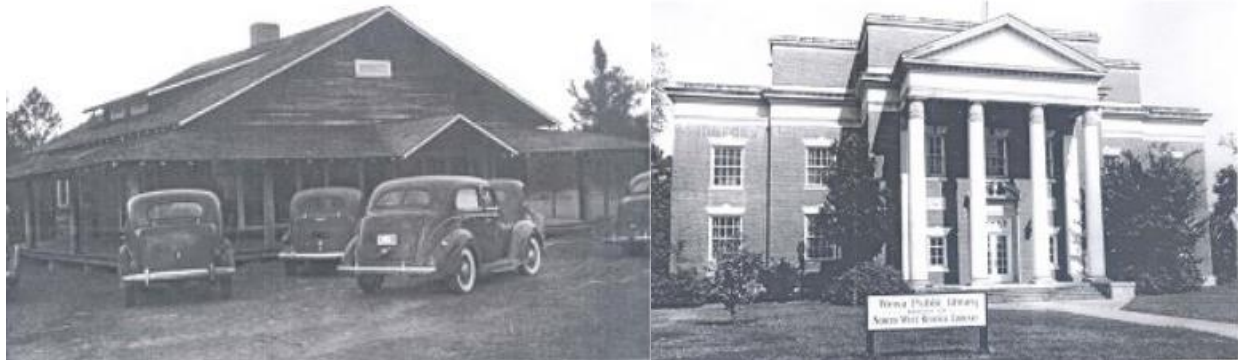


# History of the Charles Whitehead Public Library

On September 23, 1963, Irene Britt, President of the Wewahitchka Woman's Club (WWC) decided to try for another library in Wewahitchka due to all the hard work that had been put into having one in the past. There had previously been a library in the late 1930s that was housed inside the Community Building (see photo, right). Sometime during the early 1940s, a fire destroyed it along with all the books. A large portion of these books had been donated to the library by Mrs. Britt's father. It was a tragic blow to the community. Thus began the library foundation under the leadership of Club President, Mrs. Irene B. Britt. In 1963-1964 the WWC had 30 members, with less than half of them active. They started a community improvement program to provide free library services for their small community. They wanted to educate the present and future generations to a fuller richer way of life through a free library service.



**Wewahitchka Library location in the Community Building in the late 1930s and the Courthouse in 1964**

In order to secure library services for their small community, the WCC were forced to work for it county-wide since this service called for a one mill tax over the entire county. This would prove to be a battle with larger taxpayers fighting the library issue. It was not until the final hearing of the budget meeting held on September 22, 1964 that the members could breathe a sigh of relief. The library was assured. In October of that same year, the five person Gulf County Library Board was commissioned by then-Governor Ferris Bryant.

By October 15th the board was organized and at work. The Wewahitchka Library opened in the courthouse and became affiliated with the Northwest Regional library System. Buildings were acquired in Port St. Joe and Wewahitchka and a bookmobile was ordered.

In mid-December librarians were at work in both branches, books were on the shelves, and the bookmobile was put into motion. The bookmobile was making the rounds of the highways and byways



of the entire county. Within two months from the time the one mill tax was levied, they were receiving both state and federal grants as provided in the Library Services Act. Mrs. Kathleen Britt was the first librarian, after joining the Northwest Regional Library System, followed by Zora Bell Holly, and then Mrs. Ann Matlock. Dorothy Griffin was later hired as the first library assistant to Mrs. Matlock.

**Kathleen Britt, first librarian for the Wewahitchka branch**



**Charles Whitehead Public Library**

After many years of teaching and knowing the needs of the children and the community, Mrs. Marlene Whitfield-McNair had a dream and vision of opening a larger library to meet their needs. In the year 2000 plans started coming together and, after a lot of hard work by Mrs. McNair, her husband Alan McNair, and many others, a new library was opened at 314 North 2nd Street, across from the former Gulf County Court House. The new library was named after Mr. Charles Whitehead who was the largest contributor to the library. In January 2003 the doors were open and services began in the new facility. Mrs. Matlock retired in 2007 after 31 years of service. Beulah Harrison then became Branch Manager, and she remained in that position until 2020. Joyelle Linton is the current Branch Manager.

Submitted by Former Branch Manager: Beulah Harrison