



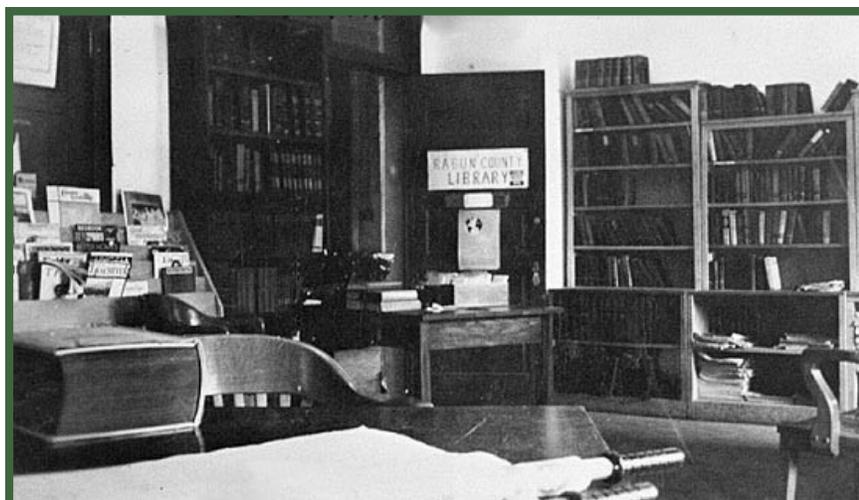
December 2019

Volume 13/No. 4

# The Vintage Rabun Quarterly

## THE ORIGINS OF RABUN'S LIBRARY WOMEN, THE "JUDGE", PANEL TRUCKS, THE WPA

- Please visit our museum and research library on Mondays and Fridays from 10:00 until 2:00.
- Group tours by appointment



Interior of the Rabun County Library located in the Grand Jury room of the Rabun County Courthouse - Photo, 1939

On February 11, 1916, *The Clayton Tribune* contained a news article that reviewed the formal opening of the public library in Clayton. More than one hundred people attended the reception, and more than fifty books were let out. That library, which was located on Main Street where Reeves Furniture Store is currently located, was operated by the Clayton Woman's Club until 1920.

The Rabun County Library opened in April 1937. The library came to be largely because of the efforts of Frank Smith, who was called "judge" since his days as Rabun County Ordinary. Smith was the brother of the famous novelist, Lillian Smith, who made her home in Rabun County. In a Foxfire interview, Judge Smith said that it was hard times in Rabun County, and people couldn't get to any books except perhaps the Bible or the Sears Roebuck catalog or a bulletin that came out from the Department of Agriculture.

During the years of the Great Depression, the WPA furnished personnel if the counties would furnish books and housing. Judge Smith found a tiny four by six foot room in the county courthouse to house the library. Judge Smith donated about one hundred of his personal books, and citizens also contributed books. The members of the Clayton Woman's Club, whose library had become inactive, gave their books, and they also wrote to authors and requested books for the library. The library opened with about 300 books. In the beginning, there were few books, short hours, and only one worker. Later that year, because of increasing circulation, a larger space was remodeled in the grand jury room in the courthouse. The first full-time librarian was hired in 1938.

In July of 1938, a Ford panel truck was purchased to carry books out into the county. It was like a vegetable truck with sides that lifted up to reveal the books. The bookmobile driver was



The Rabun County Library Bookmobile - circa 1950

also paid with WPA funding. The bookstock and circulation continued to increase, and the overwhelming majority of the circulation was through the bookmobile. When the bookmobiles first began, none of the schools had libraries, so it was the ‘school’ library for many elementary schools. For years it continued to supplement the school libraries and to offer classroom collections to individual teachers. In 1942 the total library circulation was 79,352; 64,067 of these books were checked out from the bookmobile. Circulation of library books in Rabun County was reported to be three times the national average. This was more than ten books for every person in the county. One mountain reader said Rabun County people had a reputation for being “the book-readingest folks in or out of the Blue Ridge Mountains.”

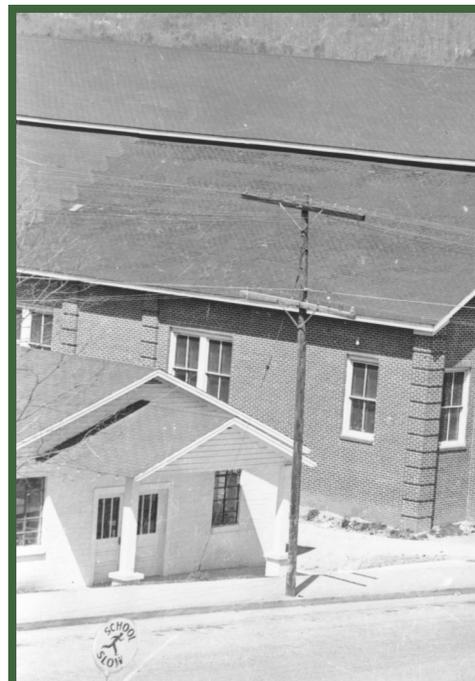
When the WPA went out of existence in the early 1940s, the library was threatened and Judge Smith acted again to save it. He waged an active campaign to obtain state aid for the library, which was accomplished in 1944.

The library and its 16,000 books were moved from the small quarters in the courthouse to a cement block building constructed on the grounds of Rabun County High School in 1949.

It remained in that building until moving to the current location in 1980. Throughout these changes, the bookmobile continued to bring the library’s services to isolated areas. It also visited schools, day care facilities, Headstart programs, nursing homes, kindergartens, children home from school for the summer, and the elderly and homebound who would have spent lonely days without books.

Dorothy Beck operated the bookmobile for 47 years and wore out at least four trucks in her journeys around Rabun. Her route increased to include Stephens, Habersham, and White counties when the library joined the Northeast Georgia Library System in 1956. Some days she traveled as much as 300 miles. When funds were not allocated to operate the bookmobile, it had to be parked until funds came available again.

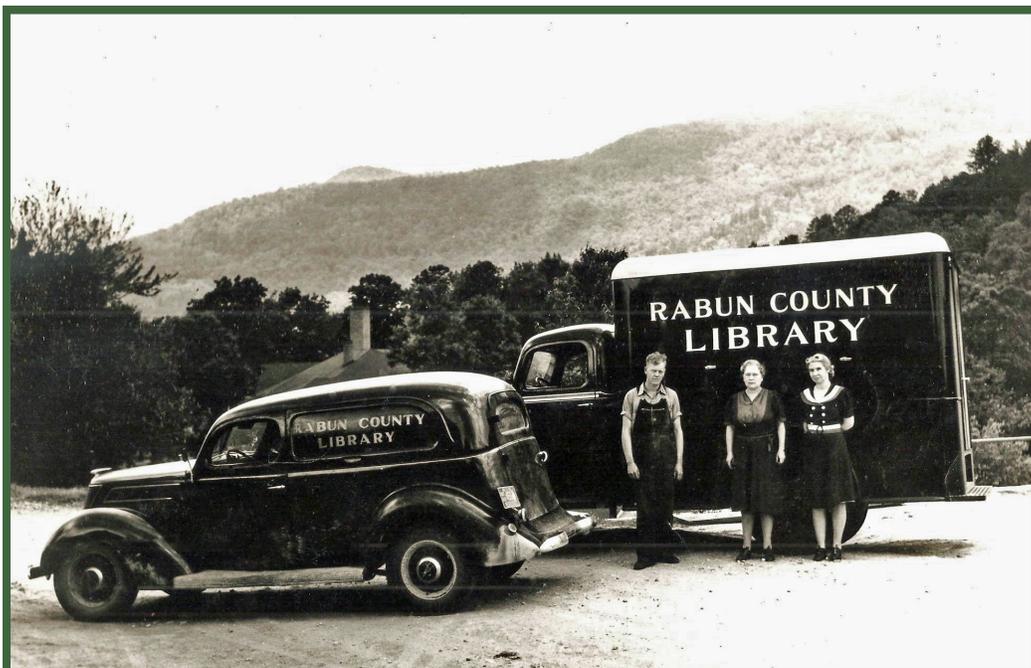
Dorothy Beck told a story about a woman on her route who had four children and no television or telephone. The bookmobile visited her home once a month, and she often met the bookmobile with a wheelbarrow to carry the books her family had read and to check out another



The Rabun County Library was moved to the Rabun County High School building in 1980. The gym was renovated and the library moved to the County Civic Center. Photo, circa 1980.

month's supply. Former Library Director, Jewel Eller, was quoted as saying, "The bookmobile fostered a habit of reading in a lot of families."

Northeast Georgia Regional Library got a brand new bookmobile in October of 1986. The previous one had over 250,000 miles. Even as late as 1986, more than 30,000 books were circulated from the bookmobile. However, as society became more mobile, the bookmobile's circulation numbers decreased, and it ceased operation around 1990.



Carrol Queen, bookmobile driver; Mrs. Jesse Greenwood, WPA-funded library assistant; and Mrs. Clara McMeekin, full-time trained librarian – Photo, circa 1941



located in a small building next to gymnasium from 1949 until 1960 and now serves as the Rabun County Public Library's modern

Construction of a new library building began in 1979 and opened to the public in 1980 in its current location. In 1981 a group of volunteers formed the Friends of the Library, and it remains active and vital to the library's operation today. Funding for the library is provided by Rabun County. The State of Georgia provides funds for some services and books.

According to their website, today the Rabun County Public Library's modern

facility houses current and classic literature, periodicals, newspapers, audiobooks, CDs, DVDs, and state-of-the-art technology with high speed internet access and wireless service. The children's library features books, computers, programs, and services for children of all ages. The library's collection and services extend beyond the physical building through access to Georgia's GALILEO database and the Overdrive Ebooks Library.

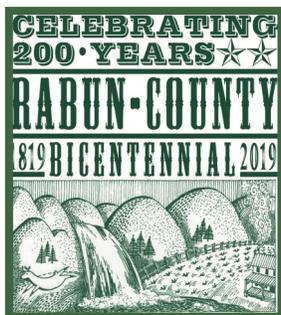
In 2006, through a combination of county and state funding, and some money from library sources, the current library building was expanded by 3,300 square feet into an attractive and functional space that continues to serve the needs of readers.



Rabun County Historical Society  
81 North Church Street  
P.O. Box 921  
Clayton, GA 30525



Phone: 706-782-5292  
[www.rabunhistory.org](http://www.rabunhistory.org)  
Email:  
[rabuncountyhistory@gmail.com](mailto:rabuncountyhistory@gmail.com)



*Rabun County was created by an act of the Georgia General Assembly on December 21, 1819.*

***Mark your calendars!!***

December 7, 2019

The Rabun County Christmas Parade and Birthday Party

This signature event will wrap up the yearlong celebration of Rabun County's Bicentennial. There will be a parade, special events, and party to celebrate 200 years.