

A DONATION OF 'BIBLICAL' PROPORTIONS

By Dorothy Senn
Special to the *Oak Ridger*, TN

Many people are aware of the work of Johann Gutenberg, creator of movable type and the famous Gutenberg Bible. A much smaller number of people have seen one of the Bibles. In addition to its historical value as the first large book to be printed with movable type, the Gutenberg Bible is still considered one of the finest examples of the printer's art and a historical, religious and cultural mile marker.



Visitors to the Oak Ridge Public Library will now have the opportunity to see and study a copy.

(Pictured: Reba Smellage, a librarian, worked for the Army's Special Services).

The late Reba Smellage was a librarian, traveler and a collector of beautiful things. She also had an extensive library, which included a facsimile three-volume set of the Gutenberg Bible. The Old Testament in one. Reba's three sisters, France Neal of Oak Ridge, Bettie Koerber of Flint, Mich., and Wanda Stewart, of Indianapolis, Ind., made the decision to donate the volumes to the library in Reba's memory.

"She loved Oak Ridge and the people," Frances said.

A native of Boma, near Cookeville, TN, Reba graduated from Baxter Seminary High School and Tennessee Technological University and held a master's degree in library science from Peabody/Vanderbilt University.

In 1956 she went to Germany as a librarian with the Special Services for the Army, where she spent 20 years. Following her retirement in 1975, Reba made her home in Oak Ridge until her death in July 1998.

"The books are all in Latin," Frances noted as she and McNeilly talked during the presentation.

"Only the captions under the pictures in the New Testament, which are scripture verses, are in English."

"We don't have much of a rare book collection," McNeilly said. "Most of our rare book collection is related to the history of Oak Ridge, so, getting a copy of the Gutenberg is branching out for us. It is a very unusual gift for us and we are thrilled to have it."

"On the religious side, it marks the beginning of people having the opportunity to own their own Bible," McNeilly noted. "There would no longer be Bibles just for the religious and very rich. On the visual side, it allowed ordinary people to own their own books, thus opening the door for education of the masses and democracy."

With regard to the Bible's production, McNeilly spoke to the fact that it is actually a bridge between the old method of hand-copied books and Gutenberg's new movable type, because while all of the type is printed on the press, there is hand done illumination adorning the pages in the initials beginning new sections and in the adornments in the margins.

The volumes are currently being prepared for use and will be available for library patrons in the reference section I the next few weeks.

"Reba became interested in the Bible when she toured the Gutenberg Museum in Mainz and in 1968 ordered the set from a publisher in New York," Frances said.

Reba was a people person who enjoyed sharing her collections, knowledge and experiences with the community through exhibits and presentations. The gift of the Gutenberg Bible to the library continues this legacy.

Johnnie Reba Smellage Obituary

b. 19 June 1925

d. 3 July 1998, Oak Ridge, TN

d/o John Barlow Smellage & Ota Theresa Anderson

Retired special services librarian

Johnnie Reba Smellage, 72, of Oak Ridge, died Friday, July 3, 1998, at Methodist Medical Center of Oak Ridge.



She was the daughter of John and Ota Anderson Smellage of Putnam County.

Miss Smellage was a graduate of Baxter Seminary High School and Tennessee Technological University and held a master's degree in library science from Peabody/Vanderbilt University. She received many academic awards and honors in school but, according to her family, she was most proud of the "Outstanding Graduate Award" she received at Peabody/Vanderbilt.

She taught English at Baxter Seminary and served as librarian in Pekin, Ill., before going to Germany as a U.S. Army Special Services librarian. Miss Smellage worked in Germany for 20 years, and her home reflected her extensive travels throughout Europe and the Far East, as did the homes of her four sisters, her sisters said.

(Pictured: Johnnie Reba Smellage, English teacher, assistant to Librarian – Baxter Seminary, 1951 Faculty, Baxter, Putnam Co., TN).

She was an avid and fast reader and retained almost all that she read, family members said, adding that she could converse intelligently on almost any topic one cared to mention. She was a frequent book reviewer for the Oak Ridge Woman's Club.

She was very close to her Philathea Sunday School Class, members of First Baptist Church, who provided transportation to a dialysis clinic for six years. She also had many special friends.

She is survived by four sisters: Frances Neal and husband Bob of Oak Ridge, Polly Holmes and husband Ken of Memphis; Bettie Koerber and husband Joe of Attica, Mich.; Wanda Stewart and husband Albert of Fortville, Ind. A brother died earlier. She is survived by seven nephews and four nieces whom she adored, her sisters said. Her seven great-nieces and great-nephews loved her story-telling ability.

A memorial service will be held at 11 a.m. Tuesday, July 7, at First Baptist Church, with the Rev. Larry Dipboye officiating. A short service and burial will be held at 3 p.m. at the Smellage Cemetery in Putnam County.

The family will receive friends from 7 to 9 tonight, July 6, at Weatherford Mortuary.

The family requests any memorials be in the form of donations to the library of First Baptist Church of Oak Ridge, where she was church librarian for many years.

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*See Chapter 2 for family list of John Barlow Smellage at: www.ajlambert.com