

## Up-and-Comers

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### One Library, One Chicago

*By Erik Henderson, Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection, Chicago Public Library*

My journey into the archival profession has brought me back to my hometown and the community library I attended as a youth with my aunt and cousins. I currently work as an archival specialist for the Chicago Public Library's Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection. I had a brief chance to brush shoulders with Beverly A. Cook, an archivist and librarian with over 30 years of experience, who was integral to the growth of the Harsh Research Collection (HRC).

I was able to absorb knowledge, witness challenging decision-making, and ask—many annoying and nagging—questions of someone with more years of institutional knowledge and experience than I have lived. Each day as it crept up to Ms. Cook's retirement, I began to become more and more overwhelmed at the thought of our department losing such a valued member with a vast skill set and knowledge. Luckily, she took me under her wing for the last two months of her tenure with the HRC. Maybe this is just the person she is, caring and wanting those she knows to succeed and reach their full potential.

Ms. Cook wanted me to assist her in processing the papers of a gentleman named Leland B. Elder Jr., whose career at Chicago Public Library (CPL) began in 1984 and lasted until 2016. Like any rookie employee seeking to impress their veteran coworkers, I jumped in head first. Through this experience, she encouraged me to communicate with her deliberately throughout the process by asking questions. As a young archivist, the time we spent deciding the arrangement and series titles and discussing how I could strengthen the historical note has proven to be invaluable. I am extremely fortunate to have had time with Beverly Cook.

Leland B. Elder Jr. was born in Chicago, Illinois, on September 26, 1955. He spent the majority of his childhood in the Morgan Park and Washington Heights neighborhoods. He graduated from John Marshall Harlan High School in 1973. He had a brief stint at Shaw University from 1973 to 1974 then moved back to Illinois in 1974, where he finished his undergraduate education at Illinois State University in 1976.

Not needing a break, Elder enlisted in the United States Air Force, serving four years, 1977–1981. Upon his return from the air force, Elder enrolled at the University of Illinois Chicago, earning his master's in mass communication. Shortly after finishing at UIC, Elder obtained a CPL internship, which turned into an offer for a position in the Office of Public Information in 1984, making him the second Black American named to the department at the time.

Early in Elder's career, he was responsible for developing contacts with print, television, and radio news reporters, directors, and producers to further CPL ties with local and national level media coverage outlets. During that time, he would also accompany the library staff photographers on assignments to set up photo opportunities and write photo captions for media releases.

More duties emerged as Elder ascended through the CPL ranks. He began contributing to the CPL monthly staff newsletters. He edited and wrote for newsletters such as *CPL Newsletter*, *CPL Matters*, and *CPL Insight*. The latter of the newsletters publicized the selection process for library materials and spotlighted the overall construction of the new Harold Washington Library Center located in central downtown Chicago, which was dedicated to the first Black mayor of Chicago on October 4, 1991, and opened on October 7, 1991.

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**THE CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY  
HAROLD WASHINGTON LIBRARY CENTER  
FACT SHEET**

**DEVELOPER:** THE SEBUS GROUP  
Sohal Associates Partnership  
Hammond Beatty & Babka  
A. Epstein and Sons International, Inc.  
U.S. Equities Realty, Inc.

**GROUND BREAKING:** October 13, 1988

**SCHEDULED COMPLETION:** First quarter 1991

**COST:** \$144 Million

**TOTAL NUMBER OF STORIES:** Ten floors plus basement

**HEIGHT:** From grade to cornice line: 125'  
From grade to top of vault: 182'

**BUILDING MATERIALS:**  
**ROOF:** Metal with steel and metal deck  
**FAÇADE:** Granite and brick (masonry back-up)  
**STRUCTURE:** Concrete frame floors 1-9, steel frame floors 10 plus roof

**TOTAL SQUARE FOOTAGE:** 750,000 gross supported square feet

**INTERIOR DESCRIPTION:**  
**FURNISHINGS:** Floor: Concrete slab with terrazzo, marble carpet and carpet tiles  
Walls: Plaster, marble, and natural finish maple, and gypsum board in a coordinated wall-system wall  
Ceiling: Bands of painted gypsum board, flat in areas and vaulted in areas, with 2' x 2' lay-in acoustic tile between gypsum board areas  
Furnishings: Coordinated with the interior finish materials such as natural finish maple for seating and millwork, polished stone for counter and table tops

**BUILDING SYSTEMS:** Cellular floor for computer and communications systems. Building also complete with security, energy management, and fire protection systems

**HVAC:** Electric resistance heating, variable air volume air distribution system

**DESIGN/BUILD INSIGHT**

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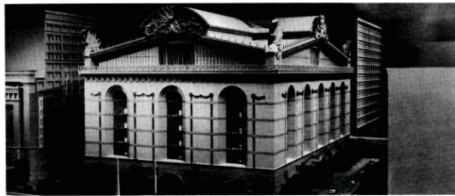
James W. Compton  
President, Board of Directors

Eugene Sawyer  
Mayor, City of Chicago

Photos provided by the SEBUS Group

**INSIGHT**  
DESIGN/BUILD

THE CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY FALL 1988 THE HAROLD WASHINGTON CENTER



**GROUND BREAKING CEREMONY  
FOR NEW HAROLD WASHINGTON  
LIBRARY CENTER**

Chicago Public Library officials have announced that the groundbreaking ceremony for the new \$144 million Harold Washington Library Center will be held on Thursday, October 13, 1988, beginning at 10:30 a.m., at the site location on State Street between Congress Parkway and Van Buren Street.

The new Central Library will be constructed by the SEBUS Group, the winning team of the Library's recent Design/Build Competition.

Commenting on the anticipated groundbreaking ceremony, Library Commissioner Duff said, "This occasion symbolizes the first real step towards construction of a new Central Library for the City of Chicago. Months of preparation by Library staff, our Board of Directors, the City's Departments of Planning, Public Works, Purchasing, the Corporation Counsel, and representatives from the SEBUS Group have gone into the realization of this event. At this point, it is now only a matter of time before Chicago has the world-class library it deserves."

Library Board President Compton also stated, "The Harold Washington Library Center will be the largest state-of-the-art public library in the country. Library and City officials have worked many long hours to make this dream of a state-of-the-art library a reality. I commend the efforts of all the people who got the job done."

**THE CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY  
HAROLD WASHINGTON LIBRARY  
CENTER**

First and foremost, the Harold Washington Library Center is a library that is public in the truest sense: in its architecture, function and urban design. It puts people first.

The building accomplishes that mission through its blend of classic architectural design and advanced interior systems, creating a historic grandeur with all the efficiency and durability that modern material can provide.

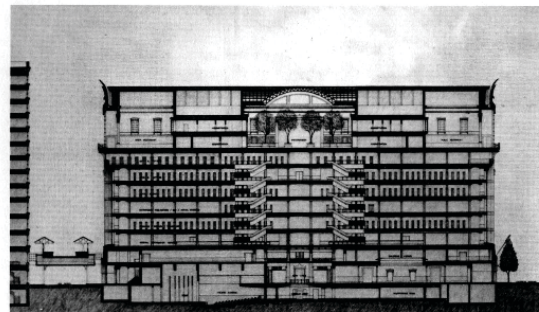
**ARCHITECTURE**

The Harold Washington Library Center will be easily recognizable as "Chicago's Library," not only because it delivers a site to house written treasures, but also because it facilitates public access.

The classicism of its architecture conveys both history and familiarity as well as the world-class dignity befitting an institution which is to stand so prominently for the citizens of Chicago and the late Mayor who once represented them.

While fulfilling its role as a creative expression of civic dignity, the library's design makes it a public building — in every sense user friendly, understandable and functional.

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Cutaway floor plan

**Harold Washington Library Center**  
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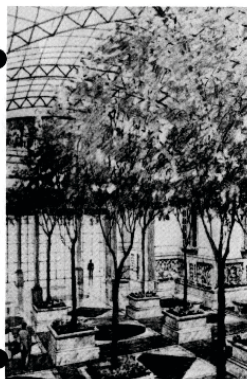
The library's polished granite walls are accented by classic ornamentation. Together, they produce an overall sense of contemporary coloration and provide the basis for a classic "look" that implies the tradition of Chicago architectural excellence and forward thinking.

A sheer glass facade along Plymouth Court and multi-story windows along State Street provide for interaction between the library and the outside world.

**FUNCTION**

The Harold Washington Library Center connects three distinct but interrelated sections:

- A grand lobby entranceway that serves to welcome the general public through a spectacular three-tiered atrium which directs library users to the core of the library itself.
- Six floors devoted strictly to library functions. These self-contained floors are treated, both architecturally and technically, as distinct units. Highlighted by a separation of classic study alcoves (east) and library shelving (west), the building serves to:
  - ...protect the valued collections of the library



Winter Garden

...facilitate access to the knowledge those collections contain

...and enhance the efficiency of both library operations and library use.

- A two-story administration penthouse to be anchored near a dazzling Winter Garden that includes restaurants and other open public spaces for both the public and library staff.

Thick double-wall construction conceals the library's air requirements while also serving as the location for advanced telecommunications, power and duct distribution.

The double-wall construction also is incorporated into the outer envelope for a thermos-bottle type effect. This meets not only the rigorous environmental needs of the library collection, but also provides strong acoustical insulation as well.

The clear structural anatomy of the building is further enhanced by location stairs, ducts and risers to the perimeter to create a building envelope which facilitates humidity and temperature control in the library.

The building is designed with ultimate flexibility. Floors are large and unbroken, facilitating the ability, in the future, for changes to the interior layout.

The design also incorporates numerous skylights and windows to enliven departments.

**URBAN DESIGN**

The Harold Washington Library Center fills its site at Congress Boulevard completely. In so doing, it works within the Burnham Plan which established Chicago as one of America's most beautiful cities.

The urban design reinforces Congress Parkway, the original main axis of Burnham's plan, with a major landscaping effort highlighted by:

- Treeplanting along Congress Parkway;
- A pedestrian bridge connecting the library to parking south of Congress;
- Redevelopment of the parcel at State and Congress to create a small urban park that forms an appropriately scaled setting for the library's main south facade.

The design/build proposal submitted by the SEBUS Group combines the ultimate in space-age technology with a classic architectural style befitting this cultural institution. Looking to the city's architectural heritage as a foundation, the new Library includes technology that will carry the structure well into the next century, and beyond, for generations of Chicagoans to use and enjoy.

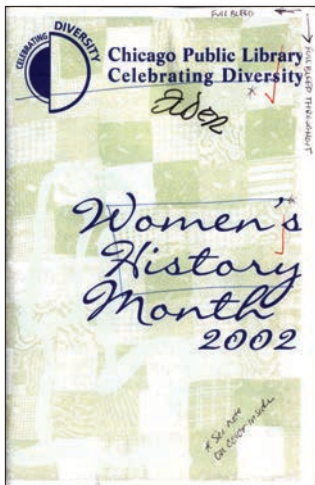
**NEW CENTRAL LIBRARY  
SPECIAL FEATURES:**

- Orientation theater at main entrance
- Teletext guides to services and calendars of events
- Hands-on microcomputer center
- Independent learning center for adult learner
- Language learning center
- Satellite dish for international TV reception
- Multi-media "islands" spotlighting high interest collections such as travel, careers, Chicago authors, and theater
- Current bestsellers, popular paperbacks, and new biographies arranged for casual browsing
- Recreational reading in 90 foreign languages
- Computer Assisted Reference Center with expanded retrieval capabilities utilizing state-of-the-art technology; one of only a few in public libraries in the country
- Innovative child development and education center
- Online information services in all subject areas, including specialized legislation services, patent information, and newspaper and magazine indexes
- Chicago performing arts archive and Chicago Blues collection
- Public access online periodical and newspaper indexes
- Largest publicly accessible sound recording collection in Midwest
- Library staffed copy center, in addition to coin-operated copiers
- Kurzweil Reading Machines to translate printed words into speech for visually impaired
- Rental typewriters
- Audio loops for the hearing impaired in auditorium and meeting rooms
- Group study/seminar rooms
- Outside drive-up windows for pickup and delivery
- Fully accessible to the handicapped
- Auditorium seating 400
- Video theater
- Restaurant and Library store

Down the line, Elder became a vital member of the library's Celebrating Diversity (CD) committee. One of his duties on this committee was to oversee the marketing and advertising of CD events. That included writing and editing press releases and outreach materials for Celebrating Diversity programs such as pamphlets for Women's History Month.

Elder wrote the press releases to give to local radio and news outlets as well as to community and citywide partners of the Chicago Public Library. Today, the Celebrating Diversity program has developed into one of CPL's major annual celebrations lasting the majority of a given year. Throughout the year, CPL highlights a number of cultural, ethnic, and underrepresented people starting in African American History Month in February. The rest of the Celebrating Diversity honorees are as follows:

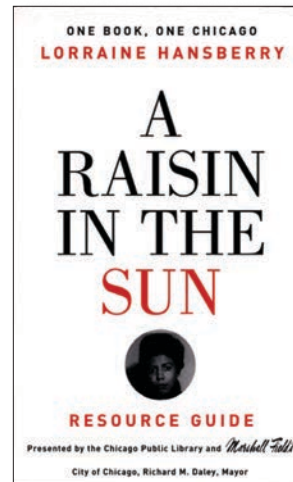
- March—Women's History Month
- April—Poetry Month
- May—Asian Pacific Heritage Month
- June—Pride Month
- July—Diversability Pride Month
- September/October—LatinX Heritage Month
- October—Polish American Heritage Month
- November —Native American History Month



*Women's History Month 2002. Leland B. Elder, Jr. Papers [Box 17, Folder 15], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.*

As a senior member of CPL's Marketing Department, Elder's responsibilities further expanded to tasks such as developing partnerships and comprehensive media lists with many of Chicagoland's print and electronic media representatives. Moreover, he took on extended duties,

including writing more elaborate and program-specific press releases promoting CPL programs, services, authors, and other events as well as visiting them.



*The A Raisin in the Sun resource guide was created to support reading annotations for the citywide discussion. Leland B. Elder, Jr. Papers [Box 18, Folder 13], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.*

One of his extended duties was helping to create and implement the citywide book club advertising campaign One Book, One Chicago, which launched in fall 2001. One Book, One Chicago is an opportunity to engage and enlighten community members and to strengthen our sense of community through reading. In 2013, One Book, One Chicago launched an expansion to the program. The expansion entailed moving to two book selections annually with programming in spring and fall. Ultimately, the many well-managed tasks, responsibilities, and accomplishments were ongoing, as were the progressive challenges that Elder continued to meet until his well-earned retirement in July of 2016.

Chicago has a long history of being a segregated city; however, a variety of ideas has been implemented to combat that. The Chicago Public Library set programs in place to highlight our individuality while bringing Chicagoans together as one. With the 150th anniversary of the Chicago Public Library coming up next year, it seemed fitting to highlight this collection. Leland Elder Jr. played a key role in the creation and dissemination of outreach materials for the One Book, One Chicago program, which aimed at bringing community members closer to each other through literature.

*(Continued on page 36)*

**UP-AND-COMERS—Continued**  
**Meredith Lowe, Assistant Editor**

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Today, housed at the Carter G. Woodson Regional Library in Washington Heights, the Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection is the largest African American history and literature collection in the Midwest and continues to document the Black experience in Chicago. The Harsh Research Collection was founded in 1932 as the “Special Negro Collection.” Vivian Harsh was the Chicago Public Library’s first Black branch head and the originator of an acclaimed collection of African American history and literature that contains everything from manuscripts by Langston Hughes and Richard Wright to the Path Press Archives (<https://www.chipublib.org/fa-path-press-archives>) and the personal papers of prominent figures such as Robert Sengstacke Abbott, founder of the *Chicago Defender* in 1905 (<https://www.chipublib.org/fa-abbott-sengstacke-family-papers-2>).