

# NORTH CAROLINA LIBRARIES

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## THE SMITHFIELD PUBLIC LIBRARY

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The Smithfield Public Library has been thirty years in the making. For fifteen years it was more or less static; but the depression of the 1930's gave birth to the Works Program Administration, and it was this agency that showed the public generally what a staff of workers can mean in making books easily accessible to those who want to read. Library-minded citizens in Smithfield grasped the opportunity which WPA offered and built a sentiment for a public library which the ending of government aid could not down, and which has steadily grown until regular annual appropriations from town tax funds together with gifts from Friends of the Library supply a budget this year of \$3,500.

The local library, like many others in North Carolina, is a child of the Smithfield Woman's Club. In January, 1915, four months after the Woman's Club was formed, the junior members of the club took as their project the starting of a public library. Cash donations, gifts of books, money earned through silver teas got together 500 volumes which were housed over a store on a main business street. It was kept open by volunteer librarians one afternoon each week. The town gave its first donation to the library in 1917 when its gift of \$50 provided new book shelves and a few new books as the library moved to a new location in the old Masonic Lodge on Second Street. But such a donation was not established as a regular thing until years afterward; and for a dozen years or more the little library remained a little library serving only a limited patronage.

In 1930, the Woman's Club built a lovely brick club house—which incidentally was the only building of any kind constructed in Smithfield during that depression year—and the library after having been closed for several years reopened in the new building. From that year on, the history of the library has been one of successive moves each time burgeoning forth into more commodious quarters and into extended areas of service.

After moving to the club house, the library through a book mending project lengthened the lives of its few volumes and added to the collection, from time to time, loans from the State Library Commission. It was in 1933 that the first State Library loan was secured. The library was kept open two afternoons a week instead of one.

Then in 1937 WPA paid for the services of a library clerk, and the library moved from the club house located on the edge of town to the more centrally located Legion Hut. That year the library was kept open four hours a day, and WPA book menders repaired 200 worn-out books. The circulation jumped from around 400 books per month to 1220. The town gave \$100; the Woman's Club \$47; and fees from a rental shelf and fines added \$65 more. Friends of the Library, an organization of contributors which had been formed, gave another \$47. These

donations totaled \$259, a previously unheard of cash budget for the library. In the eight years since that time the library has operated with a cash budget each year and, for the current year, the total budget is \$3,500. The town appropriates \$2,200; Friends of the Library are giving \$1,036; and rental fees and fines are providing \$264.

By September, 1939, the library had outgrown its small room in the Legion Hut, and new quarters were secured closer up town in a building erected as a Presbyterian Men's Sunday School classroom. More book shelves were gathered up, and to cover the discrepancies in the various shades of varnish and paint, a



*Children's Corner, Smithfield Public Library*

color scheme of black and red was adopted which has proved to be so satisfactory that it has continued to be the color motif of the enlarged library.

In 1940 the Woman's Club nominated the first board of library trustees, five men and five women, and such a board has guided the progress of the library since that time.

In February of that same year what at first appeared to be a calamity proved to be a blessing in disguise. A wind storm one Sunday afternoon unroofed the Sunday School class building and the rain flooded the library. Quick work on the part of a number of citizens saved the books from ruin, and a tarpaulin provided a temporary rain-proof roof. The Sunday School class was not inclined to spend money on repairs, and the ultimate outcome of the disaster was the purchase of the building by the library trustees. The trustees raised \$500 and bought a lot a block away in the business district and moved the building to it.

An additional \$500 was raised for renovation, and on Aug. 27, 1940, the library opened in its own home.

The annual report for the year which ended June 30, 1945, is indicative of the growth during the past five years. Although WPA aid was discontinued in 1943, two library clerks are employed and the library is open 48 hours each week. It is open every day except Sunday from 1 to 9 P.M. The book collection on June 30 totaled 4,805; the number of borrowers, 2,028; and the circulation, 21,518, for the year preceding.

The library has received one bequest—the private library of the late Mrs. Nellie Brenizer, a Smithfield native who died in Washington, D. C., in 1943. This bequest added 800 volumes to the book collection.

A memorial gift from relatives of the late Sheriff K. L. Rose is a \$300 charging desk.

The library has fostered the increasingly popular idea of sending memorial books to the library instead of sending floral offerings for deceased friends. Since January 1, 1945, one hundred and seven such books have been given to the library.

Out of the library sentiment generated in the Smithfield Library—together with similar work in other Johnston County towns—has come a county-wide library system. In 1941, a county appropriation supplemented by State Aid provided a trained librarian, a bookmobile, and the nucleus of a growing book collection which serves 104 book stations in rural Johnston County. The Smithfield Library operates as a branch of the county system.

The Southeastern Library Association has announced a meeting for 1946. The place and dates will be determined later.