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1816

Library First Funded

The General Assembly passed "An Act for the Incorporation of Public Libraries," which provided that any village, town or county that raised \$100.00 could assemble for the election of a board and incorporate into a public library. A solid financial base of \$386.00 for a public library was raised by the first sale of public land.

Ashby, Bertha. "[City Library Got Start From Sale of Town Lots](#)," Daily Herald-Telephone, July 16, 1951.

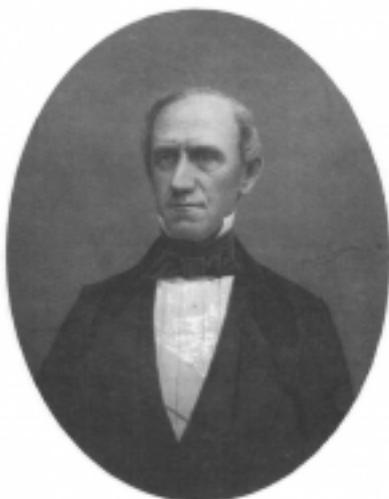


1820

First Library Collection

An earlier act which was a part of the State Constitution provided that 10% of the sale of town lots be laid for the use of a public library. This money was used to purchase the first books for the proposed library. These books were initially housed in a room of the courthouse where the first library was established in 1820. The first scheduled board meeting occurred on March 31 of that year.

Ashby, Bertha. "[City Library Got Start From Sale of Town Lots](#)," Daily Herald-Telephone, July 16, 1951.



Joseph A. Wickert

Reprinted from William W. Wickert, Biographical and Historical Sketches of Early Indiana Bookmen, 1883, page 94

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1827

Joseph A. Wright, Librarian and Indiana Governor

Joseph A. Wright served as governor of Indiana from 1849-1857, but from December of 1827 to February 1830 he was a young librarian at the Monroe County Library. Librarian was his first public office where he lent books to patrons but also furnished firewood and glass window panes for the library.

Joachim, M. "[Governor Joseph A. Wright, Librarian](#)". *Indiana Magazine of History*, Sept. 1982.



1830

Library Continues to Grow

The library collection grew to 800 books selected by a committee composed of board members who sought to maintain a balanced perspective in their choice of materials. Cataloging did not follow a standard classification scheme (i.e. Dewey Decimal Classification System), and librarians often took books for their personal use. This practice caused problems when the librarian's term of office expired and materials were not returned. The library served approximately thirty families with a combined population of 140. The library was open from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. every Saturday.

1840

Early Library Use

The Saturday hours are extended from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 pm. While books could be borrowed for a month (with a 6.5 cents a day penalty for overdue material), it was not a "free public library". Use was restricted to qualified voters only. The library had been established for nearly 30 years when a provision was made to allow women and children to use the library, and then only on a schedule separate from its male patrons.

[Early Library Meeting Minutes](#)

1844

Librarian Salary \$2 a Month

Addison Smith is the first librarian and received a salary of \$2 a month. The library board abolished the salary three years later in exchange for the librarian's use of the library room during the week. Addison Hill, the librarian appointed in 1848, used the library room at the court house for his dental office. The \$24 annual salary was reinstated in 1850.

"[Library Celebrating Birthday](#)," Daily Herald-Telephone, April 13, 1970.

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- 1894**

Library Housed at the Central School Building

From 1894 - 1909 the library was combined in the Central School Building with the Public School Library. The Sorosis Club, a local women's group, tried to obtain funds from Andrew Carnegie for a new library building as early as 1897.

McPherson, Alan, [Temples of Knowledge: Andrew Carnegie's Gift to Indiana](#) (Kewanna, IN : Hoosier's Nest Press, 2003), 164.

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- 1901**

Negotiations for a Carnegie Library

Carnegie libraries were appearing all over the country at the turn of the last century. Negotiations with the Carnegie Corporation for a library in Monroe County began on March 15, 1901, and a pledge of \$15,000 was received later that year on December 21. Five days later, the matter was given to the Nineteenth Century Club to work on getting community support for a library levy. By July 1902 there had still been no agreement on the necessary tax.

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- 1913**

The Children's Collection

The children's collection was formed in 1913 by the donation of materials by Indiana University professor Robert J. Aley.

Macomber, Rosemary. "The Story of the Bloomington Monroe County Public Library" (unpublished manuscript, January 1981), 4.

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- 1915**

Funding and Land Secured

Consequently, the question of accepting a construction grant from the Carnegie Corporation was postponed for more than a decade. E. M. C. Hobbs, president of the Library Board, re-established contact with the

Carnegie Corporation in 1913. According to the Bloomington Weekly Courier of April 2, the library board planned to bid \$12,000 the following Saturday on a lot at 6th and Washington St., which had formerly been occupied by a school for "colored" persons, and before that had been a township school. On November 7, 1913, Carnegie sent another offer to the city of Bloomington for \$27,500.

In a letter dated April 7, 1915, Mr. Hobbs stated that the lot was purchased for \$12,000. The next several months were spent trying to secure a larger grant amount to construct a finer building. These efforts were rewarded on September 29, 1915, with the promise of \$31,000 from the Carnegie Corporation.

["Plans Nearly Ready for New Library,"](#) Bloomington Evening World, May 22, 1916.



1918

Carnegie Library Built

Wilson B. Parker of Indianapolis was hired as the architect for the project. An objection to the blueprints, especially for a lecture room in the basement, delayed approval of the plans until April 4, 1917. Dedicated February 1, 1918, the Beaux-Arts style facility opened with Miss Catherine C. Ashman as librarian over a collection of 6,300 volumes. This structure remained the library's home until a new facility was constructed in 1970. The former [Carnegie Library Building](#) is now on the National Register of Historic Places. It currently houses the [Monroe County History Center](#) and the Genealogy Library.

[Letter detailing the Carnegie Library's construction problems](#)
[Historical Marker](#)

["Notice to Contractors,"](#) Bloomington Evening World, May 23, 1917.



1929

Book Truck

In the 1920s, the library initiated a movement called the Monroe County Librarian Campaign designed to expand its services beyond the boundaries of Bloomington and Perry Townships. In June, 1928, the County Commissioners voted funds for the project to begin in 1929. That year, the public library expanded services to rural and suburban districts through its "Book Truck" (later [Bookmobile](#)) program, the first such program in the state. A model A Ford was purchased for the services, and Miss Lois Henze was appointed to drive it. She continued to drive the Book Truck until 1965 when she became the [Indiana Room](#) librarian. Every two weeks, the Book Truck traveled through various parts of Monroe County. During the months of September, October, and November of 1930 the book truck traveled 1,695 miles and made 117 visits to country schools, distributing, during that period, 8,659 books. The program served 72 rural schools and several towns including Ellettsville, Harrodsburg, and Stanford. This service temporarily ceased during the Depression because of financial difficulties and the decrease in the number of schools.

Winslow, Mrs. L. A. "[Monroe County Library](#)". *The Hoosier Magazine*, Vol 2, February, 1930.

1933

The Great Depression Years

During these years, book purchases were cut as were other services. The Bookmobile service was seriously reduced. It did not operate in the summer and service was withdrawn from 54 rural schools in 1933. While the service continued every third week instead of every second, it stopped in only five towns. At the same time, libraries were withdrawn from six city schools. Despite the economic problems, however, the library still attracted many patrons. Some people came to retrain themselves in the hopes of securing better jobs while others just came to find temporary shelter. On August 3, 1931, the idea of building a children's room was discussed in the board meeting. It was proposed to establish a "library station" at Ellettsville in January of 1939. It was implemented in 1968.

Macomber, Rosemary. "The Story of the Bloomington Monroe County Public Library" (unpublished manuscript, January 1981), 12.



1942

World War II and Miss Bertha Ashby

During the War years, library services decreased, but the Bookmobile kept serving despite a mileage

reduction. During World War II, basic library services remained, but library patronage fell due to gasoline rationing. The library also supported the war effort by participating in the [Victory Book Campaign](#), a program which collected books for the armed services. Staff salaries, however, increased partly due to [Miss Ashby](#) who insisted that she could not hire and keep competent librarians if they were getting better offers elsewhere. In May of 1944, Miss Ashby prepared a report on postwar planning and an architect was hired to draw up plans for the enlargement of the Carnegie building.

1950

New Programs and Collections

This period witnessed the inauguration of several new programs. In 1950, Miss Ashby started buying adult and children phonograph records for the library. In fact, the library was among the first in the state to allow patrons to check out records for home use. A lunch hour record playing program was introduced in 1953. In 1960, children took part in a summer reading program. The film library was begun in 1964.



1955

Expansion and Redesigned Spaces

In March 1955, plans and estimates for a library addition to try to alleviate overcrowding were submitted and formally approved. The library added a garage for the Bookmobile, staff offices, and a processing room. By 1963, there were 21,042 borrowers. The local newspaper reported that the library needed to be expanded. In 1964, an auditorium for group activities was made available. After Miss Ashby retired in that same year, newly appointed director [Charles Hunsberger](#) began drafting a five-year plan for a new library building.



1965

Services Merge and Foundation Established

In 1965 the Bloomington Public Library merged with the Monroe County Public Library system and the [Library Foundation \(Friends\)](#) formed. As the collection and library use continued to grow, crowded conditions hampered further development of services. Plans for a new building were developed based on the concept that the new facility should be a kind of "nerve center" for the community. Ideally, it should reach out to the community with all the sophisticated tools of communication that modern technology could provide.

["City-County Library Merger Planned to Meet Area Growth,"](#) Daily Herald-Telephone, November 10, 1964.

1966

Miss Alice Freese's Gift to the Library

In 1966, Miss Alice Freese, daughter of Bloomington stone operator Simeon Freese, left half of her estate (\$620,000) to the library. A long time patron, Miss Freese was quite friendly with Miss Ashby. At the time, this bequest was the largest single act of private philanthropy in Bloomington history. This money was targeted for purchasing a site for the new library building on the corner of Kirkwood and Lincoln Avenues. It was proposed that the children's reading room in the new library facility be named after Miss Freese.



1968

Ellettsville Library Opened

A storefront branch library was opened in Ellettsville in 1968. It was located on Sale Street and provided the town with more immediate service than the bookmobile.

See the [Ellettsville Branch Library Timeline](#) for more history.



1971

Randtriever

A Randtriever, a series of shelves accessed by robotic arms, reduced the amount of space needed for book storage. The Randtriever was funded by a federal grant and was thought to be a good investment in terms of saving space.

[Short history of technology in Bloomington](#)

[Video of a large working Randtriever](#) at the Erasmus University Library in Rotterdam, Germany

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1971

New Library Building

The Monroe County Public Library, designed by [Richard L. Hartung](#), was constructed with Indiana Limestone. Construction began in 1968. It contained an auditorium, a special reference section for Indiana (the Indiana Room), a processing room, a children's room, a board room, a librarians' room, study carrels, a staff room, and a fine arts gallery where local art could be displayed. The move to the new library building began in November 1970. In November 1971, the building was formally dedicated. At the time of its opening, the library contained 105,000 books and served 25,000 borrowers.

"[Portrait of an Architect](#)," Herald Times, April 13, 2013.



1973

CATS Established

In 1973, [Community Access Television Services](#) was launched with a \$1 exchange with the local cable company. Bloomington Community Access Television (BCAT) as it was originally called began broadcasting with Channel 7 which later became Channel 3 in early 1974. Channel 12 was added in 1987 to host the Community Calendar. Any non-profit organization is able to publicize their events using this service. CATS is a dedicated constitutional forum for the purpose of providing citizens of Bloomington and



Monroe County access to the electronic media for the distribution of information, opinion and other constitutionally protected forms of speech.



1977

VITAL Services and Community Organizations Added

[VITAL \(Volunteers in Tutoring Adult Learners\)](#) was founded to offer a safe, respectful learning environment for adults who want to improve their reading, writing, math, or English language skills. Adults of all ages, nationalities, and economic and social backgrounds are welcome at VITAL.

A database of community organizations was developed in partnership with the Indiana University Graduate Library School. The database was stored on magnetic tape and updated through simple computer commands. The Chamber of Commerce, Community Service Council and other local businesses used this resource. The Library still keeps an active database of [Community Organizations](#) that anyone can access through the Library's website.

Wegener, Judith E., Haskett, James A. "Developing a Computerized Organization File". *Library Journal*, November 15, 1977.



1982

The Library Goes Online

According to former library director, Robert Trinkle, the most significant change during his service (1971-1992) was in the area of automation. During the 1970s, the library started investigating library automation systems. The library paid off its new building mortgage in January of 1979 and received a \$500,000 bond to implement plans for an automated library system, a renovation of the children's department, installation of a theft-detection system, and replacement of old furniture. The library selected CLSI (Computer Library Services Inc.) as its computer system for checking out books and went on-line on December 15, 1982.

Denny, Dann. "[Library Celebrates 20th Year](#)," Herald Times, April 23, 1990.

1986

Jail Library Services

In a cooperative agreement between the Monroe County Correctional Center and the Monroe County Public Library, [Jail Library Services](#) have been offered since 1986. Each month, the Jail Library is visited by about 200 inmates and circulates over 1,000 books. Each inmate has access to library service about once every three weeks.



1987

Library Spaces and Services Expanded

In 1987, the Randtriever was removed after evaluating the cost of renovation. The removal of this automatic storage system created space for several departments and programs to expand. For instance, the adult learning program, [VITAL \(Volunteers in Tutoring Adult Learners\)](#), and the Tutoring Room with its computers and learning materials for adult readers were able to utilize the space created on the second floor which formerly housed the Randtriever. The empty space on the first floor was converted into a children's program room and storage area.

A new [Bookmobile](#) went in service with 3,000 books in 1987 as well, in order to satisfy the need of Monroe County's rural population.

1990

Ellettsville Branch Built

Monroe County Public Library constructed a new Ellettsville branch building. It was dedicated in October 1990.

See the [Ellettsville Branch Library Timeline](#) for more history.



1990

Library Plans Expansion in Downtown Location

In the early 1990s, long-range planning was discussed focusing on the lack of space for materials, staff, and programs. Discussion addressed two possible resolutions: one was to renovate and expand the existing library; the other was to relocate the building to another area of Bloomington. According to Robert Trinkle, the latter proposal was rejected because the citizens of Monroe County liked the library in its present location.

Denny, Dann. "[Library Celebrates 20th Year](#)," The Herald Times, April 23, 1990.

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1992

Library Offers Catalog Access to Home Computer Users and Receives Grant

The Library started a new service for patrons with home computers and dial-up modems. The new Catalog Plus was an electronic bulletin board that offered catalog searching. The Library received a \$36,000 grant in 1994 from the U.S. Department of Education to develop its "electronic branch" even further. This branch extension included the library catalog, hours, policies, bookmobile schedule, the ability to send a librarian a question, and some databases.

Werth, Brian. "[Computer Link to Library Online](#)," Herald Times, April 8, 1992.

Schock, Lisa S. "[Library Opens 'Electronic Branch' - Federal Grant to Help Extend Computer Options Available](#)," The Herald Times, May 17, 1994.

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1995

Library Partners with HoosierNet

The Library started working with [HoosierNet](#), a community-based Internet Service Provider, to offer anyone in the community access to email and other Internet services. Through HoosierNet anyone could sign up for a free email account at the HoosierNet office in the Library and use the Library's computers to access the account.

Werth, Brian. "[Area Firms Take Aim at Internet Access - On Business and Technology](#)," The Herald Times, January 15, 1995.

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1996

Library Joins the World Wide Web

The very first version of the Library's website was posted on the World Wide Web. Developed in SGML ([Standard Generalized Markup Language](#)) that was then processed into HTML code for web browsing. Prior to 1996, a text-based version of the Library's catalog was available through a [Telnet connection](#) and a fully functional web catalog wasn't available until 1999.

[Library website as captured by the Internet Archive \(Wayback Machine\)](#).



1997

Downtown Library Expansion Completed

After long-range planning was approved, the Library began construction for its expansion in 1994. The newly renovated Monroe County Public Library building designed by [K. R. Montgomery and Associates](#) opened in May 1997. Before the renovation the library had 37,000 square feet, but now has 137,000 square feet. While many services were expanded or improved, like the Audio-Visual Department, the Children's Department, education services, and many others, some services were added for the very first time. A 24-hour book drop as well as a AV drop were built on two sides of the building. On the Grant Street side of the building a pick-up window was added with a drive-through. A public computing center, a bookmobile garage, and a silent reading room added other needed services to the library.

Hadley, Donita. "[A Lot of Factors Led to the Library Project](#)," Herald Times, May 13, 1997.



1997

New Bookmobile and CATS Programming

In 1997, the library purchased a new Bookmobile (the 6th purchased since 1929), and switched its online library catalog system to Innovative Interfaces Inc. In 1998, the online automation of the Bookmobile services enabled the Bookmobile to communicate directly with the library through cellular technology. The next year, Community Access Television Services (CATS) became the first in the nation to offer both live and archived video coverage of public meetings on the Internet.

- **1999**

Health Resources at the Library

Thanks to [Bloomington's Local Council of Women](#), the library unveils its new Health Central collection, where consumers can get information on health-related topics.

- **2000**

Library Use and Satisfaction

In 2000, the Library circulated nearly one and a half million items, the highest total in its history. A community survey and focus groups were carried out in 2002 as part of a strategic planning process. Four-out-of-five respondents to the Library's 2002 Community Survey rated the Library's services as "excellent."



- **2003**

New Library Services and Growing Collection

Library Board of Trustees approved a revised Library Mission Statement and a new Strategic Plan. Both emphasized the library as a place to gather for all. Some of the achievements of that plan included the addition of 50,000 new items to the collection, a redesigned website, cablecasting on a third CATS channel (Channel 14), installation of a wireless network for Internet access, establishment of a [Spanish Language Collection](#), implementation of an online meeting room reservation system and online program registration by the public, and addition of a [van-based outreach program](#) to daycares and nursing homes. In December 2004 the library celebrated circulation of over 2 million items.

- **2008**

Library Workers Unionize

Library workers voted in favor of becoming and local of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees ([AFSCME](#)). The Library Board of Trustees approved the resolution that officially

recognized the right of workers to belong to a union in December of 2007.

Rodriguez, Mercedes. "[Library workers approve AFSCME representation - Tuesday's vote 62-35 in favor of the union](#)," The Herald Times, April 23, 2008.



2010

Hybrid Bookmobile

In the interest of saving gas and being more environmentally friendly, the new Monroe County Public Library's bookmobile is a hybrid vehicle.

Nolan, Bethany "[Monroe County Public Library's New Bookmobile Draws Admirers](#)". The Herald-Times, February, 5, 2011.



2014

New Spaces Added and Other Services Updated

Library renovations planned by [Matheu Architects](#) began in mid-2014 which involved moving the movies and music collections to the second floor of the library. The auditorium updated lighting, the sound system and added a much needed green room. The [Friends of the Library Bookstore](#) moved in to a new and inviting space on the first floor. A dedicated [teen space](#) and [digital creativity center](#) were added on the first floor to address the needs of a changing and growing community. Other office spaces were renovated as well to improve working areas for staff.



2017

Book Bike and Story Walk

In 2017, the library added a [Book Bike](#) to its collection of outreach vehicles. The Book Bike was purchased through a grant provided by the Friends of the Library. In partnership with [Bloomington Parks and Recreation](#), the Library also added Story Walk, a page-by-page reading and walking journey at the City's [Butler Park](#). These new services, along with other community programs bring the Library out of the building and into the community.

2020

Library Goes Fine Free

Beginning March 1, 2020 the Library waives all unpaid overdue fines and no longer charges them moving forward, reducing barriers and promoting equitable access for all.

Lane, Laura "[Past, future fines forgiven at Monroe, Owen libraries](#)," The Herald-Times, January 16, 2020.

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