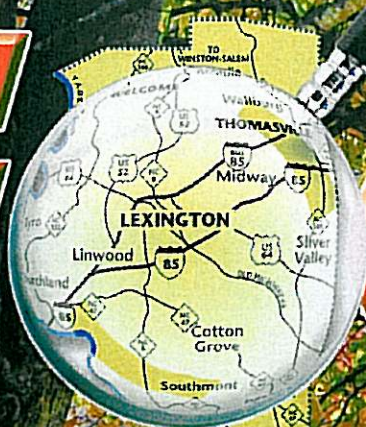


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Davidson County

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The History of
North Carolina's
First Integrated

Library

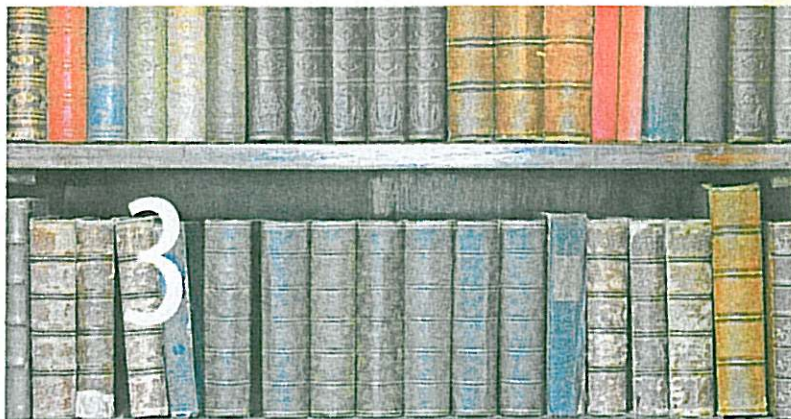
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for Full Sun

Pumpkin Recipes

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for Halloween



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FOCUS

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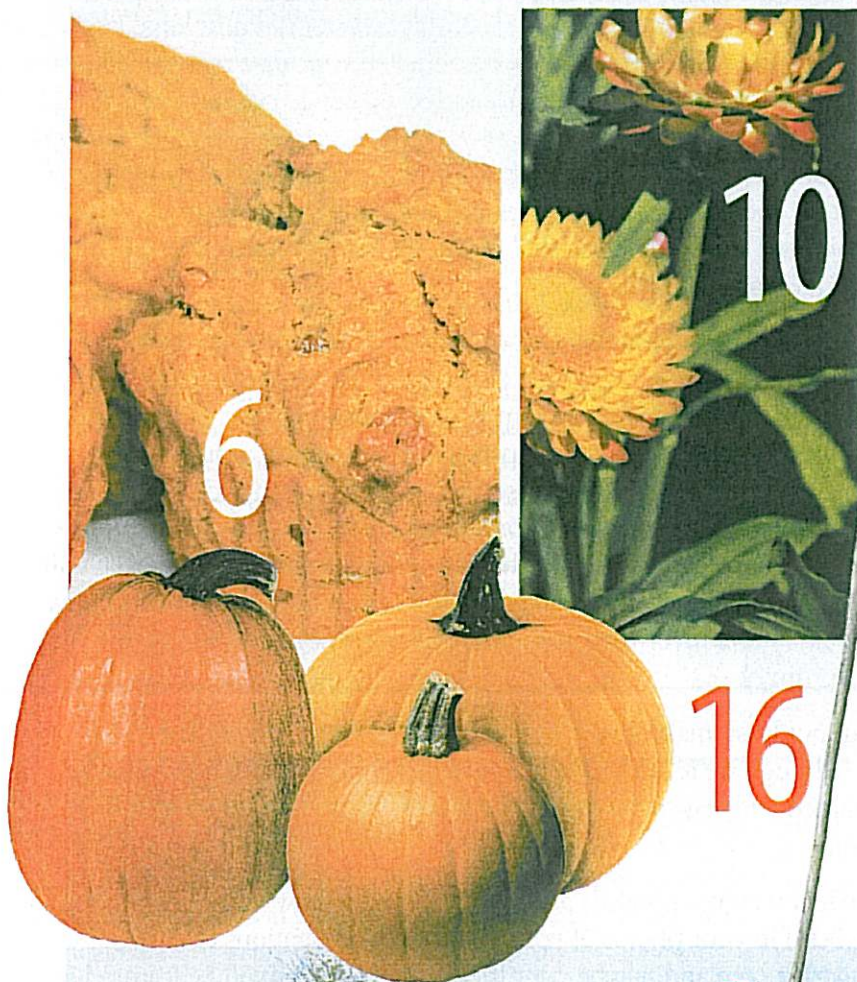
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North Carolina's First Integrated Countywide

Library

by Rev. Ray N. Howell III

The Davidson County Public

Library was not only the first countywide public library in North Carolina, but was also the first county library in the South to extend services to all people regardless of race.

Several southern librarians traveled to Massachusetts in 1921 to attend the annual meeting of the American Library Association. An outing to Salem, a city of 43,000, revealed that their two public libraries contained over 90,000 books. The librarians were overwhelmed. The Salem libraries contained more books than the municipal libraries in Asheville, Charlotte, Winston-Salem, Greensboro, Durham, Raleigh, Goldsboro, and Wilmington combined!

The need for library services in the south was great. Seventy-one percent of the southern population did not have access to library services in 1928. North Carolina did not have a single county library.

The National Federation of Woman's Clubs recognized this need and adopted the free public library movement as one of its major projects in the early 1920s. The Lexington Woman's Club decided to take this project to heart.

The women of Lexington went to work one busy day in 1923. They served lunch to the Rotary Club, conducted a white sale in the afternoon and sponsored a community oyster supper that evening. Their all day marathon netted a total of \$90! They had just raised the first funds for a library in the town of Lexington.

A year later the women had raised around \$240 and acquired several hundred books. It was time for action!

They rented a room in Lexington's March Hotel, hired a librarian and opened the library in December of 1924. The



library was not free—a \$2 annual subscription was charged—but the first public library in Lexington was a reality.

The subscription library was short-lived.

But the determined women would not give up on their dream. They united with the Thomasville Woman's Club and started a countywide campaign for a free county public library. The women solicited support from private citizens, churches, civic groups and local governing bodies.

In May of 1928 the Davidson County Commissioners appropriated \$5,000 for the "establishment and maintenance of free public library service." The city of Lexington approved \$1,200 and the city of Thomasville, \$800. On August 6, 1928, the commissioners appointed a non-partisan library board whose first task was to hire a librarian.

The board hired Miss Lillian Moore who immediately went to work securing books and preparing for the library's opening. The Lexington Woman's Club donated all of the books from the subscription library and the state library commission loaned books to get the library started. Businesses, schools and private

continued on page 4

citizens donated books and supplies to hasten the opening of the long anticipated county library.

The used books were washed with soap and water and, if necessary, the book was taken from its cover, overlapped and sewed. Every book, old and new, was given a coat of white shellac to preserve the cover.

On October 23, 1928, the Davidson County Public Library officially opened its doors on Second Avenue in Lexington. There were 700 books, two tables and eight chairs. Seventy-one readers registered on the first day and checked out 71 books. The next day the Thomasville branch opened in the Thomasville High School with 550 books.

When the library opened, it was North Carolina's first public library opened as a county library. Some of the municipal libraries later expanded their services to become countywide, but the Davidson County library was the first to be established from the beginning as a county library.

The library had 1,250 books to serve a population of 40,000. But 10% of the county did not have access to the library. It was an unwritten law, but one that everyone understood, the state's first county library was there to serve the white citizens of Davidson County. Approximately 4,000 black Davidson County citizens could not check out a book.

The library proved to be to be a great success. During the first eight months of operation, there was an average of 13 readers for each volume—a number that led the state. Bookmobile service started in early 1929. At the end of the first year of operation, there were nearly 3,000 registered readers and a circulation of 38,000.

It was evident that more funds were needed to sustain the new library. \$1,500 was spent for books the first year, but it was hardly enough. The Lexington Woman's Club returned to fund raising by hosting a Valentine's Party in 1929. Tables cost two dollars. Bridge and Rook were offered in the afternoon and there was entertainment for the evening.

In March of 1929, the Julius Rosenwald Foundation approached the Davidson County Library with a proposal. The foundation would provide up to \$20,000 for library service over a five year period—if, certain conditions were met.

Julius Rosenwald, the son of a German Jewish immigrant, was an American success story. A high school dropout, he had his own successful clothing business at the age of 22.

In 1897, Richard Sears approached Rosenwald about investing in his new mail-order business known as the Sears, Roebuck and Company. By 1909, Julius Rosenwald had become the president of Sears and Roebuck. When he retired in 1924, he had amassed a personal fortune.

Julius Rosenwald was deeply moved by Booker T. Washington's book, *Up from Slavery*. He met the great educator in 1911 and became a trustee of Washington's Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Mr. Rosenwald soon shared Dr. Washington's passion for building black schools in the rural south.

The Julius Rosenwald Fund was incorporated in 1917. The primary focus became the construction of black school buildings. Almost \$4 million was spent during the first ten years. Rosenwald schools became a fixture across the south. North Carolina was the leading state with 813 Rosenwald school buildings including the Dunbar School in Lexington.

The focus of the Rosenwald Foundation changed in 1928. Edward Embree, who directed the Rockefeller Foundation, was hired by Julius Rosenwald to manage the Rosenwald Fund. Embree wanted to tackle the root problems underlying black inequality in the South. The focus of the foundation was enlarged to include fellowships for deserving young people, help with black hospitals and health agencies and the development of county library services in southern states.

Eleven counties in seven states were selected for pilot library programs. Representatives from the Rosenwald Fund met with the Davidson County Library Board and selected citizens from Lexington and Thomasville in March of 1929.

Kearney's Drive In
Breakfast All Day

WEEKLY SPECIALS

Hamburgers - Sandwiches

Monday - Friday
 7:00 am - 7:45 pm
Saturday
 9:00 am - 7:00 pm

505 Southbound St.
 (Across from John Waynes BBQ)

Taste All You've Been Missing

FOCUS FAVORITE HOT DOG
2007 2008

FOCUS *on history*

The Rosenwald representatives explained the financial commitment. \$5,000 would be available the first year if the county could raise a matching \$3,000, provide service to the rural areas of the county via the bookmobile and open two branches to serve the black population.

The good people of Davidson County not only agreed to the terms, but were enthusiastic in their acceptance. Mr. W. O. Burgin of Lexington stated, "I consider Mr. Rosenwald a high-minded philanthropist, and I know of no other way in which the badly needed funds for the development of the library might be secured." No one was more excited than the members of the Woman's Clubs, who helped organize the effort to raise the \$3,000 in matching funds.

At the time of the Rosenwald offer, there was not a single southern county that offered library service to its rural black population. When Davidson County agreed to the terms of the offer, it not only became the first county to receive Rosenwald funds, but Davidson County became the first county in the South to extend library services to all of its citizens, regardless of race.

Two "colored" branches of the Davidson County Library were opened in late summer, 1929. The Lexington branch was in the Dunbar School and the Thomasville branch was freestanding. Circulation numbers jumped dramatically.

Almost 25% of the total circulation came from the two "colored" branches—a total of 4,007 in November of 1929. With a black population of around 4,000, that was one book for each black citizen compared to one book per 12½ white citizens.

The Davidson County Library received Rosenwald Funds for two years, but then the Depression prevented the securing of local matching funds. The library was in danger of closing in the summer of 1932, but the Woman's Clubs came to rescue again. Aided by the surplus from the Rosenwald funds, the library managed to stay open.

Even though the library was open, services were cut. Black citizens were the first to suffer. By 1931, the total circulation to Davidson County black citizens was 40,822—ten times the black population! But when the Rosenwald Funds were withdrawn in 1932, black circulation fell to 16,627 and by 1934 it was down to 7,343.

By October of 1933 the county's financial situation had improved and Rosenwald funds were restored for two more years. The Rosenwald Fund provided a total of \$17,333 to the Davidson County Public Library. During the Rosenwald years the number of volumes increased from 1,250 to 9,250. Circulation grew from 3,682 to 22,482 and the number of readers increased from 1,110 to 7,211.

In 1938, Miss Marjorie Beal, director of the North Carolina Library Commission stated: "The Davidson County Library is without question the most outstanding library in North Carolina, and I might add, in the entire southeast regarding bookmobile service, book centers, etc."

The success of North Carolina's first countywide library would not have been possible without the aid of the Rosenwald Fund and open minded citizens who were willing to provide library service to all the citizens of Davidson County. They were the first in the South to do so!



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Davidson County Library Board

1928

John R. Myers, Chair

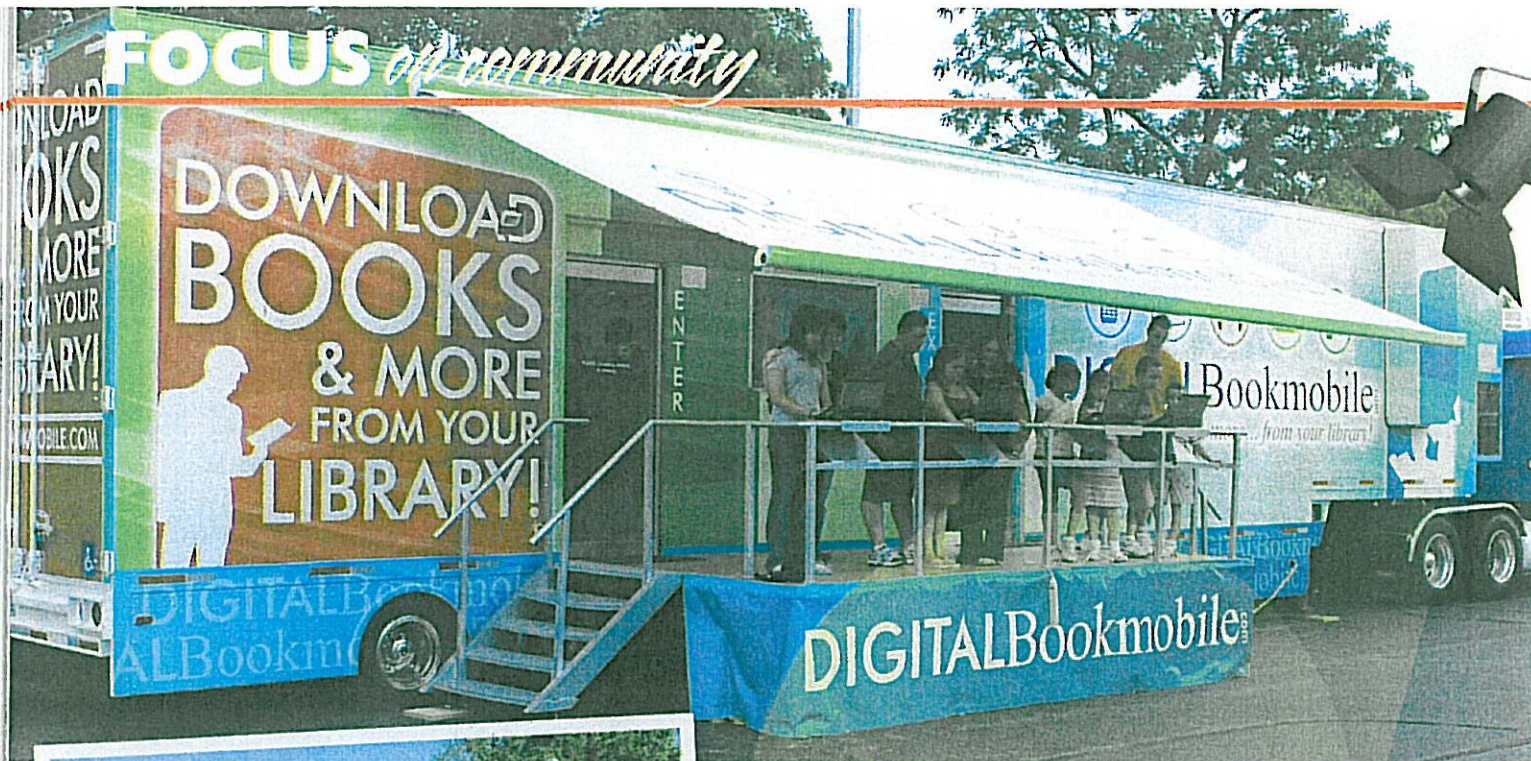
Mrs. C. F. Finch

Mrs. J. F. Spruill

A.S. Johnson

T. H. Livengood

J. R. Raper



**Davidson County
Public Library To Host**

Digital Bookmobile

NATIONAL TOUR EVENT



The digital age has truly blossomed over the last decade. There used to be nothing like opening up a book and catching the first scent of the crisp untouched pages. Or maybe, you checked out a library book because the pages looked worn like many others before you enjoyed the book. Now our days are limited and our society is stressed. We don't have the time we used to anymore to enjoy some of these simple things. The digital age has helped our generation adapt to faster paced lifestyles with the opportunity to still enjoy our simple pleasures. The Davidson County Public Library is raising awareness for a one-day event to show residents of Davidson County how they can be a part of reading in the digital age.

The Davidson County Public Library, a founding member of the NC Digital Library, will host the Digital Bookmobile, an immersive download experience inside a 74-foot, high-tech tractor-trailer, on Tuesday, November 3rd, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., at the Clock Tower parking lot across from the Big Chair in Thomasville. Readers of all ages are invited to engage in digital downloading through interactive demonstrations and experience NC Digital Library's audiobook, eBook, music, and video download service at this free event.

The Digital Bookmobile is housed inside an 18-wheel tractor-trailer. This 74-foot community outreach vehicle is a high-tech update of the traditional bookmobile that has served communities

for decades. The vehicle is equipped with broadband Internet-connected PCs, high definition monitors, premium sound systems, and a variety of portable media players, all of which help visitors explore Davidson County Public Library's download service. Interactive learning stations give visitors an opportunity to search the library's digital media collection, use supported mobile devices, and sample eBooks, audiobooks, music, and video.

Patrons can take advantage of the download service 24/7 when they visit the library's website. From there, they can browse the growing collection of best-selling, new release, and classic titles, and check out a digital title with a valid library card. Once downloaded, digital titles can be enjoyed on a



computer or transferred to supported mobile devices. Many audio titles can also be burned to audio CD. At the end of the seven-day lending period, titles will automatically expire and are returned to the digital collection. There are never late fees or damaged items.

The Digital Bookmobile is a service of Davidson County Public Library and the NC Digital Library and is operated by OverDrive, Inc. To check out and download digital books and more, visit www.ncdigital.lib.overdrive.com.

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