

WINTER HAVEN PUBLIC LIBRARY HISTORY

1907 First library consisted of a few books on shelf in drugstore of Dr. Samuel Harrison Woods on north 5th Street near Central Park. His wife oversaw the lending and returns.

1914 It was announced that the new library will be situated on the second floor of the new Englesen-Linger building, which Bill Craig built on the present site of the Red Cross rooms. The Civic League announces it will take at least 300 members to swing this deal and they list a lot of donations and one month's rent given by the owners of the building. (*A History of Winter Haven, Florida*, by Josephine Burr. 1974.)

1915 Women's Civic League took over the running of the WHPL. For a short time, the Women's Christian Temperance Union had run the library, but real stability and progress were made under the aegis of the Women's Civic League (today's Woman's Club of Winter Haven), founded by Dr. Mary B. Jewett in 1913. The club ran the library from 1915 to 1952. Dr. Jewett served as chair of the library board from 1915 to 1927.

1916 Civic League held a board meeting and discussed its new building project. Mrs. Florence Inman (sister of Dr. Jewett) gave the club \$5,000 for the purpose of building the clubhouse with a library attached. The club was to pay her 6% interest during her lifetime, but at her death, it was to be the undisputed possession of the club. Besides the offer she gave them \$1,944 for books for the library. (*ibid.* Burr)

1920 City Council voted to give the City Library \$300 per month. This went on for many years until the new building we have today was built (1955), when a millage was added to our taxes that paid for it and helped support it. (*ibid.* p.124)

1924 Remodeling (stuccoing) being done to the city library building which was really the first home that W.W. Mann built on Central Avenue between his Waola Hotel and First Baptist Church and was moved east to the site of the present library (annex). (*ibid.* p. 143) ("Waola"--combination of the names of Mr. & Mrs. Mann: Walter and Lola.)

First W.W. Mann home (circa 1912)--200 feet east of Third Street and Central, on right-hand side going east. A two-story white frame house. The club bought the house; the city owned the land. Dr. Jewett lent the money to the club at a low interest rate. At Dr. Jewett's death in 1928, her will stated that any remaining monies owed on the building by the club would be forgiven. The club made money by renting the second-floor apartment, reached by outside metal stairs, to the librarian or to others.

In 1956 the house was moved to Seventh Street, SW, on lots deeded by Mr. and Mrs. John Hanna to the Boys' Club when it was chartered in 1956. The City sold the old library to the club for a dollar and counted the balance of its worth as its contribution to the organization. (*ibid.*)

The building later became a florist shop and then a private residence. (Note: The first Director of the Boys' Club was Ota Smith, whose wife, Kathryn, went to work in the library in 1971, becoming head librarian in 1973, a position she still holds.)

1925 Club hired a librarian, Mrs. Margaret B. Chase.

1926-'29 During these years, Mrs. P.V.R. Griffin (Blanche), a former reference librarian in the public library of Indianapolis, Indiana, became employed by the library. (Source: Miss Elizabeth Griffin, daughter.) Mrs. Griffin had known Miss Clara Abel of Illinois and convinced the latter to come to Winter Haven

Head Librarians: Late 1920's - late 1940's Miss Clara Abel

Late 1940's - early 1970's Mrs. Elbert Jones (Grace)

Mrs. Dorothy Rodway, Assistant

Mrs. Jones quietly censored the books borrowed by the public by wrapping so-called risqué books, I.e., *Forever Amber*, in brown wrapping paper and keeping them under the circulation desk--on the bottom shelf. Patrons had to know of the custom and ask for the hidden books. Mrs. Rodway did her own censoring; any unauthorized person looking in the vertical file had his hands smacked.

1971-'73 Mrs. Peggy Harwick (interim) Her husband, George Harwick, was a city commissioner.

1973--Mrs. Ota Smith (Kathryn)

1952 The Civic League relinquished control of the library to the City of Winter Haven, donating the two-story frame building, the entire book collection, and plans and monies toward the building of a new facility.

1953 The new library was to be located on the "bowling on the green" area adjacent on the east side of the existing building. A city tax for the library was approved at a referendum vote called for this purpose, which insured the new brick building we have on Central Avenue East today. Dr. Mary B. Jewett had left the library \$15,000 in her will which had been kept invested so that it was a nest egg for building. The library board was able to borrow money after the tax was definitely added to the city tax list. One mill was voted for the library building. This could bring in about \$8,000 per year which could be used to pay off the loan. Mrs. Tom Swann was the person who worked hardest for this tax increase for the library. (*ibid.* p.214)

Note: At one time in the planning, the commissioners decided the library should be located on Third Street, NW, adjacent to the Florida Citrus Building and the new Health Department offices. Five women's organizations, including the Woman's Club, protested this change. Their argument was that the Central Avenue site was near the schools and the downtown area. The women put up a determined argument and persuaded the commissioners to reconsider the Central Avenue location. (Source: *A History of the Woman's Club of Winter Haven, Florida*, by Mrs. Norman Schuler. 1986)

1955 The original portion of the present brick building dates from 1955 and was 6,702 sq. ft. The library was accessed from Central Avenue as designed by Bernard Wells Close, Architect of Jacksonville, Florida. A copy of his original design document is dated January 8, 1954.

(Source: "Space Needs Study", Rood and Zwick, 1999.)

Two construction bids were submitted, a well-built building for \$90,000.00 and a less

expensive structure for \$75,000.00. The \$90,000.00 new library building construction was completed in May, 1955. That same month, the public was invited for a grand opening on a Sunday. Guests were served cookies and limeade. Two days later was the official day for business with 600 transactions made. Newspaper pictures showed the library interior with many empty or partially filled shelves. The library holdings were 6000 volumes. The collection had grown in 1986 to 48,000 books and 152 magazine subscriptions. In 1986, nine full time and four part time librarians are employed with twelve volunteers to assist. (*op. cit.* Schuler, p. 6.)

1975 An addition to the library was designed by Gene Thompson, an architect in Winter Haven. The modification added approximately 2,463 sq. ft. to the library for a total library area of 9,165 sq.ft., and reoriented the entrance from Central Avenue to the south along an alleyway renamed Library Lane. (*op. cit.* Rood and Zwick)

1976 Friends of the Winter Haven Public Library, Inc., was organized by Carl Strang, chairman of the City Library Board; Kathryn Smith, Head Librarian; and June Kuntz, an interested patron. The stated purposes of FOL are “to promote public interest and participation in the Winter Haven Public Library, its services, facilities, and needs, and to promote gifts of books, magazines, desirable collections, endowments, bequests, and any other thing which would be helpful to those using the facilities of the public library.” An Annual Sale of used books has netted thousands of dollars used by the library to purchase new books and needed items not covered by the City budget. FOL’s latest project, “Finish and Furnish,” engendered \$211,000 for the new library in 2004.

1990 Richard Waters from a Dallas consulting firm was hired to do a space-needs study for a new library. (\$7,000 of the \$14,000 fee came from FOL; the other \$7,000 from the City.) Conclusion: library circulation at the time warranted 18,000 sq. ft. There was no thought of moving the location. Recommendation: a two-story building; finish the first floor, have a skeleton second floor for later expansion plus a parking garage. Library building over 30,000 sq. ft.; total cost: \$6 million. City Commission shelved the plan.

1991 In August City purchased Activities Annex portable for \$28,000 plus \$7,000 site improvement; building was placed on the lot occupied by 1920’s library. FOL sponsored a reception in honor of the opening of the new facility in October. During the event, the electricity failed; off went the lights and air-conditioning. The cause: a squirrel had been fried on a transformer.

1997 Polk County Library Cooperative was created; usage of the Winter Haven facility increased by 11%.

1998 The City contracted a “Space Needs Study for the Expansion of the Winter Haven Public Library” be prepared by Architects in Association Rood and Zwick, Inc., New Smyrna Beach, Florida. Study submitted 11/24/99. The firm was subsequently hired as architects for the new library.

2002 City received \$500,000 grant for new library construction from the State of Florida. Site selected for new 31,000 sq.ft. library on Fourth Street, Northwest, in the downtown area. The city block was originally the location of the A.R. Klemm residence, built at turn of 20th century Klemm was a German immigrant and early citrus pioneer. By World War II the house was no longer occupied by the family and was used as a USO facility frequented by the military stationed at Bartow Air Base. In 1949 the house was demolished and a Kwik Chek (later Winn-Dixie) grocery store built in its place. In the 1960's the store was converted to a County Courthouse Annex. City purchased the land from the county in 2002 for \$350,000; City to demolish old courthouse.

Note: The 1955 library and lots, evaluated at about \$950,000, were sold for \$800,000 to a local doctor, Dr. Ernesto Perez. Additional acreage running all the way to 4th Street, S.E., had been purchased in the 1980's from Mrs. Wilma Ramsey when the City thought it would be needed for expansion. Mrs. Ramsey lived with her daughter and son-in-law, Kay and Mickey Giametta, in a small, white, framed house surrounded by beautiful Queen Crape Myrtles which the family rooted, potted, and sold. The 1991 Activities Portable was claimed by the Leisure Services Department and moved to a city-owned softball field adjacent to Polk Community College--the Diamondplex.

2003 Construction of new facility began in March; Kalamaris Construction Company, Tampa, FL. The new library will be opened to the public on July 6, 2004. Cost--about 5.3 million dollars.

Special acknowledgement must be made of the contribution of former Commissioner Scott Girouard, library liaison for the commission. Scott kept the need for a new library before the commission when other civic projects continued to take priority. The library project might possibly have been delayed even longer without the interest and perseverance of Commissioner Scott Girouard. (P. Gilbert, 7/5/04)

(Primary source: *A History of Winter Haven, Florida*, by Josephine Burr, 1974)

"History of Winter Haven Public Library" prepared by Phyllis Reese Gilbert, member, Winter Haven Library Board, July, 2004.