

History of The Friends of The Seattle Public Library

1940s (and before)

- 1939 The Seattle Public Library Staff Association pledged to create the Friends of The Seattle Public Library. The pledge was fulfilled during the 50th anniversary year of the library.
- 1941 At the College Club, during a dinner with writers, teachers, civic leaders, and patrons on January 16, 1941, the president of the chamber of commerce presided over the election of the founding officers— 8 years before San Francisco, 22 years ahead of Los Angeles, and 31 years in advance of Portland.
- The Friends’ articles of incorporation specified a mission of securing materials beyond the ordinary library budget and sponsoring projects that would be of special service to library users. The first annual meeting was convened on December 8, 1941, with more than 1,000 members.
- 1943 The Friends paid for the renovation of Fremont Library basement to house the Library for the Blind and purchased the library's first phonograph.
- 1945 The Friends convened nine noontime book forums on race relations in response to an August 14, 1944, riot by African American soldiers at Fort Lawton in Magnolia.
- 1949 The Friends organized a “Treasure Chest” drive to gather books for underprivileged children, Alaska homesteaders, inmates at the State Penitentiary in Walla Walla, and American embassies abroad.

1950s

- 1950 The Friends supported a \$5 million bond measure with brochures, community forums, and sent 42 speakers to 200 social and civic clubs.

After the measure was defeated, librarian John Richards recommended that *“The next time we are on the ballot we would like our organized Friends to number thousand instead of hundreds, and we hope that this membership will reach into every section and interest in the community.”*

Early 1950s The Friends collected magazines for the Red Cross to ship to soldiers serving in Korea.

- 1952 The Friends organized “Operation Library” for a bond measure to reach 50,000 residents by phone.
- 1957 The Friends supported the drive for a new Washington State Library building and encouraged matching funds for a federal aid program for library services in rural areas.
- 1959 The Friends created a brochure seeking money and artifacts for the new Central Library, and received both, including a piano for the music department, a Steinway for the auditorium, and plants donated by garden clubs.

1960s

- 1960 The Friends served as tour guides for the new Central Library.
- 1962 The Friends helped in the library program at the World’s Fair.

1965 The Friends purchased a portable public address system and a variety of learning media including books, map cases, and an illuminated floor globe for The Library.

1970s

1971 The first Book Sale began with collection of private donations of used books in barrels placed in the libraries. At Lake City Community Center on October 2 and 3, the sale offered 20,000 books and netted \$2,634. (The 1977 sale exceeded \$10,000 and the 1981 sale topped \$20,000.) The book sale would go on to become the primary fundraising for the Friends.

1974 The Friends, with other civic organizations, gave money for a bookmobile.

1975 The Friends made telephone calls to borrowers to encourage return of overdue items.

1977 The Book Sale targeted purchasing mobile media center equipment, and buying books for the children's department, supporting research on African American literature to provide a good list to interested readers.

1978 The Library had accumulated more than 50,000 volumes it had retired from circulation. The City allowed the Friends to sell those books on a consignment basis, with 60% of the net proceeds going back to the libraries, and 40% to the Friends to use for Library-related projects and gifts.

1979 The Friends inaugurated the Friendship Award (now the Friend of the Year Award) to recognize and honor the most outstanding volunteer.

1980s

1980 Virginia Burnside established the Seattle Public Library Foundation to increase outside financial support for The Library, stating that The Library was *"an under-appreciated, under-valued resource...a neglected child in Seattle's giving."*

1982 The Friends transferred funds to The Foundation to support The Library's Northwest Collection.

1983 The Friends began researching city council candidates' positions on library support and publishing them in the Bookmark, its regular newsletter.

The Friends opened a kiosk in Central Library to sell notecards, pencils, and supplies. The kiosk, called the FriendShop and staffed entirely by volunteers, expanded to include gift items.

1988 The Friends served as hosts at the inaugural year of the newly founded Seattle Arts and Lectures.

1990s

1990 The Friends supported early childhood literacy by funding "Raise a Reader," delivering packets containing an infant's book and other library-related items to hospitals.

1994 The Friends contributed \$15,000 to support a city Bond measure for library funding, which did not pass, complicating Library funding options.

- 1997 Book sorting and storage for the book sales moved to Magnuson Park in Sand Point.
- 1998 The Friends campaigned energetically for the successful “Libraries for All” capital campaign, speaking to many community, professional and neighborhood groups, and testifying at public hearings. They served as hosts at the reopening of each newly renovated branch library in the Libraries for All campaign.

2000s

- 2001 The Friends began providing book bags, given to patrons at checkout.
- 2003 The Friends gave a cultural communities grant to help the library create a pilot language center in the Beacon Hill branch. The following year the program expanded to provide cultural programming for Spanish and Vietnamese speaking patrons.
- 2004 The Friends made a \$250,000 gift to help The Foundation qualify for a \$1,000,000 Kresge matching grant in the capital campaign for the new Library. The new Central Library allocated a dedicated space for a permanent FriendShop on Level 3.
- The Friends served as tour guides for the new Rem Koolhaas-designed Central Library when it opened.
- 2009 The Friends received the first Renée B. Fisher Foundation Books for Teachers grant. Initial participation was slow—Friends had to beg teachers to participate, and hand-delivered vouchers to them (before long there was a multi-year waiting list).

2010s

- 2010 There were huge budget cuts in the city, including major cuts for the Library, like closing Sundays and Fridays. The Friends organized a petition drive in support of restoring funding; at the Book Sale the Friends were able to convince hundreds of people to sign, and the city council did reinstitute a chunk of the budget.
- 2011 The Friends were asked to provide input on hiring the next director of The Seattle Public Library when Marcellus Turner, who was director for the next decade, was hired.
- 2012 The Friends worked to support a Library levy. Several board members spoke in front of the city council, which was very receptive. According to one former board member, *“when the Friends of The Library come, you don’t feel threatened.”*

The Friends moved the book sale operation from Magnuson Park to the Washington Talking Book and Braille Library, leasing the second floor.

The FriendShop hosted its first pop-up sale at the Ballard Branch; held throughout the year, these events help bring the Shop, and the Friends, to Seattle’s communities through increased presence at Library branches.

- 2016 The Friends celebrated their 75th anniversary, initiating the First Library Totes program, giving a free bag to children who receive their first library card.

- 2018 The Friends moved the Book Sale from the Washington Talking Book and Braille Library to a newly rented warehouse space in the Bemis Building in SoDo.
- 2019 The 2019 Library levy passed with historic approval (73% voting yes). The Friends contributed \$25,000, sent letters of support to Seattle City Council, tabled at Library branches, and gave out donuts and sweets and shared talking points.

2020s

- 2020 The COVID-19 pandemic brought big changes to the Friends, including the end of the “HUGE” Book Sale, and the closing of the Bemis warehouse space. The Library contracted out deaccessioning to a third party. For the first time, the Friends Annual Meeting took place online as a webinar. The Friends survived the pandemic, and spent time deeply reflected on their mission, goals, and priorities.

According to one former board member, “The Book Sale was mostly what people knew about the Friends. Some folks were doing advocacy, but that’s not how people knew the Friends. It was very important to the community. The closing of the book sale was the end of an era.”

- 2021 The Joint Advocacy Committee was created, with members from The Seattle Public Library Foundation, the Friends, and Library leadership. Committee goals included advocating for sustainable library funding, safeguarding and expanding access to opportunity and imagination, and creating a resilient library system.

The Friends celebrated its 80th anniversary with a series of socially distanced/online events, including author talks, downloadable coloring sheets, an updated design of the Early Readers totes, an \$800 donation to The Foundation, and donations of books to Little Libraries around the city.

The Friends began to accept book donations from community members and processed an average of 1,000 books per week.

The Friends began to provide funding support to the annual Summer Book Bingo program. When Library branches started reopening in the summer, the Friends welcomed them back with goody bags and notes of appreciation.

The Friends were asked to provide input when The Library conducted its search for a new director, hiring Tom Fay as Executive Director and Chief Librarian.

- 2022 The Friends updated their mission and vision:
Our mission is to elevate the Library and inspire the love of reading in our communities.
Our vision: Vibrant and equitable communities connected through a flourishing Library.

The Friends opened a new satellite space in Georgetown, initially holding one pop-up event per month.

- 2023 The Friends approved two important agreements: first, the Library Partnership Agreement, which committed in writing to foundational principles for working together to support The Library through advocacy, grassroots awareness and fundraising. Second, the Friends and The Library agreed to an Operating Agreement, which defined and clarified the relationship between the two organizations.

The Friends participated in Lobby Day in Olympia for the first time, traveling with representatives from The Library and Library Foundation to show support for Seattle’s libraries.

2024 The FriendShop celebrated its 20th anniversary. Penny Lewis and former Board member Joan Abrevaya were celebrated as the longest serving volunteers—20 years—since the beginning of the modern Central Library FriendShop.

The Friends relocate from one Georgetown location to another, larger one and begin expanded hours to every Thursday and second Saturdays of each month.

The Books for Teachers program turned 15, with more than 135,000 books provided to over 1,200 teachers to date.