Wayne County Public Library
Goldsboro, NC: A brief history

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Wayne County Public Library Inc.'s largest branch is located in Goldsboro, North Carolina—the heart of Wayne County-- and has a history that spans over 100 years. The collection has grown from a circulating library of 1,000 books in twenty book cases to over 137,000 books in a five branch system. The library has made several moves in its lifetime, each time to fill a need for more space. The library currently serves a wide array of patrons from immigrants to military to college students. It is the mission of Wayne County Public Library Inc. to provide its community with information, materials, and services that support learning and the workplace; to promote an appreciation of its history and diverse cultures; and to offer community members the opportunity to meet and interact with others in the community.

Goldsboro Public Library's Beginnings

At the beginning of the twentieth century, most large cities in the United States had a public library, but this was not the case in North Carolina. In fact, it was only in 1898 that Durham, North Carolina established the first tax-supported public library; a few privately-funded, public libraries already existed prior to that. The 1890s to 1920 marked one of the first big growth booms in public library history. "By 1900, there were approximately two thousand public libraries... by 1918, the figure was close to six thousand."[1] One reason for such dramatic increases in libraries was the Carnegie family. About this time, Andrew Carnegie began to give away millions of dollars to build libraries, including ten in North Carolina.[2]

It was during this time period that the first library in Goldsboro was established as a grassroots project. In 1902, the Goldsboro Women's Club organized a small, traveling, public library as the club recognized a need "to form a center for social and mental culture."[3] This library was one of many traveling libraries in North Carolina that was organized by a member of the Federation of Women's Clubs.[4] All of the original items in the library were donated by Women's Club members who also took turns staffing the library. As the library's collection travelled, it began to grow at a rapid pace. This is mostly due to the Women's Club requirement that patrons donate an item or gift to the library in exchange for the use of its materials. In fact, the library collection grew so much that the Women's Club soon began loaning materials to nearby counties.

In 1904, the North Carolina Library Association was formed and library service and development began to shift from grassroots, organizational movements toward state and local government agencies being responsible for the creation, maintenance, and expansion of public libraries.

Shortly after the formation of the North Carolina Library Association, the City of Goldsboro's Board of Aldermen took control, both physically and monetarily, of the Goldsboro Women's Club's library. The library was moved to the Goldsboro City Hall in 1908, where it occupied one floor and the first librarian, Lollie Lewis, was appointed. Goldsboro residents no longer had to donate materials to use the library; they were now able to use it free of charge—becoming one of only fifteen libraries at the time to offer such services for free. By 1917, the collection had grown to include a North Carolina Collection, a reading room, and more. Furthermore, library circulation had continued to grow year to year with circulation numbers reaching over 13,000 in 1917.[5]

A Major Donation

With the advent of the Great Depression, 1929 was a modest time for library growth in North Carolina. But the family of Mrs. Solomon Weill donated the home at 204 W. Chestnut Street that Mrs. Weil had formerly occupied. Furthermore, they gave the library $5,000 to help renovate the building. This prominent donation came during the same time period as the Mebane family's large donation of a house and related expenses to the Spray Library in Rockingham County.

Mrs. Weil was a former chairman of the Women's Club's library committee and had worked diligently in the past to secure materials for the library.[6] At the time of the Weil donation, the library had the State of North Carolina evaluate the efficiency of using the home as the library. According to Annie Petty, the Assistant Secretary and Director of the State of North Carolina's Library Commission, "It would hardly seem wise for the library to be moved from its present location [City Hall] to the Weil home."[7] Petty concluded from her study that the home's location would be further away from the business center of town and maintenance costs would increase. Despite her opinion, the library moved into the Weil house on March 8, 1930. The Weil house actually provided the library with needed space for a meeting room, a periodicals room, two reading rooms, a children's room, an office, a workroom, and more. The décor of the library was also improved; behind the house was a wonderful rose and bulb garden that could be enjoyed by all library patrons. Despite being moved from the business center of Goldsboro, the library continued to flourish. By 1930, the library was circulating over 23,000 books, out of the 940,000 books that were being circulated in all of the libraries across North Carolina.

Becoming a County Library

Associates of the Goldsboro Library first began to ponder changing the library to a county system in 1925, two years before legislation allowed counties to operate libraries— although counties could create contracts with cities to have county service. Unfortunately, it took the library sixteen years to begin serving all of Wayne County. On September 15, 1941, Goldsboro Public Library officially became Wayne County Public Library Inc., and, on October 6, 1941 at 4:00 p.m., the Board of Trustees met for the first time to organize the new county library.[8] The decision came on the heels of North Carolina creating state aid for libraries. The only way for the library to receive this funding was by becoming a public library.

In 1942, the City of Goldsboro opened the Goldsboro Colored Library, which was soon renamed the Alice Brown Library.[9] The Brown Library was created using WPA funds to serve the entire African American population of Wayne County, something that approximately only twenty other libraries had done by this period.[10] The Brown Library was opened for four hours several afternoons each week, but was not part of the Wayne County Public Library system until later when the WPA cut the library's funding. [11]

To further provide service to all of Wayne County, the library began operating a bookmobile, purchased for $627.52 due to "a considerable discount from the state purchasing agent."[12] Susan Borden, one of two applicants, was appointed as the first county librarian and began driving the bookmobile throughout the county, stopping at thirty-four different locations. The bookmobile was nothing more than a panel truck with a table in the back that would hold about 350 books.[13] This meant that the bookmobile could not operate during periods of inclement weather.

By 1950, the bookmobile stopped at 49 different locations throughout the county. The growth of the bookmobile service represented the growth of the service throughout the state. As a matter of fact, at this time North Carolina had "more mobile libraries than any other state in the union."[14] Not only had the bookmobile service gained momentum, but the library itself had continued to grow. In fact, by 1950 the library system consisted of six employees: a librarian, a desk assistant, a children's assistant, a bookmobile librarian, a bookmobile assistant, and a librarian in the

Brown Library.[15] Excited by its growth, the Board of Trustees decided in July of 1971 to focus on increasing library services which would also qualify the library for additional state aid. A collaboration with Delta Kappa Gamma to create a Friends of the Library Organization was included in the initiative to increase services.[16]

By 1957, the library was on its third bookmobile which could hold 1100 books inside, so the service could begin to operate during inclement weather. Furthermore, two additional branches had opened under the direction of Susan Borden. Both branches were opened two days a week and offered a rotating collection.

A Need for Space

By the 1960's the Wayne County Public Library was growing rapidly and was beginning to run out of space, as were most of the libraries established in the early twentieth century. The 1960's marked a period of expansion for the library system. In 1966, the library opened a branch in Fremont at the site of the Fremont Community Building. One year after opening a branch in Fremont, a small branch was also opened in Pikeville. That same year, the library system made arrangements to turn an old jail in Seven Springs into a library branch. The next year, the Steele Memorial Library in Mount Olive joined the Wayne County Public Library system.

Despite opening so many branches, the main library in Goldsboro was still outgrowing the Weil home. The Weil home also was beginning to suffer from termite damage and other pests. In 1969, the library system made a proposal for a new library near the Weil home.

The new library would be air conditioned and able to house many more materials. Through donations and local government funding, the library raised $750,000 to build the new library.[17] On January 11, 1976, the new, 19,000-square-foot library, with the capacity to hold 90,000 volumes, was dedicated. However, instead of building the library near the Weil home, the library was placed on the eastern side of Goldsboro. The new building's meeting space was named after a member of the Weil family, Gertrude Weil. Weil was a prominent member of the Wayne County Community and an activist in the women's suffrage movement.

By 1978, the library's circulation, programming, and card-holder statistics were sky rocketing, making the move very successful. The new branch allowed the library to maintain a local history collection; increase extension services; and provide holiday, adult, and children's programming. During this time the library also received a $27,500 grant to begin outreach services to the elderly.[18]

Moving into the 21st Century

Despite its impressive growth in the 1960s and 1970s, the Wayne County Public Library continued to use antiquated technology. In the 1970's and 1980's, libraries began incorporating automated library systems. Unfortunately, the Wayne County Public Library did not have an automated library system until 1991 when the library closed from May 13 to May 19 in order to install Gaylord's Galaxy system.[19] The Galaxy system and supplies allowed the library to barcode patron cards and books in order to make circulating items easier. Furthermore, the library could now use an Online Public Access

Wayne County Public Library while it occupied the Weil House; photo courtesy of the Wayne County Public Library

The current Wayne County Public Library Goldsboro Branch; photo courtesy of the Wayne County Public Library

Catalog (OPAC) to locate items instead of the old card catalog. Patrons could also reserve library materials and have them sent to the branch of their choice without leaving their homes.

In recent years the library has worked to expand its service to include more members of Wayne County. Included in this is a Latino Outreach program, which is a response to a growing need throughout North Carolina. Furthermore, Wayne County Public Library has started book clubs, book buddies programs, a video game tournament and more. Obviously, the library has grown a lot since the first librarian was hired. In fact the library has gone from having only one employee in 1908 to now employing over 30 people.

Currently, the Wayne County Public Library is outgrowing all of the space and buildings that were created for it in the 1960's and 1970's. Although no renovation plans are imminent, there are several options being considered for the future. The first plan is to close the branches and build two large branches. The other plan is to slowly renovate and expand each library branch. No matter what the final plan for renovation turns out to be, the Goldsboro Branch of the Wayne County Public Library System will remain a vital part of the Goldsboro community.

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