

BOONE COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY DISTRICT

BRIEF HISTORY

Before 1974 residents of Boone Co. traveled to Covington or Cincinnati for library services. Beginning in the early 1940s, citizen groups tried to build public support to establish a full-service county public library. Each attempt met with failure until 1973, when a citizen's organization called ABLE (Association for Boone Library Encouragement) collected enough signatures to place the issue of a library tax on the ballot. On November 6, 1973, the voters of Boone Co. chose to support the tax and thereby established the Boone County Public Library District.

Ted Bushelman presided over the first meeting of the Boone Co. Public Library Board of Trustees on December 17, 1973. Central to the business of that meeting was discussion of how to build a facility for the new library; the first official action of the board was to apply for a state construction grant. By July 1974 temporary quarters had been found, negotiations for the site of the new library building were under way, and the first staff members were at work. On October 14, 1974, under the direction of Jane Smith, librarian, the Boone County Public Library opened its doors at 2 Girard St. in Florence, Ky. That day more than 180 patrons visited the library.

Work on the new library building proceeded according to schedule. After several months of meetings with architect Robert Ehmet Hayes, a final design was accepted, and ground was broken on July 17, 1975. Eleven months later, in June 1976, the temporary facility was closed and the Boone County Public Library moved to its new, permanent location at 7425 U.S. 42 in Florence.

In its first year at the new location, the library circulated more than 100,000 items. Children's programs filled quickly and waiting lists for the programs were long. By the early 1980s, circulation figures had doubled. The library provided full reference services, a full-time children's librarian, and expanding local history and genealogy collections. Popular new formats such as videos and audio books were also added to the offerings. In 1983 the library joined the Greater Cincinnati Library Consortium, providing Boone County residents with free access to about 30 area academic, public, and special libraries.

Like the rest of its rapidly growing county, the library struggled to keep pace with the needs created by the expanding population. The board began planning for additional facilities and services that would bring convenient library service to all county residents. With funds from a generous bequest provided by Mr. and Mrs. R. V. Lents, who were long-time library supporters, a site was purchased and plans were drawn for a branch library to serve the northern section of the county. On April 23, 1989, the Lents Branch Library opened in Hebron.

Soon thereafter, the library acquired a location in Walton to serve southern Boone County and construction of a second branch library began. At the same time, staff was busy converting the library's records into a computer-readable format in preparation for the planned automation of library services. Both projects reached their conclusion in the first half of 1994. On April 15 computers replaced the card catalog, and on June 25 county residents and officials dedicated the Walton Branch Library. In 1996 public Internet stations were added at all locations, thus updating and modernizing services and giving all library customers access to the worldwide information highway. A library Web page made it possible for patrons to "visit" the library via remote technology.

The Scheben Branch, dedicated on March 4, 2000, and the new Main Library, dedicated on January 5, 2008, placed a new emphasis on the public library as a cultural and community center. From large multipurpose rooms to individual study rooms, toddler play areas to teen centers, wifi hotspots to art galleries, specially designed spaces invited patrons to visit often and stay longer. In a unique partnership, the library participated in the construction of a community center in Petersburg that included space for a small library. The Chapin Memorial Library, named for the local benefactor who endowed it, re-opened in that space under the management of the library district on October 22, 2006.

Today the Boone County Public Library District serves a population of more than 100,000 residents from its six locations in Florence, Hebron, Union, Walton, Petersburg, and Burlington. Library collections offer more than 400,000 books, videos, DVDs, audiotapes, and CDs. Professional librarians answer hundreds of reference questions each day, and programs for children and adults attract thousands of participants each year. New information technologies offer improved access to greater stores of information. The Boone County Public Library District continues to grow in order to meet the needs of the fastest-growing county in the Northern Kentucky region.

SOURCES:

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“Boone Library Looks Back on a Booming First Decade,” *KP*, October 26, 1984, 9K.

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