



*The Main Library in the Orlando-Orange-Osceola System*

## The New Building . . .

The main Orlando Public Library building was dedicated on August 7, 1966 as the first of three stages of a main library for the Orlando and Orange County Library System. At that time, designers projected that the second stage would be needed within five years, and the population explosion brought with the then-unexpected Disney attraction, the new state university, and the Naval Training Camp established since have made the expansion even more mandatory.

The architect was John M. Johansen of New Canaan, Connecticut and he called his design a "composition in monolithic concrete," an assembly of forms, "as colonies of shelled animals assemble or grow together, to suggest the continuing process of growth." Johansen saw in the varied forms a format that would ease the addition of the 150,000 square feet that is now in the City's capital improvement program. That "addition" will quadruple the available floor space.

In a feature article on OPL's design, *Architectural Record* commented on its over-all air of handsome unity and quietness. The first local reviews were not unanimously favorable, though. Director Clara Wendel reported in an issue of *Library Journal* a year after the building

opened, "Orlando's new main library has had an emotional impact on the city unmatched by any structure in its history." The poured concrete building became an object of local controversy as soon as the construction forms were removed, and "When is it going to be finished?" became a familiar question for any library staffer.

The unfinished quality came from the rough concrete surfaces, both inside and out, carefully textured by the rich grain of rough-sawn wooden formwork that is a signature of architect Johansen. Once the Florida sun had seasoned the concrete to even silvery tone, though, enthusiastic admiration of the library center became almost universal, and much national attention came to Orlando because of the structure.

In addition to its rugged beauty, the untreated concrete is ideal from a maintenance standpoint. It simply needs no cleaning, painting or refinishing whatsoever, and that's a real tax-saver for this public institution.

The building is constructed on four levels, facing Rosalind at the corner of Central. The lower level, which is not a true basement because of the sloping site, houses the Children's Department, plus non-public areas for Graphic Arts, Acquisitions, Extension, and storage. An auditorium seating 200 and a conference room that will hold about 25 people are in constant demand for community meetings. Provided a session is open to the public at no charge and is not religious or political (as opposed to governmental) in nature, the rooms are scheduled on a first-come basis.

The General Information and Reference Dept. is at the center of the main floor which also houses the Local History and Genealogy Department and a Reading Lounge on the north, and the Young Adult Department and Community Relations office on the south. The mezzanine-type second floor is being re-arranged as this written to allow more efficient service for telephone and walk-in patrons, and also to provide more room for patrons and materials. The public service desks of the Fine Arts Department and the Business, Science & Technology Department are being merged at the top of the stairs, and most of the library's microfilm records are being brought to the Audio-Visual area in the southeast corner. The administrative offices are at the front of the second floor, and clerestory windows skylight the central reading area. On the roof, the staff room with its small kitchen is glassed in on three sides, and there is a tiled terrace with planters and benches.

The interior of the building is open, airy and well-lighted. Both of the public floors take full advantage of the light from random-width two-story-tall windows, set back in the concrete to reduce glare. Oiled walnut furniture by Jens Risom and beige Belgian linen draperies harmonize with the natural finish of the concrete walls, and charcoal carpet tames the noise that arises from the informal of-course-you-can-talk atmosphere.

Shelves added to accommodate the growing number of books encroach on reading areas, and part of the big comfortable periodicals reading lounge overlooking Lake Eola has already given way to burgeoning collections of fiction, biographies, and Florida information on the first floor. The library has reached the point where it's necessary to take one book off the shelf for each one that is added. There's just not enough room for everything.

The circulation area in the lobby often gets incredibly crowded because more than ten thousand books and other materials have to be checked out through the two turnstiles each week. Space limitations will hamper the orderly expansion of service as the service area of the library undergoes its unprecedented growth.

### **Construction**

Landmarks in the building of the current library center are worth recording. On May 29, 1962, the freeholders of Orlando passed a four-part Civic Improvements Bond Issue, which provided \$1,000,000 for a new library building. Dr. Frank B. Sessa, Director of Miami Public Library, was appointed in September of that year to be library building consultant to draw up a statement of program for the proposed building. The architect for the building, John M. Johansen, was appointed on February 26, 1963, and Martin Van Buren, of Charlotte, North Carolina, was named as interior design consultant a year later.

On April 29, 1964, the Albertson Public Library closed and during the next week moved into a temporary location. It reopened at 905 North Orange, and the people of Orlando had a converted furniture store for a library for a little over two years.

Final drawings for the new building were approved by the Library Board and the City Council on June 5, 1964. The City advertised for bids and the H. L. Coble Construction Company submitted the lowest of five base bids — \$1,264,800. The construction contract was awarded to the Coble Company on September 14, and Big Chief, Inc. had demolished the old building and cleared the site within two weeks. The groundbreaking ceremonies were held on October 19, 1964, and actual construction began a few weeks later.

### **Changing The Name**

In May 1965, the City Council approved the Library Board's recommendation that the Library officially be designated the "Orlando Public Library." When Captain Charles L. Albertson gave his collection of 12,000 books to the City of Orlando in 1920, it was agreed that the City would construct a library building and name it for him. By 1965, the book collection numbered over 200,000; less than 2,000 of them were from the Albertson gift. The other original books had

been withdrawn from the collection as a result of forty years' wear and tear. The Orlando taxpayers had spent nearly three million dollars to operate the Library during the forty years. They had financed the construction of the million-dollar-plus new building. The genealogy collection in the new Orlando Public Library is named for Captain Charles L. Albertson, since he was greatly interested in the subject, and a memorial plaque just inside the front doors commemorates his contribution to the Library.

Martin Van Buren, the interior design consultant, presented specifications for furnishings to the Library Board and the City Council late in September, 1965, and the City Council awarded furniture and equipment contracts totaling \$185,000. The building was furnished from the capital funds of the City of Orlando. The Library closed in its temporary location at 905 North Orange Avenue on July 23 for a two-week move into the new building. The main Orlando Public Library building was finally dedicated on a rainy Sunday afternoon, August 7, 1966.