

INTRODUCTION
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LIBRARY

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In 1942 the City of North Little Rock began working toward passing a tax to support “local libraries.” The tax was placed on the ballot in 1945 and was passed. Mrs. Myrtle I. Deason of the Illinois State Library was hired to organize and direct the library beginning January 2, 1946. She worked one full year with the Board of Trustees before the library 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 determined citizens and the director Elsie Wiesenberger sparked a drive for a Civic Improvement Bond issue that would include a new library building. After teaching in Hope, Wiesenberger served as Hempstead County, librarian before coming to North Little Rock, serving 1951-1959. The new building was completed in 1962. The Maple Street Library and the 13th Street Library were moved into the facility that was formally dedicated on December 30, 1962 as the William F. Laman Public Library of North Little Rock. Helen Ankrum followed as director, and then in 1970 the library was expanded under the direction of Patricia O’Bannon. Nancy Pack served as director from 1981 to 1987. The Library’s present director is Jeffrey L. Baskin.

In February 2002 work began on expanding and renovating the library. The library nearly doubled in size from approximately 25,000 square feet to almost 50,000 square feet. This expansion added a second floor, included new space for books and public programs and created two large public reading rooms. A formal dedication of the new library space took place on April 22, 2003.

In May of 2006 the William F. Laman Public Library opened its first branch on Main Street in downtown North Little Rock. The Argenta Branch, 502 Main Street, is located in the renovated building which at one time housed the City Hall and the downtown fire station. The 2550 square foot branch has a collection of approximately 10,000 adult and children’s books, DVDs, and six internet computer stations. Fittingly, the library shares the historic building with the North Little Rock History Commission.



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In the Spring of 2006, Laman plaza re-opened after extensive landscaping and renovations. The plaza received new rock work, sidewalks and dramatic lighting. A variety of new trees and shrubs were planted, and flowering annuals were also added. The gazebo, designed and built in the late 1960's by famed architect E. Fay Jones, is still the centerpiece of the plaza. It overlooks the newly restored pond and fountains. Handsome wrought-iron gates and fencing now surround Laman Plaza.



In September 2012, the Library system bought the historic Argenta Post Office at 420 Main Street for a future expansion of the Argenta branch just one block north of the Post Office.

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