

WALTERBORO LIBRARY

By Beulah Glover 7-26-47

Since the year 1820 the Walterboro Library has contributed to the literary and recreational needs of Colleton County as well as spreading its services to reach those in other states who desire research material to be found on its shelves.

Incorporated in the year 1821 in answer to a petition signed by men prominent in the life of the town, William Singelton, William G. Pinckney and Francis B. Fishburne, it has moved, with but few interruptions through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

While its establishment was due to the activities of the men, it was through the faithfulness of the women that its doors were opened at the appointed hours. During one of its inactive periods in 1868, Miss Claudia Stuart, daughter of Professor Benjamin Stuart, principal of the school, came to its rescue, reopened its doors and helped to refill its shelves. For a long time the library carried her name and books bore her imprint. When she left Walterboro, going to Washington where she established an exclusive school, Miss Sallie Henderson took her place, giving her services voluntarily and guiding the reading habits of the youth of that day. Miss Bertha Klein followed her example and served voluntarily as librarian.

In 1920, a century after its founding, the Walterboro Book club decided to open its doors, which had again closed, and take active charge of its affairs. They secured the services of Miss Millie Fraser, as paid librarian, contributed books to its shelves and, annually since, have given books.

Five years later City Council became interested in the library and since that time has made an annual appropriation for the librarian's salary and for books. The county followed with a matching appropriation, since the library serves the county as well as the town and is used freely by the school children for research work and parallel reading.

The current annual report shows a circulation of more than five thousand books and a membership of over two thousand, with one hundred new readers gained in the year. There are 6,207 volumes on the shelves. There were 281 research calls during the year. The library has built up a most useful clipping file and added more than two hundred clippings this year.

There are no membership dues but a small charge is made for new books and fines are imposed for keeping out books beyond the time limit. Such items brought in \$139.45 within this period which is used for incidental expenses.

For some years the library has been enjoying the occupancy of the building in which it was first established. Formerly it was on a corner now occupied by St. Jude's Episcopal church. In the year 1845 R. B. Bedon gave a valuable strip of land to the town on condition that the library be moved thereon and the surrounding lot be used for a park. In 1889 his son, R. S. Bedon, representing the family, gave permission for the erection of a Y. M. C. A. building on the opposite corner of the same plot of ground. Today the library is on the west end and the original Y. M. C. A. building, now the Red Cross building, on the east end.

When Walterboro was incorporated in 1826 its boundaries were defined as being three-quarters of a mile in every direction from the Walterboro Library.

The date of its construction is not known. In the year 1796 the board of commissioners obtained leave to build a parish house for the use of "said board" and one conjecture is that this building ~~may~~^{may} have been the parish house. If this theory can be proven it fixes the date of this small building as of a century and a half ago.

The mark of Andrea Palladio can be seen in the windows and door of this small building, as in countless towns in the United States. Over the door and windows are the fan shaped designs which initial^s the building as Georgian. "Windows are the smiles of a house" says Emily Post and the small half-moon windows smile a welcome to all who enter.

One other thing marks the library as unique and that is, its memorial shelf. Begun a few years ago, it now contains 48 volumes, each dedicated to someone who ~~has~~^{||} lived, and ~~was~~^{then} passed on but many will read the inscriptions and know that they too passed this way and are not forgotten by those left behind.