



KENAI LIBRARY TIMELINE

History of the Kenai Community Library

The Library was established as a non-profit organization and the Articles of Incorporation were adopted on March 17, 1949. The first community library was located in the Alaska Territorial Building which also served as a school. Jetret "Jettie" Stryker Petersen founded the library with the help of the Kenai Woman's Club/Kenai Homemakers Club and the Kenai Civic League. Joyce K. Carver was appointed the first Librarian and Kay Lemmon was the Assistant Librarian. The Library formally opened on November 16, 1949.

- 1950:** The Library received a letter from the Department of Education of the Territory of Alaska offering to transfer the old Kenai Territorial School building and grounds to the Library when the school moved into their new building. The Library partnered with the Civic League to accept the transfer and the building was used for a variety of purposes including the Library, Civic League meetings, union meetings, church meetings, picture shows, the Territorial Health Center, teacher apartments, and a taxi cab business.
- 1951:** A Library building fund was established with continuous fund-raising projects such as bake sales, raffles, and plant sales. The Library started the "Kenai Days Garden Fairs" as a fundraiser.
- 1953:** The Kenai Boosters Club, headed by Leo Brawn, was formed to help raise money for a Civic/Library building.
- 1954-1955:** Kenai Library was closed from April 1954 through January 1955 while the old Territorial School building was torn down after being condemned. Library books were temporarily housed at the Pomeroy Construction Company warehouse at Seward Station (Wildwood Army Post).
- 1955:** The Grand Opening of the Kenai Community Library at the newly constructed (but not yet finished) Civic League Building, which also housed the Kenai fire engine, was held on January 19, 1955. Frances Torkilsen took over as acting Librarian while Jetret Petersen was out of state.
- 1958:** On February 1, 1958 Kenai Library received "Public Library" status. The Library held the first hobby and crafts show during Children's Book Week in November of 1958. The show later became the Kenai Peninsula Arts and Crafts Show, which the Library sponsored for ten years.
- 1959:** Alaska became the 49th state on January 3, 1959.
- 1960:** Kenai became an incorporated city on May 9, 1960.
- 1963:** The Library stayed open year-round.
- 1964:** The March 27, 1964 magnitude 9.2 "Good Friday Earthquake" tipped over many Library shelves and damaged and destroyed books. Volunteers made repairs and re-organized the disheveled Library.
- 1967:** Mae Knudson was elected Librarian. The Alaska Centennial was celebrated commemorating the 1867 transfer of the Alaska territory from Russia to the United States.
- 1968:** The City of Kenai helped to support the Library at \$3,500 per year. Mae Knudson resigned as Librarian; Georgia Stubble was elected Librarian.
- 1969:** Kenai Community Library joined the Alaska State Library Association in January 1969. A City bond proposal to build a facility that would include the Library and a Health Center was voted down.
- 1971:** Georgia Stubble resigned as Librarian. Emily DeForest was hired as Librarian, and Alice Graves was hired as a part-time clerk. The City increased its annual donation to \$6,000.
- 1972:** The Kenai City Council approved to assume responsibility for the Kenai Community Library on July 27, 1972.
- 1975:** The City of Kenai entered into agreement with construction company Coastal-Gamble, JV to construct a 5,000 square foot Library building in conjunction with the architectural firm Lane-Knorr-Plunkett & Associates. On March 25, 1975 ground was broken for the new building on the corner of Main Street Loop and Trading Bay Road (Lot 3, Block 1) between the Kenai Court House and Fire Department. Approximately 20,000 books were moved to the new building by staff and volunteers.
- 1976:** The Grand Opening and Dedication of the Kenai Community Library in the new building at 163 Main Street Loop was held on November 21, 1976.
- 1978:** The Totem Tracers donated a large collection of genealogy materials to the Library.
- 1982:** The Kenai Library became a member of the Western Library Network.
- 1983:** Ordinance 852-83 of the Council of the City of Kenai, Alaska created a new "Advisory Library Commission" by enacting a Title 24 to the Kenai Municipal Code. The Library began using a 3M magnetic scanning and security system on circulated materials.
- 1985:** The contract for an addition to the Library building was awarded to Landmark Commercial Construction. The Board of Directors of the Kenai Community Library, Inc. endorsed the formation of a local "Friends of the Library" group on November 19, 1985 and the City of Kenai paid the membership fee. The Library began using a confidential check-out system in response to the Alaska State Statutes Section 40.25.140: Confidentiality of library records.
- 1986:** A 5,000 square foot addition was completed on the Kenai Community Library which included four sound-proof rooms, closed stack area, and an activity room. Dedication of the addition was on April 27, 1986.
- 1987:** The Library catalog and circulation system was automated beginning in 1987 with access to State Library Electronic Doorway (SLED), Gnosis and the Western Library Network.
- 1988:** Library staff began using a newly installed library automation system in June. The first annual Library book sale organized by the Friends of the Library was held on February 12 & 13, 1988.
- 1989:** A celebration of the Library's 40th Anniversary took place on May 21, 1989.
- 1990:** The Internal Revenue Service issued the Board of Directors an Employer Identification Number on July 18, 1990.
- 1991:** The Internal Revenue Service granted the Board of Directors tax exempt status in March 1991.
- 1992:** The Library issued its 15,000th library card in December of 1992.
- 1994:** The Library celebrated its 45th Anniversary with the help of the Friends of the Library on March 6, 1994. The City of Kenai Bond Issue for a Library addition was defeated.
- 1995:** The City of Kenai Bond Issue for a Library addition was defeated (for a second time).
- 1996:** The State of Alaska granted the Library a gaming permit for a dinner and raffle fundraiser held in October. Emily DeForest celebrated her 25th anniversary as Library Director; more than 200 people attended her reception on July 25th. The Library had 3 full time employees, 4 half time employees and one quarter-time (grant funded position) employee.
- 1999:** The Library celebrated its 50th Anniversary on March 7, 1999. Emily DeForest retired as Director on April 8, 1999. Ewa Jankowska was hired as the Library Director.
- 2000:** The Library Board approved \$50,000 from the Building Fund to pay for basic furnishings for the proposed Library addition. The Library's first website was created and published allowing users access to the Library catalog from home.
- 2001:** The Kenai City Council passed two ordinances on October 15 approving \$20,000 for Library addition schematics. Architects Kluge and Associates submitted plans for the addition on November 19, 2001.
- 2005:** Director Ewa Jankowska submitted her resignation to move out of state.
- 2006:** Mary Jo Joiner was hired as Library Director in February 2006. The Kenai City Council voted unanimously to support a Library addition. Klaunder & Company Architects presented a study of a building program and expansion at a City Council work session.
- 2007:** In the October 2007 election, the City of Kenai Bond Issue of \$2,000,000 for the Library expansion passed. The Library was awarded the 2007 Excellence in Small/Rural Public Libraries Award by EBSCO Information Services.
- 2008:** The Kenai City Council approved the expenditure of \$15,000 for preliminary architectural drawings. The Friends of the Library approved a fee of \$10,000 to contract with Ann Myren of Resources and Results Consulting and Cecily Stern of Planning Consulting and Grant Writing Services for the purpose of developing a Capital and Fundraising Campaign for the Library expansion. In April, the Kenai City Council voted to share half the cost.
- 2009:** The Library received a grant from the Rasmuson Foundation to purchase laptops for public use.
- 2010:** The groundbreaking ceremony for the Library's Expansion and Renovation Project was held on May 3, 2010.
- 2011:** July 2011 was the grand opening of the newly renovated and expanded Library.
- 2014:** U. S. Senator Lisa Murkowski first nominated six Alaska libraries including the Kenai Community Library for the Institute of Museum and Library Services' National Medal for Museum and Library Service. In May, the Kenai City Council voted down a portion of a resolution which would have required residents who lived outside of the city to pay an annual \$20 library card fee.
- 2015:** The Kenai Community Library joined the Alaska state-wide Joint Catalog Consortium and began participating in the Alaska Online with Libraries (OWL) Program. The Library received a grant through the Rasmuson Foundation, Friends of the Kenai Library and Totem Tracers to update the microfilm reader, self-checkout station and to purchase furniture.
- 2016:** The City of Kenai proclaimed April 26, 2016 Nedra Evenson Day recognizing her for her volunteer work at the Kenai Community Library. In October, the Kenai Library hosted its first annual Literary Haunted House. The Library received a grant to purchase iPads for public use through the Alaska Online with Libraries (OWL) Program.
- 2017:** The Kenai Library, Parks and Recreation Department, and the Friends of the Library teamed up to organize and install the "Pathways of Poetry" exhibit in the Kenai Municipal Park. Approximately 86 students submitted poetry for the project and 12 winners were selected to have their work displayed on permanent signs at the Park.
- 2018:** The Kenai Library partnered with the Kenai Airport and "Read on the Fly" program in an effort to distribute donated children's books in the airport.
- 2019:** In October of 2019, Library Director Mary Jo Joiner retired. Katja Wolfe was hired as the new Library Director in December and started at the Library on January 6, 2020.
- 2020:** The worldwide COVID pandemic forced the Library to close for a period of time, institute new rules and regulations, and provide alternative services to patrons including curbside pickup, online programming, and extended wi-fi range into the Library parking lot. In October, the Kenai City Council voted in favor of a resolution supporting the Library to go "fine free." The Library began circulating children's "Discovery" kits and "Know Your Neighbor" kits. A new self-checkout station was installed.