

## The Dalton Regional Library System

The Dalton Public Library was the brain-child of the Senior Dalton Woman's Club. This club, which was formed in August 1921 with Mrs. M. E. Judd as President, opened the doors of the Robert Loveman Memorial Library to the public on March 6, 1924 with 400 books. The library was housed in its clubroom upstairs in the Frank Pruden Building on West Crawford Street.

Mrs G. L. Westcott, in her work *Brief Early History of Dalton Public Library* writes: "In August 1924 the Loveman Family gave 'The Robin's Nest,' the home of Dalton's beloved poet, to the Dalton Woman's Club as long as it was used as a library and clubhouse. For many years the library was supported entirely by the Dalton Woman's Club, which enlarged the building several times as the library grew rapidly."

Through money raising projects, such as benefit card parties, and by private subscriptions and donations, money was raised to support the library. The County Commissioners gave funds to buy children's books. "The Robin's Nest" was remodeled to house the library and an apartment for the librarian. The Dalton Woman's Club had as their goal to pay the salary of a librarian, buy one thousand books each year, and maintain the house and grounds. In 1941, in compliance with requirements to obtain financial funding from the Works Project Administration, the first library board was named. At that time the City of Dalton started contributing \$100.00 each month for support of the library.



By 1942-43 the library resources had been greatly enlarged. The decision was made to obtain the services of a librarian who had special training in library science. Mrs. Miriam Lanier Wheeler (who at the present resides in Vidalia, Georgia) came to hold this position. In March 1943 aid from WPA ceased, and city and county officials assumed support.

In the fall of 1943, Mrs. Ann Pfeiffer Hamilton succeeded Mrs. Wheeler. All towns in the state were not as fortunate as Dalton in keeping their libraries open. Some were being closed with the loss of WPA funds. A group of interested, far-sighted people in the state recognized the need to continue to build on the foundation laid by the Georgia Federation of Woman's Clubs and WPA libraries. The State Department of Education and the Georgia Legislature succeeded in passing bills whereby local libraries in rural areas might receive financial support under certain conditions. In addition to state aid, the local Boards of Education, the County Commissioners and the mayor and Council continued their monthly contributions for the operation of the library. This arrangement, plus some federal money sent annually, starting about



1957, continues. All supporting agencies have raised their contributions from time to time on an irregular basis.

Deposit stations were opened in January 1944 at Cohutta, Tunnel Hill, Varnell, Houston Valley, and Tilton. Purchase of a used army ambulance to convert into a bookmobile greatly expanded the service. Mrs. Hamilton remembers the beginning of bookmobile service to the people and schools in Whitfield County. It was loaded for the first time in softly falling snow in December 1944 at the Loveman Home. Sara Frances Daves was the first Bookmobile librarian when the service started in January 1945. With the inauguration of this service, the Library Board saw their main objective attained: the expansion of library service to all Whitfield County. The second objective was to have good reading material. Novels like *Gone With The Wind* and *A Tree Grows In Brooklyn* were very popular.

In July 1945 Catoosa County, under the leadership of Miss Ruth Williams, County School Superintendent, joined Whitfield County to form the Dalton Regional Library. Ringgold became the first affiliate library. Under the state aid program, a library system was eligible for more financial support when two or more counties joined to form a regional system.

By 1947 the "Robin's Nest" was completely outgrown. "...When the W. C. Martin home opposite the Presbyterian Church was offered for sale in September 1947 the Dalton Woman's Club asked for a 30-day option to raise the \$35,000.00 required. Three members, Mrs. G. L. Westcott Chairman, Mrs. C. L. Hamilton, and Mrs. B. J. Bandy raised over \$43,000.00 in three weeks. Their clubhouse, housing the library was sold, the Loveman family reimbursed for the building and the balance used to remodel the Martin home for the Dalton Regional Library." (Source unknown) This building was given to the Library Board by the Dalton Woman's Club in 1948.

Gordon County joined the region in 1957, and the Calhoun Library became the second affiliate. The next year Murray County joined; their library had originally been established by The Woman's Club in Chatsworth. Catoosa County Library at Fort Oglethorpe was established in 1971. As more counties joined the regional system, bookmobile service was extended to homes and schools in those counties.

"Progress" was the keynote of Dalton Regional Library under the leadership of Eugenia Cavender, named "Woman of the Year" for 1980. Getting the year off to an impressive start, the Murray County Library was dedicated on January 20th, and as the months went by, a variety of activities filled the calendar.

Two events captured the spotlight in 1981: the expansion of the Georgiana collection and the subsequent open house and display of the new acquisitions. Everyone's energies were channelled into the upcoming move to the new facility.

The early months of 1982 were occupied with moving, as staff and volunteers transported the library from the W. C. Martin home, one of the few remaining examples of Greek Revival architecture in Dalton, to the contemporary brick facility of 42,000 square feet on the corner of Cappes and Waugh Streets. On May 15th the ribbon was cut; a formal dedication was held on October 31st, followed by a week of special days featuring services the library offers. The new atmosphere resulted in tripled demands on both the staff and collection during the first year of occupancy in the new building.

On December 15, 1986, bids were received for construction /expansion /renovation of the Calhoun-Gordon County Library. On February 10, 1988 ground was broken for the library.

Dalton Regional Library continued to grow after dedication ceremonies for the newly renovated and expanded Calhoun-Gordon County Library were held in November 1989.

In April 1990 "The Emotional Healthy Family Lecture Series" began, and National Library week was celebrated in the system as Murray County Library commemorated its 10th anniversary. The Fairmount Library Deposit was dedicated on April 28th.

And so... with "growth" as the key word for the 1980's, Dalton Regional Library moves into the 1990's, with "planning for the future" as its theme.

