

CATHOLIC LIBRARIANS SERIES

Katherine Hinton Wooten 1877-1946, Lady of the South

Between 1883 and 1915 a number of distinguished ladies in sequence headed the Atlanta Public Library. One of them was Katherine Hinton Wooten, who held the post from 1911 until her resignation in October 1914.¹

Atlanta Public Library, known as the Carnegie Library of Atlanta, organized officially, May 6, 1899, grew out of the Young Men's Library Association of Atlanta, established in 1867 during the chaotic period of Reconstruction. This library had, in succession, six male librarians, most of them Confederate veterans. In 1883, a woman,

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Lida A. Field, was appointed. She left in 1889, and under her successor, Frances Alexander Wallace, a real upbuilding of the library began. She resigned to be married in 1892, and the Board of Trustees named her sister, Anne Nicholson Wallace, to succeed her. She also did much to advance the library. She left to marry in 1908 and her successor, Julia Tompkins Rankin, continued the progress until 1911 when Katherine Hinton Wooten took her place.²

Katherine Hinton Wooten was born November 1, 1877, in Nashville, Tennessee, but was reared in Atlanta, Georgia. Her father, Powhattan Bowling Wooten, was a native of Georgia, born March 3, 1844. He came from a long line of

ancestors dating back to before the Revolutionary War. Her mother, Katherine Lynch Wooten, was a native of Atlanta and of Irish descent. Her grandfather, Patrick Lynch, and four brothers arrived in Atlanta from Ireland in 1847. They settled, married and became successful businessmen and were active in civic affairs. The subject of this sketch was named Katherine after her mother and Hinton for her paternal grandmother, whose maiden name was Martha Hinton. She was born in Wilkes County, Georgia in 1797.

The Lynch's were strong Catholics and it is reported that before a church was built in Atlanta, Mass was offered in Patrick Lynch's home.³ When in 1864 General Sher-

man determined to divide the Confederacy geographically, creating a corridor of destruction from Atlanta to Savannah, known historically as Sherman's March to the Sea, Patrick Lynch and the parish priest, Father O'Reilly, asked the General that Atlanta's few church edifices be spared from burning. The General granted this request.⁴ That priest, Father Thomas O'Reilly, served in Atlanta until his death September 5, 1872.

Katherine Wooten grew up in Atlanta in that very difficult period following the bitter years of reconstruction. She obtained as good an education as the depleted school conditions permitted. She attended Immaculate Conception Academy, Ivy Street School, Girls High School and Washington Seminary, following which in 1899 she became a trainee in the Carnegie Library of Atlanta.⁵ The social climate in which she was raised profoundly influenced Katherine Wooten's outlook. Although President Lincoln had made a plan for the restoration of government in the States that had seceded, and President Johnson undertook to follow it, Congress thought otherwise, and over the President's veto, enacted legislation, dividing the South into military districts. The was resented deeply by the people of those States, and it was not until 1877, the year in which Katherine Wooten was born, that President Hayes terminated the military controls.

The Church in the Reconstruction and Post-Reconstruction period. The era of the war, and that of reconstruction was difficult for the Church. In general she was neutral as indeed she properly might be, but throughout the South it was sympathetic to the Confederacy, as described carefully by McAvoy, "In the reconstruction of the Southern States, most of the Catholic Press remained as it had been before the war, sympathetic toward the South."⁶

There was a reaction against the Church which militated toward its members. The Nativists, the Klan and the Abolitionists, each in their

own way denounced the Church. Because the Church was neutral they said she was pro-slavery. Because, in 1870, Pius IX promulgated the dogma of papal infallibility, they said he was claiming to be God. Because the Church favored parochial schools, they said she was anti-government.

Reactions against the Church and Catholics generally, emanating from the North did nothing to produce harmony. Among Catholics of the South, the result was a feeling of suspicion and distrust and a strong (except for slavery) allegiance to the culture of the Antebellum South.

This was the social environment into which Katherine Wooten was born and raised and it conditioned her viewpoint throughout life. She was the product of a good home, good schooling, and of a church that was struggling to fulfill its mission amid hostile circumstances. But of this background she was truly proud and this she manifested by holding memberships in such organizations as The Society of the South, Order of the First Families of Virginia (Descendants of Jamestown colonists), Daughters of the American Confederacy, Daughters of the American Revolution, Daughters of the War of 1812, United Daughters of the Confederacy, Atlanta Women's Pioneer Society and Atlanta Historical Society.

Librarian of Carnegie Library of Atlanta

Immediately following the resignation of Julia Tompkins Rankin, the Trustees named Katherine Hinton Wooten as Librarian of the Carnegie Library of Atlanta. She brought twelve years of experience to the executive desk, nine as secretary to Anne N. Wallace and three as Assistant Librarian under Miss Rankin. She was very popular with both staff and public. She assumed all of Miss Rankin's responsibilities except one. This was the principalship of the library school. Although professionally trained she had been in administration so long that she felt inadequate. She did accept the title of principal on an ex officio

basis. Concerning her staff in her first report she wrote, *I wish to commend individually and collectively the members of the Staff to whom belongs whatever credit the library work merits, yet who seek none beyond the approbation of the public they serve; whose fidelity to manifold labor is not impaired because the duty is often obscure; of whose work this report is an imperfect record and acknowledgement.*⁷

Wooten constantly urged better working conditions for the staff, and on an individual basis, secured for many well deserved increases in compensation. At this time (1911) Atlanta's population was 154,837 and the library's appropriation was \$23,014.00.⁸ The *Report* for 1912 shows the staff included a Librarian, one Assistant Librarian, four Department Heads (Catalog, Children's, Reference and Circulation) fourteen assistants, two branch librarians, one story teller, and two janitors. It is interesting to note that the eminent Tommie Dora Barker, hired by Wooten in 1911, was now head of Reference.⁹ The budget now was \$25,137.04, of which \$13,670.94 was for personnel and \$7,512.53, for books. Notwithstanding the low level of support, Atlanta's public library was progressive for the times. There were for the children regular story hours and an annual Halloween party, lectures for adults in the Reference Department, book deposits in the schools and special exhibits, and in her 1912 *Report* Wooten emphasized the need for establishing a municipal reference library in the City Hall. And, to that recommendation she added "It would also be advisable to cooperate with the County officials and open the library to all residents of Fulton County and possibly of De Kalb County, also."¹⁰

Wooten took an active part in the Georgia Library Association and in 1913 was chosen Secretary-Treasurer. On two occasions she addressed the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Association. On both she pleaded for more children's libraries. She was

innovative, too. In December, 1913 she posted signs in the library asking patrons to send Christmas greetings, expression their feelings toward it. This was to provide input for evaluating the institution. About the same time she made a very strong plea for increasing the salaries of the staff and advocated also that books should be available in stores as branches. In 1914 she addressed the American Library Association's Washington Conference. Her subject was *Development of Libraries in the South*. It was a highly factual report showing the information state by state.¹¹

In her efforts to articulate the relations between the library and education Wooten set aside as special in the Carnegie library, a special Reference Room for teachers.

Resignation. As stated previously Wooten worked continuously to increase the salaries of her staff. Her own salary was but \$125.00 per month and early in 1914 she requested the Trustees to raise this to \$150.00. They were favorable but could not act except upon approval of the Finance Committee of the City Council. The Committee steadfastly refused. Actually there was more than enough money in the Library Salary Fund to cover the increase and no additional appropriation or increase in taxes would have been required. Many people could not understand the Committee's stand. Apparently it was a matter of principle. It was a matter of principal with Katherine Wooten also and she resigned October 10, 1914. Citizens protested the Committee's decision. So did the Staff by whom a testimonial in her honor was held. The *Atlanta Journal* editorialized in eloquent language in favor of Wooten. *It is a misfortune to the Atlanta public and a reproach upon the city government that Carnegie Library is to lose the services of so efficient and talented a librarian as Miss Wooten simply because of indifference and short sightedness on the part of a Council committee. The salary of the librarian is comparatively the lowest paid by any Southern city, despite the fact that*

*the Library Board has repeatedly appealed to the Finance Committee of the Council for a modest increase in the librarian's salary; but every appeal has been fruitless. The Board's latest request in this regard would not have required a dollar's additional appropriation by Council nor the transfer of a dollar from one municipal department to another; it merely asked permission to use, for the just and much needed salary increase, money which had been allotted to the library in January, but which had not been expended. Why so fair and reasonable request should have been denied is beyond comprehension.*¹²

And, more forcefully showing the growth of the library under Wooten the editorial emphasizes, *The present salary of the libraries of Carnegie Library was fixed nine years ago. There were then only one library and no branches, only fourteen employees, only thirteen thousand members and a circulation of some one hundred thousand volumes. Now there are four libraries, ten depositories of books at schools, clubs and other places, thirty-one employees, more than fifty-four thousand members and a circulation of three hundred thirty thousand volumes. The wonderful growth of the library as evidenced by these figures, the growth and usefulness to the people and to the cause of public pleasure and education has been due in large measure to the earnestness and ability of Miss Wooten and her co-worker.*¹³

Miss Wooten's later career

Immediately following her resignation Katherine Wooten accepted employment on the library staff of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington. She was here five years. In 1921 she became a cataloger in Army War College Library, later being advanced to Head Cataloger, and under this capacity she wrote an article describing this largest military library in the world.¹⁴ This institution was under the general control of an army officer designated as "military librarian." In 1933 she succeeded Mary Barndollar as Head

Librarian. She retired voluntarily in 1940 and returned to Atlanta where she made her home until her death.

Katherine Wooten was a gifted writer and scholar. As a young librarian in 1907 she completed the first bibliography of Joel Chandler Harris, for whom she had deep admiration. This explains her membership in the Uncle Remus Memorial Association. In 1912 she and Tommie Dora Barker jointly completed a bibliography of the works of O. Henry. This was published by Doubleday, Page and Company. She loved the literature of the South, and lectured on it at the Catholic Summer School in Cliff Haven, New York. She held memberships in the League of American Pen Women and the National Council of Catholic Women.

In her retirement years Katherine Hinton Wooten was very active in literary and historical circles. She took a great interest in Sacred Heart Church, her parish, notably in its choir.

Katherine Wooten died on October 9, 1946.

Reminiscing in 1939 Arthur Bostwick recalled the 1912 American Library Association Conference in Washington. It appears that a Canadian military band rendered several selections including "Marching through Georgia." He writes of the reaction of a lady from Atlanta sitting near him, *Behind me sat a well-known woman librarian from Atlanta. I could not refrain from glancing at her face when they began to play the air and the expression on it was well worth noticing. She told me afterward that she was debating whether to get up and walk out on the grounds, but a sense of courtesy to her innocent hosts outweighed the claims of outraged national pride.*¹⁵

It cannot be established with positive certainty that this lady was Katherine Hinton Wooten, but it very much sounds like her. On the one hand was a Southerner's resentment, but on the other a Christian reaction of love, kindness and forbearance. □

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References

¹ James Carmichael, "Atlanta's Female Librarians, 1883-1915," *Journal of Library History, Philosophy and Comparative Librarianship* 21:2 (Spring 1986) pp. 367-97.

² *op. cit.*, p. 380. For a summary history of the Y.M.L.A, see Betty R Callahan, "The Carnegie Library of Atlanta," *The Library Quarterly*, 37:2, (April 1967) pp. 149-151.

³ See Katherine Hinton Wooten, *The Pioneer Lynch Family of Atlanta*, Washington, D.C.: (March 2, 1939) manuscript in Archives of Atlanta Historical Society. Apparently a small church was erected in 1848, and a full time pastor appointed in 1851.

⁴ Actually the City Hall, Court House, St. Philip's Episcopal Church, Trinity Methodist Church, Second Baptist Church and Central Presbyterian Church also were spared and a small area in the center of the city.

⁵ In 1905 this training class subsidized by Carnegie Funds became the Carnegie Library School.

⁶ Thomas T. McAvoy, *A History of the Catholic Church in the United*

States (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1969) p. 194.

⁷ A Carnegie Library of Atlanta, *Report for Year ending December 31, 1911*, p. 19.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Carnegie Library of Atlanta, *Report for Year ending December 31, 1912*, p. 4.

¹⁰ Carnegie Library of Atlanta, *Fourteenth Annual Report for the Year ending December 31, 1912*, p. 17.

¹¹ Katherine H. Wooten "Library Development in the South," *ALA Bulletin*, July 8, 1914, p. 158-166.

¹² *Atlanta Journal*, October 20, 1914.

¹³ *Ibid.* For further coverage of resignation see *Atlanta Journal*, October 21, 1914 and newspaper clippings of the Wooten Scrapbook in Atlanta Public Library archives.

¹⁴ Katherine Hinton Wooten, "The Army War College Library: The Official Library of the War Department," *D.C. Libraries* 3:8-11, 1931.

¹⁵ Arthur Bostwick, *A Life with Men and Books* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1939) p. 212.