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Carnegie Library History  
Alice Myers  
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<p><b>FOR USE IN LIBRARY ONLY MANATEE COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM</b></p>
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Alice Myers -

About six months ago before our library opened, Alice Cochran went to the Library Board and she said, "I want to tell you of the plans of the creation in Palmetto of a museum to protect historical values in Palmetto. The date was March 6, 1965. Here we are, twenty-three and a half years later and we are very happy to know that the Commission with the strong support of Palmetto are dedicated to preserving the Carnegie Library.

We have had as chairman Bob Miller and helping to succeed we have Jo Harrison, who can get things done. I was even going to call her the queen of the shakers and the movers, but we know Jo is herself and can get things done.

Now today, I want to reminisce with you about the influence of the Carnegie Library, and the people of Palmetto, and the people who lived here on the north side of the river. And I want to call your attention to the fact that in the library is an excellent summary of library activity in Palmetto and the county in general, called The Palmetto Library Odyssey and it brings the gay nineties to us.

Rose Taylor, one of our former Palmetto librarians, and Fran Rodstein(?) did this. It is an excellent history step by step of what has been accomplished.

I am going to reminisce to you today about the Carnegie Library. Now we have a library program of one form or another in Palmetto for over a hundred years.

It began with a reading club that met in the homes of the members, on Saturday evenings. They moved to a single room above S.B. Black's Store. And then to a room above the Harrison-Dickie Drugstore.

The Village Improvement Association, 1900. This is the organization that founded the Woman's Club. They dedicated themselves to improvement the city, beautifying the cemetery and providing a library. And they had dues a dollar a year. And they gave ice cream socials and bazaars, cruise trips to Tampa and they accomplished a lot, with their money.

In fact, in 1904, they were wealthy enough to spend \$50 for books for a library. Now that was the beginning of a relationship between the women of the town and the library, which is usually advantageous to this day.

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In 1912, the founding of the Library Association was formed and Isabel Coates (?), the mother of Barbara Armstrong, became the librarian. And she served until the Carnegie Library was finished.

Sometime between 1912 and 1914, it was necessary to move the library from the store to the City Hall. Now, the City Hall was actually the Academy Building. The Academy building had housed the city offices, the elementary school, and the high school had just moved out into its own building. It was the two-story building south, where the little post office is. It was later moved into the Palmetto Trailer Park. It really wasn't very big. It was open two hours, two afternoons a week.

Naturally, the city saw a need for more library space, and they went to work planning a library. There is a lot we don't know, and we've got to add. And Mary tells me that on our original library committee was Mr. Brownell (?). And Mayor Whitehead (?) made the application and we received a \$10,000 grant from the Andrew Carnegie Foundation.

Now it was agreed that the city of Palmetto would provide \$1000 per year and donate the land for the site. The thousand dollars a year was for maintenance and operational expenses of the library.

December 29, 1914, was the date the Carnegie Library opened. And the first librarian was the Rev. J.D. Jenner (?) of the First Baptist Church. He was paid a salary of \$35 a month.

The next librarian in 1916, was Miss Frankie McKay, who was to become Mrs. Frankie Howze. She was paid \$25 a month. And later it was raised to \$35 a month and finally she got the magnificent sum of \$40 a month which permitted her to fire her own assistant.

Now, the Carnegie Library building, which, of course, was well-known for its library potential, but also it provided a lovely public stage, the only one in Palmetto. There was a stage in the King's building, the only 3 story building in town. The so-called secret societies have been there - the Masons and the Eastern Star, The Woodman of the World, the Knight of Pithias and they didn't have to worry about anything because nobody could see them.

The Woman's Club held its meetings there in the Carnegie Library. They soon installed a little kitchen. And they served lunches.

We have one picture of Palmetto Board of Trade, which became the Business Men's Association and then the Chamber of Commerce. And I would suspect that the ladies continued to serve lunch in the library as well.

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Now we don't know the size of the collection of books that they had. But we do know the facility was well used by adults and children. It was a refuge as libraries are now.

In the wintertime there were roaring fires in both of the fireplaces. One in the north end and one in the south end of the building. And, as a matter of fact, at the same time the library was under construction, the City Council voted to tear down the boardwalk. The board sidewalk that was built at the end of what we knew as Cedar Street when we grew up here, which is now Twelfth Avenue and went across a bayhead and connected with Thirteenth Avenue. That was where the Howze Dock was.

When the city tore down the boardwalk, specified that the wood would be saved and used in the Carnegie Library.

It had another great attraction. We had in my childhood recollection that at the south end of the Library - but it doesn't matter where it was - someone had given to the library a World War I machine-gun. I held it. A side arm pistol of some kind and several bayonets. They were in their scabbards there. And naturally all who visited the library want to see them and on special occasions when they were allowed to look and hold one of the bayonets. Bud ----- can tell you about the trouble they were in when they did something they were not supposed to do.

When we talk about the library being warm, it was also hot. We only had hand fans. And Daisy will tell you that Aurora Lockland - now this lady is not listed as a librarian, but is in the City Directory. Now she could have been Mrs. Howie's assistant. But she was in the library during the twenties.

Isn't it right Daisy that is you skated out in front of the library, she would come out and tell you that you were not supposed to be there. Now Barbara, she professes to be one of the children who would run up and down the corridors and run up and down the stairs and she also would be reprimanded by Mrs. Lockland.

But later, a more mature, book loving Barbara, was allowed to work as Mrs. Glenns' assistant. (?). It was necessary for her - Mrs. Lamb, she was then - Mrs. Lamb to leave the building, Barbara was in charge.

Now you librarians, you might remember this, you were so happy to get a -----, but ----- didn't have any ----- at all. But Mary Lamb didn't have any ----- at all. She didn't have any way to protect the books from Mildew and mold and silverfish.

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She used a mixture of shellac and quinine and she painted the covers of the books and let them dry. She did all the books in the library before she put them on the shelf.

Later on, Lucille Barbara ----- \_\_, was her niece. She worked for her in the summer.

Mrs. Lamb, I'm very pleased because one person is here today and we are certainly glad you came, as well as all this Lamb family over here.

The basement was used for many purposes. The Woman's Club building was opened in 1930. Until the elementary school was constructed, they used the basement for classes. Daisy tells me that she had classes here in the basement, in the library.

As far back as I can remember it was the polling place. It was the first place that I ever voted and I expect that is true with some of us that are now in this room.

Mrs. Stebbins had her piano recitals here and I'm sure Mrs. did too as we were building a new Methodist Church and didn't have a \_\_\_\_\_ there.

Upstairs, there was business as usual. There were special programs for children, including Ruth Davis story telling. I remember her telling stories in front of the fireplace. Incidentally, I recall that there was a beautiful leather sofa and then leathered chairs. I recall them being in front of the south fireplace.

And then Nancy Courtney, they were talking about it, recalled the secret garden beneath the trees outside.

Times change. Progress came. First it was open from three to five, six days a week. Then, one to five, six days a week. And then in modern times, from nine to five, but then they closed from eleven-thirty to twelve-thirty for lunch.

Now then, Mrs. Lamb - she became Mrs. Robert Wayne and eventually moved away from Palmetto. She served from February, 1926, to August, 1934.

She was succeeded by Mrs. Lena Kay Howze. Mrs. Howze was one of the Mrs. Julian Howze. The students called her Kay. There are a number of stories told to me about Mrs. Howze. She was popular.

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There was a story told me by Jeniffer Brown (?). She said when she came up the library steps, Mrs. Howze would say, "Aw, here is our country cousin." She would say that this is the library and everybody is welcome and we particularly love country cousins and anybody who wants to read.

Now Dot Jones, Mrs. Armstrong's daughter, is here today and she knows a lot of information about the library. She has given us an excellent pictorial description of how everything was arranged and where it was. It was beautiful wood and it was all milled and made in something that was called ----- novelty works. You might find this when you are working with beads. It was a wood working place that could do anything. Our front porch and banisters were probably done there.

I was asked not long ago what happened to our machine gun. Well, Dot in her letter said that Lyle Skene, Superintendent of the Works, I'm not sure, but ----- recalled that her Dad might have owned the gun. He might have. But when they moved the library, the machine gun was sold for one hundred dollars. Sold to a Mr. David Jones.

Another Kay Howze story was that the beginning of World War II, they had a parade to stir up support for our Allies. And so they used all these German artifacts. Dot Jones was the airplane spotter.

I was fascinated as I know that Mrs. Howze left abruptly. When the board knew she was gone they recommended somebody. The reason she left, she was flier. And she was one of those women who helped carry the airplanes from the defense plants to Canada or wherever they were going. They were military aircraft.

During the thirties, was the first time that I found the mention of the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts. And Evelyn Winter was a Scout leader. And Kathryn and George Kermode installed another kitchen in the basement, that the Scouts to use.

In the mid-nineteen-thirties, Susy Driver (?) had her kindergarten in the basement.

And there were excellent programs in the library - Smokey The Bear and others.

Mrs. Armstrong, whom we all remember, became the librarian in March, 1942 - March first. And she was there for 20 years. She had no assistant until the city hired Jerry Carter to help.

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Among her assistants were Susie Driver (?), Mrs. Bill Worley (?), Mrs. ? and Mrs. Floyd Jones.

Dot Jones said that at one time, in 1946, her mother had a budget of - the city gave her \$25 a month to buy books. She started rebuilding the collection and they would drive to Ellie's Book Store in Sarasota where they got the best discount. And Mrs. Armstrong also talked the Woman's Club into - instead of sending flowers when one of their members were deceased, that they would make a memorial contribution in the form of a book, and help build the library's collection.

Mrs. Armstrong also zealously guarded the collection. If you had overdue book and they were very overdue, she called the police department. She sent the police after them. She also wanted you to do the right thing.

I remember at the age of 16, I had two dreams that were driving me batty. And I went in and attempted to check out a book on dream analysis and Mrs. Armstrong wouldn't let me have it until she check with my mother.

And my mother said that it was probably something that she was going to ask her about. She said that Alice would probably never read that book. But I found in the first four chapters that I was having the most common dreams and everybody had in the United States. And all the rest of the stuff was for the birds and I never finished reading the book.

The library was remodeled and redecorated in 1952. That might be we're trying to find out when they put the modern door on. That may be when they did it. I found a picture of it but there was no date on it.

I'm going to refer you to a paper because they describe that there were explosive changes in the development of library development during the 1930's. There was a concern about ----- libraries. The need to widen the scope of services to provide better funding and this brought about drastic changes throughout the state.

It was passed that in Manatee County that we form one library system with one tax levy to support the library. Early in the sixties the support for the library was brought into sharp focus. It was then that the Friends of the Library - the Palmetto branch under Pauline Slaughter was organized.

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Now we run a risk when we name names. So I'm going to say that among those helping were Alice Harllee and Mrs. Edith Harrison. And many other ladies.

Thirty years later, it is still true, that they give generously of their time and money. And our next fund raiser will be on November 6, at ten o'clock in the morning, right here. You can stop in the library and get your tickets.

And now we received national attention in 1966. Palmetto became the first public library in Florida to begin the first talking books program. I was working in Washington and I was just about to pop with pride when the people in the Library of Congress told me about the talking book program. They called me and said, "Guess what! It is going to your library." Now I didn't have anything to do with it. The ladies down here and the city fathers did. We just got the notification.

Until this time, people with blindness, and those with impaired visions were served through a state agency, through the blind ----- . And this library served the non-sighted people through Hillsborough County, south, and it went through Lee County. We furnished the records and the telephone and machines were sent to our library. And the Telephone Pioneers of America kept the machines in repair.

And another thing. I think Emily was involved in this. In reading the minutes, a support group was formed for these fine people. They created a Discussion Book Club for the lending library. And I'm sure it was very gainful to them.

Judy Oakley was the one who had the biggest challenge because when she replaced Mrs. Be Tennant. Judy had worked in the library for awhile and became a librarian in 1967. But she would have the task of closing the Carnegie Library. It had outgrown its usefulness. The stairs were too difficult for our senior population and they needed more space and more sections. So there was an urgent need for additional space.

In the eight years that Judy was with the library, circulation had grown from 500 volumes to 3000 volumes. Now that was 8 years.

Treasure hunters came to Palmetto from all over the southeast because we had one of the three known copies of "The Lures Of The Thousand Islands". And anyone who wanted to go out hunting for treasure wanted to read that book. I hope that book hasn't been destroyed, but I have never seen or heard of it.

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It became a city issue. The city from the 1900's had given full support to the library. Strong fiscal support for the library. And continues to do so today. But the city had already acquired the property right across the street for a new library. And the cost of the \$120,000 building was shared. The Federal Government paid \$60,000. The city of Palmetto paid \$30,000, and the Federal Government paid \$30,000.

The present library had a voice in the planning, furnishing of the library. That was through The Friends of the Library. They bought the casual furniture which is in the new library.

Mr. Harry Wanner as a memorial to his wife, did the landscaping and the garden was created behind the library. We have our book sales out there. The ground breaking took place on April 26, 1966. And the library opened on November 10th. I think it was remarkable. I don't think buildings are built in six months, these days.

The Carnegie Library was over, but the Carnegie building continued to serve the community. St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Holy Cross Catholic Church, and independent churches around here that I have not been able to identify, used the library while they organized their own congregations and building their own churches.

There was a chess club, a bridge club and Suncoast Twirlers, square dancers, cloggers. Perhaps you can identify other people who used the old library building. And, of course, there was the Girl's Club with a long tenure, which moved only last year.

If the building could talk we could write a history of Palmetto. This time, I have tried to remind you of the importance of this building that we want to save. It was the heart of this community and that is why we want to restore it.

I want to ask you to give your memories of it and when we are ready, I want you to give us a copy of your family history. So it will be there for all times for people for reference and thank the people who contributed so much for us.

Thank you very much.