



Brief History of The Victoria Public Library

The Victoria Public Library had its philosophical beginnings circa 1855 with the organization of the Victoria Literary Society. This society was composed of girls from Mrs. Viola Case's academy for girls. After a lapse of several years, the newly organized Bronte Literary Society was formed in 1873. The society kept a collection of around eleven books. According to popular belief, they were housed in a dry goods box, kept under Mrs. Case's bed, and brought out each week to use in connection with literary society programs. In 1881, Mr. Will Venable loaned 25 books to the society for one year. The number of books increased, and Mrs. J. L. Dupree was elected librarian.

In 1885, a young man placed a book in the collection "not fit for reading". Several agitated meetings later, the book was removed from the shelves. Consequently, a ten-member committee was formed to read and censor all future donations.

After Mrs. Case's death in 1894, Mrs. Pridham offered the use of her photography studio to the Bronte Club to house the library. In 1898, the library was moved to the home of Mrs. J. M. Brownson. Later that year it moved to the Leibold Drug store on Main and Constitution Streets. In 1898, Mr. Peticolas offered rent free space in his building on Main across from DeLeon Plaza. The library was moved there above Shield's Drug Store.

On April 11, 1899, a book reception was held at the Opera House. Admission was a book

donated to the library. Four hundred books were donated.

On May 12, 1899, the library went public with 515 volumes and a printed catalog. One hundred volumes and a glass book case were donated by the Young Men's Debating Society. By May 1900, the library owned 757 books. Membership was one dollar. Library hours were from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. two afternoons a week. Books were checked out for two weeks, but recent fiction were "seven day" books and not renewable. Fines were imposed on overdue material, and members of the Bronte Club acted as librarians. By 1903 there were 1,030 books in the collection. Money making projects included concerts, minstrel shows, and art exhibits. Proceeds went to library costs and the purchase of new books.

In 1921 the Bronte Club rented two rooms over the Ara grocery store for \$10 a month. Members from each men's club, along with Bronte Club members, acted as a board of directors. The Rotary Club gave the library its subscription to the *National Geographic* and a set of *Encyclopedia Britannica* in 1923.

The Masonic lodge offered the club use of the lower floor of its building in 1924 to house the library. Therefore, the library moved to 206 W. Forrest Street. Library hours were expanded to 2:30 to 6:30 p.m., and the librarian's salary raised from \$15 to \$30 a month. The City donated \$15 and the County \$300 to library upkeep.

By 1932 Mrs. Emma McFaddin Nave, who had built a memorial to house her late husband's paintings, offered the use of the building to the library. The Nave memorial building was to be the home of the library for the next 43 years.

During World War II a box of 300 books was sent to soldiers, and in 1948 Mayor H. W. Griffith notified Mrs. E. J. Dysart of the Bronte Library that City police would be available once a month to collect overdue library books.

1949 was the year the librarian, Mrs. L. E. Silverthorn, initiated story hour for children. The first reader was Mrs. Henry Timberlake. By 1950 the library owned 15,000 volumes and operated a county extension service to rural schools at McFaddin, Mission Valley and Guadalupe. One yearly source of revenue was Tag Day. The Bronte Club set up booths at DeLeon Plaza and sold Library Tags for townspeople. Proceeds were used for the purchase of books.

In 1959 Union Carbide Corporation donated clear plastic covers to protect the 20,000 plus book collection. That same year a check out desk was installed -- replacing the old desk.

Thursday nights were added to library hours in 1961 to match commercial businesses' practice of being open on Thursday evenings until 9 p.m. There was also talk of moving the library to the old post office building after that agency's removal to the new Federal Building. Ultimately, the expense proved to be too much, and the move was reconsidered.

The City of Victoria assumed ownership of the library in 1971, and took over its administration from the Bronte club who had established the library over 70 years earlier. A bond issue was discussed for a new facility. In the next four years, land was acquired from the O'Connor

Foundation, a bond issue passed, and a Friends of the Library group was formed.

The new Victoria Public Library building located at 302 North Main Street was opened to the public on October 4th, 1975.

Circulation for the Bronte Library in 1900 totaled 1,911 volumes. By 1977, circulation for the Victoria Public Library was 243,634 volumes.

On November 23rd, 1979, the millionth book was checked out of the Victoria Public Library.

On August 7, 1980, a security system is a success with an annual book loss rate of three to four percent. The system was purchased by the Friends and paid for itself in one year with savings accomplished by not having to replace books.

On May 7, 1981, the Library received an Apple II microcomputer purchased by the Sandolphon Study Club and the Friends of the Library. The computerized circulation systems were activated on December 13, 1982 and connected us with the Victoria Community College.

In 1991, new carpet was installed in the Library, and new shelves were installed in the local history room.

In 1996 Victoria Housing Finance Corp. pledged to provide \$30,000 for the Library to get wired onto the internet. On February 18, 1998, internet access was available to the public at the Library.

In 2002 circulation had risen to 272,044 volumes. In March of 2003 the Strategic

Planning Committee and Consultants met to discuss the future of the Library.

In 2007, wireless internet access became available at the Library. In May 2008, the Library interior was renovated with new carpet, stonework, and shelving placement.

In January 2009, James Stewart, Library Director, retired after 30 years of service. He was superseded by Dayna Williams-Capone, who had been serving as the Assistant Library Director since 2007.

In 2011 the Library's five-year strategic plan was created based on input from the Library Advisory Board, patrons, staff, and local focus groups of all backgrounds and ages.

In November of 2013 the Children's space was renovated with graphic design paint, a new entryway and book bins. The public restrooms were renovated in 2014.

In 2015, a new security gate system was installed and radio frequency identification tags were placed on all library materials. The self-check out machine was updated as well.

In 2016, the 2011 five-year strategic plan was reviewed, and the Library had met or exceeded about 95 percent of its plan. We continued to work closely with our community partners and grow our outreach. The 2017-2022 strategic plan was implemented in January 2017 and again was formulated with input from the Library Advisory Board, patrons, staff, and local focus groups of all backgrounds and ages.

In 2017, we added a 3D printer for public use, new seating areas, and replaced our floor in the staff break room. Additionally, our attendance at storytimes and Spring Break programs increased substantially.

Hurricane Harvey hit Victoria in August 2017 and the Library was closed for twelve days. The library sustained water damage in the meeting room and 2nd floor office space. Luckily, none of the library's collections were damaged. We continued to provide service to the public by providing a materials pickup service and offsite storytimes at St. Francis Episcopal Church.

In 2017 circulation was approximately 375,587 volumes per year. Plans in 2018 to 2019 included the addition of a family restroom and new carpet and a continued focus on our strategic plan goals and mission.

In March of 2020 the library was faced with the global COVID-19 Pandemic and had to adapt to finding new ways to reach Patrons. During this time of no-contact, the Library implemented a curbside pick-up service & phone reference for Patrons to access physical materials and information. The Programming departments held virtual Story times, online trivia games, crafts & more via videos posted on the Library's social media pages. The library also made getting a membership card accessible thru our website.

The Library used this time to update the main floor with new carpets and flooring, combining the information and service desk to one streamlined service area and reorganizing the collections. The library re-opened to the public on June 1, 2020 with safety precautions in place for staff & patrons.

To accommodate the growing Victoria community, in 2022 the Library worked closely with Maureen Arndt, AIA, IIDA, a specialist in library design to create a new strategic plan. To include the general public in the process, the library hosted community meetings with local non-profits in addition to hosting an online survey. With this ongoing project, the library hopes to better plan their strategic goals for growth and development in line with meeting the community's needs and desires.

The library also added new updates to the building with new perimeter lighting outside & hurricane proof window film to all the windows.