

**A Brief History of G. V. Barbee, Sr. Library
Oak Island, North Carolina
A Branch of the Brunswick County Public Library System**



Compiled by the Friends of the Library, Southport & Oak Island



“The Oak Island Library Boosters, Inc. is raising money (at least \$200,000) to buy land and a building or build a building for a library on Oak Island. We will then deed the property and the building to the Brunswick County Library system for the use of the citizens.”

With this ambitious mission statement, the Oak Island Library Boosters (henceforth “the Boosters”) chartered their organization on March 5, 1991 and became incorporated in North Carolina on April 22, 1991. Newspaper articles soliciting donations appeared in the coming weeks, and the rest is history.

Oak Island Has Everything... Except a Library

In a 1991 flyer entitled “*Why Oak Island Needs Its Own Library...NOW*”, the Boosters made a compelling case. While Oak Island had many attractions and attributes endearing it to residents and visitors – “wide, uncrowded beaches... some of the best fishing and skippers... three fine piers... beautiful and diverse residential areas... art galleries... dance studios... convenience stores... banks... shops... restaurants... a magnificent auditorium at the Baptist Assembly... doctors, lawyers, dentists, and real estate professionals...” they didn’t have a library.

**Why
Oak Island
Needs
Its Own Library
NOW . . .**

Ours Is The Largest Population Center In Brunswick County Not Served By A Branch Library



Southport, Shallotte and Leland have a total of 5,135 residents and each town has a library. Oak Island's 3 beach communities and 4,725 people have no library. This clearly inconveniences and underserves all of Oak Island . . . our children . . . the elderly . . . everybody. No nearby reading and study resource for students . . . for older citizens who may lack physical capabilities or transportation "across the bridge" . . . for working parents who have to go miles out of their way to pick up their children who are encouraged and need to use the library after school.

Children Are Our Future

They must have the best learning resources, so your Library Boosters have utilized an expert team of appraisers, architectural engineers and building contractors to study the whole picture of location.

But Oak Island can expect its already overburdened community governments to contribute only a small fraction of the money needed. The greatest part has to come from small businesses, our few sizeable industries, AND INDIVIDUALS - FROM YOU!

If every person contributes only \$25, our own library can become a reality within weeks!

Special Awards For Your Tax-Deductible Contributions In All Dollar Amounts!



The award categories are: \$1 to \$99 - Supporter . . . \$100 to \$249 - Sponsor . . . \$250 to \$499 - Patron . . . \$500 to \$999 - Friend . . . \$1,000 to \$4,999 - Benefactor . . . \$5,000 to \$9,999 - Grand Benefactor . . . "Oak Tree Society Member" - \$10,000 and above. Businesses, organizations and individuals who make major gifts from the levels of Benefactor through "The Oak Tree Society" will be recognized by book shelves or plaques named in their honor. The most substantial contributors at the end of the fund-raising campaign will be permanently recognized by entire rooms in their names.

What We Have And What We Need . . .

- We have some of the best quality of life on the East coast . . . wide, uncrowded beaches on the only barrier island with trees!
- Some of the best fishing and skippers plus 3 fine piers.
- Beautiful and diverse residential areas.
- Art galleries and dance studios.
- An active, caring and ever-growing group of senior citizens.
- Convenience stores that really are fine banks and shops and restaurants.
- A magnificent auditorium at the Baptist Assembly.
- Doctors, lawyers, dentists and real estate people who are real professionals.

What don't we have? The branch library that everyone of us needs and will benefit not only ourselves, our children and our elderly, but will also be a cultural magnet to attract the kind of people we want to share our island with us!



Production of this brochure directed by Sue Way Printing
Art Production and Type by Regina Nichols • Photography by Carol Boyd.

While Southport, Shallotte, and Leland (combined population of 5,135 residents) each boasted their own libraries, Oak Island, with 4,725 residents, had no library. For many Oak Island residents including senior citizens and working parents, the prospect of a journey “across the bridge” (albeit the Barbee bridge) to get (and return) books from other libraries was impractical.

Senior citizens lacked a gathering place for continuing education and cultural activities. Children on Oak Island lacked a gathering place for after-school work. Now was time, the Boosters argued, to build a well-equipped library.

Enter the Boosters

The original Boosters Board of Directors included:

- Ann Hines, President
- Leslie Collier, Vice President
- Becky Malik, Secretary
- Betty Johnson, Treasurer
- Jane Brackett, Assistant Treasurer
- Tom Owens and Dr. Brad Williams, Co-Chairs of Funding
- David Bachman and Lou Ann Hoy, Site Committee
- John Wilson, Publicity Committee Chair
- Tillie Sugg, “Knowledgeable concerning libraries”

In addition to the Board members, the Boosters membership included dozens of committee members from across the community united in their shared goal of bringing Oak Island a library worthy of its citizens, present and future.

The Boosters also reached out to local experts – appraisers, architects, engineers, and building contractors to supplement their own knowledge and skill base and to ensure that they were providing their donors with well thought-out plans for the new library.

The Boosters' Vision

The Boosters' plans were noteworthy in that they united three communities - Long Beach, Yaupon Beach, and Caswell Beach - in a common endeavor and defined "our needs as an island community", specifically the need for a library:

- To help the island's 633 public school children raise their test scores
- To give pre-school children story hours to ensure a better start to learning
- To support the efforts of professionals, free-lancers, students, and the working population
- To provide more accessible reading material for seniors and the disabled.

Fundraising: It Takes a Village

Recognizing that building a brand new, modern library would be a costly endeavor and that the county was unlikely to fully fund something of this magnitude, the Boosters set out to raise the funds needed to purchase the land and get the process started. As a 501(c)(3) organization, they solicited tax-deductible contributions from individuals and businesses in all dollar amounts, from coins dropped into collection jars to five-figure donations.

The Boosters were committed to being good shepherds of their community donations, ensuring that the Boosters' activities and operating expenses did not exceed 1% of their funding. They also had the good sense to involve summer residents and visitors of their ambitions for the library through articles in the *State Port Pilot* and other publicity efforts.



The Boosters' multimedia publicity efforts – signs, articles, flyers, fundraising events, letters, phone calls, and community outreach - were a constant reminder that everyone had a vested interest in building a library for the citizens of Oak Island, young and old.

In addition to soliciting community donations, the Boosters established a grant writing committee to gather statistics, identify available funding sources, and write grant applications. Fundraising also include events such as June 1991 and June 1992 auctions featuring everything

from surfboards, lawnmowers, and paintings to a boat and a pinball machine. The Boosters also organized an August 10, 1991 concert by the Brunswick County Band, held at the Hatch Auditorium at the Baptist Assembly on Caswell Beach. A 13-mile beach “walk-a-thon” was organized in September 1991, with each walker committing to raise pledge money.

The Boosters extended their fundraising outreach to local businesses and industries for donations and to ensure that opportunities for matching funds were not overlooked. Area clubs such as the Jaycees were approached to ask whether they would hold fundraisers for the library initiative. Tee shirt sales were launched to help with raising both awareness and money. No stone was left unturned in the Boosters’ quest for support.

A Brunswick County Miracle

Brunswick County Commissioners ensured the legacy of the county libraries in June 1992 with the establishment of the Brunswick County Library system, funded with a commitment of nearly \$1.5 million (in addition to the \$250,000 that had originally been proposed.) County Commissioner Gene Pinkerton noted, *“If we piecemeal the library system, it will take us ten years to have the system we need. This will give the people of Brunswick County what they have been asking for... a state-of-the-art library system.”*

This funding windfall was attributed to the collective efforts of the Library Board, the Friends of the Library, the Boosters of Oak Island and Leland, the library staff, the County Manager, and the County Commissioners. Residents concerned about the implications on Brunswick County property tax rates were pleasantly surprised to learn that the tax rate was dropped from 68.5 cents to 68 cents concurrent with the library funding initiative.

The Boosters were thrilled with the county’s commitment to the library system, with President Ann Hines noting that she was *“thrilled, absolutely thrilled”* and looking forward to turning over fundraising efforts over to the county after eight years at the helm of the Boosters. Also *“absolutely thrilled”* was Tillie Sugg of the Boosters and the Library Board, noting, *“It’s something we dreamed of, having the county finance us in this way. I feel like our work has borne some fruit.”*

Finding a Site

The Boosters’ Site Committee was charged with evaluating proposed sites for the new library. Options included re-use of an existing building or construction of a new building. Property maps of Oak Island were reviewed with the goal of finding suitable parcels of land, contacting the land owners, pricing the land, and seeking land donations. The Site Committee also consulted with the Brunswick County Library Board to ensure the suitability of property under consideration.

The Boosters identified their preferred site for the library as a parcel jointly owned by United Carolina Bank and Gib Barbee, Jr. and his wife Billie located at 8200 East Oak Island Drive. According to property tax records, the parcel was valued at \$248,200. United Carolina Bank and Barbee agreed to sell the property for \$210,000.

Further price reductions were offered to make the transaction more attractive. United Carolina Bank offered to reduce the price by \$55,000 in exchange for a room in the new library to be named after the bank. Gib Barbee, Jr. offered a \$65,000 price reduction in exchange for the honor of having the library named for his father, the late Gibson Vester (G.V.) Barbee, Sr. The Boosters pledged \$45,000 and Boosters President Ann Hines committed to continuing to raise another \$45,000.

Honoring G.V. Barbee, Sr.

Much of what we now take for granted on the Oak Island landscape was the result of G.V. Barbee Sr.'s vision and his life's work, including the development of Yaupon Village (later known as "Yaupon Beach") beginning in the 1950's. Until recently, the G.V. Barbee bridge was the only land access to Oak Island across the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. His generous personal philanthropy was cut short by a heart attack at age 45, but his family has continued their dedication to community service and philanthropy.

In August 1992, the Brunswick County Library Board toured the proposed site of the new Oak Island library. Brunswick County Library Board member Don Eggert remarked, *"I was very impressed with the tour and the interest shown on Oak Island. We would be doing the taxpayers a disservice by not accepting the property."*

As the most generous contributor to the establishment of the new Oak Island library, one might think that Gib Barbee, Jr.'s request for naming rights for his father would be readily accepted. However, since the time of the original agreement, the county had taken over the library system, and thereby controlled the naming rights. Finally, it was agreed that the library could be named for G.V. Barbee, Sr. provided that the wording read: *"Brunswick County Library – G.V. Barbee, Sr. Branch."*

Beginning Construction... Finally

With a site agreed-upon and county funding in place, plans for the Oak Island library progressed, as did plans for a new library in Leland. The new Oak Island library was designed by John Sawyer Architects and construction was performed by Luther T. Rogers, Inc., General Contractor.



Pouring the Slab – September 1993



Raising the Roof – December 1993

Meanwhile, the libraries in Southport and Shallotte were in need of renovations. The Brunswick County Library Board of Trustees agreed that, before closing Southport and Shallotte's libraries for repairs, the new libraries on Oak Island and in Leland should be open to ensure county residents access to needed library resources and services. The Oak Island and Leland libraries both broke ground in June 1993 with initial plans to complete construction by December 1993.

Visions of a Modern Library

Tillie Sugg and Edith Tillman, president of the Leland Boosters, were hailed as *"local heroes who rallied support for the new branch libraries in their communities"*, in an October 14, 1993 editorial in the *Brunswick Beacon* by Eric Carlson entitled *"Let's Build on Libraries' Possibilities."*

Carlson also made these prescient statements in the editorial as construction began on Oak Island and in Leland:

- *"How can we possibly expect our educational system to improve if we don't provide the means for children to improve themselves? They need places to explore learning on their own."*
- *"Next spring at budget time, as the new libraries open and the old ones get their facelift, it will be up to this [library] board to seize a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Because this project should never be considered finished."*
- *"We need to forget how libraries used to be and imagine what they are destined to become. This means spending the money for a state-of-the-art computer system and a transportation system to make the four small branches into one large library."*

Carson also envisioned interlibrary loan systems to serve all branches, eventually extending state wide through the North Carolina library system. Reference materials such as hardcopy encyclopedias could be replaced with computer-based systems that would be more readily updated and more accessible. Teachers could access library resources remotely from the

classroom. With proper planning and investment, Brunswick County's libraries could meet the demands of the information age.

The Boosters Continue Fundraising

The Boosters, meanwhile, did not rest on their laurels. They continued their involvement in funding the necessary equipment for the library, offering donors the chance to earmark their donations for a wide range of applications such as:

- A children's library collection (\$12,000)
- A copy machine (\$5000) and a microfilm reader (\$4500)
- Computer equipment (\$7500) and computer software (\$5,000)
- A coffee maker "to keep our librarians happy – and awake" (\$40)
- A refrigerator and microwave oven (\$400)
- A slide projector (\$350) and overhead projector (\$300)
- A television (\$500) and video cassette recorder (\$275)
- Rotating paperback book racks (\$600)
- The library name sign (\$1,200)
- A wall clock (\$25)
- A brick wall needed to meet Yaupon Beach zoning ordinance (\$5,000)

In the end, the Boosters raised nearly \$80,000 to the establishment of the new library. Mary Owens Fitzgerald, a Long Beach property owner, donated \$10,000 to the Boosters in memory of her parents and requested that a library conference room would be named for them. The Friends of the Library Southport & Oak Island (FOLSOI) donated \$2000 worth of equipment and planted the shrubbery surrounding the library.

Every single person who bought a tee shirt or an auction item, raised money in a walk-a-thon, or made a cash or in-kind donation deserves recognition for enabling the Boosters to demonstrate that a dedicated group of like-minded people can achieve their goal, no matter how lofty that goal might be.

The Culmination of a Dream

The G.V. Barbee, Sr. Library Branch of the Brunswick County Library System was dedicated on June 26, 1994 in a ceremony attended by local luminaries including:

- Don Eggert, Chairman, Brunswick County Library Board
- Don Warren, Chairman, Brunswick County Board of Commissioners
- Dot Kelly, Mayor Pro Tem of Yaupon Beach
- Joan Altman, Mayor of Long Beach

- Joseph O'Brien, Mayor Pro Tem of Caswell Beach
- Major contributors Gib Barbee, Jr. in memory of his father, G.V. Barbee, Sr; Baxter Stirling, representing United Carolina Bank; Mary Owens Fitzgerald and Frank Owen Fitzgerald, Jr. in memory of Fannie Owens and Graham Whitehurst Bell; Howard Brackett, President of Oak Island Library Boosters in recognition of member contributions.

Who Benefits?

Once open, the G.V. Barbee, Sr. Library served not only the needs of Oak Island residents and tourists, but also the needs of Southport residents while Harper Library in Southport was closed for renovations. Oak Island visitors could get a temporary library card to enjoy Barbee Library's offerings. Paperback "beach books" were sold for \$1.00, and library computers could be used free of charge.

Reading materials from children's books to newspapers and magazine subscriptions could be enjoyed by year-round residents, seasonal residents, and visitors to Oak Island, underscoring the value placed on the library by the community.

Making a World of Difference

With their fundraising mission complete and Barbee Library open for business, the Boosters realized that it was time to disband their organization. The Boosters' by-laws pledged *"continuing support to the entire Brunswick County Library system"* and noted that *"all excess contributions will be donated to the system."*

Before they disbanded, however, the Boosters, now led by Wolfgang Furstenau, made one last donation to Barbee Library: a gorgeous 32-inch diameter illuminated globe displaying 23,000 place names (including Southport) and set in a hand-carved mahogany stand.

The globe was manufactured by Replogle, purveyor of distinctive globes to world leaders including Franklin Delano Roosevelt.



Barbee Library has opened the world to its patrons, young and old. Without the vision and dedication of the Boosters, none of this would have been possible. They created an aspirational

vision for a private-public partnership to secure a facility of enduring value to their current residents and visitors and to future generations. They proved that no dream is beyond the reach of committed volunteers working with local businesses, residents, and government entities.

If the young patrons of Barbee Library take these lessons to heart and act upon them, we envision great things for Oak Island and Brunswick County.

Acknowledgments

The Friends of the Library Southport & Oak Island (FOLSOI) are extremely grateful for the donation of notes, correspondence, photographs, newspaper articles, and records provided by Wolfgang Furstenau of Oak Island Library Boosters and Susan (Phillips) Angelow, the longest-serving branch manager at G.V. Barbee, Sr. Library. We relied heavily on these contemporaneous accounts regarding the planning, fundraising, and commissioning of the G.V. Barbee, Sr. Library, and appreciate their personal perspectives shared with us as we embarked on preparing this narrative.

For anyone wishing to learn more about the history of Oak Island, we recommend Wolfgang Furstenau's book, *"Long Beach – A North Carolina Town: Its Origin and History"*, available for sale at the Southport Historical Society.

Barbara Lemos and Diana Fotinatos

