

# From Backwoods to Cyberspace



**The Tennessee  
Regional Library  
System  
and  
Public Library  
Development**



This presentation  
is dedicated to

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**Dr. Edwin S. Gleaves**

Tennessee State Librarian & Archivist,  
1987-2005

# Tennessee Regional Library System

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- A division of the Tennessee State Library & Archives, Tennessee Department of State
- Created in 1939 to provide guidance and leadership in the development of public library service in Tennessee





# The beginning...

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- In 1933-34, only 16 counties in Tennessee provided public library service... through 25 libraries
- Two-thirds of the state's population were without library service
- Tennessee, and the country, was in the throes of the depression

# The beginning.... With TVA



- The **Tennessee Valley Authority** started building their first dam (Norris) in 1933
- They saw the need for library service for their workers...as "aids to employee training and morale."



# TVA Philosophy

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- The most important factor of TVA library service was its flexibility.
- Libraries were non-traditional, planned to meet existing needs and to grow in whatever direction was needed



McClung  
Historical  
Collection

Watts Bar  
Dam, Fort  
Loudoun  
Region

- The slogan “Taking the Library to the Worker” developed from the TVA policy of making the opportunity to read convenient and easy.



# 1934

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## Mary Utopia

**Rothrock**, former director at Lawson-McGhee Library in Knoxville, became lead librarian at TVA's Norris Dam project

- She had a vision of a regional library program...one she immediately put into practice





# Rothrock quotes

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- "Wherever they live or work, the library follows."
- Rothrock had the hope of "making books available to all."
- She called schools, libraries, and bookstores "the appliances of mental growth."

# Mary Utopia Rothrock

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- She set up the first rural library in the model town TVA built for the workers that built Norris Dam
- Her next library was in Meigs County, near Watts Bar Dam
- She set up small libraries in post offices, stores and filling stations -- all over East Tennessee
- She won the 1938 ALA Lippincott Award for her work in the TN Valley

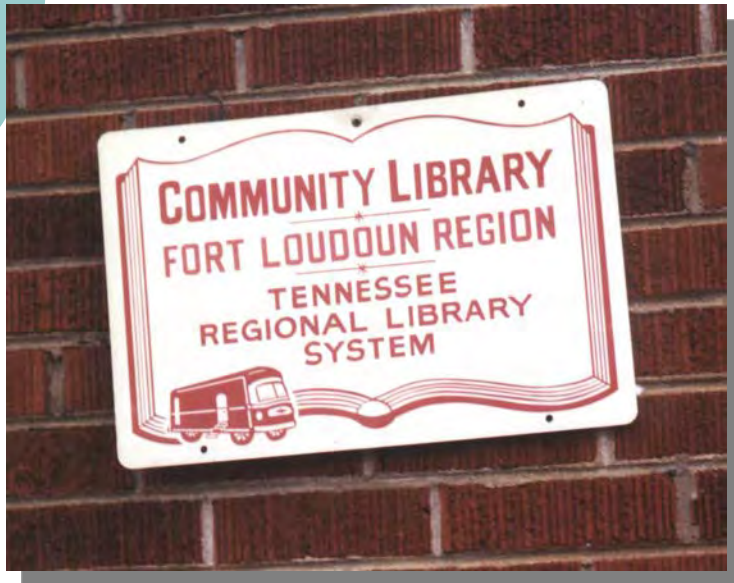
# 1937



- The first Tennessee state law allowing the creation of regional libraries passed in 1937
- The law created a Division of Libraries within the State Department of Education

# The first official region

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- In 1939, four counties (surrounding Watts Bar Dam) came together to form the first region- Meigs, Rhea, Roane, Loudon
- First called Loudon County Region, later renamed the Fort Loudoun Region
- It was funded by TVA for 5 years



# Slowly, but surely

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- The second region started in 1941 and later became known as Nolichucky Region
- Similar growth started in West TN in 1941 -- later known as Reelfoot Region
- The first state funding began in 1943 -- \$20,000... to make up for the loss of TVA funding
- Growth spread rapidly across the state

# The WPA provided aid

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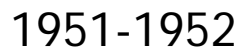
- o In August 1941, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) provided the first bookmobile for the region
- o Funding also included a driver, salary assistance for librarians in larger communities, and supplemental book money



The First Regional Bookmobile – serving a negro community in Knox County



1951-1952





- By 1968 the system included 12 multi-county regions and 4 metropolitan regions, encompassing the entire state and all 95 counties





# Organizational Changes

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- Regional Program overseen by State Dept. of Education from 1937-1951
- Establishment of State Library & Archives Commission in 1951-52
- Moved to Dept. of State in 1982
- Contract agencies from 1937-1999
- Became official state agencies in July, 1999

Since the beginning, it has always been about:



Establishing Public Libraries



Reaching unserved citizens



Aiding libraries already existing



Aiding in effecting local legislation



## It's still the same today...

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- Although our role is still the same, through the years we have adapted our services to meet the needs of our communities
- We still serve libraries
- We still serve the unserved
- We still encourage library growth



# A Quick Trip through the Past...

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# Days of Development 1939-1980's

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**Creating and Expanding Public  
Library Service**



# The very first regional service

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- We began with “Book Boxes” loaded on the back of tool wagons at TVA dam construction sites at Norris and Watts Bar... (1939-1941)





McClung Historical Collection



# The first regional service vehicle

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- Then service expanded to rural areas and small towns when the first regional library received the very first bookmobile (1941)...









McClung Historical Collection

Fort Loudoun Region



Soon other regions received delivery vehicles and service began to increase speed across the state.

Clinch-Powell Region





Nolichucky Region





Clinch-Powell Region





McClung Historical Collection

Fort Loudoun Region







Highland Rim Region



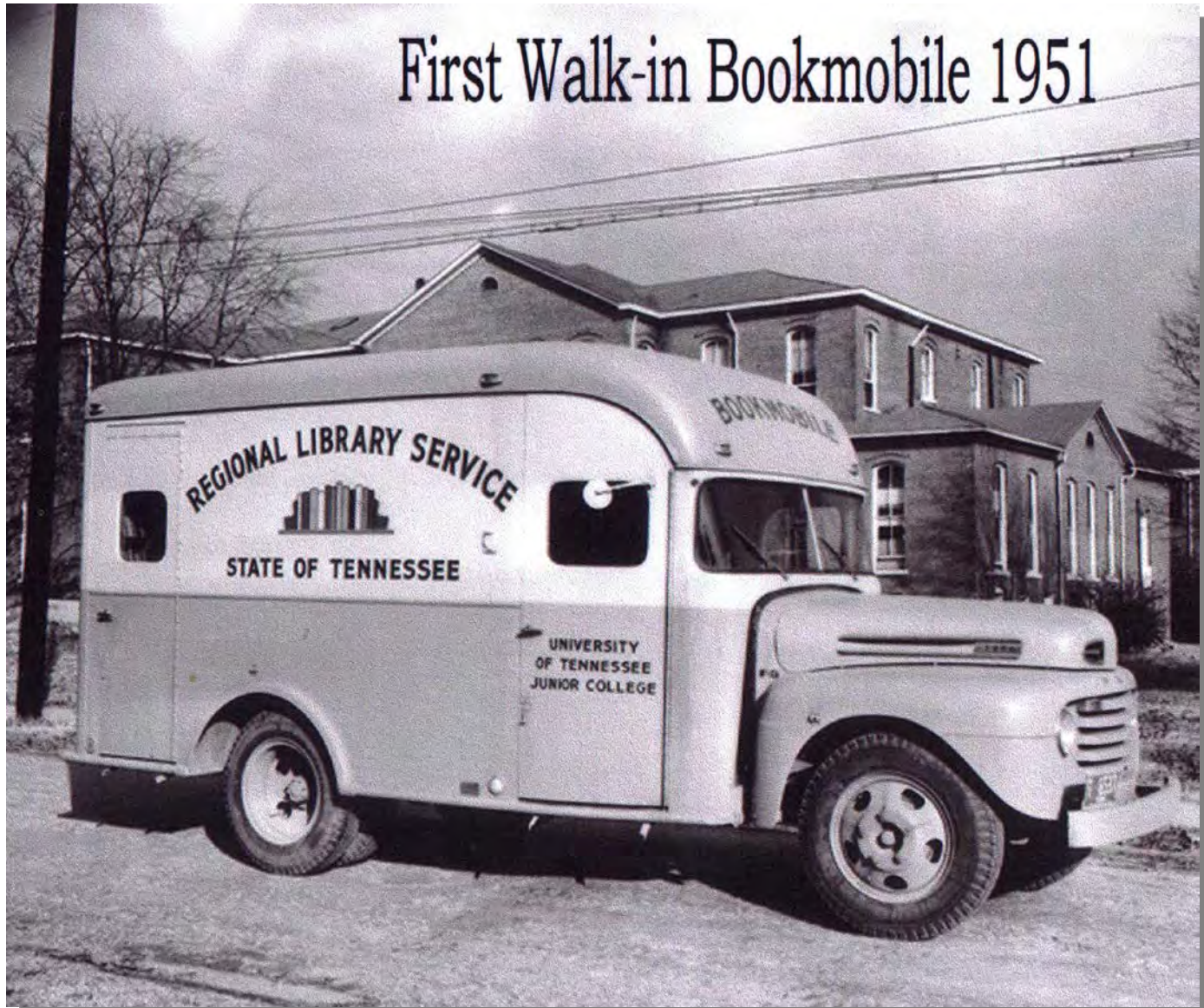


Upper Cumberland Region



Upper Cumberland Region

# First Walk-in Bookmobile 1951



From UT Junior College at Martin – later [Reelfoot Region](#)



# We've visited all sorts of places...

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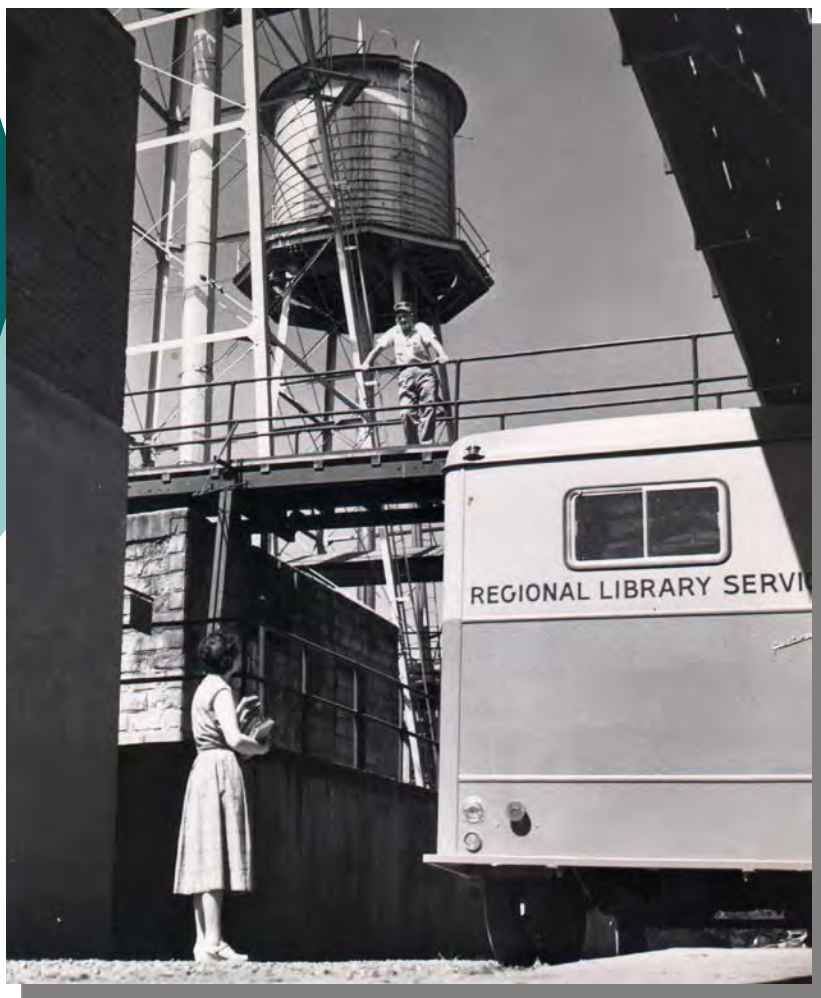
From a library in  
Gatlinburg...

Nolichucky Region

To a bookmobile  
station in  
Bell Buckle...

Highland Rim Region





...to industrial sites...

Warioto Region

to county fairs.

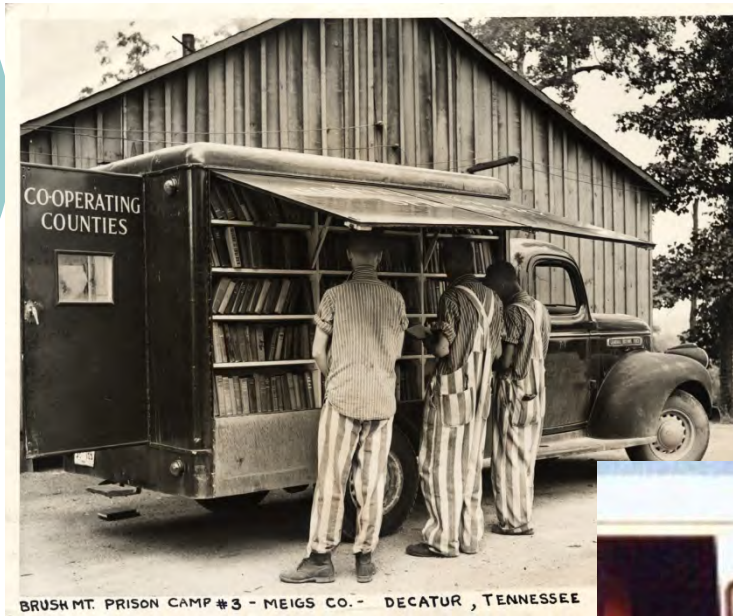


Blue Grass Region



# We've also been to...

Prison camps...



And State Fairs.





We've set up bookmobile deposit stations...



Upper Cumberland Region

In Post Offices...

Highland Rim Region



in country stores...



Watauga Region



Reelfoot Region



in private homes..

Nolichucky Region





...in churches and  
Nolichucky Region

...in funeral homes.

Reelfoot Region





# Through the years...

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We've  
processed  
books,  
books, and  
more  
books...



Highland Rim Region





We've sponsored reading conferences...

Clinch-Powell Region



...evaluated  
library  
collections  
and “de-  
selected”  
library  
materials.

Blue Grass Region





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Along the way,  
we even had  
an interesting  
visitor or two!

Nolichucky Region

## Highland Rim Region



## Watauga Region





We've provided service to humble libraries,  
in hard-to-reach places...

Clinch-Powell Region





...and to fabulous libraries in the heart of a university town.

Highland Rim Region

We have even tried mailing books to homebound readers.



Clinch-Powell Region



# 1990's and TODAY

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Providing Support Services that  
Strengthen Public Library Service



Nowadays, we  
conduct a great  
deal of training for  
library staff and  
trustees.



Shiloh Region





Blue Grass Region

Fort Loudoun Region



We began the decade serving special populations in HeadStart centers...

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Shiloh Region

...and nursing homes.

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Blue Grass  
Region





# We help our libraries by assisting with Summer Reading Programs...

Forked Deer Region



Warioto Region







...with Story  
hours...

Warioto Region

...and Puppet shows.

Caney Fork Region



# We participate in Special events...

Alex Haley book signing  
in [Shiloh Region](#)



Career Day in the  
[Forked Deer Region](#)



...help to move  
libraries...

Fort Loudoun Region



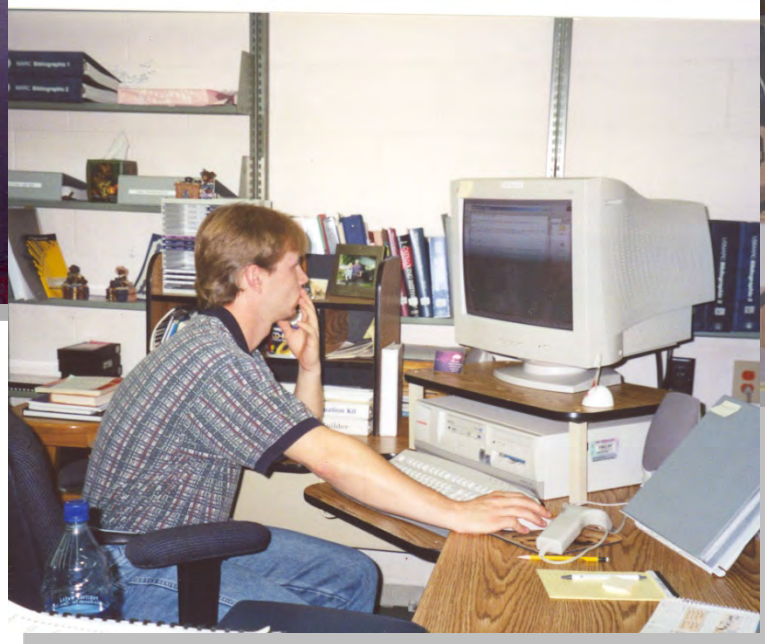
...and conduct  
library inventories.

Warioto Region

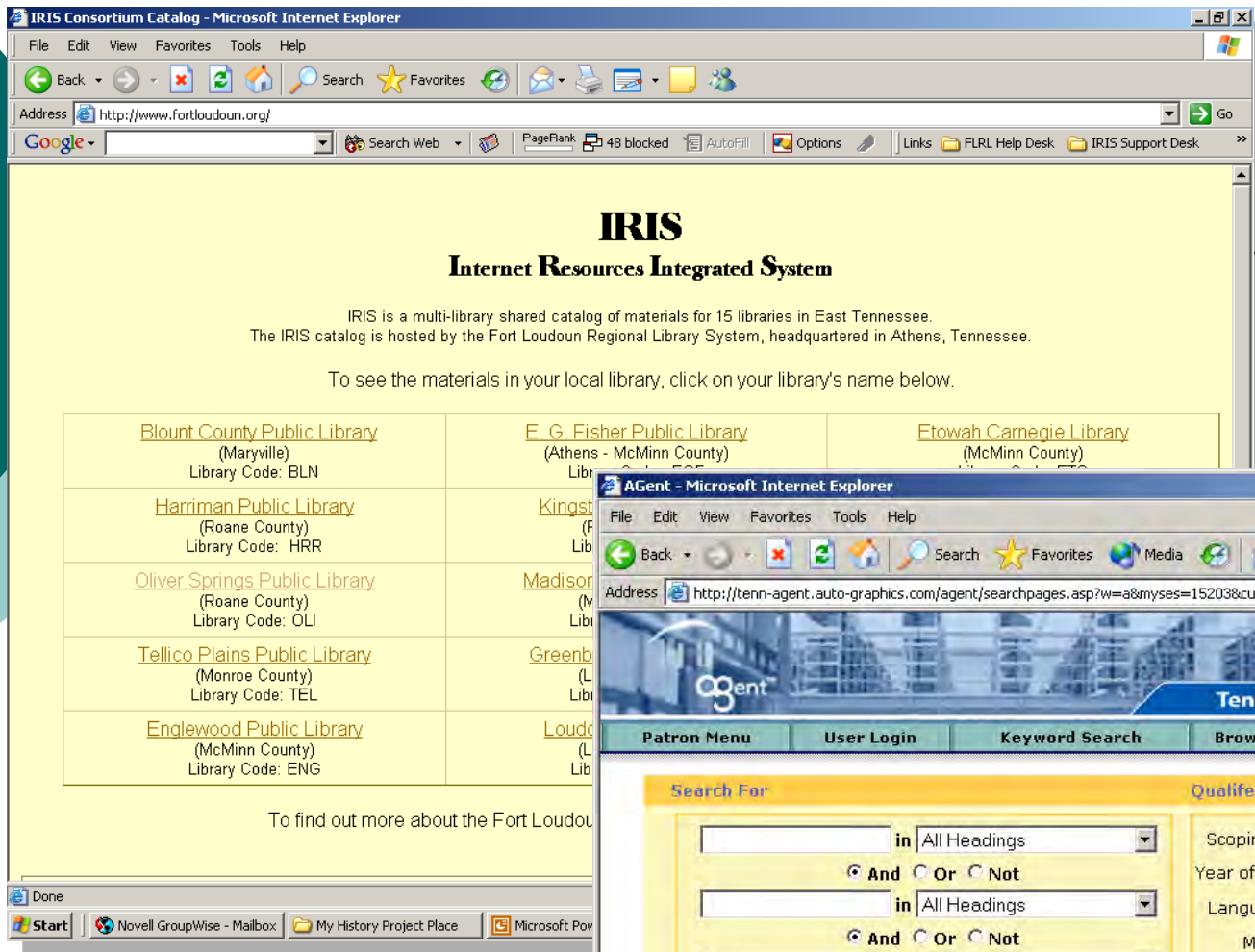
And our newest services....

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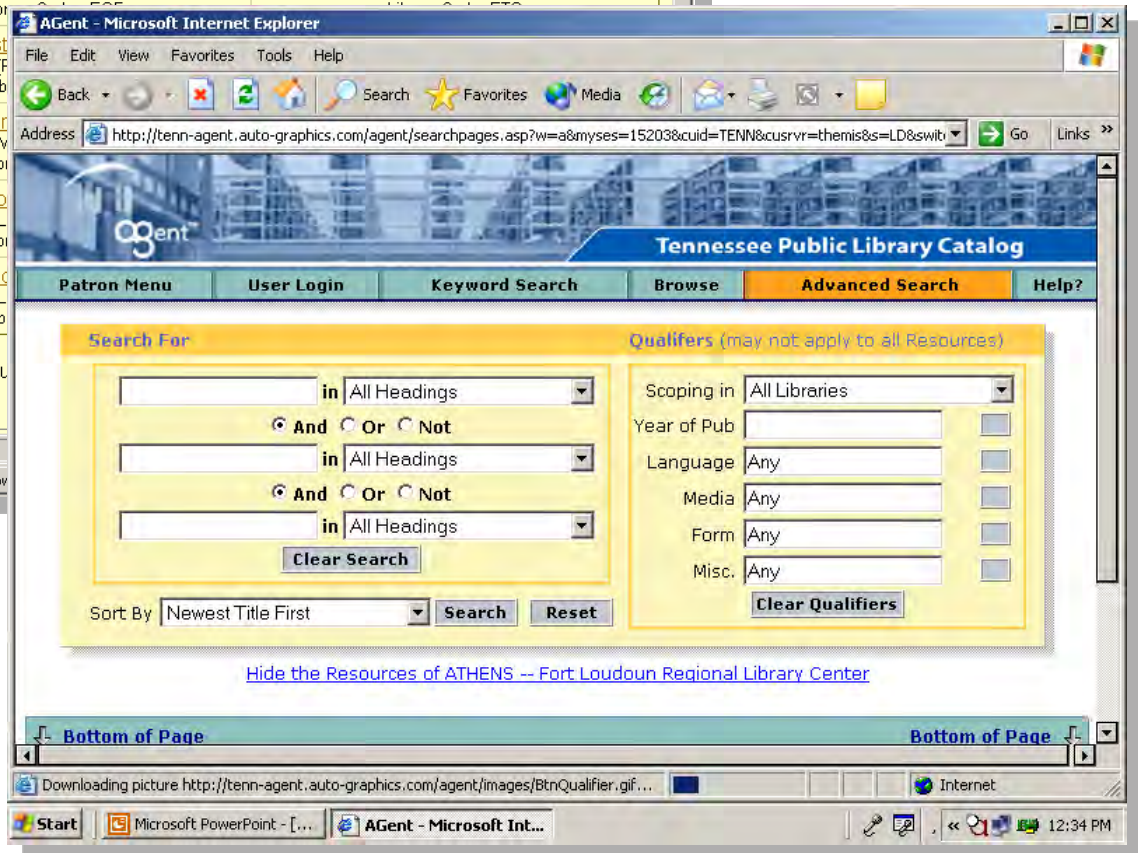
## Technology Support







## Library Management Systems



## Automated Cataloging



...and Virtual Libraries.

The Tennessee Electronic Library

# We've had great days...

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Announcement of the  
Dolly's Imagination Library/  
The Governor's "Books from  
Birth" Program –  
Pigeon Forge, 2004





# The first graduating class of the Tennessee Public Library Management Institute

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Graduation ceremonies, 1997

# Gatherings with good friends



Fort Loudoun Region

Region-Wide Trustee Workshop, 1998



# The Dedication of New Library Buildings



Blount County Public Library, Maryville – Opening Day, 2002





...and bad days

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Breakdowns...

Clinch-Powell Region



Hail Storms

## Ice Storms

Watauga Region

Clinch-Powell Region







*Arson!*

Highland Rim Region,  
1986





The end of the TRLS state-wide bookmobile program

June 30, 2003





But the thing of which we are  
most proud...

Fort Loudoun Region





# We've helped libraries GROW...

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Now:  
Briceville, 1996

Then:  
Briceville, 1940's  
Clinch-Powell Region





# Deer Lodge

Clinch-Powell Region

Then: 1960's

Now: 1996



Then:  
1970

# Lake City

Clinch-Powell Region

1985



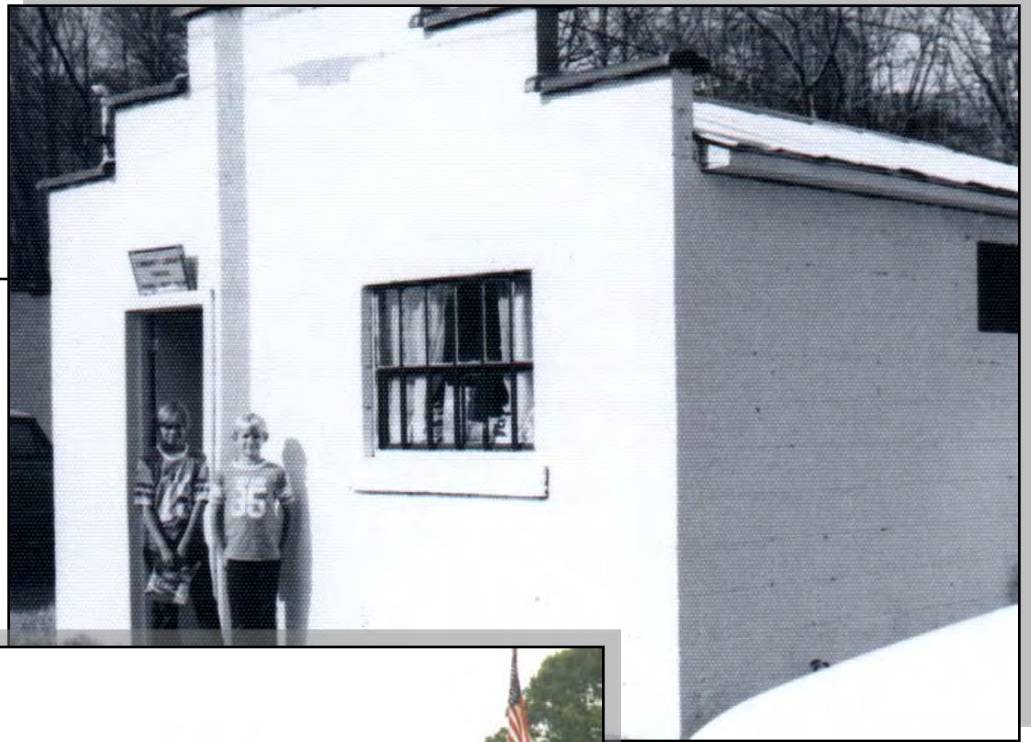
Now: 1996



# Petros

Then: 1975

Clinch-Powell Region



Now: 1996



*Browning Circle Library*

Then: 1946

# Athens – E.G. Fisher Public Library

Fort Loudoun Region

Now: 2003





# Coffee County -- Manchester

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Then: 1967



Now: 2003

Highland Rim Region







# Moore County Library

Highland Rim Region

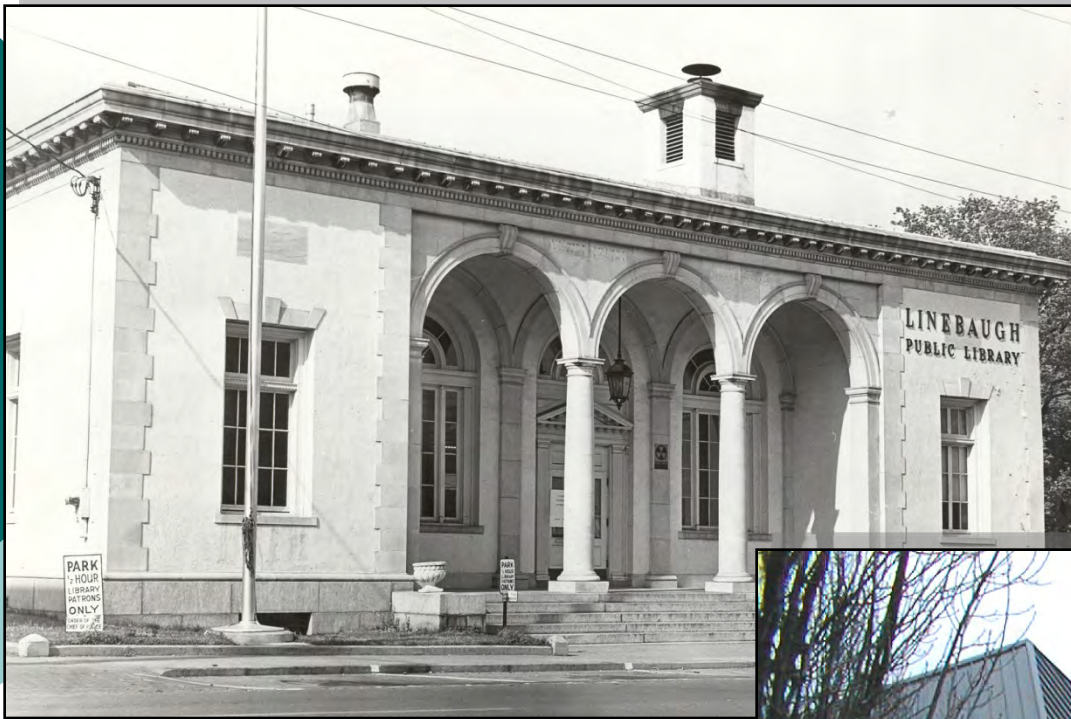
Then: 1950's

Now:  
1963



# Murfreesboro – Linebaugh Public Library

Then: 1962

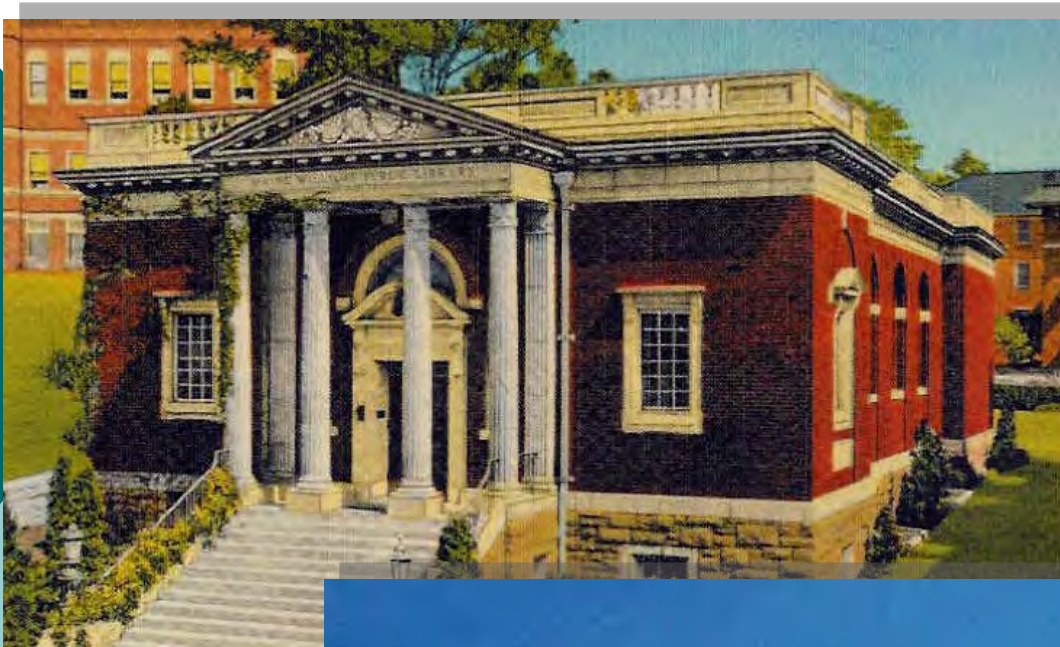


Now: 2003

Highland Rim Region







# Johnson City Public Library

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Then: 1940's

Now:

2003

Watauga  
Region







# Blount County Public Library, Maryville

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Then: 1970

Fort Loudoun Region

Now: 2003



Wonder what Mary Utopia Rothrock would think of her “brainchild” now?

1939 –  
25 public library buildings



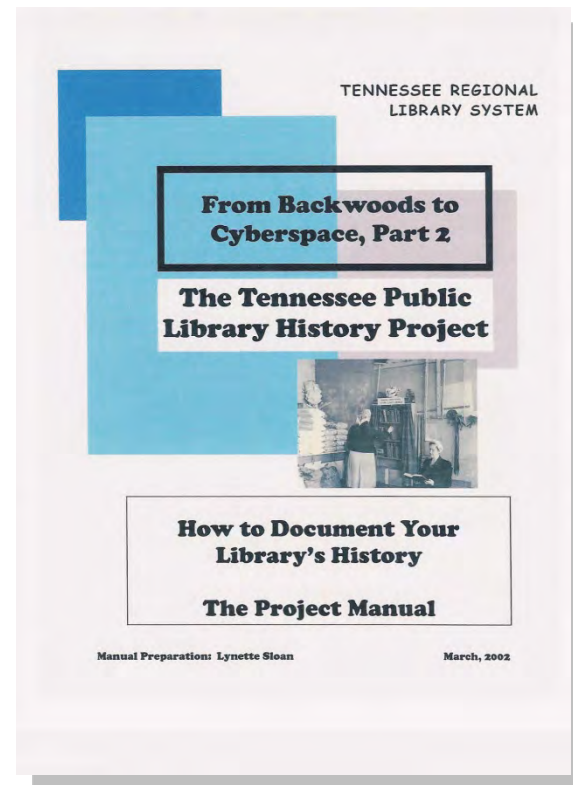
2004 –  
301 public library buildings



# From Backwoods to Cyberspace

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## The Tennessee Public Library History Project





Prepared by Lynette Sloan, Fort Loudoun Regional Library  
Assisted by Jason Sloan, SSA

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## Our Thanks to the staff members of:

Blue Grass Regional Library  
Caney Fork Regional Library  
Clinch-Powell Regional Library  
Forked Deer Regional Library  
Fort Loudoun Regional Library  
Highland Rim Regional Library  
Nolichucky Regional Library  
Reelfoot Regional Library  
Shiloh Regional Library  
Upper Cumberland Regional Library  
Warioto Regional Library  
Watauga Regional Library



April, 2001  
Revised March, 2003  
Revised March, 2004  
Revised May, 2005



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...and a very special thanks to  
The McClung Historical Collection  
&  
The Tennessee State Library and Archives