

Downtown Library Announces Plans to Add Planetarium Learning Center

On April 27, 2022, the Downtown Library celebrated the 25th anniversary at its current location on South Church Street in downtown Spartanburg. Since 1885, when the Spartanburg County Public Libraries were first founded, there have been several locations around Spartanburg that have housed collections and offered library services to the public.

Thanks to a gift from Mrs. Helen Fayssoux Kennedy of the lot where her husband's office once stood, Spartanburg's first "public" library opened on October 17, 1885, on the top floor of a two-story building facing



Figure 1 - Proposed Addition to Downtown Library

Kennedy Place in the central business district. Her gift honored her husband, Dr. Lionel Chalmers Kennedy, a well-known and respected physician who had died five years earlier. Among the library's first holdings was Dr. Kennedy's 600-volume medical library and some 300 other books collected by the citizens of Spartanburg.

It was unheard of in those days to collect taxes to support libraries, so the Kennedy Library kept its doors open by charging annual and monthly membership fees. The facility soon was adopted by the Ladies Auxiliary Association, which kept it stocked with books and furniture. By 1899, the ladies realized that Spartanburg was on the verge of outgrowing the little library. They took it upon themselves to write a letter to the famed philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, asking for a contribution to help build a new library. After four years of correspondence, the Kennedy Library Board was notified in June 1903 that Carnegie would donate \$15,000 if the city would purchase the land and contribute \$1,500 annually in support of the library.

Assured that Spartanburg could afford a new library, the building committee chose a site on Magnolia Street, right on the trolley line, and construction began on the Kennedy Free Library. When it opened on January 15, 1905, it was called "one of the best and most modern libraries in South Carolina." Despite its fame, the new library struggled financially. Librarian Mary Baughman often worked without salary, and evening hours were discontinued in 1908. By 1934, the situation was so dire that no new books were bought at all.

On the initiative of the Spartanburg County Foundation, a group of citizens began a campaign to make the library a tax-supported institution. In 1947, the Spartanburg County Legislative Delegation approved the creation of a true “public” library, and a one-mill tax was levied on all property in the county in support of the facility. Hours were extended, and the library reached out into the Black community for the first time, opening branches in the South Liberty Recreation Center in 1947 and in the Bethlehem Center in 1950. As a demonstration project by the Junior League of Spartanburg, a bookmobile went on the road in 1947 and became a permanent service in 1948. The library’s first Children’s Room also opened in 1948. In the mid-fifties, Spartanburg began outgrowing its library again, and the local Jaycees began a concentrated drive to convince residents to support construction of a larger, more modern building. Their successful effort won them a National Jaycees Award. Bonds were sold, and construction began on South Pine Street in 1960. When the building opened on May 15, 1961, Spartanburg again had one of the best and most modern libraries in the South.

The library then began an explosive period of growth. Between 1969 and 1979, Landrum and Woodruff branches moved to permanent buildings and new branches were added in Lyman, Inman, and Chesnee. An automated circulation system became operational in 1979, making Spartanburg the first public library in a four-state area to do so. A year later, the library system loaned half a million books for the first time. During the eighties, branches were added in Boiling Springs and on Spartanburg’s Westside. Realizing the county was once again outgrowing its main library, citizens, community leaders and the Library Board began laying the groundwork for the new headquarters. In 1992, an \$11 million bond referendum was approved by voters, setting the stage for construction of the South Church Street Headquarters.

During the same period the library system, lending over one million books per year, saw rented facilities in Inman, Boiling Springs, and Lyman replaced with permanent buildings and new service in a new building in the Pacolet area between 1991 and 1996. On April 27, 1997, the new Headquarters opened to the public. The larger building also made possible the Kennedy Room of Local History and the Cleveland Genealogical Collection.

Since 1997, the Spartanburg County Public Libraries have continued to grow to include a staff of approximately 200 in an effort to deliver the best service possible to the citizens of Spartanburg County. Today the libraries offer 10 full-service local libraries and a Bookmobile. Each location provides a variety of programming for children, teens and adults and is equipped with meeting room facilities, free internet access, and shelves full of books, magazines, movies, music and more. For those who are not able to come into a library, Homebound Services delivers books to shut-ins almost every day. Additionally, many downloadable books and resources are available on our website www.spartanburglibraries.org. The Spark Space at the Downtown Library provides many makerspace opportunities and the Kennedy Room of Local History, also at the Downtown Library, has ample resources for genealogy and local history research. Also, you can visit the Libraries on our social networking sites – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram.

And now in 2022, after celebrating 25 years in its current location, we are happy to announce that the Downtown Library will be home to a new planetarium learning center. The Library’s proposed planetarium learning center is a \$5 million, 5,000 square foot facility that will be at the corner of Broad and South Church streets in downtown Spartanburg. The planetarium learning



Figure 2 - Proposed Interior of Planetarium Learning Center

center will house 45-foot domed planetarium theatre with 125 seats and additional spaces for STEAM, makerspace and other learning activities and programs.

Dedicated to lifelong learning, the planetarium learning center will offer free educational experiences to children, teens and adults. Visitors will explore supernovas, tour the human heart, run with dinosaurs, live-stream

concerts, and even chat with astronauts on the International Space Station. The planetarium learning center will bring pedestrian traffic to the city's historic downtown and build county-wide partnerships with schools, universities, and businesses. We will also connect with national partners including NASA and the National Science Foundation. This is a donor supported project with funding from both private and public funds. More information will be forthcoming so continue to visit www.spartanburglibraries.org for updates.