

GREENVILLE COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM

In 1921 several citizens, including Thomas Parker and J.W. Norwood, realized the need for a free public library and established the Greenville Public Library Association. The first library opened in a store building on East Coffee Street. Soon after, the library placed a collection of new books at the Phillis Wheatley Building to serve Greenville's African-American citizens.

Because the library was intended to serve all people regardless of race or residence, the first mobile library began visiting rural schools and mill villages in 1923. Privately financed at first, it was taken on by the county four years later. The city and county departments operated under a single board and director, but the county contracted with the city for some services. Branch libraries in Greer, Fountain Inn, Simpsonville, and Tigerville opened in 1926. During the 1930s the stately Park School was purchased for a main library. The McBee Avenue Branch replaced the Phillis Wheatley Branch in 1952.

Big changes soon followed. In 1960 the Friends of the Library was organized to assist in library improvement efforts with Greenville businessman and philanthropist Arthur Magill as president. (He and his wife later donated a large rotating geophysical globe, which remains one of the main library's most visited attractions.) In 1961 the state legislature formed a consolidated Greenville County Library and approved a 2.25 mill tax levy countywide, which allowed expanded services. New branches in Travelers Rest and Mauldin opened. The McBee Avenue Branch closed in 1965 after the County Library was fully integrated.

Between 1965 and 1968 the Symmes Foundation gave \$600,000 to the library—the largest private donation ever made to a Greenville County institution at the time. The donation was combined with local, state, and federal funds to purchase land and construct a new main library, which opened in 1970. Over the next several years, five additional branches were established in Berea, Taylors, Augusta Road, and East and West Greenville.

In the early 1980s, the library system began automating its services and today is considered a technological leader among



public libraries in the state. County Council approved a program in 1993 to replace nine branches and the main library and build a future branch. The new Hughes Main Library adorned Heritage Green by 2002, and the last of the replacement branches opened in 2005.

Today, more than half of Greenville County's residents borrow over three million items annually from eleven modern library facilities and the bookmobile, which receive more than 1.7 million visits each year. Library services include free Internet access, online databases, genealogical resources, public meeting spaces, wireless access, books, music, videos, and programs for all ages.



Above: The Greenville Public Library began service to rural schools and mill villages with a bookmobile in 1923. The first bookmobile, called the Pathfinder, is shown at the Monaghan Mill stop in 1928.

Below: The Hughes Main Library on Heritage Green is an award-winning public library. It is the second largest in the state and offers an inviting facility for reading, taking advantage of the latest technology, performing research, and exploring your world.

