

Roanoke Public Libraries
Gainsboro Library
Gainsboro Library Records

Collection Description

Repository: Gainsboro Branch of Roanoke Public Libraries

Title: Gainsboro Library Records

Physical Characteristics: 2 (two) record storage box.

Arrangement: This collection is arranged in series with items pertaining to the conception of the Gainsboro Library to the end of Virginia Y. Lee's librarianship as Series I; followed by items pertaining to Carla Lewis' librarianship until her retirement in 2009 as Series II; Series III contains various non paper objects and items relating to the time frame of Series II; lastly items that are oversized and relate to the time periods of both Series I and II are arranged in Series IV. Items in each series are then arranged by item type or by the relationship of items and finally by date.

Creator: Virginia Y. Lee, Carla Lewis

Reproduction Restrictions: No known restrictions on publication. Gainsboro Library copy fees apply.

Processor: Megan Koehler Mizak, April 2020

Historical Note:

The Gainsboro Branch Library opened on 13 December 1921 in the basement of the Odd Fellows Hall, later the William A. Hunton YMCA, on Gainsboro Rd. and Patton Ave. Lucy Addison, Rev. A. L. James, and Rev. Lylburn L. Downing began the first Gainsboro Library Advisory Board that worked to open the library. Ella F. Bowden was the first librarian (1921-1923), followed by Emma Lyons (1924) and Harriet Miles (1924-1928). Virginia Y. Lee became the fourth branch librarian in 1928.

Virginia Dare Young Lee was born 22 November 1906 in McComas, West Virginia to Robert D. and Lula B. Young. She was raised in Roanoke, Virginia and attended Harrison School, graduating as class Valedictorian in 1924. After graduating from the Hampton Institute's School of Library Science she worked at LeMoyne Junior College in Memphis, Tennessee and later Gilmer School in Roanoke, Virginia.

Upon becoming the branch librarian at the Gainsboro Library, Lee immediately began to develop a Black History Collection and create library displays of the accomplishments of African Americans. Later she continued to grow the library's collection by writing to prominent African Americans who

would donate signed copies of books, photos and other materials to the library.

As the library's collection grew, it became clear that the basement of the YMCA could no longer accommodate the library. Lee appealed to the City to build a new library, yet she was met with resistance. However, the City agreed to allocate \$20,000 toward building construction, if Lee could somehow secure the land. Undeterred, Lee approached Father Thomas at St. Andrews Catholic Church in 1941 and asked if the church would be willing to lease land for the new library. Father Thomas gave his blessing and worked with Lee to write a letter to Pope Pious XII for permission. The Pope did more than lease the land, he donated the land for the new library, "for the next 99 years."

On 10 May 1942 the new library was open to the public. The design of the library was imagined and sketched by Lee, drawing from the Tudor style of the Hotel Roanoke. Architectural firm Eubank & Caldwell, Inc. completed the design and blueprints for the building. The new building covered 3,050 square feet and included a main reading room, office, lecture room, reference room and an unfinished basement. The library's opening day collection was 7,000 titles.

In 1943, Lee collaborated with the William A. Hunton Branch YMCA and the Hampton Institute to launch the People's War College, an adult education series designed to prepare citizens for life during and after World War II. Courses offered varied from religious studies, to bookkeeping, shorthand, english and mathematics. After the end of the war, the program was renamed the Community College. In 1946 the program ended.

In the mid-1940s, Lee faced opposition from city officials, demanding that she dispose of the library's growing collection on black history. Lee defied the officials and hid the collection in the basement of the library and continued collecting materials.

After 43 years of service, Virginia Y. Lee retired from the Gainsboro Library in 1971. Upon retirement, she gifted 3,500 books and other items on black history that she collected to the library.

Following Lee's retirement Rebecca Cooper became branch librarian from 1971 to 1972. Caralene (Carla) Lavern Mathis Lewis became branch librarian in 1973.

Carla Lewis was born in Bladen County, North Carolina on 2 February 1949. She graduated from Booker T. Washington High School and then attended Federal City College in Washington D.C. In 1969 Lewis transferred to Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia, graduating in 1973 with a degree in Elementary Education.

Shortly after graduation, Lewis became branch librarian of the Gainsboro Library and quickly implemented children's programing including preschool storytimes and puppet shows.

In 1976 and 1982, the City of Roanoke attempted to close the Gainsboro Library, however both closures were stopped due to the community's push for it to remain open.

The Virginia Y. Lee Collection was dedicated in 1982 through the efforts of Carla Lewis. The collection consists of rare and first edition books, many of which were collected by Lee, on African American history and literature.

The library was designated a Virginia State Landmark and added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1996, an accomplishment overseen by Lewis with the involvement of many community leaders. Additionally, Lewis launched the Roanoke Public Libraries Oral History Initiative in 2006 and was instrumental in collecting and preserving stories of historic Gainsboro by gathering participation of neighborhood residents.

In 2008, Lewis oversaw the renovation of the Gainsboro Library which included expanding the building with an addition, nearly doubling the size of the structure, yet maintaining its original character. The renovation added a community room, new bathrooms, a hallway, study room and teen center to the library. Additionally, the Virginia Y. Lee Collection was moved and is now housed in the Virginia Y. Lee Room.

Lewis retired after 36 years as branch librarian in 2009.

Scope and Content:

- The Gainsboro Library Record Collection consists of 2 (two) record storage boxes.
- Items in the collection were collected by librarians Virginia Y. Lee and Carla Lewis.
- Items in the collection range from the inception of the Gainsboro Library in 1921, through the librarianship of Virginia Y. Lee and to the end of Carla Lewis' librarianship in 2009.
- Series I consists of items pertaining to the conception of the Gainsboro Library in 1920 to the end of Virginia Y. Lee's librarianship in 1971.
- Series II consists of items from 1972 through Carla Lewis' librarianship until her retirement in 2009.
- Series III contains various non paper objects and items relating to the time frame of Series II.
- Series IV contains various items that are oversized and relate to the time periods of both Series I and II.
- Collection consists of various paper documents, including original letters, programs, booklets and news clippings, a photo album and audio/visual materials.

Container List:

Box 1 of 2

Series I - 1921 - 1971

Folder 1: 1940 Bond Issue and New Library Proposal

Folder 2: 1942 Dedication Ceremony

Folder 3: Activities Report

Folder 4: Certificates

Folder 5: Correspondences

Folder 6: Donations

Folder 7: Historic Narratives

Folder 8: Jessie Fauset Reading Club

Folder 9: Library Cards

Folder 10: Library Committee

Folder 11: Library Ephemera

Folder 12: New Library Building

Folder 13: News Clippings

Folder 14: Pamphlets and Programs

Folder 15: People's' War College

Folder 16: Press Releases

Folder 17: Various Documents

Series II - 1972 - 2009

Folder 1 : Certificates

Folder 2 : Correspondences

Folder 3 : Fiftieth anniversary Celebration, 19 November 1992

Folder 4 : Friends of the Library

Folder 5 : Library Programs

Folder 6 : Library Renovation 2007-2008

Folder 7 : Library Studies

Folder 8 : National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Folder 9 : News Clippings

Folder 10: Press Releases

Folder 11: Reading Garden

- Folder 12:** Ribbon Cutting and Grand Opening, 9 March 2009
- Folder 13:** State Letter Writing Campaign
- Folder 14:** Tribute to the Late Mrs. Virginia Y. Lee, 10 February 2005
- Folder 15:** Various Documents
- Folder 16:** *Virginia Dare Young Lee and the Gainsboro Library*, by Shirley B. Lawson, May 2000
- Folder 17:** Virginia Landmarks Register
- Folder 18:** Virginia Y. Lee Collection Bibliography
- Folder 19:** Virginia Y. Lee Collection Dedication, 26 September 1982

Series III - Various Objects

- Audio Tape - Virginia Y. Lee Collection Dedication, 26 September 1982
- CD - Black History Month, 24 February 2006
- CD - Cafe Night 27 April 2006
- CD- Will Clay: Storyteller, 8 February 2007
- DVD - Virginia Y. Lee Collection Dedication, 26 September 1982
- DVD - Gainsboro Library Images, 1942 - 2005
- DVD - A Tribute to the Late Mrs. Virginia Y. Lee 10 February 2005
- DVD - Dr. Florence Farley Art Exhibit, 22 & 28 February 2007
- DVD - Tommy L. Carmichael, 29 March 2007
- Floppy Discs - A Tribute to the Late Mrs. Virginia Y. Lee 10 February 2005
- Photo Album - A Tribute to the Late Mrs. Virginia Y. Lee 10 February 2005
- VHS - A Tribute to the Late Mrs. Virginia Y. Lee 10 February 2005

Box 2 of 2

Series IV - Oversized Items

- 1942 Gainsboro Library Blueprints
- Certificate: The National Hampton Alumni Association 50-Year Certificate, Mrs. Virginia Young Lee, 25 May 1975.
- News Clippings