NOLS
NORTH OLYMPIC
LIBRARY
SYSTEM

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The Clallam County Rural Library was formed in January, 1945 following a favorable vote of the people in November, 1944. The County Library Headquarters was established in the basement of the Port Angeles City Library, not then a part of the county system, and a contract was signed with the city to provide library service to county residents in the Port Angeles area. A branch library was opened in Forks in the old grade school the very first year and Sequim joined the county system in 1947 following the completion of the Clyde Rhodefer Memorial Library Building.

Unable to afford a bookmobile, the library initiated mobile service using private cars and an old Red Cross disaster unit. The first regular bookmobile was purchased in 1947. In addition, deposit stations were opened in Joyce and Eden Valley.

In 1948 the District's headquarters moved to a new location, 507 South Lincoln Street, and again in 1949 to 114 West 8th Street, where it remained until 1966. In 1964 the Library Board purchased land at the intersection of Peabody Street and Lauridsen Boulevard and following a successful bond issue election in November of that year, started construction of the current Service Center facility. The building was completed in April, 1966 at a cost of approximately $120,000 including furniture and landscaping.

The Port Angeles City Library and the County Library District merged in 1973, forming one library system to serve all residents of the county. It was at this time that the name North Olympic Library System was adopted.

Port Angeles. The first public library in Port Angeles was opened in 1912 by the Women's Auxiliary of the Commercial Club in the back room of their clubhouse. The entire collection consisted of 100 books donated by the Port Angeles Reading Club. In 1913, the Library was moved to a small room attached to the Old Central School which was on the site where the present Post Office is located. The Library Association has started the search for land for a new structure the same year the Library was formed. Five years and an act of Congress later, the site on Lincoln street was acquired. The structure was built with a $12,500 grant from the Carnegie Fund and $500 from the City of Port Angeles. The Carnegie Building was finished in 1919 and opened to the public with a collection of 1,600 books. The Grand Opening announcement included an invitation for citizens to donate a book to help fill the shelves of the new library.

A new section was added to the front of the Carnegie building in 1962 at a cost of $140,000. An article in the Port Angeles Evening News noted that the addition was "not a thing of beauty but the money just didn't stretch that far." Though it seemed spacious in 1962, library service

in Port Angeles quickly outgrew the new addition. As early as 1967, a newspaper article referred to the library's "desperate need for more space." In the same year, a study titled *Concepts of Service for the Port Angeles Public Library* by library consultant Martha Boaz concluded that the building was inadequate in many areas and should be replaced with a new facility.   A community study in 1974 confirmed the facility was inadequate to meet the demand for service in Port Angeles.

On September 16, 1986 and again on May 19, 1987, the North Olympic Library System held county-wide bond issue elections in an attempt to finance a new central library and service center facility. Both elections asked voters to approve a 5.8 million dollar issue to build a combined Port Angeles Library and Service Center of approximately 40,000 sq. ft. (25,000 public service, 15,000 service center). Both bond issues failed to receive the necessary 60% yes vote in order to pass. In the 1986 attempt, a 49.7% yes vote was attained county-wide. However, 61.2% of the voters in Port Angeles precincts voted yes. In the 1987 election, 52.1% voted yes county-wide with a 59.8% yes vote in Port Angeles. The turnout in 1987 was about twice as high as in 1986, primarily due to a vote-by-mail procedure which was used for the first time in Clallam County.

In 1992, efforts to build a new main library got back on track. The NOLS Board approached both the Port Angeles School District and the City of Port Angeles to explore a partnership in building a new library. Because of legal restraints, the School District was unable to participate. However, the City agreed to study the matter. A joint Library-City task force was formed, meetings held and a recommendation to build a new library forwarded to the City Council.

In July of 1994, the Port Angeles City Council agreed to sponsor a bond election for a new library to be held on September 20, 1994.

The Port Angeles Friends of the Library formed a political action committee to promote the bond issue, take out advertisements and doorbell neighborhoods throughout Port Angeles. Following a very active campaign, the library bond issue was approved by voters with a 66.3% yes vote.[1]

Ground was broken in 1997 and the new $5.6 million facility was opened to the public with a dedication ceremony held on August 16, 1998. The Carnegie Library on Lincoln Street is currently a museum operated by the Clallam County Historical Society.

Forks. On January 19, 1946, the first public library in Forks opened in an unused room of the town's elementary school. As a branch of the county's Clallam Rural Library, it had an initial collection of 600 books, augmented by volumes from the county system, and Lillian Dimmel was the first librarian. When Muriel Huggins moved to the area around Forks in 1941, the remote Olympic Peninsula timber town of about 550 people had no library. So Huggins went about collecting books and magazines to share, hand-delivering items people wanted to read. Her husband Del later built shelves in their enclosed porch, where people were free to come and go and borrow what they liked. Huggins joined others when planning for an official library began in 1944, and it opened in January 1946. Soon after, the library faced some immediate challenges: the Town of Forks had voted to incorporate in August 1945, which meant that the

new library could not remain under the management of the rural library district. The local PTA (parent-teacher association) rallied forces to keep the library in Forks, and a nonprofit library association was formed.

The fledgling library also found itself in need of a new home barely a year and a half into operation, as the library's grade-school home was needed to accommodate increasing enrollment. A small building once owned by long-time resident Bert Fletcher, where he raised rabbits in the 1920s, became temporary quarters in 1947, and the short-lived "rabbit-hutch library" was born.

Around the same time, residents decided that the library would make a fitting war memorial, and the Forks Memorial Library Association began fundraising -- the association would operate the library though 1973, with staff and materials provided by the county's rural library district. In 1951 a site was donated on the corner of B Street and the Olympic Loop Highway (U.S. 101); volunteers completed the building's construction that year, and the library's first permanent home was dedicated June 28, 1952.[2]

The library merged with the newly formed North Olympic Library System in 1973, and plans to resolve crowding at the Forks branch were underway by 1979. The solution turned up just across B Street in the form of the old Seafirst Bank building, which was remodeled and opened January 19, 1981, with 20,000 books. Volunteers moved the library's collection, including grade schoolers who formed a human "book brigade," passing books hand-to-hand across the street and through a window of the new library. The Forks Memorial Library celebrated its 60th year in 2006, serving the still-small town of 3,120 with a collection of 30,000 books and circulation topping 65,000 items checked out annually. A major renovation of the Forks Branch is planned for 2014.

Sequim. Sequim was incorporated in October 1913 and in 1936 constructed a public library. The Clyde Rhodefer Library was built with Public Works Administration funds on land donated by the Progressive Club of Sequim. It was the culmination of years of effort by women of the community who first started a circulating collection of 300 books in 1915. The library became part of the North Olympic Library System in _____.

A larger building was constructed in 1982-83. The project cost approximately $545,000, including about $112,000 raised in a community fund drive spearheaded by the Sequim Rotary Club and the Sequim Friends of the Library. An additional $70,000 was donated by the City of Sequim following the sale of the old library building, which is still in use as a chiropractor's office on Sequim Avenue. $13,000 worth of property was donated by longtime library supporter Gertrude Nelson. NOLS funds accounted for the remaining $350,000 of the project's total cost. The Sequim Library was given a major renovation in 2009. There has been an acknowledged need for a larger Sequim Library since at least 1998, and the Friends of the Library have spearheaded several initiatives to initiate a building planning process. NOLS was reluctant to move forward with any such plans because of concerns about the District's ability to pay for the cost of operating a larger facility. The passage of the library levy lid lift in 2010 means that the Library Board will begin planning for a new building or expansion in 2013.

Clallam Bay. Due to increased cost and lower usage levels, Bookmobile service was terminated in December, 1981. The beloved Bookmobile was put on blocks in Clallam Bay and it served as the first branch library in Clallam Bay until an appropriate building was leased in the downtown area. In 1984(?) NOLS built the one-room Clallam Bay Library at its current location. Within a decade, the library was bursting at the seams, and the Friends of the Library began a fundraising effort to expand the building. In 2007 the Friends reached their fundraising goal and in October 2008 the expanded Clallam Bay Branch opened to the public with almost three times as much space, as well as an office for staff and a public meeting room.

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[1] History of the Port Angeles Library by Hal Enerson
[2] History of Forks Library by Julie Van Pelt, HistoryLink.org