

1 **Telling Our Story: Honoring the Past**
2 **The History of the Forest Grove City Library**

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4 Volume 4: This volume begins with an interview with Donna Selley, former coordinator
5 of Washington County Cooperative Library services, and the interviewer is Linda Styles
6 Taylor.

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8 Interviewer: Linda Stiles-Taylor (LT)

9 Interviewee: Donna Selley (DS)

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11 LT: Donna, first came to Washington County via the Midwest from Spokane in 1972,
12 right? What was your first impression? What was it like?

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14 DS: I think my first impression was with 2 preschoolers, 'Oh my goodness, there's no
15 libraries.' So not too long after my arrival I found a group of women who were starting a
16 new chapter of American Association of University Women, UAW.

17
18 LT: And that was in Beaverton at that time, right?

19
20 DS: They were all young women like me, with preschoolers, and had come from all
21 different parts of the county and were shocked that there were no kindergartens and no
22 libraries. So after getting organized we formed some task forces and we started looking at
23 the situation about libraries. I ended up being on the library part. And we looked at the
24 situation about libraries. And we realized that two thirds of the Washington County
25 population was unserved by any library and paid a fee. And that the libraries with the
26 exception of Hillsboro's newly planned and designed library for Shute Park, the libraries
27 were very inadequate, underfunded, lack of resources, not open very many hours, and for
28 all of us who had come from elsewhere this was appalling.

29
30 LT: So there were libraries, but not of the kind and the standard and quality and access
31 that you were accustomed to coming from other parts of the county.

32
33 DS: Absolutely.

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35 LT: So for the majority of the population not being served without paying,

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37 DS: Or libraries not open except for just a few hours a day, those of us who were used to
38 taking our children regularly to children's programs in libraries, and this was not just me,
39 it was women from all over the county. So we got busy and we talked to the state library
40 and talked to the city of Beaverton and talked to the librarians in the county and we
41 looked at all the libraries and we said is there anything we can do? And the city of
42 Beaverton said, well, we're looking for a consultant to come help us develop library
43 service in Beaverton, and the state library responded that no, we are not going to give a
44 grant in Washington county for an individual consultant, for an individual city, that we
45 want you all to look at library service on a county wide basis. And we find out in all of
46 our research that Washington County had the largest unserved population; that means

47 without access to a public library without paying a fee, almost, particularly in Oregon,
48 but almost in the entire county. So that gave us wonderful leverage when we are talking
49 about all of us getting together to help hire a consultant, and be part of the process. So
50 that's how it got started, and that's how Beaverton served as a fiscal agent, and were
51 awarded a grant on behalf of the county, and Philis Daulton came and worked with us for
52 almost two years. And when I say worked with us she worked with the staffs of the
53 existing libraries. And maybe you'd be interested, Linda, in the status of what the
54 libraries were like.

55
56 LT: By all means.

57
58 DS: First of all Sherwood was in a tiny little hole in the basement of City Hall, and I
59 think they couldn't have had a thousand volumes. And they had a part time part time
60 person. West Slope was not supported by any governmental agency and were supported
61 by the West Slope women's club, and they were in a basement. And they had a couple
62 thousand volumes. Beaverton, I call it now the white bunker, was in a concrete block
63 building they have just torn down. There was an adjunct to old city hall and the fire
64 station, and that they have just torn down for the new Beaverton library which is really
65 exciting. Hillsboro had just begun building a design, an award winning library that was in
66 Shute part, and it was the only library that had any beauty to it at all. Cornelius was a tiny
67 little closet, city hall,

68
69 I.T: Shute Park in Hillsboro was the only one that was actually built to be a library, it
70 wasn't just somebody found a space and...

71
72 DS: That's right. It was built to be a library, it was beautiful, it was gorgeous, but, um,
73 their collection was pretty old, they didn't have much book, they got the building, but not
74 much money for new books. As I said Tigard was next to a leaky plumbing store, and I
75 think Forest Grove was the oldest public library in existence in the county. I'm not sure
76 of that, but it's my impression that the library had been in existence for longer than any
77 other library in the county. And it was certainly in an awful, awful hole. The location
78 wasn't so awful, but the facility was obviously inadequate. And I wish I could remember
79 about how many books were in the county at that time, but I think it was far less than 50
80 thousand to serve a population of 150,000 to 200,000. So the collections were inadequate,
81 they couldn't have even been open the hours that they were open without lots of
82 volunteers...

83
84 LT: Certainly not professionals, there were just very few librarians.

85
86 DS: I think there were two professional librarians in the county at the time. So there was
87 a long way to go, and we started meeting, just the librarians meeting, which meant they
88 started talking together about all the new trends in library service, what they could do
89 better, what their issues were, what a hard time they were all really, really struggling. So
90 the consultant suggested the group write another grant. And we did, I mean the first grant
91 was for Philis was 30 or 40 thousand dollars. The second grant was for 70 thousand

92 dollars, and with that we could hire coordinating staff and do some shared AV, at that
93 time it was cassettes, that we could
94
95 LT: Old time radio tapes I remember...
96
97 DS: Right, Old time ratio tapes, cassettes. And this was before music went off, with some
98 mini books on tape, that they could just share and rotate among them. But books by mail
99 really took off, and it struck a cord in Washington County, about the idea that could order
100 books by mail. And they were paperbacks, and it was a limited collection. But so many
101 people in Washington County really had never been exposed to public libraries service.
102
103 LT: There was no bookmobile service, so books-by-mail was the alternative.
104
105 DS: So it was far less costly than trying to put a fleet of bookmobiles on the road. No
106 governmental agency had the resources to help us do that. So this is something that we
107 could do, and it just took off like a wildfire. And it gave us the countywide publicity and
108 support that we needed, plus the impetus to go for a levy, and to do something successful,
109 that they could see that we were meeting together, that it was a very successful project,
110 that we could pull something off, with all these limited resources and staff, and I would
111 say that's the basic foundation, and with passing the levy, it was just a very minimal
112 amount in those days, but it was only 260 some odd thousand dollars. And with that it
113 gave us staff to do staff training development, to recruit volunteers, we started creating
114 libraries, just from ground swell, from volunteers,
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116 LT: Now that was Cedar Mill,
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118 DS: Cedar Mill
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120 LT: which was originally in a truck, right at first?
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122 DS: Well, we had an old book mobile that we barrowed for a while
123
124 LT: It was stationary in a parking lot...
125
126 DS: In a parking lot, um, a group of volunteers started library service in Banks, just a
127 little bitty hole-in-a-wall.
128
129 LT: And the Town Center Library...
130
131 DS: The Town Center at Tanasbourne has been totally reconfigured, but at the time
132 Standard Insurance gave us space for library and offices, and as they completed the
133 construction we also got a full-fledged library and joint office space which we were there
134 for several years.
135
136 LT: And at that point it was this lovely new mall, with beautiful wood floors, and it was
137 gorgeous, the building, and it was at 185th and Sunset highway, and today, which isn't

138 that many years later that mall is leveled and replaced with all these big box stores like
139 Target and Mervyns so there is like no evidence, its is already gone.
140
141 DS: Yes, it's gone, it's gone.
142
143 LT: So there was the Town Center Library, and then the original Washington County
144 Cooperative Library Services office was in the back.
145
146 DS: That's where we did books by mail.
147
148 LT: And you were the first coordinator.
149
150 DS: Yes, paid by the county. We had SEDA funds to pay us too. That was time for
151 SEDA and we could, we helped support all the libraries in getting SEDA funds for staff.
152
153 LT: And what that was, someday no one is going to ever have heard of SEDA, it was an
154 employment program to help people that, at that point there was a high unemployment
155 rating, and it would include some training, and it was basically government funded free
156 staff for agencies that could qualify for the employees.
157
158 DS: That's right. They had adequate supervision, and financial and bookkeeping, and all
159 of that good stuff.
160
161 LT: So you had three freebee people,
162
163 DS: And that was an incredible boost, not just for WCCLS but for all the libraries that got
164 SEDA workers. It brought a new level of quality to the library services.
165
166 LT: And in those days they had really good people to qualify for SEDA who had skills
167 but just didn't have jobs, and as time went on libraries continued to use those people, but
168 they got more and more stringent about the standards until you had to take people who
169 were unemployable and could do nothing that were kind of paperweights, and that was
170 kind of the demise of utilizing SEDA to keep libraries going.
171
172 DS: That's right. But the first levy just gave everybody a boost. That was incredible. That
173 they could be successful at something, that they could work together. We had long, hard
174 meetings, and it was very difficult, for these understaffed, overworked, library staff. I
175 think there were only 2 professional in the county.
176
177 LT: Who really had no sense of what they could do.
178
179 DS: And struggling to get good service in their own library, let along thinking of a plan
180 for what good county wide library service could look like. But the basic underlying factor
181 that all of these pioneers that I call them, shared was that no one should have to pay to get
182 library cards. Now, whether you were trained, or not trained, or whatever, or just the
183 general public, everyone thought that paying to get library service was just tragic. And

184 that it should be supported by local government, and that it did belong in that realm. And
185 of course Washington County was faced with this phenomenal, incredible growth. I mean
186 I think about what it was like in 1971 and '72, with $\frac{3}{4}$ of the county being rural, and only
187 $\frac{1}{4}$ being urban, and what it is now, which is almost the exact opposite ratio, that, here's
188 this poor county growing like crazy, with no resources, and these librarians saying,
189 'You've got to do us too! We're important too!' and they said we cannot afford you, if
190 you go to the voters, and they support you, that's the only way that local governments can
191 afford library service, we cannot afford it out of our existing revenues. And we did, and it
192 was just very exciting over the years to have that support, we don't need serial levees
193 anymore. Now it's folded in as part of the regular taxing package of Washington County,
194 but to work out all the wrinkles, and double taxation, and to agree that circulation was the
195 basis for distributing funds, and to agree on the activities that we wanted to do together.
196 And that we all wrote grants together, like crazy, for everything. It wasn't just SEEDA, it
197 was for the state library for this project, and anybody we could get money from, we wrote
198 grants. And there weren't very many foundations either, in that day and age. Foundations
199 wouldn't look at us very seriously because they say you're supposed to be supported,
200 your not adequately supported by local government. Foundation's not going to pick up
201 the slack. But wouldn't you do some staff training, or wouldn't you help us do that? The
202 other big movement that was going on in library land, as I like to call it then, was
203 resource sharing, and this was particularly important in the Northwest because we do not
204 have very many resource centers in the Northwest. And when I talk about the Northwest I
205 am talking about Alaska, and Washington, and Oregon, Montana and Idaho. I mean,
206 that's who our sister Pacific Northwest was. And really the biggest resource center was
207 the U of W. So what was developing outside our county, and statewide and region wide,
208 was a hierarchy of resource sharing. And what you had to be able to do was maximize the
209 resources you had available to you close by before you accessed your state resources or
210 the Pacific Northwest. That meant we had to get organized about resource sharing in our
211 own county. That meant we had to invite Pacific University, the schools. We needed to
212 invite the hospitals, Tektronix had a big library at the time, we became a prototype for the
213 state for a true multitype cooperative, because we were so resource-poor, not only
214 professional staff wise, but just plain materials-wise, we needed everybody to help us,
215 and however we could get resources to people, we did. So that's how we got a grant. So
216 we could transport all of these things. We got a SEDA grant to build a massive card
217 catalog. I mean, we filed thousands of cards, thank goodness the collections weren't that
218 big, but we photocopied all... we got a grant to do this. And we put this massive card
219 catalog out at Pacific University, we started our own backup reference service for
220 resources at Pacific University. A tremendous impact, or course, on the whole county,
221 that we could find out what any library in our whole county had.

222

223 LT: And that union list was, you hired a professional reference librarian to support all of
224 the...

225

226 DS: Right, she supported that, the union catalog and the maintenance. So that, and she
227 supported backup reference. She also played a major major role in training people and
228 helping them develop reference, and training all these non-professional staff in reference
229 work. We just...I can remember we had training sessions all the time, it was such a

230 struggle to schedule so people could even get there. And to come even to Aloha, which is
231 in the middle of the county was just an incredible feat for people to get there, I mean, to
232 even get poorly staffed libraries to come to a training, I mean it was really a struggle. But
233 we had a vision that our county was growing fast, and we didn't want to be left behind. I
234 would say that, you know, that we didn't want to be the eight ball, and we did have far
235 poorer libraries than Multnomah County or Fort Vancouver library.

236

237 LT: And that was an advantage as it turned out because Multnomah County was so well
238 established at that point that it had already been around for so many years that it was
239 already (high?) bound, whereas this was the "wild west".

240

241 DS: We could title it however we want, that's right, that's right. And so we started
242 putting pressure on this Pacific Northwest regional stuff going on and we had some
243 statewide resource sharing going on, but what we really needed was access to Multnomah
244 County and their reference resources. It would be years before we could ever develop the
245 same lever. So, we moved our reference service to Multnomah County. And so that we
246 would not be a drain on their collection. And this started the impetus for the three
247 counties and Fort Vancouver to do regional resource sharing too. Our multi-type
248 cooperative really did set a model to be looked at in the rest of the region, just because
249 we were fearless, and we needed everybody, and we needed everything.

250 LT: You went in few short years, if you lived outside the city of Forest Grove you had to
251 pay to walk into the city and check out a book to being able to check out a book free of
252 charge from Clark, Skamania, and Klickitat county, Washington, Clackamas County,
253 Oregon, and Multnomah, Washington County, Oregon, anywhere, and be able to check
254 out whatever you wanted, in just a few short years.

255

256 DS: I would say that was a major accomplishment. Cheaper to let people go find the
257 materials themselves than to try to deliver them. It doesn't mean we didn't care about
258 services to people. I mean, we wrote a grant, and Linda, you were part of the first VISTA
259 grant to get VISTA volunteers and you were very instrumental in starting outreach to the
260 homebound. And Books-By-Mail wasn't enough. These people had vision problems,
261 some of them, they couldn't even get to order paperback books appropriate for some of
262 them. That is a program that goes on today, and I think Washington County has always
263 done a wonderful job of reaching the unreached.

264

265 LT: 'Cause the jail library service was...we came in 1977 to do library outreach and you
266 were already providing, personally, service to the Washington County jail.

267

268 DS: Yes, that was my one little direct service thing...you know when you're an
269 administrator, yes we were always in the back room growing the public library at Town
270 Center, but particularly when we moved to our new administrative headquarters in Aloha,
271 I really missed the direct public service. And you could tell what it meant to the people
272 who could not get out to use regular public libraries, they were always very polite,
273 delighted to see you, very appreciative of the service. There was never anything that I
274 thought was imposed on anyone, it was something that they really cared about.

275

276 LT: Well, and I remember when Jeff Haskett and I first came in 1977 as part of the
277 VISTA grant to do the outreach program and you took us on a tour and one of the first
278 places we went was the county jail, and Seth Jackson, who was a wonderful man, used to
279 go to the jail with you, and I remember what an eye opener it was to see these inmates
280 absorb these books, I mean to pour donated paperback in there and they would read so
281 much, so many people read them so much that they would just sort of dissolve.

282

283 DS: I mean, of course you know, this is the West, and Lewey Lamore was probably the
284 most popular books they literally, you're right, they wore them out.

285

286 LT: Some of these people were just scarcely literate, they would become fevered readers.
287 I remember that westerns were big, and mysteries, the spy themes, there was always
288 people who wanted love poetry, whoever the drop of us on the outside,

289

290 DS: They needed to write nice letters and...

291

292 LT: Some of them wanted religion and there was...

293

294 DS: Yes, there was...

295

296 LT: Censorship was an issue, not with you, but with the administration of the jail
297 saying...

298

299 DS: But they started a law library too, which fortunately I didn't have to supervise that,
300 that was under the court system. No, library service grew, we got lots of publicity for the
301 jail library service, that, nobody...and I think that really symbolized that we really cared
302 about everybody.

303

304 LT: It was a struggle though. I remember you used to struggle to make that work. At that
305 point the jail was at the top of the courthouse, and now they have this enormous building,
306 this huge jail, but at that point the facility I think held about 130 people max.

307

308 DS: And I think somebody built special carts for us to store our collection in, and it could
309 only be a certain size.

310

311 LT: So here's a lock-up facility at the top floor of the courthouse, and I remember one
312 time you went in there and the actual shelving had disappeared and the deputies didn't
313 know where it went.

314

315 DS: I found it though, I remember finding it. I found it in the kitchen, I found it. Yes, we
316 had to suspend service some months every once in a while because there would be some
317 serious issues going on and they would ask me not to come. We did understand, and I
318 realize by being cooperative and working with them in this severely overcrowded facility
319 was a way to earn big points with them long term paid off. They have a professional
320 librarian now.

321

322 LT: A real library, rather than the donated carts.
323
324 DS: Right. So, I mean, I just think it's been, you know, all of those little programs that
325 we started, now books-by-mail has turned into combined with outreach and you can get
326 large-print books and paperback books for anyone who cannot get out for any reason. But
327 the libraries, what I think is so wonderful, is the quality of the collections and the caliber
328 of the staff. The facilities still have a way to go. I mean Beaverton's had to go far to long
329 wait for an adequate library.
330
331 LT: So they're on their third building since you've came right?
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333 DS: This will be their forth.
334
335 LT: But they're not in their new one, right? They're still in the refurbished Albertsons.
336
337 DS: Right.
338
339 LT: So it was retrofitted to look like a library.
340
341 DS: And one of the things that has always been real sad for me is the library levy for
342 WWCLS would have never passed without strong support of Beaverton. And yet the poor
343 Beaverton voters didn't get to go to the ballot until just a few short years ago for a really
344 adequate library that the people of Beaverton deserve.
345
346 LT: So Forest Grove, when you came to town it was one of the first libraries to get new
347 and beautiful facilities designed to be a library.
348
349 DS: Right, so that's the second one in the county, the first was Hillsboro, the second one
350 was Forest Grove.
351
352 LT: Mike Smith was here when you first came, you have some early memories of Mike
353 Smith...
354
355 DS: Oh, Absolutely. Well, Mike was one of the two professionals in the county.
356
357 LT: Fresh out of Berkley, full of ideas.
358
359 DS: And he really knew what good library service was. And he epitomized it, and he
360 lived it, and, um, day in, day out delivering great library service to Forest Grove. Greatly
361 improved and greatly enhanced I think was an important key in that part of the county. In
362 fact was symbolic to a lot of the rest of the county because all of the western folks came
363 to Forest Grove. 'Cause Banks was pretty tiny then.
364
365 LT: And Cornelius was just multiple copies of paperback romances.
366

367 DS: Right, so that, um. And he obviously had the vision and I would say the vision of
368 what resource sharing looked like, what good collections looked like, and of course, he
369 and I did the first automated project. We knew we couldn't have these card catalogs,
370 massive card catalogs, anymore at Pacific University. We knew we had to take that
371 gigantic leap. And of course, this was astronomically expensive. I don't know where we
372 got the guts to do it. I couldn't have done it without him, and I don't think he could have
373 done it without him. But we were a really good team, I think, and we had people like you,
374 and the vision just grew to what it is, and I am so proud, so proud of what it is today. I
375 mean it is just magnificent. It is more than a dream come true. I wish we had more new
376 buildings. I wish Cedar Mill, and West Slope, I mean we did get a new building for West
377 Slope and they are going to grow, but I think libraries all over the country always fight
378 for facilities, and more important is the good staff that welcomes them, and the wonderful
379 facilities, Internet access to everybody opens the world, really equalizes what libraries are
380 all about.
381 *****