

Allegheny County Library System A Brief History

On July 1, 1960, the public libraries located in Cumberland, Frostburg, LaVale, Pennsylvania Avenue School and Westernport became the Allegheny County Library System.

In July 1963, Mary Walsh retired as the Director of the Library system after 39 years of service to the community. Ms Walsh, hired in 1924 by the City of Cumberland, built and merged the libraries of Allegheny County into the Allegheny County Library System.

From July 1963 through June, 1964 Charles Blank served as Director and established incremental wage scales for personnel, standardized open hours, and introduced a new charge out system.

In July 1964, Assistant Director Robert Neal took over as Director and embarked on an ambitious plan to extend library service throughout the community. Mr. Neal oversaw the construction of the current LaVale, South Cumberland, and Westernport branches in addition to introducing bookmobile service to our community. In September 1969, the Allegheny County Library on Washington Street was opened to the public on Sunday's from 1 to 5:00 PM, becoming the first public library in the state to offer Sunday hours.

In 1993, the Library Board of Trustees appointed Ms. Jane Rustin to serve as the Director. Ms. Rustin began the process of automating the library system as well as starting the new Frostburg and George's Creek library branches.

In January 2000, Mr. John Taube was appointed Library System Director. Mr. Taube has brought many new innovations to the library system, and expanded the library's services to include public computer classes and free public computers in every branch, as well as introducing the public to new collections. In addition, Mr. Taube was responsible for the renovations of the Washington Street Library in 2005 and the Westernport Library in 2008.

Washington Street Library



The Cumberland Free Public Library was opened in March 1924 on Greene Street. The City of Cumberland established a free public library on the first floor of a small home and appropriated \$2000 for maintenance and salaries. The library was open 38 hours a week and purchased books and magazines with funds received from private donations and library social functions. In June 1934, the library was moved to its present location which formerly housed the Allegheny County Academy. At this time the city's contribution was increased to \$6500.

The County Board of Library Trustees approached the County Commissioners, who agreed to share half the cost with the State for an addition to the Academy building. Construction began in 1965 and the new \$190,000 addition was dedicated on May 7, 1966.

In 2005, the Washington Street Library re-opened after a 10 month renovation that added an elevator to the mezzanine, and 2nd floor, a meeting room, and space for staff offices. The 1.2 million dollar renovation was funded with a combination of state, local, and library funds. The renovation moved the Maryland Room to the first floor, allowed staff to offer computer classes, and created a story-hour steeple circle for our children's programs.

Frostburg Library



The Frostburg-George's Creek A.A.U.B. Education Group organized a Friends of the Frostburg Public Library in July 1955. They opened the first public library in Frostburg located on the first floor of a vacant grocery store on Broadway.

In June 1957, the library moved to the first floor of the Masonic Temple. Through the efforts of the county library board, local board of trustees, and the City of Frostburg, construction of a new library for that community began in December

1960. The facility located at 90 E. Main was opened in September 1961. This was the first building constructed in Allegany County specifically for library purposes. Through the fundraising efforts of local citizens, the current Frostburg Branch was constructed and opened at 65 E Main in January 1999. The facility is 10,400 square feet and cost 1.7 million dollars.

In 2003, thanks to a gift from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, staff transitioned a meeting room into the Gates Computer Lab. This 11 station lab provided state of the art computers for our public and initiated the start of offering computer classes to the public.

LaVale Library

In April 1953, members of the Century Club, a women’s service organization, opened a public children’s library in the first floor of the Rexall Drug Store.



In the spring of 1955, a local realtor deeded the vacated State Police Barracks to the Century Club for use as a public library. The building was renovated by the husbands of the club members and was opened to the public in September 1956.

The LaVale Civic Improvement Association led the fundraising efforts to build the present 8800 square foot facility. The current building was dedicated September 28, 1975

South Cumberland Library

The first branch of the Cumberland Free Public Library was established in a classroom at the Pennsylvania Avenue School starting in fall 1934. The South Cumberland Library Building Corporation was formed and successfully moved the library to 301 Virginia Avenue in January 1965. This location proved more accessible to the public.



Ground was broken on the present facility on March 9, 1981. The current facility, located at 100 Seymour Street, was dedicated on December 12, 1982. The building occupies 9000 square feet on a lot approximately 120’ X 100’ and 110 linear feet of the structure faces Seymour Street. The South Cumberland branch cost approximately \$862,000.

Westernport Library



In the fall of 1924, a local citizen advertised for gift books in a local newspaper and by December 100 books had been donated. The City Council gave its permission to have them placed on the second floor of the city building. They were later moved to First floor of City Building in spring 1945. Construction on the present building began on April 1969 and the new building was dedicated in February 1970. The \$170,000 cost was shared by the Mayor and Commissioners of Westernport, and County Library Trustees, Westvaco, a local citizen, and LSCA Funds.

In the Fall of 2008, the Westernport community celebrated the re-opening of the branch after a 6 month renovation project. The renovation modernized the layout and updated the infrastructure to support additional demand. In addition, the new furniture compliments “Reeves Woods,” an enchanted forest story hour area made possible by the many gifts of Margaret Reeves. The Adult reading area also features a mobile constructed by local sculptor Kurt Bonello.

George's Creek Library



In 1989, the citizens of the George's Creek region began fundraising for a branch of the Allegany County Library System to serve citizens of the George's Creek region. This 6400 square foot branch was opened in March 2001.

The large windows framed with a masonry arch in the front and back of the library and the Children's Story Tower represent the Lonaconing Iron Furnace that was used in the mid-1800's by the George's Creek Coal and Iron Company to make iron from coal. The purplish black support posts down the middle of the library and along the walkway outside, represent the pillars of coal left standing to support the mines. We are the only library in the area with a meeting/history room. This room houses the 1st American League MVP trophy, it was awarded to Lefty Grove, a former Lonaconing resident. The room also has lots of local historical information and artifacts including a dress worn by Mrs. John Alexander, the wife of the founder of the town. Many people use this room for genealogy research. During the summer of 2008, the town erected a playground with picnic tables and benches at the back of the library. In 2009 the quiet study was changed into a teen room for our local youth.

Allegany County Bookmobile



The first bookmobile was purchased with LSCA Title I funds and began operation in April 1961, with 13 stops and a capacity of 1800 books. The county's first library on wheels cost \$11,390. The Library System's second bookmobile began operation in July 1971.

Through a generous gift of the Skitarelic Family, the bookmobile was replaced and began operation in 1996.

In response to the total devastation of public libraries in Hancock County Mississippi due to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Board of Trustees donated the bookmobile to the Hancock County Public Library System. In partnership with the Maryland Library Association, staff members Jan Carder, Judy Castleman, and John Taube delivered the vehicle to community.

Once again, thanks to the continuing support of the Skitarelic Family, the Allegany County Library System dedicated a new bookmobile in the summer of 2006.