



## Nashville Public Library Collection, 1885-2012

### Collection Summary:

**Title:** Nashville Public Library Collection

**Date Range:** 1885-2012

**Summary:** A collection of materials from the Nashville Public Library, including administrative records, financial records, reports, publications, and correspondence.

**Physical Description:** 103.2 linear feet; 213 boxes

**Language:** English

**Stack Location:** S6-1 - S6-30; S7-25 - S7-30; S13-1 - S13-4

**Repository:** Metropolitan Government Archives of Nashville-Davidson County, 615 Church St., Nashville, TN 37219

### Historical Note:

In 1885, a charter of incorporation establishing the Howard Library was registered in Nashville, Tennessee, thereby creating Nashville's first public library. Originally, patrons purchased reader's cards in order to gain access to the library's collections; however, the practice ended in 1901 and Howard Library became a free circulating public library. In the same year, Andrew Carnegie donated \$100,000 for a new library building in Nashville, and the cornerstone for the Carnegie Library on the corner of 8th Avenue and Union Street was laid in 1903. The library opened to the public in 1904 with Mary Hannah Johnson as the first Library Director.

Between 1914 and 1920, the library received additional funding from Andrew Carnegie and saw the opening of four new branches, including the South Branch (which later burned down in 1942), the North Branch, the Negro Branch, and the East Branch. By 1934, the library had changed its name from the Carnegie Library of Nashville to Nashville Public Library. Library radio programs were put on the air.

The 1950s saw the opening of the Hadley Park Branch, the expansion of Bookmobile services, and the establishment of the Friends of the Library. In 1959, Nashville Public Library was formally turned over to the city, and soon afterward the Richland Park Branch opened. In 1961, the building of a new Main Library and five new branches was approved by the City Council. During the 1960s, Nashville Public Library saw the opening of the Airport Reading Room, the first WPLN broadcast, the addition of the Old Hickory and Goodlettsville community libraries to the Nashville Public Library system, and the building of the Thompson Lane, Donelson, Edgehill, Green Hills, and Inglewood Branches. The new Main Branch was opened in 1966, and was later named for former Mayor Ben West in 1977.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Nashville Public Library saw the opening of the Bellevue, Southeast, and Pruitt Branch libraries, as well as the Metro Archives. In 1999, construction began on the new Main Library building downtown, which was completed in 2001. During that time, several new library buildings were opened, including those in Green Hills, Madison, and Bordeaux, and several other branches were renovated. Since then, the Nashville Public Library has offered increasing support to the Nashville community through the use of public programming, language learning services, computer classes, and collaboration with Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools. The Library continues to receive support from the Friends of the Library and the Nashville Public Library Foundation.

**Scope and Content Note:**

This large collection contains over 3,400 items consisting of a wide variety of materials belonging to the Nashville Public Library. Records begin with the establishment of the Howard Library in 1885 and end with Donna Nicely's term as Library Director in 2012. The bulk of the Nashville Public Library Collection consists of the managerial papers belonging to each director; however, various record books and audio recordings are included in the collection as well. Directors' papers comprise administrative records, correspondence, reports, financial records, publications, newspaper clippings, and information on individual library branches. The contents of this collection are such that they document the history and progression of the Nashville Public Library system over the course of nearly 130 years, as well as the changing roles of the Library over time. Large amounts of correspondence with other libraries around the country and materials relating to the American Library Association illustrate the development of the library profession both in Nashville and in the United States.

**Index Terms:****Subjects:**

American Library Association.

Archives.  
Carnegie Libraries  
Libraries--America  
Libraries and metropolitan areas  
Nashville Public Library (Tenn.)

**Arrangement Note:**

This collection is arranged chronologically by Library Director, with two additional series for books (administrative record books and scrapbooks) and multimedia (audio tapes). It is organized into twelve series.

The *Howard Library* series ranges from 1885 to about 1903, and contains materials documenting the establishment and operation of the Howard Library and the Library Board, including administrative records, correspondence, financial records, and reports. Of particular prominence is the library's charter of incorporation (1885) and by-laws, along with correspondence to Andrew Carnegie and reports of the Free Library Commission.

The *Johnson, Mary Hannah* series ranges from approximately 1901 to 1912, and contains materials largely documenting the funding, building, and operations of the Carnegie Library of Nashville while under the directorship of Mary Hannah Johnson. Other materials give information on the curricula and coursework for different library schools across the country, documenting the progress of education in library science. Sub-series include administrative records, book lists, correspondence, financial records, library schools, miscellaneous items, and reports. Of particular prominence are photographs of the original Carnegie Library staff, architectural plans for the Carnegie Library, and correspondence with Melvil Dewey.

The *Kercheval, Margaret McE.* series ranges from 1912 to 1920, and details the operations of the Carnegie Library of Nashville under the directorship of Margaret McE. Kercheval. Included in this series are materials relating to the construction and opening of the South, North, Negro, and East Branch libraries, as well as a great deal of materials relating to the library's efforts in support of World War I. This includes correspondence, reports, and campaign materials for the Books for Soldiers program and copies of the ALA's *War Libraries Bulletin*. Noteworthy items among these materials include a notice of the appointment of Marian M. Hadley as the Negro Branch Library's first Librarian, a plan drawing of the North Branch Library by architect C.K. Colley, and a report of the Nashville War Library Committee.

The *Baskette, G.H.* series contains administrative records, correspondence, and reports relating to the operation of the library and library branches during G.H.

Baskette's term as Library Director, from 1920-1927. Materials include annual reports, correspondence relating to the business of the Board of Trustees for the Carnegie Library, and correspondence with State Librarian and Archivist John Trotwood Moore.

The *Brigham, Harold F.* series ranges from 1927 to 1931, and contains materials relating to library operations under the directorship of Harold F. Brigham. This series is largely made up of correspondence, as well as materials relating to the Nashville Museum of Art's beginnings and its use of the Carnegie Library for exhibit space. Sub-series in this collection include the Art Museum, correspondence, miscellaneous items, North Branch, publications, and reports. Notable among these materials is a letter from Sergeant Alvin C. York regarding the publication of his autobiography, issues of the Carnegie Library Bulletin, and the constitution and by-laws for the Nashville Museum of Art.

The *Drury, F.K.W.* series contains materials spanning the period of 1931 through 1946, during F.K.W. Drury's term as Library Director. Some materials in this series document the Carnegie Library of Nashville's actions during the Great Depression, as well as the establishment of the Business Branch of the library, the burning of the South Branch, and the Nashville Public Library radio show *Your Library and Mine* on WSIX. Sub-series include administrative records, Business Branch, correspondence, photographs, publications, radio programs, reports, South Branch, and WPA projects. Notable items include applications for Civil Works Administration projects and correspondence with the Emergency Relief Administration of Tennessee, photographs of the Carnegie Library, and radio scripts for *Your Library and Mine*.

Materials in the *Alvarez, Robert S.* series cover Nashville Public Library's history under the directorship of Dr. Robert S. Alvarez between 1946 and 1959. Included in this series are items documenting changes in Nashville Public Library's system, such as the establishment of Bookmobile services and Booketerias, the construction of the Hadley Park Branch in 1952, and the formation of the Friends of the Library in 1957. Prominent among these materials are radio scripts for several Nashville Public Library programs on WMAK, correspondence regarding the desegregation of the Nashville Public Library in 1950, and newspaper clippings regarding the transfer of the library to the city in 1959.

The *Stewart, David Marshall* series ranges from 1960-1985, and contains a large amount of materials relating to Nashville Public Library under the directorship of David Marshall Stewart. This series covers a number of events in Nashville Public Library's history, including the opening of several new branches, the establishment of the Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and a number of special projects such as the Thermogram Project and the Read and RAP Program.

A large quantity of this series consists of correspondence and reports, as well as financial records and materials relating to the American Library Association. Additionally, this series contains materials from various conferences attended by David Marshall Stewart, correspondence and reports for the Municipal Reference Library, and detailed information regarding the Tennessee Bicentennial reenactment in 1976. Notable materials include architectural plans for the Ben West Library and several branches, numerous flyers for Tom Tichenor marionette shows, and WPLN program guides.

The *Stark, Caroline* series ranges from 1985 to 1994, and covers Nashville Public Library's operations under the directorship of Caroline Stark. Most of the materials consist of financial records and administrative reports, and others document the opening of the Metro Archives, Southeast and Pruitt Branches. Notable materials include planning documents for the Fisk Learning Library Program, materials related to the Library's conversion to an automated system in the early 1990s, and photographs documenting the construction of the Southeast Branch Library.

Materials in the *Nicely, Donna* series cover the Library's operations during Donna Nicely's term as Director from 1995 to 2012. Much of this series is dedicated to the groundbreaking, construction, and 2001 grand opening of the new Main Library downtown. Materials for the new Main Library include building plans and architectural drawings, designs for the new building by competing architectural firms, and project manuals. This series also contains materials relating to the opening of the Edmondson Pike Branch in 2000, the renovation of the East, Edgehill, and Thompson Lane Branches, and the opening of the new Madison, Green Hills, and Bordeaux Branch libraries. Other materials include those relating to donations to the Nashville Room, branch histories, and monthly reports of the Nashville Library Building Program.

The *Books* series contains scrapbooks, reports, and other administrative records for the Howard, Carnegie, and Ben West libraries, as well as the East, Negro, North, and South Branches. Books are arranged alphabetically by library or branch, and include accessions and circulation books, library card registration books, and Board of Directors minutes.

The *Multimedia* series contains a small collection of reel-to-reel audio recordings belonging to Nashville Public Library. These recordings range from around 1967 to 1975, and consist of recordings of various Metro Government meetings and WPLN broadcasts. Notable items include a recording of President Lyndon B. Johnson at the Tennessee General Assembly in 1967, presentations by Jacob Rader Marcus on issues within the Jewish community, and recordings of a

meeting between Mayor Beverly Briley and the Black Committee of South Nashville in 1973.

**Contents Listing:**

**Box 1:** *Howard Library*

**Boxes 2-10:** *Johnson, Mary Hannah*

**Boxes 11-15:** *Kercheval, Margaret McE.*

**Box 16:** *Baskette, G.H.*

**Boxes 17-18:** *Brigham, Harold F.*

**Boxes 19-24:** *Drury, F.K.W.*

**Boxes 25-39:** *Alvarez, Robert S.*

**Boxes 40-134:** *Stewart, David Marshall*

**Boxes 135-165:** *Stark, Caroline*

**Boxes 166-195:** *Nicely, Donna*

**Boxes 196-209:** *Books*

**Boxes 210-213:** *Multimedia*

For a complete collection inventory, please contact Metro Archives.

**Restrictions:**

**Restrictions on Access:** In-library use only.

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**Administrative Information:**

**Copyright:** The Metropolitan Government Archives of Nashville-Davidson County retains intellectual property rights to this collection. Some restrictions may apply.

**Provenance:** Nashville Public Library

**Processing Information:** Processed by Kelley Sirko, Program Coordinator, November 2016.

**Accruals:** Further accruals are expected.