THE ladies of Quitman had already had valuable experience in public works, having organized the Ladies Memorial Association, bought land for a cemetery, set an ornamental iron fence around it and placed on the courthouse square a modest granite shaft as a war memorial, and now under the leadership of Miss Lily Pierpont, they planned to organize a Library. The first page of the Brooks County Library Association record begins: “January 31, 1880 in response to a call for a public library the ladies of Brooks County having met, proceeded to form an association to elect officers for the purpose of commencing to carry on the work.” Mrs. A. J. Rountree was elected president; Mrs. J. S. N. Snow, vice-president; and Miss Lily Pierpont, recording secretary.

It was seventeen years later, in 1897, that the Georgia Library Association was formed to “aid the growth of library development in the state”, and it was not until 1904 that the General Assembly of Georgia enacted a law authorizing cities to appropriate money to maintain libraries; so it appears the ladies were proceeding without official guidance and aid. Of necessity it was a subscription library and dues were fixed at ten cents per month for ladies and children, gentlemen to pay twenty-five cents. This disparity was no penalizing of reading for gentlemen but a recognition that money must come from those who have it, an idea we have since become familiar with as “ability to pay.”

The matter of funds for a library building was canvassed thoroughly and a committee was appointed to see if the premium money Brooks County won at the Thomas County Agricultural Fair could be diverted to the library and another committee of six was “to solicit subscriptions from the gentlemen of Quitman.” At the second meeting, February 7, 1880, the sum of $332.50 is reported in subscriptions “and more are expected.” Miss Lily Pierpont’s recording of the barest of essential facts gives no hint of the dimity wiles they employed in furthering this project designed to sustain culture, but we may imagine the committee of six swishing pleasantly as they walked in starched

Note: Besides conveying a good deal of specific information, this article bears upon the general question of small Georgia libraries.
muslin and ruffled petticoats. Their fresh complexions carefully pow-
dered would have no paint or lipstick and they would look at the
gentlemen with dove’s eyes and as they presented their cause a re-
finod odor of violet and rose geranium would be wafted about.

Women had long been schooled in such procedures and well knew
that the gentlemen should be deferred to, but with no demeaning
of themselves, no compromise of their elect ladyhood, and the gentle-
men were thanked in a manner to convey that while the ladies might
plant the seed and tend the undertaking, they were expected to give
it increase. It must have worked very well for later entries reveal
that the handsome sum of $800 was speedily subscribed, which was
better than the men of a later day did when they were called on in
behalf of the library.

Within the month the Association has named the following impor-
tant professional and business men on a Board of Directors: A. J.
Rountree, Captain H. G. Turner, Dr. E. A. Jelks, Clayton Groover,
A. P. Perham, G. W. Avrett, Joseph Mabbett, Dr. J. H. McCall,
Judge Jos. Tillman, Judge J. O. Morton, Dr. R. M. Hitch. February
28th. the minutes record the ladies as gratefully accepting Mr. L. F.
Haddock’s offer of a room rent free for the use of the library and
a committee is appointed to clean it, calamine the walls, beautify
it and get bookshelves made. A letter is sent the Georgia Historical
Society, which maintains a library in Savannah, relative to buying
second-hand books. Periodicals are ordered: Sunday Magazine, $3.00;
Frank Leslie’s Weekly, $4.00; Harper’s Magazine, $3.00. The first
dues are reported in the amount of $4.25 and the oyster supper benefit
held in Judge Tillman’s hall brings $24.45 to the treasury. The
Library has assumed form and substance and two months after organ-
izing a meeting is held in the library room.

At this meeting the secretary reports gifts that have an odd sound
if the naive zeal of the ladies for a good cause is not borne in mind.
Woods & Company of Savannah, Wilcox & Gibbs and George W.
Scott, of Atlanta, each send the library a half-ton of guano. Colonel
J. H. Estill, publisher of the Savannah Morning News, has donated the
Weekly News, the Farmer’s Monthly and the Morning News Library.
Later entries report a saddle sold to Mr. Perdue for $10, and $5.75
received for two suits of clothes. A wagon received from the Web-
ster Wagon Company, Moundsville, W. Va., brought $50 and a sugar
boiler sold for $18. The Savannah, Florida and Western Railway do-
nates $38.31. It would appear that the ladies have been canvassing in
behalf of the library those firms which profited from business with Quitman. Promoters of good causes who have sought aid from impersonal agencies will admire this approach based on interdependence.

The first list of books ordered in March, 1880, included John Halifax, Gentleman by Miss Mulock, The Law and the Lady by Wilkie Collins, The Mill on the Floss by George Eliot, The Strange Secret by Bulwer Lytton, Marcus Warland by Caroline Lee Hentz (a Georgia novelist who contributed to Godey’s Ladies’ Book), Violet, or the Cross and Crown by Miss McIntosh, Pickwick Papers by Dickens, Put Yourself in His Place by Charles Reade, Jacob Faithful by Marryat, Innocents Abroad by Twain, Abbot’s Histories. Donations of books received were mostly histories, missionary adventures in Africa, books on the education and influence of women, works on theological and moral science, and Washington’s Writings in 12 volumes.

The ladies stretch their slender resources by seeking bargains and they offer to buy all of Mr. Tom Wallace’s books for 50c per volume, or a few at 75c if he is unwilling to accept less. W. T. Gaulden and Walter Allen appeared at a meeting to present $27 derived from an entertainment and the minutes recorded that Mr. Gaulden “made a beautiful little speech.” The gift was timely for after all bills were paid only fifteen cents remained. But it is April, guano is moving to the farms and the Library sells a ton of its gift guano for $28. And a benefit dinner on the courthouse square brings in $24.65. The semi-annual report made in June, 1880, shows total receipts of $90.67 and expenditures of $88.42.

In September, 1880, a plan to erect a two-story brick building is formed and a meeting is called to consider a proposal from Mr. A. P. Perham, editor and publisher of the Free Press, to share in the expense of building and to occupy the ground floor as a printing office. The ladies agree, specifying that he build the first floor and lay joists for the second which they will complete, also that he make the building ten feet longer. Mr. Perham accepts this provided the Association release him from his pledge of $20 to the building fund. A. J. Rountree, Clayton Groover and Dr. H. Mabbett are appointed on the building committee and the Association decides to apply for a charter, which is drawn up for them by Captain H. G. Turner and duly executed.

It is indeed a busy season. A fair is planned as a benefit for the building fund, books and periodicals are ordered in the amount of
$50 and furnishings ordered against the time the new hall will be ready. These include "Two dozen chairs at $2.25 each, half dozen ditto at $3.25, settee at $1.80 per foot, desk at $20." This furniture is still used in the Library and is worth far more than its first cost, as antiques. Along with tongs, shovel, dusting brush and a new lantern, the ladies also on motion voted to buy a spittoon, which would place the time as that period when chewing tobacco had not yet been outlawed by polite social usage.

The fair held in June, 1881, is reported as adding $1,000 to the building fund and by September "the president had no formal report but thought the next meeting might be held in the new Hall." No mention is made of the ceremonial occupation of the hall, but there are items about the sale of goods donated the library, collection of dues, books bought. Mrs. Perham is appointed to have the building and furniture insured. A Dickens party is planned to be held in the courthouse the Monday night before Christmas as a benefit. January, 1882, marks two years during which the Library is established and settled in its own building. Its guiding spirit, Mrs. A. J. Rountree, is again elected president, a position she is to hold continuously until her death thirty-two years later.

Although comparatively opulent now all business affairs are conducted with an eye to thrift. A balance left over in the building fund is loaned to Dukes & Bro. in the amount of $500 at 8 per cent. The building was reported to have cost $1,100.69 and later mention is made of buying Mr. Perham's interest for $500. The lower floor was rented and probably brought more than an 8 per cent loan. The book committee still looks for bargains in second-hand volumes and when the librarian reports that Mr. Sim Remington, the local cabinet maker, will charge $4.00 to frame and hang the map, the ladies accept provided he will include the mending of one chair. The committee appointed to scan all books before they are placed in the Library reports that "Captain Laneham's books are unsuitable," but a second-hand Life of Garfield is bought from Miss Ann Perkins for $1.40. Mrs. Pierpont buys "an old oilcloth from the Association and pays for it in Seaside." This must have referred to an early attempt at popular cheap printing, Mudie's Seaside Library bound in blue paper.

Many entries in the record are such as do not often appear in dry and formal reporting and might be classed under the head of amenities. The Association hospitably permits the Hall to be used by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Benevolent Society, but does
not think it seemly to have parties with card playing. Mr. L. F. Had
dock had been notified that he would not be expected to pay dues as
long as he furnished the library a room free of rent. It was moved
and carried that Miss Hannah Mabett, the treasurer, who had made
a mistake of $1.70 in her accounts not be permitted to refund this.
The Association followed a community pattern in tender concern
for those in sorrow and "On learning of the sad death of a life mem-
ber a meeting was called and Willie Gaulden, Lewis Lane, Lewis
Creech and John Lewis were named a committee to bear the floral
offerings prepared by the Association to the grave of our esteemed
member." Country people had to pay fines for overtime if they kept
a book longer than a month, "except in cases of illness and death."
And the Library voted to close at night during the Baptist protracted
meeting.

The minutes of July 4th, 1881, tersely report that the librarian was
appointed to call on Messrs. Willie Gaulden and C. M. Powers and
notify them the Association would expect them to pay their fines; also
to state to Mr. Powers that a written apology is required of him for
"ungentlemanly conduct at the Hall in the presence of ladies." There
is no further reference to this incident and we shall never know
what it was that gave offense, nor can we who knew Mr. Powers in
later years even imagine, for he was indeed a pattern of propriety, a
gentle and sensitive soul. We could wish Miss Lily Pierpont had been
more discursive in her recording.

Mr. Noah Webster Cooper came to Quitman in 1890, fresh from
Peabody Normal College, to organize the first public schools, which
were to take the place of the academy and the private schools. He
was agreeably surprised to find a public library and wrote an article
in the Free Press May 9th, 1890, expressing a scholar's appreciation
of its contents. Among the books on philosophy he found Paley and
Lord Bacon. The histories included Hallam, Hume, Macaulay, Pres-
cott, Irving, Josephus, d'Aubigne, Smith and Liddell. The juvenile
collection had a large number of biographies and stories "to incite
the youth to higher and nobler efforts." The works of Dickens,
George Eliot, Miss Mulock and Lord Lytton showed constant use
and all the prominent English and American poets, headed by the great
Shakespeare and Chaucer, were there. "There can be nothing finer
than a good circulating library," concludes Mr. Cooper. "Looking
over a list of libraries in the United States I find Quitman among a
very few small towns that have such an enlightening institution."
The Handbook of the Libraries of Georgia, published in 1907 by the Carnegie Library of Atlanta, does not include the Brooks County Library Association although there are not a great many which are older. The ladies had apparently been so intent on keeping their roof mended and the library going they had neglected to publish their good works abroad, an insularity in respect to such an institution which seems strange now. The biennial report of the Georgia Library Commission for 1925-1926 mentions the failure of a bill in the General Assembly to permit county authorities to appropriate funds for library purposes, and said that the representative from Brooks County immediately introduced and secured the passage of a bill permitting that county to appropriate as much as $600 a year to the Library at Quitman. This representative was S. M. Turner, a son of Congressman Henry G. Turner, who was a charter member of the Library Association.

Depending on dues and benefit parties the ladies have kept the Library open for more than thirty years and now changes impend. J. W. Spain, whose parents were also charter members, has returned from Boston with modern ideas about library methods and in 1911 he helps the ladies card index and catalogue the Library's 2,000 volumes. The Library has outgrown the Hall built thirty-one years before and when the Carnegie Fund comes into being it seems most opportune and the ladies secure a grant of $10,000 for a new building. In 1912 the old building is sold to S. S. Rountree and the money invested in a larger lot facing the courthouse square. Mayor J. Russell Davis appoints S. S. Rountree, D. G. Malloy, H. W. Stubbs, S. S. Bennet and L. W. Branch as a building commission and a plan is prepared by H. W. Witcover, Savannah architect.

The Association was hospitable to the W.C.T.U. and the Benevolent Society in early days and their successors now want an assembly room as part of the new Library and Mr. Carnegie says if they have one it will have to be in the basement. The ladies visit neighboring towns with basement assembly rooms and everywhere they hear of mildew and damp and ruined pianos. Timidly they ask the building committee to explain to Mr. Carnegie how unsuccessful basements are in this low country and couldn't the assembly room be overhead or behind? How changed from those early days when the ladies planned their building and found money to pay for it! Now they are dealing with absentee gentlemen who think they do not know what is good
for them. The Library has come up against impersonal, organized philanthropy.

Up to now the only philanthropist the Library had knowledge of was Major J. C. Cutler of Boston, a winter resident in these parts who gave the Library its first Chambers Encyclopedia in 1882 and every Christmas thereafter sent a list of excellent periodicals and the money with which to subscribe for them. In his will he left a $1,000 trust fund, the interest to be used for periodicals. Mr. Carnegie was not like Major Cutler, the ladies thought. If he ever visited here he would see how unsuitable a basement is but he never came and finally the ladies gave up and decided to endure the basement for the sake of a new building.

But when the bids were received the lowest was $12,000 and the building committee balked: they thought the building should not exceed the Carnegie $10,000 and would not budge from their decision to wait until costs came down. So time passed and frustration increased, until after more than four years in 1919 Mr. Carnegie took his money back and the Library faced the worst period it has ever known. It is paying rent now on the building it once owned and its patrons, expecting a free library, have stopped paying dues. Mrs. Rountree is still president but after these many years she no longer has the bright vigor with which she once dealt with library problems. When she talked about her great longing to see the new building tears ran down her cheeks and when she died a little later in her eighties, like Moses she had journeyed far but might not enter the promised land.

Mrs. Lula Hitch Chapman, who had been vice-president a long time and had assumed most of the task of keeping the Library going, was elected president. The ladies again rally around and the Daughters of the American Revolution ask for used clothing for the rummage sales they propose to hold on the courthouse square every Saturday “so long as they are profitable,” the proceeds to go toward paying off the balance of $110 owing on the new Encyclopedia.

These women do not give up; they start once more raising funds for a new library building. Again they have a fair and realize $1,000 for the building fund. Again some woman recalls a sum remaining in the bank from a premium the county won at a fair. It is $450 and Mr. R. L. Groover presents it to the ladies in “a beautiful little speech” just as Mr. Willie Gaulden did when he brought the $27 derived from the entertainment. The Daughters of the Confederacy had sent only $500 of the $1,000 they pledged to the Stone Mountain
Memorial and they divert the remaining $500 to the building fund. It is almost like it used to be, except that now the ladies do not feel encouraged to ask the gentlemen for subscriptions.

By January, 1932, the building fund has grown to $4,183.75 and the *Free Press* seeks to stir public interest with editorials that are tinged with irony. The Library is fifty-two years old, eight years older than the Bank of Quitman which has moved several times into increasingly opulent quarters. The schools, churches, commercial firms have expanded their plant facilities and colleges launch million dollar campaigns. The Library, built in 1880, and the jail, built in 1884, seem to be the only institutions here which have not experienced the benefit of modern progress, and the Library, in its classic poverty, must have rummage sales of cast-off clothing to keep going.

The city commission had made it a free library in 1917 and appropriated $50 per month for maintenance and in 1925 the county appropriated $25 per month. With a lot paid for and a pledge to raise $5,000 for the building, the ladies approach the city commission on the subject. The commission gave with one hand and took away with the other. It voted in favor of the plan “provided the money could be spared and further if it was found the taxpayers were agreeable to spending money for this purpose.” Then came the depression. The government began spending money on public works to provide employment and brisk stirring in behalf of the Library, trips to Atlanta to wait upon people in high places, finally secured an appropriation of $5,000 to match the funds in hand.

Plans are drawn by Lloyd Greer, Valdosta architect, and the contract is let for the new building. January 30, 1933, is the Library’s fifty-third anniversary and that day Mrs. Chapman turns the first shovel of dirt for the building. It would not seem that anything untoward could now befall, but it did. The lady inspector who arrived to see that the government money was being spent according to plan explained that it must go directly to people who were on relief, even if they were mostly colored mothers with babies in arms who were calling at the Red Cross office to get a sack of flour and a roll of outing flannel. It was no use explaining that decent artisans needed work and the money put in circulation would help the town take care of its indigent. Here was more planned philanthropy with rules that could not bend around individual situations.

About $1,000 was spent cleaning the old brick and moving dirt in wheelbarrows and they took the rest of the money back. The city
commission rose nobly to the occasion and made up the balance, thus inadvertently aiding in the building and later being justly proud of an undertaking that turned out so well. For it is indeed a gem of a building with a charming paneled assembly room in the rear and the total cost of $9,423 is so amazingly small every one mentions it with pride. The Library has what is called atmosphere so that visitors who are sensitive to such matters feel peculiarly at home in it. The crayon portrait of Major Cutler hangs on a wall and there are the pictures of General Lee and his staff, and of his Farewell Address brought from the old Hall. There is the faded red silk banner with gold fringe under which the Piscola Volunteers marched off to join the Confederates at Savannah, and there is a picture of General John A. Quitman for whom the town was named, charging the heights of Chapultepec with white plumes on his hat.

The American Library Association published a booklet in 1939 called “Small Library Buildings” and setting forth ideal requirements as a guide for builders. Twenty-four libraries from all sections of the country were pictured and their floor plans and notes as to cost and uses given. Like Abou Ben Adhem, the Brooks County Library’s name led all the rest. It was the only example chosen from the entire Southeast and the ladies were very happy about this honor and especially pleased to note that these modern designers did not think much of the basement assembly rooms either.

The Library reached its sixty-seventh anniversary in January, 1947. It has 8,000 volumes, which include a prized collection of Georgiana beginning with an autographed copy of White’s Statistics of Georgia, circa 1818, and former Governor Ellis Arnall’s The Shore Dimly Seen, 1946. However, some items by Georgia authors are excluded by that same standard of good taste which found Captain Laneham’s books “unsuitable” in 1880. Nevertheless, a catholic attitude prevails in selecting books and if patrons ask for Proust and Anatole France they are ordered. The 1944 statement of operations showed an annual income from all sources of $1,472.80 and a book circulation of 10,651. The city appropriated $757.21 to the Library, which does not seem excessive when compared with $3,000 for operating the garbage trucks.

Mrs. L. H. Chapman is president of the Library Board for life and active members of the board are women. They sometimes boast modestly that the Library gives more service for less money than any other local institution. It sent reference books to country schools
which had no libraries and with W.P.A. library aid regularly circulated books to all parts of the county. Last year under the Arnall administration plan for state aid to small libraries it received an allowance of $800 for books to be circulated in rural sections. The ladies are getting county schools and the home demonstration agent to take bags of books to country people. They need a bookmobile, although officials who appropriate public funds have declined their request. With such a long tradition of achievement behind them it is fairly certain the ladies will find a way.