

*We decry the fact that our people are not a reading people.
We forget that they have not had access to books.
We have no right to indict them till they have had the chance.*

-Dr. Walter Sikes, 1934

The Peoples State Bank of Columbia, South Carolina closed its doors on December 31, 1931, one of thirty-four banks to fail that year in South Carolina in the midst of the Depression¹, and took with it five hundred and twenty dollars, raised by the South Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs (FWC)² to extend the work of the first ever employee of the South Carolina State Library.³ Historians have credited the development of the statewide library system in South Carolina, whereby every county in the state is represented by a county or regional library, to prominent librarians, political leaders, the Carnegie and Rosenwald foundations, the Works Projects Administration (WPA), and the State Library itself, but have ignored the coordinated efforts of women's clubs at the local, county, and statewide levels, that constituted the push--the consistent pressure--behind the library movement. While the above forces deserve to be credited for their efforts toward library development, women's clubs should be recognized, as well, for the scope of their efforts in pressuring political leaders, working with librarians and the foundations, partnering with the WPA, and leading the drive for a State Library.

¹ John G. Sproat and Larry Schweikart, *Making Change: South Carolina Banking in the Twentieth Century* (Columbia, S.C.: South Carolina Bankers Association, 1990), 202.

² For brevity, this paper will not add "SC" to the beginning of the statewide civic clubs' acronyms. For example, the South Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs will be referred to as "FWC."

³ South Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs Records, Correspondence and Related Papers, "A Report of the Library Division" (Winthrop University Archives, Dacus Library, Rock Hill, S.C.).

The story of the FWC and its doomed money illustrates the challenges inherent in library development work for clubwomen, from the economic troubles of the 1930s to the lack of recognition of public officials towards the library needs of South Carolinians. When the General Assembly created the State Library in 1929⁴ but appropriated it no money, the South Carolina Library Association (SCLA) and the Julius Rosenwald fund⁵ stepped in to donate the salary for a library field agent who would travel throughout the state determining its library needs. A prominent library professional, Parmalee Cheves, accepted the job and worked until the money ran out at the end of 1931. Aware of this deadline, the women of the Library Division of the FWC decided to raise money to help extend Cheves' work into 1932. They asked each member club to donate a set amount of money per member and persuaded the Rosenwald fund to step up once again and match the amount raised. Over forty clubs responded, representing a diverse cross section of club culture, from the Moving Picture Club to the Graduate Nurses in Charleston to the Daughters of the American Revolution chapter in Rock Hill. When the bank closed, Cheves continued without salary in hopes that the bank would return the money or the

⁴ State libraries, as official state agencies, had to be legislated into creation by the state's governing body. Each state had to decide the scope of their new agency--would it serve the research needs of state officials only or would it also offer assistance to public libraries throughout the state? The state had to settle on the new agency's governing structure. In the case of South Carolina, the State Legislature chose to name their new state library the South Carolina Public Library Association and name a Board of Directors to oversee its operations. Commonly, people called the new agency the State Library or State Library Board (this became its official name in 1966).

⁵ Julius Rosenwald, chairman of Sears, Roebuck & Company, believed in enhancing educational opportunities for communities throughout the South, particularly in rural areas. Money from the Rosenwald fund could not be used for library construction or purchase of a building, but for materials and salaries. In return for funding library projects, the fund required that communities provided equal service to blacks and to whites, though counties did not always follow this stipulation, as seen with the Richland and Charleston County library projects. Dan Lee, "From Segregation to Integration: Library Services for Blacks in South Carolina, 1923-1962," in John Mark Tucker, ed., *Untold Stories: Civil Rights, Libraries, and Black Librarianship* (Champaign: GSLIS, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1998), 95-96.

state would replace what was lost. Neither happened and at the end of March 1932, Cheves left for Georgia.⁶ The State Library, which proved to be essential to the creation of county libraries in this state, would not have another paid employee or funds of any kind until 1938, and then for only a brief period of time.⁷ Not until 1943, when Congress disbanded the WPA, leaving small libraries across the state without operating funds, did the Legislature give its first appropriation to the State Library.

This paper will examine the efforts of women's clubs behind public library development work at state, county, and local levels in early to mid-twentieth century South Carolina. To do so, it will first reveal the struggle from 1914 through 1943 of clubwomen and their fellow library advocates to create and then fund the South Carolina State Library; discuss the ways in which women's clubs partnered with the WPA in its statewide program to advance library development that operated from 1936 through 1943; describe the involvement of three statewide women's organizations--the Federation of Women's Clubs (FWC), the Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs (FBPWC), and the American Association of University Women (AAUW)--in city and

⁶ South Carolina FWC Records, Correspondence and Related Papers, "A Report of the Library Division." Parmalee Cheves returned to South Carolina to become president of the South Carolina Library Association and to serve on the steering committee for the influential 1934 Citizens Conference on the Library Needs of SC.

⁷ In October 1938, Julia Merrill, librarian in Columbia, met with Governor Olin Johnston (unplanned, apparently). She told him that the State Library Board desperately needed a field secretary in order to meet the requirements of a federal aid to libraries bill. Johnston replied, "If one thousand dollars will help you, I will make that amount available from the Emergency Relief Fund for use in December, January, and February. Having someone in the field will help to secure an appropriation from the General Assembly to continue the work and procure the allotment from federal funds to South Carolina." From this, Dr. Helen Gordon Stewart of British Columbia came to South Caroline for at least five months in 1939 to work as a field agent. Among other suggestions, Steward advocated to the Board that regional tax-supported libraries were the most efficient and least expensive form of library service. Julia Wright Merrill to Frayser, 3 Oct. 1938, Mary Elizabeth Frayser Papers, Winthrop University Archives, Dacus Library, Rock Hill, S.C.

county library development from the 1920s through the mid-1940s; examine the ways in which women's clubs supported an increase in library services to the state's African-American population; and finally, look more closely at the efforts of individual women's clubs on the local and county levels in a sampling of counties across the state, focusing on the women's clubs of Rock Hill as a case study.

The field of library history on the national level has overlooked the efforts of clubwomen toward library extension.⁸ Anna Scott, in her 1986 article, "Women and Libraries," affirms that library history has brushed over the achievements by women's associations in library development. In her search through the literature, she found no mention of the involvement of clubwomen in library development among the "standard works in library history."⁹ She hoped that in-depth research would provide new ways of looking at the "tremendous social change" that occurred when women educated themselves, joined and founded women's organizations, and finally moved into public political activity.¹⁰

Sidney Ditzion's 1947 *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture*, a work on the public library movement in the U.S. from 1850 to 1900, makes scant mention of women's groups. While crediting women's groups for their eagerness in *using* public libraries, Ditzion refuses to accept the thesis that women's groups could have been the push behind the library movement. Instead, he writes in passing that the real function of women's organizations was to push small towns to support a library, to convince states to legislate

⁸ "Library extension" is a term used by library advocates and clubwomen throughout the period covered in this paper and will be used interchangeably with the term "library development" in this paper.

⁹ Anne Firor Scott, "Women and Libraries," *Journal of Library History, Philosophy and Comparative Librarianship* 21 (Spring 1986): 400.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 404.

for library support, and to “carry the movement to recently settled or educationally backward parts of the country.”¹¹ Clearly, Ditzion is confused. He credits the clubwomen for their efforts while refusing to admit it. In 1938, Louis R. Wilson in *Geography of Reading* attributed the establishment and support of hundreds of libraries to the General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC) and credited the high interest and extended support of women’s clubs as one of the causal factors of library extension in the U.S., but in doing so, he offers only a few sentences of acknowledgement.¹²

At the height of library development nationwide, those in the field knew of the contributions of women’s clubs to library development. In 1933, the American Library Association (ALA) recognized clubwomen for their work, crediting them with initiating seventy-five percent of public libraries in existence at the time.¹³ Mary Jean Houde writes in her history of the GFWC that in search of ways to improve the education of themselves and their communities, clubwomen pursued the development of libraries and made it one of the “fastest-growing areas of club action in the early 1900s.”¹⁴ House weaves through her story evidence of local clubs throughout the United States working toward library development.

¹¹ Sidney Ditzion, *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture: A Social History of the American Public Library Movement in New England and the Middle States from 1850 to 1900* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1947), 83-84.

¹² Louis R. Wilson, *The Geography of Reading* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1938), 295, 420.

¹³ Sophonisba P. Breckinridge, *Women in the Twentieth Century: A Study of Their Political, Social, and Economic Activities* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1933), 93.

¹⁴ Mary Jean Houde, *Reaching Out: A Story of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs* (Chicago: Mobiumpress, 1989), 75.

A statewide study of the women's club movement in South Carolina does not exist. If one is ever written, ideally it would include a discussion on women's clubs accomplishments in the library field, instead of focusing only on the more popularly discussed areas of women's club work such as suffrage, labor concerns, welfare reform, wartime activities, and civic improvement (not including libraries). And in doing so, it would describe the amount of coordination among women's clubs and demonstrate that these clubs applied pressure on public officials and the public decade after decade in pursuit of a statewide public library system.

Several studies have documented the creation of public libraries in South Carolina during the first half of the twentieth century. In her 1955 thesis on the development of South Carolina's county library system from the start of the Depression through the early 1940s, Penelope Jarrell credited the Rosenwald Foundation, the WPA, several statewide conferences held by library advocates, and the State Library. In 1997, Mary Laird Whitmire broadened Jarrell's scope and looked at South Carolina's efforts to build a statewide tax-supported public library system, from the time of the first public library in the state to 1977 when the last countywide library system was legally recognized.¹⁵ These efforts included the work of the State Library Board, the influx of Carnegie grants, the WPA library demonstration projects, and the efforts of civic groups throughout the

¹⁵ The terms "public library" and "county library" can be nebulous. For this paper, the terms will be used in the manner in which Mary Frayser defined them in her article, "Libraries of South Carolina." Frayser agreed with another library authority, Dr. Lucy Bostwick of the State Library Board, on her definition of a public library as one owned or controlled by the public or freely accessible to the public. A county library, on the other hand, is a free library system reaching every person in every part of the county, utilizing branch libraries in population centers and book deposits or bookmobiles in rural areas, according to Mary Frayser's "The Libraries of South Carolina," *South Carolina Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* (vol. 292, Oct 1933). At the time of Frayser's article, common places for book deposits included rural schools, filling stations, post offices, clubs, homes, churches, and crossroad stores. This description of a county library is subjective, of course. Library leaders estimated the number of established countywide libraries in 1933 between three to six.

state. Estellene Walker, State Librarian for over thirty years, authored *So Good and Necessary a Work: the Public Library in South Carolina, 1698-1980*, a book that gives a brief history of each county/regional library system, considered the standard by the librarians of most counties.

These statewide studies give credit to clubwomen for their library development efforts at the local and county levels but do not credit them for the scope of their efforts which put consistent pressure upon political leaders through persistent and coordinated efforts at three tiers of government, local, county, and state, and resulted in the creation of a statewide library system, whereby every county in the state was represented by a county or regional library. This thesis intends to finally give women's clubs in South Carolina the recognition they deserve.

South Carolina, not surprisingly, fell behind other states in library development in the early twentieth-century, in terms of number of public libraries, development of county libraries, rural library service, and books per capita. In turn, the South fell behind the rest of the United States.¹⁶ By 1936, South Carolina had one of the least-developed library

¹⁶ Statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Education, the ALA, and a master's thesis on women's clubs in Georgia illustrate South Carolina's situation compared to the U.S. and to the Southeast:

As of 1914, South Carolina was one of eleven states, all western and southeastern, with no state library. In 1920, only two states, North Carolina and Arkansas, had fewer total books per capita in public libraries than South Carolina, according to the U.S. Bureau of Education. While South Carolina had between seventy-six to one hundred seven books per one thousand people in 1925, the average among eleven Southern states (AL, AR, FL, GA, KT, MS, NC, SC, TN, TX, and VA) was one hundred fifty-three books, and the average nationwide was four hundred sixty five.

Statistics from three leading library states highlight South Carolina's and the Southeast's deficiencies. In the 1920s, while South Carolina had 107 books per one thousand people, California, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire (California had the preeminent example of a statewide system, Massachusetts had the highest number of libraries, and New Hampshire had the most volumes per capita) had 950, 1,885, and 1,978, respectively. *University Weekly News*, 28 Oct. 1925; Sadie P. Little, "The Need for Libraries in South Carolina and the Remedy," Master's Thesis, University of South Carolina, 1925, 25-27. During the following decade, South Carolina made little progress. In 1933, only four states offered library service to a smaller percentage of inhabitants than South Carolina. Only twenty-two percent of South Carolinians had access at the time. As reported at the 1934 *Citizens Conference on the Library Needs of South Carolina*, the State Legislature had some culpability for this. In the early 1930s, South

systems in the country, and symptomatic of this, the highest illiteracy rate in the nation.¹⁷

Four out of five white South Carolinians had no access to a public library, and black South Carolinians had even less access. In 1933, only Greenville, Richland, and Charleston counties provided countywide library service.¹⁸

Clubwomen used a variety of methods to correct this poor state of library services. Their methods to promote library development at the local level differed little throughout the southern states. They collected books for book deposits,¹⁹ stocked school libraries, particularly in black schools, and sent bookmobiles, or traveling libraries, around to rural areas. Many a women's club organized with one objective: to build a library in their community. They gathered books from members for the collective use of membership and by extension, deposited them in a local store and staffed the collection with volunteer clubwomen so the community at large could benefit, as well. The bookmobile was a favorite method among women's clubs throughout the U.S. for extending library service to rural areas, the advantages being that a smaller collection of books was needed than for a library building or reading room, women's club volunteers could staff them easily (and did, in large numbers), and the bookmobiles could be taken to convenient locations, like playgrounds or schools, throughout a large rural area. The earliest bookmobiles surfaced in the early 1890s. By 1904, the GFWC reported that its

Carolina spent 9.7 cents per person on library service while Massachusetts spent \$.85. Marion A. Wright, "Turning Point for S.C. Libraries," *South Carolina Librarian* 26 (Fall 1977): 3-7.

¹⁷ According to the 1930 Census.

¹⁸ Robert M. Gorman, "Blazing the Way: The WPA Library Service Demonstration Project in South Carolina," *Libraries & Culture* 32 (Fall 1997): 427.

¹⁹ Book deposits were small collections of books stored in businesses, private homes, schools--made available for the public to borrow. They were usually in rural areas, far removed from public libraries in the larger towns.

member clubs ran over one thousand bookmobiles in thirty-four states, and that the number of traveling libraries altogether likely totaled four times that amount.²⁰ The FWC listed library development as one of its earliest priorities after its formation in 1898. In pursuit of this, two early leaders of the FWC in South Carolina, M.W. Coleman and Louisa Poppenheim, convinced all the railroad companies in the state to give free transport to traveling libraries. The Southern Railroad even donated twelve “good, well-made cases” for storage and transport of books. The chairman of library extension for the FWC reported that at the time of the railroad’s withdrawal of free transport in 1906, the state federation had 105 libraries of between fifty and one hundred books ready for and in circulation.²¹

The promotion of education for club members and for the community-at-large has always been a major objective in women’s clubs. The development of libraries became an education objective as these women realized their own need for reading material, discovered the poor state of their local school libraries, and made the connection between illiteracy and lack of libraries. In the late nineteenth-century, urbanization and industrialization brought a sharp increase in the number of women’s clubs, as women looked outside the extended family, the church, and the rural village for recreation and opportunity. Middle and upper class women moved into public life through club work,

²⁰ House, *Reaching Out*, 100-101.

²¹ *Time Marches On, 1898-1939* (Columbia, S.C.: South Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, 1939), 7-8.

socializing, learning new skills, and gaining confidence to make positive changes in their communities.²²

In South Carolina, one of the most influential library advocates and women's club leaders of the 1920s through 1950s was Mary E. Frayser (b.1868-d.1968). She was active on the local and statewide levels in pushing library development, seeking recognition for the role of libraries in communities, and helping to pass a state library law and to secure funds for the new agency. Estellene Walker said, following her retirement from over thirty years as State Librarian, that the current public library program in South Carolina was:

...largely the result of the interest, energy, and determination of Miss Mary E. Frayser who spared no effort to establish a library program and to bring books and reading to the people of the state....Miss Frayser...left no stone unturned until the state had a good public library law and had authorized the establishment of a state library extension agency.²³

This is high praise from Walker, whose dedication as head of the State Library during its first decades resulted in the creation of a countywide system of public libraries statewide by 1977, a goal towards which Frayser always worked but did not live to see reached.

Frayser was born in Virginia, taught school in Richmond, earned Bachelor of Science and Master of Arts degrees from Teachers College, Columbia University²⁴, served as a community extension agent and a child labor inspector for the federal

²² Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 214; Sharon Hartman Strom, "Leadership and Tactics," *Journal of American History* 62 (Sept. 1975), 300; Marjorie Stratford Mendenhall, "Southern Women of a Lost Generation," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 33 (Oct. 1934), 350.

²³ Estellene P. Walker, *So Good and Necessary a Work: the Public Library in South Carolina, 1698-1980* (Columbia, S.C.: South Carolina State Library, 1981), 1-2.

²⁴ Frayser entered Teachers College, Columbia University in 1908. Frayser earned her B.S. in 1911 and M.A. in 1919. Teachers College admitted women at this time even though it was affiliated with Columbia University, which did not admit women until 1919.

government, and worked as a home economist for Clemson and Winthrop Colleges. It was during her time at Clemson and Winthrop, between 1926 and 1946, that Frayser was most active in several women's organizations.²⁵ Early in life, perhaps through her own mother's work in clubs in Virginia, Frayser learned that change could be affected more readily if people worked together. "From girlhood the possibilities of the work of organizations has gripped me," she claimed.²⁶ Frayser held officer positions and served as library, education, legislative, and public health chairwoman in several organizations, including the SC Women's Council for the Common Good, the SC Home Economics Association, the American Home Economics Association, the SC State Congress on Parents and Teachers, the FWC, the AAUW, and the FBPWC.²⁷

The FWC recognized Frayser in 1941 and 1942 for her club work, promoting adequate library service for all, including African-Americans. The fortieth anniversary history of the FWC singled out Frayser for her efforts in the days before the creation of a State Library, writing "During these long years of working, the name of Miss Mary Frayser stands out like a bright and shining star through all the dark nights of discouragement."²⁸ Under Frayser's guidance in 1943, the FBPWC realized the need for the State Library to receive an overdue and adequate appropriation, and worked towards this goal. "Books and magazines shall be educational and recreational factors available

²⁵ Frayser Papers, Biographical Data.

²⁶ *The South Carolina Woman*, 2 (Jan. 1936): 4.

²⁷ Eunice Stackhouse, *Mary Frayser, Pioneer Social and Research Worker* (Place of publication and publisher unknown, 1944), 42.

²⁸ *Time Marches On*, 8.

to all," she said in this quest.²⁹ Frayser served as chairman of the State Library Board for a short time beginning in 1943, and at that time was the only woman chairman of a state appointed board.³⁰ Because of Frayser's extensive involvement in library development through her work with several women's clubs and other organizations, and because of the extensive documentation that she kept, this paper will discuss her efforts at length.³¹

The story of the creation of the State Library and the tenure of the WPA in the state is that of a thirty-year struggle by leaders of library advocacy organizations and women's clubs who worked together tirelessly to secure the recognition and funding necessary to create county and regional libraries in the state. South Carolina, already one of the last states to create a state library, would need to prove to the State Legislature that

²⁹ Stackhouse, *Mary Frayser*, 57-58, 95.

³⁰ Ibid., 47.

³¹ Other library advocates of the early twentieth century deserve recognition: Judge Charles A. Woods, Justice of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, helped establish the Marion Public Library, the first public library in the state, in 1898. According to Estellene Walker, he was influential in the establishment of public libraries throughout the state but particularly in Darlington, Florence, and Greenville. Estellene P. Walker, "The Public Library in South Carolina," *Southeastern Librarian* 30 (Winter 1981): 148.

Estellene Walker served as the Director of the State Library Board and as State Librarian for over thirty years, from 1946 through 1979, a crucial period of county library development. By the time of her retirement every county in the state had a county library (Williamsburg County was the last county in SC to organize a county library or join a regional system in 1977). In 1946, only eleven held this distinction. By her own estimation, forty-six percent of South Carolinians had no access to library service in 1946. When she retired, one hundred percent had access. In the early 1970s, Governor West bestowed upon her the Order of the Palmetto in recognition of her work. Estellene P. Walker Papers, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C.

Robert M. Kennedy, head librarian at the University of South Carolina, worked from the 1910s on promoting a public library system and establishing a state library. As part of his quest to promote a library system, Kennedy joined with the Marion Public Library, Librarian Louise McMaster, and Judge Woods in March 1914 to secure passage of legislation that allowed townships, counties, and municipal corporations to levy a two-mill tax (a form of sales tax, one mill is 1/10 of 1 cent) in support of libraries (Roger Hux, "The South Carolina Library Association: Advocate for Libraries," South Carolina Library History Project, Available at <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/sclahistory/scla.htm>). In October 1915, he and Elizabeth English, an assistant librarian, brought together librarians and other library advocates to discuss the problems of library development in the state. Twenty-four people at this meeting formed the SCLA. The SCLA began work immediately on a library commission law to create a state library, and continue today in 2003 as an active organization promoting library work in this state. Walker, "The Public Library in South Carolina," 148.

enough public demand existed to create a state library. Library women understood that their state was behind other states in the region.

Julia Wright Merrill, Executive Assistant of the Committee on Library Extension of the ALA, wrote to Frayser in October 1928 with the news that the Mississippi Library Commission had secured its first appropriation, Florida was trying to establish a commission to supplement the library work already performed by their state archives, and Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, and Kentucky all had active state library programs.³² Merrill reminded Frayser of this in response to the news from Frayser that Charlotte Templeton, President of the SCLA at the time, would begin as Library Chairman of the AAUW beginning in November 1928.³³ In fact, Merrill contacted Frayser in the midst of South Carolina's fight to pass a commission law, to let her know that South Carolina and Alabama were the last two southeastern states with no state library services.³⁴ Knowing this, four state federations of clubwomen--the AAUW, the FWC, the FBPWC, and the SC Home Economics Association--joined forces and prepared for the challenge ahead.³⁵

Robert MacMillan Kennedy, University of South Carolina Librarian, wrote in 1914 that other states had passed a state library law through the work of a few dedicated library workers, women's clubs, and librarians and teachers, both individually and in

³² Letter from Julia Wright Merrill to Frayser, 8 Oct. 1828, Frayser Papers, South Carolina Library Movement, Correspondence and Related Papers.

³³ Letter from Frayser to Julia Wright Merrill, 2 Oct. 1828, Frayser Papers, South Carolina Library Movement, Correspondence and Related Papers.

³⁴ Letter from Julia Wright Merrill to Frayser, 11 Jan. 1929, Frayser Papers, South Carolina Library Movement, Correspondence and Related Papers.

³⁵ Letter from Frayser to Lula Buck, 29 Jan. 1929, Frayser Papers, South Carolina Library Movement, Correspondence and Related Papers.

associations.³⁶ South Carolina had these ingredients. When the SCLA formed in 1915, it immediately formed a committee to work with the Legislature towards the creation of a state library commission.³⁷ Librarian Louise McMaster wrote to Frayser in 1927, telling her of past efforts towards this goal. McMaster recalled that since 1915, she had worked for the passage of a library commission law. With the help of Kennedy, she had drawn up a library commission bill and attempted to get the “Federation” to endorse it. She surmised they declined at the time due to other legislative commitments. Since that time, every year she and a few others had tried to get such a bill passed “in every way possible.”³⁸

The clubwomen worked for the same goal but to be sure, there were a few problems along the way. Frayser wrote in confidence to Clerk of the Senate W. Anderson Clarkson in January 1929 with a hint of some problems, agreeing with a comment from a fellow clubwoman that “if they have been at the head since 1915 and haven’t turned a trick, they ought to be glad is some one [sic] help them.”³⁹ Presumably, she is speaking of the unsuccessful efforts by the SCLA and McMaster and Kennedy to get a library commission law passed since that time. On the surface, though, SCLA appeared to be pleased by the extra help. Lula Buck telegrammed to Frayser just a few

³⁶ Robert MacMillan Kennedy, *Public libraries*, 14.

³⁷ Roger Hux, *The South Carolina Library Association: Advocate for Libraries* (Columbia, S.C.: SCLA, 1990), 4.

³⁸ Letter from Louise M. McMaster to Frayser, 14 Apr. 1927, Frayser Papers, South Carolina Library Movement, Correspondence and Related Papers.

³⁹ Letter from Frayser to W. Anderson Clarkson, 29 Jan. 1929, Frayser Papers, South Carolina Library Movement, Correspondence and Related Papers; Clarkson responded to Frayser on Feb. 1, 1929, that she and fellow federation women would be wise to muzzle a certain party.

days later, “As President of SCLA I gladly cooperate with any measure that mean [sic] library extension in the state.”⁴⁰

At the beginning of 1929, the FWC attempted the same feat unsuccessfully. Mary Frayser, in her capacity as a member of AAUW, became the main liaison between civic groups and the legislature in another effort later that year to pass legislation to create a state library as a new state agency, hopefully with accompanying appropriations from the state. This time, the efforts paid off in part (the state would not give its new agency money for operations until 1943). Frayser teamed up with Clerk of the Senate Clarkson and he helped push a bill through the Legislature creating the South Carolina Public Library Association with a Board of Directors to oversee operations. This Board was commonly referred to as the State Library Board. Frayser became the first vice-chairman of the Board. The first secretary and treasurer were fellow clubwomen, Lucy Hampton and Charlotte Templeton, respectively.⁴¹

Clarkson and Frayser worked closely to draft the bill, iron out a name for the new agency, and discuss such topics as sponsorship and presentation to the governor. In one instance, Clarkson informed Frayser that the Governor did not want “commission” or “bureau” in the name of the agency. Most other states used commission in the official names of their libraries but the Governor felt those words sounded too political or bureaucratic and preferred to emphasize the educative function of the new agency. Clarkson went out of his way to babysit the bill through the General Assembly, finding

⁴⁰ Telegram from Buck to Frayser, 31 Jan. 1929, Frayser Papers, South Carolina Library Movement, Correspondence and Related Papers.

⁴¹ State Library Board Meeting Minutes, 17 June 1929, Frayser Papers, South Carolina Library Movement, Correspondence and Related Papers.

sponsors for it, gaining support from the State Superintendent of Education and Committee of Education chair, and showing it to the Governor's private secretary and then to the Governor himself and winning his support.⁴² Nowhere in their string of letters did Clarkson or Frayser intimate why Clarkson displayed such vigor in securing this bill's passage, but he and Frayser appeared to have had a previously established professional relationship and he clearly respected the longstanding efforts and dedication of Frayser and her fellow library advocates. Possibly he feared letting them down!

Once the bill passed, Clarkson put forth Frayser's name, along with two other women, for Chairman of the Board. Frayser wrote to him with gratitude but explained to him that she would rather a man take the chairmanship so that other people would be comfortable working with the Board. To demonstrate she was correct, she pointed to herself and other female library advocates who needed Clarkson's help to get the bill passed because male legislators preferred to work with Clarkson rather than the clubwomen.⁴³

The victory soon soured, however, as the state did not appropriate money to its new agency and the State Library Board sought to raise enough money from private sources to hire a field agent for the library. The Board asked for donations in exchange for membership in the Citizen's Library Association, an organization of library advocates formed in 1930, and raised one thousand dollars. The Rosenwald Fund added an additional four thousand dollars. The money allowed the Board to hire library extension

⁴² Letters from Clarkson to Frayser, 11 Jan. and 6 Feb. 1929, Frayser Papers, South Carolina Library Movement, Correspondence and Related Papers.

⁴³ Letters from Clarkson to Frayser, 29 Apr. 1929, Frayser Papers, South Carolina Library Movement, Correspondence and Related Papers.

professional Parmalee Cheves temporarily, starting in June 1930, gathering invaluable observations and dispensing help to areas in need of library services and advice. When she left in March 1932 due to the unfortunate bank closure and loss of over five hundred dollars newly raised by the FWC, not only did the State Library lose its only paid employee, but the Citizen's Library Association folded, as well. The lessons learned from these disappointments and the data gathered by Cheves helped Frayser write an influential October 1933 bulletin on the future of libraries. In it, she listed the eight most essential library needs of South Carolina. Her observations reflected on past disappointments and demonstrated a knack for seeing into the future.⁴⁴

1. A tax-supported public library system organized on a countywide basis in every county with enough money for free distribution to every person (*realized as of 1977 when the last county library organized*).
2. State aid based on population (*which the state refused to give in 1929 and in the years since*).
3. An active State Library Board (*stymied since creation in 1929 due to lack of funds*)
4. State field library worker under the State Library Board (*lost in 1932 due to lack of funds*)
5. School library supervisor under the State Department of Education
6. Trained staff at every library (*WPA would help with this in 1936*)
7. Training for librarians in the summer
8. Cooperation between public libraries and public school libraries⁴⁵

Before the WPA entered the state in 1936, two significant things happened for library development. First, the Rosenwald Foundation contributed even more to library development in the state. It chose to donate money to Richland and Charleston counties for establishment of two five-year county library demonstration projects. The success of

⁴⁴ Frayser Papers, South Carolina Library Movement, Historical Data.

⁴⁵ The eight points are a direct quote of Frayser; comments in parentheses are mine. Frayser, "The Libraries of South Carolina," 33-34.

these projects showed the feasibility of countywide service.⁴⁶ Second, the Citizens Library Association formed to gather together South Carolinians in every county interested in furthering library development by working towards the creation of tax-supported public libraries.⁴⁷

The WPA's entrance into the state with the South Carolina Library Project pushed county library development even further with impressive results. Whereas at the beginning of the Project only three counties had countywide library service, by the end eight additional counties could be added to the list and the remaining counties had all benefited from WPA library demonstration projects, many on their way to funding those projects permanently and eventually creating countywide service. The Women's and Professional Projects Division of the WPA came to South Carolina in 1936, in part because the Division's leader, Margaret A. Davies, believed in the development of libraries and in finding women employment.⁴⁸ The Division looked to SCLA President Fanny Taber to find a coordinator for the State WPA Library project who could plan, organize, and get the project underway. Taber appointed Ida Belle Entrekin. Entrekin and her successors, Agnes Crawford and Roberta O'Hear Bonnoit among them, were in charge of organizing library service demonstration projects. When setting up library service in communities, the WPA teamed with local women's clubs, citizens' library committees, and other civic clubs to open reading rooms and send out bookmobiles.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Walker, *So Good and Necessary a Work*, 2.

⁴⁷ Stackhouse, *Mary Frayser*, 73-74.

⁴⁸ Gorman, "Blazing the Way...," 429-30.

⁴⁹ Ibid.; Estellene P. Walker, "The Public Library in South Carolina," *Southeastern Librarian* 30 (Winter 1981): 149.

Partnerships with local groups were essential because bookmobiles and reading rooms required books, money to rent the rooms and bookmobiles, and local women to staff them alongside WPA workers. Frayser outlined the advantages of WPA involvement in a 1937 AAUW Newsletter. The WPA gave financial assistance and professional direction to library development work. Their money paid for bookmobiles and library assistants to staff them. In addition, the increase of library services would help to convince South Carolinians of the need to support libraries with public monies.⁵⁰ When the WPA came to South Carolina, groups such as the SC Council of Farm Women, the State Department of Education, parent-teacher associations, the FWC, the AAUW, and the BPWC collected books and helped start bookmobile projects.⁵¹ The WPA in South Carolina supported extension of libraries for African-Americans. According to the National Director of the WPA's Library Service Section, South Carolina was second only to North Carolina in expanding services to African-Americans. After three years of work in the state, WPA supported twenty-nine libraries in black schools that served the general public.⁵²

By 1943, nine counties had comprehensive library systems and two other counties shared a system. In the remaining thirty-five counties, the WPA sponsored twenty-five demonstration projects. When the WPA's South Carolina Library Project disbanded in March 1943, these projects would be left without funding. In an urgent campaign to continue this momentum after WPA's eminent departure, the FWC, the FBPWC, and the

⁵⁰ State Library Chairman Report, Newsletter, March 1937, Frayser Papers, AAUW, Correspondence and Related Papers.

⁵¹ Stackhouse, *Mary Frayser*, 46.

⁵² Gorman, "Blazing the Way...," 445.

Congress of Parent-Teachers worked to convince the Legislature to appropriate money to the State Library for the first time in the state agency's existence.⁵³

Though Congress disbanded the WPA in 1943, the WPA's influence in the creation of public libraries in South Carolina extended far beyond. Their power rested not as much with the library services they provided for seven years but in the domino effect of this service in the minds of clubwomen, local political leaders, and eventually the State Legislature. In locales where clubwomen had not yet contributed any efforts to library development, the WPA's arrival brought many a clubwoman into partnership with them. With hopes of eventual self-sufficiency for libraries, the WPA encouraged leaders at the city and county levels to find a way to fund the library projects permanently, either through a millage tax or an annual appropriation. Cities and counties passed millage taxes and approved appropriations in increasing numbers, and women's groups fighting for State Library funding made sure the State Legislature heard about these numbers. The Legislature could not ignore, as they had done for fourteen years, that South Carolinians actually used and liked libraries.

In 1929, when the Legislature refused to appropriate money to the new State Library Board, they used as an argument that people in the state did not seem to be clamoring for access to reading materials. Library advocates had fought this perception for decades. Dr. Walter Sikes is well known for his opening statement at the 1934 *Citizen's Conference on the Library Needs of South Carolina*, "We decry the fact that our people are not a reading people. We forget that they have not had access to books. We

⁵³ Ibid., 442-43.

have no right to indict them till they have had the chance.”⁵⁴ The WPA and women’s clubs changed this perception, and forced the state to take action when the WPA departed. The State Budget Commission gave one thousand dollars and the General Assembly added two thousand to cover the period from March through June 1943. Then, the Legislature appropriated fifteen thousand for the fiscal year beginning July 1943. The State Library could finally work full force on county library development.⁵⁵

Women’s clubs at the local level that worked toward library development were aided by the efforts of statewide women’s organizations, umbrella organizations to which local clubs usually belonged. The work of the FWC, the AAUW, and the FBPWC towards library development will be discussed at length below, though other clubs such as the Farm Women’s Councils, organized in countless communities across the state, helped to increase library service to rural areas. These groups worked in a number of capacities: from increasing rural library service through book deposits, school libraries, and bookmobiles; to working with the WPA on their statewide library development projects; to joining forces to pass a state library law and then to secure funding for its operations.

The group that would become the General Federation of Women’s Clubs first met in March 1889 when the Sorosis club of Massachusetts (founded 1868) held a “Conference to Form a Permanent Federation of Clubs.” The conference garnered attendance from close to one hundred clubwomen from nineteen states. The following

⁵⁴ Citizens' Conference on the Library Needs of South Carolina and A.B. Bryan, eds., *Proceedings of the Citizens' Conference on the Library Needs of South Carolina* (Clemson College Library, 1934), 3.

⁵⁵ First Annual Report, July 1943-June 1944, Frayser Papers, South Carolina Library Movement, Annual Reports of the State Library Board.

year, these women met again for a ratification convention under the motto “Unity in Diversity,” and the GFWC was born.⁵⁶ At the state level, representatives from nineteen clubs met in June 1898 at a convention in Seneca, South Carolina to organize a state federation.⁵⁷ At the first meeting of the new state FWC, a committee drafted a list of subjects from which the federation could form its departments and placed library extension at the top of the list. They formed three departments: Philanthropy and Civics, Horticulture and Village Improvement, and Education. They decided library extension would be the Education Department’s “special work” for the year.⁵⁸ Writing of the sporadic gains made in library development in the post-Civil War period, Estellene Walker pronounced, “It was not until the turn of the century, with the organization of women’s clubs and the establishment of the South Carolina Federation of Women’s Clubs that progress was made.” Establishing community libraries became objectives for numerous women’s clubs and the Federation strongly supported their endeavors. The reports from the Federation’s Library Division support her claim.⁵⁹

According to Frayser, who drafted countless Library Division reports, the GFWC asked each of its member clubs to appoint a library committee to aid the public library in its community. Frayser sent a circular, “How Club Women May Help Libraries,” in April 1933 to district directors and club presidents. In addition, she sent letters to one hundred federated club presidents, who already had libraries in their communities, with

⁵⁶ Houde, *Reaching Out*, 19, 27.

⁵⁷ The SCFWC officially joined the General Federation in 1899. The president of the General Federation, Rebecca Douglas Lowe, attended the SCFWC’s 1st Annual Convention to welcome them.

⁵⁸ *Time Marches On*, 4.

⁵⁹ Walker, “The Public Library in South Carolina,” 148.

recommendations for their local library work. In her report, she summarized these recommendations:

- Appoint a library committee for public relations work so the public understands the value of a public library
- Work to prevent cuts in appropriations or rate of taxation
- Publish figures showing circulation increases and the extra demand on them that the depression has caused
- Offer help to local librarian
- Study local school libraries because the Southern Association of High School and College will refuse to give accreditation to any high school after September 1933 if it had fewer than 5 books per student
- Devote one program each year to study of state library
- Write to the State Library Board Chairman to learn about resources at your disposal.⁶⁰

In her capacity as Library Chairman for the FWC and the AAUW, Frayser reiterated her points in a letter to the president of the FWC in late 1934. She asked that every member club appoint a library chairman, devote one program per year to libraries, and write to the South Carolina Experimental Station for the pamphlet “Libraries of South Carolina” (Frayser was the author) and use it in developing library programs. She reported some dismaying statistics on school libraries, relaying that fourteen percent of white high schools, eighty percent of black high schools, thirty-nine percent of white elementary schools, and ninety-one percent of black elementary schools did not have libraries.⁶¹

In the Library Division’s report for 1934 through 1935, Frayser discussed the progress for the year. She sent more letters out to presidents of member clubs and mailed out many copies of “Libraries of South Carolina,” and she noted that three of four district

⁶⁰ Report of the Library Division, April 1933, Frayser Papers, FWC, Correspondence and Related Papers.

⁶¹ Letter from Frayser to the president of the SCFWC, 1 Oct. 1934, Frayser Papers, FWC, Correspondence and Related Papers.

federation meetings devoted increased time to library extension discussion. And in true Frayser fashion, she gave a pep talk to the member clubs, reminding them that most of the existing libraries were the result of the vision and effort of clubwomen like themselves. She implored them to keep working on library extension because the depression demanded it, she urged them to keep informing the public of the benefits of public libraries, and she encouraged them that their efforts would result in all the more library development once the economic situation improves. As Frayser indicated graciously in closing, the interest of Federation women in library extension was evident to her and she appreciated the cooperation she received from her fellow clubwomen during her four-year tenure as Library Chairman.⁶²

As of 1935, twenty-three FWC member clubs reported a library chairman. During the previous year, twenty clubs had organized a program devoted to libraries. Nine clubs had used “Libraries of South Carolina” extensively in developing their programs. And an amazing thirty-two reported some form of help to their local libraries. These efforts included raising, collecting and donating books, lobbying for taxation to support local libraries, and securing of funds for repair or construction of libraries. Frayser must have been delighted by these efforts as the clubs clearly had taken her recommendations of 1933 to heart.⁶³

Another statewide women’s organization working toward library development, the AAUW, organized in South Carolina in 1924. It adopted two main objectives: mandatory school attendance law and library development. The national AAUW formed

⁶² Report of library work for 1934-35, Frayser Papers, FWC, Correspondence and Related Papers.

⁶³ Forms of Help to Libraries by Federated Clubs, 1934-35, 10 Apr. 1935, Frayser Papers, FWC, Correspondence and Related Papers.

in 1881 to give college graduates a way to continue their education and use their knowledge to better their communities. Frayser served as the first vice-president and second president for the state AAUW and was active in organizing branches throughout South Carolina. After her tenure as Library Chairman for the FWC, she became Library Chairman for the AAUW. By the time of her first report as chairman in 1937, the WPA was active in the state, and her report reflects this activity. Early on, the AAUW realized that in communities where small libraries had been established by the WPA's statewide library program, clubwomen had a good opportunity to secure permanent financial support for these libraries, either through appropriations from city and county governments or through a millage tax.

In fact, the Sumter, Spartanburg, and Gaffney AAUW chapters worked with the WPA and their local Farm Women's Councils to expand library service countywide. The chapters understood that they could use this service to sell rural South Carolinians on the advantages of supporting public library service. Frayser praised these chapters for "crystallizing interest in library development." She reiterated to other chapters that now, with WPA presence and the economic upturn, they had a good chance to convince South Carolinians to pay for a one millage tax to support countywide library service. The rural vote would be easy to secure because rural people wanted free reading material and the vote of others could be secured, she said, "for we are out of the depression!"⁶⁴

AAUW's legislative program for education from 1939 through 1941 called for securing federal aid for tax-supported public education, including libraries. In 1939, the Legislation Committee organized clubwomen to write letters in support of the Federal

⁶⁴ Newsletter, Library Chairman Report, March 1937, Frayser Papers, AAUW, Correspondence and Related Papers.

Aid for Education Bill. To drum up support, Frayser asked the women to talk to farm women's county council members, home demonstration agents, clubs and civic groups, newspaper editors, and others who would be persuasive in the fight to secure federal aid to libraries.⁶⁵

As with the FWC and the AAUW, Frayser's involvement with the Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs (FBPWC) and her position as their Education Committee Chair beginning in 1937 provides a window into the library development activities of the FBPWC. Nine branches of the Federation existed as of May 1939. Education Reports reveal that three of them--Rock Hill, Columbia, and Greenville--had worked in support of the Federal Aid for Education bill (that included libraries) during the previous year.⁶⁶ Later that year, Frayser reminded the clubwomen that even though they had worked wholeheartedly for library extension, their goal of uniting the smaller libraries into regional units had not yet been reached.⁶⁷

Even after the state first funded the State Library in 1943, the clubs continued to work for library development. In 1947, the FBPWC's legislative program reported on their seventeen-point program in cooperation with the Women's Council for the Common Good. Number ten was "continuation of support for the State Library Board."⁶⁸ The Education Committee, still under the chairmanship of Frayser, continued their support. Recommendation number six in a May 1947 report was "cooperation with local and state

⁶⁵ Legislative Program, 1939, Frayser Papers, AAUW, Correspondence and Related Papers.

⁶⁶ Annual Report of the Education Committee, May 1939, Frayser Papers, FBPWC, Correspondence and Related Papers.

⁶⁷ Newsletter, 19 Sept. 1939, Frayser Papers, FBPWC, Correspondence and Related Papers.

⁶⁸ Legislation Report, 1947, Frayser Papers, FBPWC, Correspondence and Related Papers.

library boards to secure the establishment of a network of county and regional libraries covering the entire state.” This was essential, the report stated, because at the time sixteen counties were still without any form of countywide library service and no counties were spending at least one dollar per resident on library service, an amount recommended by the ALA as the minimum for “adequate library service.”⁶⁹

Women’s clubs attempted to increase library service to African-Americans in a variety of ways though their efforts were often sporadic, and statewide organizations, while setting the objective of increasing rural library service, did not specify increasing service to black South Carolinians. Local clubs and library advocates, though, believed in providing library services to African-Americans and their actions demonstrated this to an extent. Their methods included donating books to black school libraries, setting up book deposits in private homes and businesses, organizing the opening of black branches of community libraries, partnering with the WPA on demonstration projects, such as with bookmobiles, possibly the favorite vehicle for library extension among women’s club members.

These approaches combined with the number of public libraries open to African-Americans--only four of the existing fifty-six public libraries in South Carolina in 1933--still gave only fifteen percent of black South Carolinians access to libraries in the early 1930s.⁷⁰ Library leaders realized the challenges inherent in increasing this percentage.

⁶⁹ Recommendations of the Education and Vocations Committee, May 1947, Frayser Papers, FBPWC, Correspondence and Related Papers.

⁷⁰ The ‘Faith Cabin’ Library Movement brought much needed library service to adult African-Americans in Georgia and South Carolina. Northern philanthropists had before donated collections of books to black libraries in South Carolina. But one project began by a white mill worker in Saluda, South Carolina, provided unprecedented donations of books for black libraries in South Carolina and Georgia, and spurred communities to construct buildings, separate from the local schools, to house them. Willie Lee

In 1932, Charlotte Templeton wrote to a friend, “Negro extension work will have to be done (at least in S.C., Georgia, and Mississippi) with no great publicity or it will create antagonism.” And in her capacity as State Librarian, Estellene Walker admitted, “progress is being made quietly to provide books and library service for the Negro population.”⁷¹

For her part, Frayser understood the challenges in extending library service to African-Americans but nevertheless, worked many years towards this endeavor. Frayser found a friend in her pursuit in Marion A. Wright, the first Chairman of the Library Board. They both believed that access to libraries increased literacy and that more literacy led to good morals and ethical behavior. Wright thought that a literate community would not stand for prejudice; that literacy would create open minds, not open to bigotry.⁷²

The GFWC denied membership to African-American clubs during its early years. At their 1900 convention, the GFWC denied a seat to an African-American delegate, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, because she represented the Woman’s Era Club, an African-American club that had been given membership mistakenly by the current GFWC president. In wake of the controversy surrounding their actions, the GFWC decided that they would grant membership to African-American clubs if their state federations

Buffington recognized that the black adults had little access to libraries and that even if their children’s schools had libraries, they could not access them. Inspired by a local teacher, Buffington sent out five letters to acquaintances requesting donations of “unused used books.” The first significant donation came from a minister in Harlem, New York who rallied his congregation to collect over one thousand books. As word of Buffington’s efforts spread nationally, donations poured in and ended up stocking more than one hundred free libraries in South Carolina and Georgia. Buffington required that books, even when housed in schools instead of newly community-constructed library buildings, be made available to all members of the community (Lee, From Segregation to Integration, 99-100).

⁷¹ Lee, “From Segregation to Integration,” 93.

⁷² Marion A. Wright, “Literacy and the Free Mind,” *New South* (March 1954), 1.

allowed it, thus effectively cutting out southern clubs.⁷³ As of 1896, a new organization, the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NACWC) gave African-American clubs on the local level another option for membership.⁷⁴ In July 1909, African-American women's clubs in South Carolina came together at Columbia to form a state federation of the NACWC, the South Carolina Federation of Colored Women's Clubs (FCWC).

Local chapters of statewide women's clubs, of the FCWC and the three at the heart of this paper, attempted to increase library service to African-Americans and they took on related projects as a "special interest." The Sunlight Club, a member of the FCWC, owned and operated a community center in Orangeburg. One of the center's main attractions was a library with a children's books section and a set of shelves set aside for books by African-Americans. A 1949 anniversary publication of the FCWC boasted that this library served daily "citizens, county and city teachers, high school and elementary pupils."⁷⁵ In a 1937 AAUW Newsletter, Frayser commended the Spartanburg and Rock Hill branches of the AAUW for their book loan program to African-Americans.

⁷³ The president of the GFWC accidentally extended membership to the Woman's Era Club prior to the 1900 convention, without realizing it was an African-American club. When the GFWC Board of Directors learned of her mistake, they immediately rescinded the offer of membership. Thus, when Ruffin went to claim her seat as delegate of the Woman's Era Club at the convention, they denied it to her. Ruffin also served as the delegate for two other clubs, the Massachusetts FWC and the New England Women's Club, both majority-white clubs, and while she could have taken seats as the delegate for both, she chose not to out of protest; Maude T. Jenkins, "History of the Black Woman's Club Movement in America" (Ed.D. Thesis, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1984), 129-30.

⁷⁴ The National League of Colored Women and the National Federation of Afro-American Women joined to form the NACWC in Washington, D.C. in July 1896.

⁷⁵ 40th Anniversary of the SCFCWC, 1909-1949 (p. 11). In the *Records of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, 1895-1992, Part I: Minutes of National Conventions, Publications, and President's Office Correspondence* (Bethesda, Md.: University Publications of America, 1993-), Reel 22: 0537. Microform.

The Spartanburg chapter, for example, collected books from members and took them “from playground to playground” to loan them.⁷⁶

Reports from library chairwomen of at least two statewide women’s organizations in the 1930s reveal one of the clubwomen’s major motivations for pushing library development during this period--the Great Depression. In a 1935 report, Frayser reminded her fellow FWC clubwomen that library development was all that more important because of the Depression.⁷⁷ These reports and others show to what extent library advocates worked in the interim, between the creation of the State Library Board with no appropriation and the arrival of the WPA, to bring hope and recreation in the form of reading to their state during the trying times. In 1935, Frayser expressed passionately the significance of the clubwomen’s efforts during this time:

The more prosperous times which we all hope soon to see ushered in will find an increase in the measure of library consciousness in this state and throughout the land. Literally thousands of people who never before used a public library have turned to it for solace and recreation as their finances dwindled or with the loss of gainful employment. Others who have always been users of libraries or desired to do so, are making for greater use of reading rooms and books loans than formerly because of a shortened working day with resulting increase in house of leisure. It seems reasonable to infer that the increase in library consciousness will pave the way for a very rapid development of reasonable service as our economic situation improves. In order than all possible impetus shall be given to this movement our members are urged to take thought concerning the need for the expansion of free public libraries and to use effort to educate the larger public to this need and the way to meet it.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ State Library Chairman Report, Newsletter, March 1937, Frayser Papers, AAUW, Correspondence and Related Papers.

⁷⁷ Report of library work for 1934-35, Frayser Papers, FWC, Correspondence and Related Papers.

⁷⁸ Report of library work for 1934-35, Frayser Papers, FWC, Correspondence and Related Papers; To relate Frayser’s expectations in this quote to the realities of today, the Richland County Public Library reports that circulation has increased 33% during the recession of the last few years.

AAUW's legislative program for education in 1939 included support for federal aid for tax-supported public libraries. In convincing the clubwomen to write letters to their congressmen in support of such aid, Frayser pleaded, "It will mean the economic salvation of the South."⁷⁹

There had to be a more overarching motivation for these women to come together and form clubs and then become a philanthropic presence in their community. At the 1889 conference of what would become the GFWC, delegates reported on their club work back home. From the day's reports, Jennie June, a Sorosis club leader, summed up the formation of women's clubs and addressed their motivations:

Starting almost invariably with the desire of a smaller or larger group of women for intellectual culture and the moral and physical improvement of their environment, the pursuits of these objects had gradually displaced the old, meaningless social routine and substituted a broad, stimulating, educational, and helpful life in which latent faculties were exercised and opportunities of every sort multiplied.⁸⁰

In fact, to support June's summation, almost half of the 1300 GFWC member clubs in 1896 reported that they focused their club work towards education and literary pursuits. The 1896 convention revealed that while clubwomen had interests such as labor concerns, women in professions, environmental protection, equal wages, and more, the overriding interest of the women was in education and public libraries. Recognizing this, the GFWC decided that education would be the central focus that united their member clubs. They implored their members, "The future of education in this country is practically in (your) hands, and education is the cornerstone on which is built the

⁷⁹ Legislative Program, 1939, Frayser Papers, AAUW, Correspondence and Related Papers.

⁸⁰ Houde, *Reaching Out*, 24.

Republic.”⁸¹ The focus and interests of the GWFC and women’s clubs in South Carolina would shift in the following decades, but clubs, in general, kept an interest in library work throughout, as evidenced by their active library and education committees.

The efforts of women’s clubs in Rock Hill, South Carolina, and surrounding York County illustrate how clubwomen worked at the local level to enact both library-related objectives according to their own membership’s interests and other objectives decided on by the state federations to which they belonged. The involvement of clubwomen in public library development in Rock Hill and York County can be used as a case study for the work of women’s groups on the local level throughout the state. Thus, the efforts of clubwomen in library development in a sampling of other counties will be described briefly, as well.

Women’s clubs in Rock Hill helped develop library service in Rock Hill and surrounding York County. Clubwomen in the Castalian Literary Club discussed plans for a library around 1900 and decided to approach the Carnegie Foundation for funding to build a library. No further information is recorded about that but the clubwomen went on to collect well over one hundred volumes to circulate out of a store on Main Street. In 1910, the Women’s Club Union re-established the Rock Hill Library Association and received from the mayor a site for a future library building. The Union decided to approach the Carnegie Foundation once again. This plan fell through but the women continued to circulate their collection from several different locations. In 1923, Rock

⁸¹ Ibid., 78-80.

Hill voted to support the library with a one-millage tax and the library became a vital part of the community, thanks to the efforts of the women's clubs of Rock Hill.⁸²

The Rock Hill chapter of the AAUW formed on October 8, 1925, only one year after the state AAUW organized. Frayser was a charter member. At the time she was an Instructor in Sociology at Winthrop University and the Director of Community Activities in Chester and Rock Hill Cotton Mill Villages. The Rock Hill club stayed an active AAUW chapter with over fourteen separate committees, including Library, Education, and Legislation (the latter two dealt with library issues, as well). Frayser served as committee chair for the latter three at different points between 1925 and (at least) 1951.⁸³

Frayser announced her intension as Education Chair when she read aloud a letter at the fall 1927 meeting, urging other branches to reestablish library extension work.⁸⁴ A year later, Frayser delivered a well-received talk to the club about the problems facing the chapter. One thing she wanted the club to work on was increased statewide library service, in the form of a new State Library, a goal that would be realized two years later.⁸⁵ A Mrs. Kinard, Chair of the Library Committee, reported in early 1929, "nothing definite accomplished yet but interest is aroused throughout the county for a county library." By this she meant that the committee had written to other women's clubs in Rock Hill, asking for their cooperation, and had spoken to the superintendent of Rock

⁸² Walker, *So Good and Necessary a Work*, 50-51.

⁸³ AAUW-Rock Hill Records, General (Winthrop University Archives, Dacus Library, Rock Hill, S.C.)

⁸⁴ Minutes, Fall 1927, AAUW-Rock Hill Records, Minutes and Related Records.

⁸⁵ Minutes, Oct. 1928, AAUW-Rock Hill Records, Minutes and Related Records.

Hill schools, who was speaking with his teachers about countywide service.⁸⁶ Later that year, Kinard revealed plans to help build libraries in schools across York County. She announced plans to collect books and magazines from club members.⁸⁷

At a meeting in late 1929, Frayser presented to the chapter the three projects that the statewide AAUW would consider at their upcoming meeting in the new year. The delegates at this meeting would choose one of them as AAUW's major project for the year. The three projects were fellowships for women, a survey of professions open to women in the state, and library extension work. The Rock Hill women expressed an interest in all three and promised to support the project chosen at the state level.⁸⁸ The delegates chose to concentrate on fellowships but once again, the Rock Hill chapter pledged to continue to do whatever they could for library extension.⁸⁹ The Rock Hill branch was one of the over forty women's clubs that donated money to the State Library Board to support the hire of Parmalee Cheves, the first state library field agent, in exchange for club membership in the SC Citizens Library Association.⁹⁰ The branch donated over one hundred dollars to the Rock Hill Library in 1933 and a lesser amount to the local black library and to small rural schools.⁹¹

In the early 1940s, the Legislation Committee was actively interested in a bill before the General Assembly that would "equalize library opportunity between the rural-

⁸⁶ Minutes, Jan. 1929, AAUW -Rock Hill Records, Minutes and Related Records.

⁸⁷ Minutes, Apr. 1929, AAUW -Rock Hill Records, Minutes and Related Records.

⁸⁸ Minutes, Nov. 1929, AAUW -Rock Hill Records, Minutes and Related Records.

⁸⁹ Minutes, Jan. 1930, AAUW-Rock Hill Records, Minutes and Related Records.

⁹⁰ Minutes, Oct. 1931, AAUW-Rock Hill Records, Minutes and Related Records.

⁹¹ AAUW-Rock Hill Records, Histories.

urban, poorer-richer sections of the state” through a state appropriation for public library development. In fact, the branch legislative chairman had framed the bill and helped arrange for its hearing in the Legislature. During 1943-1944, women’s clubs from throughout the state banded together to secure the first ever appropriation for the State Library Board, necessary in the wake of WPA’s departure from the state. The Rock Hill Library Committee endorsed these efforts and organized the club membership to write letters, send telegrams, and make appearances at the appropriation hearings. In future years, the chairman would make additional trips to the Legislature to be present at library appropriation hearings.⁹²

The Library Committee was active during this period as well. They donated books and reading tables to city hospitals and books to an area black high school. They sponsored book weeks at the public library, collected books and opened a reading room at a military school, and donated books to local hospitals. The Committee indicated in 1945 that they had arranged for the black library in Rock Hill to be housed in its own building. They spoke of their long interest in seeing this come to fruition and felt a great “satisfaction” to see their goal reached. The Committee expressed a commitment to support this library in the future by collecting magazines and raising or donating “a substantial amount” for the purchase of books.⁹³

The Rock Hill women were not alone in their efforts to push library development at the local and county levels. Their success mirrors that of women’s clubs in other counties throughout the state. Laurens County established a county library in 1929. It

⁹² Reports, 1940-1945, AAUW-Rock Hill Records, Branch Reports.

⁹³ Reports, 1941-1945, AAUW-Rock Hill Records, Branch Reports.

could not have happened without the Wednesday Club, a women's club in Laurens that founded a private subscription library in the 1880s and opened it to the public for one dollar per year. The Wednesday Club donated their collection of twenty-five hundred books to the collection for the county library in 1929. In 1940, the WPA came to Laurens to help operate a bookmobile for the county library. The Laurens County Farm Women helped raise money to purchase a bookmobile and partially fund salaries of its two staff members and operating expenses during its first two years of use.⁹⁴

The creation of the Chesterfield County Library is a testament and good example of what the WPA accomplished in counties across the state. The Chesterfield County Board of Commissioners and the local Council of Farm Women sponsored a WPA library demonstration project beginning in 1937. WPA money rented a bookmobile and enabled reading rooms to open in six towns. Clubwomen worked with WPA employees to staff the bookmobile and reading rooms. One year later, Chesterfield County took over financial responsibility for the library project, realizing the benefits of increased access to library material.⁹⁵

In Chester County, the Palmetto Literary Club organized a library in 1900. The Club formed only two years earlier and right away sent two delegates to the organizational meeting of the South Carolina FWC. The women returned inspired to found a public library in Chester as the club's first objective and two years later, the Palmetto Club opened a library in City Hall. It was not a free library at first; it was supported by paid memberships. The Chester library soon became the People's Free

⁹⁴ Walker, *So Good and Necessary a Work*, 35; Frayser, "The Libraries of South Carolina," 21.

⁹⁵ Gorman, "Blazing the Way...," 430.

Library. In 1924, finances became an issue and instead of discontinuing services temporarily, twelve women's clubs in Chester banded together and pledged fifty dollars each per year for the next six years to enable free service to continue. When the Chester Library Board of Governors took over operation of the library and a tax was passed for its support in the early 1930s, the clubwomen donated the books to the city. The WPA funded a bookmobile and supplies in 1938. In 1946, the Chester Free Library turned into the Chester County Library and branches opened in Great Falls and Lowrys.⁹⁶

In Sumter County, the Sumter Civic League opened a library in a one-room cottage that served the citizenry up until the construction of a Carnegie library. Between 1889 and 1917, the Carnegie Corporation financed the construction of 1679 libraries, only fourteen of which were in South Carolina.⁹⁷ Sumter was one of only fourteen cities to receive a Carnegie library and the story of its construction is a good illustration of one women's club's involvement in bringing Carnegie libraries to small communities. The Sumter Civic League collected books, staffed the library, raised funds, and at one point even convinced the city council to pay them fifteen dollars per month for library upkeep provided the League donated sixty dollars worth of books annually to the library. The success of this library compelled the city to begin a correspondence with the Carnegie

⁹⁶ K. Stringfellow, "History of Chester County Library," *South Carolina Librarian* 5 (1960): 19-21; Walker, *So Good and Necessary a Work*, 35.

⁹⁷ Libraries built in SC with Carnegie money: Anderson, Beaufort, Camden, Charleston, Darlington, Gaffney, Greenwood, Honea Path, Kingstree, Latta, Marion, Spartanburg, Sumter, and Union. This represents less than 1% of all Carnegie Libraries built in the U.S. but this percentage was indicative of southern states in general. By the time that southern cities gained the necessary awareness in the community and the required financial support from city and county councils, Carnegie had ended his funding of public library construction (he did so in 1917). This level of support did not exist in most South Carolina towns before 1917. South Carolina library history is littered with stories of hopeful towns being turned away from Carnegie after he cut off funding in 1917. Nevertheless, fourteen communities did apply in time and the libraries built as a result still stand in some towns, perhaps as a testament to the foresight of those communities.

Corporation in want of a larger public library. Given the Carnegie Corporation's requirement that cities demonstrate support for a future library, Sumter could point both to the nucleus of books owned by the Civic League that they would donate to the new library and the city's previous partial support of the League's library.⁹⁸

In 1936, the staff of the Richland County Public Library wrote a letter to library workers of 1986. They expressed hope that by then all counties in the state would have county or regional libraries, that circulation would reach two million books per year, and that illiteracy would be eradicated.⁹⁹ Their first two wishes came true. All counties in the state had countywide library service by the late 1970s, and circulation reached three million in Richland County alone in 2002.¹⁰⁰

Their dreams would not have been realized without the efforts of women's clubs, a point ignored by some historians and overlooked by others. Until now, no one has attempted to capture the scope of women's club efforts toward library development in South Carolina. The Federation of Women's Clubs, the American Association of University Women, and the Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, and other groups not credited here but deserved, worked for the better part of the twentieth century, helping to bring books to areas and people not served by libraries. They worked together to convince the state to create and then fund the South Carolina

⁹⁸ Ruth J. Edens, "A Substantial and Attractive Building: The Carnegie Public Library, Sumter, South Carolina," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 94 (January 1993): 40-42.

⁹⁹ The letter went on to say, "Perhaps by the time this is opened library service will be a thing of the past and everyone will obtain their knowledge and information by radio or thought transference or some yet undiscovered source. Perhaps all children will be born with a knowledge of all information. Maybe all readers will automatically know how to use the catalog...." Letter from Richland County Public Library to the Librarian and Library Assistants of 1986, SC Library History Project Files, Columbia, S.C.

¹⁰⁰ Richland County Public Library, "Statistics," <http://www.richland.lib.sc.us/rcplstats.htm>.

State Library. They pushed for community support of libraries, both in partnership with the WPA during the execution of the South Carolina Library Project, and of their own accord. This thorough examination of the efforts of women's clubs at the local, county, and state levels to increase library service and develop public libraries, makes it clear that women's clubs played such a significant role in these activities that they should not be ignored in any future analysis of public library development in South Carolina.

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Appendix A: ABBREVIATIONS

AAUW	American Association of University Women
ALA	American Library Association
FBPWC	Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs
FCWC	Federation of Colored Women's Clubs
FWC	Federation of Women's Clubs
GFWC	General Federation of Women's Clubs
NACWC	National Association of Colored Women's Clubs
WPA	Works Projects Administration
SCLA	South Carolina Library Association

Appendix B: Timeline of library development in South Carolina

- 1698 Charleston Free Public Library opened to white residents as a subscription library. The line between “subscription” and “free” was nonexistent in the colonial period.
- 1898 Marion Public Library opened as the first tax-supported public library in South Carolina
- 1898 South Carolina Federation of Women’s Clubs organized.
- 1914 State law passed that allowed townships, counties, and municipal corporations to levy a two-millage tax in support of libraries.
- 1915 Oct. South Carolina Library Association organized with expressed purpose of convincing the State Legislature to create a state library agency.
- 1924 South Carolina Division of the American Association of University Women organized.
- 1929 The South Carolina State Legislature passed a library law, creating the South Carolina Public Library Association with the State Library Board as its governing body. Commonly called the State Library.
- 1930 June-Mar. 1932 First State Library field agent, Parmalee Cheves, hired by outside funds to tour the state, determining library needs.
- ca.1930-34 South Carolina Citizens Library Association formed. Helped raise private money for state library.
- 1934 *Citizens Conference on the Library Needs of South Carolina*, held at Clemson.
- 1935 The Rosenwald Foundations donated money to Richland and Charleston counties for the establishment of two five-year county library demonstration projects.
- 1936-1943 Active dates of the South Carolina WPA Library Project, initiated by the Women’s and Professional Projects Division of the WPA.
- 1939 Second State Library field worker hired for five months through emergency funds secured by Olin Johnston.
- 1943 South Carolina appropriated money to the State Library for the first time in the agency’s existence.

- 1946-1979 Estellene Walker serves first as Chairman of the State Library Board and then as State Librarian, beginning in 1966 with the name change.
- 1966 Official name of the South Carolina Public Library Association and State Library Board changed by State Legislature to the South Carolina State Library.
- 1968 Mary E. Frayser died at the age of 99 (b. 1868). Worked from 1920s-1950s for public library development in South Carolina through leadership in a dozen women's organizations.
- 1977 Williamsburg becomes the last South Carolina county to create a county library system, legislated in the General Assembly and funded with public monies by citizens of the county.

**'RAISING LIBRARY CONSCIOUSNESS':
WOMEN'S CLUB EFFORTS IN PUBLIC LIBRARY
DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH CAROLINA, 1914-1943**

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