LA VISTA PUBLIC LIBRARY

La Vista's library was born out of a generous gift from a resident, Howard Hamilton, who wanted nothing more than for his city to have a library.
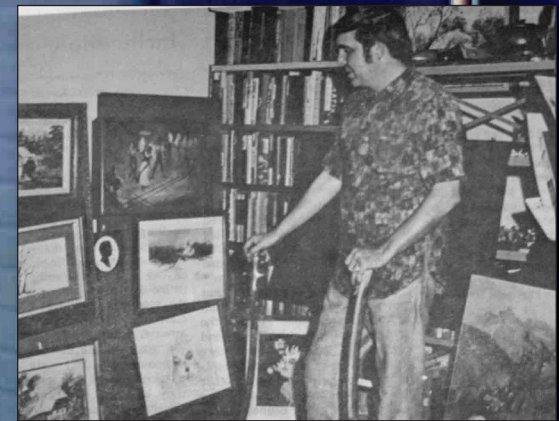
Hamilton, an accomplished writer and book and art collector, donated 3,000 of his own books to fill the shelves of the city's first library. But there was a catch – the city did not have a building to house the books and pieces of art, so it had to commit funding for construction in order for Hamilton to commit his books to the city.

Hamilton, who had been living at the Alpine Village Apartments for a short time, approached the City Council in October 1971. As he tells the story from his cluttered Omaha apartment, Hamilton's presentation was generally well-received by the mayor and council and he was told they would form a committee to explore the possibility of constructing a library.

La Vista Mayor Omar Robb is quoted in the *Sun Newspaper* in March 1972 as saying the city would be pleased to accept Hamilton's offer of 150 large art pieces and autographed and first edition books, but they had nowhere to put them.

"Walking into his apartment is in itself vaguely like walking into a museum," wrote the author of the March 1972 newspaper article.

Hamilton heard nothing for months. In the spring of 1972, he approached the council again and asked for an update. By now, La Vista had a new mayor, Harold Leathers, who seemed cool to the idea of the city finding funds for a new library.

TOP: LA VISTA'S ORIGINAL PUBLIC LIBRARY.
ABOVE: HOWARD HAMILTON WITH THE ART COLLECTION HE ALSO DONATED TO THE LA VISTA LIBRARY.
BEHIND: SOME OF WHAT REMAINS OF HAMILTON'S COLLECTION.

A PANORAMIC PHOTO OF THE EXTERIOR OF THE LA VISTA PUBLIC LIBRARY AND METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE SARPY CENTER.

LA VISTA PUBLIC LIBRARY CONT.

"I met later that night at a bar with City Council people, maybe four or five of the seven or eight. They said they supported it and said they were going to bring up the issue, and they felt that they would pass accepting it and if the mayor vetoed it, they would have enough votes to override," recalls Hamilton.

The city's hesitation in accepting Hamilton's collection nearly resulted in voiding the offer altogether. He told the mayor and council he was prepared to make the same offer to the cities of Bellevue or Ralston.

"After one meeting, the City Council people and the mayor came to my apartment to look at the collection and when they saw it, they had heard me talk about it, but when they saw it, they were flabbergasted," recalls Hamilton of city officials' reaction at seeing his 4,000 books and art collection jammed into a two-bedroom apartment.

A few months passed and in the fall of 1972 the council approved a proposal to contribute $75,000 for the construction of a library next to City Hall. Mayor Leathers promptly vetoed the measure, but, true to their word

FOR SOME, THE LIBRARY HAS BEEN A PLACE TO RELAX, INCLUDING THE LITTLE BOY IN THIS UNDATED PHOTO.

to Hamilton, the council overrode the veto, unanimously, and the deal was done.

"I think the next day I had a call from one of the City Council people saying that the mayor approved of it," Hamilton recalls.

Groundbreaking took place in September 1973 and La Vista's first public library opened in June 1974.

In its original configuration, the library also was combined with a community center. When the city constructed a separate community/recreation center attached to City Hall, the library expanded to take over the entire facility, according to Jean Hurst, an employee at the library for more than 30 years. Hurst has worked in both the original library and the city's new joint effort with Metropolitan Community College located on Giles Road.

More out of necessity than anything else with 4,000 books under one roof, Hamilton devised his own organization system. In each book his name is stamped behind the title page and on page 11. The books remaining from his original collection still can be found in the history section of the city's current library.