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Fort Myers Beach Public Library

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Florida Library History Project

Fort Myers Beach Public Library

1970-1998

Note: For a history of the library from 1954 to 1969, please contact the University of South Florida, Tampa Campus Library, Special Collections Department.

In 1970 a construction project doubled the size of the library, at a cost of \$28,000. Now that the library had more shelving space additional books were purchased and donated books continued to pour in. The librarian, Emily Spencer, had a hard time processing all of the materials.

Jayne Coles, a former school librarian, was hired in 1972 to work part time. She typed catalog cards, helped process the backlog of books, worked at the front desk during evening hours, and became familiar with library procedures in preparation for becoming library director when Miss Spencer retired.

In 1974 a small construction-type trailer was attached to the back of the library, providing additional space for technical processing. This temporary work area was replaced by another permanent addition to the library in 1978. At this time the library was refurbished and the interior rearranged. A fund drive was established for carpeting the library, which not only added to the decor but helped to muffle the sound in the formerly rather noisy interior.

On January 2, 1975, Emily Spencer retired as full-time director and Jayne Coles was hired to take her place. Charge out machines were added for circulation. The library board increased the budget significantly, allowing the library to purchase additional recommended titles to replace many of the older, donated books, and to add a bookkeeper and library clerk to the paid staff to supplement the help of many dedicated volunteers.

As the population of Fort Myers Beach increased and the number of library patrons grew, the library again experienced growing pains. Lack of adequate parking became a real concern, as well as overcrowded library shelves and work

areas.

In 1990 the library board, after much deliberation, voted to approach the owners of the property adjoining the library as to the feasibility of purchasing part of their property for additional parking. The property was purchased at its appraised value of \$370,000. This kindled the dream of a major building program to meet not only current but future needs.

Rob Fowler of the Fowler Company was hired as project manager to obtain a development order for the parking lot and to investigate the feasibility of constructing a larger library building. The expanded parking lot was completed. The Friends of the Library financed new landscaping and the Kiwanis Club donated a beautiful new flagpole.

In late 1991 the library board budgeted funds for staff to begin placing library holdings in MARC format in preparation for a computerized catalog.

In 1993 The Fowler Company was hired again as project manager and Gora, McGahey, Associates in Architecture, were hired to design the new library.

The library moved into the second story of NationsBank with a small core collection and the remainder of the collection was placed in storage during construction.

Linda Tafel was hired as Reference Librarian, to assist Mrs. Coles and to help convert nonfiction and reference records to machine-readable form for the new library's Intelligent Catalog.

On April 29, 1994, our new, two-story, 14,669 sq. ft. library was dedicated. Hundreds of residents and patrons streamed in to admire the bright, attractive and spacious building, beautifully decorated for the occasion by the Estero Island Garden Club. Total project cost was \$1,288,241.

The Children's Room, Reference, Audiovisual and all other areas now had additional space and staff workrooms were enlarged as well. New areas were added, including YA, Genealogy, a Literacy Room for tutoring, a Public Computer Room, and a Conference Room. Bequests from several long-time

library patrons and gifts from service clubs provided furnishings for many of these areas. The Friends of the Library furnished the big, new circulation desk.

In October 1994 the library received the New Image Award from the Greater Fort Myers Beach Area Chamber of Commerce for the construction of the new and beautiful building.

In January 1995 a third librarian, John Lukow, joined the staff. His expertise with computers has been vital as the library offers more services in electronic format.

In September 1995 the Internet was added at the Reference Desk for use by the Librarian. In 1997 the Library Board authorized purchase of a computer to provide public access to the Internet, the first public library in Lee County to do so. A Florinet grant enabled the library to purchase a second computer for Internet access later in the year. A gift from the Friends of the Library will allow the library to upgrade one of the computers in the Children's Room in the spring of 1998. This brings the total number of computers available for public use to eighteen, including the computerized card catalog stations.

The Beach Library continues to flourish due to supportive taxpayers, dedicated library board members, steadfast volunteers, generous local service clubs and a competent and caring staff. The library has adapted over the years to meet various challenges, and must continue to do so. With community support the library will continue to be what some have called, "The Best Library under the Sun."