
James Anthony Schnur,
Nelson Poynter Memorial Library.

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A library first existed along the Bayboro Harbor when the United States Maritime Service Training Station’s “A” Building opened in the early 1940s. The base library occupied a small conference room near the executive officers’ headquarters in the front of the building. Florida Presbyterian College used former dormitory space for its first library. When that institution (now Eckerd College) moved to its new campus, the Florida Institute for Continuing University Studies (FICUS) brought to the “A” Building its “Extension Library” that served students enrolled in distribution education classes throughout Florida. With the demise of FICUS in 1965, the Extension Library remained on site as a statewide institution. Meanwhile, USF created a small “browsing” collection for the initial wave of freshmen. That initial collection grew to approximately 2,400 volumes by the summer of 1968.

By 1968, the Extension Library moved to a new off-site location to create a stand-alone library building. Shortly after the ceremonies, the board became a reading room for the microfilm collection. In 1979 the over 100,000 titles were moved to the new library building (now Bayboro Hall).

Credit for this phenomenal expansion during the 1970s rests with the dedicated staff led by Doris Cook, a 1929 St. Petersburg High School graduate who returned to her alma mater to lead the newly created library in Poynter’s honor. It opened in May 1981 with nearly 70,000 volumes that had previously resided in “A” Building. The structure also included a media center, allowing Bob Thrush—the audiovisual wizard who operated out of cramped quarters in the rear of “A” Building—to move his operations into a new-and-improved setting. Bob and his student assistants had quite a chore, pushing television sets across campus, taping lectures and events, setting up lecterns and movie projectors, and often lug-ging equipment up the wobbly steps of “B” Building, a wooden structure that lacked an elevator.

Longtime editor and publisher of the St. Petersburg Times, Nelson Poynter had lobbied local and state authorities for the creation and—later—expansion of a university campus in downtown St. Petersburg. He took pride in attending the June 1978 groundbreaking ceremonies for the Phase I expansion of the campus that would create a stand-alone library building and a new classroom building. Shortly after the ceremonies, Poynter suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and passed away.

Within a month, the Board of Regents unanimously voted to name the new library in Poynter’s honor. It opened in May 1981 with nearly 70,000 volumes that had previously resided in “A” Building. The structure also included a media center, allowing Bob Thrush—the audiovisual wizard who operated out of cramped quarters in the rear of “A” Building—to move his operations into a new-and-improved setting. Bob and his student assistants had quite a chore, pushing television sets across campus, taping lectures and events, setting up lecterns and movie projectors, and often lug-ging equipment up the wobbly steps of “B” Building, a wooden structure that lacked an elevator.

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