



From Humble Beginnings:

A History of the Irving Public
Library System

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1941: FIRST IRVING LIBRARY OPENS

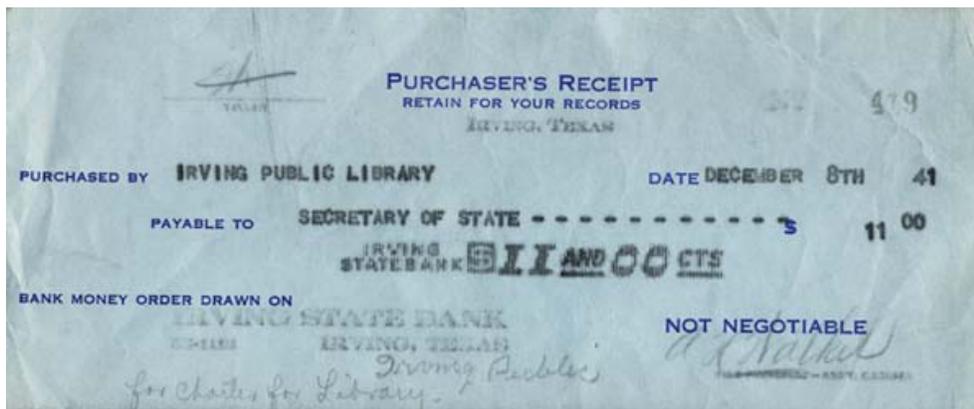
On May 5, 1941, civic activist Esther Hurwitz opened Irving's first library in a corner of Louis Blaylock's furniture store at 126 East First Street. The store was on the south side of the street just east of the intersection of First and Main Streets (First Street is now Irving Boulevard).

To provide enough books to open, Mrs. Hurwitz stocked the fledgling library with 50 volumes from her husband's private collection. Topics ranged from sheep ranching to popular fiction.



Esther Hurwitz

Soon after the library's meager beginning, several residents organized the Irving Library Board to oversee its activities. On Dec. 8, 1941, the Irving Library Association received a state charter, with J.E. Van Horn, W.E. Harrington, and Mrs. Hurwitz serving as incorporators. This act officially sanctioned one of the first privately owned libraries in the Dallas area.



The original receipt for the \$11 fee to charter the Irving Public Library with the state of Texas, Dec. 8, 1941.

Mrs. Hurwitz had planned to start a library in Irving as early as 1936, but the plan never came to fruition. Perhaps her inspiration for the 1941 library came from the Dallas County Library System, which gave each member library \$25 a month.

Irving received its first donation on April 17, 1941. Scarcely three weeks later, the Irving library was in business.

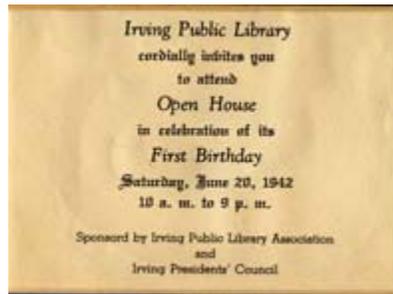


Blaylock's Furniture Store, December 1941: The site of Irving's first library. From left: County Commissioner Tom Field, County Judge George Harwood, Mrs. W.P. Jones, and Mrs. Esther Hurwitz.

AN EYE TOWARD THE FUTURE

The city populace of approximately 1,089 supported the library enthusiastically. Donations to the library and usage of its collections increased, and the library quickly outgrew its small portion of Blaylock's Furniture Store.

During the spring of 1942, the library rented quarters at 113 E. First Street (now E. Irving Boulevard) for \$25 a month. The 1,200 square-foot building had previously housed Johnson's Feed Store. The new library building had chipped paint, a leaky roof and exposed pipes, but Mrs. Hurwitz enlisted a team of carpenters who remodeled the structure for a very modest cost.



The invitation to the new library's open house, June 20, 1942.

With an eye toward the future, the Irving Library Board began planning to purchase land on which to build a new library building. They created a lot fund in the fall of 1941, and on Jan. 6, 1942, purchased four lots on the corner of Main and Third Streets for \$1,400, the present site of Heritage Park. They purchased two adjacent lots on Nov. 13, 1943, for \$700.



*Irving Public Library, 1942-1951, rental space at 113 E. First Street.
This photograph dates from the spring of 1942.*

Plagued with drainage problems, the lots were unusable until Mrs. Hurwitz arranged with Dallas County to grade the site. The Irving Public Library Association solicited donations from individuals and businesses alike to raise money to expand the library. Rent escalated to the point where moving from the First Street location was the only way the library could survive.

Although the library owned sufficient land, there was not enough money to build a new building.

THE SEARCH FOR A NEW FACILITY

When Mrs. Hurwitz realized that she could not raise adequate funds to construct a new building, she began searching for an existing building to move to the new lots and renovate for use as a library.

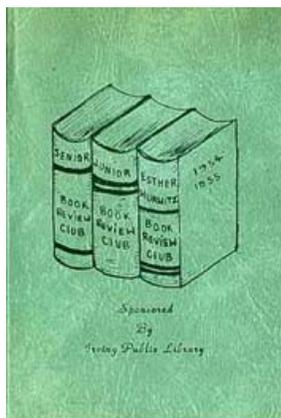
She approached the Dallas County Commissioner's Court in 1950 about buying a five-room house that the county had secured through a right-of-way settlement for Highway 356. The court asked \$6,000 for the building; Mrs. Hurwitz offered the entire building fund of \$1,000, which the commissioners accepted. The house was moved to one of the six lots that the library had purchased in the early 1940s.

*The Irving Public Library,
1951-1962. The building still stands.
This photograph dates from
the summer of 1951.*



Donations of materials and labor to renovate the frame building kept costs for the project at a minimum. Mrs. Hurwitz moved the library's 3,401-item collection into the new facility. This building still stands at 217 S. Main Street. Supporters of the library hoped that a new two-story brick building would soon be built on the remaining lots.

FROM PRIVATE TO PUBLIC ENTITY



In a 1958 newspaper advertisement, the library reported a staff of three full-time librarians and three part-time assistants. It boasted 3,771 “locally owned volumes... seven sets of encyclopedias and four sets of other reference books...” The ad further reported “There are books stacked in the closets for lack of shelf space.”

By 1960, Irving's population had exploded to 45,985, and the library building was too small to meet the public's needs. City government support of the Irving Public Library, a private enterprise, was limited to minimal funding for salaries, books and building repair. Recognizing the need to expand library services, the city council decided to establish a municipal library.

The official opening of the Irving Municipal Library at 915 N. O'Connor Road on Feb. 24, 1962, marked the birth of a city-owned and -operated library system. At the same time, Mrs. Hurwitz and the Irving Public Library Association began dismantling their library, which had served Irving so well for the previous 22 years.

*You are cordially invited
To attend the Grand Opening Ceremonies
of the Irving Municipal Library
915 O'Conner Road
on February 24, 1962
at 10:00 a.m.
R.S.V.P. to City Secretary
BL 4-9151*

Most of the books and property owned by the Irving Public Library were transferred to the new municipal library.

In the closing days of the old library, all of the six lots purchased in the 1940s were transferred to Dallas County. Their estimated value was \$65,000. Finally, on Dec. 22, 1964, the Irving Public Library Association, chartered by the state in 1941, was officially dissolved. The last remains of Irving's first library had officially given way to the new library system.

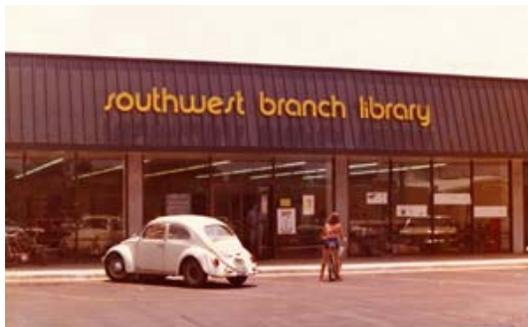
The new 2,100-square-foot library building housed approximately 8,200 items. Irving residents founded a friends group, the Irving Municipal Library Association, to supplement the library's budget. Later in 1962, Mrs. Verna Dornbluth was named librarian, and she served in the position until 1966.



Irving Municipal Library, 1962-1986; 915 N. O'Connor Road. This photograph dates from 1962.

GROWTH CONTINUES

The city's population reached 73,467 by 1965, and the growing demand for library services rendered the original building too small. In November 1965, an addition to the library increased its size to 9,860 square feet.

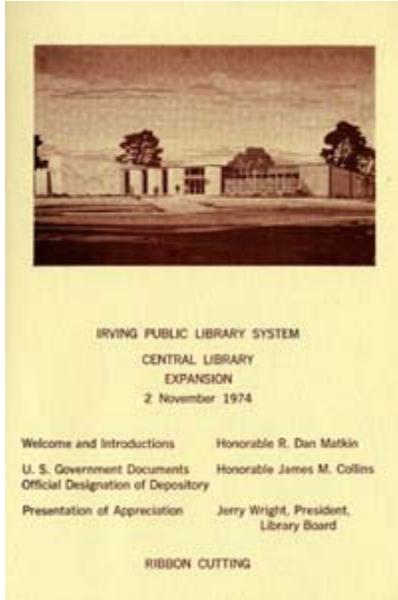


Irving Municipal Library Southwest Branch, 1974.



Irving Municipal Library Northwest Branch, 1976.

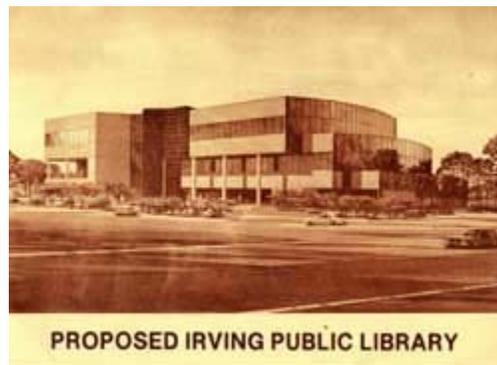
Kathryn Watts Manning served as library director from 1966 to 1973. The first branch library, Northwest Branch, opened in 1973 near the southeast corner of Belt Line and Rochelle roads. The 2,200-square-foot facility housed approximately 6,000 items.



The city's population skyrocketed to 108,182 by 1973. The next year, under the direction of Shelah Bell, library director from 1974 to 1982, the main library on O'Connor Road was expanded again and boasted a 16,960-square-foot building.

Also in 1974, the Southwest Branch, near the southeast corner of Story and Shady Grove roads, opened to the public with a collection of 4,000 items in a 4,200-square-foot building.

By 1980, when the U.S. census reported that Irving's population had more than doubled since 1962, the central library facility was again overcrowded and inadequate. A bond election in January 1982 provided \$7.2 million to construct a new building, and architects competed for the design contract. (Interestingly, the winning design was not the one shown in bond election literature.) That same year, Dr. Lamar Veatch took over as library director.



In July 1986, the 82,000-square-foot facility, located immediately east of the Civic Center at 801 W. Irving Boulevard, opened with a collection of 440,438 items. The grand opening ceremony, held Aug. 2, 1986, featured noted author Alex Haley. The three-story structure had a staff of 83 to serve Irving's population of approximately 147,200.



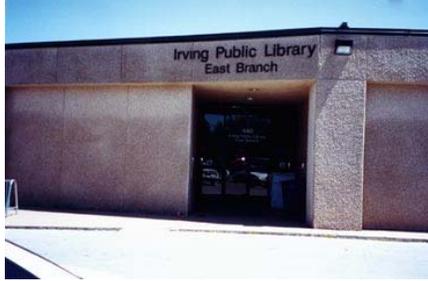
Central Library, 1986-present. This photograph dates from 1996.

To further serve the growing city, the Southwest Branch expanded to 9,600 square feet when it moved one storefront over in July 1992. Northwest Branch expanded four times over the years. After a disastrous fire in 1985, the branch moved a few doors from its original location in 1986. The current facility has 8,030 square feet.



(Left) Southwest Branch, 2001. (Right) Northwest Branch, 2001

The library system continued to expand. In the summer of 1996, it opened the Valley Ranch Branch at West Valley Ranch Parkway and MacArthur Boulevard in far north Irving and the East Branch on Nursery Road near the intersection of Irving Boulevard. The Valley Ranch branch was a 10,000-square-foot building that housed a collection of 20,000 items.



(Left) Valley Ranch Branch, 2001. (Right) East Branch, 2001.

The East Branch opened in a 3,000-square-foot space in the Irving Human Services Building with approximately 3,000 items. In 2001, the East Branch was enlarged to 4,800 square feet.

In the fall of 2007, a new 26,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art Valley Ranch Branch opened at the intersection of MacArthur Boulevard and Cimarron Trail. The free-standing building is designed to meet the future needs of the library patrons of north Irving for years.



Valley Ranch Library Branch, 2007.

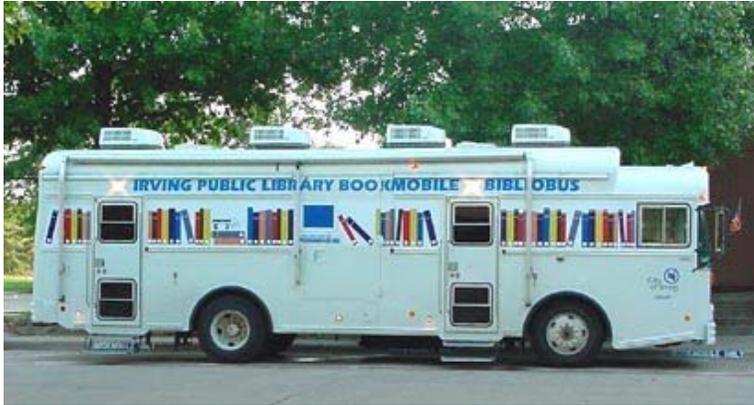
CITY ARCHIVES ESTABLISHED

The Irving Archives, established in 1981 as part of the City Secretary's Office moved to the Central Library in October 1996 with 70 linear feet of material. The Archives collects documents, photos and other items relating the history of the city of Irving, its residents, businesses, clubs and churches, as well as its predecessor communities.



Irving Archives

Today the Archives houses more than 1,200 linear feet of material and more than 25,000 photographs.



Bookmobile service was initiated in January 2000, allowing the library to reach previously underserved residents. The bookmobile stops at nursing homes, apartment complexes, and private and charter schools with bimonthly visits.

The bookmobile has the capacity to house 3,500 volumes and circulates an average of 1,800 items monthly.

September 2014 update: Bookmobile services have been discontinued.

IRVING PUBLIC LIBRARY DIRECTORS

1941 to present

Esther Hurwitz — 1941–1962
Verna Dornbluth — 1962–1966
Kathryn Manning — 1966–1973
Shelah Bell — 1974–1982
Dr. Lamar Veatch — 1982–1999
Nancy Smith — 1999–2002
Patty Landers - 2002-2010
Chris Michalski - 2010-2011
Chris Dobson – 2011-present