

Growing in the Garden City: The East Central Georgia Regional Library

By Sue Anne Spears

In 2005, the city of Augusta plans to welcome a new Main Library headquarters building to the East Central Georgia Regional Library System. This library system has a long heritage in terms of size, location and development. This paper chronicles the major developments leading up to the adoption of a constitution for a regional library system to serve the city of Augusta, Richmond County and its surrounding counties.

The history of the library in Augusta dates back to the eighteenth century when there was activity conducive to the formation of a society library. In 1732 and 1733, various persons in England donated books for a public library in the colony. Some of these are known to have arrived on the *Charming Nancy*. There is also documentation of the “Catalogue of Augusta’s First Library” as early as 1750 (Fleming 4). These books were mostly of religious subject matter and there were multiple copies of all titles, including “Common Prayer Books,” “Holy Bible,” “How to Walk With God” by Thomas Gouch and “The Great Importance of a Religious Life Considered.” The first meeting of the Georgia Library Association took place in 1764. This paved the road for library services in the state. Then, on December 12, 1789, the Augusta Chronicle printed a call for subscribers to pay their dues for the library. It stated, “The subscribers to THE AUGUSTA LIBRARY SOCIETY are requested to pay the amount of their respective subscriptions, in specie, to Mr. Amasa Jackson, who is appointed Treasurer, on or before the third Monday in January next; at which time those who shall have paid are requested to meet at the Academy, in order to proceed to business. - By direction, R. Dickinson,

Sec'y" (Fleming 6). The dream of an organized library in Augusta was coming true for its citizens.

During the late 1700s and early 1800s, the community of Augusta flourished. In 1798, the city developed a theater for dramatic entertainment. In 1800 an editorial appeared in the Augusta Herald contemplating the establishment of a "circulating library in the city of Augusta" (Fleming 7). By 1808, the population of Augusta reached approximately 3,000, and a stagecoach was available for travel to Savannah. On March 5, 1808, the front page of the Augusta Chronicle announced that the Thespian Society had performed "The Heir at Law" to a receptive audience. The paper stated that the Thespian Society was contemplating the establishment of a public library.

This became a reality on December 17, 1808, when the Thespian Society published an "Act to Incorporate the Thespian Society and Library Company of Augusta" in the newspaper. It stated that "The Senate and House of Representatives of Georgia in General Assembly met, and hereby enacted the authority of the same," that members and "whosoever they may afterwards admit, and their successors, shall be and are hereby declared to be a body corporate by the name and style of the Thespian Society and Library Company of Augusta'" (Fleming 10). Benjamin Whitaker, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Henry Mitchells, President of the Senate, signed this document.

The Thespian Society and Library Company of Augusta was well received by the community. An editorial to the Augusta Chronicle on February 18, 1809, stated, "The object of the Thespians is certainly very laudable, and as long as it goes to establish a Public Library, deserves the countenance and support of every friend to Literature and Science in Augusta" (Fleming 10). "This club was a success, but dramatics in time

became the principal interest of the society” (Young Men’s Library Association 1).

In 1811, the citizens of Augusta began meeting to discuss the establishment of a Public Library. The cost of a subscription to the library at this time was \$10. By 1827, the newspaper was asking subscribers to deposit books at the library for others to borrow. The library was moving from being a part of the Thespian Society to becoming its own entity.

On December 22, 1827, the Senate and House of Representatives of Georgia met in General Assembly and signed an act to incorporate the Augusta Library Society. Governor John Forsyth assented to this on the same day. The library was housed on McIntosh Street (now Seventh Street) behind the Georgia Railroad Bank, and the Librarian was William P. Beers. Gentlemen met here to read the news and discuss politics, but there is no evidence that ladies patronized the library (Fleming 13). The library then moved to the old Masonic Building on Broad Street in 1835. After this, it moved again, to the basement under the Presbyterian Lecture Room.

The year 1848 is known as a “Golden Epoch” for Augusta. During this year the Augusta Canal was completed, the population reached about 8,000 and a meeting was held in January to organize a Reading Room and Library Association. A Constitution was adopted on January 27, 1848, to establish The Young Men’s Library Association. This Association was to provide a Library, Reading Room with newspapers and periodicals, and deliver Lectures to the community. The subscription for this library was \$50 for a life membership and a Board of Directors was to be appointed. Duties for the officers were defined in the Constitution and a meeting was put on the calendar for the first Monday in December each year. The Young Men’s Library Association and Reading Room opened

March 11, 1848, and the society had its First Anniversary celebration December 4, during which the annual report was read.

The Young Men's Library Association was successful for a time. However, during 1849 and 1850, the number of subscribers declined. As other subscription libraries arose across the Southeast, there was a need to improve the financial situation of the one in Augusta. On April 8, 1853, a permanent Trust Fund was established for the Young Men's Library Association. Sixty-four people agreed to donate funds totaling \$12,700 in money, stock or bonds for the benefit of the library. These trustees agreed to invest annually as long as the library continued operation.

The library prospered and its Lecture series became quite popular for several years. The collection numbered 3,000 volumes, and the number of volumes borrowed in 1862 was 74,000. The fee to maintain a subscription was set at \$5 per year. Women began to use the library during the 1860s and requested works of fiction. The library subscribed to 15 newspapers and a number of periodicals as well. It was clear that the community respected its library because it was heavily used at this time.

In 1871, however, the library had reached a point of financial decline. In a report to the Augusta Daily Chronicle and Sentinel on April 2, 1871, George T. Barnes, Member of Congress for the Augusta District and President of the Young Men's Library Association, stated that the library was in need of assistance. It stated, "We have a library of '3,600 volumes of the leading and most popular works of all kinds, history, biography, voyages, etc., with scarcely any resources'. The Trust Fund of \$12,700 has been reduced to 'A productive fund of about \$3,200.' He called for the public: 'Visit our rooms. We offer no argument upon the advantages of such an institution, believing that their own

judgment will sufficiently suggest reasons why it should be maintained' ” (Fleming 39).

The amount of subscribers increased slightly after this plea.

In 1876, Public Libraries in the United States was published. It listed four libraries in Augusta, including the Young Men’s Library Association. At the time this book was published, it listed the following statistics for this library:

- 4,400 volumes
- 300 yearly additions
- 8,200 circulation
- \$7,500 in permanent funds
- \$850 income
- \$225 spent on books and periodicals
- \$600 spent on salaries and incidentals.

The Librarian, S. G. Simmons, submitted these statistics (Fleming 42).

During the late 1800s the decline of the Young Men’s Library Association continued. In 1882, the library moved into three rooms on the second floor of the “Poullain Building” at the corner of Jackson and Broad Streets. However, the number of subscribers was only 170 annually. At this time the organizational structure was divided into the following committees: Books and Periodicals, Endowment, Finance, Library and Hall, and Lectures. In 1885, Major Barnes resigned as President and it became difficult to get the Board to attend meetings. On July 1, 1888, Life-membership certificates were made available for \$50 each and 12 Life-membership certificates were issued. Other fundraisers, such as concerts and a “Living Chess Game” were also held to benefit the library. These funds helped some, but by July 1889, the evening news reported that the

library was in a “precarious condition” and the Board of Directors discussed “closing the doors” because of the lack of support from the community (Fleming 51). At this time there were only 300 members and the collection held 6,000 volumes.



The Young Men's Library Association Reading Room, circa 1939.
Seated: Horace Day, Vera Middleton and John M. Booth.
Standing: Jane Jackson and Sara Crawford.

During 1897, the Georgia Library Association and the Georgia Library Commission were established to organize and promote libraries in the state of Georgia (Dorsey 111). These groups also worked for public funding for libraries within the state. As a result, at the Annual Meeting in 1899, John Neely, President of the Library, stated that he would like to see the library free to the public. Public interest in the Library increased and by March 1, 1900, the Directors declared “the Library has more daily visitors than any other time in its history” (Fleming 56). Neely then selected a committee to research getting a Carnegie Library for Augusta. In February the response came from Mr. Andrew Carnegie, through his secretary, indicating that he would not help the library because the Mayor and City Council did not support it. The talks continued and on January 28, 1903, Carnegie offered to fund \$50,000 for a public library building on the condition that the City Council agreed to pay \$5,000 a year for maintenance. Many citizens thought Augusta had too much pride to accept this offer.

In 1905, the library was in turmoil. The offer from Carnegie was still open. Another suggestion was made to turn the library over to the Board of Education and let the board finance and run it. The citizens of Augusta were sending mixed signals about whether or not they even wanted a public library. The problem of funding was prevalent and no one seemed to be willing to help. It appeared as though the city of Augusta had lost interest in maintaining the Young Men’s Library Association.

To solve this dilemma, the library closed. A headline from the Augusta Chronicle on July 28, 1906, read “Library Closes Next Wednesday.” No subscriptions were accepted and the books were left to the care of Mary Campbell, Librarian. By December 1906, the telephone had been removed, newspaper subscriptions were canceled and the

rooms were no longer heated. It was impossible for the library to operate with no funding.

The library reopened July 6, 1907, and the Trustees each paid \$75 a month to ensure its operation. However, the library building was sold and the library relocated to a few rooms rented in the Metcalf Building on Greene Street. In 1908, the balance in library funding was \$0.33. By 1909, the Trustees agreed to pay \$100 per month instead of \$75. The budgetary struggle continued for years after this.

In 1916, due to the loss of subscribers, the Board decided that the library must move. The library was relocated to the fifth floor of the Leonard Building. This space was available for \$50 per month. The library opened at this location September 15, 1916. On November 14, 1916, the Young Men's Library Association held its "70th Anniversary" celebration by hosting a tea. At this time, the Librarian was paid \$60 per month and the Assistant was paid \$10 per month. The citizens of the community were reminded of the importance and value of a library. By 1919, there was more money in the budget, more subscribers and more readers. At this time, the President of the Young Men's Library Association, Mr. T. J. Hickman, wrote the American Library Association to investigate having an expert visit Augusta and evaluate the local library situation.

By 1924, the library circulated 28,851 items and 5,916 patrons visited the Reading Room. The Library had an income of \$4,500, and this was enough for the Board to appropriate funds to buy Christmas presents. The Librarian and the Assistant each received a \$5 gold piece and the Janitor and Elevator Girl each received \$1.

Progress continued and community interest in the Library rose somewhat. As the library prospered, plans were made for relocation. On November 10, 1926, the Trustees

of Richmond Academy announced that they would rent the old Academy Building on Telfair Street “To the Young Men’s Library Association for 10 years at \$300 a year. A contractor would make needed alterations to the building for \$1,510” (Fleming 69). Between 1927 and 1929, contributions totaling \$2,687.81 were raised to aid in the relocation of the Library. During 1929, the Board considered making the Library a Public Library, but Directors opposed the idea. The City Council would not make appropriations for the library, and when asked again in 1935, they again refused, stating that unless the County made appropriations, they would not. The County refused.

The years 1936 and 1937 were extremely positive for Augusta’s library. During January, the City Council, County Commission, and Board of Education made “appropriations of public money for library services” (Fleming 70).

On October 23, 1936, the “Hill Branch” opened and was located in the George Walton Apartments. In July 1937, another branch opened at the McBean Depot, and the “Hill Branch” moved to the Partidge Inn. Major progress at this time also included the abolishment of subscriptions and free Library service to the public. John M. Walton, the first Library Administrator, asked Miss Wheatcroft, State Library Board member, to visit Augusta to offer professional advice on library operations. Her report was critical and she stated that the Library staff was not adequately trained. At this time, staff salaries were paid by the Federal Government because the workers were provided by the Works Progress Administration.

The 1940s were lively times for the Augusta Library. In 1940, the City appropriated \$1,650, the Board of Education appropriated \$375 and the County appropriated \$375 for Library use. In 1942, it was announced that the Georgia State

Library Association planned to hold its annual meeting in Augusta from October 6 to 8, 1942. During this year, plans were made to form the Friends of the Library. In 1943, the Elks Club donated \$1,200 to fund an Elks Reference Shelf. In 1944, the Board decided to have an outside agency create a long-range plan for the Library. Miss Tommie Dora Barker, Dean of Emory University Library School, was selected to survey the Library and create this long-range plan. The Barker report is currently available in the Main Branch Library archives. Among the many suggestions Barker made were to expand finances to \$2 per capita for superior service, recondition floors, improve lighting, provide a meeting room for the community, purchase book trucks, create vertical files, make a place for a workroom, and increase staff. Barker also noted that the Library was, at the date of her report, for use by whites only (Barker).

On August 7, 1944, the County Commissioners designated the Library as a County Library System and this enabled it to qualify for state funding. On March 28, 1947, the City Council and the County Commission created an amendment to the by-laws of the Young Men's Library Association. This amendment reduced the number of Board members from 18 to 12 and required that two members be elected from City Council, two from County Council and four from regular members of the Association. The City raised its annual appropriation to \$7,500 and the County raised its to \$2,500. The Library was an official "Public Library" with government funds to support it. Ordinance Number 1608 (August 7, 1944) declares that the Augusta Library was designated as the Public Library of Augusta.

In 1947, the City Bond Committee agreed to allot \$100,000 for the Library if the County would also allot a bond issue. In June 1947, Celeste W. Cheatham, President of

the Library Board, wrote "The Augusta Library, What It Was - Is - Can Be." This was a report to the Bond Committee, which detailed the specific needs to be included in a new library. It also discussed the current library of 1947 with facts about funding, the Library Board of Directors, the facility, circulation, and the collection. It stated, "The Directors of the Library, in submitting to you these facts and figures concerning a proposed Public Library Building, believe that the time has come to bring the library facilities of Augusta and Richmond County up to the standards appropriate today to a city and county of their wealth and importance" (Cheatham 1).

On October 6, 1947, the Library became mobile with the donation of a bookmobile for service in the County. The "6 Home Demonstration Clubs of Richmond County" donated this and a dedication ceremony was held. On October 19 of this same year, the bond issue was defeated, and the public explained, via editorials in the newspaper, that schools needed funding more than the Library at the time. This was a huge disappointment to library advocates and employees.

On December 3, 1948, the Library celebrated the "First Hundred Years of the Young Men's Library Association." It was a difficult journey, with successes and failures along the way, but the Library had become a positive force in the Augusta community and in Richmond County. The transition from a subscription library to a public library was made and government and public interest in the Library System was increasing.

The Augusta Library had enjoyed a "poor but proud tradition" during its first two decades (Shivers). January 1949 was the birth of a new era for the library. This year marked the arrival of Jean Cochran, professional Librarian. When Ms. Cochran came to Augusta for an interview, she realized she would have a big challenge on her hands if she

took the job. Years later she said of her initial visit,

“I spent the night here and then met the Board on a Sunday morning, I think, and this was quite an ordeal. It was so much larger a situation - the old Library Building itself was so much bigger than the one I was in then (Carnegie Public Library, Sumter, South Carolina). They told me about a ‘room’ that they had. Said they didn’t have a key for it. I wondered at the time if this was intentional, if they didn’t want me to see inside that room. And I was right. It was. They didn’t. Because this was the room that was filled with old, old books and magazines and they were piled to ceiling and dusty and dirty and all” (Shivers).



Library Storage Room, circa 1950.

At this time, the Library was located at 540 Telfair Street. The building was dilapidated and crowded. “Standing dormant on its shelves were many books which had not been circulated in thirty years, and, out of sight in the ‘famous locked room’ was a

hodgepodge of old Augusta newspapers, files of magazines, and several thousand uncataloged volumes including many old fiction works” (Shivers). There were no branch library buildings in 1949 and only one station wagon bookmobile, which served Richmond County residents living outside Augusta’s city limits. Cochran had to weed through the books and catalog the ones worth keeping. She also began to make plans to establish a regional library to provide more users with library access.

On March 30, 1949, the City Council appropriated \$10,000 for Library use. An additional \$5,000 was granted for permanent improvements to the building. During this year, 100 Years of Augusta’s Library by Berry Fleming was published. This book began when Fleming suggested that the Association get together a little historical sketch of the Young Men’s Library Association in commemoration of the hundredth anniversary. Six months later her “little historical sketch” turned into a factual chronology of trials and tribulations.

In 1949 the Library had no way to tell how many books were in the collection because many had not been cataloged. “It became obvious that the only practical way to make the collection readily usable to the public would be to effect a recataloging of the library’s books” (Cochran, Augusta Richmond County Library Since 1949 23). In 1950, the Library made some changes in circulation and collection management procedures. The list of borrowers was organized alphabetically and numerically, and \$1,400 was set aside to recatalog the entire Library. In 1951, the Library hired its first full-time cataloger. Most of the year 1952 was spent on the Library cataloging project. This involved putting catalog cards for newly acquired books and recataloged books into the new catalog. This project went slowly because the Librarian had to weed and catalog the

entire collection. By the end of 1952, the project was completed. “This marked the first time in many, many years that the Library had been able to give a realistic count of the number of books in its collection” (Cochran, Augusta Richmond County Library Since 1949 23). The inventory of books owned by the Library reported 28,701 in the entire collection; 17,960 were adult books and 10,741 juvenile.

There were small achievements for the Augusta Library in the early 1950s. In 1951, “ Friends of the Library” was officially formed. The Junior League donated a filmstrip and slide projector and film strips. The Library also applied for and received the “Leroy Howard Memorial Fund.” This fund provided for the purchase of a Ford Vannette bookmobile to be used for library service in the city of Augusta, Richmond County and Columbia County. Then, “the sight of this shiny white bookmobile sold Columbia County on bookmobile service” (Cochran, Augusta Richmond County Library Since 1949 18).



The Augusta Library Bookmobile in the early 1950s.

Accordingly, a contract was made between the Augusta Library and Columbia County Board of Education, thus forming a two-county regional library. Shortly after this, Augusta officials provided additional funds for the operation of this new Vannette bookmobile within the city limits of Augusta.

During the 1940s and 1950s public libraries in the United States began to develop

and expand. In 1945, the Library Extension Division of the American Library Association proposed the investigation of writing a manual to aid county and regional public library systems with organization (Schenk iii). The main goal behind organizing regional library systems was to strengthen library services for a greater number of people in a larger geographical area (Schenk iii). By 1950, planning for statewide library services based on regional systems was in the works on a national level. During this same year, Congress voted on a bill to provide federal aid for public library service. The bill lost by only three votes (Schenk iii). This narrow margin gave the Library Extension Division the hope it needed to push forward with creating standards for regional library systems.

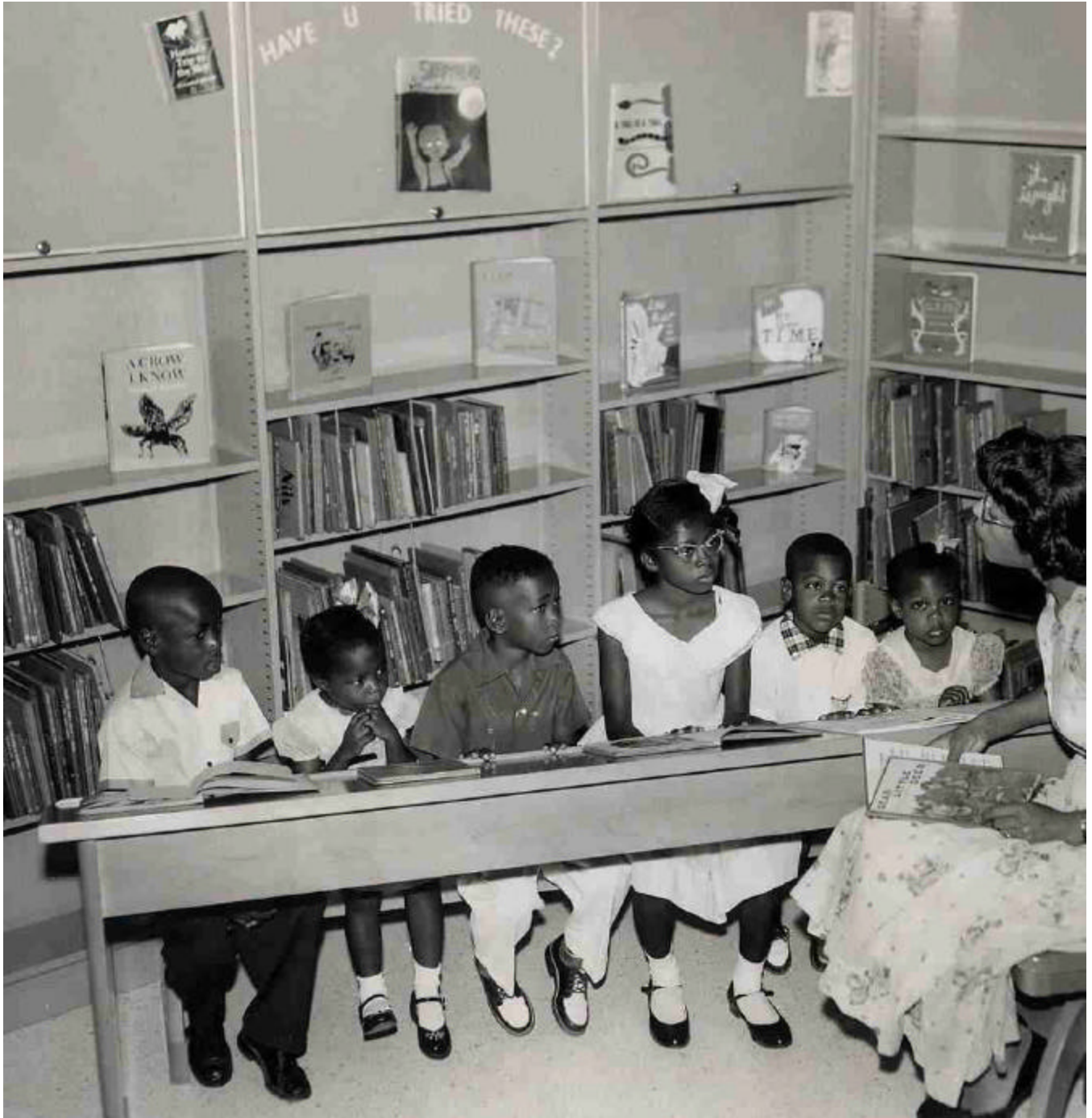
This trend of regional library organization became popular in Georgia as a result of \$100,000 in funding made available by the state to use as funding for public libraries in the state in April 1944. A conference of librarians, laymen and representatives of the State Department of Education was held in Atlanta in 1944. This conference initiated the formation of regulations for the expenditure of this state funding. "The committee wanted to ensure that the funds were expended wisely and actually stimulated the growth of libraries in the state" of Georgia (Dorsey 98). This committee encouraged the development of regional library networks and stated that these networks should be run by qualified librarians. Extra funding would be allotted by the state for regional systems overseen by a regional library board and administered by a certified librarian (Dorsey 98).

Libraries wishing to be considered regional networks had to meet certain standards, as stated by the Textbook and Library Division of the Georgia State

Department of Education, in order to qualify to receive state funds. County allotments for funds were based on the number of public school teachers in each county (Dorsey 98). These standards included the qualifications that the library be administered by a legally constituted Library Board that functioned actively; that the library serve the entire county population, including rural areas; that library services be continually improved; and that the library be supported by sufficient local funds (Dorsey 99-100). There was also a clause in this list of qualifications that stated “In addition to the direct grant to each county, an additional sum of \$2,000 is available for the purchase of books and toward the salary of a trained librarian if two or more counties decide to pool their library resources and furnish bookmobile service to the people of each county (Dorsey 100).

In 1951, the State Department of Education increased its financial aid of book funds and salaries to the Augusta Library because of its regional status (Cochran, Augusta Richmond County Library Since 1949 18). Shortly afterward, in 1952, a contract was signed with Glascock County for bookmobile service, creating the three-county Augusta Regional Library system.

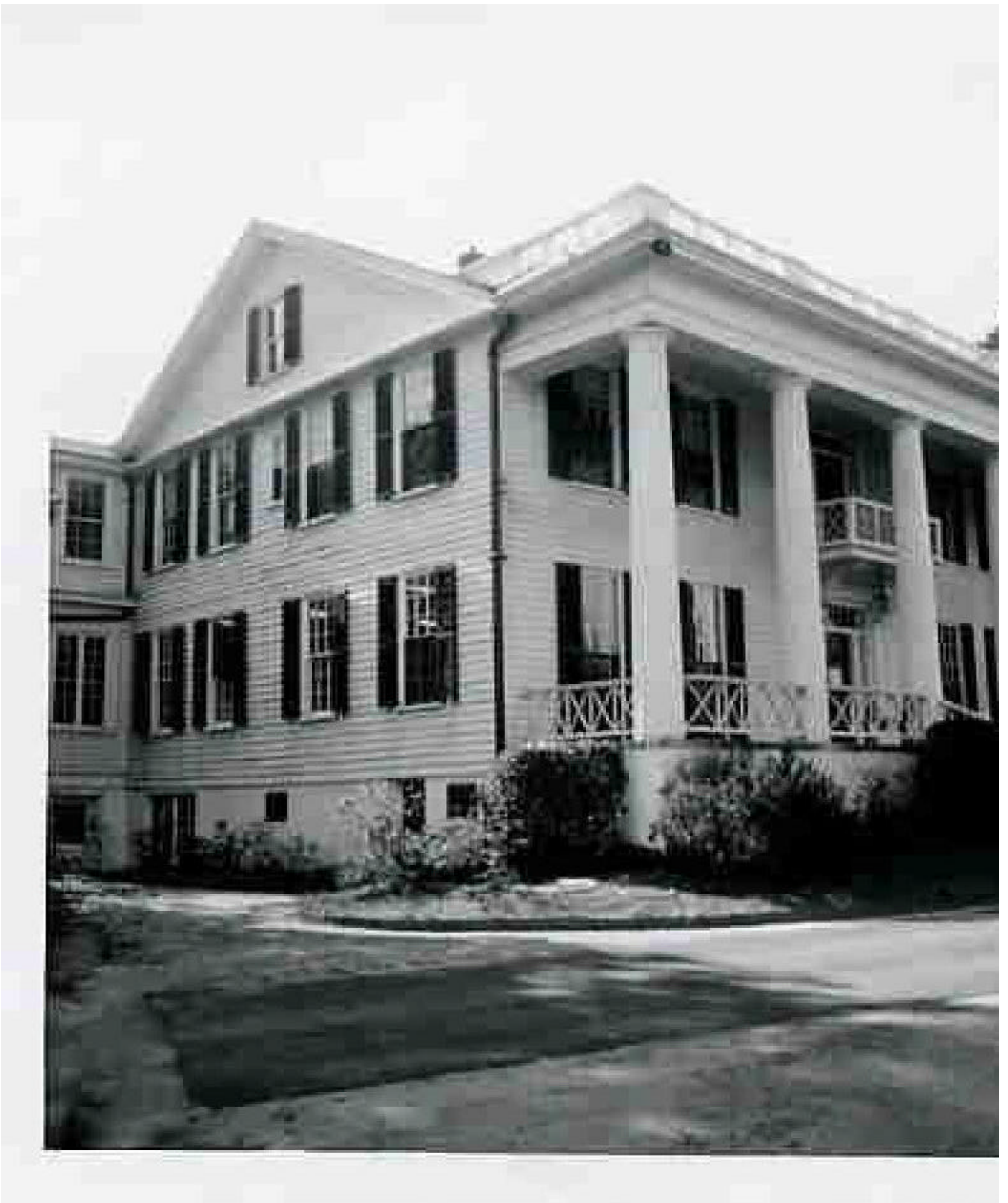
In 1952, the Augusta Library “assumed responsibility for a branch in the Negro community of the city. The former Community Library at 1237 Gwinnett Street became the Wallace Branch. This Library was named in honor of Reverend Samuel B. Wallace.



Story Hour at the Wallace Branch, or "Negro Library."

The city obtained another branch location for the Augusta Regional Library in 1954. Mr. Scott B. Appleby gave his residence at 2260 Walton Way to the city of Augusta for use by the Library. This Library, dedicated May 30, 1955, became the new

branch for the neighborhood of Summerville, known as “The Hill.” The “antebellum home, with spacious gardens, did not have the ease of administration that a building designed for a library would have, but there was compensation because of the beauty of its architecture and the suitability for its particular location and clientele” (Cochran, Augusta Richmond County Library Since 1949 6).



Appleby Library, 2260 Walton Way.

In 1955, programs called “Evenings in the Appleby Garden” were supported financially by the Scott B. Appleby Trust Fund. These programs were planned to provide cultural entertainment, such as music, lectures and drama, during summer months. This Trust Fund allowed for an annual allocation of \$1,000 to be used for the purchase of books for Appleby Library.

In an article published in “Citizens Review” on October 23, 1956, titled “Augusta Library Source of Income,” the financial situation and circulations statistics for the Library were published. The following criticisms were brought out in this story: The circulation figures for the first nine months of 1956 indicated that the number of books would exceed half a million a year; it was impossible to meet the needs of the public without adequate facilities; space for more books in the present location was practically exhausted; and, physical facilities for research by businesses and students was practically nil. It was obvious that the Augusta Regional Library needed new facilities. In a 1956 Richmond County bond election, the citizens voted in favor of a bond of \$950,000 for the Library to build new headquarters and a new building for the Wallace Branch. This was the first time a bond had been approved for the Library. The “forceful campaign for this bond sponsored by the Friends of the Library, American Association of University Women and the League of Women Voters can be credited with this huge success” (Cochran, Augusta Richmond County Library Since 1949 5).



The lot on the corner of Greene and Ninth streets was selected for the "Future Home of the Augusta Library."

This was a victory for the Library. "It was against a background of struggle for survival" that the new era began for the Augusta Regional Library (Cochran, Augusta Richmond County Library Since 1949 2). On December 11, 1960, a "progressive year for the Augusta community climaxed with formal dedication of Augusta's New main library

(Central 1) on the corner of Greene Street and Ninth Street. “The city now had some of the most beautiful and serviceable libraries in the area and they invited public use. The Main Library, the Appleby Branch and the Wallace Library are storehouses of recorded knowledge and fiction” (“Building Augusta” 1).

The site for the new building was a lot on the corner of two busy streets, Greene and Ninth. The Library was quite modern. A detailed description of the new library was disclosed in the ALA Bulletin July- August, 1961 in an article written by Jean Cochran. This article also provides floor plans for the first and second floors. The total cost for the new Library headquarters was \$775,000. This included the site, furniture and office equipment. The Library building, still in use today, is 155 feet by 120, with one-story windows 72 feet by 26 feet, totaling 38,000 square feet. Special features include a Children’s Room near the main door, magic carpet doors, Local History Collection, an auditorium, and reading areas. The architects were Eve and Stub and the Library Consultant was Hoyt R. Galvin. Jean Cochran described it as “a thing of beauty, both inside and out. Its exterior of marble, glass and black brick was created to serve as a beacon for those who have never been attracted to Augusta’s Library” (Cochran 629).



The Wallace Branch today.

So began a new era for Augusta's Library. By 1968, the focus was on library services rather than finances. Adult Education was one service the Library intended to provide. The 1968 Annual Report stated, "More and more across the country librarians are seeing their role in the community not just to interpret a storehouse of information but as active agents, teaching individuals and groups how to use the library, seeking to bring people of all ages and educational levels into the library and reaching into low income

areas to touch the illiterate and beginning adult readers and introduce them to library services. This past year, in addition to carrying out its formal role, the Augusta Library has expanded toward these new horizons of service” (Augusta-Richmond County Public Library 2-3).

The Library was attempting to reach out to the community with services. Programs were offered to teach users about the Readers Guide to Periodicals, the Young Adult collection expanded, the first floor of the Main Library was rearranged to better serve patrons; the noonday film series continued; “Evenings in the Appleby Garden” continued; the Wallace Branch expanded programs for Senior Citizens and to Head Start and Upward Bound participants; and Bookmobile services increased. By 1968, the Augusta Library had grown into a successful regional system. At the end of this year, the Book Collection totaled 202,631 and Circulation for the year in books alone was 660,414.



“Evenings in the Appleby Gardens.”

In the Seventies, the Augusta Regional Library had some successes. In December 1970, the Main Library celebrated its Tenth Anniversary at the 902 Greene Street address. In October 1971, South Augusta realized the dream of the Maxwell Branch. Mr. Jeff Maxwell donated money to fund this Library. His gift of \$90,000 matched funds provided by the Federal government, Richmond County Commission and the Library

Board. This branch opened for service in February 1973 and is still open today. In October 1973, the Talking Book Center opened to serve the blind and physically handicapped in the Augusta Region and Jefferson County Library areas. The Talking Book Center is also the Library's Audio-Visual Center.



The Talking Book Center.

In 1974, Jean Cochran celebrated 25 years with the Library. This year is also noteworthy because it finalized the Regional System. A Constitution for the Regional Library System was adopted in Augusta 1974. This officially established the Augusta Library as a regional system, with the Main Library serving as Headquarters. This system is composed of six counties, Richmond, Columbia, Glascock, Warren, Burke and Lincoln. It also includes the Talking Book Center and bookmobile services. Funding is separate for each county, but state funding for the Library System is based on the combined population of all six counties. The state also provides for the salary of a specified number of professional staff. The purpose of the regional libraries in Georgia is to set up cooperation between urban and rural areas so that citizens of all counties benefit from resources purchased by library systems. The Augusta Regional Library became the East Central Georgia Regional Library and was entitled to city, county, state and federal funding based on the adoption of the Constitution for the Regional Library System adopted in 1974.

The East Central Georgia Regional Library System of today is the result of a number of struggles spanning across decades. Public appreciation for the Library has risen and fallen over the years, as has the amount of funding and services provided. The major developments that led to the formation of the Regional System are noteworthy because they compose a portion of the city's history and represent the achievements of those who gave time and money for library services. The long heritage of the East Central Georgia Regional System should be appreciated as the Library moves into the Twenty-first Century.



AUGUSTA LIBRARY
AUGUSTA, GA. EVE & STULB ARCHITECTS

“Augusta Library.” Eve and Stulb Architects

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