

Peerless Places

The Rockville Regional Library

The Rockville Regional Library is one of the City's best known modernist buildings. Completed in 1971, it was the City's first permanent full service public library and served the needs of residents until its closing in the fall of 2006, when a new and larger facility was completed in Rockville Town Center. Situated within the civic architecture of government buildings and courthouses, the Rockville Library was a flagship facility among several new library construction projects of the late 1960s.

Its 1971 dedication was the culmination of a century-long odyssey to establish a permanent library in Rockville, a movement that originated in 1869 with the founding of the Rockville Library Association of Montgomery County. This early initiative failed to sustain momentum, and it was not until 1916 that Rockville women's groups organized a small lending library on Montgomery Avenue. By 1921, the Rockville Library Association had relocated its 1,500 books to Dr. Stonestreet's former medical office. The collection grew steadily and, in 1937, it was moved to the Rockville Academy building where it remained for the next 30 years.

The Association reorganized as the Rockville Public Library in 1948 and voted to offer free library services to Town residents. The Montgomery County Department of Public Libraries was created in 1951, with Rockville joining the new system in 1957. In 1966, the library moved to a stylish new office building at 255 North Washington Street. The 40,000-volume collection quickly filled this temporary space as plans for a permanent facility were being formulated.

Since the late 1950s, Rockville had been the preferred location for a central library headquarters and a regional library. In 1968, the County selected a 1.5-acre site on Perry



photo courtesy of Mary T. Arthur

The Rockville Library shortly after its completion in 1971 and in September 2006.

Street (today Maryland Avenue) and named Stanley H. Arthur, who designed the Davis Library (1964) in Bethesda and numerous buildings in Rockville, project architect for the Rockville Library.

Arthur's design triumphed over the sloping topography of the site, making full use of its longitudinal axis by placing the length of the 2-story building along Jefferson Street. Arthur located the main entrance under a sheltered walkway on the south façade and created a focal point by placing an entry plaza within the southeast corner of the T-shaped design. The International Style building with its broad bands of beige brick and tinted ribbon windows was a dramatic addition to Rockville's streetscape. The first floor housed the reference sections, open stacks, and a Children's Room; the second floor provided administrative offices, book storage, and delivery bays. Completed in September 1971, the building was dedicated to George P. Moreland, the first director of Montgomery County Library Services.



photo by Scott Robinson

In its 35 years of operation, the Rockville Library provided residents with information, opportunity, enrichment, and access to a wider and rapidly changing world. It adapted to the Information and Computer Age, establishing a Telephone Reference Service in 1982 and subsequently providing electronic databases, computer stations, and Internet access. The collection of foreign language materials grew in response to changes in County demographics. A versatile and well-designed facility, the 1971 Rockville Regional Library is currently scheduled for demolition to make way for a District Courthouse.

The Peerless Places series highlights Rockville's historic sites. Contact us for more information.

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