

Mary E. Bivins Memorial Library



Thirty years ago, the city of Amarillo, Texas, housed its city library in a renovated four-story home. Located downtown, the house had once been the home of the Bivins family, founding fathers of a sort, and still retained the sense of being a home. Settlers in the Texas panhandle seemed to have a uniform concept of grandeur -- massive white stone columns, wide steps on all sides, covered verandas, an odd assortment of shuttered windows, simple red brick walls, a minimum of frills, all shadowed by huge trees. The showplace homes from pioneer times looked much alike, though none was precisely modeled on the pattern of the southern plantation mansion, all partook of its image to some extent.

The Bivins place borrowed the grand entrance from the South, and with its double staircase, mahogany banisters, marble mosaic floor, and hanging chandeliers, it impressively introduced a child to libraries. Because it felt like a home first, and an institution not at all, the library was a place to spend Saturdays in luxuriant companionship with books.

By the time I was eleven years old, my best friends and I spent Saturdays going to the library on our own. Being young was safer then and there was nothing dangerous about letting a group of fifth-grade girls take the bus downtown unattended by adults.

Looking back, it is hard to recapture how special those Saturdays were. And the whole day was special. Early in the morning we would gather and walk ten blocks to the nearest bus stop. We always had lunch in the Silver Grill Cafeteria. Evenings, we would return by bus, weighted down by the dozen books we each checked out.

For that, too, was a special part of the library visit. Unlike bookmobiles, the main library let us check out as many books as we could carry, and there never seemed to be an end to the books I wanted to read.



That love of books was undoubtedly partly due to the library itself. All the juvenile books were grouped together on the fourth floor, and someone with an elevated idea of juvenile interests had scattered Austen and Dickens and Cooper and Hawthorne in amongst the Nancy Drew's. Someone had placed Huxley right after Heinlein, Arthur Conan Doyle with Agatha Christie, Darwin's *Autobiography* with *I Was a Teenage Nurse*. No doubt there were older equivalents of Judy Blume and Sue Hinton, but they stood little chance against the heavyweights that spiced the shelves.

The library was a haven for quiet reading. Because it had been a home, the building offered a variety of little rooms, odds and ends, cubbyholes, each with its comfortable chair and reading lamp, centered on its Early American braided rug. The screened balconies on the fourth floor were special hideaways, right up amongst the leaves, and in the Texas panhandle the cool greenery of tall trees was a rarity. The bentwood rockers with wicker seats awaited a regular guest.

When I was eleven, I owned no books. Yet I could go to the most elegant house I knew and make myself at home, browse someone else's book shelves (and I always felt as if the books belonged to some kindly aunt), and as long as I was well behaved, properly respectful of the privilege offered, I could kick off my shoes, curl up in a rocker, and read undisturbed by household chores or little sisters.



Even then, I knew the old library was something special, though I could never have voiced my reasons. Later acquaintance with the sterile concrete monstrosities that masquerade as libraries has since made me aware of how much easier it was to meet books inside that kindly imaginary aunt's home.

Ten years ago I returned to Amarillo, and I had casual intentions of showing my husband the homes I lived in, the schools I attended, the places I knew. The city and all in it were alien to me, but it was not a crushing realization, for I had left it long ago. Perhaps the fourth floor of the Mary E. Bivins Memorial Library was the one place I expected to find unchanged, but, of course, it, too, was gone. Other buildings, not one a library, stand in its place.

The new library is undoubtedly new.

I didn't look for it.





Jillions of Books Read

Fifteen youngsters reported 100 or more books read in the Friendship 7 Reading Club sponsored by the children's department of Mary E. Bivins Memorial Library.

Approximately 1,000 youngsters attended the annual summer reading club party which was held from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Saturday at Municipal Auditorium.

Highlight of the party was the presentation of certificates to youngsters who had reported on 15 or more books during the summer.

Thomas Cartwright, chairman of the library board, spoke to the youngsters on the importance of reading before the showing of "Alice in Wonderland." Refreshments were served at the conclusion of the party.

Seven of the youngsters who read over 100 books represented three different families. There were three youngsters from the Jay U. Kirkman family of 1600 Bonham, two youngsters from the R. E. Steele family of 3501 Lynette and two youngsters from the Harvey L. Braswell family of 3609 NE 19th.

The children reporting 100 or more books are:

Elaine Hazlewood — 336; Donna Davis — 212; Bruce Braswell — 205; Jean Marie West — 184; Bobby Steele — 176; Cathy Steele — 176; Karen Kirkman — 160; Carolyn Braswell — 150; Carla Kirkman — 140; Dale Vernon — 116; Susan Butler — 113; Mary Rachel Garza — 110; Raymond Rodriguez — 105; Jay Kirkman III — 100; Tonie Valverde—100.