

History of the Corinne Costin Gibson Memorial Public Library in Port St. Joe

There have been numerous library facilities in the City of Port St. Joe prior to the construction of the current building known as the Corinne Costin Gibson Memorial Public Library. Early records tell us that in 1945, the city's school library put out a call to the community asking for donations of books that people might have in their homes. At the time, the library had a total inventory of only 400 books to serve 250 students. In April 1947, the Junior Woman's Club took on the public library as a project. With the help of civic clubs, private businesses, and individuals, the group opened two rooms in the Miller Drug Store Building on Reid Avenue. Lumber for book shelves was donated by Basil Kenney, owner of Kenney's Saw Mill. The PTA donated Mother Goose prints to decorate the children's reading section. The name "Memorial Library of Port St. Joe" was chosen as it was dedicated to the servicemen and women of the area.



Corinne Costin Gibson Memorial Public Library

On February 22, 1952, an article appeared in *The Star* announcing that the Memorial Library was now open to the public and located in City Hall. Library hours were Wednesdays from 1 to 5 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. Books could be rented for 3 cents per library day or 6 cents per week. Eventually, the library was unable to maintain staff and the books lay unused and locked in a corner room at City Hall.

In the fall of 1963, a children's library was opened on 8th Street by the St. Joseph Catholic Church; it stayed in operation for more than a year. The city and county stumbled along without sufficient library facilities until 1964, when the county commissioners adopted a resolution requesting Florida Governor Bryant to appoint a library board. The board consisted of Edward Banjough, Mrs. Sam Britt, Miss Netta Niblack, C. E. Daniell, and Mrs. Charles S. Davis. A state grant for \$19,770 was awarded to finance library services and construction, with the condition that the County enter into a contract with the State Library

and Historical Commission for the operation and supervision of the library project during the period of the grant.

On October 27, 1964, the Gulf County commission approved a contract between the Library Board and the Bay County Library Association for the operation of library service in Gulf County. Thus began our association with the Northwest Regional Library and Mrs. Jane Patton, Head Librarian. The Port St. Joe Library opened its doors in January 1965 in the Tapper Building next door to the old Post Office site on Monument Avenue with Elizabeth Jones acting as Library Assistant. The facility was small, being a former laundromat, but the Northwest Regional Library System provided the services of a bookmobile which visited Gulf County twice each week. Books and references could be requested and delivered by the bookmobile. Mrs. Jean Faliski became the new Library Manager in 1967 and continued in that position until her retirement in 2006.



Portrait of Corinne Costin Gibson

Future plans were made to build a larger, modern facility and steps to reach this goal began in earnest in 1975 when it was reported that a private citizen had pledged a considerable sum for library construction and operation. A building committee was appointed and the site for the new library facility was chosen on the west side of the courthouse on Highway 71. Later, the architect Charles Arthur Gaskin and the engineers determined that the east side would be a better site due to poor soil samples on the west side. They reported the change would save \$25,000 in building costs. A state grant of \$120,000 was obtained, and the county agreed to match this amount. Dr. Tom Gibson was identified as the private donor, and his gift of \$50,000 was made in memory of his late wife. On July 27, 1976, the county commission adopted a resolution naming the library the Corinne Costin Gibson Memorial Public Library. The building was completed and the dedication was held on October 23, 1977. At the ceremony, the

Port St. Joe High School band played the National Anthem while the ROTC unit raised the American flag, which was donated by the St. Joseph Bay Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution. William J. Rish presided. Everett Owens, Jr., Chairman of the Gulf County Commission, and Frank Pate, Jr., Mayor of the City of Port St. Joe, led the ribbon cutting.

On October 25, 2006, the newest addition to the library building, the Alfred I. duPont Florida History and Genealogy Center, was dedicated in a ceremony led by Nolan Treglown, Chairman of the Gulf County Library Advisory Board. Members of the Port St. Joe High School chorus, directed by Ann Comforter, sang the National Anthem. Carl Copeland, who was instrumental in selecting materials for the center, was the Library Branch Manager at the time. Construction of the wing was made possible through a donation of \$50,000 from the Alfred I. duPont Foundation and the fundraising efforts of the Friends of the Gulf County Public Libraries Building Committee.



The Alfred I. DuPont Florida History and Genealogy Center

Since 1976, the library has been well used by the Port St. Joe community and has become a major resource for the town and surrounding area. Currently, the library is home to over 26,000 books, magazines, papers, CDs, and DVDs. There are 9 public computers, 3 children's computers, and 4 laptops available for use. Nancy Brockman, the current Gulf County Library Coordinator, works diligently to update the library, gather cutting edge technology, and provide a wide range of programming for patrons young and old.

A look at the past tells us that Gulf County recognizes the value of a public library and is willing to make sacrifices to ensure citizens will always have access to a well-supplied, relevant facility. As we look to the future, we are certain our community will continue to honor and support our library and its numerous resources.

Submitted by: Paula Boone, Library Assistant Manager