

WEST PARK TIMES

A Nostalgic Look Back at the West Park Neighborhood of Cleveland

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The Opening of a West Park Landmark, March 28, 1928

by Dar McGeady

THE CLEVELAND PUBLIC LIBRARY West Park Branch has been serving the community for more than 85 years. The site at the southeast corner of Lorain Avenue and West 157th Street had originally been designated for a library by the Village of West Park. After West Park was annexed to Cleveland in 1923, the Board of the Cleveland Public Library authorized payment of \$3,500 to the City of Cleveland for “good title, without conditions” to the property.

Library Director Linda Anne Eastman notified library agencies on November 2nd, 1926 of the “increased library facilities in the West Park neighborhood,” advising to begin purchasing books for the new branch in “an almost entirely untilled field offering an opportunity which challenges our best efforts.” At the time, the only area library open to the public was at Nathaniel Hawthorne School on West 130th Street.



West Park Branch Library north side and main entrance, February 28, 1928. Photos: Cleveland Public Library Archives

Walker & Weeks, the city’s most prominent architects, were chosen to design the building. The firm designed the Main Library building in Downtown Cleveland in 1918 as well as several branches on the East Side. H.E. Klefman Company served as building contractors and ground was broken in 1927.

The West Park Library was designed in a modified English Tudor style of red brick trimmed in light stone with a

slate roof. The steep center gable dividing the two wings extended to form an entrance at West 157th. Prominent features of the library are its leaded-glass bay windows, one projecting above the entrance, others at the north and south ends of the building. A staff room was located upstairs in the gable above the entrance. Cost of the building was \$93,938; equipment and furnishings cost \$18,410; about \$1,500 was spent for landscaping. The metal shelving accommodated 23,430 volumes.

In 1927, Helen D. Marvin was appointed Branch Librarian. At the time of West Park Library’s 30-year anniversary in 1958, she recalled how the high ceilings conveyed “the feeling of grace and spaciousness.” Artwork had been carefully selected.

With the exception of the Branch and Children’s Librarians, the large staff, who had never worked together previously, began on Monday, March 26th, to unpack books and prepare for that week’s opening. Workmen were still on-site and there was a certain amount of unavoidable confusion. Miss Marvin recalls “flying around with a pocket full of nickels needed to make necessary phone calls.”

After a week of intense publicity and in spite of a dreadful late-winter storm, opening ceremonies were well attended and festive. The open house and reception for adults on March 29th began with music, followed by remarks from Miss Eastman and other notables. Children were welcomed with a special open house and story-telling on March 30th.

On March 31st, 1928, the West Park Branch Library officially opened for registration and book circulation, thus becoming the first public building erected in West Park following its annexation to the City of Cleveland five years earlier, in 1923.

Additional historic photos appear on page 2...



*Special thanks to Anne Marie Wieland
Cleveland Public Library Archives*

Memories of West Park Library

by Dan Weber

In the early 1940s during World War II, our West Park branch of the Cleveland Public Library had a "Summer Reading Program." I was a student at Our Lady of Angels elementary school on Rocky River Drive and the nuns tipped us off about the program. I jumped on my bike and rode down to check it out. If you joined, your name was added to a poster-sized sheet and placed on an easel in the library. Every book read was noted by a gold star after one's name. The goal was to read ten books during summer vacation.

There were checks and balances, though. We were allowed credit only for books assigned to our school year. We could not, for example, read a third-grade book if we were entering the sixth grade. Also, we had to give an oral book report to a librarian prior to receiving the gold star next to our name.

But, oh... the bragging rights it gave us! We would compete with our buddies through the summer, then

when school started in the fall there were nudges in class along the lines of "How many did you read? ...Yeah? Well, next summer I'll whip you!"



*West Park Library, World War II Victory Corner, 1942.
Cleveland Public Library Archives*



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