

# Library a study in survival

**A decade ago, there was talk that the Stanford L. Warren Library might no longer be needed. But today it is thriving, a tribute to the Durham library's rich history.**

BY ALISON K. McLAURIN  
STAFF WRITER

**DURHAM** —In one form or another, the Stanford L. Warren Library has been serving the needs of the Bull City's black community for nearly 80 years.

Now, after sweeping renovations to bring it up to date, supporters hope the aging facility on Fayetteville Street can keep doing that for years to come.

Since December 1991, the library has gotten a face-lift costing about \$240,000. The work included re-roofing the entire structure, adding a foyer to the children's level and reconstructing the handicapped-access area.

Friends of the library say the project, which is nearly complete, is a symbol of survival.

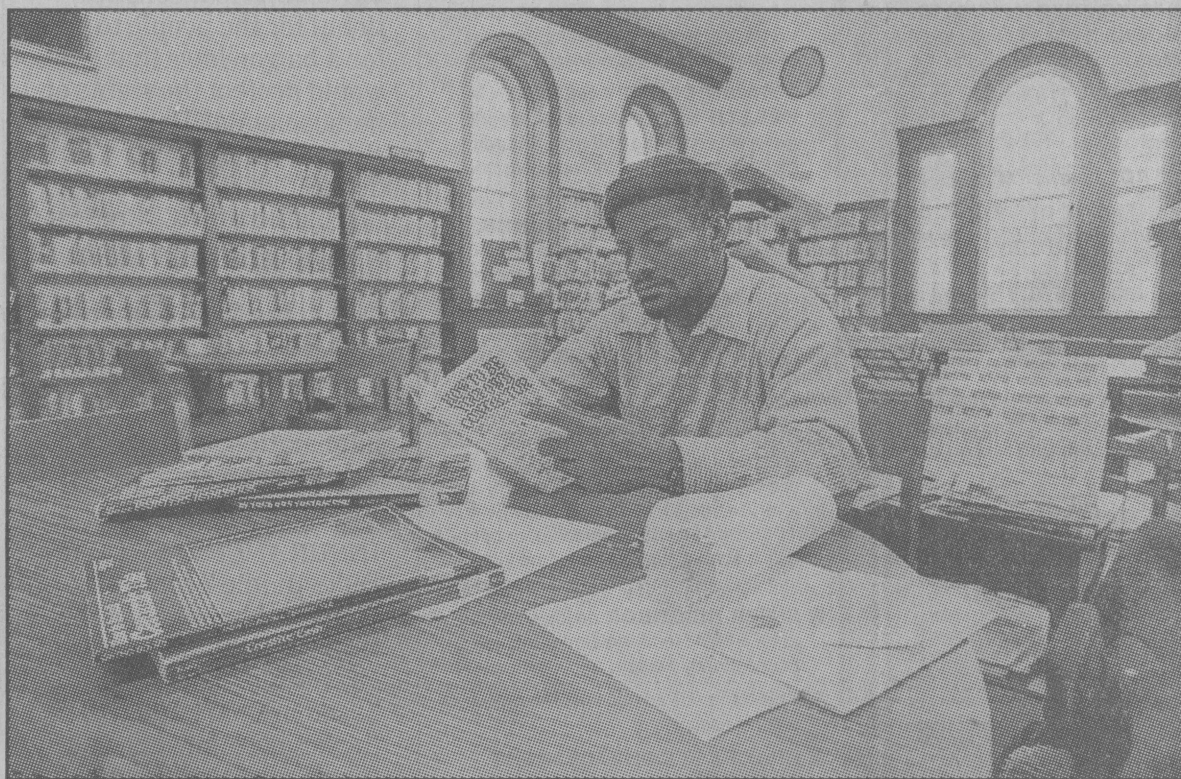
In 1980, when the county's new main branch was built on North Roxboro Street about a mile away, there was talk that the Stanford Warren building might no longer be needed.

But today it is thriving. William Gattis, branch manager since 1988, says it's the library's legacy that keeps it going.

"It has too much of a history to close," Gattis said. "You may hear uninformed people say they would like to see it closed, but that won't happen."

Stanford Warren's rich past includes a stint as the Durham Colored Library, well before it became a part of the county system in 1966. It was only the second black library in the state, with its own black board of trustees. The first, the Brevard Street Library in Charlotte, began in 1905.

Stanford Warren also boasts that it is the only one of Durham's seven branches that offers public access to Apple 2 computers. It is also the only branch other than the main one with its own resource center and service levels on two floors.



Drexel Yarborough reads up on contracting at the Stanford L. Warren Library on Fayetteville Street

STAFF PHOTOS BY CHUCK LIDDY

But it's really the history that makes it special.

Aaron McDuffie Moore, a black physician, started the library in the basement of White Rock Baptist Church in 1913.

Three years later, it moved to the corner of Fayetteville and Pettigrew streets to a building owned by John Merrick, a black businessman. It was there that it was renamed the Durham Colored Library.

"It began as part of an overall scheme to serve the black community," he said. "They say that necessity is the mother of invention. Well, part of that was survival."

In 1939, Durham physician Stanford L. Warren bought a lot on Fayetteville Street for \$4,000. It soon became the library's new home.

The library is also unique because of some its holdings, including an African-American Collection — the Selena Warren Wheeler collection — named after Warren's daughter. Previously called the Negro collection, it is a special gathering of books about black culture, history and literature,

comprising 4,732 volumes.

Wheeler, 81, the second library director during 1932-1945, said she remembers hard times.

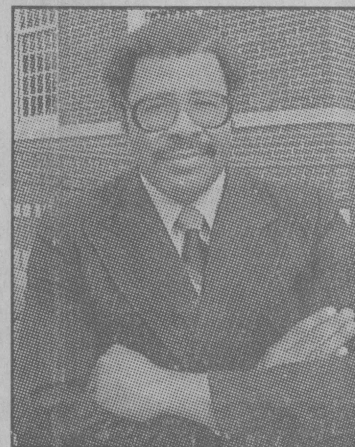
"You had to enjoy it because you weren't paid anything," she said. "There wasn't much money in the beginning. We started working for \$40 a month, so you can imagine. But we really did enjoy it."

Tucker said Warren's presence was felt long after his death.

"I used to straighten the books at night," she said. "And I would hear them creaking and I would say, 'Dr. Warren doesn't like the way I have them up there, so he's rearranging them.'"

Gattis agreed that the presence of the founding fathers is what keeps the library going today.

"It becomes an intricately woven family kind of affair that is destined to be successful because of their drive and their Midas-like touch, everything turns to gold," he said. "This is not to say that the struggle was not there, the suffering was not there. The will to survive was definitely there."



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