

EXTRACTS FROM MRS. HOWLAND'S LETTERS TO OUTSIDE FRIENDS.

The Pines, April 19, 1900.—Yesterday was a memorable day for me, and I trust for this colony. It was the day of the opening of the Fairhope Public Library. For days it had rained most of the time, and it is pouring now as if it had never had a chance before. This being our rainy season, we advertised in the COURIER, as you know, that, should Wednesday be rainy we would defer the opening till today; but the weather was propitious for a few hours, more or less, on both sides of our celebration.

At intervals in the afternoon messengers, mostly children, began to arrive with masses of flowers and "towering, many-storied cakes." Mrs. Sykes and Mrs. Mead assumed all the responsibility of the collation, I doing no more than to set my face like a rock against any elaborateness, further than cake and lemonade; this because of the small size of all the rooms of The Pines, and because I did not like to see the friends put themselves to so much trouble as is always involved in the preparation of ice cream, etc. Having no care about the collation, I finished the simple preparations of the rooms, early in the afternoon, and then passed the intervening time delightfully, lounging in the hammock, reading *The Theosophical Review*, and receiving the little messengers with flowers, etc. Most of them were in the greatest hurry; but Jimmie Gaston lingered a minute to describe a wonderful wild flower that had been found, and which was to be taken North by a visiting relative. Jimmie brought one of the "many-storied cakes."

I say "lounging", and I want to impress you, dear sister, with the importance of not losing the art, as so many persons do who allow themselves to undertake the bearing of more burdens than they can stagger under. Without a few minutes each day for real rest, i. e., for relaxation of that strained, "wound up" feeling of the over-worker, we have no time for meditation: a serious misfortune, as all students of philosophy well know. But I am in danger of digressing!

Sister Sykes came early and we arranged the flowers, she directing, as having the more artistic taste. We were almost smothered in flowers: in roses and honeysuckles especially. "Dr. Clara" (Atkinson, M. D., but, affectionately, she is always "Dr. Clara.") sent masses of the red or coral honey suckle. This arranged in a pitcher of dark blue glass, made an artistic finish to the bay window book-case. There were ten other bouquets, and, beside all these, there were flowers enough to decorate all the other rooms of the house. The Pines was very proud to be able to furnish the only Chinese honey suckles, being a little earlier. Was this because it was planted right under the pines that shade the east veranda? The Pines also furnished tea roses, lillies of the valley and English violets, but so few comparatively, that they were lost to view in the flower-show all around them.

Mr. Bellangee, as master of ceremonies, made an excellent opening address, bespeaking from the librarian an account of the books of the Howland Collection, now forming, with 167 volumes mostly furnished by the colonists, the 1200 numbers of the catalogue. But this before being printed will be augmented by a box of books—how large I know not—from our generous friend, D. D. Chidester of Ohio.

Now the librarian had carefully prepared some notes for the occasion but incontinently lost them just in time for their use! I think what I said contained very little of the notes, but it was as well, probably, on the whole. You know I am no speaker, having a morbid

anxiety to be brief; so that my efforts in this line are something, to use the words of Mr. Howland, "like the Mississippi trying to empty itself through a quill." But I gave a history of Mr. Howland's books: of his first library in New York City, which he sold to raise money for a newspaper venture, the Saturday Press (a complete file of which is in this library); of his collecting books in Europe for the firm of Philes & Co., (of which he was the "& Co."): of the library at Casa Tonti, our beloved home in Hammon, N. J., of our breaking up there, moving library and the Credit Foncier printing press and outfit to Topolobampo, Sinaloa, Mexico, in 1888; of the library at Alberton Hall where we printed the colony organ for five years more; of the failure of the colony and the shipment of the books back to "the States" in 1895. I should have added that the expense of getting the books back from Mexico was borne by another friend of Fairhope, a great lover of good literature, and a very noble man, C. B. Hoffman of Enterprise, Kansas. In shipping the books here, and in congratulating this colony on its acquisition of the Howland Collection, he modestly refrains from saying what is probably very true, that but for that kind act the Fairhope Public Library would not have possessed this collection, nor have been organized at this time.

After the remarks of the librarian there were several very excellent little speeches; notably one from Miss Ingham of Cleveland, Ohio, a visitor and patient of "Dr. Clara," who showed an enviable knowledge of books and the conduct of libraries. She explained the importance of the public library in an economical point of view, and dwelt upon the profession of librarian as acknowledged by the colleges and universities of the present day. "Dr. Clara's" remarks were too much in appreciation of the "present incumbent" to be reported by me. I may say the same of the remarks of Mr. Littlefield who moved votes of thanks for Mr. Fels and for myself. Mr. Knowles, one of the library's best patrons, talked at some length. I would like to record what he said of grubbing stumps, etc., but the editor, might put his blue pencil through it. Mr. Coleman thought that the library should be in a very central place and on the first floor; so that people could run into the reading-room without inconvenience and look at the files of newspapers and other current literature. Mrs. Woods spoke well upon the importance of the public library as an educator, and especially as an auxiliary to the schools. Mr. Stimpson appreciated the work we are doing, and regretted that in his youth he had not had the advantage of access to a good library, as our children here will have.

Several young people were present. They sat at the library table and were much interested in the books of drawings and engravings—so much interested were some of them at times, that they could not stop turning the leaves when there was speaking by their elders. However, they did not do this to any great extent, and did it very quietly, moreover.

This letter is too long to say more, except that the collation was dainty and excellent; that the most perfect harmony and good feeling prevailed, and the occasion was marred only by the absence of some friends who were attending a family party given in honor of relatives who were on the eve of their departure. M. HOWLAND.

Mr. Littlefield has put up a very neat barn for Dr. Mershon. It is on the west end of Nathaniel Mershon's two acres and a half on Fairhope Avenue, near the Willoughby shop. Dr. Mershon expects to build a house soon on the front of the lot.

THE NEW STORE.

Mrs. A. B. Call, proprietor of our new Millinery Store has always on hand the latest styles in millinery shirt waists, skirts, wrappers, underwear and ladies' furnishings.

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History of Fairhope Library to June, 1969

Old-time residents of Fairhope take a measure of pride in the fact that the town of Fairhope had a public library even before the much older city of Mobile established one. Thanks to the public spiritedness of one woman, Mrs. Edward Howland, a library was formally opened to the public in Fairhope on April 18, 1900, only six years after the town was founded.

Mrs. Howland moved to Fairhope in 1899, bringing with her 1,200 books which had been collected by her husband, a Harvard graduate and a journalist who had died in 1890. Even before arriving in Fairhope, Mrs. Howland had expressed her desire to find a home that would be in a location suitable for a library. She wrote, "I want to help form a library in the place I settle, teach some young woman to manage a library, and leave all my books to that library when I die."

Thus it was that the Fairhope Public Library opened its doors in Mrs. Howland's own cottage in 1900. Mrs. Howland herself served as librarian for the collections of 1,700 books--her own volumes plus 500 donated by other citizens.

A Library Association was formed in 1906 to support the library through volunteer help and funds raised from a small membership fee of \$1. With the backing of the association a single-room building was constructed on Fairhope Single Tax Corporation property, and in September, 1908, the books in Mrs. Howland's library were transferred to this new building and given to the Single Tax Corporation. The Library Association assumed the management of the library, while the Single Tax Corporation held title to the building and the books.

Funds for the library were derived from a regular monthly allowance from the Colony Council, dues from members of the association, and donations from friends. The library was open two days a week.

From this modest beginning, the Fairhope Public Library has now grown to a collection of 26,274 volumes. The original one-room has been expanded several times and the library has extended its hours to six days a week. There are now three regular staff members--Mrs. Roland Carr and her assistants, Mrs. Michael Antinarella and Mrs. Naomi Byrd.

From October to June the library provides a weekly story hour for pre-school children, and a weekly book review for adults. In the summer months there is a special vacation reading program for young people. Service has been extended to Thomas Hospital, with a small collection of books kept there for patients. After years of dedicated support from the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation, the library has been transferred to the city of Fairhope, so that city funds can be available for expanded services.

A look at the early records shows that additions to the original library were built in 1919 and 1924. By the time the library celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1925, there were 8,000 volumes in the collection--a large library for a town of less than 1,000 people.

Mrs. Mary H. Lee served as librarian from 1921-1930.

After Mrs. Howland's death in 1921, much of the work involved in keeping the library open fell to Mrs. L. J. N. Comings, who served as president of the Library Association for 35 years, until her resignation in April, 1941. One of her accomplishments was to have a small museum opened in connection with the library in 1929. The museum was a part of the library for many years until lack of space forced its removal.

During the years of the Depression the Fairhope library suffered from lack of funds since the Single Tax Colony was forced to reduce its appropriation; but library service was maintained on a half-time basis. The Library Association and many civic clubs in town sponsored concerts, lectures, card parties, and silver teas to raise money to keep the library open.

Book purchases dropped to almost nothing; but many people donated books to the library, and in the ten years between 1925-1935 the collection was almost doubled.

Mrs. Martha Albers was librarian from 1930-1935.

From 1934 to 1942 federal work projects provided funds to hire workers to carry on an extensive book-binding project. Thousands of books were rebound or repaired so they could be put back into circulation.

As financial conditions began to improve in the late 1930's, some remodeling of the library building was done to provide a workroom for the staff and more shelving space for books. By 1941 the Fairhope library had grown to be the fifth largest library in the state of Alabama--an outstanding achievement for a town of 1,800.

In 1941 Mrs. James Gaston, Sr., accepted the presidency of the Library Association, a position which she held for the majority of the years between 1941 and 1964, until the Library Association ceased to operate the library.

Librarians who served Fairhope from 1935 to 1857 included: Mrs. Bertha Mershon, Miss Mary Bishop, and Miss Anna Braune.

Fairhope's present librarian, Mrs. Roland Carr, came to the library in August, 1957. By that date the library collection numbered approximately 24,000 volumes, with a circulation of 15,700.

(During the 1950's and early 1960's there were several developments which improved the service offered by the library.) In 1958 the Fairhope library began to receive books on indefinite loan from the State Library Service Division, and also signed a contract to borrow books from the American Lending Library. Both services have provided hundreds of new books which the library could not afford to purchase.

(The Friends of the Library, a volunteer work group, was organized) in 1959. Most of its members spent one day a week at the library repairing books, classifying periodicals and books, and doing other things to improve the library. This group was very active for several years.

(Fairhope's famous Noon Book Reviews began in 1960, providing a weekly book review from October through May. Crowds of 75 to 100 people attend each week.)

(The biggest change in many years occurred in 1964 when the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation transferred to the city of Fairhope all of the library book collection and equipment and agreed to lease the building to the city. When the city of Fairhope officially assumed the transfer in April, 1964, the library was put under the management and control of a Board of Trustees composed of five members elected by the city council.) The first members of that board were: Mrs. James E. Gaston, Sr., Dr. C. A. Gaston, Mrs. Celia Brazael, Mrs. Mamie McNulty, and Mr. James Lipscomb.

The city allocated \$1,000 a month for the operation of the library--an increase of approximately \$700 a month over what had previously been available. Immediate improvements during the first year of city financing included an increase in library hours, an increase in book purchases, the air-conditioning and refurbishing of the building, and the purchase of new tables, chairs, shelving and office equipment.

In 1965 for the first time the Fairhope library received an appropriation of \$1,000 from the Baldwin County Library Board, which had recently been established by the County Commission to help improve the services of the five libraries in the county. Each year since then the Fairhope library has received an annual appropriation from the County Board, as well as part-time services of professional library workers hired by the County Board.

The Fairhope Lions Club, the Kiwanis Club, several garden clubs and other civic groups have carried out a number of special projects to aid the library in recent years.

At the present time the library has over 26,000 books in its collection, with an annual circulation of 64,830. This circulation is more than the combined total of all the other libraries in the county and four times what it was ten years ago. The library is rapidly outgrowing its present quarters.

Present members of the Fairhooe Library Board of Trustees are:

Mrs. James E. Gaston, Sr., Mr. J. W. Lipscomb, Mr. Jason Kutak,

Mrs. Douglas Harrell, and Mrs. Claude O'Gwynn.

Marie Howland, founder of Fairhope's library, was born in Lebanon, New Hampshire in 1836 and came to Fairhope in 1899. The town of Fairhope was only six years old when the public library was formally opened April 18, 1900.

The first library was in Marie Howland's own cottage located at that time behind the present library building. The area was then called The Pines - leading us to believe the gracious oaks here now are fairly recent. We don't know the fate of that original structure but we've been told it no longer exists.

The library opened with a collection of 1,700 books. Twelve hundred belonging to Mrs. Howland's late husband, Edward - a Harvard graduate and a journalist who died in 1890. Five hundred books were donated by other citizens and non-local supporters.

The grand opening of the original library was celebrated with lemonade, cakes and flowers, profusions of roses and honeysuckle donated by friends. While volunteers, Mrs. Sykes and Mrs. Mead, assumed responsibility for the collation, Mrs. Howland tidied the books, which we understand were arranged and cataloged at that time according to size. ~~xThe xxxxxx~~ She then passed the afternoon lounging in her hammock reading and lamenting "the importance of not losing the art (of lounging), as so many persons do who allow themselves to undertake the bearing of more burdens than they can stagger under. Without a few minutes each day for rest (i.e. for relaxation of that strained 'wound up' feeling of the over-worker) we have no time for meditation; a serious misfortune, as all students of philosophy know."

The librarian did rally for the official opening ceremonies - at which Mrs. Bellangee officiated. She discovered at the last moment that she'd lost her carefully prepared notes for the occasion. ~~HEHEHEHEHE~~ She managed, nonetheless, to give a history of Mr. Howland's books and properly thank all of those who had so generously contributed.

Other speeches followed stating the benefits of the library to the community and schools. The celebration was reportedly "dainty and excellent...the most perfect harmony and good fellowship prevailed..."

As the success of the library grew and the number of volumes overflowed to the porches of Mrs. Howland's cottage it became apparent that a separate building for the library was necessary. A new one-room structure was built, largely with volunteer labor and materials furnished by Fairhope's community-minded citizens. In September, 1908, this new building was donated to the Single Tax Corporation and opened to the public. This original structure is now the children's room of the present library building.

In those days the library was financially supported by a monthly allowance from the Single Tax Colony Council, dues from members of the library association and donations from friends. It was open two days a week.

It was quite common to hear requests from patrons such as, "My mama wants a good book. She don't want no hist'ry or no killin'." or, "...don't like no fightin' nor no shootin' scraps." It was reported that one big clumsy fellow asked for a book titled "The Hoosier School Kid." "...or if you ain't got that, then I'll take the school teacher," he said.

A donation of \$1000.00 by Mr. Joseph Fels, the wealthy Fels-Naptha Soap manufacturer of Philadelphia, made possible a new and much needed room to the library in 1919. That addition is now the central, entrance room of today's library building. It was most probably the scene of Mrs. Howland's simple funeral service when she died in 1921.

Mrs. Lydia Newcomb Comings succeeded Mrs. Howland as librarian in 1917 and with the assistance of Mary Quarles, held the position until 1921. At that time Mrs. Mary Heath Lee became the first regular paid librarian. The library hours expanded from a few hours a week to an eight hour a day, six day week!

An extensive addition was built on the southside of the library in 1924. A fiction and reading room was joined by a so-called art room - later used as a small museum and at times a W.P.A. workroom. W.P.A. standing for Works Progress Administration.

Around 1933 the government subsidized this work program which was of great benefit to our local library. A group of women utilized all available work space in the library for rebinding and lettering books.

During those depression years the library was heavily dependent upon the good will and generosity of local civic clubs. Concerts, lectures, card parties and silver teas were held to raise money to keep the library open. Even though there was little money for purchasing books, the collection was almost doubled between 1925 to 1935 thanks to donations of books by citizens.

Throughout the years the appearance of the library has been enhanced by local garden clubs and donations from private citizens. The plaster cast of the Pied Piper over the fireplace in the reading room is a good example of such gifts. Also the stained glass Howland Memorial Window in the fiction room. The library's exceptional collection of arts and crafts books, many donated by the Art Association, are a reflection of the community's thriving interest and activity in the arts.

In 1951 the library was renovated, painted, re-roofed and the heating and lighting was updated. Space for one more large, new room was added. The library's services were expanded shortly thereafter (in 1958) due to book loans from the State Library Service and the American Lending Library. The Friends of the Library

was organized in 1959; a volunteer group who actively worked one day a week on library maintenance and improvements. The library's famous book reviews began in 1960. Crowds of 75 to 100 people reportedly attended each week.

The most significant recent event of the library's history occurred when the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation relinquished the Colony Library to the City of Fairhope on May 1, 1964. This was done in order to provide more equitable financing for the library.

At this time the Fairhope Public Library boasts the largest per capita circulation in the country. Reading programs for the children during summer vacation plus pre-school story hours, movies for adults, and special holiday programs keep our present day library thriving with activity. Our present building has expanded to its furthest bounds and brings to mind Mrs. Howland's dilemma in 1908 when the first and original library outgrew the space in her little cottage and overflowed to the porches.

Modern day tastes in reading have changed considerably. Contrary to the days when patrons wanted "no hist'ry and no killin'" the most popular fiction these days are chilling mystery thrillers and historical novels. An exception to the rule, and there are always exceptions, are Herriot's books which would probably have been as appealing then as they are now. Our current staff of three is kept happily busy providing the reading and programming needs of the Fairhope community and, unlike many other libraries in the country, can claim that the public's interest in their library has never waned.

FOR EDUCATION'S SAKE

From its early construction as a one room library through numerous additions and renovations, the purpose of the building at Ten North Summit Street has always been education. The initial bungalow-styled structure was built in 1908, when it became apparent that Marie Howland's personal cottage could no longer suffice as an informal public library, as it had for the previous eight years. The community-minded spirit of Fairhope was evident in the construction of the new library, as it was built largely with volunteer labor and donated materials. In 1919, the original structure was renovated drastically, and the present central entrance hall was added through a donation by Joseph Fels, the wealthy manufacturer of Fels-Naptha Soap. An extensive expansion of the south side of the building was completed in 1924. A fiction and reading area and an "art room" filled this new addition. Again in 1951, another large room was built, and the entire building was renovated.

By 1983, the library was once again bulging with books as before in Marie Howland's cottage of 1908. This time, however, after 75 years at the same location and many additions, the city moved the library to the new civic center complex. The building's tradition of education was to continue as Faulkner State Junior College opened a branch in the former library. In 1985, the Baldwin County branch of the University of South Alabama began sharing the building and offering upper level and graduate courses. By 1988, both USABC and Faulkner had such successful programs that more space was needed by each. Faulkner moved to another location, and USABC renovated the entire complex for its administrative offices and some of its classes. Thus, from a small but early beginning, through numerous additions and renovations, the structure at 10 North Summit Street has experienced many changes, but always its purpose has been education.