

# **Florida Library History Project**

## **Sarasota County Library System**

Six community libraries and a Bookmobile make up the Sarasota County Library System. The history of each library demonstrates that citizens of Sarasota County have worked together to maintain the quality of life long before the libraries became a part of Sarasota County Government. From the first library, which was established in 1907 by the Sarasota Town Improvement Society, to the newest in Jacaranda, county libraries have been established in response to community demands and needs.

The first libraries were autonomous with the Head Librarians reporting directly to the County Administrator. Sarasota Public Library was managed by Betty Service, the Englewood library by Harriet Ives, and Venice by Jean McGuire. These libraries were in place when Joan Hopkins was hired in 1974 to take over the Sarasota library and be Coordinator of the Libraries. In 1979 she was given the title of Libraries Director and took on the job of forming an integrated library system. This was done not only to qualify for state aid, but also to standardize and improve service throughout the county. During her 23 years with Sarasota County Libraries, Joan Hopkins directed and coordinated library services for the rapidly growing population. She directed the establishment of Gulf Gate Public Library, North Port Public Library, Frances T. Bourne, Jacaranda Public Library and the new downtown Sarasota library, and laid the groundwork for building future libraries in the county. She also lead the libraries into the information age in 19\_ making Sarasota County Public Libraries one of the first in southwest Florida to have an automated library system for card catalog, circulation and technical services. She retired in March 1997 and continues to serve on the Library Advisory Board. Shirley Amore took over as Libraries Director in October 1998. She has \_ years of library experience, the most recent being Head of the main library in Broward County.

## **SELBY PUBLIC LIBRARY 1907\_**

The first library in Sarasota County was established in 1907 by the Town Improvement society to improve the quality of life in the community. They started this library in a room at Five Points with a fund of \$65. It started with donated books and 51 subscribers. The Woman's Club took over the library in 1913 and in April 1915 moved it to the east wing of the Women's Club. Also in April the Sarasota City Council appropriated \$150 a year to locate the library in the old schoolhouse on Main Street rent free for five years. In 1940 the Women's Club requested that the city take complete control of the library. The city moved it to 701 N. Tamiami Trail. As more people moved into the county by the mid 1970's, the growing need for additional books and materials was evident. The library moved to the current Boulevard of the Arts site on June 24, 1976, and Sarasota County Government took over its operation. The Selby Library got its name after a single contribution of \$500,000 from the William G. and Marie Selby Foundation. Today, the Selby Public Library is the largest in the Sarasota County Library system with holdings of 235,941 volumes. It serves a population area of 141,255.



### **Elsie Quirk Public Library 1962-**

In the late 1950's, members of the Lemon Bay Women's Club and residents began collecting books and gathering support to open a bi-county public library. In 1962, there were no free public libraries in Sarasota County; a charge of \$4.00 was levied for any county citizen who wished to use the City of Sarasota Library. With money and land donated by the Quirk family, Elsie Quirk Library opened in 1962 to serve the Sarasota County residents of Englewood. A campaign led by Lois Potter and Leah Lasbury resulted in Elsie Quirk library's receiving the first Sarasota County tax dollar support for a library. Today, the library serves approximately 20,279 residents with a collection of 66,884 items.



### **BOOKMOBILE 1962**

The Bookmobile originated in 1962, It traveled as far north as DeSoto Road and south to Englewood. In 1977 the Bookmobile was replaced with a larger truck that carried approximately 3300 items. The Bookmobile serviced about 21 stops and served mostly senior citizens.



During the holidays and summer vacations, circulation of children's materials increased and proved there was a need to purchase more materials for a children's collection. As more families moved to the community and the demand for more books and services increased, it was evident that a larger vehicle was needed. The community got that wish in 1991 when a 50 foot tractor-trailer was purchased to house more materials. The Bookmobile currently carries over 6000 items and has 24 weekly stops throughout the county from DeSota Road to Osprey. The collection includes popular fiction, a greatly expanded juvenile collection, and a separate young adult section. In addition, the collection includes a parenting section, a Florida section, and a collection of audio books.

### **VENICE PUBLIC LIBRARY 1965**

When the Venice-Nokomis Women's Club library outgrew its space, Venice citizens, including author Walter Farley and his wife Rosemarie, formed the Friends of the Venice Library. After three years, with land from the City of Venice, contributions from individuals, organizations, businesses and foundations, plus a proposal from the County to contribute to operating expenses, the organization had enough resources to start building an 8000 square foot public library. The library opened its doors at 300 S. Nokomis Avenue on October 4, 1965. The Friends operated the library with financial support from Sarasota County until 1977 when it became part of the Sarasota County Library System. In 1979, the Friends and the County funded a 10,000 square foot addition to accommodate the growing community. The Friends added another 800 square feet in 1984. The additions proved that the library was needed and well received by the community. In 1993, a 6000 square foot expansion, funded half by the community and half by the County, was completed. The 24,800 square foot library located in the downtown City of Venice currently houses some 105,385 volumes and serves a population of 51,104.



### **GULF GATE LIBRARY 1973-**

The Gulf Gate Library was established after the Bookmobile could no longer accommodate all of the needs and demands of the community. Gulf Gate Library opened with a collection of 4,000 volumes on November 5, 1973, in a 1500 square foot storefront location on Gateway Avenue. Named originally for a Sarasota Librarian, it was called the



Betty Service Branch. The new library was so successful that it quickly outgrew its quarters and in November 1978 moved to a double storefront on Gulf Gate Drive. Within a few years it became obvious that larger library quarters were needed in the Gulf Gate community. After Leslie Shoemaker donated land in memory of his wife, a dedicated group of friends began a fundraising campaign. The campaign paid off and the new library was opened and dedicated on December 5, 1985. Today, over 200 volunteers help man the Gulf Gate Library that houses 80,436 volumes and serves a population of 88,370.

### **NORTH PORT PUBLIC LIBRARY 1975-**

The first library in North Port was founded in 1975 by the Friends of the North Port Area Library, an organization formed by the North Port Women's Club. The Friends purchased a house that originally stood on the site of the present 12,400 sq. ft. structure. Operating the library with volunteers, the Friends applied to the Sarasota County Libraries Department in 1976 to become part of the Sarasota County Libraries Department. Later they raised funds for an addition to the original facility. The North Port Library was the first project built with the one-cent sales tax passed by the citizens of Sarasota County for capital improvements. The Friends of the Library Enhancement Fund Task Force raised nearly \$200,000 to help furnish the new library in an effort to provide North Port with a modern facility. The North Port Library currently houses 53,906 volumes serves a population of 27,260.



### **FRANCES T. BOURNE JACANDA PUBLIC LIBRARY 1994-**

The need to establish a new branch in east Venice was foreseen in the mid- 1980's Sarasota County voters approved a one-cent optional sales tax levy in 1989. A ten year library Capital improvement program was developed that called for such a library to be built in 1994-95. When it was discovered that the County already owned appropriate acreage on Jacaranda Boulevard north of U.S. 41, the project was moved ahead of schedule. The 12,500 square foot library opened January 25, 1994. It was rededicated and renamed in 1995 after the Friends of Jacaranda Library founder and President Frances T. Bourne. Frances Bourne was a library advocate who also served as chair of Sarasota County's Library Advisory Board. The newest library of Sarasota County has a popular circulating collection with a high demand for



fiction, mysteries, biographies videos, and audio books. Its 30 foot clerestory windows provide an open view in this modern architectural structure. It houses 44,955 volumes and serves a population of 35,709.