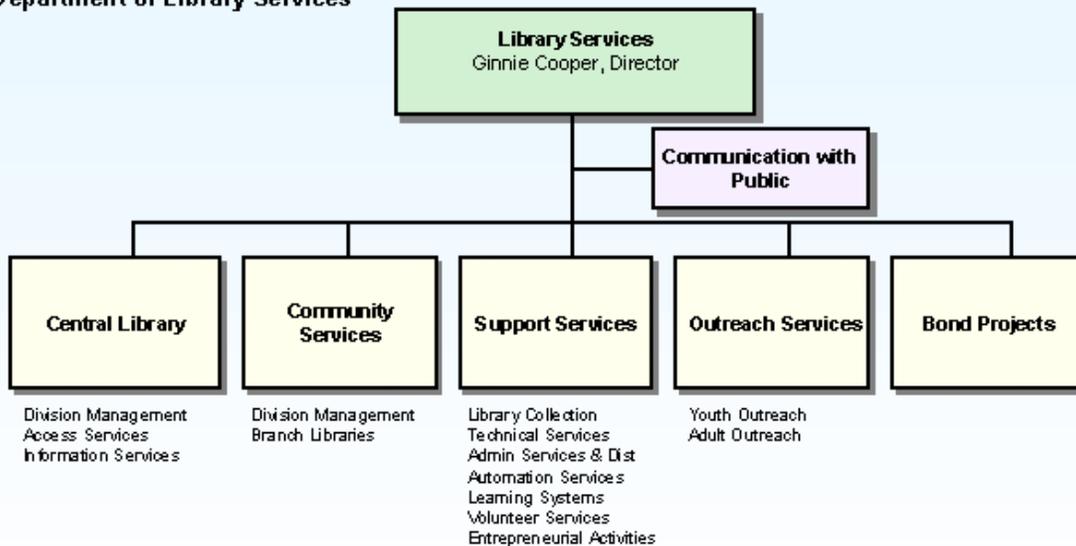


Multnomah County Library Administrative History

The Multnomah County Library system is the largest public library in Oregon and serves over one-fifth of the state's population. It is the oldest public library west of the Mississippi, with a history that reaches back to 1864. Central Library and the 17 libraries that make up the library system house more than 350 computer search stations for the public and a collection of 1.9 million books and other library materials.

The library is governed by the County Commissioners who appoint a 14 member Library Board to oversee library operations. The library system is managed by a library director who directs the program operations (as shown in the organizational chart below):

Multnomah County Department of Library Services



(source: <http://mint/orgcharts/LibraryOrgChart.pdf>; accessed 9 July 2002)

Multnomah County Library's largest branch (24,000 square feet) is the Midland Library, which opened September 16, 1996. Gresham Library, which opened in January 1990, is the second largest neighborhood library with 20,000 square feet.

Libraries within the system are linked by a sophisticated automated circulation and catalog system. The library's collection totals 1.9 million books, audio cassettes, videotapes, DVDs, compact discs, maps, documents, CD-ROMs and other library materials.

A reciprocal agreement with the public libraries of Multnomah, Clackamas, Washington and Hood River counties in the state of Oregon and the city of Camas in the state of Washington currently allows all residents to check out and return books at any one of over 40 public libraries located in these counties.

The history of the Multnomah County Library system can be broken into three distinct periods, each representing different methods of governance, different funding structures, and different methods of service.

Library Association of Portland Subscription Library (1864-1900)

In late 1863, Leland Wakefield began soliciting donations to raise funds for a reading room and library. By January, 1864, he had raised \$2500 and a meeting was held to elect US District Court Judge Matthew Deady as president of the newly formed Library Association of Portland. A constitution and by-laws were adopted in February and a Board of Directors was elected to govern the association. The library was located at 66 SW First Street until 1869, when William Ladd gave the association a 3 year lease to space in the new Ladd & Tilton Bank, on the corner of SW First and Stark.

The library was initially funded by donations, bequests, and membership subscriptions (at \$12 per year). Life memberships were offered in 1869 for \$200. In 1875, perpetual memberships (which could be transferred or bequeathed) were offered for \$250. In 1883, the library received its first bequest, in the amount of \$5000, from the estate of Stephen Skidmore. In 1884, the library was designated as a federal government document depository. By 1885, the association was able to purchase a half block on Stark Street between Broadway and Park. In 1889, the library received \$127,500 from the estate of Ella Smith and a new library was constructed and dedicated in 1893. This building also housed the Portland Art Association.

D. F. W. Bursch was appointed as librarian in 1893 and was the first professionally trained librarian to oversee the library. He brought new methods and techniques to the library, of which the installation of the Dewey Decimal System was the most important.

The Portland Public Library was founded in 1891 by prominent Portlanders. It operated out of City Hall and had only about a tenth of the volumes of the association's library, but was a free library and had half the circulation.

The association tried to boost subscriptions in 1898 by offering a student membership at \$1 per year. The resultant flood of students overburdened already strained association resources. The free public library model was also becoming the common city library model in the United States.

Two events came together to change the structure of the library. The first occurred in 1900, when John Wilson left his personal library of 8000 volumes to the association for

use as a “Free Reference Library.” He also left \$2500 for maintenance of this collection. Acceptance of this bequest would require some public access to the library’s holdings.

The second was the 1901 passage by the state legislature of “an act to authorize the establishment and maintenance of public libraries.” The association’s board of directors convinced the legislature to insert language allowing a city to enter into a contract with a secular association to run a public library.

These two events convinced the association’s board of directors to change the library from a subscription membership to a public library. On August 14, 1901, the association entered into a contract with the City of Portland to operate a free public library. Later that year, the Portland Public Library transferred its assets to the association and was dissolved. On March 10, 1902, the library opened for the first time as a free public library.

Library Association of Portland Public (Free) Library, 1901-1990

By 1903, circulation had nearly tripled and the city’s support had become inadequate to fund librarian, Mary Frances Isom’s, vision of a countywide library system. She and board member W. B. Ayer convinced the state legislature to pass a county library law. The association entered into a contract with Multnomah County to provide a one-fifth of a mill tax to support the library system.

Community deposit stations were created in eleven outlying locations. A County Department was formed in 1906. In 1907, the first three branch libraries – Albina, East Portland, and Sellwood – were opened and the deposit stations were replaced with five “reading rooms.” Library service to the County Jail began in 1910. In 1911 and 1912, Andrew Carnegie donated a total of \$165,000 for the construction of seven new branch facilities. The library offered lectures, adult education classes and story times in the newly created Children’s Reading Room. Both the children’s programs at Central Library and services to schools, teachers, and students were especially emphasized.

The County Library Law was amended in 1911, making the county the sole supporter of the library. Its contract was amended to increase its level of support to an annual levy of one-half mill. The law also made the County Commissioners ex-officio members of the Library Board of Directors.

The county levied a special two-year tax for the construction of a new central library building. The Central Library building, located on SW Tenth and Yamhill, was designed by Portland architect Albert Doyle and was built at a cost of \$480,000. It was dedicated in September 1913.

Local neighborhood groups funded the construction of four branch libraries during the twenties, when the association lacked funds for expansion. The association either leased or assumed the mortgages for the buildings. Bookmobile service also started in 1920

when the association started two rural “book wagon” routes in eastern and western Multnomah County. The service was so popular that the association had a custom truck built in 1924, with a capacity of 800 volumes. The library also began service to hospitals at this time.

Changes were limited during the 1930’s due to financial constraints brought on by the Depression. At the same time, demands on library services rose to levels unequaled until the 1960’s. By 1935, federal and state emergency funds allowed expanded staff and book funding. The Ayer bequest began funding a staff pension program in 1935. Central Library and several branches were renovated and one new branch was constructed. Central Library also added a music room in 1935.

In 1941, the county contract was amended to remove the one-half mill limitation for tax support. The advent of World War II focused the library’s activities. Book drives, a war information desk, and special service to the Merchant Marine were instituted. Branches were also established at Portland Air Base and Vanport City (the latter was destroyed in the Vanport Flood in 1948) and books were sent to the Japanese Evacuation Center.

Library collections were expanded in the 1948 by the addition of circulating phonograph records, a collection of 16-mm films, and microfilmed newspapers and periodicals. The Henry Failing Art Library was established in 1950.

In 1954, the original Albina Branch was converted into an Extension Center as headquarters for branch and bookmobile activities. Support services, Books for the Blind, and the book and periodical bindery were transferred from Central Library to the new center as well. In 1966, this facility was expanded with the construction of a Library Service Center. Between 1957 and 1972, nine new branches were built, often as replacements for smaller subbranches.

In 1956, Central Library replaced its functional organizational structure with one based on subject departments, such as Art, Literature and History, and Music. The Popular Library Department, which contained popular periodicals, duplicate copies of popular non-fiction, and the fiction collection, was set up at this time. Collection development continued in 1966, with the addition of adult basic education materials, collections for the underprivileged, and large print titles. Paperback book collections were added in 1968 and 8mm films in 1970.

In 1969, the Service to the Blind program was transferred to the Oregon State Library. Classroom library services were also discontinued. In 1974, the library began offering book delivery services to housebound seniors. The library also began applying technology to its circulation and cataloging procedures, with an automated circulation system installed at Central in 1976 and extended to all branches in 1980. In 1978, it streamlined classification and subject heading structures.

From 1972 until 1984, the library’s services and staff were significantly impacted by repeated budget crises. In 1972, the national energy crisis and recession combined to

create a severe county budget crisis. Library hours were reduced and staff resigned. The Friends of the Library was formed as a non-profit support group. Federal aid and grants allowed some restoration of services through the next three years, and a serial levy was passed in 1976 to shore up library funding, but continued uncertainty about future funding led to more staff resignations and the formation of a staff union in 1978. The failure of a serial levy in 1981, led to the reduction of service hours to 48, the permanent closure of two branches, the elimination of bookmobile services, and the elimination of 30 full-time positions. Further budget cuts in 1983-84 eliminated 18 more positions and forced the first ever closure of the library for one week. The passage of a serial levy in 1984 allowed restoration of most service hours and staff and also allowed the purchase of nearly 50,000 volumes.

The 1985 contract between the county and the library association mandated the identification of a long term funding solution by June 30, 1986. The solution that the association decided upon was the transfer of the library to county ownership. This process took four years to complete.

In 1987, the library received grant funding to set up a reading room in the Burnside area to serve the homeless and low-income population. The Old Town Reading Room opened at 219 NW Couch in 1988. The Title Wave Bookstore, housed in the original Albina Carnegie library building, also opened in 1988. It sells donated and withdrawn books to raise money for library operations. The Dyna online library system debuted in 1989 via 38 OPAC terminals available to the public.

The Gresham Regional Library was dedicated on January 7, 1990. It replaced the original Carnegie branch library, which was sold to the Gresham Historical Society. It is intended to serve all of east Multnomah County.

Multnomah County Library (1990-present)

In July, 1990, the Library Association of Portland transferred ownership of the library buildings, books, and other holdings to the governance of the Multnomah County Commission. The ordinance authorizing this transfer also created a Library Board to be appointed by the commission. The board serves to advise the commission and the library director. A 3 year serial levy had been approved in March, authorizing \$30 million dollars, including the one time costs of this transfer.

In November, Oregonians approved Ballot Measure 5. The resultant property tax limitations reduced the library's levy and forced the County Commission to reduce the library's budget by \$800,000. Further budget reductions occurred in 1991 and 1992.

At the same time, serious structural problems were identified in the Central Library walls and electrical system. Over 70% of the library's materials were unavailable for browsing because of need to close the stacks. In 1993, voters passed a 3 year serial levy and approved general obligation bonds to renovate Central and Midland libraries.

In 1992, Central and Administration staff were connected to PORTALS, providing the first internet access to a public library in the Pacific Northwest. Public PORTALS terminals were installed in 1993. Staff email accounts were created in 1994. The library's website was introduced in late 1995.

In 1993, Central Library held a 80th birthday celebration. Festivities included the reading of an original poem by Board Member and Oregon author Ursula LeGuin.

Central Library closed for renovation on November 26th, 1994. During its closure, library services were housed in the former State Office Building on 4th and Salmon. Over 875 tons of materials were moved to the temporary facility, named TransCentral Library, which opened on December 19th, 1994.

Midland Branch Library was razed and replaced with a brand new 23,000 sq. ft. library. The new library, built at a cost of \$5.3 million, opened on September 16th, 1996.

The Library Foundation, Inc. was established in 1995 "to develop and encourage the private initiatives and gifts ensuring the people of Multnomah County the full measure of resources, services and access befitting a great library." It operates as a charitable corporation that supports the Multnomah County Library by raising capital funds, program funds, and endowment funds through citizen donations.

In 1996, a new levy and general obligation bonds were approved. This funding allowed open hours in the system to increase by 16% and four branches opened on Mondays – the first time that had happened since 1971. This increase was short-lived, though, with the passage of Measure 47 in November, 1996. Service hours were reduced in January and June 1997. These included the closure of the Old Town Reading Room, elimination of bookmobile services, reduced branch hours, and closure of Central Library on Sundays.

Trancentral library closed in February, 1997 and Central Library reopened on April 8, 1997. The renovated building included a store operated by Friends of the Library and a Starbucks in the main reading room.

A library funding measure was placed on the November, 1997 ballot and was approved. This allowed the July, 1998 restoration and expansion of service hours, expanded programming, a 60% increase in book acquisition, Spanish language outreach, a 118 fte staff increase, and new branch construction and operation.

Budget concerns are still the dominant concern of the Library. A levy to replace budget cuts in 2001 and 2002 was passed by voters in May 2002, but due to low voter turnout was not implemented because it failed to achieve the "double majority."

Sources:

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Branch Offices
(see <http://www.multcolib.org/mcl-hrs.html#hls>
for current information)

Albina (1907-present)
Arleta (1918-1971)
Belmont (1924-present)
Brooklyn (-1971)
Capitol Hill (1972-present)
East Portland (1907-1962)
Fairview-Columbia (2001-present)
Gregory Heights (1966-present)
Gresham (1913-1990)
Gresham Regional Library (1990-present)
Hillsdale (1957-present)
Holgate (1971-present)
Hollywood (1959-present)
Lents (-1971)
Lombard (1927-
Midland (1958-present)
Montavilla (1936-
North Portland (1913-present)
Northwest (2001-present)
Old Town Reading Room (1988-1997)
Parkrose (1998-present)
Penninsula (
Rockwood (1963-present)
Jail (1910-present)
Rose City (-1959; replaced by Hollywood)
St. Johns (1913-present)
Sellwood-Moreland (1907-present)
South Portland (1914-?)
Southwest Hills (1957-
University Park (1933?-1976?)
Vernon (1937-1975?)
Woodstock (1966-present)

