

Gladys Bradley and the First Kinmundy Library

By Helen (Robb) Garrett

Our community is so proud of our new library in the park frequented by citizens here and the surrounding area. With its computers, copy machines, ability to copy old-time photos, (while the owners wait) it is a far cry from Kinmundy's first library. This building was a small one room frame building located across from our current city hall. The first and only librarian was Miss Gladys Bradley. The library was part of a government project established during depression-era days. Better known at that time was the WPA where the thousands of unemployed were given jobs building and improving the intra-structure of the country. Locally the WPA toilets were one of their busiest projects.

Gladys Bradley had been a success story for her era. She was born in Kinmundy, the daughter of Will Bradley and Mandy (Vallow) Bradley in 1893, graduated from Southern Illinois Normal University in 1923, taught English here at Kinmundy High School in 1926. Later she moved to St. Louis where she was employed as a teacher at Webster Groves. Gladys owned her own car, was very much in charge with a successful career when a car accident ended that. One leg was badly crushed, became infected, and she spent one year in Barnes Hospital. Remember this was an era when our antibiotics, so successful now, were unheard of. Eventually Gladys's leg had to be amputated leaving her with only little left of her thighbone. The all-wooden leg she was fitted with was a heavy one, attached with straps to her body. Mrs. Matelda Maxwell, her aunt on the Vallow side, welcomed her to her home here in Kinmundy as she recovered. Her independent spirit took over and she read of a government program concerning libraries, applied for it, moved to her own rented home south on Monroe Street. (Fern Gray's old home) A familiar sight were the Fulfer's—Kenny and Wilma Jean, teenagers whose parents ran the Fulfer Restaurant, pushing her wheelchair over to the library. They also ran errands, got groceries for her. The library was very well stocked with books, due to the government program. On Saturday afternoons, Gladys had special children's hours where she read to them. Many of we older ones read "Gone With The Wind" for the first time!

Gladys was truly a symbol of those whose philosophy was "When the going gets tough—the tough get going!"

When the government program was discontinued, Gladys moved up to Main Street, put in a dress shop in a small frame building with living quarters in the back. The dresses, hats, purses were sent to her on consignment. The ones that didn't sell were sent back to the company. Everyone stopped in to see the newest fashions.