

## **"TEN YEARS HERE"**

*Carteret County Public Library marks decade of service at Live Oak Street location*

**By CHUCK WATERS**

Join the Friends of the Carteret County Public Library in a "Ten Years Here" celebration from 10 a.m. to noon Monday, Aug. 26, as the library marks ten years at its current 1702 Live Oak Street location in Beaufort. This special Open House event is free and the public is invited to attend. Festivities will include refreshments and an exhibit documenting how a former IGA grocery store was transformed into the Carteret County government complex which now houses the library, the Board of Elections and the Parks and Recreation Department.

Having outgrown the former home at 210 Turner Street, the library moved into the Live Oak Street facility exactly ten years to the day - August 26. Carteret County Public Library director Susan Simpson has been with the library since 1985 and oversaw the massive relocation project as all the library's books, computers, shelving, storage cabinets, furniture, equipment and supplies had to be boxed, crated, and carted from Turner to Live Oak Street. At the time, she noted: "This commitment by county commissioners and residents of Beaufort shows the tremendous support that public libraries have in Carteret County," adding that it marked a "tremendous step forward."

Realizing that the library had outgrown the 7,500-square-foot building which opened in October 1971 at 210 Turner Street, the Carteret County Board of Commissioners in 2008 approved the lease of the former IGA grocery store space at 1702 Live Oak Street. Burnette Architecture and Planning PA of Morehead City drew up the redesign blueprints and estimated total renovation cost for the project was \$1.4 million. The Turner Street library closed in July 2009 and reopened August 26 at its new home.

The new 15,000-square foot facility nearly doubled the library's space and offered improved parking, space for books in all departments, more computers for adults and teens, program and conference rooms, and other amenities.

## **A CENTURY OF LIBRARIES**

There has been a library - of one sort or another - in Beaufort for more than a century. In December 2004, Mrs. Simpson researched the history of libraries in Carteret County using old newspaper records, various books, including Dr. Jack Dudley's excellent reference works on Carteret County's history. She was also able to access an unpublished manuscript (*Library*) by Annie Gardner Swann. Following is an unofficial timeline of Beaufort's library history, according to Mrs. Simpson's documentation:

The first library in Beaufort is thought to have started about 1910-1911 in the old courthouse building located at the corner of Turner and Broad streets.

In 1921, the Beaufort Woman's Club (then known as the Beaufort Community Club) was organized, and a Library Committee was quickly formed. In April 1922, a public library was opened in an office in the Martin and King Store on Front Street.

In October 1922, the fledgling library had to find a new location. Mrs. Sallie Shelton offered the use of a room in her Turner Street home, but the library was eventually relocated to the home of Mrs. John Forlaw, who was chairman of the Library Committee, on Front Street.

The library, now part of a Beaufort Community Club project ("The Public Rest Room & Library"), was located in a building on the corner of Front and Craven streets. This was around 1924-26.

The library was next moved to the Courthouse Annex (former graded school) at the Carteret County Courthouse Square, where it remained until 1934.

Through the efforts of Miss Clyde Duncan, the Beaufort library became a NC Work Projects Administration (WPA) library project in 1934. Carteret Post 99 of the American Legion offered the library the use of their "clubhouse" (a log cabin with electricity and water) on Turner Street, where it remained until December 1940.

### **ALL ABOARD THE LIBRARY TRAIN**

The Beaufort Library enters the "modern era" in December 1940 when owners of the abandoned Beaufort Train Depot were persuaded to sell it to the Town of Beaufort for use as the library. The 2,570-square-foot structure (with distinctive terra cotta tiled roof) on the corner of Broad and Pollock streets was built in 1906 when the railroad first came to Beaufort. With Federal WPA funds set to expire, retired librarian Emily Loftin approached the State Library Commission about securing funding for payroll and operating expenses. She learned that in order for the Beaufort library to receive state funding, it would have to be incorporated as a county library, with funding and support from county government. Thus, in February 1942 the Beaufort Library was officially incorporated by NC Secretary of State Thad Eure as the Carteret County Public Library. Lena Duncan, Mrs. H. C. Jones and Mrs. W.L. Woodard were named as incorporators, and for the first time the Beaufort library had a permanent home. (A framed copy of the certificate hangs in the library's reference section).

By 1949, the library was receiving funding from the Town of Beaufort and Carteret County government as well as state allocations, but financial difficulties continued. This continued through the 1950s, as the State Library Commission mandated that the Carteret County Library Board of Trustees hire a professional librarian with a Bachelor of Science degree. As early as 1956, library board members considered joining a regional library system with Onslow or Craven County. This eventually happened in October 1962, when the Carteret County Board of Commissioners approved a contract which created the Craven-Pamlico-Carteret Regional Library, with Elinor D. Hawkins as director. **SIDE NOTE:** This May, Carteret County Commissioners voted unanimously to withdraw from the CPCRL believing that the five Carteret County Library branches "would be better served by local Carteret County representation,

direction, staffing and funding." Such action requires a one-year notification requirement, and unless county commissioners reconsider this action, it will become official on June 30, 2020.

## **WELCOME, FRIENDS**

In 1961, the Friends of the Carteret County Public was organized, with Ann Costlow as its first president. The Friends support the library with tax-deductible contributions for equipment, materials, and programming, such as the Summer Reading Program, the adult book discussion series "Let's Talk About It," and a genealogy research workstation. One of the Friends' first order of business was to initiate planning for a new library to be constructed on a vacant Turner Street lot. The nearly 60-year-old Train Depot was deteriorating and by February 1966 the terra cotta roof had developed leaks, which was causing extensive damage to the book collection and also provided a breeding ground for termites. To make matters worse, the depot's old pot-belly stove provided inadequate heat and only half the building could be used during the winter. The Friends, the Beaufort Women's Club, area businesses and library patrons all supported the project, and with county and federal funds available, groundbreaking for the new library took place on Nov. 10, 1970. On October 17, 1971, the new 7,500-square-foot building at 210 Turner Street was open for business. At a cost of approximately \$143,000, the new air-conditioned library was stocked with more than 28,000 books and featured more space for open stacks (shelving), a book and magazine reading area, a large children's area. It remained the Carteret County Public Library in Beaufort for more than 30 years.

## **THIRTY YEARS ON TURNER STREET**

On October 25, 2001, current and former library board members and interested patrons gathered at the Turner Street library for a "30 Years on Turner Street" celebration. Attending were former librarian Rosemary B. Garrish (1982-1993) and Minnie S. Simpson, who was library director from 1960 to 1982. The library had added two branches (Bogue Banks and Emerald Isle, now Western Carteret Library in Cape Carteret) and the book collection totaled more than 45,000 volumes. Other improvements and upgrades included public computers for Internet access, an online catalog, and an Outreach Service for the home bound and physically handicapped. As current library director Susan Simpson noted: "As children ate cake and candy, the adults looked over displays about the history of the library and reminisced." Former Library Board Trustee Lucille Guthrie summed up with the words *This whole library is a testament to the women of Beaufort.*

Monday's "Ten Years Here" event should provoke similar memories but will prove a bittersweet moment for Mrs. Simpson, who announced earlier this year that she will be retiring November 30 after 26 years as Carteret County Public Library director. Under her tenure, the library has increased circulation, added extra computer terminals for children and teens, and implemented a variety of community programs and activities.

She will be missed.