

RG57 Enoch Pratt Free Library (1867-present)

History

Late in 1881, Enoch Pratt, a Baltimore merchant, financier, and philanthropist, began construction of the city's first free public library. In January of 1882, Pratt presented the library to the mayor and city council. Several months later, the state legislature incorporated the first board of trustees for the library and that same year the city's voters approved a library bond issue. Construction of the central library was completed in 1884.

The library opened to the public in 1886 along with four branches, for which Pratt had also donated funds. At the end of the first year, these five libraries had a total of 45,109 volumes on their shelves and 25,963 registered borrowers; circulation totalled 410,215. From these beginnings the library continued to grow and expand its services. This necessitated the construction of a new and larger central facility, completed in 1933 on the site of the original building, and the addition of branches throughout the city. At present, the extension division consists of thirty-two branches and a bookmobile service, which was inaugurated in 1949.

Records Summary

The archives conducted a comprehensive survey of the library's records in 1982. A significant amount of historical records were found, most of which date from about 1970 to the present. There are proportionally fewer records available before 1970, although several important groups of materials were identified. Subjects dealt with in the records include general administration, policy decisions, professional activities, grants, public relations, branches, budgets, financial accounting, library materials acquisition, and children's services. Record types include correspondence, legal documents, reports, clipping files, financial materials, and minutes.

At the time of this writing, all of the library's historical records remain in their offices of origin. This arrangement exists at the request of the library's administration.

Series

Sub-group 1. Board of Trustees

1. Minutes. 1883-present. 1 cu. ft. (8 vols.).
Arranged chronologically.

Sub-group 2. Director's Office

1. Letterbooks. 1884-1926. 4.5 cu. ft. (38 vols.).
Arranged chronologically.
2. Reports of the Librarian. 1892-1902. 13 lin. in.
(1 vol.).
Arranged chronologically.