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Florida Library History Project

Volusia County Public Library

Prior to the enactment of the Library Services Act in the mid-fifties (later to become the Library Services and Construction Act), throughout the United States libraries were frequently substandard or non-existent, particularly in rural areas. In Florida, 2,000,000 people had no access to library service, and only a quarter of the population had adequate service.

Volusia County libraries were small, often started by women's clubs, or associations which supported the library through memberships. Others were supported by municipalities, but cloistered in small rooms of city halls or community centers. Not only were facilities inadequate, book collections consisted mainly of second-hand books contributed by citizens, and there were few professional librarians.

Charlotte Smith, head librarian at Stetson University during that period, recognized the need for a countywide effort to upgrade libraries, and organized the Volusia County library program in 1949. C. Smith served as leader for the group and arranged for the survey of Volusia County library facilities made by the Florida Library Association in 1952.

The Library Service Act passed by Congress in 1956 provided funds to supplement or organize library service to communities under 10,000 population. Federal funds were available for a period of 2 years to set up a county system, which would also serve rural areas through bookmobiles. This act allowed the State library to function and to begin to build service throughout the state.

On September 20, 1960 in New Smyrna Beach, two state officials, Elizabeth Cole, Florida State Public Library Consultant and Verna Nistendirk, Director of Extension Services met with library board members, librarians, city and county officials to show a film and to explain the advantages of the Library Services Act. A committee was appointed to make a study of library conditions in the county. Mr. George Boone was named chairman of the study group and was charged to report within the year.

At that time there were 10 libraries in Volusia County with a total annual expenditure of \$34,634. To use Edgewater as an example, a library was in place in a Village Improvement Association building and supported by the city. A non-professional librarian was paid \$1.00 an hour and \$50 a month was allotted for new books. Other expenditures during this period included a door silencer because the banging screen door distracted the few readers and the installation of a telephone on a party line. Children's storytime was offered regularly and a Friends of the Library group actively supported the library.

The advantages of a centralized library system were obvious. Central buying would save money and time, while central processing and cataloging would free local librarians from this task. Borrowers could have inter-library loan service and library cards would be interchangeable throughout the county. Statistics showed that library users did not necessarily live in cities, and used city libraries at taxpayer expense or were assessed a fee for service. With the proposed system, free access would be available to all residents of the county. Joint board meetings of the boards in the county would determine overall policies. Local boards would determine specific local policies. Federal funds would be funneled through the state to the county to be allotted and spent through the county library system.

On April 12, 1961 a meeting was called at the request of the study group and held once again in New Smyrna Beach. About 70 people attended including all five County Commissioners. The committee recommended the formation of a unified county library system. Various cities and library boards also urged the County Commission to support the countywide library.

Word was received in May that the Florida Legislature had passed a Library State Aid bill, and the scene was set for the county government to make a commitment. In September of 1961, the county library system went into operation. A library board was appointed by the governor and George Boone was named Chairman. This governing board received monies from the County for appropriate dispensation.

One of the first acts of the County Library Board was the hiring of the first Director of Volusia County Public Library, Bradley Simon from Mecklenburg, North Carolina at the salary of \$333 per month. The original operating grant consisted of \$74,776 from the County and \$15,215 from the State. Contacting

local boards and city officials was top priority for Mr. Simon in preparation for the presentation of contracts to be signed with the County. Cities must agree to the terms of the agreement and Daytona Beach allowed the County to take over City Island Library operations as county library headquarters.

Of equal importance to meeting the requirements of the Library Services Act was the setting up of a bookmobile service. David Kantor was hired as Director of Extension Services for Volusia County Public Library in July, 1962 and charged with the responsibility. Two secondhand bookmobiles were purchased from Michigan for \$3800. They were painted and refurbished for service to the rural areas of Volusia County beginning in September.

One by one the cities and associations agreed to the unified system. By October 1, 1962 Volusia County Public Library was a viable organization with eight employees. Members of Volusia County Public Library were as follows:

1. Bookmobile Services
2. City Island Library, Daytona Beach
3. DeBary Public Library
4. DeLand Public Library
5. Edgewater Public Library
6. H. G. Putnam Memorial Library Association, Oak Hill
7. Hopkins Library, Lake Helen
8. New Smyrna City Library
9. S. Cornelia Young, Daytona Beach
10. Volusia County Public Library Headquarters.

While funding was being received for upgrading materials and services, no money was available for added professional personnel. In 1962, the Federal government provided funds for scholarships in reaction to an urgent need for professional librarians. In Florida alone a need was shown for 1000 in school, public, college and industrial libraries. Florida State University, the only accredited library school in the state was recruiting prospective students. Several people working in the system wanted librarianship as career and were able to take advantage of this opportunity. Later other staff members took leaves of absence to pursue their studies in the field. In this way a professional staff began to grow.

Holly Hill was soon to join the system, followed by Ormond Beach in 1965.

Orange City became the tenth in January, 1966. Libraries needing new construction began the process to qualify for those funds provided by the federal government by the Act. Bradley Simon resigned at the end of 1963 and David Kantor was named acting Director. On June 9, 1964 D. Kantor officially became director and remained in this position until his retirement in January, 1981.

In the years to follow there was a flurry of new construction. More funds were made available in conjunction with the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, a part of the War on Poverty. DeLand had already opened a new library on April 15, 1964. In January, 1965 New Smyrna City Library became the fourth in the State to win a grant approval under the Library Service and Construction Act of 1964. However controversy over the site and design delayed start of construction. It was dedicated December 11, 1966 and renamed the Brannon Memorial Library, honoring the name of local attorney Fred Brannon, a library board member before his death.

Holly Hill qualified soon after. The grant allowed the library to move out of the basement of City Hall and into a new building in June 1967. Edgewater dedicated their new building on October 15, followed by DeBary in November, 1967. By 1965 there were efforts to build a new city-county facility at Daytona Beach, but it was 14 years from the start of planning to fruition. Gertrude Dayton and her committees rallied public support from the city and county to get a full federal grant made available by Congress to alleviate unemployment during an economic dip in the 1970s. A two-million dollar grant was approved in 1978 and the building was completed in the fall of 1979.

In the first three years that the Volusia County Public Library had functioned circulation had more than doubled from a figure of 208,023 in 1963 to 540,408 in 1966. The budget had also increased dramatically as well, from the original operating grant of some \$75,000 to \$112,000. LP recordings were added to the collection in 1966, and film service was provided in 1967. S. Cornelia Young offered an innovation, the Vico Matic. This coin-operated copying machine could be used to make copies for 25 cents per page.

The first countywide in-service workshop on library service improvement was conducted in DeLand in March, 1968, children's programs and services being the emphasis. The same year a children's film preview committee was formed. Members of this committee met in the evening once a month and rated films to

possibly purchase for the county collection. In January, 1969, Kathryn Stewart, coordinator of library services for the county (now Director of Brevard County Library System), initiated in-service training meetings for head librarians in order to satisfy a state requirement. Monthly head librarians meetings continued until 1986. At that time the schedule was changed to every other month, and finally in 1991 to quarterly meetings.

In 1968, 50% of library patrons resided outside of city limits and by virtue of the county system had access to all library services. A discussion began about the possibility that the county assume financial responsibility for all public libraries. Under this plan the operation of the library system would be fully integrated into county government. Library boards would become advisory rather than policy making boards. Staff members would become Volusia County employees and tasks related to personnel, payroll, purchasing, etc. were to be assumed by Volusia County. Buildings and their maintenance would remain the responsibility of the cities. The contract to activate this new form of unified library service was voted in by County Council September 7, 1972 and most cities were willing to accept new agreements. The notable exception was Ormond Beach. Finally the controversy was taken to court in 1979, at which time the City of Ormond Beach sued the County of Volusia, requesting that residents of the municipality not be taxed for the operation of the county library. The case having been settled in the County's favor, Ormond Beach joined the library system in October, 1980.

Deltona was developed by a large construction firm, the Mackle Brothers, as a planned residential community between Sanford and Daytona Beach in the late sixties and early seventies. At this writing, it is still unincorporated. A group of citizens asked to join the library system, and at first only bookmobile service was provided. After the Mackle Brothers donated land for the library site, within two years sufficient matching funds were realized from private donations to qualify for a government grant. Deltona Library opened on February 2, 1976, the only fully county owned library.

Dickerson Community Center Library opened in December of 1977 and provided library service to the black community of Daytona Beach. The City of Daytona Beach took pride in Bethune Cookman College, and there was no official segregation of library facilities. However even after desegregation of schools, the black community as a whole was still uncomfortable with using the City Island Library. When Daytona Beach provided a community center for blacks, the

opportunity to ask for space for a library was realized. A survey of the black community showed interest in the library. Federal money was available to hire and train a black staff. Thus, a library was established in the Campbell Street Center, later to be renamed Dickerson Community Center.

Children's Services have always been a top priority with Volusia County Public Library. Participation in the State Library Summer Library Program began in 1968 with "Tournament Tactics" as the theme and continues each summer. Libraries became interested in providing puppet shows for young patrons and early in 1973, puppet workshops were held on the third Tuesday evening of each month. At these meetings interested staff members learned to make puppets, chose shows and rehearsed. Neighboring libraries cooperated with each other to present programs. In 1975, Suzanne Shaeffer became the first Children's Coordinator and children's services became an organized countywide focus. By 1978 the children's coordinator conducted monthly meetings of children's services personnel from all system libraries, and continue today. Puppetry, crafts, storytelling techniques, book selection, and other activities may be on the agenda. Among many noteworthy achievements of Children's Services over the years has been the selection of Volusia County to present the State Summer Library Program Workshop twice. Suzanne Shaeffer and Elaine Manson presented "Quest: Search for the Dragon's Treasure" in 1984, and Elaine and Ruth McCormack "Summer Safari" in 1991.

VCPL (Volusia County Public Library) has also been active on the state level in other aspects. Many employees are members of the Florida Library Association and attend or participate in caucuses and annual conferences. Our director from 1981 until 1993, James Wheeler served as President of that organization, as well as on several committees. Each year a large convoy of Volusia County supporters journey to Tallahassee for Library Day. This event affords an opportunity to lobby the legislature and the governor on behalf of library concerns. The tradition of the large delegation from Volusia County began in 1983 when Eugene Allison (who served as Coordinator of Library Services, Coordinator of Daytona Beach Libraries, Assistant Director and Library Services Manager/Collections during his 19 year career with Volusia County Public Library) organized a group of 46 people to make the trip. At this annual event, Volusia, County remains "the county to beat" in numbers and enthusiasm.

As early as 1978, VCPL began to recognize the necessity for automation in the

libraries. E. Allison attended a workshop on automated systems and began to research the possibility for the new Volusia County Library Center being constructed on City Island in Daytona Beach and the other three large libraries. Funding was not available at that time, however.

Other innovations were possible though, largely thanks to Friends of the Library groups. One of the first public libraries in the country to offer personal computers for public use was the Brannon Memorial Library at New Smyrna Beach. The Friends purchased the first PC for the library in 1981, and have continued to support this service. Other Friends groups followed suit and soon personal computers were available throughout the county as a library service.

No history of VCPL could be complete with discussion of the importance of the 5,000 Friends of the Library and more than 1,000 citizen volunteers, the most in Florida. These support groups provide funds and volunteer labor without which VCPL would not be able to function at its present level. In June of 1992, the 1,000,000th volunteer hour in service of VCPL was attained. The 126,308 hours worked that year equates to 69.4 full-time personnel and conservatively estimated, a savings of \$928,363 annually. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been raised on behalf of the Library by Friends groups around the county, providing equipment, furnishings, services, and books for the public.

Although a delay had occurred, the commitment to automation had remained. The first OCLC terminal arrived in 1983, and processing of materials using this equipment began in 1984. Automation and the CLSI program was approved by County Council in 1988 and preparations for the automated system could begin in earnest even though funding had not yet been approved. Sarah Webster had been hired in 1986 as Head of Technical Services and Automation. Under her direction much of the background for the project had been done. As soon as financing permitted, CLSI equipment was installed in August of 1989, and training began immediately. Jim Bailey was hired as System Operator and the monumental task of data entry and barcoding was being carried out in each branch. At last VCPL began on-line circulation December 10, 1990. Judy Valk is the current Head of Technical Services/Automation. Over a million barcodes are in use for materials and borrowers. The public access on-line catalog will be in place as financing allows.

During the '80s the Library thrived. Expansion of existing libraries occurred in

many communities. Port Orange began its library in a storefront in Riverwood Shopping Plaza in 1984 until construction could be completed in a portion of Port Orange's City Hall. New buildings were completed in Lake Helen and Edgewater in 1988, and in DeLand in 1989. Statistics revealed that VCPL was 7th or 8th in the state in circulation and square footage, but 42nd in books per capita and 46th in operating expenditures. Salaries were 25% lower than comparable positions in neighboring counties and the 103 -member staff had the highest work load in the state.

Under J. Wheeler's leadership, efforts were made to correct these problems. Materials budget increases were fought for and the books per capita improved. The Cody Personnel Studies of 1984 and 1989 recommended the upgrading of salaries for non-professionals, and pay comparable to teachers in the area for librarians. In 1984, the County Library Board passed a resolution that placed a moratorium on construction of new branches. Long range plans were discussed that included the possibility of regionalization. Within the next 20 years, they anticipated there being 6 libraries the size of the Library Center in Daytona Beach with the potential to serve 100,000 customers. At a subsequent meeting of the Board in 1985, the regional concept was again discussed. It was agreed to support regionalization, but the importance of community branches was emphasized.

In 1986 (the year VCPL annual circulation surpassed 2,000,000), HBW Associates, Inc., a firm of library planners and consultants, was hired by Volusia County to prepare recommendations for a long-range plan. The final report was presented in April, 1987, and addressed issues facing VCPL into the next century. This report continues to be used as a planning tool, the ultimate goal being to meet national library standards and to provide the highest quality library service.

Towards these goals, changes are taking place. Administrative functions have been moved to a centrally located facility on Indian Lake Road that was constructed for this purpose in 1991. A reorganization of staff and responsibilities resulted in creating the new positions of Library Services Manager for Operations, Support Services Manager and Collection Development/Outreach Manager positions currently held by Sue Habel, Bill Bowden and Russell Long. Volusia County Library Center has been renovated to make use of space made available when VCPL administration was relocated. It now functions as Daytona Beach Regional Library. DeLand, Ormond Beach, Port Orange, Deltona, and New Smyrna were also designated regional libraries. Building programs to provide

facilities adequate to the task are planned for Port Orange and Deltona. NSB is presently considered the Southeast Volusia Regional, and a site is being selected in the southeast area for construction of a new facility.

In the approximately 30 years that VCPL has been an entity, enormous progress has been made. A loose federation of community libraries has evolved into a progressive system of 14 libraries linked by computer technology. Materials available to the library user have gone from an inadequate collection of mediocre books to a desirable selection of books, magazines, videos, CDs, cassettes, toys and art prints. Well over 400,000 reference transactions are handled annually by a well-trained staff. Volusia County Public Library's annual circulation of 2.5 million ranks ninth in Florida and higher than that in systems in Boston, Washington D.C., Detroit, and New Orleans. Program attendance in Volusia County libraries leads the state.

There is much to be proud of in reviewing the accomplishments of the past. There is also much to be done. Upgrading of facilities and equipment will continue. Goals and objectives regarding staff, services, and materials will be met. We must keep abreast of the rapid changes that are occurring in technology and information systems at a fantastic rate. Dealing with the tasks ahead is made more challenging by the present economic climate. However, the spirit and energy that led VCPL to be the progressive system it is today in a short period of time will no doubt prevail, and VCPL will go forward successfully into the next century.

Compiled by: Gayle Harmon Edgewater Beach December 1993

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