

## 2006-08

The Main Library closes for a month of cosmetic remodeling, including new carpeting, paint, new Circulation/Reference Desks, offices and a computer lab. Building reopened Oct. 2, 2006.

From Dec. 2007 to May 9, 2008, a new portico was constructed to improve the South entrance. The Rock Island Public Library Foundation-funded project was dedicated June 17, 2008.

## April-October 2015

Seven-month stone restoration and roofing project at the Downtown Library (formerly known as Main.)

Funded by Rock Island Capitol Improvement Project (CIP), the work restores the stability of the building's exterior stonework.

## 2021

RI Library Foundation begins fundraising with the Two Rivers YMCA to renovate

the former Tri-City Jewish Center on 30th Street. RIPL will share occupancy of the building, which is owned by the YMCA.

## Significant Dates

1855: "Association" library founded

1864: Young Men's

Literary Association founded, hires 15-year-old Ellen Gale

1872: YMLA turns collection, rented space & library director Ellen Gale over to the City to found the first public library in Rock Island

Nov. 25, 1872: Rock Island 1st public library to open after passing of the Illinois Library Act

Dec. 15, 1903: Grand opening of 1st permanent library building

1909: Branch services in schools

1910: Children Services Dept forms

1937: Ellen Gale retires as the longest serving library director in the nation.

(65 years with RIPL, another 4 with the private library)

1955: Renovation of Main Library

1956: Reference Service begins

1957: 30/31 Branch added

1960: Bookmobile replaces former school branches

1974: Southwest Branch added

1986: Main Library expanded

1989: Milan-Blackhawk Area Library District established; contracts with

Rock Island for library services

Feb. 18-Oct. 10, 1999: 30/31 Branch construction

June 19, 2000-April 2001: Southwest construction; trailer operations.

Aug. 2001: SW grand opening

Sept. 2019:

Bookmobile purchased with RI Public Library Foundation gift.

Dec. 14, 2019:

30/31 closed to prepare for sale

Jan. 6, 2020:

Library2Go starts routes

Aug. 7, 2020: Sale

of former 30/31 to American Doll & Toy Museum

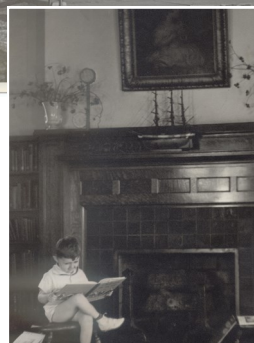
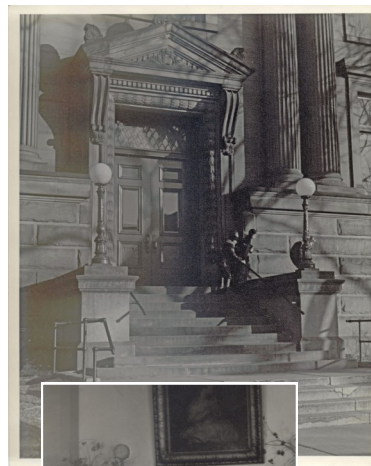
June 2021: Fundraising campaign started for 30th St. Branch, later named the Watts-Midtown Branch

### Rock Island Library Directors

1872-1937	Ellen Gale
1937-1948	Elsie Schocker
1948-1968	Anne Benner
1968-1972	Betty Kohler
1973-1978	Leonard Meinhold
1979-1982	Charles Perdue
1983-1998	James Warwick
1998-2012	Ava Ketter
2013 -	Angela Campbell

# Rock Island Public Library

## Our History Since 1872



Photos:  
Rock Island Library  
special collections

309-732-READ



[www.RockIslandLibrary.org](http://www.RockIslandLibrary.org)

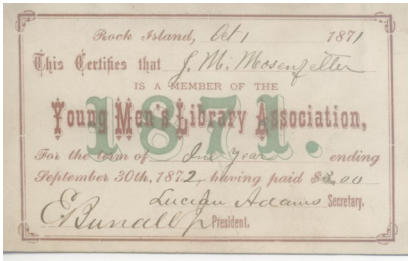
ROCK ISLAND  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
Begin Here.

## 1855

The first library in Rock Island is established in 1855, as a private "Association" library. Subscriptions and donations from local business leaders funded the library, with members paying an annual \$3 fee to check out materials. This effort ended after two years.

## 1865

The privately funded "Young Men's Literary Association" starts a library. To provide more revenue, the YMLA sponsors lectures with well-known speakers, such as Clara Barton and Ralph Waldo Emerson.



## 1872

Following the disastrous Chicago fire, the State of Illinois authorizes communities to assess taxes to provide public libraries. The YMLA board turns over its entire collection, rented space, and its library director, Miss Ellen Gale, to the City for the purpose of opening a truly public library. The Rock Island Public Library opens on November 25, 1872, making it the first Illinois public library to open after the Act's passing.

## 1872-1903

Library facilities consist of rented rooms, the first of which is a 24 x 48

foot space in the Mitchell and Lynde Building just north of 2nd Avenue at 17th Street.

## 1901-1903

With space at a premium, the library board decides the library needs a permanent home, and construction begins in 1901 at 401-19th Street. The new Rock Island Public Library opens on Dec. 15, 1903.



Original Children's Room

Local newspapers call it "Rock Island's Temple of Literature." Much funding came from two Rock Island businessmen, Frederick Denkmann and his brother-in-law Frederick Weyerhaeuser. Both became giants in the American lumber business.

The original library included a rotunda and skylight that illuminated a circulation desk below.

## Early 1900s

In 1909, Rock Island Library began branch service to public schools, maintaining collections there to provide students with library services. In 1910, the library established a full-fledged Children's Department in what is now the



Community Room.

## 1940s/1950s

The building undergoes reconstruction and fire code changes, including:

- Removal of ornamental roof trim
- Encasement of skylight dome.
- Removal of 2nd floor balcony. & flooring over the

rotunda.

- Installing an elevator at the main entrance.
- Moving the Children's Room to the Ground Floor from its original home on the 2nd Floor. Addition of stage creates Community Room on 2nd Floor.

In 1957, a small room added to a City firehouse created the 30/31 Branch at 3059 30th Street. The branch would fill the entire firehouse in 1999, with a grand reopening held December 11, 1999.

## 1960s & 70s

School branches replaced by a new Bookmobile, which ran until December 1990. (Bookmobile service resumed in 2020 with "Library2Go.") From the late 1970s to Dec. 30, 1982, the library ran a small branch at the Martin Luther King

Center. In 1974, another firehouse addition created the small 1,500 square foot Southwest Branch at 9010 Ridgewood Road. In 2,000, the branch was expanded to 5,373 square feet. From 1972-73, the library celebrated its 100th anniversary.

## 1985

An addition brings the Main Library to 30,000 square feet, adding space for stacks and a mezzanine level. The renovation restored the authenticity of the original building by:

- Reopening the skylight dome with ornamentation underneath,
- Refurbishing and replacing original oak doors and brass door fixtures,
- Restoring the marble foyer to its original look, and
- Moving the elevator back to a central location.

The renovation also added a ground floor entrance on the south side. As a finishing touch, the Harris and Katz families donated a sculptural fountain for the north side of the new addition. The official name for of the fountain is "Essere Umano" (to be human), although it is more commonly known as the "library swans."

## 1997-98

The library celebrated its 125th anniversary with a year of events. (2003-04 marked the 100th anniversary of the Downtown Library.)