association erected a building for its library. The City of Miami's library was founded through the efforts of the Ladies' Afternoon Club which later became the Women's Club of Miami. Its purpose was "reading and the discussion of literature." By 190S the Club was trying to provide a public reading room for its collection of books. The Club had no permanent home and for a number of years the reading room moved from place to place, as often as six times in a single year! Miami was still a small town with about 4,700 permanent residents. By 1913 the Miami Women's Club had its own building located at the corner of today's SE Second Avenue and Flagler Street (then Avenue B and Twelfth Street) on property donated by Henry Morrison Flagler. His gift of land for the construction of a clubhouse contained a proviso that a public reading room be maintained in the building.

Reliable financial support for the library was a continuing problem and in 1915 the Miami City Commission was convinced of its responsibility to support the library and $50 each month was allocated to its support. This downtown location was later sold and the Miami Women's Club erected its current building at 1737 North Bayshore Drive. The Flagler Memorial Library was established in this new building . By 1925 the communities of Cocoanut Grove and Lemon City had been annexed into the City of Miami. The first bookmobile was proudly pictured in the Miami Herald of January S. 1928. The first public library serving the Black community was the Dunbar Branch at 2059 NW 6th Court established March 14, 1938 by the Friendship Garden Club assisted by the Miami Women's Club. While the Dunbar Branch was being used, the Friendship Garden Club and the Washington Heights Library Association raised part of the funds to build a new library building.

The City of Miami appropriated the remainder of the money to construct a

structure on land donated by Black philanthropist D. A. Dorsey. The one-story concrete block and stucco building was named the Dorsey Memorial Library and opened on August 13, 1941 under the supervision of the Miami Public Library's head librarian. This was the first public library building owned by the City of Miami. The City of Miami thus had several community libraries receiving various amounts of financial support from public funds. In 1942 it was decided to bring all of these libraries together in a single public library system governed by a Board of Trustees and administered by a Head Librarian with administrative headquarters in a new downtown library. A new main library building had been proposed for Bayfront Park in downtown Miami as early as 1938 but the proposal did not become a reality until more than a decade later. Miamians anxiously began using their new library in Bayfront Park on July 2, 1951 even before its formal dedication on July 27 of that year.

The following years brought a number of new neighborhood libraries, and the closing and consolidation of others. In April 19S7 the subscription library in Coconut Grove became part of the system while eight new branches were constructed in the next eight years. In December 1965 the City of Miami and Metropolitan Dade County reached an agreement whereby the City of Miami would provide public library service to Unincorporated Dade County and to those municipalities that did not provide their own municipal library service. At this time two existing municipal libraries, Coral Gables and South Miami, entered into the agreement with Metropolitan Dade County and were included in the new public library system. A year later the Miami Springs Library was added to the system. Library service to the unincorporated area was provided by four bookmobiles. On November 1, 1971 the City of Miami transferred its library system to Metropolitan Dade County which created a new Department of Libraries with a Director reporting directly to the County Manager. The passage of the "Decade of Progress" bond issue in November 1972 included $34.7 million for the construction of public libraries. While some municipalities elected to continue providing public library service through their own municipal operations, the City of Homestead's public library joined the County system on January 1, 1975.

The Hispanic Branch (Rama Hispanica) serving a primarily Spanish-speaking clientele opened August 2, 1976 in Little Havana. On July 19, 1985 the new Main Library of the Miami-Dade Public Library System opened on the Cultural Plaza adjacent to the new downtown Government Center as headquarters for a system which had grown to 31 libraries. August 24, 1992 is a date burned into Dade

County's collective memory. Hurricane Andrew's howling winds inflicted significant damage to the library system, completely devastating Homestead, South Dade Regional, Coral Reef, and West Kendall Regional libraries. Nearly every library and nearly every employee was directly affected. Thanks to massive efforts and effective leadership, the library system was rebuilt stronger than ever so that today the Main Library and its 30 regional and branch libraries serve a population of 1,710,000.

-- S. J. Boldrick, Florida Collection Manager

9 February 1998