

December 1997

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Recommended Citation

Murphey, Barbara Ann, "Largo Library" (1997). *Florida Library History Project*. 48.
https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/fl_library_history/48

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Florida Library History Project

Largo Library

The beginnings of the Largo Library can be traced to the Largo Woman's Club. Mrs. Jennie Judkins is given credit for spearheading the drive for a library around 1907. However, sidewalks were the priority of other Club members. Once these were installed in 1912 the Library project became the focus of their attention. In December of 1914, when the Ladies Improvement Society reorganized as the Largo Woman's Club, their first project was the library. The library committee received permission to use a room in the Town Hall, but fund raising efforts delayed the library's opening until April 7, 1916. There were 560 books and a Librarian was hired at \$2.00 a week paid by the Town Commission. Opening hours were limited to two afternoons a week.

Over the years, the library collection grew through donations of books and the support of the Largo Woman's Club. In 1958 the hours were increased from 29 to 36 due to increased support from the town and there was a move to build a new library. The Largo Library officially became a department of the City of Largo in In 1960 land was purchased and on December 15, 1961 ground was broken for a \$36,000 library. The Largo Woman's Club and other civic organizations contributed the money for interior furnishings and landscaping. A 2,340 square foot building was opened May 27, 1962. An addition of 552 square feet was added in May 1968. This building is currently in use by the Largo Community Development Department as part of the Largo City Hall, but with the move of City facilities to a new complex it is expected to be sold.

By 1969 the annual circulation had increased to 126,186 and there was growing demand for additional services. The current Library Director, Barbara Ann Murphey, was hired in 1970. Hiring a professional librarian was the first step in upgrading services. For two years the Director and the Library Board sought a good library site; the City had budgeted purchase money, but a suitable site that was also available for purchase was not found. However, the Board identified a site which was then being used as a driving range as a location that met the requirements of five acres, on a main road in the center of town, and within walking distance of one elementary school, the middle school and the High

School. The owner of the site could not be identified, but by fortuitous circumstance the Library Director spoke to him regarding plans to put the library in the building plans for a Police building.

On December 23, 1974 the deed to a site on 351 East Bay Drive was written. On December 17, the land was accepted by the City Commission and on December 27, 1976, four and two thirds acres of land were recorded in the City's name. The land was donated by Mr. John A. Jenkins, a local banker, with the stipulation that it would only be used as a library site. The site was not only adequate but extremely well located. This donation promoted a united effort to build a 24,900 square foot building for a total cost of \$941,590, and to increase the library materials budget to allow an effort to meet standards.

The library building on Bay Drive was completed in 1976. It was eight times the size of the previous building and capable of holding 140,000 book collection. The architect was Schweitzer and the contractor was Attkisson-Bankston. Hoyt Galvin was the consultant. The special features of this building, which was innovative at the time, included compact shelving, a book detection system, a drive-in book return, a children's story hour area, and an automatic fire protection system. It was also unique at the time because of the design emphasis on handicapped access and energy conservation. The building itself is a masonry and steel framed single story building faced with panel brick, featuring exposed ceilings and five clerestories.

Services and professional staff were expanded, but by 1985 there was a need for expansion and renovation. In 1987 an expansion brought the total square footage of the building to 36,190. Educated Design was the architectural firm with Ted Williams as the project manager. Bentley Construction was the contractor. A renovation project the following year doubled the existing children's area, expanded the program area, expanded and changed the circulation area and moved the reference desk.

A snapshot of the Largo Library in 1998 would show a medium-sized public library housed in a contemporary 36,000 square foot building which includes a 100 person meeting room, a Friend's book store, an interior conference room, two tutor/study rooms and a children's program room. It is an extremely busy library with almost 50,000 registered borrowers. Circulated items include extensive large print, audio (audio cassette/CD) and video collections as well as books. The genealogy collection is sizable. Other special collections are a local history, and

parent-teacher collection. In 1997 a new special collection focusing on career information was initiated, as was an investment collection named after Priscilla Rugg who provided funding which was invested through the Greater Largo Library Foundation to provide ongoing support funds.

--Barbara Ann Murphey

--December 1997