

2016

## Clark County Library

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### Recommended Citation

Richter, Wendy Bradley, "Clark County Library" (2016). *Articles*. 224.  
<https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/articles/224>

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## ***Clark County Library***

The Clark County Library is one of the oldest library buildings in the state of Arkansas. Its origins date back to 1897, when about thirty Arkadelphia women founded the Woman's Library Association. With a goal to establish a public library in the city, the women's work was representative of early efforts to establish such entities in the state. Notably, the library was among just a very small number of public libraries serving Arkansas in the first part of the twentieth century.

The Woman's Library Association began to collect books through donations from members and other interested parties. At first, books were stored in the president's home, then moved to a space downtown as the holdings continued to grow. By 1899, it became clear that interest was sufficient to warrant building a new, larger, permanent, building.

After many fund-raising activities such as spelling bees, fiddling contests, bazaars, and oyster suppers, construction began in 1903. One of the most memorable fundraising events occurred in 1905 when William Jennings Bryan gave a benefit lecture for the new facility. Designed by well-known architect Charles L. Thompson of Little Rock, the library was built by James Pullen. Fund-raising continued for years: it was not until 1913 that the debt for the building was paid off.

From the time of its opening in 1903 until 1939, the library was owned and operated by the Woman's Library Association. In 1939, the building and its contents were donated to the city. In 1974 the deed was transferred to the Clark County Library Board. The Library building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.

Significantly, many of the records of the Woman's Library Association have been preserved, including the library's circulation records from the library's early days.

Today, those records are housed within the Archives and Special Collections Department, Riley-Hickingbotham Library, Ouachita Baptist University.