

# THE PAMPHLETEER

The Richard B. Harrison Library

A Community Asset

BY

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## The Richard B. Harrison Library – A Community Asset

**T**HE twenty fifth anniversary of the Richard B. Harrison Library has been celebrated. I had hoped to be present at that time to offer my testimonial in appreciation for the personal services rendered me by the staff through the years.

Although the celebration is over, the facts about what I would have said still remain, and ought to be expressed to the general public. I am therefore taking the liberty to do just that, even though I know that these workers would prefer that I remain silent at this time.

In the *Lady Clara Vere de Vere*, Tennyson wrote these lines:

“Howe’er it be, it seems to me  
’Tis only noble to be good;  
Kind hearts are more than coronets,  
And simple faith than Norman  
blood.”

There is a French maxim by La Rochfoucauld which says that the only way to compel men to say good things about you is to do good. The wise man of Biblical History declared, there is a time for everything.

This may well be the time for this community to take inventory of its assets, and balance the sheet on the level of educational facilities.

A glance through the brochure pub-

lished in 1955 celebrating the 20th anniversary of the library and entitled, “TWENTY YEARS,” gives a comprehensive summary of its history and services from 1935 to 1955. It is recommended that every citizen in this community visit the library and read this story, in order that he or she may be well informed about what has been provided for the education and culture of the community as a whole. Time and space will not allow a full review of the data contained in this brochure. There is, however, one interesting unrecorded fact concerning the establishment of the library which ought to be mentioned just here.

Prior to the meeting at Christ Church referred to in the brochure of 1955, there was a young woman employed by a white family in the city who became interested in reading, and was instrumental in stirring up interest in the community that led to the action taken at Christ Church.

There are possibly only three persons at present who have any recollection of this fact, but neither one remembers the name of the party to whom reference is made. Miss Lena Hunter and Miss Mary Phillips, veterans in public school work and civic relations, remember that there was such a person who was fond of reading and who was so

employed. They are of the opinion that this was one and the same person mentioned. *This reporter has definite knowledge of the fact but cannot recall the name. Such is the tragedy of not recording important historical data.*

Another item worthy of note is this: Some day a little six-year-old may say: "Ma, why do they call the library the Harrison Library; does he own the library?"

If you don't know the answer you will be brave and honest and tell him so. If you do know, this is what you will tell him:

"A long time ago, before we had a library, there was a man by the name of Richard B. Harrison. He was a very talented man, well educated and a great lover of books, poetry and great literature. He went about the country reading poems in schools and colleges, whenever they would receive him. He was a really fine artist, but seldom appreciated by many, because they were not learned in his profession. Like many others with cultivated minds and souls, he suffered much for lack of appreciation of his art.

He was once almost a vagabond, roaming from place to place seeking an opportunity to display his talent. He finally found a place at Greensboro, North Carolina, and taught speech at the A&T College. It was there that the American Theatre found him to be the perfect type for the leading role in "Green Pastures."

It is said that he was a great humanitarian and loved children; that he loaned money to his fellow players

when they were in financial trouble. That is why, when they came to the point of naming the library, they said: "Let's name it the Richard B. Harrison Library, in honor of the man who so well deserves to be honored."

One more word with regard to the early history. The work began in the Delany Building on Hargett Street, on the ground floor, with Mrs. Mollie H. Lee in charge, assisted by the then Miss Annie Ellington during the second year of service.

The quality of service has not changed with the passing years. Only in degree and volume can this be noticed. That is to say, quality of service has been the secret of the success achieved.

Let us take a look at the present site of the home office, the physical aspect, the internal workings and the personnel.

The library moved from the rented Delany Building on Hargett Street into its own \$30,000 Building at 214 South Blount Street in July, 1948. The two-story building (frame) stands on a lot fronting Blount Street.

As you enter the main room on the ground floor you are greeted on your left and directly in front of you by shelves of fiction, Biology, Philosophy, Reference Works and Records; to the right by the Children and Young Adult Collections of History, Biology, Fine Arts, Science, Non Fiction, Negro, Juvenile and Reference Works.

On the second floor, the north room contains sections of Fine Arts, Literature, Education, American History, Magazines and Periodicals. The south

room is filled with rare collections of Negro Fiction, Biology and Reference, perhaps the most select special in the state. Numerous other volumes and references on History occupy shelves on the west end of the hall. The librarian's office is also located at the head of the stairs, south.

From this description you get a picture of a library not the largest, finest and most elaborate, but one that is clean, attractive, conveniently located and arranged to serve the reading public. From this description also one may get some idea of the several local branches in the public schools and at Apex, North Carolina. They all follow the same general pattern, though in a way to fit the local situation.

It is well to consider, by comparison, the progress made since the publication in 1955. In number of services as of 1955, the list ran as follows:

	1955	1960
For Everybody	20	20 plus
Adults	5	3
Young Adults	3	3
Children	3	5
Bookmobile	1	1
Branch Libraries Apex	Apex	Apex
Washington Terrace	Washington Terrace	Washington Terrace
Chavis Heights	Chavis Heights	Chavis Heights
Special Service to Handicapped Readers	Special Services to Handicapped Readers	Special Services to Handicapped Readers
Volumes in Library	24,288	36,239
Registration	15,476	
Circulation	70,638	82,051
Appropriations:		
City	\$13,000.00	\$20,500.00
County and Apex	18,756.21	24,134.33
State of N. C.	2,187.13	3,433.33
Receipts:		
All Sources	37,518.12	50,313.00
Expenditures	35,264.60	48,872.42
Staff Members	9	11

While the services as of this date remain practically the same, with the exception that some services have been emphasized and expanded, the financial

statement shows an increase of more than \$5000.00, which suggests an increase in the value of all services in direct ratio to this increase.

But the most valuable of all, in terms of the interest, is the increase interest of the reading public and the devotion of the staff to the total function of the library.

I have referred somewhat briefly to the history of the library, its original setting and its gradual growth from the beginning up to and including the year 1955. What I have said thus far has to do with the physical and numerical growth of the institution, without the element of human interests, which we ought to consider as vastly important in the equation of values.

All the things I have hitherto mentioned did not just happen. No miracle was performed to bring them about. The human element played first fiddle in this symphony of progress. Without wise planning organization and conscientious effort from the very beginning, this institution could not have maintained its high rating among the public libraries of the country.

In selecting and securing the services of the present librarian, the organizers could not have done a better job. Indeed, Mrs. Lee herself became at once, in part, at least, organizer, promoter and chief officer in the institution.

For the benefit of those who do not know her, who she was, who she is and her true worth, this is the story:

Incidentally, and by that token all the more interesting, she is the wife of Dr. James S. Lee, distinguished Biologist,

of North Carolina College, of Durham. This, of course, has nothing to do with her rating in her own right.

Born in Columbus, Ohio, she was brought up in that western environment as Mollie Houston. After her formal education there she came east, entered Howard University and graduated with the degree of A.B. She received the degree of B.L.S. from Columbia University. She was librarian at Shaw University from 1930-1935. She was Supervisor of Raleigh Negro Public School Libraries from 1942-1947; Supervisor of North Carolina Negro Public Libraries, 1946-1953; teacher of Library Sciences, Summer 1938, Atlanta University Library School; Summer 1939, North Carolina College Library School; Summer, 1941, Shaw University. She was organizer and first president of North Carolina Negro Library Association, 1934. She is honorary member of the Association of N. C. High School Library Clubs; member of A. L. A. Council, elected at large, 1950-1954; elected "Raleigh Woman of the Year" for outstanding services in the field of Adult Education, 1954; cited in Wilson Library bulletin as one of six most distinguished Negro Librarians in the country, 1955. She is the author of "Securing the Branch Library" (Opportunity Magazine), "Development of Negro Libraries in North Carolina (Libraries in North Carolina)", "North Carolina Negro Library Association, 1934-54 (Library Service Review); Book reviews: Library Journal, Phylon, Newspapers, etc. She was the first Negro to receive a scholarship from Columbia University School of Library Service; She was supervisor of the Delta National Libra-

ry project in Franklin County, North Carolina, and was instrumental in establishing the Delta Public Library in Louisburg, North Carolina. She has been Mid-Atlantic Teen-Age Regional Director of Jack and Jill of America, Incorporated. She was the North Carolina delegate to the 1961 White House Conference on "Aging." Finally, she has been added to the roster of Who's Who of American Women, and is the mother of a fine son in college at the University of Indiana. Her hobby is cooking and painting.

I think the people of this community should know a few things about Mrs. Lee's first assistant, Mrs. Annie Ellington Robinson. To me and others who have known her through the years she has been recognized as "Miss Annie." This familiar name she acquired in the employ of C. E. Lightner, deceased undertaker who built his monument on Hargett Street here in Raleigh as undertaker, builder and business man.

This young woman deserve great credit for her loyalty, courage and determination. Standing firmly by her employer in the trying moments of his building career, she continued her education at Shaw University, in the meantime graduating in the class of '37 with a college degree of A.B. in Elementary Education. Her High School work was done at the Washington High School, this city, the work being completed in 1933. In 1938 Hampton Institute conferred upon her the degree of B.S.L.S. She has been closely associated with Mrs. Lee since she first entered the service in 1936. At the present time she is in charge of the Bookmobile Service. and is supervisor of the Apex Branch.

Mrs. Robinson is a living example of what can be accomplished by loyalty, ambition and perseverance. Young people of today will do well to know her and follow her example.

Miss Maude Young is the daughter, I should say the favorite daughter, of the late Allen Young, of Wake Forest, North Carolina. Her background is exceptional in that she is heir to a double environment of education and culture, that of the A and I Institute founded and managed by her father and the renowned Wake Forest College, both institutions being within stone's throw of each other.

Miss Young comes from a family of talented men and women who have made a success in the field of education and art. Two brothers are noted musicians. Other members of the family are engaged in education.

When I asked her to give me a few notes about herself, things about which I did not have personal knowledge, this is what she wrote. It is so unique in form and spirit that I quote it verbatim:

**"RAMBLING ABOUT RBH AND ME"**

By MAUDE E. YOUNG

"I was born in Wake Forest, Wake County, where I have lived all of my life. Have never attended a public school, having attended a private elementary school at home, then to Barber-Scotia College at Concord, N. C. and then doing some work at Shaw University.

"It was by sheer accident that I came to work at the library. In 1940, the supervisor of WPA Library project informed me that

Mrs. Lee, Librarian of Richard B. Harrison Public Library, would like a library helper, and I was chosen to fill this place. Since that time when I began work here, I have considered it to be the most wonderful opportunity ever to come to me. I had no formal training nor preparation for library work other than a brief one-week workshop sponsored by the WPA program.

"A year later, at the cessation of the WPA project, I was selected by the librarian to remain at the library as a librarian assistant. Under the capable training of Mrs. Lee I soon found myself learning the work satisfactorily.

"My work has included many duties, including circulation, records pertaining to the library, secretary to the librarian, etc. It has meant meeting many people, and I enjoy that. One of my most interesting jobs has been working with the patients at Saint Agnes Hospital. For years, it has been my pleasure to go to the hospital on Tuesday of each week and distribute carefully selected reading material to those patients who desired it. It has been gratifying to see the joy and appreciation these sick people have shown for this bedside library service.

"When not on the job, one of my main interests is working with youth in various ways, such as directing social activities, in church school and progress. Somehow, their response gives me a lift. I am also an ardent sports fan. Basketball is my favorite sport, with tennis a close second."

Mrs. Beatrice Hamlin, wife of Valentine C. Hamlin, was born here in Raleigh, in September, 1921. She received her elementary school training at

St. Augustine's, Saint Monica and the Raleigh Public School. She finished Saint Augustine's Prep College in 1938 and Shaw University in 1942. She has done further study at Columbia University and North Carolina College of Durham.

Before joining the library staff in 1952, she taught in Gates County and at the Crosby-Garfield School here in Raleigh.

She is a member of Saint Ambrose Church, and is the mother of two little book worms, a boy and a girl. Her hobby is "work."

While there have been other workers on the changing staff, which, by the way, constitutes one of the headaches involved in the conduct of any well organized institution, who have rendered splendid service in connection with the library program, these are the four members who, by virtue of their train-

ing and devotion have given the library standing among all patrons and lovers of books.

If I should make comment on the intrinsic value of these personalities as it relates to the sum total of library assets I would call attention first, to their preparation and fitness for the job undertaken, their loyalty and faithfulness to the cause at hand. I would speak of the relations within the staff and their relations with the public, the quiet manner with which they go about their work, with no bickering or unpleasantness, the eagerness to please every one who seeks service, the conduct of the little children and a number of little courtesies that make the whole setting complete. To say more in this connection would be an anticlimax.

Sum up these physical and moral aspects of library assets, and I think we will find ourselves on the right side of the ledger.