

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Joyce Kennerly**

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System. Interview taken at the Mamie George
Library in Richmond, TX

19 Pages



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Transcript

GOODSILL: Joyce, we are here to talk about the origins of the Fort Bend Library System.

KENNERLY: I think it's a wonderful story. I had seen it one other time, where a group of ladies got together and started a library. That really resonates with me. Since I am such a history buff, when I came to this library system I immediately wanted to know how the library had started.

In 1945, there were twelve ladies who all lived in Rosenberg who decided to start a book club. They had a book club where they would go to each lady's house one month of the year. That was why there were twelve ladies. No one else could belong. They had to be invited to be in the group. They would meet at the house and discuss a book. After the first two years, they decided they would like the club to do an annual project. The project they decided to take on in 1947 was to establish a county library. This had been tried several years earlier, but it didn't work because the roads were not good enough throughout the county for them to be able to use a bookmobile. That was the primary transportation to smaller towns. Libraries all across the country were using bookmobiles to get to people because there weren't that many library buildings people could come to.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The ladies named above successfully founded what we know today as the FBC Library System.

By 1947, they thought the roads were sufficiently good to get to most of the towns in the county without any problems. So they decided it was time to try again to establish a library. The twelve ladies were Mrs. Mayde Waddell Butler, Mrs. Emma Lee Schawe Dickerson, Mrs. L. D. (Doris) Erwin, Mrs. John (Fern) Garmany, Mrs. Alvin E. (Inez) Hockmuth, Mrs. Maude Wallace Knippling, Mrs. Kathleen Joerger Lindsey, Mrs. Angela Joerger McNutt, Mrs. Lillian Hruzek Meyer, Mrs. Ruth Beckmann Schult, Mrs. Marjorie Balke Vogelsang, and Mrs. Viola Yates. Mrs. Maude Wallace Knippling had a degree in Library Science and she knew a librarian in El Campo.

So they invited the librarian in El Campo to talk to them about what would be involved in establishing a library and how it would operate. They did their research. Then Maude Knippling set up a schedule of assignments for each lady and they went throughout the county, completing their assignments. Kathleen Lindsey, who is an attorney, [Since deceased.] was working with her father, F. X. Joerger, who had been County Judge at one time.

She was the one who knew the most about the legal issues involved. In later years, she was the one I talked to the most often, when I got into learning the story. She was in and out of the courthouse all the time and knew all the judges and commissioners, too.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the Kathleen Joerger Lindsey interview on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=26333>

The ladies visited libraries in the surrounding counties and surprisingly, all the counties around Fort Bend HAD libraries. That was kind of a shock to me, but at that time, Fort Bend County's population was much smaller than it is today. Angela Joerger McNutt set up a schedule for Marjorie Volgelsang, Kathleen Lindsey and Doris Erwin to visit Sugar Land. Angela and Viola Yates taught in Orchard and Beasley so they took care of those communities. Ruth Schult did Richmond. Emily Dickerson and Lillian Meyer did Needville, and Damon had Long Point. They all emphasized that it wouldn't be just Rosenberg that would have the library, it would be for the whole county. What they promised was that there would be bookmobiles that would visit each of these places. That became a primary concern for them when the library was established and everyone thought the job was done. They had promised bookmobiles and Kathleen said that was one of their major concerns.

GOODSILL: It took a lot of planning, organization and coordination to have a bookmobile?

KENNERLY: Yes, and money, which was the primary factor.

After they had met with any group in the county who would listen to them, they asked these people to come on a particular day to Commissioners Court and let the Commissioners know that they wanted a library in this county. They also asked for letters to be sent to the Commissioners prior to that meeting. They went to Commissioners Court on May 12, 1947. The County Judge was Charles Schultz. The Commissioners were J. C. Gassaway, Tom Snedecor, I. G. Wirtz, Jr., and Andrew Briscoe. Approximately 50 people came to Commissioners Court to support the library that day, and that was a very unusual thing.

Kathleen Lindsey is the one who addressed the Court. She outlined why a library should be established – for the children, for the community, for education. She explained the method of financing the library, which I've never been able to find out, and what its needs would be and how a bookmobile would be able to take books to every corner of the county.

At that time, their aim was to have one bookmobile. Apparently it was a 'go' from the very beginning because permission was granted on the spot for them to set up a library. County Judge Schultz asked for recommendations for people to sit on the library board. The club recommended that its first president, Ruth Shult, be one of the board members. The rest were selected from throughout the county so that the entire county would be represented on the board.

Ruth Shult and Kathleen Lindsey went to the Rosenberg mayor and asked for some space in City Hall to set up the first physical library. They gave them a very small room and the Share-a-Book Club helped set up shelving. People began bringing books and very quickly they had more than 1,000 books! There wasn't enough space in that room for that many books. So the next concern was to try to find a place to have this library. Obviously the county wants a library but how are we going to find a building?

In 1948, Mary Lou Cooper was hired as the librarian and she ordered more books. The Club was still trying to focus on acquiring a bookmobile and they finally purchased one in July, 1948. Eventually they had three. Kathleen told me how happy they were that they were finally able to keep their promise to the people in the community to have a bookmobile.



Going to the Bookmobile.

--Courtesy wateringholdclubhouse.blogspot.com

GOODSILL: Did the Commissioners Court give them a budget?

KENNERLY: That I don't know. But they had to have been given money for the librarian, the books she ordered, and the bookmobile. I'm assuming it came from the county because the county was the only entity that could have given them a budget.

Next thing they needed was a building. Mamie George, who was well known in this county for philanthropy, indicated she would donate land next to Polly Ryon Hospital if they would build a building that was consistent with the architecture of the hospital. So that's what happened.

The first building opened in 1948 with 8,111 volumes. Mary Lou Cooper took official charge of the building. It grew so rapidly! The demand for libraries in the county is just astronomical, even today. We can't have enough library space to satisfy the people in this county. It became so crowded, they had to add on to the building. That was done in 1958 and the collection at that time was 36,954 volumes. I talked to one of the assistant directors of the building we are currently in (George Memorial Library) who was a librarian in that old building. She said it was so crowded that they literally had books stacked in the aisles, their offices, the restrooms – they had them placed anywhere they could. There simply was not room to move by the time they got this new building.

It's kind of remarkable to go back and look at the statistics for that period of time. The population of Fort Bend County in 1947 was approximately 32,000. Wharton County had approximately 33,000 and Brazoria had approximately 41,000. So the towns were considerably smaller than they are now. The population of Richmond was 2,030; Rosenberg had 3,457 people with 128 businesses – it was the largest town in the county. Missouri City had 100 people; Stafford had 400; Sugar Land had 1,500–2,000. I could not get a number on Katy. Needville had 500–600 people. So you can see Needville was larger than Stafford or Missouri City at that time. Beasley had 200–300; Orchard had 200; Fulshear had 100–200 and Simonton had 150–200. That was remarkable to me. As for the libraries in the surrounding counties in the mid-1940s, Brazoria had established theirs in 1941 and by 1946 they had a library in Angleton and branches in Alvin and Freeport. AND they had a bookmobile.



Librarians pose with second FBC Bookmobile, ca. 1950–52.



FBC staff pose with the third and final FBC Bookmobile outside the George Memorial Library.

That was one of the places the Share-a-Book Club ladies got their idea for doing the bookmobile. Wharton's first library opened in 1940 in El Campo. The Louise branch and the East Bernard branches were added in 1942, and the Pierce branch was opened in 1943. The Pierce branch closed in 1953 and was served by a bookmobile. These statistics reveal what the county looked like at that time. For these ladies to have the foresight and the courage to attempt to establish the library and the bookmobile was remarkable.

GOODSILL: In 1972 the Friends of the Library was organized and that's when 1,500 more books and a book trailer were obtained. What was a book trailer?

KENNERLY: It was a trailer to literally haul books from one place to another. I believe they had set up a storage space outside the library for books that were coming in. By that time the Share-a-Book Club ladies were no longer involved with this.

When I came to the library system in 1972, there were only eight of the original twelve Share-a-Book Club ladies left. Four had died. Those still living were Doris Erwin, Fern Garmany, Kathleen Lindsey, Angela McNutt, Lillian Meyer, Marjorie Volgelsang and Viola Yates. I worked actively with Doris, Kathleen, Angela, Lillian and Marjorie. I met Viola Yates and went to her house to visit with her.

When I came here and found out that they had not ever been recognized in any way, I was appalled! We very quickly set up a Founders Reception in 1994. We invited all the ladies who were still living to come and talk about the establishment of the library system. It was not terribly successful in that no one wanted to talk. They just wanted to make Kathleen Lindsey their spokesman. Kathleen is a fairly retiring lady and she's not accustomed to putting herself in the forefront unless she's in court. So we really didn't get a lot of information from that, which was frustrating, but at least we were able to recognize them. I had little brass library cards made for them, with their names on it, to be a permanent and very unique library card. It actually had a bar code on it. Then we made little purses for the cards to fit in. One of the ladies who worked for me was a very good needle worker, so she made these little quilted purses that folded over and snapped closed that the cards fit into. There were two ladies who couldn't be there. Fern Garmany was in a nursing home. I never was able to get hers to her. I did deliver it to her family. Viola Yates was pretty much in retirement. She was still mobile but didn't like crowds so I went to her house and took the card to her and talked to her at length. It was very interesting to get her take on what some of the ladies were like then. I had already formed impressions of their personalities as I talked to them and some of the insights she gave me were very interesting. Unfortunately I never got to see her again. She died not too long

after that.

GOODSILL: Did they like their cards and purses? That's adorable!

KENNERLY: Yes, they did. I think that Kathleen Lindsey, being an attorney and being somewhat retiring, was somewhat suspicious of me because I was making so much out of them. I made sure they were invited to every library event. When we hit our 50th anniversary, we had a big event here at the library where all of them came. We had the old fashioned box lunches that people could bid on. The young guys always had people bidding against them to make it go higher and higher because they knew it was coming out of his pocket and he wanted his girl to look good and he wanted to be able to eat with her and not someone else. That was one of the old country kind of things that I remembered from back in Missouri and apparently they did that here, too.

We made boxes for each one of the ladies that day and auctioned them off to people in the audience. That was really fun. I think at some point Kathleen began to trust me and she realized I truly was in awe of them and did appreciate what they had done. Up to that time no one took the time or trouble to recognize what they had done.

GOODSILL: Also, it sounds like this was a fairly quiet and studious group. They weren't looking for recognition. They were looking to accomplish a goal and didn't really quite know what to do when they got recognition.

KENNERLY: Yes. When I talked to Kathleen after we got to know one another, she made the point that for them, this was their year's project. They had no idea what it would become. It is now a system of 10 libraries, scattered throughout the county. We also manage the Law Library. We have some outreach collections – one was just established in the Senior Center. We have outreach collections during the summer at schools so that kids who don't have the means to get to a library can go someplace closer to get books for the Summer Reading Club. This way they can all participate and get a trophy. We are now up to \$10,000,000 a year budget. There will be more libraries. I'm not sure how thrilled the County Commissioners are to consider that prospect because they don't think of themselves as being in the library business, but as each community begins to grow, there begins a demand for a library. I don't know what this library system will end up being.

GOODSILL: It's quite something, what became of these ladies' vision.

KENNERLY: They had NO idea. I talked to six of the remaining ladies and none of them had any idea. Doris Erwin who worked with me on my Shakespeare Festival Committee

told me it was the thing she was the proudest of in her whole life. I don't know if that was true for the rest of them. She's the only one who expressed that to me. But it was the most impressive thing she had accomplished.

GOODSILL: I'm curious about how the bookmobile worked. Then tell me the story from then on.

KENNERLY: They got the first bookmobile in 1948. I have two photographs of the people who drove the bookmobile. They went to each of the towns that they had visited when they were trying to get support for building the library. There was a regular schedule.

People would come onto the bookmobile and return the books they had checked out before. I can't tell you what the schedule was or how frequently they went out. I'm not sure we have that information. They traveled regularly to each of these places.

Ladies who worked for the library drove the bookmobiles. They would rotate the collection out every so often because people would have read everything that was on there. They would be at a location for a certain number of hours and people would come, turn in their old books and check out new ones.

As a child, I lived in the country and I couldn't get enough to read. I read my mother's encyclopedias, I read her doctor book, I read the dictionary – just so I could have something to read. So I very much relate to people who could not wait for the next time the bookmobile came. I would make my sisters and my brother and my mother check out the maximum number of books that they could, including what they wanted to read, so that I could read them. I would give them extra books to add to their stack.

Bookmobile schedule

The summer schedule for the county library bookmobile was announced this week and the dates for the various stops are as follows:

Needville: Mondays, June 7, July 12 and August 9, 9 to 9:30 a.m.

Missouri City: Wednesdays, June 9, July 14 and August 11, 9 to 9:15 a.m.

Sugar Land: Wednesdays, June 9, July 14 and August 11, 9:30 to 9:45 a.m.

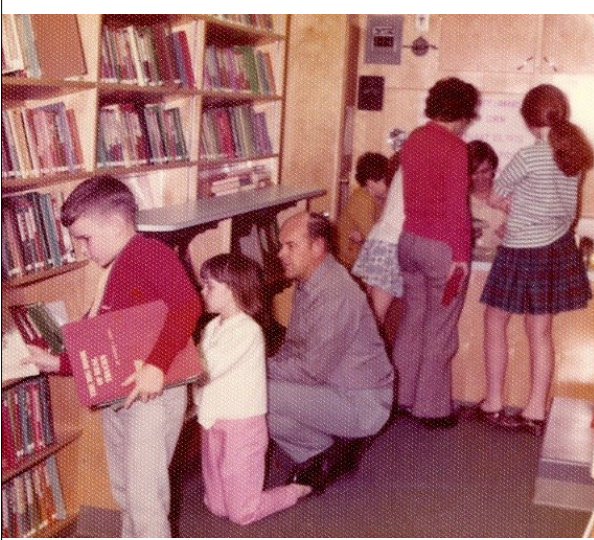
Fulshear: Thursdays, June 10, July 15 and August 12, 9:10 to 9:20 a.m.

Simonton: Thursdays, June 10, July 15 and August 12, 9:30 to 9:50 a.m.

Orchard: Thursdays, June 10, July 15 and August 12, 10:30 to 10:40 a.m.

Bookmobile Schedule from May 1965.

--courtesy FBC Main Library



Families returning books and selecting new ones at one of the FBC Bookmobiles.



Patrons scoured the limited shelves for a good read when a bookmobile visited their community.

Eventually (and I don't have the dates) they were able to get two more bookmobiles, so there were three that were going. In 1974, they built the first two branches. At that time they were still operating in the building on US-90A, next to the hospital.

They built branches in Needville (Albert George Branch) and Stafford (Mamie George Branch). They were named for the Georges because their donations made both of those libraries possible, and they had made the first library possible. In 1975, the book trailer that had been used to transport books was moved to Orchard and it was set up as a mini-branch. It was a trailer, not a flatbed, and operated as a small outreach branch. It was closed in 1984.

In 1976, they stopped the bookmobiles. People that I have talked to, who worked on those bookmobiles, said they were such a problem because they were always breaking down out on the road and full of books, with the two lady drivers.

Schools established libraries and we started to build branch libraries at the locations the bookmobiles used to visit. Eventually it became more cost effective to get rid of the bookmobiles and have people come to the branches.

Then in 1986 the George Foundation purchased the land to build the George Memorial Library in Richmond because the existing library had become woefully inadequate. They contributed several hundred thousand dollars toward the building itself. This became the central location and is still a source of amazement to people who come out here.



George Memorial Library, Richmond, Texas, built in 1986.

When we had the Shakespeare Festival, people would come out and say, “This is such a beautiful building” and I think they were thinking (and a few even said) “How did you manage to get a building like this in a little hick town?”

Over the years, I have been to the funeral of every one of the ladies who founded the library. There is now only one living and that is Kathleen Lindsey. She's in her 90s and isn't able to get around now, but her mind is still sharp. It's been a little frustrating to me, knowing how sharp her mind is, that sometimes when I ask her questions she says, “I just don't remember.”

Kathleen repeated to me that this was only one year out of their lives. The next year they moved on to another project and the year after that there was yet another project. So even though the library is OUR primary focus, it was not THEIR primary focus. It was like, “Okay, did that. Move on.”

GOODSILL: It's quite a testimony to the county and the commissioners that they thought it was important enough to continue funding it and progressing with this project.

KENNERLY: Yes. In 1986 they had a bond election to build more branches (Missouri City and First Colony), convert the catalog system to make it digital for the whole system, and to complete space that had been left empty over on one side of George Memorial Library. Within twenty years, every library building is going to be outgrown. They were very wise when planning this building, to leave space that was unfinished. That bond election passed overwhelmingly. When it comes to spending money on libraries, the citizens will vote 'yes'. It's interesting to see that when the county has something they want to pass, they'll put something for the library in there. There was another bond election a few years ago to build more branches (Sienna, University and renovating a couple of other branches) and it passed without any problem.

This is one of the most diverse counties in the United States. It's a highly educated population; it's a sophisticated population. Libraries are expected. It's not a matter of it being an option. It's a necessity. Any time the community begins to build, the first thing they ask is "When are we going to get a library here?" The County Commissioners have to listen and respond to that and have to figure out how to give them libraries. We're very fortunate to have had the George Foundation, which has been so helpful to the community in terms of financing projects. We would not be here without the support of the George Foundation.

GOODSILL: Do they still fund the library system?

KENNERLY: They don't fund us, but they do give us grants. The most recent grant was the digital monitors that we have throughout the system now and digital signage that we have for our rooms.

GOODSILL: Please explain what that is.

KENNERLY: The digital monitor is essentially a 46" television screen and there is at least one in each branch. The two story branches have one on each floor. It lists the programs that we offer and gives information about things happening at the library. We see it as an all-day ad for the library, both the system and the individual branch.

The digital signage indicate in which meeting rooms programs are happening and whether it is our program or somebody from the community who has booked the room to do something there. The digital monitor will display when it is going to be and what time it is going to be held. Then we have the two monitors that are a directory for all of the meetings that are taking place. When a meeting is completed, it 'falls off' the listing, so only the meetings that are still going on or will happen later that day are showing. That grant also covered a new marquee. We wanted to have an electronic marquee out front and it has been extremely popular. We have requests all the time from people in the community who want us to put a message up there. It's right at the intersection of FM-1640 (Avenue I/Golfview Drive) and FM 762 (Thompson's Highway). Unfortunately we're not sure what's going to happen to it because that intersection is changing.

GOODSILL: You mentioned the catalog system being updated. Was that from a grant or a bond election?

KENNERLY: That was a bond election item. People who are old enough can remember that we used to have a card catalog system. You would go into a library, open a drawer and it held cards that were alphabetized, and were arranged by title, by author, and by subject. That has all been digitized – put on a computer as computers became smaller and less expensive. It's so much faster, of course! But it was a very complex conversion process, taking all of those cards and entering the information into a computer. At that time they used punch cards that had to be run through a larger computer to give reports. All of that information had to be physically entered into a computer system that would go into what became the digital catalog.

The catalog is much more complex than merely author, title, and subject because there are records called MARC records (Machine Readable Cataloging). That term continues to be used even though they no longer use a readable card.

The catalogs now have become so complex that we can get any kind of report we want. We can tell you how many times a book has circulated, which is very helpful when it comes time to weed out the collection. As new books come in, you have to get rid of older books because you have a finite amount of space. It helps to know what books aren't being checked out because then they are taking up space and not being used.

It was a two-year process to get that system converted. It just about did in the lady who was in charge of Cataloging Circulation. She told me she wondered toward the end if she were going to make it! I have likened that to an Olympian feat. This was a large system by that time. When I came the library had this building, the Law Library, and branches at Needville and Stafford. Six months after I got here, we opened the Missouri Branch. A year later we opened the one in First Colony. We had a little outreach library in Simonton for the Simonton-Fulshear area and we knew we were going to build a building over there. And we were going to build one in Sugar Land. Somewhere along the way, Katy decided they had to have a library so we set up a volunteer library in a room in one of the buildings U of H had on their campus over there. That was rapidly overwhelmed so we moved into what had been the developer's sales center for the expanded volunteer library. Demand was so strong we finally had to build the Cinco Ranch Branch. That one snuck in there, in between the Sugar Land and the Fulshear Branches.

Then we went into the partnership library with Houston Community College (HCC) at Sienna Plantation and another partnership branch with the University of Houston on University Boulevard in Sugar Land. We know there will need to be another one in the Fulshear area and another one in the Cinco Ranch area, as those communities continue to build. Those people are very well read, very educated and in their minds, their library is a right, not a convenience.



It's very interesting, and I think I am coming to the third thing that this county has been very fortunate in is that there were twelve ladies back in 1947 who had the foresight to establish a library in a county that was still very small. They could not possibly have foreseen how that library system would grow and how necessary it would be to the community as it has become. I think one of the things that grabs every female who hears the story is that it was women who did it.

GOODSILL: Women in a book club. Studious women!

KENNERLY: Yes. I don't remember who told me that the book club itself started because these ladies knew one another socially. As they would see each other at a social event, knowing they were readers, they would say, "Oh, you've got to read..." whatever it was. Then they would stand there and talk about it. Another lady would come up and get in on the conversation. So they decided that since they all loved to read and liked to share information about these books, they would start a book club.

GOODSILL: Wouldn't it be interesting to get a list of the books they read back then?

KENNERLY: Yes, it would. Part of their book club meetings had a social aspect, because each one had to prepare lunch. They were always trying to outdo the other, of course, and then they would discuss the book after lunch. After a while, they got to the point where they would have people come out from Houston and give them book reviews. So it wasn't just a matter of them talking about books.

They were still meeting when I came here, up until 1995–1996. I'm not sure of the exact year. Then Lillian Meyer's health got bad and she moved to Dallas to be near her daughter. Viola Yates died, Fern Garmany died and then Angela McNutt died, which was a real shock. I think the heart went out of them and there were so few of them left. I think every time they met they were reminded of the ones who weren't there.

GOODSILL: But the goal was accomplished and it keeps rolling along. I notice you have a couple of pictures. Do you want to share them?

KENNERLY: We have a scrapbook with all of their photographs. When we held the Founders' Day, we put them on a panel in the lobby here at George Memorial. I took the photographs and we will put them together at some point and have them on display. I also want to get these on the website.

This is at the groundbreaking of this building.

GOODSILL: Look at them! They are wearing suits, hats, and heels, and carrying SHOVELS!



Five of the founding ladies of the Fort Bend County library system at the groundbreaking for the George Memorial Library in Richmond, Texas, ca. 1986. The ladies are identified in the text beneath this photo.

KENNERLY: This was in 1986. Marjorie Vogelsang is at the left; next is Doris Erwin, then Mayde Butler (she was Fort Bend Telephone Company), then Lilly Meyers. At the far right is Kathleen Lindsey, who is still living.

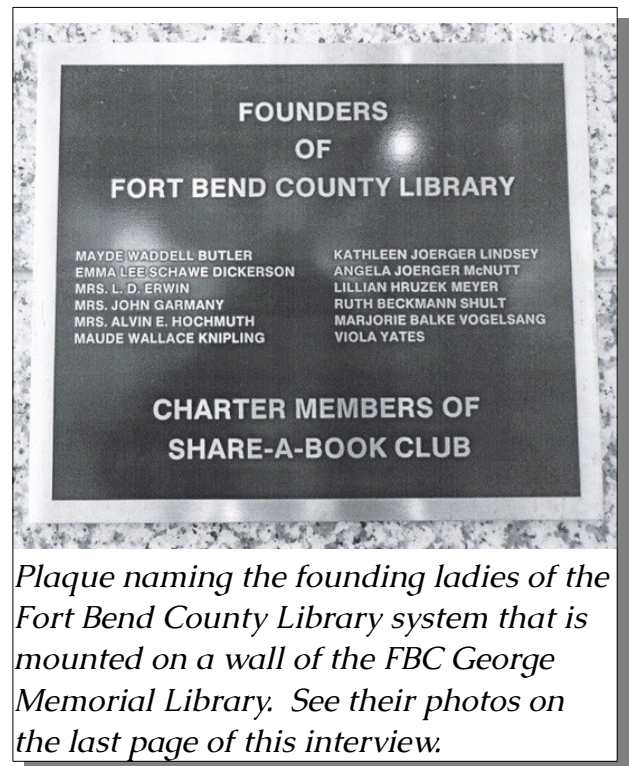
GOODSILL: What do you think she is doing in that picture? Picking up her shovel, holding her purse. It's adorable because they are all dressed up and it's a windy day.

KENNERLY: What I can't figure out is where Andrea is? She was living but just not in the photograph. Angela was her sister and she didn't die until the mid-1990s.

This is a copy of the plaque that we have in this building that names all of them. People can go to the website (www.fortbend.lib.tx.us), go to 'About Us' and the library's history is there and the Founders' history is there. We just need to upload the photographs.

GOODSILL: Is there anything else you'd like to mention?

KENNERLY: George Memorial Library was opened in 1986. It's our largest building, at 77,360 square feet. It is unique in that it has an outdoor amphitheater. When I got here I researched libraries in the United States to see if there were any others that had an outdoor amphitheater, and we were the only one at that point, which was probably ten years ago. It is newly renovated!



We did the Shakespeare Festival with HCC as a co-sponsor. We worked through their theater department and they did the production. We raised the money for them to be able to do it. That's a whole 'nother topic that we could talk about! It's a remarkable story. We would do a comedy and a drama or history each year. They would sometimes get a guest director. They brought down a director who had worked at the Alley Theatre and the Shakespeare Festival at Hermann Park. She was very skeptical about coming and when she came she commented that it was a lot smaller than what she was used to. But she agreed to do it. The first night she was absolutely entranced with how full the amphitheater was and how intimate it was.

The feel between the audience and the actors was very Shakespearean. The people who were in these plays weren't all students. Many of them had day jobs but they loved to act. They would never be able to perform to an audience like this except here. They would fight to be in the next year's production, whatever it was, just to have that experience. Some of the props people backstage said that at the same play at the Heinin Theater at HCC, the audience didn't 'get' all the lines, but the audience here did! Ours was a very attentive and knowledgeable audience. They appreciated the performance and let the actors know it. The actors ate it up.

In 1990 the library took over the operation of the County Law Library and we still do that. It's located in the Fort Bend County Justice Center. It has its own board and its own budget but we manage it. It has proved to be beneficial for them to have somebody take over the management.

The little mini-branch opened in Simonton-Fulshear in 1990 and closed before 1992. Missouri City Branch opened in 1991, First Colony in 1992. In 1994 we established the Distance Learning and Telecommunications Center, it's the Mayde Butler Room. Eventually we quit using that for distance learning because it's incorporated throughout the whole system now. 1997 was the library's 50th anniversary and Founders' Day. We made homemade ice cream for everybody that day. The Fulshear-Simonton Branch opened in 1998. That was also the year that the little Katy-Fort Bend Volunteer Library was set up. Sugar Land Branch opened in 1999. Cinco Branch opened in 2004 and then in 2006 the bond election was held for the new branches at Sienna, U of H Sugar Land and renovation at George Memorial.

GOODSILL: Do you want to tell us something about the on-going renovation at the Mamie George Library?

KENNERLY: After twenty years any library is overrun. A building as large as this has maintenance issues that need to be addressed. Some of our major issues here were the ceiling, and the heating and air conditioning systems. The carpet was worn and we had a very small teen space. Our teen patrons are growing at a fast rate. We also house administration for the entire library system and we felt it wasn't fair to take up library space in this building. So we're building a new building out back for administration and this area will become an internet café. There will be more study rooms and meeting rooms as well.

GOODSILL: It's moving with the times, isn't it! Good for you.

KENNERLY: Yes. The teen department is now where genealogy was. Genealogy and Local History needed a larger space so it has moved. The amphitheater is being redone. They are putting sails over it to keep the heat from being so intense. We'll be able to reopen the gallery for exhibits. What is now the print shop, where we do all of the printing of promotional materials will be redone.

The Public Information Office is in charge of all promotion and publicity. We manage the web site. We do all of the digital communications, and the marketing. Up until a year ago we did all of the system-wide programming. We do everything that happened in the amphitheater, grand openings and anything like that. We also design and print every piece of paper that you use when you are in the library; all the brochures, all the forms – we make all of those. But my print shop is not an actual press. It's just a copier but we house the paper in there, do the foam board things, laminate.

GOODSILL: So you are updating and expanding your print section?

KENNERLY: Actually we're getting smaller. I don't know how all that's going to work out. We'll have less space when we move. What is now the print shop will be the dressing rooms for more theater productions.

GOODSILL: Because that is very popular with the community and that brings more people to the library?

KENNERLY: It's been about seven years since we've had a festival and I still get asked by people when I'm in the grocery store, "Aren't you that Shakespeare lady? Are we ever going to get them back?" The first year we didn't have one, that first Friday night at the time we would have been setting up, I just went down and sat there for a while. Over that weekend, someone brought a candle in a little container and wrote a note, 'Missing Shakespeare', and left it there.

GOODSILL: That really meant a lot to you? It was validation of the good work?

KENNERLY: That was the most fun thing I did. It was a lot of work. I would be here until 3:00 am every night. But I loved it. To see those kids sitting out there, kids who had never seen live theater, and to see them go up to the stage, literally hanging off the edge of the stage was great!

We had one young teenager who was staying with his grandparents and they came every night, always on the front row. They told him, "We're going over to the Shakespeare Festival. If you want to come, okay, but we're going." "Well, okay." At the end of the first night they asked him what he thought. He said, "I want to be there next year." He came back with them every night. The next year, he was IN the play! I thought, "Oh WOW – another Shakespeare story."

Interview ends



(top row) Mayde Waddell Butler, Emma Lee Schawe Dickerson,
Doris Erwin, Fern Garmany

(middle row) Inez Houchmuth, Maude Wallace Knipling,
Kathleen Joerger Lindsey, Angela Joerger McNutt

(bottom row) Lillian Hruzek Meyer, Ruth Beckmann Shult,
Marjorie Balke Vogelsang, Viola Yates

In 1947, a group of Rosenberg ladies who were members of the Share-a-Book Club decided to undertake the establishment of a library for Fort Bend County. Earlier attempts toward that goal had been made by other organizations, but none were successful. The Share-a-Book Club felt that county roads were, by 1947, adequate to support a bookmobile, and that a library to benefit the entire county could be founded. Their success was swift and fully supported by the community. Bookmobiles were purchased and library branches built as budgets permitted. Fort Bend County Libraries has now grown to a full library system, with ten locations throughout the county. The library also manages the County Law Library. The original 12 members, our Library Founders, probably could not have foreseen what would be the magnificent fruits of their long-ago efforts, but we're sure they would be very proud.

--courtesy FBC Library System