Institution Case Study:
Charleston County Public Library, Main Branch

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PLACE INFORMATION AND INTRODUCTORY GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Location Address

Charleston County Public Library, Main Branch
68 Calhoun Street
Charleston, SC 29401

Introduction and Location Background

Each institution is unique in its own way. The idea of this case study is to analyze its components by the following general sections and detail considerations that are either good or poor. Being a case study, observations are subjective to the observer. This introduction takes into account the following general points of consideration (not all points will necessarily apply to this institution):

location data, purpose/mission of the institution, its background/history, and general feel of the facilities on arrival, etc.

The Main Library downtown branch of the 16 location-wide and one Bookmobile Charleston County Public Library (CCPL) system is found near the heart of the historic city of Charleston, South Carolina–a city of history that has played a central part in our country's first 200 years, from the city's founding in 1670 to the American Revolution and the Civil War. The public library has a patron base of over 355,000 citizens in the county and a corresponding tax base for its funding and community support (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

The Charleston County Library was established in 1930 and formally opened on January 1, 1931. It was first housed in the Charleston Museum building. Within the first two days, four hundred cards were issued, and by the end of February, 8,473 books had been circulated. The library's services expanded rapidly, and by June, 1931, the first library branches were opened to make

library materials accessible to residents across the county. By the end of the first year, the library had 9,705 card holders and had circulated some 77,459 books. In 1935 the library had expanded rapidly and it was felt that a separate building was needed, so the library moved to a new location at 94 Rutledge Avenue (CCPL, 2011).

By 1954, the 94 Rutledge Avenue location had also been outgrown and a public campaign was launched for construction of a new headquarters library building. A bond issue was put before the voters by County Council and was passed with a large majority. A site was selected on Marion Square (404 King Street) where the west wing of the old Citadel was located, and the new headquarters building opened its doors in November, 1960. This location stayed open until February 8, 1998, when it closed its doors for the last time in order to be relocated. A new library was built only a few blocks away at 68 Calhoun Street, and the grand opening was held Tuesday, April 7, 1998 (CCPL, 2011).

COLLECTION SPACE OBSERVATIONS

Physical Collection

Section general rating: 4
Rating scale: 1 = bad, 2 = bad-average, 3 = average, 4 = average-good, 5 = good

This section focuses on specifics in collection development of the institution's collection space. The general rating (listed above) took into account the following general points (not all will necessarily apply to this institution): *general stacks, special collections, rare books/artifacts, ready reference area, dedicated interest areas (business area, art, etc.), special events areas (holiday/seasonal); as well as the shelving layout, the space on shelves, order of material, and indexing system of each of these sections.*

Specific considerations worthy of a 1 (poor) rating or 5 (good) rating are detailed below. Considerations rating 2-4 will not be as well documented. The idea is to highly document practices which can either be avoided (in the case of poor) or utilized (in the case of good) in future planning and design in either library renovations or new establishments. Documenting and re-documenting standard practices and mediocrity here will not lead to the elucidation of superior or inferior methods. As a whole, the institutions of tomorrow can learn from the practices of today.

The Main Library has a fairly large and decently developed physical collection covering many diverse topics and interest. It is organized by the Dewey Decimal indexing system. When I was a patron and employee of the library from 2003-2005, I found that the encyclopedic development had books on many of my diverse topics and interest, and a recent review of the collection showed that they have maintained that same level of diversity. Most other patrons I think would agree for their own interest. As well, the library was very responsive to patron request for specific new acquisitions.

They have a small collection focusing on the Holocaust and another large collection focusing on South Carolina History and Genealogy. Both have links on the system's Website. Other secondary collections also include a small area and resources dedicated to accessing the Foundation Center's material and database–an international organization acting as a clearing house for grants and philanthropy initiatives. They also house a career center area and business resources for general research. The FY2010 circulation at Main was over 601,000 items (CCPL, 2011).

In review of the stacks, the space on the shelves seemed tight, and the system does not have a dedicated stacks department, but given its general size and development, this does not seem to be limiting factor to patron needs so far. For a public library, the general collection was well suited to the local community's needs.

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