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Multnomah County Library: Still Going Strong After 141 Years!

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Multnomah County Library:

Still going strong after 141 years!

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As the original member of our state's "Centennial Club," Multnomah County Library welcomes the Eugene Public Library and the Oregon State Library to the list of Oregon libraries that have faithfully served Oregonians for a century or more.

Multnomah County Library's history is a rich and complex story that demonstrates how decades of community support and visionary librarianship can build an outstanding library system. Today, MCL has the highest circulation of all U.S. libraries and is frequently lauded for its innovative youth programs, elegant and functional facilities, and sustained commitment to serving the needs of library customers of all ages.

On this page, you'll find a few snapshots of Multnomah County Library from its early days to the present.

1. Multnomah County Library's history began in 1864, when civic-minded individuals created the Library Association of Portland. For its first thirty years, the library was housed in leased space. In 1893, this new library opened on Stark Street between Park and Broadway. It remained the library's home until the opening of the current Central Library in 1913.
2. Director of the library from 1901–1920, Mary Frances Isom earned a place in national library history as a Western library pioneer. During her tenure, the library grew extensively by creating multiple branch libraries, county stations and a sparkling new Central Library.
3. One of the library's earliest bookmobiles.
4. Named after Oregon author Beverly Cleary, the Central Library Children's Library features this bronze tree, whose fanciful components are kept "polished" by the many small hands that inspect it each day. 🌳

