

Progress Club Incorporated As Service Organization, 1921

by Mrs. L B Lollar

A small group of women, talking among themselves as they sewed and visited, decided the town needed a club to promote better reading and civic work. Having faith and willingness to work, they decided to meet at the home of Mrs. EP Goodwin. Mrs. Julia Bell was elected as the temporary chairman on March 23, 1921. Mrs. Bell, a farsighted and progressive woman, full of energy and enthusiasm, went to work immediately. She called on friends to present her ideas. The organizational meeting was called and the group adopted the name "Progress Club". Mrs. TH Robertson was elected president. Mrs. AM Grimsley was elected vice president; Mrs. RF Peters, secretary; Mrs. WW Monroe, treasurer, and Mrs. Julia Bell, parliamentarian.

The group held regular meetings at which they read good papers and discussed civil improvement projects such as clean-up campaigns, beautification and others.

The idea of a library assumed top priority with the club members. The members brought books, ask for donations and bought some. They were first placed in a corner of the Fayette County Courthouse, then in a small entrance of Dr. JA Branyan's office which was located over what is now Berrys Department Store. This was in spring of 1922.

The club elected a ways and means committee and the library was on its way to becoming what it is today – one of the best in Alabama.

Mrs. TA Wilson, Mrs. JA Branyan and Mrs. HK Donaldson composed the committee. Each member was asked to donate a book and a "book shower" was held at the local high school. The first library opened with 68 books. Next the club purchased a secondhand bookcase and a set of encyclopedias (Britannica) from Mrs. Wilson. It wasn't long until the library outgrew the allotted space.

In July 1924, the First Baptist Church donated a one room Sunday School building to the club and the Fayette Presbyterian Church gave permission for it to be placed on their vacant lot, back of their church. In its new building and new location, the library opened with a Silver Tea in November 1925. There were 738 books.

Members of the club had always served as librarian on a voluntary basis. The city paid the light bill and began paying a small salary for a librarian. Until 1925 it had been open only on Saturdays.

Club dues were raised to \$2 and membership reached 38. The library was kept open two days a week by Miss Exie McCluskey and Mrs. TA Wilson. Their salary was \$6 per month. The club managed to keep the library open by having fund-raising activities – rummage sales, cake sales, special dinners and solicitation of donations.

During the 1930s, when the government relief program got underway, the WPA set up a book repair project and during this time most of the books in the library were repaired and re-bound. The club raised \$2,000 to pay for supplies and other expenses of the project.

Miss Evelyn Peyton and Mrs. Maggie Pollard were the next librarians and they were paid \$9 per month. As the library grew, the Progress Club members felt the entire county should have library service. The library was then turned over to the county under the sponsorship of the club.

It wasn't long until the library with the aid of a bookmobile (a converted ambulance) was serving 18 schools and volunteer stations in homes and stores. Mrs. LB Allen (now Mrs. RG Owen) was the librarian.

In 1949, the club had enough money to purchase a very desirable \$3,000 lot for a new building. In 1953 the club had \$15,000 in the building fund as a result of a request made by Miss Elizabeth Robertson, a deceased member. The city and county officials voted to match this \$15,000 by each giving \$7500. This still was not enough to cover the cost of a new building, so the city gave an additional \$5000. Many local clubs, organizations and individuals made generous contributions. Without this financial assistance, as well as moral support of the people in Fayette County, the library would never have become a reality.

In 1943 when it became a County library, each succeeding probate judge, commissioners court, mayors and Councilman, and members of the board of education not only have endorsed the library project, but have helped to support it financially. Many people have helped with the library. On the wall of the entrance hall, you will find two memorial plaques. On one of the plaques you will find the names of many people as well as businesses and organizations who have helped in the building of the library. On the second plaque you will find the memorial names.

The members of the Fayette progress club Incorporated have not only been interested in a library for the town and County of Fayette, but have encouraged more and better reading. They have sponsored Federation projects, brought speakers to Fayette, sent representatives to the national convention of Federated Clubs.

Following is a list of the past presidents, some of whom have served more than one term:

Mrs. TH Robertson, Mrs. WW Monroe, Miss Bessie Robertson, Mrs. JA Branyan, Mrs. HE Berry, Mrs. AM Grimsley, Mrs. LB Lollar, Mrs. BW McNease, Mrs. JM Brown, Mrs. TH Robertson Jr, Mrs. AC Branyon, Mrs. GE Stewart, Mrs. CM Holder, Mrs. WF Price, Mrs. William Humber, Mrs. JM Moore, Mrs. James A Branyon II, Mrs. JB Houston, Mrs. Richard Arthur, Mrs. BF Harkins, Mrs. Eric Grimsley, Mrs. JD Wright, Mrs. Glenn Treadwell, Mrs. Locke Collins and Mrs. CP Vick.

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