

FAQ: Faith Cabin Libraries

What were the Faith Cabin Libraries?

During the Depression, the segregated South denied African-Americans access to county libraries and the reading materials they contained. Against the prevailing thought of the day, Willie Lee Buffington, a white mill worker, established the Faith Cabin Libraries – a log cabin library system -- for African-Americans in South Carolina and Georgia.

These private, community-based libraries were in operation from 1931 to the mid-1970s, to provide book collections for rural African-American communities during the segregation era.



Through Buffington's letter writing campaign and appeals for donations, over 100 small libraries were constructed in South Carolina and Georgia.

Who started the Faith Cabin Libraries?



Willie Lee Buffington started the Faith Cabin Library system in 1932. Buffington later became a Methodist minister and college professor.

Where was the first library?



The first Faith Cabin Library opened in the Plum Branch community in Saluda County, South Carolina in 1932.

Why did he start the Faith Cabin Libraries?

Motivated by his respect for an African-American schoolteacher, Euriah Simpkins, Buffington established the first library in Saluda County, South Carolina. A life-long friend of the Buffington family, Simpkins sent Buffington a dollar a year while he studied in Connecticut. It was this kindness and the lack of reading materials for rural African-Americans that inspired Buffington to start the Faith Cabin library system.



Because African-Americans were denied access to county libraries in South Carolina and Georgia, Willie Lee Buffington started the Faith Cabin Libraries movement to build libraries where children and adults could find reading materials.

How did the libraries get books?

Buffington solicited the books for the libraries through a letter writing campaign. He wrote to women's clubs in the South and Northeast. The first library opened in the Plum Branch community of Saluda County, South Carolina with a collection of 1000 books received from donations across the East Coast.

What was the impact of the libraries?

According to Dr. Robert V. Williams, of the University of South Carolina's School of Library and Information Science, the Faith Cabin Libraries movement left a remarkable and far-reaching legacy thanks to the efforts of its founder, Buffington. He remarks that the "movement was the largest private, community-based movement in the Southeast (and perhaps the entire country) involved in establishing library collections for African Americans, at a time when they were almost completely excluded from public libraries in the Southeast."

The story of the Faith Cabin Libraries movement, as revealed in the documents and photographs now archived at the South Caroliniana Library, serves as a reminder of an era in Southern history when basic services were denied to a significant portion of the population. At this time, African-Americans often relied upon the efforts of the philanthropist and the missionary-minded. Through the efforts of Willie Lee Buffington and against difficult odds, library service was made available to many African-Americans.

Works Cited

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