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## Looking Back: Woman's Library Club in Kentucky

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# LOOKING BACK

BY REINETTE F. JONES

LIBRARIAN, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS RESEARCH CENTER • UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

## LOOKING BACK: WOMAN'S LIBRARY CLUB IN KENTUCKY

The Woman's Library Club Movement arrived in Kentucky around 1896. It was not a true movement, but rather a period when dissociated groups named Woman's Library Club were established throughout the United States. There was not a national office or state offices. Each club functioned independently. News about activities and programs was printed in local newspapers starting in the late 1800s. Today, the most recognized of these organizations is the Woman's Library Club of Glencoe (Illinois), established in 1874 and still in operation.

In reference to Kentucky, the most noted organization was the Woman's Library Club in Paducah. The organization was a year old when mentioned in the *Paducah Sun* newspaper in 1897. The state of Kentucky was a minor player in the Woman's Library Club Movement. Had it not been for the Paducah newspaper articles, the state as whole may have been overlooked. Not only was there news about the club, but it was discovered that articles about the Woman's Library Club predated the articles about the Woman's Book Club.

These small independent organizations were not included in the chapter on Kentucky women's clubs in the title *The History of the Woman's Club Movement in America* by Jane Cunningham Croly under the authority of the General Federation of Women's Clubs (1898). The content about Kentucky had come from the Kentucky Federation of Women's Clubs, the recognized state organization that

was founded in 1894. One of the organizational goals was to educate and bring about social change by way of the public libraries.

The Kentucky Federation of Women's Clubs was the fourth state organization to join the General Federation of Women's Clubs in 1896. Five years later, the Kentucky Federation voted to continue to deny requests for the membership to be opened to African American women's clubs. In 1903, the Kentucky State Association of Colored Women's Clubs was organized. The association was a chapter of the National Association of Colored Women. It is also well worth mentioning that in spite of the newly formed associations, it was not the goal of every woman's club in Kentucky to become a member of the state or national association.

In 1895, there was an independent Colored Library Club [African Americans] in Hopkinsville, KY. The members were women, though the word "woman" was not part of the club name. The focus was on the community, not the membership. New York banker, J. C. Latham, made a large sum donation to the club. Latham was an African American man who was born and raised in Hopkinsville. A

mass meeting was called in 1914 at the Virginia Street Baptist Church to discuss ways to secure a public library for the African American people in Hopkinsville. The city public library barred African Americans. More than twenty years later, the library for African Americans was housed in the Church of the Good Shepherd with 1,000 volumes. The library received some support from the City of Hopkinsville. The Colored Library Club members were Rosa M.

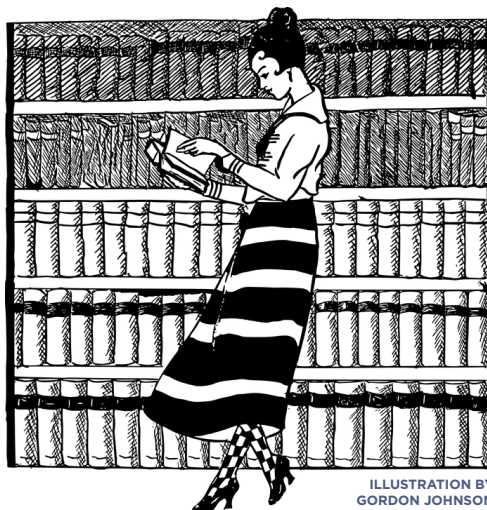


ILLUSTRATION BY  
GORDON JOHNSON

Hopson, Ora L. Brewer, and Dolly R. Brown.

In 1896, the Paducah Woman's Library Club was established within the women's committee at the YMCA. The group used membership subscriptions to purchase books for the YMCA library. The membership fee was \$1 per year. The club was sometimes referred to as the ladies' committee in the newspapers. Eleven books were ordered in April of 1898. These were new titles that included *Story of an Untold Love* by Paul Leicester Ford (1897); *A Lady of Quality* by Frances Hodgson Burnett (1896); *On the Red Staircase* by Mary Imlay Taylor (1897); and *Caleb West, Master Diver* by Francis Hopkinson Smith (1898).

The Paducah YMCA library was used mainly by the women until around 1901, when young men at the YMCA started to use the library also. The YMCA directors planned a meeting to draw up a resolution to present an annual commitment of \$3,500 to

the city, this was the amount that had been requested by Andrew Carnegie for the support of a public library. Ground was broken for the new library on August 10, 1902. The Paducah Carnegie Library opened on October 5, 1904.

There were two other clubs in Kentucky. The Woman's Library Club in Guthrie, KY, met in 1902 and they were entertained by Mrs. Ben Kendall. Guthrie is located in Todd County, on the Kentucky/Tennessee border. Nothing more is known about the club at this time. In Madisonville, KY, the Woman's Library Club sponsored musicians Mrs. D. H. Kincheloe and Miss Bernice Wimberly for their concert in Corydon in 1913. There may have been other clubs, but a change had occurred in the early 1900s; there was more being written in Kentucky newspapers about the Woman's Book Club, and less was written about the Woman's Library Club.



**Meet *Kentucky Libraries* new columnist, Reinette Jones.** Reinette Jones is a research and reference librarian at the University of Kentucky Special Collections Research Center. She is the author of *Library Service to African Americans in Kentucky* and has many other publications. She is the co-creator and manager of the Notable Kentucky African Americans Database (NKAA). She is also a regular contributor of highlights from Kentucky historical newspapers converted into brief posts on the Kentucky Digital Newspaper Program (KDNP) Facebook site.

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