

PUTNAM COUNTY LIBRARY STARTED WITH JUST 12 BOOKS ON A SHELF

By Megan Trotter: Herald-Citizen Staff

Twelve books on a shelf by the chimney in a little cottage — that was the start of the Putnam County Library. According to the history book, “Putnam County, Tennessee, 1850-1970,” these first books were purchased in 1923 by the 12 regular members of the Book Lovers Club. Club



member Clara Cox Epperson, who was also the poet laureate of Tennessee, suggested they all pitch in \$1.15 to buy books to create a library.

(Celebrating the Putnam County Library’s 75th anniversary are current staff members, in front, from left, Marcia Donovan, Emily Sciacca, Sarah Crawford and

Nelda Stewart. In back, Jennifer Bilbrey, Vincent Nares, Chris Phillips, Aaron Urbank, Brian Page, Matt Knieling, Clay Robertson and Stacie Netherton. Photo by Ty Kerna).

“The club voted to use these as the nucleus for a circulating library,” the history book recounts. “Members checked out books from the home of Laura Copeland, (known as ‘Rose Cottage’), to borrowers at a cost to adults of one dollar a year.”

Club members continued to purchase books through fundraisers like talent shows, lectures, movies, tea parties, Bridge parties, book sales and solicitations until by 1929, they had accumulated more than 1,000 books.

When they had about 3,000 books, the club decided that the library had outgrown its home in Copeland’s cottage. In 1938, it was moved into the building on the square that had previously been the home of the Putnam County Herald. After Epperson passed away in 1937, the club renamed the library the Clara Cox Epperson Library in her honor. The following year, the Book Lovers Club consolidated their collection with that of the Putnam County Board of Education and formed the county’s first publicly financed library. By 1943, the library had 5,887 books and needed to be relocated to a home on North Dixie Avenue owned by Stacy Wilhite. That building is no longer standing.

The library continued to grow, and in 1951, it was moved to a building at 441 East Broad St., still standing today, which was previously used as the city hospital and as the county school offices.

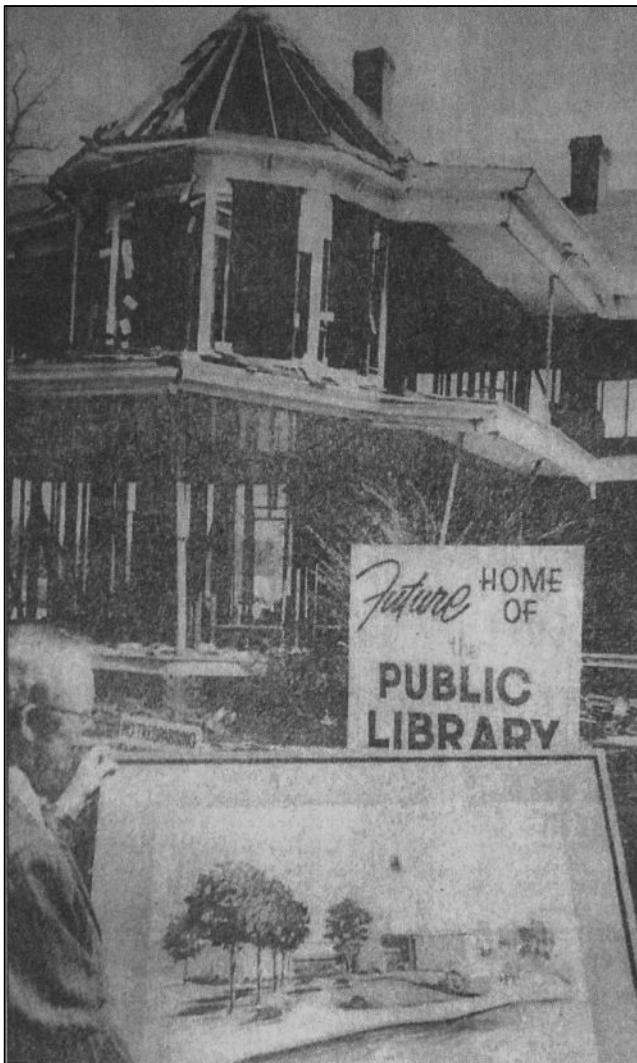
“The school board building was inadequate as a library,” said a Herald-Citizen article from Feb. 24, 1980. “There was a general lack of space, no room for new volumes, and sometimes windows had to be covered with shelves to carry the inventory.”

The building underwent a renovation that expanded the space from 895 square feet to 1,839 square feet. However, soon that was still not enough space to house the growing collection. The library moved to its current location at 50 E. Broad St. in 1973, on the spot of the former home of Judge Robert B. Capshaw. Since then, the library has continued to grow and flourish. These days, patrons can check out thousands of physical books, as well as thousands of digital books and audio books online. There are reading programs, book clubs, children’s activities and more, all because of Clara Cox Epperson’s dream, and the 12 books that started it all.

As a *Herald-Citizen* article from 1980 said, “The modern, sand-blasted concrete building which houses Putnam County’s library ... was not erected without many prior hours of cajoling, working, planning, lobbying, sweating and praying on the part of many who felt Cookeville needed just such a facility ...

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: Sunday, 7 December 2014, pg. Living C

*Read more about the history of Putnam Co., TN & surrounding areas at:
<http://www.ajlambert.com>



In an old newspaper clipping, the then Cookeville Mayor Robert Davis holds up an architect’s drawing of the current library facility at the site where the old home of Judge Robert B. Capshaw was being renovated.

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The back of this old photograph of the library lists those pictured as: seated, from left, Clara Starnes, librarian; Mrs. J. T. Moore Sr.; and an unknown man. In back: Mrs. T. J. Farr "Lottie"; Elise Draper Dawrin, Fowler Clark, James Murphy and Elise Epperson Howard.

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Pictured above: This building on East Broad St. served as a hospital before being used as the Putnam County Library form 1951-1973.

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In a clipping from the April 9, 1989 edition of the Herald-Citizen, the library board members stand outside the current facility. Pictured, in front, from left, Janet Kolff, Anne Low and Mary Della Roberson. In back: Bob Luna, Doug Powers and Frances Eldridge.

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FORMER LIBRARY DIRECTOR SAW TECHNOLOGY MILESTONES

By Megan Trotter: Herald-Citizen Staff

COOKEVILLE — Over the years, technology has greatly changed how patrons have used the Putnam County Library, and former director Reilly Reagan was there for some key updates that took tremendous effort and a lot of time to implement.



“I used to joke that we were getting the library into the 20th century just in time for the 21st, and that was about how it worked out.” she said. “It took years to accomplish.”

(Pictured: A library patron checks out a book from librarian Clara Starnes).

During her time as director from July 1987 to January 1998, library staff took on the challenge of creating the first computerized record of everything in the library.

“A funny note: the first computer we got to hold the catalog records had the ‘awesome’ storage capacity of one gigabyte,” Reagan said. “We just thought that was an enormous amount of memory at the time. Now people have multiple times than that in the phones they carry in their pocket!”

The job of adding books to the computer, headed up by Bette Flatt and Jennifer Freeman, would eventually replace the card catalog system with today’s digital system that brings up lists of suggested books with just a keyword search. That list did not magically happen. Every single book and other resource that is compiled there had to be hand-entered by dedicated library staff and volunteers.

“Every time you access the library’s catalog from your smart phone or home computer, you should thank the unseen heroines of the project who made it possible,” Reagan said.

Another significant change Reagan saw during her time as director was the decision to open the library for a half day on Sunday afternoons. To their surprise, they started getting as many patrons in the library during those half days as they did on a typical full day. For more than 10 years, the Putnam County Library was the smallest public library in Tennessee to be open the entire week. Currently, the library is not open on Sundays.

“I hope the Putnam County Commission might restore funding to the library to have it again in the future,” Reagan said. “With the beautiful new Dogwood Park next door, the main library has become even more of an attractive family destination. Sunday library hours are a great help to heads of families who work Monday through Friday.”

In the late 80s, patrons started requesting a new service — the addition of videocassettes to the library.

“I knew we could not keep up with the for-profit businesses which could offer multiple copies of popular movie releases, so we worked on developing a library of primarily non-fiction titles, ‘based on books’ novel adaptations, and quality children’s programs.” Reagan said. “I have always viewed the word library to mean a collection of something, rather than the literal old definition of a collection of books.”

She also brought in the library’s first collection of audiobooks — then on cassette tapes — as well as a small collection of classical music CDs during her time as director.

These days, the technology is still evolving. Patrons can access electronic books and audiobooks, read records from online databases and even search their family’s genealogy from the library’s access to Ancestry.com.

Technology is continually growing and changing, and the library will always utilize it to bring the best resources to the community in the most convenient format possible.

“That’s the great thing about public libraries; they constantly change to meet the public’s demands, interests, and technologies,” Reagan said.

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