

BLACK OAK AND AFTER

THE OAK LAWN PUBLIC LIBRARY

Issue researched by Verlyn Biere, edited by Grant Subs

1934-1936

The Oak Lawn Public Library was founded in the midst of the Great Depression. The unemployment rate had risen to more than 20% - with more than 15 million Americans desperately seeking work. In 1934, a committee of civic leaders began efforts to establish a local library. Village president Albert Brandt, general storekeeper August Behrend, retired teacher Edith Exter, Congregational Church pastor Reverend Kirk Dewey, and other residents gathered an initial collection of 100 books.

In 1935, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt created the Works Progress Administration (WPA) as part of his New Deal economic recovery program. The WPA provided jobs and



"Little Red Library" 1936



*A Series on the
history of Oak
Lawn prepared
by the Oak
Lawn Public
Library Local
History Staff.
No. 10*

income to the unemployed by offering work in construction projects across the United States, while also promoting a variety of public programs - including library development. In Oak Lawn, the program provided a librarian's salary and additional books for the collection. The village hall collector's office acted as a temporary storage space until Behrend donated room in an unused barn standing at the center of the village on 95th Street. A local resident recalled that a flock of pigeons had escaped from a nearby bird farm and nested in the building. Volunteers thoroughly cleaned the barn before the collection moved in.

Some of the first fixtures in the new library - casement windows and a librarian's desk - came from the "midget village" in the 1934 Chicago World's Fair. The founding committee built shelves and painted the interior blue and yellow. The library opened on March 23, 1936. The building's bright red exterior

quickly led residents to nickname the barn "The Little Red Library."

THEN AND NOW

The current library stands on the same spot as the original location of the "Little Red Library."

1941 – 1949

In 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, and the United States officially entered World War II. The WPA redirected its funds to support the war effort, money for the library became unavailable, and the organization asked for the return of the initial book collection. The Oak Lawn Lion's Club and Home Owners Association rallied around the library, holding fundraisers to replace the diverted money and lobbying the WPA to leave the books. High school students ran tag days during which volunteers publicly solicited money and gave contributors tags as a thank-you for their donations. The library sold memberships - as well as cookies. These efforts raised



Interior of the first library

more than \$400.00, and the WPA agreed to leave the books in the custody of the library committee.

Since more funding was needed, the library board proposed a referendum for a tax levy and a board member election. On March 4, 1943, 193 of Oak Lawn's 3,500 residents voted 169 yea to 24 nay to allow taxation and elected the board. With the tax money authorized by referendum, the community officially established a public library. The newly elected library board met for the first time on March 29, 1943 and chose the following members as officers:

Mr. Harvey N. Wick - Chairman

Mrs. Lillian C. Stubbe - Secretary

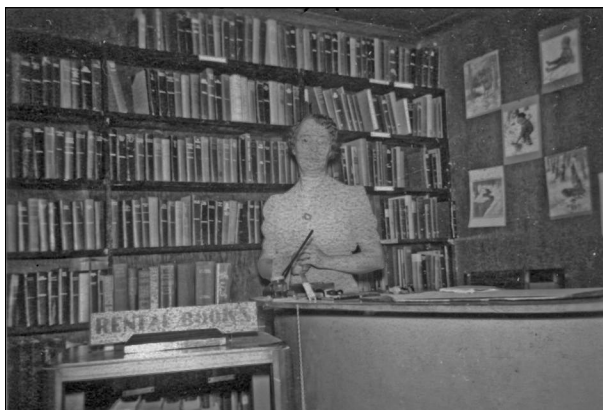
Mr. Wiley Simmons (Superintendent of School District 122) - Treasurer

Mrs. Gladys O. Hickey (President of the Oak Lawn PTA)

Mrs. Betsey G. Schaller (active Red Cross worker)

Mr. William J. Brunn

Edith Exter served as the permanent librarian with an annual salary of \$480.00. Mrs. Exter graduated from Blue Island High School, attended the University of Chicago for one year, and taught elementary school for ten years in Cook County. Mrs. Harold Simons succeeded her as librarian with a salary of \$50.00 per month. The staff also included a Mr. Castleberry and Mrs. Simon's husband, who each received \$1.00 per week for maintenance



Mrs. Simons, Director, 1943-52

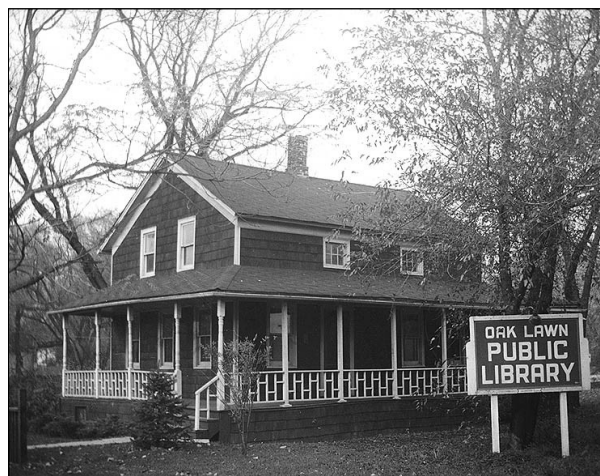
and upkeep of the building and grounds. The Chicago Lawn Library agreed to share resources with Oak Lawn. Mr. Simons also traveled to the Chicago Lawn building; borrowed books from their collection; then delivered them to the Oak Lawn Library for residents to check out; and later returned the materials to Chicago Lawn. The library now housed about 1900 books and had hours from 7 to 9 pm on Monday and 2:30 to 5:30 pm Tuesday through Saturday.

The book collection began outgrowing the barn, and without an adequate heating system, the building became inhospitably cold in the wintertime. So in 1944, the board spent \$1,000 to purchase the east lot of Charles Wertz's property, which straddled 94th Place and Cook Avenue. Two years later, the library purchased more of Wertz's property along with his house for an additional \$4,000. The board estimated that renovations would make the two-story shingled building usable. Instead of

one room, the library would now have a reference room, a children's room, an adult's room, a librarian's office and a meeting space for community organizations.

The oldest standing building in Oak Lawn now housed the library. Franklin Chamberlain, one of Oak Lawn's pioneers, built the house in 1845 near 95th Street and Minnick. The Chamberlains operated a country store and post office at the northeast corner of 95th Street and Cook. Oak Lawn resident Frank Wilson recalled the first post office in the old store used a wooden grocery box where everyone had to find their letters. In 1890, the Chamberlain family moved to California. Shortly thereafter, the house was moved to the location at 94th Place and Cook.

Dee Kopf, a Wisconsin native and graduate of the River Falls State Teacher's College, joined the library staff. The library added more hours running from 10 am to 12 noon on



Library in the Chamberlain house, 1946

Wednesdays, and 7 to 9 pm on Friday. The collection now contained more than 3,000 books. Twelve hundred people registered as users, checking out material more than 17,400 times between May 1945 and April 1946. Weekly story times for children began on Saturdays.

The new building saw a variety of improvements, including porch repair, and interior and exterior painting. The library installed the first telephone in 1946 and the first bathroom in 1947. The board established a permanent building fund with the purchase of U.S. government bonds.

The library faced some interesting problems. The staff received a variety of phone calls asking for answers to questions on radio quiz shows such as "Stop the Music" emceed by popular radio personality Bert Parks. The calls became so frequent that the board considered removing the library's number from the public listings.

A committee of Board Members selected books in cooperation with the librarian. Board rules stipulated that the library could not purchase material without receiving a majority vote of approval among members. In case of a tie, the librarian voted. Issues arose in April of 1949 when Mrs. Simons recommended books on Communism, socialism, Fascism, and childbirth. The Board rejected those books for purchase in a decision which reflected the strong anti-Communist sentiment of the times.

THEN AND NOW

The library continues the tradition of Saturday story hours. Children's librarians read stories for babies, toddlers, preschoolers, and grade schoolers. The "Mother and Daughter Book Club" and the "Guys Read Program" also provide reading opportunities for young students. In addition to listening, children can practice their reading in the "Read to Rover" program where Rover provides a furry non-judgmental audience for their favorite stories, but he doesn't particularly enjoy *The Cat in the Hat* – or *Old Yeller*. The children's section only housed books in the Forties, but now, the Youth Services department also offers audio books, a youth computer center, a teen blog, book kits with CDs or tapes, leap pads, puzzles, video games, DVDs, and more.

In 1947, the library purchased a Smith Corona typewriter for \$84.00. Today the library has 68 computers for staff use, and 72 for public use.

1950 – 1959

The Board saw the need for a new facility in the early Fifties as the population of Oak Lawn exploded with WWII veterans using the GI Bill to secure low cost mortgages. The number of residents grew from 8,700 in 1950 to over 27,000 by 1960. The Library Board contacted Springfield for help, and Laura Langston, Chief of Extension Services for the Illinois State Library, agreed that the condition of the present building and inadequacy of space demanded a new and larger facility.

The Board continued to add to the building fund, while at the same time maintaining the Wirtz house. Maintenance workers patched the leaky roof and shortened posts to flatten a bulge in the floor. Books that were not in demand were discarded and spending for new material increased 50%.

Early in the decade, Mrs. Simons presented the Board with a list of nine borrowers who refused to return books, and the Board deliberated calling the police to assist in the recovery of the material. Later the library began sending postcards and letters to request the return of overdue items.

Mrs. Simons resigned in April of 1952, and Delores "Dee" Kopf, who had been an assistant librarian since 1946, became the director. Mrs. Kopf began to take library science classes at the University of Chicago.

In 1954, the Board considered six proposals for a new building, finally selecting Ralph E.



Dee Kopf, Director, 1952-72



New construction, Chamberlain house in background

Ernst, a Chicago-based architect. His model featured a modern design centered on the library property. The Board awarded the general contractor bid to Oak Lawn firm John L. Burke, Inc. Harvey Wick, Village President and former chairman of the Library Board, laid the cornerstone on Sunday, October 24. The new one story L - shaped building featured face brick and a stone exterior. Inside, the 72 x 36 foot structure provided ample space for an adult and children's area, librarian's office, book workroom and boiler room. The new library housed 6,800 volumes.

To pay for the \$30,000 new building, the library board negotiated a 15 year loan from the Oak Lawn Trust and Savings bank to avoid buying bonds. Without any increase in rates, residents still paid less than \$1.00 per year on their tax bill for library services.

The new library opened on April 2, 1955, after closing one week for the move. Boy Scouts



Aerial view, 1957, little barn still standing



Library, 1955

and volunteers helped transfer the collection to the new building. The library held an Open House on Oct. 30 of the same year.

The new facility now opened 39.5 hours per week. Library hours ran from 1:30 to 5:30 pm and 7 to 9 pm Monday through Friday, as well as 10 am to 12 noon on Wednesday and 10 am to 5:30 pm on Saturday.

The library continued to buy more books - sometimes adding nearly 400 titles a month. By 1959, the library owned about 13,000 volumes. Phonograph records appeared in the collection. The first purchased records could be described as early audio books. Titles included the *Book of Psalms*, Kipling's *Just so Stories* and *The Best of Mark Twain*. However, residents could only check out the records on Wednesday evenings between 7 and 9 pm.

THEN AND NOW

The audiovisual collection, which first consisted of 52 records, now houses 32,500 items. The department continually explores and adds new formats. CDs replaced cassettes, which had replaced phonograph records. The library now purchases DVDs rather than videotapes, and movies on flash drives will soon be the next format. The collection also offers Blu-ray discs and Playaways, plus downloadable books and video.

During the Fifties, the library featured art exhibits from both the schools and the Oak Lawn Art Group. This tradition continues today with the art gallery on the second floor, featuring new exhibits each month from area residents and Oak Lawn Schools in the Youth Services Department.

1960 - 1969

Oak Lawn's growth continued with the number of residents increasing from about 27,500 in 1960 to more than 60,000 in 1970. Library use grew along with the population. Circulation jumped from about 30,500 in 1954 to nearly 135,000 in 1963, and the library collection increased to more than 21,000 books. The need for even more space became obvious. An addition completed in 1963 increased the building space from 2,078 square feet to over 5,600 square feet - almost by three fold. Adult material occupied the new section, and the children's collection remained in place. The addition featured more comfortable and attractive reading areas, study space, and more room for programs and meetings. The library could now also expand the book collection to the point where it became the largest in the southwestern suburbs. The library hours now ran from 1 to 9 pm Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday; 10 am to 9 pm Wednesday;

and 10 am to 5 pm on Saturday, giving residents 50 hours per week to make use of the facility.

In 1965, the Illinois General Assembly created Library Systems to encourage resource sharing among libraries. The system enabled the transfer of material between member libraries for their users. Oak Lawn joined the system in southwest Cook County the following year. Several years later, the Library Board agreed to issue Library System cards to residents that would allow them to borrow from other area libraries. Oak Lawn library trustee Alice Ihrig, known for her civic involvement, served on the system board. Mrs. Ihrig had also participated in the Illinois Constitutional Convention, served as an Oak Lawn village trustee, directed programs for Moraine Valley Community College, held a position with the American Library Trustee Association, and helped found the Oak Lawn League of Women Voters.

To reduce wait times, the library installed an automatic checkout machine. The library issued new cards with a metal plate that featured an embossed number. The machine stamped the number onto a book card - a unique card in each book that contained the title, author, and Dewey Decimal number or author's last name for fiction. Librarians filed book cards by due date and book classification. Later, the Board also installed the library's first copy machine.

In addition to supplying material for check out, the library sponsored a "Friday Night at



Library, 1964



Library Float in village's 60th anniversary parade, 1969

the Library” speaker series that hosted nationally respected figures. Euell Gibbons, naturalist and author of *“Stalking the Wild Asparagus”* promoted natural foods. *Time Magazine* film critic Richard Schickel gave a lecture entitled “Movie Makers and Movie Moguls: An American Epic.” Tribune writer and editor Robert Cromie and columnist Jack Mabley appeared. Award winning Indian Actress Madhur Jaffrey presented “A Thousand and One Nights,” a program of Eastern poetry and prose. Other programs featured authors Harry Mark Petrakis and Cleveland Amory. Petrakis had written stories about Greek immigrants in urban America, and Amory devoted his life to animal rights.

Library displays also grew popular, so the library purchased a display case. Library users saw model airplanes, coins, stonework, World

War II artifacts, models of Oak Lawn Civic Center buildings, art club paintings, and more. On the 100th anniversary of President Lincoln’s death, a “historymobile” parked outside the library to display relics from Lincoln’s life. More than 1,700 people toured the exhibit.

Reflecting the social values of the sixties, the Board passed a policy stating: “Books and other reading matter selected are chosen for values of interest, information, and enlightenment of all the people of the community. In no case should any book be excluded because of the race or nationality or the political or religious views of the writer.”

On April 21, 1967, a devastating tornado struck Oak Lawn. With trees on library property felled, the building barely escaped damage. The May board report noted that decreased circulation numbers reflected the turmoil in the village. The library agreed to provide temporary office space to the Small Business Administration, which offered an estimated 5 million dollars in loans to local businesses in need of repairs.

During the latter part of the decade, the Board realized the need for more expansion. They wanted to expand adult reading, the children’s section, the reference collection, the microfilm area, magazines, meeting rooms, and staff work space. The Board investigated the purchase of additional land on 95th Street, including the site of a tavern. Architect Ralph Ernst and library building consultant Peter Bury began designing a second addition.

The formation of a Historical Advisory Committee attested to a growing interest in local history. The library hired a part-time employee to organize a local historical department at the library. That staff member began to collect photos, old phone books, and school yearbooks. The fire chief donated pictures of the aftermath of the tornado. The library conducted oral history interviews that still remain in the local history collection.

THEN AND NOW

Today a full time local history coordinator replaces the Historical Advisory Committee and part-time staff of the sixties. The library actively works to preserve Oak Lawn's past through artifact collection and preservation, oral history, public programming, and research. The staff has scanned more than 1,000 documents and 3,700 photographs, which are accessible through the library's home page [<http://www.oaklawnlibrary.org>], and recently produced exhibits and programs about Oak Lawn veterans and the 1967 tornado.

In the Sixties, the Board arranged library programs. Now a full time public relations staff member coordinates these events. More than 5,500 people attended 157 adult programs during 2008.

1970 – 1980

Between 1970 and 1980 village growth slowed. The library spent the decade adjusting to the population boom of the previous twenty years. With two building additions and an increase in staffing, the library expanded to a

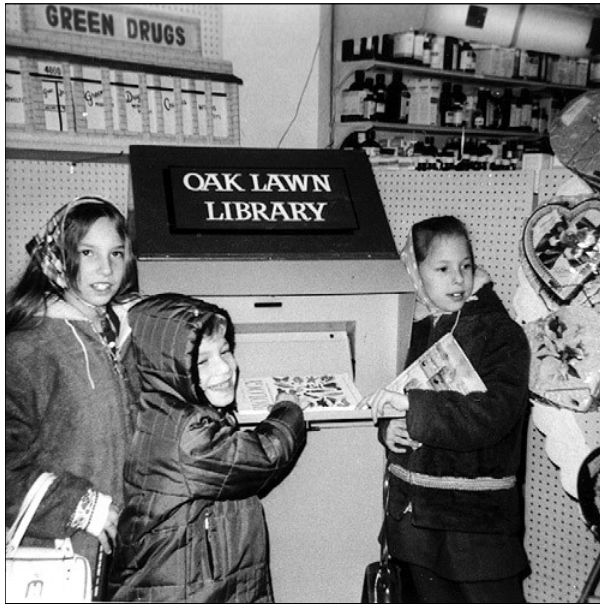
medium sized facility.

In 1970, the residents of Oak Lawn voted against a tax increase to fund the proposed addition by a vote of 1,223 no to 509 yes. (The town had more than 60,000 residents at that time). Despite the results, the Board felt determined to move ahead. They started by purchasing more property along 95th Street, including the site of the Dewey tavern, and then borrowed the money for construction. The new addition, dedicated in 1972, increased the library size to 11,300 square feet. A week of special events celebrated the opening, including Organization Day, which honored local groups; Old Timers Night; a film festival; staff recognition day; Governor Ogilvie Day; a Children's Day that featured a theatrical adaptation of Hansel and Gretel; and a formal dedication ceremony on May 28th.

The construction project added a basement for the children's area and additional space on



School pick up service, 1970



Book drop in Green Drugs, 1970s

the first floor, including a meeting room for community groups and programs. Even with this space, large crowds forced the library to turn people away from Friday night film screenings.

In 1971, the library owned about 43,000 books, and spent \$35,000 on the purchase of additional titles. Nearly 34,000 residents held library cards, and more than 185,000 check-outs occurred.

The Board hired the library's first professional librarian, Sandra Masson, to work in the children's department. Ms. Masson held pre-school story hours, seasonal parties, and film showings; planned summer reading events; and worked cooperatively with local schools. Young users flocked to the department when the library funded a bus to run between the



South side of library, prior to ground breaking ceremony, 1975



Demolition of Dewey Tavern prior to 1975 construction

schools and the library. Monitors and staggered pick up times helped accommodate the increased use.

A short time later, Nancy Stefan, a professional reference librarian, joined the staff, and the Board selected Paul Ax, a Rhode Island librarian, as director. The staff now numbered 26 and included circulation clerks, a secretary, nine shelvees, and two custodians.

With the enlarged facility, came a variety of new services. The library added Sunday hours, installed book drops at various sites throughout the village, purchased a TV for viewing stock reports, and offered tax forms for the convenience of residents.

The director hired Bill Goodfellow as a second reference librarian, as well as Sister Rita Bert to replace children's librarian Sandra Masson.

Even with the expansion, the library operated below Illinois Library Association minimum guidelines, so the Board planned a third addition of 25,000 square feet. Completed in 1976, this addition provided nearly 48,500 square feet to house about 72,000 volumes and a maximum of 315 people. The project added a second floor and enlarged the basement and first floor. A full time staff of 20 enabled the library to open 72 hours per week and led to an earlier opening time at 9:00 am.

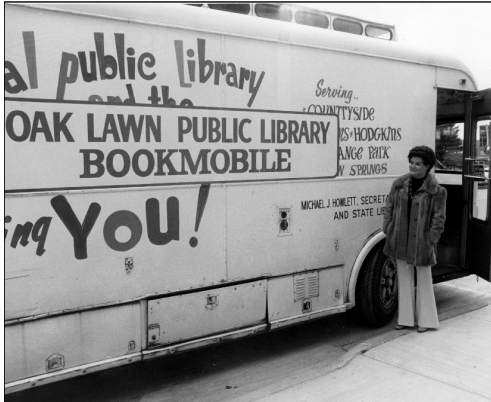


*James O'Brien,
Director, 1976-86*

The first floor housed adult fiction, non-fiction, and more than 400 magazines and newspapers. The children's department and a newly created fine arts and literature area resided on the second floor. The basement featured two community rooms for organizational meetings and library programs. The library circulated art prints, sculptures, slide sets along with a projector, 8mm films, tape cassettes and recordings. The board hired library director Leonard Swift, who was succeeded by James M. O'Brien in 1976.

Library use greatly increased - from more than 288,000 circulations in 1976 to 412,000 in 1978. The library installed an automated circulation system composed of four Cathode Ray Tube (CRT) units, early computers. The staff assigned all materials and cardholders a unique number or bar code. The CRT units electronically connected the book codes with the patron. This system eliminated the need for bulky paper circulation files and expedited the check out process.

The library began to quickly order material requested by library users, calling the new procedure "on demand purchasing." The book budget increased from about \$25,000 at the beginning of the decade to \$131,000 by 1980. In 1979, the library purchased its 100,000th book, *The Times Atlas of World History*, at a cost of \$50.00.



Bookmobile, 1970s



Library, 1977

Staff spent a great deal of time helping patrons both in person and by telephone to locate information. The Adult Services, Fine Arts, and Children's staff answered more than 19,000 reference questions in 1978. The Southwest Bar Association and 5th Circuit Court donated material for a law collection. The Suburban Library System rented space in the building for the back-up reference service and housed their collection, making additional material available to Oak Lawn users.

The library stopped the school to library bus service and made arrangements for a bookmobile through the Suburban Library System. Increased access to public transportation gradually allowed more patrons to visit the library. The Board eventually canceled the bookmobile after determining that the money spent on the program could be used more efficiently on services inside the library building.

The library added a local history room on the second floor. The director hired a local his-

tory librarian along with other staff - an assistant director, public relations manager, graphic artist, and head of circulation. The local history staff produced a series of brochures on Oak Lawn history, collected tornado articles, prepared a Community Analysis, and conducted oral history interviews.

Dee Kopf, former head librarian, along with former library trustees organized the Friends of the Oak Lawn Library organization. They wanted to stay involved with the library and to offer continued support for library services. Kopf remained active in the group and visited the library daily until her death in 1990.

At the end of the decade, the Board selected Chicago artist Abbott Pattison to design a sculpture for the 95th Street side of the building. Pattison's work had been featured at many buildings in the Chicagoland area, the Lincoln Library in Springfield, the Chicago Art Institute, and the Met - The New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, linking the li-

brary to other great cultural institutions. Mr. Pattison designed a group of semiabstract human figures, which he described by saying, “I hope to portray the relationship of reading and knowledge to the community and how that endeavor is again returned to the community. I have made the figures with a certain aura of mystery to show the enigmatic character of man and how the mysteries of life can be unlocked by the library.” The dedication of the sculpture took place on Dec. 9, 1979, marking a decade of significant library growth.

THEN AND NOW

In May 1978, eleven people met to form a Friends of the Library group with the purpose of promoting library use, providing opportunities for cultural enrichment, and funding purchases beyond the library’s budget. By November, 100 people had joined the group and 120 people participated in the Friends-sponsored tour of the Pompeii exhibit at the Art Institute. Today more than 830 members



Construction of the central staircase



Pattison sculpture

belong to the organization, making it proportionally one of the largest groups in the country. The Friends conduct all of the library’s book sales; operate the bookstore; plan cultural and educational bus trips; sponsor the *Sunday with the Friends* concerts and the Lyric Opera lecture series; and lead two book discussion clubs. The group purchased the library’s first computer, an IBM AT; funded Timex Computers for circulation; and most recently donated a digital microfilm reader scanner and digital video camera. All of the

equipment has helped the library stay at the forefront of technological advances. They have provided money to begin both the video and audio book collections and have funded countless other library purchases including the outdoor fountain in memory of Dee Kopf; aerial photographs of the village of Oak Lawn; genealogy books and material; and the micro-filming of Oak Lawn newspapers and local history records.

1980 – 1990

During the recession of the early Eighties, the library experienced budget cuts. The board and the administration closely examined services and activities. Budget adjustments included the elimination of Friday evening hours, a reduction in staff, cuts in the materials budget, and increases in fines. In November of 1980, the board unsuccessfully asked residents to vote in favor of the creation of a library district. Board president Lawrence Collings felt, “the wording on the proposal led



Staff member Lillian McAninch at early computer

many people to think that an additional tax was being proposed and it would appear that we were not successful in dispelling that point.” The following year further cuts occurred, with Sunday hours being eliminated for one month. Budget challenges continued through the decade forcing the library to discontinue its newsletter mailing and to solicit business funding for adult programs.



Reader Services desk, 1980s

Another challenge came from protests over the sex education book *Show Me*, housed in the parenting section. The book contained text from the psychiatrist Dr. Helga Fleischhauer-Hardt and nude photographs by Will McBride. *Show Me* appeared in Germany in 1974 and came to the U.S. one year later. When it came to the library's attention in 1980, only nine card holders had borrowed the book. In 1975 and 1976, judges in three states and Canada all ruled that *Show Me* was not obscene. Some readers appreciated the frank depiction of sexuality. Other Oak Lawn residents, led by

teacher Nancy Czerwec, viewed the material as child pornography and presented the board with 800 signatures asking that it be removed from the shelves. Over 200 people attended a heated meeting where residents voiced their opinions on the book's removal. The controversy ended with a compromise when board members decided to keep the title, but to store it in the librarian's office. The board restricted check out to adults. The library withdrew multiple copies of the book in early 1983. Each book had circulated more than 100 times, and excessive use caused them to fall apart. The U.S publisher St. Martin's Press eventually discontinued *Show Me*, stating that though they believed it was not pornographic, they could no longer afford the legal expenses to defend it. Today, the World Wide Library Catalog today lists 166 copies of the first edition held in U.S. libraries. A German publisher printed a second edition of the title in 1990.



Mayor Kolb and Library Trustee Leon Stevens examine the touch screen catalog

Material controversies continued with complaints regarding the books *Brace Yourself Bridget* and *The Christian World* and the film *The Tin Drum*. A patron objected to *Brace Yourself Bridget*, which purported to be the "official Irish sex manual" (all the pages were blank). Another patron objected to *The Christian World's* portrayal of the Christian faith, and a third person had mistakenly believed that *The Tin Drum*, an adaptation of a novel by Nobel Prize winning author Gunther Grass, was intended as a children's movie. The film depicted Germany's rapid descent under Nazism and contained a sexually explicit scene. The library retained all the material.

Installation of the public "Touch of the Future" computer catalog in late 1982 marked a significant milestone for the library. Ten terminals provided users with the ability to locate more than 2.1 million volumes held by participating libraries. Patrons touched the screen to select material by author or title, and the computer showed if the item was on shelf or checked out. Some libraries estimated this could save \$30,000 per year - the cost of maintaining a card catalog.

As the mid 1980's approached, the library board and administration felt they could find better uses for the existing space. Town statistics showed a stable population, with community residents opting to stay rather than move away. The trend caused difficulties for younger families trying to move into the village, and the number of school age children decreased while the number of senior citizens

grew. The board approved a remodeling plan that would provide a greater amount of convenient space for users, and utilize staff for improved patron services. The library planned to spend \$300,000 accumulated from operating surpluses, and applied for a \$200,000 federal grant.

A grand staircase, centralized check-out, more study areas, added patron services, and spacious quarters emerged from the year long project. Youth services moved from the basement to the first floor with a new story hour room. The crowded non-fiction area on the first floor merged with fine arts and moved to a larger space on the second floor, with local history material now displayed in an open area. Magazines and newspapers remained on the first floor, gaining seating and display area, and audiovisual services relocated there for user convenience. The library created a Reader Services desk to provide general information about the location of library departments, give assistance with book selection, and help patrons use the computer catalog. An open house in May 1987 celebrated the completion of the remodeling.

Director James O'Brien resigned from his position after ten years of service to become executive director of the Suburban Library System. He began in 1976 during a construction project and left as another neared completion. Two directors - John Moorman and Joy Kennedy - followed during the eighties.

To reach out to the community, the library continued to sponsor a variety of activities



James Casey, Director, 1992-

ranging from offering Moraine Valley Community College courses to holding blood drives to registering voters. Adults and children launched 1500 balloons in an event co-sponsored with the Oak Lawn National Bank - one balloon traveled all the way to White Cloud, Minnesota. Film series included the films of Humphrey Bogart, Spencer Tracy, Katherine Hepburn, John Wayne, and Gregory Peck. The Sunday music series featured a hand bells concert, jazz bands, dueling banjos, and the songs of Glenn Miller. Travelogues took viewers along a 5 month trek on the Appalachian Trail, to Alaska, Egypt, India, New Zealand, Australia and "Around the World in 90 Days". A "Know Your Town Series" featured the Oak Lawn Park District, Chamber of Commerce, PLOWS Council on Aging, and Southwest Resources for Counseling and Psychotherapy. Displays on energy conservation

and programs on economic stress, bicycle maintenance, and food co-ops reflected issues of the decade.

Statistics show the growth of the collection during these 10 years. Library holdings grew from more than 109,000 books in 1980 to more than 157,000 by 1990. The number of cardholders increased from nearly 31,500 people at the beginning of the Eighties to more than 54,000 in 1989. Yearly circulation increased by almost 78,000 transactions during the decade. Staff answered more than 56,000 reference questions in 1986 and more than 94,000 in 1989. 488 children registered for the summer reading program in 1983, while more than 1,570 readers participated by the end of the decade.



Aerial view, 1999

In addition to books, a 16 mm film projector, Polaroid cameras, Timex computers and VHS as well as Beta video tapes could be checked out. The library provided access to three typewriters and an Apple II computer with various programs. The staff provided computer instruction for both the Apple computer and the library's new catalog. A "computer fair" displayed a variety of home computers for comparison purposes.

THEN AND NOW

In 1987, the reader's services department introduced the "CDM Reading Club", with the Roman numerals representing 100, 500, and 1000 books read. In 2008, five members completed the 1000 book goal. In addition to consulting with library staff, readers can now find suggestions for reading material on the fiction database *NoveList*; join an online book club; subscribe to monthly book reviews; or join the "Best Sellers Club" to have selected material automatically placed on hold. And the recently added Hot Picks area offers users a chance to grab popular books at checkout without waiting.

1990-1999

Several staff members distinguished themselves as authors during this decade. William Goodfellow, head of reference services, compiled four titles: *SongCite*, *SongCite Supplement 1*, *Wedding Music*, and *Where's that Tune, An Index to Songs in Fakebooks*. These titles indexed songs in music collections, allowing users to easily locate specific song titles. Susan Baird, head of patron services, wrote *Audio Book Col-*

lections and Services. The book, published in 2000, gives instructions for planning, developing, marketing, and administering an audio book collection. A reviewer noted her book as being a core title for students and an invaluable aid for librarians. Library director Dr. James Casey wrote articles for publications including *American Libraries*, *Library Journal*, *Public Libraries*, and *Bottom Line: Managing Library Finances*, as well as *The Celator* and the *Numismatics International Bulletin* - two journals on the subject of the study of coins and medals.

Censorship issues drew national attention to the library in 1990 when the board voted to ban children under the age of 13 from the adult section of the library if their parents so desired. Board member Nancy Czerwec advocated this new policy. Czerwec had also led efforts in the eighties to ban the book *Show Me*. The board overturned the policy the next



Demolition, 2002



1954 Time capsule removed

month with the votes of members who were absent at the previous meeting. The library also heard appeals to ban the lesbian mystery *Beverly Malibu* and *The Limerick: 1700 Examples with Notes, Variants and Index*, which critics claimed defamed members of the Catholic clergy. Again, the library retained the titles.

Dr. James Casey replaced Joy Kennedy as library director in March 1992. Before coming to Oak Lawn, Dr. Casey served as director at the Pickaway County District Library in Ohio, head librarian of the Ohio Historical Society, and head reference librarian of Western Reserve Historical Society. At the beginning of his tenure, Dr. Casey expressed strong interest in exploring the opportunities available with new technology.

Under Casey's leadership, the Oak Lawn Library kept pace with new developments in the digital era. In 1993, the library installed a local area network (LAN) to link all computers in

the building. A year later, library users gained access to CD-ROM products. Early CD-ROM titles included: Magazine Index; Newsbank (a newspaper index); and Value Line (an investment tool). The library billed them as fun, fast, powerful, and economical. The introduction of CD-ROMs marked the beginning of the move from print to computer research tools.

The Nineties also saw an explosive growth in the Internet. By 1997, the library provided Internet access to the public, with one terminal in youth services and one in the reference department. The library installed more terminals for public use each year. The library also added its home page to the World Wide Web and gained a real presence in the virtual community.



Director Casey places time capsule into new cornerstone, 2003



Construction, 2003

During this time of steady economic growth, civic leaders and library supporters founded the Oak Lawn Library Community Foundation, providing an opportunity for businesses and individuals to make tax deductible contributions in support of library programs and service.

The library continued its sixty-year-old tradition of improving service based on changes in public demands. Minor remodeling took place. The projects enhanced both the youth services and audiovisual areas on the first floor - two heavily used areas. The renovation of the story hour room doubled its size, and us-



Youth Services Department, 1990

ers gained more direct access to audiovisual material. The renovations also combined two lower level meeting rooms, increasing seating space from 100 to 250. Painting and re-carpeting provided a fresh look to the interior of the building.

The population of Oak Lawn continued to decline during the decade, but library use increased significantly each year through 1994 when card holders checked out more than 674,000 items. Compared to 1975, circulation had risen 132%. During the Nineties, the library added nearly 98,000 books; more than 6,160 audio recordings; and approximately 7,800 videotapes.

Adult programming continued with Sunday music performances, travelogues, financial seminars, sign language classes, job strategy workshops, writing instruction classes, genealogy research symposiums, and lectures with

book signings by mystery writers. Events for youth and their families included shows from the Children's Theater of Western Springs and Roberts' Marionettes; four storytelling festivals with nationally recognized performers Jim May and Syd Lieberman; and an annual Great American Read Aloud Night with notable readers sharing their favorite books. Dorothy Haas, writer of the *Peanut Butter and Jelly* series, nature author Carol Lerner, and writer Debbie Dady all made appearances. Each summer the youth services department continued the summer reading club with themes such as Station Read 1990, Amazing Book Capers, Dive into Books, and Time Trek Readers. In 1993, 1878 young readers reported reading 35,697 titles.

THEN AND NOW

In the busiest year of the Nineties, the reference department answered over 96,500 questions, about one question every two minutes during library hours. The department, which once stood alone, now includes the computer center and periodicals, along with the re-established local history room. In 2008, magazine users made more than 18,500 requests for back issues and browsed current issues more than 8,400 times, while adult computer users logged nearly 54,000 sessions.

2000 – 2008

Since the library's last major expansion 25 years ago, the collection more than doubled in size and new technology impacted service and demands. On September 25, 2001, fourteen days after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Oak Lawn Village Board concurred with the Li-

brary Board in authorizing another expansion program. Director Dr. Casey reflected, "It was a bold action in defiance of the negativity and fear which the terrorists had hoped to instill in our country. In response to an act of destruction, the Oak Lawn community voted to build upon a long tradition of support for libraries and learning - important pillars of freedom and democracy." The Village Green Vista project enabled the library to replace the nearly 50 year old, one story building on the north end of the library campus with a modern two-story facility, including a full basement. When construction started in 2002, workers uncovered a 48-year-old time capsule embedded in the cornerstone of the oldest part of the building. Sealed inside a piece of limestone, staff found a copper box containing historic material in excellent condition. The documents, placed there in 1954, included an election ballot for the library board; photo-

graphs of the barn and Chamberlain house which once housed the collection; budgets; news articles about the library's history and important events; and a letter from Mayor Harvey Wick wishing the library well, along with \$1.00 in the event a new building fund was needed. The addition now holds a new time capsule.

The library grew more than 21,000 square feet in size. This drastic increase in square footage provided for a computer lab; a drive-up book drop; a public lounge area; beautiful views of the village green area; expanded collection areas for all materials; added seating and group study rooms; community meeting space; space for the Friends Ongoing Book Sale; a café; and space for future growth. A 92 year old avid reader, Pauline Daniels, attended the September 19, 2004 dedication, her third such ceremony. She had participated in festivities when the library first opened in 1954 and again in 1972 when the library expanded south to 95th Street. Two years after the 2004 dedication, the library re-established a local history room and hired a historian with funds provided by the Oak Lawn Library Community Foundation.

Library staff received additional recognition for their professional work. In 2001, the Illinois Library Association awarded Bill Goodfellow its Excellence in Reference Award for his creation of numerous indexes and collections for the library, including the local obituary index, songbook and automotive repair manual collections, and the online Oak Lawn



Second floor view of the Village Green

history archives. Author Archibald McKinlay used numerous pictures from these archives in the publication of his book *The Oak Lawn Story*, a photographic history of the village. Four years later, the Illinois Library Association (ILA) named Dr. Casey Librarian of the Year. In addition to his work at Oak Lawn, Dr. Casey's contributions to the library community included participation on the American Library Association Council as well as other committees of the Metropolitan Library System and ILA. The annual publication *Who's Who in America* listed Dr. Casey beginning in 2000.

The library's subscription to *Playboy* fueled public debate in 2005, when Oak Lawn resident Mark Decker requested the title be eliminated from the magazine collection. The Library Board voted unanimously to keep the title citing its frequency of use and inclusion in indexing services. In continuing his campaign, Mr. Decker gathered signatures in favor of the magazine's removal and participated in a discussion on WLS AM Radio. While the Illinois Family Institute and the Oak Lawn Village Board lobbied to remove the title, the American Library Association supported the library's stance, and a *Playboy* spokesman noted that no courts have ruled the publication to be obscene. A *The Daily Southtown* published an editorial, "Oak Lawn Library Made Right Decision on Playboy Magazine," while *Southtown* readers voiced opinions on both sides of the issue in the public forum section of the paper. The Illinois Library Association selected the

Oak Lawn Library Board of Trustees for its Intellectual Freedom Award in 2006.

New technology continued to impact library operations. With cardholders able to place their own requests for material, inter-library loans increased substantially. In 2000, the library filled about 10,000 requests for other system card holders, while the number jumped to nearly 49,000 in 2008. Statistics show the growing popularity of audiovisual material, with adult circulation increasing from 97,000 in 2000 to more than 125,000 in 2008. Hits on the library's home page grew from 209,000 in 2005 to more than 484,000 by 2008. Database use increased during the decade – by 2008 users conducted more than 7000 searches on ALLDATA for automobile repair; patrons made more than 13,000 inquiries on NewsBank (a national database of newspapers); and approximately 100 people each month used Ancestry to research their family histories.

THEN AND NOW

Before the renovation, users often waited for computers or Internet access. The new computer center provided much greater availability and began offering classes for the public covering Internet basics, e-mail, word processing, Excel, Publisher, eBay and more, with attendance topping 700 in 2008. The staff also offered drop-in computer help once a week and instituted innovations on the library web site - adding blogs, a Facebook page, and video projects.

2009 AND BEYOND

Throughout its 73 year history, the Oak Lawn Public Library has grown along with the community. As the village has expanded and diversified, the library has provided more space, professional staff, convenient hours, materials, Internet and computer access, community events, and classes. What started out as a Little Red Library housed in a barn has become a modern facility with more than 280,000 books; 33,500 audiovisual items; 830 magazines; computer availability that includes wireless Internet access; and a website on the Internet providing worldwide access to library holdings and services. As our society becomes more information driven and depends on an increasing variety of media, the Oak Lawn Library will continue to adapt in order to meet the needs of Oak Lawn residents. As former Director James O' Brien noted, "The people of Oak Lawn and the Library Board have never been satisfied with standing still. They recognize the ever-changing needs of the community and the obligation of the Library to meet those needs. The result is a Library that moves steadily forward." So, on this, the village's 100th anniversary, the library marks a recommitment to its mission:

"To assemble, preserve and provide access to information in a variety of formats to serve the educational and recreational needs of the community.

To promote and stimulate the communication of ideas, fostering enlightened citizenship and the enrichment of personal lives.

To encourage and provide all citizens the opportunity and resources for lifelong learning."





OAK LAWN PUBLIC LIBRARY

9427 S. Raymond

Oak Lawn, IL 60453

(708)422-4990

www.oaklawnlibrary.org
