



university and Marion's civic and cultural organizations to promote literacy and learning in order to strengthen the community.

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## **2. Project Credits**

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[Logos used for each organization]  
The Ohio State University at Marion  
The Marion Women's Club Home  
Marion Public Library  
Let's Read 20  
The Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives

## **3. Marion's Literacy Past - Section Introduction**

### Marion's Literacy Past

A look back into Marion's past reveals many stories about a diverse range of citizens working through civic organizations to promote a love of literacy and learning throughout the community.

For this project, our students from various majors became historians. Working in small teams, they spent hours in the archives of the Marion Women's Club, consulting with Club archivist, Keily Cunningham, and searching through handwritten meeting minutes, typescript correspondence, scrapbooks, and photographs. Building on this archival work, students then searched through articles in the Marion Star newspaper, following up on leads that provided additional information about early literacy projects in Marion.

This timeline showcases their historical discoveries and reveals the many connections made between the Club, the Library, the University, and the wider Community over the civic mission to promote literacy and learning.

Note: This portion of the project grew out of Margaret Sumner's History of US Women's course (HI2610), Spring 2023.

[Image: three students sitting at table looking at archival materials.]

[Image: two students sitting at table looking at archival materials and making notes.]

Research team exploring archives in Marion Women's Club Home, summer 2023.

[Image: computer monitor with image of front page of old *Marion Star* newspaper.]

Research team member accessing *Marion Star's* online archives.

[image: Several full file boxes on table.]

A small sample of the much larger archival collection in the Marion Women's Club Home.

#### **4. Timeline: 1890s - 1920s**

[Note: Many of the entries throughout the Timeline section are accompanied by historic photographs or newspaper clippings referenced in the textual information.]

1890s-1910s: Origins

Origins of the Marion Women's Club (1895) | Today's Marion Women's Club traces its origins to 1895 when a group of literary-minded women formed a book

club. By 1900, the little book club had turned into an organization (or "Federation") of multiple clubs in which women read together, but also worked together on community projects dedicated to improving Marion.

Carnegie Library Opens in Marion (1907) | In 1904, clubwomen began advocating for a public library, publicly urging city leaders to accept Andrew Carnegie's offer of funding for its construction. Marion's "Carnegie Library" opened in 1907, offering reading material to the public and meeting space for civic groups like the Women's Club.

Literacy Promotion in Marion, early 1900s |

- From the 1890s to the 1910s, Black men and women in Marion hosted a literary society at Quinn Chapel, home to the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Together, they organized lectures and debates for the public on topics ranging from ethics and morality, questions of law and justice, and the ongoing struggle to protect civil rights.
- In 1916, Marion schoolteacher and clubwoman, Louise Cunningham, was the first woman appointed by the Mayor to the Library's Board of Trustees.
- Clubwomen led campaigns to collect and donate books to the new public library, to school libraries, organizations like the Womens' Reformatory, the Children's Home, and the City Infirmary, and to anti-illiteracy organizations.
- Clubwomen often threw fun "book showers" for individuals and supported the first course on book reviews, in a Shakespeare course, at the Central Junior High in 1922.

1920s-1930s: Florence Roberts Head

Children's Book Week in Marion (1920) | The American Booksellers Association launched Children's Book Week in 1919. One year later, the Public Library promoted this new literacy campaign with the support of Marion's clubwomen, the city's schoolteachers, and the Boy Scouts. These groups worked together to promote the campaign's slogan of "more books in the home," highlighting the library's collection of children's literature and encouraging the public to "stimulate" children's reading by borrowing or purchasing books. By 1925, Children's Book Week reached over 5,000 cities.

Florence Roberts Head (1923 – 25) | Florence Roberts Head, an Ohio Wesleyan alumna and English major, served as Club President from 1923-1925. Her literary leadership strengthened ties between local clubwomen, librarians, and

teachers who worked together to promote self-improvement campaigns centered around reading. As Mrs. Head observed in a speech to Marion's clubwomen in 1924, "There is in this great world of books, a book for every need, every turn, every crisis."

Mrs. Head and the Ohioana Library Association (1929-1954) |

- In 1929, Florence Head worked with Martha Kinney Cooper, Ohio's First Lady, to create the Ohioana Library Association as a way to collect and promote books by Ohio writers.
- Mrs. Head served as executive director of Ohioana from 1930 to 1954. She gathered data on Ohio authors whose work had literary, historical, and scientific merit, regularly corresponded with authors, and collected books from across the state to build up the Ohioana collection.
- In 1937, the Ohioana Board voted to fund an endowment, and the Ohioana Library continues to collect and promote Ohio literature today.

## **5. Timeline: 1920s - 1930s**

1920s-1930s: Literacy Becomes a Community Project

Citizens form Marion's NAACP chapter (1930) | As they read and discussed the ideas of India's political and intellectual leaders, Mahatma Gandhi and the poet Rabindranath Tagore, Marionites founded a chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). This group sponsored public programs at the AME Quinn Chapel and Mt. Zion Baptist Church, offering classes on civics, Black history, and current events as well as lectures by state and national speakers who engaged audiences on how to solve community problems caused by racism.

Creation of Federal Emergency Schools (1930s ) |

- As the Great Depression deepened, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) funded a series of "Emergency Schools" around the country to provide jobs for unemployed teachers and free educational opportunities for growing numbers of unemployed Americans.
- By 1935 in Marion, members of the Women's Club, the Public Library, the Chamber of Commerce, The Rotary Club, the Kiwanis, the American Legion, the Red Cross, the YMCA, Labor Unions, state and county officials, public and parochial school leaders, and the Parents-Teacher

Association joined forces to help advise, recruit, and support this educational project for the community.

- After the first classes were offered at the Y.M.C.A., more buildings and more classes were added due to popular demand. Marion's children played in supervised playgrounds while parents attended classes. Course offerings ranged from basic reading and writing to secretarial skills, scientific and literary topics, home economics and car maintenance.
- After World War II, Marion leaders adapted this "Emergency School" structure and continued running a popular county wide "Adult Education" program that lasted into the 1960s.

#### Federation Radio: The Women's Club and Marion Radio (1930s – 1947) |

Throughout the Depression and World War II, Marionites turned to the radio for news, entertainment, and literary education. Clubwomen reported on their activities and shared news about new literature and ideas via a program called "Federation Radio," broadcast on WMRN. In 1930, Mrs. Cora Henderson served as the first chairman of the Club's radio committee and the Club regularly invited clubwomen from across the state to be guest speakers on civic and literary topics.

Public Speaker Extraordinaire | As Club member and Ohioana director, Mrs. Head shared her literary knowledge on the "Federation Radio" programs. She also gave numerous public lectures in Marion and around the state. She was a renowned public speaker who claimed some degree of literary expertise in 25 areas. In a published endorsement, Ohio Wesleyan Dean and English Professor, William Smyser, described her as having "cultivated taste and sound judgment" and went on to write, "She is a clear and entertaining speaker whom I am glad to recommend as a lecturer to any audience."

In 1934, she presented a lecture to the Marion Women's Club titled "Literature, a Mirror of Life." According to a report in the Marion Star, "Mrs. Head followed the trend of literature and its portrayal of the activities and mental attitudes of the time to the present day when readers are asking for books of the romantic and philosophical school and historical novels are enjoying a popularity not enjoyed since the early 90's."

#### Literacy Promotion in Marion, 1930s |

- 1934: Clubwomen worked with Marion Public School teachers and Boy Scouts in a "book drive" to collect books for Public Library.

- 1935: Clubwomen gave Easter Baskets to Marion Children's Home with illustrated nature books in them.
- 1939: Clubwomen wrote letters to state representatives regarding the need to continue aid to public libraries. Throughout the Depression, they continued to collect and donate books to Marion Public Library, while also building up libraries in local schools. Clubwomen started one of the first "story hours" at the Silver Street school.

## 6. Timeline: 1940s - 1950s

1940s-1950s: Mildred Lawrence & Rose Nichols

Colored Civic Club (February 14 –23, 1940) | The newly formed Colored Civic Club arranges a program in coordination with the new county adult education program in observance of “National Negro History Week” starting February 14. The Colored Civic Club offered public classes in Black history and civil government.

Marion Women’s Club Gets New Home - Celebrates with Huge Book Exhibit (1945-1946) | Shauck and Ida Barlow willed their mansion to the Women’s Club to serve as its “Home.” A year later, in 1946, the Club celebrated “National Book Week” at their new headquarters with a huge public book exhibit. They filled the house with book displays and musical performances and served tea (Ohioana Collection was represented – as well as books on all kinds of subjects.)

Mrs. Mildred Lawrence (1948-1950) | Mrs. Mildred Lawrence served as Club President from 1948-1950. To promote adult literacy, she spearheaded a community wide literary contest in May 1949. Nearly all entries were poems. She regularly traveled to promote the Club, going to Columbus and Toledo for conventions. She was the first president to host the Club's annual "Fine Arts Day" at the new Club Home, a public event started in 1930 by clubwomen to highlight local artists and encourage art education in Marion.

Clubwomen Supporting Classes for the Blind (1950) | Another large focus for Mrs. Lawrence was supporting the education of blind students in Marion. Clubwomen sent supplies to young blind students who made objects they could sell, and the profits helped support the school program. As chairman of this project, Mrs. Thomas D. Bain also received a letter from students, thanking them for sending the class a cabinet of vinyl records. Club minutes from March

21,1950 reported that clubwomen raised \$2,146.27, which after inflation today, would be around \$27,650.42.

Literacy Promotion in Marion, 1950s | The Marion Women's Club promoted use of local libraries, supported legislation for State Library Service, and promoted local library service in parts of Ohio where it was inadequate or nonexistent.

Mrs. Rose Nichols (1947-1957) | In 1947, a group of Black women in Marion, led by Mrs. Rose Nichols, formed a club of their own, the Jessie A. Gardner Federated Club, offering programs of cultural and literary enrichment, civic education, and community support like daycare for Black children. In 1951, President Nichols addressed the Marion Women's Club, informing the white club women of her club's accomplishments over the past four years. Rose Nichols and Mary Hane, the new president of the Women's Club, began to talk and serve together, as Club presidents, on some of Marion's public health advocacy committees.

## **7. Timeline: 1957**

1957: Janet Berg & Myrtle Huhn

Myrtle Huhn (1956 - 1958) | This influential clubwoman held several high-profile positions in Marion that fostered civic engagement, literacy and cultural promotion, and public health advocacy. Serving as president of the Council of Jewish Women in 1951, Mrs. Huhn was also a member of the Marion Women's Club. From 1956 to 1958, she led the Women's Club as president and, as Club representative, served as member of Marion's Tuberculosis Board of Directors in 1956 and the Advisory Subcommittee for Marion General Hospital in 1957.

Janet Berg Becomes Public Library Director in 1957 | Janet Berg became director of the Marion Public Library in 1957. As a Marion clubwoman, she formed the "Friends of the Library," building on the Club's library support network while also stimulating wider community interest. Miss Berg implemented various services as director: home delivery of books, a bookmobile, a weekly radio program about literature and library events, and the creation of a local history and genealogy section. .



Club President serves on Regional Campus Committee (1957) | As President of the Marion Women's Club, Myrtle Huhn joined Marion's "Committee of Sixteen." Working with other high profile community leaders in Marion including politicians, business leaders, clergy, and others, she helped with the planning for the regional campus.

Mrs. Rose Nichols Models How to Read and Learn Together (1957) | Known for her love of literature and her love of roses, Rose Nichols hosted a "Tea of Roses" at her home on N. State Street. The event was attended by both Black and white clubwomen and their husbands. Here, they shared tea, played and sang music, and read poems - together in Mrs. Nichols' rose garden.

Literary Promotion in Marion, 1950s | Along with many in Marion, clubwomen and librarians enthusiastically supported the coming of the new OSU "branch campus."

- Clubwomen hosted gatherings of professors and students, and ran fundraising events for the new campus.
- Janet Berg, new director of the Marion Library, offered study space and reference resources to the future students attending the new campus.

## **8. Timeline: 1960s - Present**

1960s to Present: Birth of a University Campus

New Campus, New Building (1968) | After its founding in 1957, and sharing space with Harding High School for a decade, the Marion campus is established with the opening of the site's first building (now named Morrill Hall).

Big Community Support for New Campus (1968 to present) | The Ohio State University at Marion and its new "literary enterprise" receive an enthusiastic round of boosterism from a wide range of community backers.

The Move to the New Library (1979) | Before her retirement in 1982, Janet Berg oversaw the move from the original Public Library building, donated by Andrew Carnegie, to the present location on East Church Street. Miss Berg lectured to the Women's Club as well as many other community groups during the late 1970s, describing the new building design and explaining the many new resources, especially audio-visual, that the new site would offer. The new library opened its doors in February 1979.

Mrs. Earlean Hatch and the Library's "Afro-American History Month" (1982) | After the Christ Missionary Baptist Church hosted Marion's first "National Black History Month" program in 1980, the Public Library begins coordinating with Mrs. Earlean Hatch and her "African American Heritage and Culture Committee" to launch yearly exhibits promoting Black literary, historic, and artistic culture. Exhibits often include books by Black writers, African sculpture, and the work of local Marion artist, John Nelson.

Literary Promotion in Marion, 1960s to the Present |

- Janet Berg specifically invited her fellow Clubwomen to tour the new library and they continued their literary and financial support throughout the years, donating books, hosting community writing competitions, and promoting reading programs and "Friends of the Library" events.
- Founded in 1977 by Mrs. Earlean Hatch, the "African American Heritage and Culture Committee" continues its educational work today as Marion's "Black Heritage Council."
- The old Carnegie Library now serves another educational purpose for the community as the Children's Museum of Marion - the "Explore-It-Torium."

## **9. Marion's Ongoing Literacy Legacy: Section Introduction**

Marion's Ongoing Literacy Legacy

[Image: Stock photograph of person being interviewed and video recorded.]

Given Marion's rich tradition of support for literacy and learning beyond the classroom, it only makes sense that we see the continuation of this tradition today.

For this project, we reached out to current members of the Marion community—higher education professionals, politicians, civic club leaders, and more—to get their own accounts of influential memories about literacy from their own backgrounds. We also asked them how those early experiences with reading, writing, and learning might have influenced their current choice of occupation, their own ongoing interest in reading and writing, and how they continue to support the literate activities of others in their household or community.

Collectively, these voices give testament to the enduring power of literacy—not only in their professional careers, but also in their personal lives and the lives of those around them.

Note: This portion of the project grew out of Ben McCorkle's Digital Media and English Studies course (ENGL 4569), Spring 2023.

[Image: DALN logo and QR code]

In addition to the video trailer accompanying this exhibit, the entire interview series can be found on the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN) by scanning the QR code here, or by accessing the URL:

[go.osu.edu/ReadingTogetherInMarion](https://go.osu.edu/ReadingTogetherInMarion)

The DALN is an open, publicly accessible repository of individuals' noteworthy experiences with literacy. Launched in 2007, this international project serves as a resource for scholarship, teaching, and the preservation of local oral histories pertaining to literate practices and traditions.

## **10. Literacy Narrative Profile: Greg Rose**

[Note: Each of the posters in the Literacy Narrative Profile section include a headshot of the person profiled.]

“I’ve always been a voracious reader. I read a lot—all the time—and continue to read a lot, and I think that has had a significantly positive impact on my ability to write.”

—Greg Rose, Dean & Director, The Ohio State University at Marion

## **11. Literacy Narrative Profile: Jackie Peterson**

“Reading is fundamental, and if I didn’t learn how to read back then, I wouldn’t be where I am now.”

—Jackie Peterson, Pastor, Logos Christian Ministries & President,  
Inter-Denominational Ministerial Alliance

## **12. Literacy Narrative Profile: Valerie Wigton**

“Our parents were involved with us from the beginning. And it was usually Dad saying “Do you have your homework done?” [...] Mom, back in her day, was a valedictorian. [...] She made sure that we got through school and we were all in honor society. [...] I know that her influence and Dad’s influence are still with me today.”

—Valerie Wigton, President, Marion Women's Club

## **13. Literacy Narrative Profile: Tara Dyer**

“A lot of the [literacy] influence in my culture comes from African American churches, and of course your first piece of literature is the Bible. So when you ask about the interaction of people helping, that came in the form of helping to learn speeches for Christmas programs or Easter plays or even attending Bible school.”

—Tara Dyer, Marion City Schools Board of Education member, retired teacher & community activist

## **14. Literacy Narrative Profile: Heidi Jones**

“I’ll be at the grocery store and I’ll run into a kid and they’ll say, “Miss Heidi, do you remember when you tutored me in spelling and reading?” And I’ll say, “Absolutely!” Best times of my life were in my early 20s [tutoring young students].”

—Heidi Jones, President, Marion Area Chamber of Commerce

## **15. Literacy Narrative Profile: Kirk Detweiler**

[On “Set the Stage” summer theatre camp for youth] “If you’re in a play, talking about imagination, you take it into the third dimension because you not only have to read and understand the script, you have to interpret it for an audience. You’re basically making the words on the page come to life.”

—Kirk Detweiler, Executive Director, the Marion Palace Theatre

## **16. Marion's Literacy Future: Section Introduction**

### Marion's Literacy Future

Recent reports show a staggering reality: 54% of Americans between the ages of 16 and 74 read below a sixth-grade level. However, we note that Marion's rich tradition of support for literacy and learning beyond the classroom continues today, giving us hope for the future.

For this project, we joined Let's Read 20 and the Marion Public Library in partnering with River Valley's summer meal program to bring storytime to Marion's youth. We shared our enthusiasm for reading with the children as they had lunch. Programs like these help support Marion's youth in their literacy development—not only for today, but for generations to come.

Note: This portion of the project grew out of Nikole Patson's Language Development course (PSYCH 4554S), Spring 2023.

[Image: Photograph of an adult reading a picture book to a group of children.]

Let's Read 20, a non-profit in Marion, is dedicated to building a Community of readers by encouraging everyone to read to a child for at least 20 minutes each day from birth through elementary school. Why 20 minutes? Because reading, like other skills, is best developed when it becomes repetitive. Forming the habit of reading at a young age is linked to higher performance and achievement throughout life.

[Image: Let's Read 20 logo]

## **17. Marion's Literacy Future: Reflecting on Summer Story Time...**

### Reflecting on Summer Story Time...

[Image: infographic showcasing information about the positive effects of reading to children.]

Each summer, The Lunch Bunch provides free, healthy meals for children in the River Valley School District. We partnered with the Marion Public Library to provide story time for the kids while they ate.

[Image: Stephanie and Sydney holding poster at Marion Meadows]

Stephanie and Sydney read at Marion Meadows. Of the experience, Stephanie said:

“The best part about reading to the kids was seeing how much they enjoyed us reading to them. They would ask when we would be coming back and what kinds of stories we would be bringing with us.”

## **18. Marion’s Literacy Future: Reflecting on Summer Story Time...**

Reflecting on Summer Story Time...

[Image: photograph of Cheyenne under covered picnic area at Grandview Estates.]

Casey and Cheyenne read at Grandview Estates. Of the experience, Casey said: “We read *Abe the Service Dog*. The kids seemed to enjoy it and were interacting with the book as it was being read!”

[Image: photograph of Abigail sitting in chair and reading picture book to children.]

Abigail and Autumn read at Waldo Community Park. Of the experience, Abigail said:

“I had an amazing time reading to the kids at Waldo Community Park... Reading is so important to not just a child’s education and future, but their life in general. It makes us curious, and allows us to explore the world in new ways.”

## **19. Call to Action Poster**

## CALL TO ACTION

Marion has had a long history of putting books in the hands of its fellow Marionites. From hosting library fundraisers to holding books drives to throwing book showers, the citizens of Marion have gotten more books in homes. You can be part of that continuing tradition by donating to Marion's Imagination Library.

Marion Public Library, the county partner of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library of Ohio provides FREE books to children under the age of 5 in Ohio to help prepare every child for kindergarten! You can help ensure these books remain free by donating to the Marion Community Foundation Fund.

[Images: logos for Dolly Parton Imagination Library of Ohio and Let's read 20, with corresponding QR codes.]

Visit [go.osu.edu/libraryfund](https://go.osu.edu/libraryfund) or scan the QR code to the right.

Also, you can scan the QR code to the left to sign the Let's Read 20 pledge to read to children for at least 20 minutes every day.

## 20. Interaction Station Poster

What's *your* favorite childhood book? Leave a note here.

[Image: clip art of children playing around a tall stack of books.]