



## History of the Patrick County Branch Library

Early librarian, Lady Louise Clark worked as librarian from 1941 until 1972 and a December, 1980 interview with her by Mary Britt, provided information about the early Patrick Library.

In February of 1941, the county supervisors were approached by Commonwealth Attorney, E.P. Burton, notifying them that an anonymous donor wanted to make a contribution of a library and a collection of books. The anonymous donor turned out to be Mr. David Bruce, who at the time, served in the Virginia General Assembly. He later became ambassador to Great Britain, West Germany, and China. (He gave 10 libraries to poorer counties in southside Virginia.)

The supervisors and town council decided on a location and Mrs. Shockley sold the lot to the county for \$1,000. The beginning years were financially lean ones with a budget of only \$2,000 (somewhat like today). So during Children's Book Week, the Woman's Club had the children "tag" people for donations of 25 cents or 50 cents. The "tags" were similar to today's "I Voted", or "I Gave Blood" tags. These donations were used to aid in buying children's books. During the war years of 1940 and 1941 gas was rationed, so the fund raising efforts were concentrated on the streets of Stuart, therefore, making the library more for the town of Stuart in the beginning. It became more of a county library when the bookmobile came into service during 1946. The bookmobile, along with a collection of books, was provided by an appropriation from the State, if the library budget was raised from \$2,000 to \$3,000. The forward thinking school superintendent realized that the one and two room schools throughout the county which had no libraries could use this service. As soon as the bookmobile was put into service, circulation greatly increased. In those days the bookmobile stopped at the schools, stores, community stops and community centers. The bookmobile went out 5 days weekly, but without enough budget to operate both the library and the bookmobile, the library opened at about 3:30 each day. The volunteer help at this time was from the National Youth Administration (a part of the Works Progress Administration.)

Around 1954 the Patrick Library merged with Franklin County Library, which was also an Ambassador David Bruce library. Patrick was considered the "home" library since Franklin County did not have a librarian. The merged library was named alphabetically, Franklin-Patrick. When Franklin County decided to go it alone, around June, 1974, Patrick County along with Martinsville became the Blue Ridge Regional Library system and in 1991, the Library was the next to last tenant to leave the Bruce Building, moving to the current site at 116 West Blue Ridge Street.

In addition to the usual services offered by libraries, the Patrick Branch has a telesensory machine. This machine is available for the visually impaired, especially those who suffer macular degeneration. We were not able to determine the degree of magnification; however, if you have need for this machine, it is truly remarkable.

(Lady Clark commented that one of the changes she had seen in her 31 years of service with the Library is that more men are using the library now than during the early years in Patrick County. She gave reasons for that being: 1 - male librarians, 2 - influx of people into the area who were accustomed to frequenting libraries, and 3 - the demand is much broader now than previously. Another interesting item she talked about was an article in the Richmond News Leader on December 7, 1951. The article indicated that in Patrick County the number of books read were six books per capita. She explained to the interviewer that these numbers were high because of the children's participation. When teachers were questioned about circulation numbers, they reported that every child read every book. There was also a reference made to "Boswell While the Moon Shines"; a bit of humor directed at "moonshiners" reading while they made the brew in Patrick County. Lady Clark did not respond to this article because she regarded it as humorous and that it was to be taken humorously.

During the early years, the Patrick Branch had help from local clubs such as the Garden Club, the Book Club, and the Woman's Club for things such as landscaping the garden and grounds, donating blinds for the windows, carpeting, and driveway improvements. Lady Clark also commented that in reviewing some papers of the Stuart Book Club, she noted that M. R. Taylor was given permission by the Board of Supervisors to clean out the basement of the courthouse to form a reading room for the young men of the community. This was during the 1920's. The Book Club later started a book rental service and then later donated the entire book collection to the Library. This was almost 20 years before the Library was officially begun.

In 1948 Carl Conner drove the bookmobile. He was paid \$4.00 daily and went out into the county three days a week. Today, the bookmobile is driven 4 days a week. On Fridays, the driver is busy with the usual things librarians do - shelving books, catching up on record keeping, finding materials requested by patrons, etc. In the Historical Center next door to the Library, a book is opened showing photos taken in 1946, one of which is of the bookmobile at one of its stops.

Current scheduling for the bookmobile indicates stops to 4 elementary schools, and various other locations, which last from 30 minutes to 2 hours. Stops include Ararat to Claudville to Meadows of Dan to Woolwine to Charity to Patrick Springs, serving over 1000 people a month, with average circulation of approx. 3000, traveling approximately 8,000 miles a year.