

Come read with us; the best is yet to come!



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE OAK PARK PUBLIC LIBRARY

June 15, 1958 - June 15, 2018



14200 Oak Park Blvd.
Oak Park, MI 48237
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*“Our **Mission** is to provide materials, services and information to the diverse community within the City of Oak Park to meet the community's lifelong educational, informational, cultural, and recreational needs. This has been the catalyst for the Library's program and service develop-*

BEGINNINGS

The citizens of Oak Park had been paying non-resident fees to nearby libraries, as had Oak Park High School, but they wanted a library of their own.



The first step was to contract with the State Library for service by Bookmobile. The Bookmobile provided both books and magazines.

Then a Friends of the Library group was formed by David Shepherd. These determined residents went door to door collecting money for book purchases and raising awareness of the need for a millage so a building could be built. The Friends had several hundred members, which shows the level of citizen support. They collected \$24,000.00 and book donations as well.

In the spring of 1954 a bond passed for \$200,000 to construct a library, with a 73% “yes” vote.

Construction began in 1957, and a Library of 9,000 square feet was opened in 1958.

Before the Library could open to the public, a director and staff were hired. The Friends of the Library ordered furniture and shelving. Books were ordered, the Friends providing much of the money for the children's books. Cards were typed for the card catalog. Finally, all the preliminary work was done.

Sunday, June 15, 1958 was an open house for the public.

The Library officially opened for business on Monday, June 16.

That first year, 160,000 items were circulated.

A COMMUNITY HUB

In the early years, the Library was already providing more than books to its citizens; it was a community hub. The Oak Park Symphony Orchestra was coordinated by

the Library, although the concerts themselves were held at the high school. From 1958 through the early 2000s, there was an Israel-Judea Stamp Club, headed by Mr. Peiss, with 50 active members. There was also a housing clearinghouse in the Library, set up by the city, to connect prospective buyers and sellers. The Needlethreaders, a local embroidery club, borrowed picture books from the Library to make their wall hangings, which they then displayed periodically at the Library. Art exhibits and concerts were frequent.



In 1959 *The Hill that Grew* was published, a book for beginning readers about the making of the hill in the park by using dirt from the construction of homes in the area. The book was nationally known and the Library was proud to have copies for the local children, who used that hill for sledding.

CHANGING WITH THE TIMES

In the 1960s, the Library was so busy that an expansion was needed. The renovation, finished in 1968, nearly doubled the area, to 16,800 square feet. An addition on the north side held a children's room and an all-purpose room used for programs and quiet study.

At the entrance to the children's room was a pamphlet and map file cabinet. (In the days before the Internet, pamphlets were used, along with books, for report writing; before GPS, paper maps got a lot of use.)

The Library continued to adapt with the times. As technology changed, the Library changed to best serve its citizens. LP (long-playing) record albums were added, then cassettes. A small picnic table was put in the children's room with a tape player so children could listen to music and stories on cassette. Then music CDs and audio books came along. DVDs were added in 2003. Online audio books, e-books, and magazines came next. Computer databases are provided by MeL, from the Library of Michigan. Also, graphic novels and urban fiction were added, by popular demand.

COMPUTERS

The circulation system (checkout and return) was automated in 1988 with a computer system that connected us to other libraries. Updated systems were installed in 1995, 2004, and 2018. These made it easier to place holds on items and to interloan items from beyond our immediate area.

For a while after computerizing the book catalog, the Library kept up the paper card catalog as well, typing cards for author, title, and subject and filing them in the large bank of wooden drawers.

However, in the early 1990s the card catalog went away, much to the dismay of many.

The Library's first web page went online in 1998.

Internet access for the public came in 1997, but the Library received more computers for public use from the Gates Foundation in 2000.

Since 1992, our residents have been able to use MeL (Michigan Electronic Library) to borrow books from other libraries across the state, and to access databases.

MORE RENOVATION

In June 2011 renovations came again with the need to provide for expanded electronic services as well as traditional items. New wiring and outlets had to be added throughout the building. The west wall was

opened up with a large picture window, which provided more light. Restrooms were updated, new carpets and new lighting installed, walls painted, and some furniture reupholstered. At the same time, the adult and youth rooms switched places, and what had been the program and study room became the site for added public computers. A new entrance replaced the front entrance on the street side, and the parking lot entrance was removed.

More recently, the teen area was expanded, in the area which had housed, at various times, the biography collection, art exhibits, and a reading room for magazines and newspapers.



MORE TECHNOLOGY

Due to popular demand, other services were added during and after the renovation. These include Wi-Fi, electrical outlets on some tables for laptops, a fax machine, a self-checkout station, a scanner, remote printing, a sound system, a new copy machine, and a security system.

With social media so important, a Facebook page was begun.

PROGRAMS

From the beginning, the Library has been a place of community involvement, featuring programs such as concerts, lectures, art exhibits, animal shows, quilt displays, book sales, and the annual displays of artwork and photographs from Oak Park students. The book discussion club is still going strong. Movies are still shown, although no longer using 16 mm. projectors. The Friends group funds many programs, especially the summer reading program.



The summer reading program and preschool story times have always been a beloved part of library services. Some story times are held in the evening, since many parents work during the day. Occasionally an adult will come to us and say, “I remember coming to story time here. It was so much fun!”

A popular service currently is basic computer classes, held one morning a week.

Following the requests of our residents, in the last few years the Library has tried to meet the demand for maker-spaces, STEAM programs (science,

technology, engineering, art, and math oriented), a coloring group, and also a game-playing group.

The Library participates in the Michigan Adventure Pass program, which provides discount tickets to some 440 Michigan state parks, campgrounds, museums, trails, and arts and cultural destinations.

SOME RECENT STATISTICS

Last year, the Library

- Registered 1,000 new card holders
- Had 18,000 registered library card holders
- Circulated 104,000 items
- Answered 23,300 reference questions
- Borrowed 12,519 items from other libraries
- Loaned 9,270 items to other libraries
- Owned 86,648 items to lend to our citizens
- Served 45,000 computer and wireless users
- Engaged 6,570 to attend programs
- Enjoyed 146,000 annual visits



DIRECTORS

6 librarians have directed this Library in the past 60 years.

- **Leo Dinnan**, founding librarian, until March 1962
- **John Oliver**, March 1962 to 1967
- **Lawrence Wember**, 1967 through December 31, 1989
- **John Martin**, June 1990 to 2011
- **Beth Tomkins**, 2011 through September 2014
- **Brandon Bowman**, September 2014 to July 2018

SPECIAL THANKS

- to **Keith McClellan**, who provided information on the early days of the Library
- to the **Friends of the Oak Park Library**, whose support is invaluable (They can always use new members!)

FRIENDS OF THE OAK PARK LIBRARY

Friends of the Library is a non-profit organization developed to help fund the Oak Park Library programs and services.

We are members of the community who volunteer our time and effort to provide support to the library for educational programs, physical improvements in our library and to encourage the overall enjoyment of reading.



All that we have provided to the library and its patrons is at **no cost** to the taxpayers of Oak Park.

Friends need your support and many new members to achieve our goals!

Thank you in advance for your membership participation!

We meet the **second** Thursday of each month at **7:00 p.m.** in room **4** of the **Community Center** (except July and August).

To become a member of Friends of the Library, please fill out a **Membership Application** and return to the Library front desk.

The **Friends of the Oak Park Library** was founded in the mid-1950s prior to the opening of the Library in June 1958. Its purpose was to provide "support of the library, broader understanding of what the library offers, and wider use of the library by more people." Volunteers went door-to-door soliciting members, money and materials. Through their efforts over \$24,000 was raised to provide funding for most of the library's furniture and equipment.

The group now has more than 200 members who raise money through their dues, donations, and book sales. Since 1992 the Friends have given over **\$50,000** to the Library that has been used to fund a wide variety of programs, purchase items for the library, and to encourage the overall enjoyment of reading.

Happy 60th Birthday

Oak Park Public Library!

Friday, June 15th at 4pm to 7pm

In the library at 14200 Oak Park Blvd.



Come celebrate this momentous occasion with us! We will have lots of fun things to do! Everyone is welcome! Without you, the loving public, we wouldn't have come this far!

- Lots of yummy food! (Including Kosher)
- Fun games for all ages!
- Face painting!
- Wonderful music!
- Learn about what makes us a library!
- Guessing games to win prizes!
- Free mystery prizes!
- Win a raffle basket full of goodies!



This event is sponsored by the Friends of the Oak Park Library!