

NORTH LITTLE ROCK PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM
INTRODUCTION
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LIBRARY

The roots of the North Little Rock Public Library System date back to 1942, when the city began working to pass a tax to support “local libraries.” The measure appeared on the ballot in 1945 and was approved by voters. Mrs. Myrtle I. Deason, of the Illinois State Library, was hired to organize and direct the new Library System beginning January 2, 1946. She spent a full year working alongside the Board of Trustees before the Library officially opened in 1947.

The original Library was housed in a dwelling built at the turn of the century located at 211 Maple Street. It was two stories, the first floor containing books and second story serving as living quarters. A Library for the Black community was established near the MoPac railroad grounds, at 808 East 13th Street.

In 1959, a group of dedicated citizens, led by Library Director Elsie Wiesenberger, spearheaded a successful campaign for a Civic Improvement Bond that included funding for a new Library building. Wiesenberger, a former teacher in Hope and Hempstead County librarian, served as director from 1951 to 1959.



The new Library building was completed and formally dedicated as the William F. Laman Public Library of North Little Rock on December 30, 1962. Both the Maple Street and 13th Street locations moved into the new facility. Helen Ankrum followed as

director, and in 1970, the library was expanded under Patricia O’Bannon’s leadership. Nancy Pack served as director from 1981 to 1987. For nearly 30 years thereafter, Jeffrey L. Baskin led the Library System through significant growth and modernization.

In February 2002, the Library underwent a major renovation and expansion, nearly doubling in size - from 25,000 to almost 50,000 square feet. A second floor was added, along with expanded space for books, public programs, and two large reading rooms. The newly renovated Library was formally dedicated on April 22, 2003.

In May 2006, the Library opened its first branch: the Argenta Branch at 502 Main Street in downtown North Little Rock. Located in a renovated historic building that once housed City Hall and the downtown fire station, the 2,550-square-foot branch offered a collection of about 10,000 books, DVDs, and six internet computer stations. It shared space with the North Little Rock History Commission.



That same spring, the surrounding Laman Plaza re-opened following extensive landscaping and improvements. New sidewalks, dramatic lighting, ornamental fencing, trees, shrubs, and annuals enhanced the space. The centerpiece remained the iconic gazebo designed in the late 1960s by noted Arkansas architect E. Fay Jones. In 2021, the plaza evolved again with the opening of the inclusive Laman Plaza Playground, built on the site of the former pond and fountain and maintained by the City of North Little Rock's Parks and Recreation.



In March 2013, the Library System began renovating the historic Argenta Post Office at 420 Main Street. The new Argenta Library opened on April 5, 2014, offering a much larger and more functional space.

Crystal Gates became Executive Director in October 2015. Under her leadership, the Library System eliminated overdue fines, launched student library cards tied to North Little Rock School District IDs (benefiting more than 8,000 students), and officially returned to the North Little Rock Public Library System name. The library also introduced Rover, a mobile library, taking books, technology, and outreach programming directly to North Little Rock neighborhoods and community events.



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