

HISTORY OF THE SAVANNAH PUBLIC  
CHATHAM – EFFINGHAM – LIBERTY REGIONAL  
AND CARNEGIE LIBRARIES  
1903 – 1963

Beginnings, 1903 – 1916

In 1903, the Georgia Historical Society and the City of Savannah worked out a plan whereby they cooperated in the establishment of the Savannah Public Library. Service began in a limited way in June but the library was not fully open to the public until November 1, 1903. The public library remained in Hodgson Hall through August 1916.

The original stimulus for the public library came from the Georgia Historical Society. The Society set up a planning committee to determine how the facilities of the Society might best be made generally useful to Savannah.

The members of the planning committee were H.C. Cunningham, Chairman, George J. Baldwin, W.W. Mackall, A.R. Lawton and J.F. Minis. They met with a special committee of council appointed by Mayor Herman Myers. This committee consisted of the Mayor, the Honorable Pope Barrow, J.M. Dixon, R.J. Davant, and D.R. Thomas. It was unanimously decided by this joint committee that the establishment of a Free Public Library would prove of great value to the people of Savannah.

The agreement between the City and the Society stipulated that the Society should allow free use of its own books, except those which related strictly to the historical purposes of the Library, provide quarters for the Library, and give a sum of \$500.00 annually toward the support of the public library. The city was the appropriate \$3,000.00 annually.

The Public Library was opened as an experiment to be continued for a three years' trial to see whether public response would be sufficient to warrant the City in continuing an appropriation for its maintenance. The reply was immediate and conclusive; the people of Savannah wanted it and proved this by their widespread interest and use of its facilities.

By 1909 the Georgia Historical Society found itself no longer able to continue its annual appropriation so the City took over the full support. In 1915, the last full year in which the Public Library remained in Hodgson Hall, support from the City was approximately \$10,000.

The members of the Georgia Historical Society who served on the Board of Managers of the Public Library, 1903 – 1916 were:

J.R. Anderson  
Otis Ashore  
George J. Baldwin  
Dr. T.J. Charlton  
H. C. Cunningham  
Charles Ellis  
William W. Gordon  
H. Wiley Johnson  
A.R. Lawton  
W.W. Mackall  
H.J. Nunn  
H.P. Smart

During the three years the public library was housed in Hodgson Hall and controlled jointly by the Georgia Historical Society and the City 1,154,580 books were borrowed from the library by the reading public. A number of special services were begun during this period, too. As early as 1903, there was a department for

the children but no one younger than 14 was allowed to take the books out for reading at home. By 1906, however, the library had yielded to demand, and cards were being issued to children.

Very early in its service the library recognized the need of a reference department and the report of 1906 speaks of a small collection of reference books. There was never enough space available, however, in Hodgson Hall for an adequate reference department.

#### Main Library Building, 1916

The present Main Library building was opened for use in November 1916. It was furnished largely by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation; of the total cost of \$104,041.78 the local contribution was only \$29,041.78.

The building, which had seemed quite spacious when it was first put into service in 1916, was badly overcrowded by the time a book stack wing was added in 1936. A grant of money from the WPA made this addition possible.

By 1956, the overcrowding in the Main Library had grown quite serious. A temporary measure to relieve this situation was the purchase in 1956 of a residence immediately behind the Main Library. Into this were moved the extension service staff and book collection and certain non-public activities such as mimeographing and display making.

In 1963, the need for space in the Main Library building has become acute.

#### Expansion of service beyond the Main Library (in the City of Savannah)

Almost from the time of the Library's establishment proposals were made by the board and the librarian to extend services outside of the library itself to make books as accessible as possible. It was not until 1916 that the first branch was opened, the East Side Branch at Congress and Habersham, and this was open at first only one afternoon a week. In 1917, a beginning of service to children in the schools was made with the opening of the branch at Waters Avenue School, for after school service only, under the care of Miss Amelia Shumate, a teacher in the school. In the early days the service in these two branches was confined to children.

The Georgia Historical Society again went into partnership with the City to give library service to Savannah when a branch of the public library was established in Hodgson Hall in March 1923. The branch was continued to September 1948 when it was withdrawn to make space available for the library of Armstrong Junior College.

During the years when Hodgson Hall served as a branch library 587,023 books were circulated to readers. The public library also did much to make the valuable historical materials in the Society's collection more readily available. Cards listing these books were included in the catalog of the public library so that users of the public library would have this material called to their attention.

Much of the Society's pamphlet and book material had never been organized. The pamphlets were sorted and arranged by subjects and 5,027 volumes belonging to the Georgia Historical Society were cataloged.

In 1924, traveling book collections were placed in four elementary schools: Anderson, Fell, Henry, Massie. As the library could find the necessary books and staff time service was started in other elementary schools, so that at one time or another most of the elementary schools within the city limits have had branches from the public library. These are Anderson Street Branch (1929-1946), Barnard (1923-0 April 1953) Charles Ellis (1929-1956), Fell Avenue (1930-1955), Henry Street (1929-1955), Massie (1931-1955, Montgomery (1927-1937), Moore Avenue (1943-1952: then served by bookmobile), Oglethorpe Avenue (1937- date), Pennsylvania Avenue (1948-1936), Jacob G. Smith (1951-1962), Thirty Eighth Street (1930-1948), Waters Avenue Branch in Romana Riley School (1917-date). Both the Pennsylvania Avenue Branch and the

Waters Avenue served the adults and the community generally as well as the students in the schools where they were housed.

In 1926 the Down Town Branch was opened in quarters very generously made available by the Savannah Morning News in its new building. This branch was established primarily to serve the business people of Savannah.

In 1930, when the Savannah Morning News could no longer spare the room the library occupied the branch was moved to Congress Street in space given by the John Wesley Hotel. The next location was in 1942 on Bryan Street between Bull and Drayton. And on October 1, 1954 it was moved to its present location at 4 East Bay Street in the Gamble Building. In 1956-57, the Down Town Branch was enlarged, air conditioned and renovated, and renamed in honor of Miss Ola Wyeth.

In January of 1963, the Carnegie Library system, a separate system serving the Negro population of Savannah, was consolidated with the Savannah Public Library. The Carnegie building became a branch library and its two sub-branches; Yamacraw and Robert Hitch became sub-branches in the system.

The Carnegie Library building was constructed with Carnegie funds in 1913, and the Library service to the Negro citizens of Savannah, begun in about 1906 by the colored Library Association, was transferred there.

Those instrumental in establishing this early Negro library service were Mr. A.L. Tucker, Julian Smith, J.W. Armstrong, E.E. Desverney, J.T. Burton, Henry Pearson, H.A. McBeth, G.W. Jacobs, Dr. F.S. Belcher, L.S. Reed, R.W. Gadsden and C.A.R. McDowell; Mr. C.A.R. McDowell was the first librarian. The library was housed in rented quarters, a two-story building at the corner of Price and Hartridge Streets, and started with a book collection of 352 volumes, largely gifts.

The Negro library service was poorly supported and also inadequately housed until it moved into the new Carnegie Library building on East Henry Street in August of 1914. This building, which cost \$12,000, was a gift of the Carnegie Corporation to the Negro citizens of Savannah. The \$3,000 for the site was raised through public subscription by the Negro citizens of Savannah.

The Carnegie Library system was supported from the beginning by city appropriations but for many years these were most inadequate. However, support grew from the \$1,200 annual appropriation in 1914 to approximately \$40,000 in 1962.

In 1963, the Carnegie Library was discontinued as a separate system and became a part of the Savannah Public Library. At this time the Carnegie Library system included two small sub-branches in Negro Public housing developments: Hitch Village (established in 1959) and Yamacraw Village (started in 1946). In December 1963 a third sub-branch was opened in the new Herbert Kayton public housing development.

#### Expansion of services beyond the Main Library (in rural Chatham and Neighboring Counties)

There was early realization that people living outside the city limits of Savannah should be served by the Library. Four years after the establishment of the Savannah Public Library, the annual report of 1907 reported, "There is a very decided need that traveling libraries should be provided for all the public schools of Chatham County." This same report indicated that citizens who lived outside Savannah but transacted business within the city were being allowed library cards and suggested that "there should be an annual appropriation made by Chatham County to assist in sustaining and extending the usefulness of the Library."

In 1916 three hundred and twenty five of the children's books, which were to be transferred from Hodgson Hall to the new library building, were given to the Huntingdon Club to be used in its traveling library work with the County Schools. Cooperation of this kind with the Huntingdon Club was continued for about ten years.

The first attempt on the part of the public library to build up a service agency in the county area was the establishment of a branch library in a store at Port Wentworth in 1918. The books for the branch were

purchased with a gift of \$500.00 from Mr. William Minot, president of the Port Wentworth Terminal Corporation, and the clerks in the store agreed to take care of the books under the general supervision of the public library. This arrangement did not prove to be satisfactory, however, and service was discontinued within about two months' time.

There were other sporadic efforts made by the public library to serve Chatham County – small collections were lent to town libraries at Thunderbolt and Pooler, the transient camp at Port Wentworth, and six community centers maintained by FERA. But it was only with the advent of WPA that the Library was finally able to begin a regular program of service to people living outside the city limits of Savannah.

The WPA offered funds for a bookmobile driver's salary and to purchase the chassis for a bookmobile, the Chatham County Commission had the bookmobile body built, the public library transferred 1446 books from its collections and the bookmobile started on its rounds on August 28, 1940. The book collection was so small that adult borrowers had to be limited to two books of fiction at one time and children could be allowed only one book. Nevertheless in 1941, the first full year of service, there was a circulation of 29,350 books.

The war years were difficult and challenging ones. Because of tire rationing the service was almost immediately threatened with interruption but enough tires were made available to keep the bookmobile on the road. The growth of war industries brought many industrial workers to Savannah and the development of housing projects for their families. The bookmobile extended its services to these projects.

There was a continual effort on the part of the Public Library to get adequate support for the bookmobile service from the County Commission but there was no increase in local funds during these early years.

In 1944 the State Office of Education Public Library Division offered a grant of \$2,000.00 for the rural library program if the county would appropriate a more nearly adequate sum. This the County Commission found itself unable to do, and the service was discontinued in December 31, 1944.

This discontinuance of the rural library service brought protest from many organizations in the city and county, particularly from the American Association of University Women. Finally the County Commission offered support of \$2000.00 annually, Chatham and Effingham counties decided to merge into a region and pool their state subsidy (\$3725.50), the Civitan Club raised \$1000.00 and there were gifts from other sources. Miss Dorothy Raymond was appointed Assistant Director and the Chatham – Effingham Regional Library goes under way in February 1945.

At the time of the merger of the service in Chatham and Effingham counties into one program there was a bookmobile already operating in each county and also a branch library in Springfield. Sub-branch libraries were opened soon in Chatham County at Pooler (1946), Thunderbolt (1947), Bay View (1948), and Port Wentworth (1949). The Bay View sub-branch was closed in 1955 because there was not enough use of the small sub-branch to justify its continuance.

In 1952, as the result of a fire, the Springfield Branch had to be moved into new quarters, and old drugstore, well located in the Main Street, but most inadequate in size and unattractive. In December of 1963, Effingham County made a big step forward in its library program when it completed an attractive brick library building, and in February of 1964 service in the new building began. Funds (about \$15,000) for the building came from a local bond issue and equipment was purchased with \$1500 made available by the State Department of Education.

In 1946 the Chatham County Board of Education contributed for the first time to the support of the bookmobile service. Various agencies and industries gave money from time to time to help out in financial crises, notably the Savannah Sugar Refinery, the Union Bag, the Southern States Iron Roofing Company, the Housing Authority of Savannah.

Libraries were established in the schools at Port Wentworth and Pooler and weekly service to the children there was begun in 1949. The Port Wentworth library also served the adults of the community. In 1953, the

Port Wentworth sub-branch was moved from the school to the Port Wentworth corporation building, where it has continued to function as a community library.

In 1963, at the end of the school year, the public library withdrew from the Pooler School and the school began the operation of its own school library.

The WPA bookmobile which had served Chatham County well for over ten years finally in 1951 became unsafe to use and as the result of two years or more of strenuous effort on the part of Miss Raymond and interested citizens enough money was obtained to purchase a new bookmobile. The Chatham County Commissions, Chatham County Board of Education and Housing Authority of Savannah all contributed generously and there were other gifts from organizations and individuals throughout the county. In January 1952 the new bookmobile started out on its rounds.

Unfortunately the new Chatham County bookmobile was not rugged enough to stand up to the hard driving over back county roads. IN 1955, it was replaced with the help of the State Department of Education and the Chatham County Commission with the first Gerstenslager bookmobile the library had ever owned.

In this same year Effingham County replaced its old bookmobile with a small one built on a Blue Bird truck body. The old bookmobile, which dated back to WPA days, was probably the oldest one still in service in Georgia, having been on the roads since about 1943.

In 1960, to take care of increasing service demand from suburban and rural Chatham County, the library added a second bookmobile, purchased with a special grant of money from the State Department of Education. The bookmobile service in Chatham County was then set up so that one bookmobile served the school sin the school year, and the other gave school-community service. In 1963, there were 28 different routes covered in a regular schedule by the Chatham County Community bookmobile and 21 schools served by the bookmobile.

In 1963, there was again a new bookmobile purchased for Effingham County. This bookmobile was a Gerstenslager, purchased with funds granted by the State Department of Education.

The bookmobile staffing the very early days was made up of WPA workers. Then, Mrs. Sue Sowers served in Chatham County for nearly 11 years (1943-1954) and Mrs. Edith Anderson for 17 years (1943-1960) in Effingham County. In Chatham County, Mrs. Alberta Moore replaced Mrs. Bowers in 1955 and others were added to the Chatham bookmobile staff as the service grew. Mrs. Theresa Zipperer became Effingham County librarian in January 1961.

Miss Ola M. Wyeth was the first director and Miss Dorothy Raymond the first assistant director of the Chatham – Effingham Regional library. In September 1951 Miss Frances Rees became Assistant director and in January 1952 Miss Geraldine Le May replaced Miss Wyeth as director.

In May 1956, the regional library was expanded to include Liberty County, where there was a sub-branch library in Hinesville, which had already been in operation for more than 10 years. The growth of the library program required almost immediate enlargement of the branch and by 1959, it was tripled in size and attractively renovated. However, it remained within the old Liberty County school building. In 1964, there was great need for larger and more functional quarters.

Land in the southern part of Chatham County was deeded to the library by the Chatham County Commissions in 1959. The gift was made to furnish the site for a branch library building.

#### Special Materials in the Library Collection

##### Framed Pictures

In 1938, using as a nucleus 17 color prints received as a gift from the Carnegie Corporation, the library began a loan collection of framed pictures, the second public library in the South to offer such a service. By 1963, the collection had grown to 181 prints, and the number of loans that year was 965.

### Record Collection

In November 1946, the Recorded Music Society of Savannah presented a record player to the library, and a small number of records. This was the beginning of a very popular service in the library. By 1963, the library has a collection of 2083 records, held chiefly in the Adult Loan Department of the Main Library, but with small collections and record players also in the Main Library Children's Department, the Ola Wyeth and Carnegie Branches. In 1963 the records circulated 7,838 times, and the collection included not only music but also drama, poetry, history and language study records.

### Projected Records

A new activity with great service possibilities was started in 1950 when books of films and projectors to how them were given to the library. The Savannah Council of Jewish Women was most active in pushing this project but contributions came also from a number of other organizations including the American Legion Post #36, Junior Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis and Lions. Five projectors and 199 books were bought.

For a number of years the Savannah Council served as a volunteer group to take projectors and books to interested users. However, as demand lessened they became less interested and after a few years no longer gave the service.

The increasing popularity and availability of TV lessened the need for the projected books and the service was very little used about 1956. Three of the projectors were sold by the Savannah Jewish Council. In 1963 there were 333 books in the collection.

### Microfilm

The library began building a collection of materials on microfilm with the 1939 New York Times. AT the end of 1963 its microfilm holdings included the New York Times from 1939 to date, the early Savannah papers preceding the Savannah Morning News, with almost a complete coverage from 1774-1849, the Savannah Morning News from 1850 to date, with the exception of the 1943 volume which was still to be microfilmed and the current Savannah Evening Press from August 1961. Plans had been laid for filming the old Savannah Evening Press to get a complete back file on microfilm.

The library also began in 19649 subscribing to various magazines on microfilm and at the end of 1963 had 21 such subscriptions. A complete file of the Sears Roebuck catalogs on microfilms is also in the library's collection through the generosity of the Sears Roebuck Company.

The development of the library's microfilm collection of local newspapers was very largely a cooperative venture. When the Savannah Public Library first began its filming of the current Savannah Morning News in 1944 it secured four subscribers to help share the costs: the Georgia Historical Society, the Library of Congress, the Savannah State College and the Savannah Morning News itself. Later, the University of Georgia became a subscriber.

The very early papers, which preceded the first publishing of the Savannah Morning News starting in 1850, were filmed by the Morman hurh and the library was asked to buy positive prints of these. The University of Georgia filmed the major part of the Savannah Morning News prior to 1900, with the library and the Savannah Morning News publishing company helping to share the costs. Then, the University of Georgia arranged for Man Laboratories in Virginia to film the rest of the file up throught 1942 and the cost was divided among the three cooperating libraries.

### Newspaper Indexes

IN 1929 the library began making an index to the current Savannah Morning News with Miss Edith Inglesby as indexer. Miss Inglesby did this work for 25 years as a member of the staff and after her retirement in 1955 continued this as a leisure time job. She was paid a small salary, with the money coming from several different sources during the first few years, ( the local Shrine group, the Friends of the Library). However, in 1958, plans were worked out with three of the agencies who received copies of the index to pay a large enough annual subscription to cover the cost of the salary. These three are the Savannah Morning News Company, which pays half of the total, the University of Georgia, and the Savannah State College.

Other agencies which receive costs of the current Savannah Morning News index are the Georgia Historical Society and the Library of Congress.

The Works Progress Administration during the depression days began a project for indexing all the old Savannah papers. It did complete an index to the papers which preceded the Savannah Morning News for the period 1763-1835. The WPA also undertook a more ambitious project to index and abstract the articles on the old Savannah Morning News. When the WPA was discontinued the years for 1851-1869 had been completed and bound, and preliminary work had been done on most of the other years between 1850-1895.

The files containing the WPA slips for the years not completed remained stored in the basement of the library, without any work being done on them and arranging them chronologically. In 1956 a group of volunteers, under the chairmanship of Mrs. Perry Brannen, began subject heading the slips, as the first step in completing the volumes. IN 1961, the first volumes (1850 and 1870) were completed and bound. By the end of 1963 all of the subject heading on slips for all volumes had been done and considerable progress made toward completing the proper noun indexes.