

# From the Archives

## 100 Years of the NAR Library & Archives

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the [NAR Library & Archives](#). Established in 1923 as a “clearing house of practical and useful information on every branch of the real estate business and on other subjects closely affiliated, such as housing, city planning, etc.” Starting from scratch, the sole librarian, Elta Lenart, compiled much of the information herself in the earliest days. She sent surveys to local associations, built a collection of city zoning ordinances, compiled lists of real estate courses, and tracked down data on state license laws.

Almost from its inception, the Library fielded inquiries from members, staff, and local associations. Questions were largely received and answered through the mail. If the librarians (by 1925 there were two of them) couldn’t find the answer in house, they wrote to REALTORS® across the country who had some expertise on the subject. Beginning in 1932, the results of detailed reference requests would be sent to the requestor via “package libraries,” which could include copies of articles, pamphlets, full books, and correspondence. Today we answer questions in much the same way, although an entire package of materials can be sent much more quickly through a simple email attachment.

Some of the reference questions received in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century speak to a bygone era, such as “how will the automobile impact real estate development?” or “please provide a list of local boards that permit women members.” However, many of the questions the librarians answered in the 1920s are still just as relevant in the 2020s – information on starting a business, remodeling homes, or the market for golf courses, for example. In fact, we’ve created ready [reference pages](#) on NAR’s website to address such perennially popular topics, so the information is now just a click away.

Upon its founding, the Library was envisioned as “a depository and treasury of real estate publications, and in this it aims to become the most complete real estate library in the United States.” By 1939 it had been “built up into the most varied and comprehensive compilation of material on real estate that is known.” A 1936 report to the Board of Directors listed the Library’s contents as 1,879 volumes and 293 periodicals. Over time, the collections grew to include other formats, such as audiocassettes, VHS tapes, CDs, and, in 2006, eBooks. In 2023, our holdings include over 12,000 books, 66,000 eBooks, 500 hard-copy periodicals, and 6,700 periodicals available electronically.



*The NAR Library as it looked in the 1930s, in the 59 E Van Buren building*

All materials – both print and digital – are available to any member of the REALTOR® family as a benefit of membership. Today, we have six professional librarians on staff to help you find the information you need. If you have questions about borrowing items, searching our collections, or reference requests, please contact us at [librarians@nar.realtor](mailto:librarians@nar.realtor).



*...when typewriters, index cards, and giant rolodexes were the tools of the trade.*



*The Library of the 1960s, at 36 S Wabash...*