

A Brief History of the Florida Public Library

On October 24, 1958 the Florida Public Library was chartered as an Association Public Library to serve the people of the Village of Florida and the Pine Island area. Fifty-eight years later (October 2016) the Florida Public Library is a school district library which serves the residents of the Florida Union Free School District. The library received its absolute charter on April 23, 2002 after having a provisional charter for many years and receiving extensions over the years.

The library had its early beginnings when there was a movement in the community to form a library. This took place in 1956 and with the support of many businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, PTA, and civic minded citizens, the Boy Scouts began to collect books. Mr. William Rosenberg, a local businessman, offered a year's free use of a building to store the books. Mr. Lou Gordon donated space above the bowling alley in what is now the professional building for the cataloging and preparation of the books. In October 1959, the Florida Public Library joined the Ramapo Catskill Library System which was just forming. At this time the library was housed in the basement rooms of the Sokoloski building which was located next to the present fire house on South Main Street. The library had 3716 books in its collection. The hours of operation were Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 6:30 to 8:30 pm and on Saturday from 1 to 4 pm. Mrs. David Mance was the librarian and she was assisted by volunteers.

By the late 1960s the library moved to another basement. This time it was on Bridge Street and was the former Village Tavern. Again the library had two rooms and the collection began to grow. Best sellers and other requested materials could be obtained through the library system. The library also began receiving funding from the Village of Florida of \$3000 per year. Shortly thereafter, the Florida Union Free School District appropriated \$4000 per year in their budget to be given to the library. In 1974, the Town of Warwick paid for a typewriter, copier, and some audio-visual materials. The hours expanded to every week night from 6:30 to 8:30 pm and on Wednesdays noon to 4 pm. Saturday hours were 1 to 3 pm. The collection increased to about 5,000 books and many LP recordings.

The Florida Public Library became registered with the University of the State of New York on January 27, 1968. (The provisional charter was extended through 1994 when a permanent charter was granted.)

As the library began to grow so did the demands for services. The Board of Trustees recognized this need and put the proposition of becoming a school district library before the voters and on May 8, 1991 this was approved. The library now had an operating budget of \$20,000 and one full time paid librarian and an assistant. The hours increased and the library again continued to participate with New York State's Summer Reading Program. This was held in conjunction with the Village's summer recreation program which was held at the Memorial Park.

During the years of 1990-1991, the library was cleaned, painted and repaired by a group of volunteers, the trustees, the librarian, and many business people who donated supplies. The book collection increased to about 8,000 books, videos and other materials. The annual circulation for 1994 was over 7,000 and about 23 children's programs were held. Developing the children's area became a main focus of the Trustees. Their thought was that if you get the children started at the library early, they will continue and the

other programs will develop. Much emphasis was on buying books and materials for the children.

On July 8, 1994 disaster struck the library as a violent rainstorm rolled through the area causing part of the roof to collapse. Gallons of water, which had been collecting on the poorly drained roof, came pouring into the library. With the help of the Florida Fire Department, trustees and volunteers many books were quickly moved to the gym of the S. S. Seward Institute where large fans were used to help dry the books. The Summer Reading program was able to continue although it was a shortened version. The craft sessions were held in the hall of St. Edward's Church. However, as summer came to an end and the old quarters were uninhabitable, all the books and materials had to be packed and moved. They were stored in the Village Barn, Fire Department's Hall and local farmer's lofts.

In late September 1994, Mr. John Witterschein of Pharmline donated a trailer to be used as a temporary library. This was placed on village property next to the Police Station. Some of the shelves from the Bridge Street quarters were moved to the trailer and the shelves were filled with best sellers and children's books. The staff became quite creative in using what little space there was to carry out basic programs and meetings. The "tin can" as it affectionately became called was very warm in the summer and cold in the winter. Many winter days found the pipes frozen and the staff left without bathroom facilities. Many patrons chose to go to other libraries within the Ramapo Catskill Library System. Things looked rather bleak for the struggling library.

The trustees kept exploring areas to rent or buy and build a new library. Fundraisers took place and monies were set aside for a new library. The Village Trustees saw a need for the library and agreed to donate part of the parcel of land in Cohen Circle for a new building. The village contracted with CorCraft from Mid-Orange Correctional Facility to build modular units to be put together for a new building. Many volunteers gave time and machines to dig and construct a foundation on which to set the building. October 2000 saw the opening of the present building. It had a separate children's room, the Leona B. Harter Room, which is also used as a meeting room today. Much of the furniture from the Bridge Street building was refinished with funds donated by the Friends of the Library and placed in the library's reference area.

Today's building houses not only books but also computers and many new technologies. There is a computer station for the patron's use along with laptop computers which can be borrowed. Many audio books are available. Classes on computers along with iPads, iPhones, tablets etc. are taught at the library. Programs for children, tweens, teens and adults are held throughout the year.

The budget for fiscal year 2015-2016 is now over \$400,000 and the number of employees is four full time and five part time along with substitutes and pages. The hours now are Mon.-Thur. 10am to 8pm; Fri. & Sat. 10am-5pm and Sun. 12 noon -5pm. giving a total of 59 hours per week. In summer, the Sunday hours are eliminated during July and August.

During the 58 years the library has existed, its history has been one of never ending search for space and funds. At present, the library again is crowded and looking for space. The Board of Trustees along with the Friends of the Library and interested volunteers continue to work towards funding for an addition/or new building. Many hundreds of people have donated time and money to make sure this small, but growing

community has a library, which meets the needs of today's population.

The information for this history was compiled by Shirley Coughlin who served 23 years (1991-2014) as a Trustee of FPL. She was Secretary, Vice President and President, some offices more than once, and is our longest serving Trustee. She has remained active as an officer in The Friends of the FPL.