

HISTORY OF THE CATAWBA COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM

The beginnings of the Catawba County Library System story began with dedication to a distant goal by citizens of a community who foresaw what a library could mean to the county. It includes many hours of voluntary service from interested men and women.

1932 - The beginnings toward creation of a library can be traced back to a meeting of Newton's Unit 16 of the American Legion Auxiliary on March 17. Fundraising efforts began in earnest. Under the presidency of Miss Challie Brandon Hall, an appropriation of \$25 was made for a public library. Miss Hall added a \$1 gift of her own to the sum. From that point on the Auxiliary spurred efforts for a library. A number of events were staged to raise money for the project, including "cotton balls", cotillions, pageants, floats in the Soldiers Reunion parades, and rummage sales.

1935 - A site for the facility was gained when the late George McCorkle offered the use of two rooms in the kitchen wing of his old family home, which stood on the southwest corner of the Court Square in Newton. The first library was housed in the historic home, overlooking a small garden at the rear of the house, through which the early library patrons entered. The library occupied the property rent-free for several years until new owners acquired the McCorkle house.

1936 - After a public drive for book donations, the formal opening of the library was arranged for March 17, 1936, exactly four years after the plan was conceived; however, due to inclement weather of that year, the opening actually was held on March 20, and books were put in circulation on April 1. During its early years the library was owned and operated by the volunteer service of the Legion Auxiliary.

1936 - Miss Challie Brandon Hall served as the first librarian. She held that position from 1936 to 1948.

1938 - In order that the library might become more serviceable to rural Catawba County, the library board sought a bookmobile. A school bus was turned over to the Auxiliary for that purpose. The first trip was made on February 18, 1938.

1939 - In July 1939, the commissioners appropriated \$2,000 for buying and equipping a Catawba County Bookmobile to be operated by the Newton Public Library.

1941 - In 1941 the Auxiliary turned the library over to the Catawba County Board of Commissioners for public financing and expansion. A Library Board of Trustees was named.

1945 - At the conclusion of World War II, the members of the American Legion undertook the creation of a Catawba County War Memorial Center to be located on property adjacent to the Legion building on South Brady Avenue (today the Mary Elizabeth Hardister Recreation Center of the City of Newton.) In addition to a war memorial listing those Catawbans who had lost their lives during World Wars One and Two, the Memorial Center was to include the historic Matthias Barringer house, a two-story log dwelling dating to 1790 and originally located two miles southeast of Newton. The house had served as Catawba County's first courthouse in 1843. The building was to be moved to Newton, restored and used for the library's second home.

1946 - On August 15, 1946 (Soldiers Reunion Day), the unique public facility was dedicated in formal ceremonies. North Carolina governor R. Gregg Cherry was the speaker. A large stone fireplace, wormy chestnut paneling and colonial furnishings inside the library reflected the atmosphere of the log house. An addition had been constructed as a children's room. Upstairs over the library was the first county historical museum.

1948 - Librarian Challie Hall was succeeded by George Linder (1948-1956).

1948 - A library station was opened in Maiden in November 1948. This station, the library's first branch, was open on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. It was located in the Maiden Beauty Shop.

1952 - Tragedy struck the Catawba County Library in Newton during the early morning hours of February 25, 1952, when fire nearly demolished the historic old structure. All books, newspapers, periodicals and other materials owned by the library, except those in circulation and on the bookmobile, were destroyed. The library was moved into temporary quarters in the business district of Newton while plans went forward for the construction of a new library building. After a fundraising campaign, construction began on a modern-style one-story unit on a site at the corner of North College Avenue and East Second Street in Newton.

1954 - Construction began in early 1954 and the facility was opened to the public on September 1, 1954.

1956 – Bill Wilkinson was named Library Director (1 year).

1957 – Mary Summers was named Library Director (1957-1972).

1970 - As the 1960's drew to a close, it became increasingly apparent that a new library building was required. The increasing stock of books, magazines, newspapers, films, sound recordings and other lendable materials gradually used up space needed for adult and youth reading areas. Plans took shape for a new facility after consultations with representatives of the State Library and library architectural consultants. The result was a project to construct a new building to offer facilities for a growing public library that would be adequate to serve the county's citizens for several decades.

1973 – Richard Meldron was named Library Director (1973–1976).

1973 - Catawba County purchased a lot on West C Street from the City of Newton.

1975 – Main Library in Newton – Construction began for a new 30,000 square foot building in June of 1975. The cost was \$865,000; this included land, construction and furnishings.

1975 – Sherrills Ford Branch Library was opened on October 1, 1975 with funds received through the NC State Library. The library was called the East Catawba County Library. The building in which it was then located comprised an area of 450 square feet and was located across the road from the present branch site in a small rented facility.

1976 – Richard Meldron was succeeded by Evelyn Rhodes as Interim Library Director (until February 1977).

1976 - Construction on the new Main Library facility was completed in September 1976. It opened to the public on October 15, 1976. In its new building, the library has been able to greatly expand its services to the community. The dedication ceremony was held on October 27, 1976.

1977 – John Pritchard was named Library Director (February 1977-April 1997).

1978 - In February of 1978, a move was begun to build a new library building for Sherrills Ford. The Sherrills Ford community purchased the land for the site for \$3,600. This movement culminated with funds secured from the Board of Commissioners in July 1978 to build the facility.

1979 – The Sherrills Ford facility was replaced with a new facility of 1,375 square feet.

1979 – The Maiden community petitioned the Town Council of Maiden and the Board of Commissioners for the establishment of a branch library in their town. The town and the county responded by opening a branch library in Maiden. This effort proved successful with continued community usage of the facility through the 1980s.

1980 – The Sherrills Ford Library was dedicated on April 19, 1980 (1,375 square feet).

1981 – The Maiden Branch Library was established in response to a high level of community demand. The branch was placed in a storefront building in downtown Maiden. The branch was comprised of 1,100 sq. ft. and circulated books and films.

1986 – The Rhodes Room (Genealogy and Local History Department) was dedicated on February 26, 1986.

1987 – The St. Stephens Branch Library is the largest branch of the system with 10,200 square feet.

1988 – The groundbreaking ceremony for the addition of the Sherrills Ford Branch Library was held. The ceremony opened the door to a 1,375 square foot addition to allow for service in response to the community's demand for library service.

1989 - May 25, 1989 was the Bookmobile's last day after 51 years of operation. The Library's Outreach Service continues to provide services for those patrons who are homebound, as well as for rest homes, nutritional sites, and day care centers. This program was set to begin in June 1989.

1989 – The St. Stephens Branch Library opened to the public on October 9, 1989. The new facility was dedicated on November 11, 1989.

1990 – The St. Stephens Branch Library won the NCPLD Association Award for “Outstanding New Facility.”

1990 – An Open House for the Sherrills Ford Branch Library was held to celebrate the completion of the addition. This addition expanded the total square footage to 3,350. The new addition was opened to the public on April 22, 1990.

1990 - It became evident that the Maiden Branch Library service in Maiden had outgrown its storefront facility. The Town of Maiden and Catawba County conducted a study of alternatives. This study resulted in the cooperative funding of the new Maiden Branch library facility.

1991 – The groundbreaking ceremony for the Maiden Branch Library was held on February 24, 1991. The new site was to be located approximately one block from the then current facility.

1991 - The dedication ceremony for the new Maiden Branch Library was held on October 27, 1991. The new Maiden Branch Library facility had 3,000 square feet which included a meeting room for public usage. The Maiden Town Council chambers were also located in that area.

1993 – The Library System automation system project was complete by March 8, 1993. The Library System became automated in November 1992 using the Gaylord system known as GALAXY.

1996 – Public Access Internet began in April.

1996 –The Smart Start program "Books on the Go" begins.

1997 – The Southwest Branch Library opened to the public on March 3, 1997. This library is a storefront library located in the Westover Plaza in Mountain View.

1997 – The grand opening/ribbon-cutting ceremony was held on April 25, 1997. The Southwest Branch was the first library to be constructed in a shopping center. The Catawba County Board of Commissioners appropriated money to begin this project as an ongoing plan of providing library service to all residents of Catawba County.

1997 – John Pritchard retired as Library Director after 20 years of service.

1997 – Peggy Stinson was named Interim Library Director from May to August 1997.

1997 – Denise Peterson was named Library Director on August 5, 1997.

1997 – The Lake Norman Garden Club and the Sherrills Ford Branch Library recognized Representative C. Robert Brawley for his role in the development of the W.A. Day Memorial Botanical Garden on October 24, 1997.

1998 - NC LIVE service begins on April 20, 1998.

1999 - The Conover Branch Library was dedicated on April 14, 1999. The City of Conover provided 800 square feet of space in their newly remodeled city building.

1999 – Denise Peterson resigned as Library Director in July 1999.

1999 – Karen Foss was named Interim Library Director in July.

2000 – Karen Foss was named Library Director in March.

2001 – The reforming of the Friends of the Library group took place.

2002 - After many years of planning and effort, the Claremont Branch Library opened in its 2,400 square foot facility. This branch, the seventh in the system, is housed in the Claremont City Hall. The ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Claremont Branch took place on February 12, 2002.

2002 - The Genealogy Department reopened in its new enlarged room at the Main Library in April.

2004 - Renovations to the Main Library included a new rear public entrance and elevator.

2006 - The Conover Branch was expanded to nearly triple its original size, 800 to 2,400 sq. ft. It reopened on November 11, 2006 after a three-month repair and renovation project at City Hall.

2011 – The Conover Branch moved to 403 Conover Station Southeast (3,200 square feet).

2012 – The Conover Branch won the NCPLDA facility award for “Outstanding Facility under 10,000 square feet.”

2013 – Karen Foss retired as Library Director on January 31, 2013. She was succeeded by Suzanne White on February 28, 2013.

2013 – Maiden Branch Library. The Town of Maiden built a new Town Hall and vacated the council chambers of the Maiden Branch Library on June 30, 2013. This move provided the Maiden Library with an additional 800 square feet to the current library space which is used for programming and meetings. County administration worked with the Town of Maiden on an agreement for the library to take ownership of the building.

2013 – On August 5, the groundbreaking was held for the new Sherrills Ford-Terrell Library project.

2014 – On September 29, the Sherrills Ford-Terrell Branch Library grand opening and ribbon cutting was held. This new state of the art library (10,000 square feet) offers popular reading and audio-visual materials for adults and children, a reading area with current periodicals, a meeting room and computers available for public use.

2019—Mobile library service in Catawba County resumes with the Library to Go. This mobile branch provides a wide variety of books, technology, services and programming to underserved communities, events, and nonprofit agencies.

2020 – Suzanne White retired as Library Director on August 31, 2020. On October 3, 2020, Siobhan Loendorf, who had served as the Assistant Director since 2014, became the Library Director.