

Timeline of Our Library

Established in 1952, Jefferson County Public Library was founded on a commitment to freedom through knowledge for all residents of Jefferson County. The library has since grown to become one of the top 25 most technologically progressive library systems in the nation and one of the most service-oriented organizations in the state, while holding fast to its mission of equal access for all.

Following is a brief timeline of the history of Jefferson County Public Library.

Herculean Efforts of Pioneer Libraries

The road to today's modern library was paved by Herculean efforts of volunteers. Jefferson County Librarian William A. Knott, who has led the countywide system for 31 years, praised the pioneers' determination to have libraries:

It was as if libraries in Jefferson County grew straight up out of the grass. There was no official encouragement, funding, anything. They just turned up on street corners. People decided they wanted a library and were willing to commit the time, energy and resources.

The first Evergreen librarian begged books from Newark, N.J., of all things—and got them! There's an old picture of Golden with dirt streets, but right there is a sign that reads Golden Reading Room.

To be honest, it was amazing how hard people worked to create the early libraries and keep them going. As a matter of fact, there were more libraries before consolidation than there are now—not better, but more. The idea was born then that you don't build some main library. Nobody wanted some great big thing in the middle of the county. They wanted a library that served their particular community. That's the basis of today's system.

The romance and heartbreaks of these pre-consolidation libraries is brought to life in a research paper presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of Librarianship at the University of Denver in August 1973 by Barbara A. Braswell for her master of arts in librarianship degree. Following are summaries of her histories of the original Jefferson County libraries in chronological order, based on founding dates:

- **Golden Library:** Located in the county seat of Golden, this was the county's first library. It was organized in 1913 by women's clubs determined to provide ladies with a "public rest room," described in the *Golden Transcript* May 4, 1961, as a place where women could read and meet in Golden. The clubs purchased property for \$900 from the estate of Jacob Schoder at 713 13th St., and the Golden Library was launched. By 1952, the Golden book collection numbered 7,860. Golden Library remained independent of the consolidated Jefferson County Public Library until 1961.

- **Evergreen Public Library:** The spinster sister of an Evergreen Episcopal priest is the heroine of the Evergreen Public Library story. Julia Brewster Douglas was a professional librarian at the Free Public Library of Newark, N.J., where she worked under John Cotton Dana, who became one of Denver's pioneer librarians. She fell ill and had a hard time recovering from bouts of bronchitis, according to "A History of the Evergreen Public Library: an Oral Interview with Mrs. Jane Kemble" by Braswell, part of the Jefferson County Public Library Oral History Project in 1973.

To attempt a cure, Miss Julia moved to Colorado. She stayed with her brother, the Canon Charles Winfred Douglas, and his wife, Dr. Josepha Williams Douglas.

The woman, who was fondly known as Aunt Julia, wrote about the 1917 birth of the Evergreen Library:





Miss Julia, also fondly called Aunt Julia, is the woman wearing glasses pictured above in her beloved Evergreen Library.

The use of an old shack across the creek was given together with \$25 to buy equipment, and I organized the library with not quite 600 books—many of them discards from the Newark Library. The furniture, like the building itself, was old and rickety but it served its purpose for a number of years.

The library has never received anything from taxes as Evergreen is not incorporated, and there is no provision in our tax budget for libraries. It depends on

entertainment, gifts, fees for cards issued to transients, a very small rental collection at a cent a day a book and fines at the same rate.

There are no salaries ...

The library has a collection of classified mounted pictures, charts, pictorial maps, posters, clippings and includes periodicals.

After dedicating her life to the support of this community library, in 1936 Aunt Julia died. Her brother's church and the Sisters of St. Mary took charge of the collection. Canon Douglas donated 3,000 books.

Evergreen lost its Community Chest funds when the countywide library was created, but the independent board voted not to join the county system. The librarian at the time, Jane Kemble, was quoted by Braswell, explaining why Evergreen Library remained independent:

Timeline continued

1952

• Jefferson County Public Library was organized and funded in the amount of \$10,000 by the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners. Jefferson County was previously served by several small municipal libraries supported by cities, women's clubs and a Community Chest.

By ourselves we could do more in the community in advertising...and in working with the library. And we felt that...we were better off if we could raise a thousand dollars in our own community...than (if) we were to be a part of the County Library.

In the end, however, there was more to be gained by consolidating than remaining independent. Evergreen Public Library came on board in 1959, seven years after the countywide system was created.

- **Lakewood Public Library:** Lakewood Library was a National Youth Administration (NYA) Library Project initiated in 1937 by the Ladies Aid Society of the Lakewood Community Church. It offered books obtained from the Denver Public Library and was housed in a church annex.

When first its NYA funding and then its Work Projects Administration (WPA) assistance ended, the library was kept alive by volunteers and associations until 1945 when the Community Chest donated \$900 a year. The library moved to 1537 Wadsworth Blvd. in 1949.

Braswell said the library found it hard to stay alive.

It served a population (of) 20,000 people at this time and was open from 3 to 8 p.m. two days a week. There were three librarians at this time who received \$3 each a day. None had had any previous library training.

When consolidation came, Lakewood Library joined quickly. Its first librarians under the new system were Mrs. Martin Molholm and Mrs. Fred Ticen.

- **Morrison Library:** Touted as the smallest public library in the United States, the Morrison Library was launched by the local Parent Teachers Association in 1937.

A destructive flood in 1938 caused the library to be moved from the Pike Grocery Store to the Morrison Post Office. It continued to move around town, once being evicted to make room for a liquor store.



Between 1937 and 1942, the Morrison Library was one of six NYA Library Projects in Jefferson County, along with Lakewood, Edgewater, Fruitdale, Arvada and Indian Hills. When NYA and WPA ended, these libraries, plus Evergreen and Wheat Ridge, received financial support from Community Chest until they ceased to exist or consolidated in the county system.

Morrison Library finally found a home in its “little white house” that was built especially for the library by W.H. Holmes. The *Golden Transcript* reported that C.A. Peinze donated land and materials, and the library opened in 1947 with Mrs. Holmes as the unpaid librarian.

Morrison joined the countywide system in 1958. Mrs. Holmes retired in 1961. It was closed in December 1978.

- **Edgewater Public Library:** The story of Edgewater’s early library has an

urban success ring to it. Edgewater Public Library was established in October 1937 as an NYA project sponsored by the PTA. Its first home was in the local high school. Braswell reports:

Florence Kocontes was named chairman of the library committee and she, with three assistants, took the library training offered by the NYA. More than a thousand books were donated by the citizens of Edgewater, and by the first of 1938, a larger and more centrally located place was desired.



Edgewater Librarian Ann Moore and former Edgewater Librarian Elaine Bell were honored in the 1977 Edgewater Days Parade.

It moved to the Edgewater Town Hall.

Braswell reported that, during the first three and one-half years the library was open, as many as 1,400 books were checked out in one month.

However, when the NYA was discontinued and the WPA oversight began, the circulation dropped. In 1943, WPA stopped, so the library was turned over to the city. It appropriated \$200 to \$500 per year, according to Braswell.

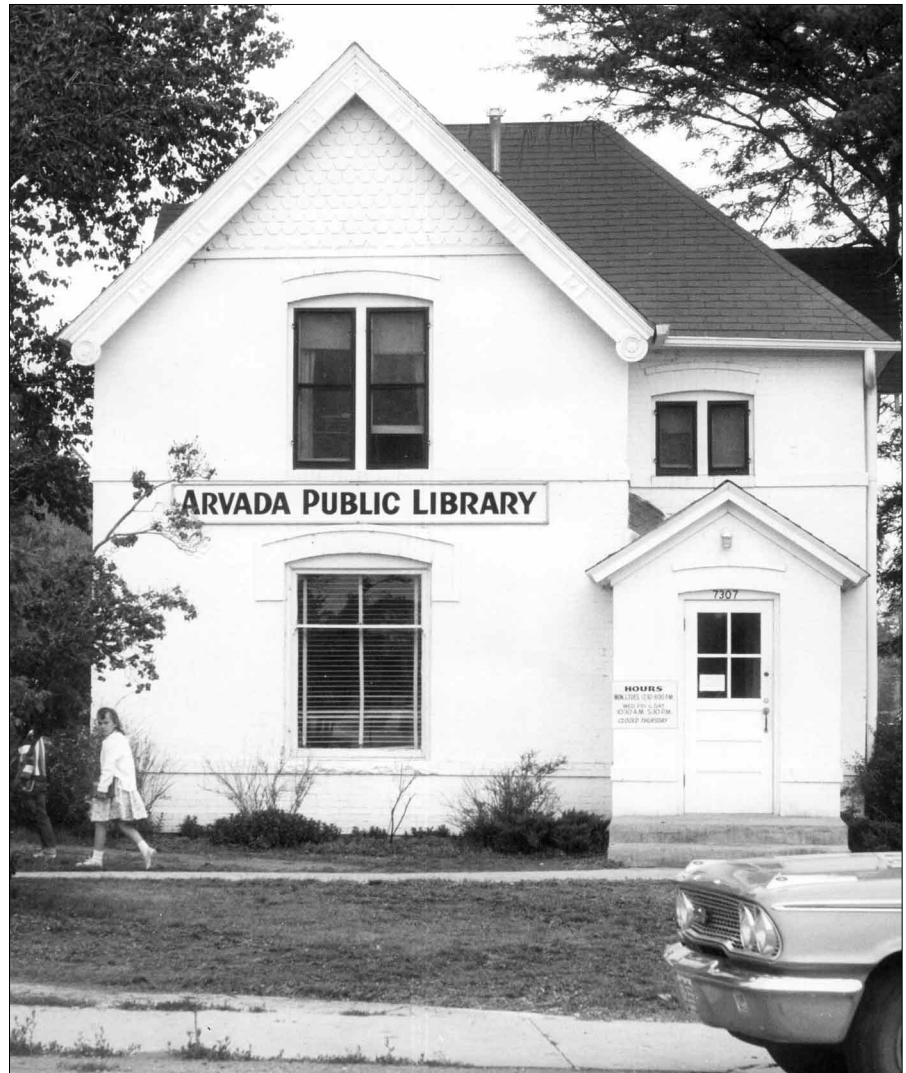
In 1944, Katherine Wind resigned and Florence Kocontes was appointed librarian and library board president. In 1948, Elaine Bell succeeded her.

The Edgewater Library did not affiliate with the countywide system until Jan. 1, 1969.

• **Arvada Public Library:** The Arvada Library dates from 1938, first opening its doors in the Arvada Town Hall with Alice Gallagher as the librarian. It received NYA assistance and rented books from the Denver Public Library. In 1941, the library moved to a building on Wadsworth Boulevard (now Olde Wadsworth) at Grandview Avenue in the Davis block and to another building in the same block in 1942.

From 1941 to 1943, the library board lobbied to have the city take over library financing. That eventually happened when the WPA ceased its funding in 1943. As a city-owned library, it received \$863 annually. After a succession of librarians, in 1946 Murrel Gill became the librarian, and she helped the library grow until 1964, when she retired.

During Gill's tenure there were varied sources of library aid. In 1950, Community Chest began contributing \$200 a year. Local clubs also helped. The Lions Club donated \$250 in 1948 "for purchase of teen-age books to help curb juvenile delinquency," according to a report by the Denver Welfare Council. In 1950, the Citizens' Library Committee formed to find larger quarters for the library, moving it to a city-owned house in McElvoy Park in 1951.



A little girl walked home with books pictured in front of the Arvada Public Library in McElvoy Park prior to 1966.

1953

• First year of operation for Jefferson County Public Library. The first four libraries to join are Lakewood, Wheat Ridge, Fruitdale and Daniels.

When consolidation was offered in 1953, city funding for the library had grown to \$3,000 a year, so the Arvada Library decided to remain independent. By 1964, when Librarian Kenneth E. Dowlin replaced Gill, the library's budget was \$28,000, which supported four full-time librarians and three part-time employees.

Thanks to fund-raising efforts of the Better Arvada Library League and city funds, ground was broken Aug. 3, 1965, for a new library at 57th Avenue and Dover Street.

In 1969, the Arvada Library joined the county system.

• **Fruitdale Public Library:** In 1939, the Sew and So Home Demonstration Club organized the Fruitdale School Library that existed until 1953. It was Murrel Gill, later of Arvada Library prominence, who made the motion to start the Fruitdale Library with available materials and receive help later as it became available. NYA helped support the library, along with other Fruitdale School District clubs, including the Victory Club, the Mother's Club and the Book Club. Community Chest funding began in 1947.

One of the Book Club members was Bonnie Bonham, a retired teacher who had served overseas with the Red Cross in World War I and helped get Community Chest funds for the library.

In 1950 she was elected chairman of the board and served until her death Feb. 1, 1953. Braswell wrote:

Miss Bonham was one of the organizers of the county library system. She and a group from the community went to the Board of County Commissioners and presented a proposal to the state Legislature that passed the enabling act to support libraries.

At the (Fruitdale) board meeting on Oct. 20, 1952, she announced that the county was taking over the library, that \$10,000 had been allotted for administration for the first year and that the current board would continue to function with one member serving in advisory capacity on the County Library Board.

After Miss Bonham's death, it was suggested by the County Board that the Fruitdale Library change its name to the Bonnie Bonham Branch Library, which was done.

• **Wheat Ridge Summer Libraries:** Three small libraries for summer reading for children composed the original Wheat Ridge Library. They were created by the Wheat Ridge Youth Council in 1944. The Wheat Ridge Library was housed in the back room of Bailey's Barber Shop on West 38th, the Columbia Heights Library was in the firehouse on West 32nd, and the Mountain View Library was in the Wheat Ridge Town Hall on West 43rd. With books lent from the Colorado State Library and with volunteer help, Braswell reported, the reading rooms were very popular even though they were open only one day a week for four hours. That first summer, 1,800 books were circulated.

In 1948, Community Chest funds began to help the library, but in 1953 those funds were withdrawn.

Needing funds, the library joined the countywide system as soon as it was invited in 1953. At that time, the library was in the Wheat Ridge Grange. Then, in 1959, it moved to 4429 Brentwood in a building rented from St. James Episcopal Church. It moved in 1961 to a larger building in the Wheat Ridge shopping area. By 1979, the library was located at 5475 W. 32nd Ave. in the former Columbia Heights Elementary School.

• **Conifer Library:** A milkhouse donated in 1950 by Mr. and Mrs. Norman Meyer on property they owned housed the first Conifer Library. It was supported by the Conifer Civic Club. In 1954, the club affiliated with the Jefferson County Public Library, and Eleanor Nelson was elected librarian. In 1955, the library moved to a room in West Jefferson Elementary School.

Citing low usage and lack of funds, in 1964 it was proposed the Conifer Library be closed and that mountain residents be served by the Bookmobile. However, 270 Conifer residents protested and, although other small libraries were closed as a cost-cutting measure, the Conifer Library remained open.

In 1996, the Conifer Library opened in the new Conifer High School under a special contract with the Jefferson County R-1 School District as a shared library. During the school year, the facility is a school library until 2:30 p.m. when it becomes a public library.

