

History of the Durham County Library and the Stanford L. Warren Library

The story of public libraries in Durham begins with a June 1895 meeting of the Canterbury Club, at which the literary group debated the question of how club members could contribute to their young city's development. Edwin Mims, professor of English at Trinity College (now Duke University), suggested a public library. Lalla Ruth Carr, club member and daughter of prominent Durhamite Julian S. Carr, sold her father on the idea, and he donated a lot worth \$2500 at Durham's Five Points. Durham Public Library opened on February 10, 1898, without help from national philanthropic organizations and in a generally poor, rural, largely illiterate region of the country—an amazing feat.

For the first decade and a half the library was run by a caretaker and overseen by the Board of Trustees and the Board of Lady Managers, whose main purpose was to raise money. The early years were difficult, with financial problems and, after a while, a lack of interest and support. The first step to modernize the library was to hire a professional librarian, something no other library in the state had done. Lillian Baker Griggs arrived in Durham at the end of June 1911.

Durham's African-American library owed its existence to the vision and commitment of one person—Dr. Aaron McDuffie Moore. In 1913, Moore set up a 798-volume library in the basement of White Rock Baptist Church where he was a Sunday School teacher. The library remained in the church for three years. Moore's business partner, John Merrick, owned a building on the corner of Fayetteville and Pettigrew Streets, which he agreed to rent to the library. On August 14, 1916, the Durham Colored Library—the second library for African Americans in the state—opened its doors to the public with Hattie B. Wooten as its first librarian.

Meanwhile, the Durham Public Library outgrew its first building. At Griggs's suggestion, the library board applied for and received a Carnegie Foundation grant for \$32,000 to build a new one. On July 6, 1921, Durham's new state-of-the-art library, designed by master library designer Edward L. Tilton of New York, opened. A chance meeting of Griggs with the county superintendent of education and R. L. Baldwin, friend and Kiwanis Club member, resulted in North Carolina's first bookmobile, purchased by the Kiwanis Club in 1923 and aptly named Miss Kiwanis. The Kiwanis Club also donated funds to help open a children's room in 1930. Griggs's other accomplishments included sending books to Durham's mill districts, starting story hours for children and extending service to Durham's rural communities. In 1923 Griggs resigned her position in Durham to work for the North Carolina State Library Commission. Clara Crawford, who had served as cataloger and assistant librarian under Griggs for two years, took over as librarian.

Dr. Stanford L. Warren, a prominent, forward-thinking physician and businessman became president of the Durham Colored Library Board of Trustees in 1923. Through the effort of Warren, other board members and Hattie Wooten, the Durham Colored Library soon became a central community institution, with Wooten spreading the word about the library and developing numerous programs.

By the mid-1930s the Durham Public Library structure built in 1921 was inadequate and needed repair. Although various means of raising the funds to expand or replace it were tried, none succeeded, and the building remained Durham County Library's home for the next four and a half decades.

Hattie Wooten died in November 1932, and Selena Warren Wheeler became director of the Durham Colored Library. She was the daughter of Stanford Warren and wife of John H. Wheeler, trustee and secretary of the library board from 1931 to 1966 and lifetime library advocate. Through the efforts of these three, Durham's African-American library expanded its programs, built a new library, extended its county outreach and secured significant increases in appropriations from local authorities.

In 1939 Stanford Warren donated \$4,000 to purchase a lot at the corner of Fayetteville and Umstead streets for a new library building. The opening of the library, named after Stanford L. Warren, on January 17, 1940, brought about a dramatic expansion of services. The new library contained a separate children's room, and on Mrs. Wheeler's advice, the library designated its collection of books on and by African Americans as a non-circulating special collection. The library introduced bookmobile service in 1942.

On March 27, 1947, the Durham Public Library celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. In the half century since its founding, the number of books had grown from a small collection donated by members of the community to over 30,000 volumes. Thousands of these books were stored in the basement of City Hall and at the old East Durham Cotton Mill because of lack of space. With leaks, crumbling plaster and basement flooding, the building's condition was approaching the danger point.

Likewise, the Stanford L. Warren Library had filled to capacity by the end of the war. In the fall of 1945, Ray Moore took over as librarian when Wheeler resigned. During the late forties and 1950s, both Moore and Crawford dealt with the space problem by increasing bookmobile service, constructing annexes and developing branch libraries. The first branch of the white library opened at Carr Methodist Church in March 1944; the second in Forest Hills Clubhouse in 1947. In 1954 Stanford L. Warren Library set up a branch in the McDougald Terrace housing project, in 1960 at the John Avery Boys Club and in 1962 Bragtown.

A major, long-term initiative of Ray Moore's early tenure was the establishment of the Library Corner for the Blind. In 1949 Lyda Moore Merrick (the daughter of Aaron Moore and daughter-in-law of John Merrick), chairman of the Board of Trustees, was inspired by her blind friend, John C. Washington, to set up a library club and resource center for blind people. After two years of successful programs and growing membership, Washington and Merrick collaborated to establish the Negro Braille Magazine, which achieved national and even international circulation.

In 1965 George R. Linder was hired as Durham Public Library Director after a five-year stint by Audrey Johnson Cushman. He was specifically tasked with guiding the merger of the black and white libraries and serving as director of a combined system housed in a new facility. Linder's hiring and the creation of a unified system ushered in a twelve-year period of defeated bond elections, neglect of the library by local officials, even more crowded and deteriorating conditions and extreme frustration for the library's advocates. On September 14, 1976, voters finally and overwhelmingly approved the construction of Durham's first new library since 1921.

The new 65,000-square-foot facility opened March 17, 1980, with a children's room, an audiovisual room, capacious office and work space and a North Carolina Room. The North Carolina Room enabled the library to consolidate the collection of materials relating to North Carolina that was started with Julian Carr's donations beginning in 1897.

Dale Gaddis became director in 1982 after Linder's retirement. Her first major accomplishment was the renovation of the Stanford L. Warren Branch. The Library Board of Trustees appointed a committee in the fall of 1983 headed by Constance Watts (granddaughter of Aaron Moore and John Merrick). The branch reopened its doors in November 1985 under the leadership of Shirley Brown, who renewed its programs and services.

The opening of the Southwest Branch in October 1992 brought the total number of branches in the system to seven, the others being Bragtown, McDougald Terrace, North Durham, Parkwood, Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club and Stanford L. Warren.

Another major initiative of Gaddis' early tenure was bringing the system into the computer age. In fiscal year 1989-1990 the library reached an impressive milestone—one million volumes circulated—which could not have happened without automation. In 1997 county government agreed to provide funding for an entirely new aspect of library service, public Internet access.

In November 2001 Durham County voters passed a bond issue to help build regional libraries in the county's eastern and northern sections and set the stage to expand services in fast-growing southern Durham. The first, East Regional, opened June 16, 2006 followed by North Regional on January 30, 2007.

Dale Gaddis, who retired in 2002, was replaced by Philip Cherry III. During Cherry's tenure the library received a National Endowment for the Humanities grant that brought greatly expanded humanities programming and a paid humanities program staff person to the library system. In 2006 Hampton "Skip" Auld replaced Cherry as library director.

On September 7, 2006, Stanford L. Warren Branch Library reopened after a renovation and expansion which won two local awards. In May 2008 the Durham City/County Planning Department awarded the renovation the Golden Leaf Award for community appearance, and in January 2008 the renovation won the Spirit of Hayti Legacy Preserver Award for Historic Preservation, given by the St. Joseph Historic Foundation.

After more than a century of service Durham County Library is now a regional system. With the opening of the renovated Southwest and South Regional Libraries in 2010, Durham County has a full-service library within five miles of nearly every Durham citizen. The library offers more than 200 public access computers and free WiFi in all library locations. In addition to traditional library books and magazines, the library offers CDs, DVDs, audiobooks, downloadable ebooks and online databases for research. With more than 2 million visitors annually to a library location, an additional 2 million visitors to the library website, as well as 5,000-plus programs for children, teens and adults, the Durham County Library system remains vitally relevant to the Durham community at all stages of life.