

LIBRARY RESOURCES

HISTORY

The birth of the public library in Lee County was realized through the efforts of a women's club around the turn of the century. The Sanford Literary Club, a ladies' group organized in September 1905, met occasionally throughout the year to discuss and give reports on literary releases. Wanting to establish a community-wide system of lending books to the general public, the club members convened several times during 1905 to discuss such a proposition. The September 13, 1905 edition of the *Sanford Express* reported that Mrs. R. W. Allen and Mrs. R. E. Carrington "read papers on the establishing of libraries" to the rest of the members.

With the collection of 12 books, the Sanford Literary Club was on the way towards starting the new library. Over the next three years the literary club solicited and collected donations of books door-to-door. Rummage and bake sales were held in Sanford to raise money to purchase the newer literary releases.

Records show that 80 club members had been recruited by the time the library had its official opening at the Smith Building in 1910. At that time the library stayed open only for one hour each week and the subscription rate for members was \$1.00 per year with the rental rate being 5¢ for each book a week.

By the beginning of 1913, the *Sanford Express* reported, the library had acquired over 300 books and magazines. Miss Mary Nisbet was the librarian and the subscription rate had risen to \$1.50 a year. Originally the library was open on Mondays and Fridays from 3:30 – 5:30 p.m. and Wednesdays from 7:30 – 9:00 p.m. but by 1915 the Sanford Literary Club had to reopen their library on Friday nights from 7:30 – 10:00 p.m. to accommodate the growing number of patrons visiting the library.

The library itself never realized a permanent home until the mid-1920 when the library was situated over the Crabtree Drug Store on Moore Street. Previously, the library had been housed

in quite a few interesting locations, among them being the school building, the old opera house and various private homes.

Over the next couple of decades other Sanford civic clubs began to offer their assistance to the Sanford Literary Club in supporting the Sanford Library. The organization, though, remained primarily the brain-child of the women's literary club and was recognized as such.

Despite the strong support from the subscription members, the library was facing some financial problems in the early 1920's because of the growing costs of books and upkeep of the building. The county commissioners were asked many times to designate tax dollars to be used toward the support of the library. In 1925 both the school board and the county commissioners agreed to give \$300 each to the library for building maintenance and purchasing of books.

Nevertheless, the Sanford Library, like many businesses and individuals during the 1930's was suffering from a crippling national economy. It was becoming increasingly more difficult to maintain a subscription library. Due to a cut in appropriations the number of books regularly bought to keep the library sufficiently stocked had to be decreased over a period of several months. Realizing the problem the Lee County Commissioners gave to the library \$1,000 which once had been earmarked for the county school libraries. At the same time two county commissioners, C. H. Crabtree and K. E. Seymour, were appointed to meet with the library board and a state library commission representative to discuss the reorganization of the Sanford Library.

A week later the Lee County Library became a reality. It was announced on July 27, 1933, that the Sanford Library was to be re-established as a county institution with the intention of its moving from a subscription to a loan basis of book service to the public. The new library board consisted of C. H. Crabtree, Miss Elva Bryan, Mrs. S. V. Stevens, W. H. Fitts, Mrs. C. M. Reeves, Mrs. W. W. Robards and Librarian Miss Helen Rosser. With the creation of this new county facility it was arranged that volumes of many of the same books could be placed in each of the four county schools to facilitate circulation. By December of the same year the Lee County Library,

with over 5,000 books in its possession, was transported to the main room in the courthouse annex on Steele Street.

The Lee County Library extended their services to the county borders through the adoption of the bookmobile in 1947. With the use of an old paneled truck the bookmobile transported its wares to some 15 scheduled stops in the county.

In 1956 the S. B. Chapin Foundation offered \$7,500 to the library with the stipulation that it be used to purchase a new building. To meet the challenge the citizens of Lee County voted to give \$50,000 to buy the old Rogers Funeral Home for the library. The County of Lee was able to purchase what is now the library building on Steele Street with \$30,000 of the appropriation, using the remaining \$20,000 for remodeling the funeral parlor to meet the needs of the library. At that time the library contained some 16,000 books and plans were being formulated to begin a record collection for library patrons.

Today the Lee County Library possesses over 60,000 books and 50 magazines and periodicals, according to Mary Scott Gurley, Lee County Librarian for the past 22 years. The library itself, though, which easily had accommodate the late 1950 Lee County population already is providing too small and ill-equipped to meet the ever-growing needs of today's library goers. With the Sanford/Lee County population expected to reach over the 50,000 mark within the next 20 years, the present library system would be inadequate in serving the public's literary needs.

In an effort to provide a county library system geared to satisfy both present and future community demands the Lee County Library Board of Directors has studied various blueprints and development plans for a new Lee County Library. A parcel of land has already been purchased in the name of the Lee County Library as the site of construction. Located on Hawkins Avenue between the Frist Presbyterian Church and Crowson's Exxon Service Center, the proposed branch of the Lee County Library is expected to become both a convenient and indispensable new edition to the scene of Lee County.