

Brief History of the Mexico-Audrain County Library District

The movement to have a library in Mexico was led by R. M. White, publisher of the Mexico Ledger and J. F. Llewellyn. In 1902 Mr. White corresponded with the Carnegie Corporation about obtaining a Carnegie Library. The Federation of Women's Clubs, D.A.R. and other groups were actively promoting a library for Mexico also Mr. and Mrs. Llewellyn had one of the finest private libraries in the state, and with 1118 donated books, the library opened in 1909 above the Llewellyn Drug Store with Miss Ester Houston as first librarian. Earlier volunteer-supported libraries there had lapsed after varying intervals.

In 1912 a one mill tax (10 cents on \$100 valuation) levy was approved to operate and maintain the library in accordance with the Carnegie gift of \$12,500 to build the library on land donated by the Llewellyn's. The new library opened in 1914 at 316 N. Washington Street with Mayor Potts urging people to use the library.

During the 1920's, 30's and 40's the library grew in numbers of books and patrons served with Miss Tine Houston as Librarian. In 1943, a "Victory Book Campaign" was organized and people were asked to donate books; 1265 books were collected and sent to servicemen.

In the 1940's State Library laws creating library districts were passed and in 1953 a countywide election was held to create a taxing library district in the county. The State Library loaned a bookmobile for countywide library service and the Vandalia and Audrain County Library Districts operated under a joint contract and the joint boards met together during this time, merging as the Mexico-Audrain County Library system in 1967.

Under the leadership of Rev. Robert Collins and Col. Charles R. Stribling III, the county voted in 1966 to increase millage from one to two mills with the issue passing in every single precinct. This led to eventual creation of branch libraries in Laddonia and Farber.

The Vandalia Branch Library was first housed on the second floor of 10 North Main Street, then the high school and later at the back of the Vandalia State Bank with books furnished by the Mexico Library. In 1957 the Vandalia community building was completed and the library occupied the upper floor and became a full-time facility.

Farber had a circulating library in the 1940's and early 1950's. In 1962 a reading room was established in Farber. In 1966 the Farber Branch Library began regular part-time service to the community.

In 1969 a group of citizens in Laddonia worked with the Mexico-Audrain Library Board to establish a branch in Laddonia.

The need for more space was met in 1968 when the Mexico Headquarter Library moved into the old Post Office Building at 305 W. Jackson that was extensively remodeled and the old Carnegie Building was sold to R.M White, publisher of the Mexico Ledger thus

providing seed money to assist with the purchase of the old Post Office Building. This Headquarters Building was completed in 1913 at a cost of \$80,000 that included \$10,000 for the land.

In September of 1989 the Martinsburg Branch Library was established in the old St. Joseph's Church rectory and later moved to the Martinsburg Bank building that houses the library and the community building.

With changes in service and overcrowding at the Mexico facility in December of 1990 the library district, after the donation of the Old Carnegie Library building by the Mexico Ledger, moved the building to the location behind the old post office building at Jackson and Clark streets. It was the first time a building of that size and magnitude had been moved in this area. It would have been tragic to lose such a historic building as other Carnegie libraries have been torn down or are no longer being used for libraries. The Carnegie building was going to be used as a library again. The building became the reference room for the library district in 1991.

In 1992 LISTEN was the ILS (integrated library system) that the library used to provide access to its patrons. It was a consortium with St. Charles-City County Library District and small rural libraries in the Central Missouri area that wanted an automated system without all of the transition that it takes to have a system. Each library facility had access to an online Public Access Catalog (PAC) and the libraries could also use the circulation portion of the module or just use the PAC and Cataloging portion of the module. LISTEN prepared the library for our fully automated system that is presently in use in the library district.

In 1994 plans were made to move the Laddonia branch library from Laddonia Community Building to a new location behind the community building. The library was housed on the upper level of the building with two narrow stairways that were not handicapped accessible. In January of 1995 a ground-breaking ceremony was held at the location of the library. In July of 1995 the Ed French Memorial Library was officially open for business.

In 1995 the library district integrated public access computers for patron use in all of its facilities. The library district became affiliated with LLION and MOREnet to provide Internet service to all library facilities in the county. In 1996 the library district became a vital part of MAAIN, a community information network that helped Audrain County patrons have dial-up access in their homes.

In 1997 the library became an integral part of the education system of the community when the University Outreach and Extension, city of Mexico, and MAAIN formed a partnership to establish the Mexico Telecommunication Community Resource Center (TCRC). It was housed on the lower level of the library with interactive video classroom and distance learning systems and networked computers. The TCRC was housed on the lower level of the library until the Advanced Technology Center opened in the summer of 1998.

In 1997 the need for a new facility for our Farber Branch library was felt and the Farber Community Betterment made plans to start a fund drive for the library. The citizens of Farber were really supportive and a new facility that was handicapped accessible and safe was opened in the Farber community with a grand opening held on May 7, 1999.

On June 27, 2001 the Library unveiled its new automated circulation system to the patrons of Audrain County. The system connected all of the library facilities to a central computer that has the library holdings. Patrons can browse the catalog from any location and remotely from their homes to see what the library district owns. Access to the catalog provides our patrons with the shelf location of the materials and the branch that owns the materials. When materials are purchased and processed they are instantly accessible for searching in the library catalog with the branch designation of Mexico, Farber, Laddonia, Martinsburg or Vandalia. Materials owed at one location can be transferred to another district location to fill a request.

In 2017 the need for a new Vandalia Branch Library was felt and in March 2017 a ground breaking ceremony was held at 312 S. Main the future location of the new Vandalia Branch Library. The open house for the facility was held in October 2017.

The district is affiliated with MOREnet to provide internet services to all facilities. MACLD collection has changed through the years. Thousands of books, CDs, DVD's, magazines, and newspapers are available. Thousands eBooks are available for free download thru Missouri Libraries 2 Go for Audrain County patrons.

The Library Board of Trustees meets the third Wednesday each month at 10:30 a.m. at the Mexico headquarters or the Martinsburg Branch Library. During the Summer months the meetings are often held at the Martinsburg, Laddonia, Farber and Vandalia branch locations.

This is a brief history of the Mexico-Audrain County Library District. We encourage reading and lifelong learning to open doors and adventures. Community, Literacy and Learning!

(The library history was compiled by Mrs. Violet Lierheimer and Ms. Christal Bruner)

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