

Alice Gene Lewis

(1929-2013)

By Jerry Long
c.2026



Alice Gene Lewis – Director of the Daviess County Public Library,
Owensboro, KY, 1965-1995

Alice Gene Sale was born 25 May 1929 in Union County, KY. She was the daughter of Hershel Raymond Sale (1893-1980) & Ruth Galbraith (1897-1979). Her father was a lockmaster and civil engineer. Her third-great-grandfather, Anthony Sale (1740-1826), a resident of Caroline County, VA, brought his family to Kentucky, where he died in Jefferson County.

Alice Sale is enumerated in the 1930 & 1940 federal censuses of Union County, KY. At the time of the 1950 federal census she was an English teacher at the Webster County High School in Dixon, KY.

Alice Gene Sale married Ralph Vernon Lewis (1913-1983) on 23 November 1950 at Uniontown in Union County, KY. He was a retired public relations director and was editor of the newspaper, "Owensboro Star" (1968-1969). Alice and Ralph Lewis separated about 1970. Ralph & Alice Lewis had one child – Lucinda Ruth Lewis ("Cindy", 1955-2008), wife of Michael Shawn Boone.

Alice Gene Lewis attended the Western State College in Bowling Green, KY. She received her masters in Library Science from the University of Kentucky in 1959. She has had three years experience with the U. S. Army Library at Camp Breckinridge during the Korean War and was hospital librarian at Fort Knox. She was employed for five years as head of the reference department of the State Library at Frankfort, KY (1960-1964). Several syndicated A.P. articles were published in many Kentucky newspapers about her role as state librarian. Upon her employment at the Owensboro library she was assistant librarian and faculty member at the Alice Lloyd Junior College, Pippa Pass, Ky (1964-1965).

Alice Gene Lewis was hired as head librarian at the Owensboro Carnegie Free Public Library in Owensboro, KY on 1 September 1965. She was the first director with a Master's in Library Science. She served in this position for the next thirty years and four months. She announced her retirement in July 1995 and her last day of service as head librarian was on 27 December 1995.

She is one of sixteen who have served in the position of director of the Owensboro library (see "Daviess County Public Library", by Shelia Brown Heflin, Daviess County, Kentucky: Celebrating Our Heritage, 1815-2015, Evansville, IN: M. T. Publishing Company, Inc., 2015, p.181). Mrs. Lewis is worthy of receiving the library's most accomplished and outstanding service to the community award. No other director's length of service approaches that of Mrs. Lewis. Her tenure saw the building of a new library when the Griffith Avenue library was dedicated on 1 December 1968. Under the guidance of Mrs. Lewis the Kentucky Room was expanded and opened in a separate room in the basement of the library on 13 February 1976. In 1993 the automated library card catalog went online, bringing the library into the computer age. Another, possibly the most significant, accomplishment during her tenure was the establishment of a taxing district in 1995. This saw the resolution of the annual tense bickering between city and county governments over funding of the library. Many times the library had been threatened with losing part of its funding. Her resolute position led to the library not losing ground.

This writer was an employee of the Daviess County Public Library for twenty-seven years seven of which was under the directorship of Mrs. Lewis. It is my opinion that Mrs. Lewis' service and leadership was the most dedicated and noteworthy. Mrs. Lewis was not a cloistered director. Her presence was regularly seen throughout the library and at times she would assist various departments when needed. The depth of her dedication to the library was witnessed by myself when I saw her on multiple occasions picking up garbage in the library or on the grounds. She was willing to do what ever advanced the mission of the library!

Alice Gene Lewis died on 31 December 2013 at the Hartford House in Owensboro, KY. She was 84. She had resided on the hill at 1312 Parrish Avenue for 47 years. A framed 24 in. x 28 in. portrait of Mrs. Lewis is housed in the Kentucky Room storage area at the Daviess County Public Library, Owensboro, KY.

– Jerry Long



Courier-Journal, Louisville, KY, Wednesday, 15 November 1950, p.5B:



Miss Alice Gene Sale

Col. H. R. Sale and Mrs. Sale of Uniontown announce the engagement of their daughter, Miss Alice Gene Sale, to Ralph Lewis, son of Mrs. Mary Lewis of Cincinnati. The wedding will take November 23 at the home of the bride-elect's parents.

Miss Sale is a graduate of the University of Kentucky. Mr. Lewis attended the University of California at Los Angeles.

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The Lexington Herald, Lexington, KY, Tuesday, 17 April 1962, p.11:



ANSWERING ANOTHER REQUEST- -With few details to guide her, Mrs. Alice Gene Lewis, reference librarian for the Kentucky Library Extension Division, selects a book to answer a request from one of her book-by-mail correspondents. From her 30,000 volumes, Mrs. Lewis answers requests from individuals, the state's 10 library regions and from school and county librarians. She also supplies material to various government agencies in Frankfort.

State Reference Librarian Answers Unusual Requests

FRANKFORT, Ky., April 16 (AP) "Send me a book on all Kentucky and other state laws. I want to find a place to get married quick."

"I need the latest books on embalming and etiquette practiced in a funeral home."

"My son is a holy terror. Do you have anything on controlling teen-agers?"

Pulling out reference material for these book-by-mail customers and finding answers to their questions is job of Mrs. Alice Gene Lewis, reference librarian at the Kentucky Library Extension Division in Frankfort. There is no charge.

Mrs. Lewis has 30,000 volumes from which to choose, but knowing where to find the material not on her own shelves is a big part of the job.

Last month, for example, a correspondent from Princeton asked for a book to help identify an old violin. Not finding much in her own collection, Mrs. Lewis contacted the Louisville orchestra concertmaster, Paul Kling.

She learned that Kling would be at Princeton for a concert April 1. If the Princeton man would show him the violin after the performance, Kling might be able to identify it.

Where the state obvious source — the Kentucky Historical Society, the law library, the Legislative Research Commission — some questions in these fields are referred to the respective agency.

Not all of Mrs. Lewis' 50-odd mail requests a day are from individuals in the counties composing Kentucky's library regions. Requests are channeled to Mrs. Lewis through the regional librarians.

On Wednesdays each week, walk-in service is available to borrowers from Frankfort, where there is no tax-supported public library.

Mrs. Lewis and her staff occupy the original library the old Berry Mansion atop a hill west of the city.

Every wall of the room covered with part of the reference collection. The rest the books fill the drawing room, music books and master bedrooms.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 22 August 1965, p. 2C:

**Union County
Native Named
Librarian**

The board of trustees of the Owensboro - Daviess County Library announced the appointment of Mrs. Ralph Lewis as librarian of the Carnegie Free Public Library.



Mrs. Ralph Lewis

Mrs. Lewis, a native of Union County, received her A.B. and Masters degrees in Library Science from the University of Kentucky.

She was librarian at Ireland Hospital, Fort Knox; reference librarian for the State Department of Libraries in Frankfort, and until her recent appointment was a member of the faculty and librarian at Alice Lloyd College, Pippapass, Ky.



Carnegie Free Public Library, 903 Frederica Street, Owensboro, KY



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 2 September 1965, pp.1A & 16A:

Mrs. Ralph Lewis
New Librarian
At Public Library

Mrs. Ralph Lewis has been named head librarian at Owensboro Carnegie Free Public Library.

Mrs. Lewis assumed her duties Wednesday, succeeding Wayne Baker who resigned to take the position of assistant librarian at Evansville College.

Owensboro's new librarian takes over the post after serving as assistant librarian and faculty member at Alice Lloyd Junior College, Pippa Pass, Ky.

She was employed for five years as head of the reference department of the State Library at Frankfort and has had three years experience with the U. S. Army Library.

A graduate of the University of Kentucky, Mrs. Lewis earned her master's degree in library science from UK in 1959.

Mr. Lewis will be associated with the Hardin Printing Company. The Lewises, who reside at 1311B Claranette Court, have two daughters, Connie, 18, and Cindy, 10.

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Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 31 July 1966, p.1A:



\$75,000 PRESENTATION – The Honorable Edward T. Breathitt, Governor of Kentucky, is shown chatting with local library officials following his presentation of a \$75,000 state Bond Issue check to the Owensboro - Daviess County facility. The money will be used in the construction of a new library building on the southeast corner of Griffith and McCreary Avenues. Talking with the governor are Mrs. Alice Gene Lewis, librarian, and Miss Ellen Hart Smith, library board chairman, who accepted the check.

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Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 26 September 1966, p.1B:

Librarian Unveils Plans For Expanded Service

**State Lags
In This Field
She Believes**

By Dick Fackler, Messenger and Inquirer Staff

Writer Kentuckians are unawakened about good public libraries because they haven't been exposed to them, says Mrs. Alice Gene Lewis, librarian at the public library. "

I don't think the people of Kentucky have had good libraries and what you haven't had, you don't miss," she explained.

The tall, slender librarian sees Owensboro as a bright spot in the general picture because the city is in the process of building a new, modern library – and there are few, if any, other cities in Kentucky building new, large libraries.

Federal, state and local funds have been committed to construct a new library on the southeast corner of Griffith and McCreary Avenues. The existing library at 9th and Frederica Streets was built in 1909.

Opportunity

Mrs. Lewis, with 10 years' experience in library work plus a master's degree in library science from the University of Kentucky, intends to capitalize on the opportunity to offer better services which the new library will provide.

Here are some of the features she plans which the existing library doesn't offer, or offers in a very limited fashion:

- Movie showings of old classics.
- Special programs tailored to age groups varying from small children to senior citizens.
- Arts and crafts programs. Use of meeting rooms for 12-library-related programs.
- Building a strong collection of books for the use of persons taking adult education courses.
- Making the reference section so comprehensive that it will be spotlighted throughout Kentucky.
- Stocking books in subjects like retailing and personnel management which are particularly apropos for use by small business owners.
- Bolstering the collection of classic literature and related essays and criticisms.
- enlarging the Kentucky collection (books about the Commonwealth).
- Extending the genealogy collection for persons interested in tracing their ancestry.

Bookmobile

Mrs. Lewis, in addition, hopes to acquire a larger bookmobile eland have it in operation 60 hours instead of the current 30 hours.

Another major ambition is to greatly expand the selection and services in the children's room because "if you hook your reader young, you can expect him to stay with it the rest of his life."

An important step in improving the service in the children's room goes into effect on Oct. 1, when a full-time children's librarian will be employed.

"I am very happy about this," said Mrs. Lewis, "because now we are just directing traffic in there instead of giving the children the help they need in finding and selecting books."

Mrs. Lewis has a lot of ideas about library operations, personnel, and readers.

Male Librarians

Talking about careers in library work, she said, "I'd like to see more men in the field." She noted that in the big cities men frequently are the librarians or chief administrators.

"I believe nowadays a librarian needs the qualities of a teacher and has to have some salesmanship. They have to like people and genuinely want to help them." "

The librarian today has to be different, not the retiring type of person seeking security and seclusion which traditionally has been associated with libraries."

There have been radical changes in library theory also, commented the librarian.

"Years ago – some places still – the librarian wanted to have all the books on the shelf where they could be seen and were safe."

The modern theory is just the opposite, the emptier the shelves the better, because it means the books are being read, explained Mrs. Lewis.

"The traffic in books measures the success of a library."

More Books

Her idea is not only to increase the traffic in books, but increase the number of them to 250,000 in the new library. The library now has about 50,000 volumes, which will form the nucleus of the collection in the new library.

Less than 2,000 new books are added annually and this number is insufficient to keep the library up-to-date, according to library standards. Mrs. Lewis would like to hike the figure to 8,000.

She estimates the number of library users will rise by a third immediately after the new library, which will have parking facilities, opens.

Mrs. Lewis plans to have a small lounge with food and soft drink dispensing machines for the convenience the library users. She believes this will have special appeal for residents of the county who have to travel a long way to the library.

Public's Taste

Has the public's taste in books varied much in the past years?

Mrs. Lewis commented since Sputnik the public has been a little more science-oriented, but readers are still as unpredictable as ever.

"The public's taste never ceases to amaze me," she said, "the latest run (on books) is on how to make wine at home."

As a veteran observer of readers, Mrs. Lewis has worked out a few generalities on what type of person enjoys what type of book.

Mysteries seem to have great appeal to persons with high-pressure jobs, she has found. Her analysis: "It's escape reading!.

At the other end of the scale is the person with a very mundane job. The librarian finds this person often choosing book on some complicated hobby or similar subject. Maybe this is escaping from routine into complexities.

Feels Lucky

Mrs. Lewis came to Owensboro on Aug. 13, 1965, and feels fortunate that after being here year, a new library is in the offing. "A new library means a lot to me," she says. "To build a new library is a feather in any librarian's cap.

"I just happened to come along at the right time. A new building was inevitable, but it could have dragged on for years more without the unusual interest shown by the library board and the city and county."

Asked for a prediction, she responded with: "Within 10 years I can see two branch libraries in Owensboro and at least two bookmobiles."

Mrs. Lewis lives at 1403 Waverly Place. She has one daughter in Southern Junior High School and another in the Women's Army Corps (WACs). Her husband, Ralph, operates his own business in advertising.

Mrs. Lewis was in charge of the Army's first bookmobile program at Camp Breckinridge during the Korean War. She was hospital librarian at Fort Knox, and head of the reference department for the State Library at Frankfort, and assistant librarian at Alice Lloyd Junior College at Pippa Passes, Ky.



YOUNG READERS – Mrs. Alice Gene Lewis, librarian, is very interested in attracting children to the library to stimulate their interest in reading. She is explaining one of the children's books to Karen and Martha Robertson, daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Ivan Robertson of 1926 Sussox Place. Karen, 11, is in the center of the photograph.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 2 December 1968, p.1A:



RECEIVING LINE – Among those in the receiving line at the main entrance to the new Owensboro-Daviess County Public Library at its grand opening Sunday was Mrs. Ralph Lewis, librarian, here pictured greeting one of the guests. Mrs. Lewis has been head librarian since 1965.



Daviess County Public Library, 450 Griffith Avenue, Owensboro, KY



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 1 December 1973, p.1B:



Namesake – A Picture of Col. Joseph Daviess, the man for whom Daviess County was named, has been donated to the Owensboro-Daviess County Library by Henry Wilson, right. Preparing to hang the portrait in the library's Kentucky room is Mrs. Alice Gene Lewis, librarian. The library is celebrating its fifth anniversary at 450 Griffith Ave.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 1 March 1984, p.1D:



Alice Gene Lewis, Director of
Owensboro-Daviess County Library

Setting the course for a 'tight ship'

By Karen Owen, Messenger-Inquirer

Alice Gene Lewis gets paid to read but owns only a enough books to last her through a two-week snowstorm.

That is because Ms. Lewis, 54, of 1312 Parrish Ave. has enough books where she works to see her through many winters. She is director of the Owensboro-Daviess County Public Library, and she often indulges herself by browsing through one of the 108,000 volumes surrounding her.

"Anybody who has a job where you are paid to read and talk about it is the luckiest person in the world," Ms. Lewis said, sipping iced coffee recently in a local restaurant.

The 6-foot-tall Morganfield native most people know as "Aggie" has been director of the library for 19 years. She oversees a staff of 32 employees and a \$529,000 annual budget, but spends much of her time selecting the nearly 5,000 new books added to the library's collection each year.

"I don't hear many complaints," Ms. Lewis said. "Owensboro is a tolerant community, as long as you don't absolutely fly in the face of what the standards are."

An official from Frankfort once told her she runs "too tight a ship," but she disagrees, Ms. Lewis said. The library couldn't lend out 1,000 books a day if it were operated "willy-nilly," she said.

She admits she doesn't like surprises on the job. "I know the only thing in life for sure is change," Ms. Lewis said. "What I want is to be flexible. Whether I am or not is open to debate."

Flexible or not, she is both outspoken and open-minded, her friends say.

Her daughter, Cindy Boone, said Ms. Lewis "never seems to be influenced by what people think she should do. I'm sure some people would think she's a little strange, but I don't."

Bill Chandler, who serves on the library board, describes her as a "free thinker."

"Aggie is one of the most interesting persons I've ever known. She's got a good wit. She's a learner," he said. "She may be opinionated, but she's always willing to listen."

Ms. Lewis' particular passions are gardening, cooking and knitting. She can knit through an entire meeting without missing a stitch.

"A lot of people resent that," Ms. Lewis said. "They think I'm not paying attention. You can't read what I'm really thinking by how I'm knitting."

She also loves to travel, preferably by herself because she moves at a fast clip.

"I can't keep up with the woman," Mrs. Boone said. After their last journey together, "I swore I would never go on another trip with her."

Ms. Lewis usually travels to the British Isles, perhaps because she can speak no foreign language despite taking 14 semesters of French at Brescia College, she said.

In Owensboro, she walks nearly everywhere she goes or rides her bicycle. She got a car and a driver's license 10 years ago, but "out there with all the crazy people, it's hard enough to walk," Ms. Lewis said.

If she hadn't become a librarian, she would have liked to have been a lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union or some other kind of spokesman for people who can't speak for themselves, she said.

She serves on Judge-executive Bill Froehlich's Juvenile Task Force and Study the Owensboro-Daviess County Literacy Council.

A reminder of the unfortunate – a necklace made of horseshoe nails – hung around her neck during a recent lunch break. She bought it on a trip to Great Britain from a boy wearing ragged clothes, Ms. Lewis said.

She's not a bleeding-heart liberal, but a conservative, Ms. Lewis said, although "I think they're both dirty words." Political tags mean whatever the user wants them to, she said.

With her easy access to the library, she has never owned many books herself, Ms. Lewis said, but she loves to read books for "normal neurotics" – self-help and books popular psychology books – and books on British history and travel, world religions and politics.

She has just enough books on hand to keep her occupied if she ever gets snowed in for two weeks, Ms. Lewis said.

Even so, "books are a way of life for her," Mrs. Boone said. The library "is not a job to her. I've always envied her that."

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Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 13 June 1994, pp.1A & 2A:

Speaking volumes

Lewis doesn't fit stereotype of librarian

By Greg Kocher, Messenger-Inquirer



For the past 30 years, Alice Gene "Aggie" Lewis has been director of the Owensboro-Daviess County Public Library.

Library board members come and go, but there is always "Aggie."

For the past 30 years, Alice Gene Lewis has been director of the Owensboro public library. She and her 40-member staff have provided stability and calm during the recent controversy about library funding and appointments to the board of trustees.

"She's very efficient at running her establishment," said Tom Neudecker, former chairman of the library board.

"We're lucky to have her," said Richard Weiss, president of Friends of the Library, a group that raises private money for the library. "She establishes a good mood for the place."

At age 65, it would be easy for Lewis to step out and leave the wrangling behind. But that's not in her plans.

"I think it would be awful in this state of flux for me to leave and then a new librarian to come in," Lewis said. "So I'm going to see this through. I want the most money I can get for the library."

"Aggie" ranks with other local notables such as "Waitman" and "J.R." (as in former Owensboro Mayors Waitman Taylor and J.R. Miller) whose last names are superfluous. Just say "Aggie" and folks know who you mean.

Which is something of an accomplishment. Librarians aren't usually household names. They are stereotyped as prim women with pursed lips and their hair in buns, demanding silence and the prompt return of borrowed books.

Lewis chews up that stereotype and spits it out.

She is witty. She is outspoken. In a one-woman show at Owensboro Community College some years ago, Lewis portrayed Lillian Hellman, the playwright who once told a congressional committee, "I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions."

Those words could just as easily have been spoken by Lewis, said her daughter, Cindy Boone. Boone said her mother "always shoots straight from the hip." And a divorce years ago made Lewis more "self-reliant," Boone said.

Lewis isn't cloistered in the book stacks, either. The Union County native revels in new experiences. In the last two years she has taken dancing and singing lessons, and has gone horseback riding. She said she'd like to learn fly-cast fishing.

"I fully expect her to tell me she's going to take up sky diving," Boone said.

"She believes in life-long learning," said Ray Shepherd, Lewis' 72-year-old sister.

In short, Lewis may be a bookworm but she isn't bookish. Books are her living, but not her life.

On the other hand, Lewis is a vocal and articulate advocate for libraries. The controversy about funding for the library has strengthened that resolve.

"In my own mind, the three most important things in town are police, fire and sanitation. The fourth thing is the library," Lewis said.

During an interview in her second-floor library office, Lewis kicked off her shoes and put her legs up in her chair. The palm of her left hand bore a scribbled note in ink.

While the library brouhaha has taken its toll on the nerves of Lewis and her staff, she said it could be a "wonderful opportunity" to improve service to patrons. Her wish list includes branch libraries, an idea that seems remote at the moment.

The library has been in the news since a Daviess circuit judge, in response to a lawsuit filed by the library's board of trustees, issued an order April 20 that said the library is a city library. The trustees had sought a clarification on the library's status so they would have a clearer idea of what funding is due the library.

That clarification would seem to be simple enough, but the order and further litigation concerning library board appointments has thrown the library into confusion.

Lewis acknowledged that she sometimes regrets that the board of trustees – the board that was in place before the city employees were appointed - sought a court clarification about the library's status.

"Every now and then I just wish we'd left it alone," Lewis said. "Although it has been really, really frustrating to work on your budget knowing what you need and knowing how underpaid our people are. And then to ooch your budget up a teeny few thousand dollars and then to have them (local governments) cut it. It's kind of like making bricks without straw.

"What I really hoped would happen is that we would be ruled a city library and the politicians would go 'Oh! My goodness! We've owed you all this money and we haven't been doing the right thing. Now, let's start doing the right thing.' "

Further controversy erupted when the City Commission appointed six city employees as library trustees, an action that raised questions about whether the board could act independently. (On Friday, a judge ruled as invalid the appointment of city employees to the board.)

When the new board met for the first time, tension was thick in the air and evident upon the faces of the new trustees. There even had been rumors that the new board would fire Lewis.

Lewis defused the tension quickly and simply. She offered Pez candies to her new bosses. And she engaged them in banter before they got down to business.

Addressing new member Bob Whitmer, Lewis said, "Didn't I have you in Sunday School?"

She had. And what could have been an ugly situation turned out to be a smooth meeting. Ray Shepherd said her sister is an "idealistic realist."

"I am a hired hand," Lewis said. "I have never forgotten it. I do not run the board. Neither does the board run me."

Lewis on ... ***

Some other facts about librarian Alice Gene Lewis:

Her favorite books: "There Is a River" by Thomas Sugrue, a 1945 biography of Edgar Cayce, the Christian County clairvoyant. Also, "The Hundreth Monkey" by Ken Keyes Jr., a 1985 anti-nuclear treatise. Lewis sent a copy to U.S. Sen. Wendell Ford.

Her favorite vacation spot: England. Lewis has been there seven times. "The last four times I've said I'm not going any more. About the fourth trip back I said I'm not going back. I've done England. The next day I bought \$100 worth of guidebooks, so I knew I lied."

And it's not only the history that appeals to her. "In England, the public transportation is wonderful. I can get around that country easier than I can our little town."

Her favorite exercise: "I do 30 minutes, four times a week, on a Nordic Track and that's goo-o-od." Why does someone who walks to work need a Nordic Track? "It's only 12 minutes to my home, so if I do that twice a day, that's not much. (Walking outdoors) is too indefinite. The humidity is awful. It's bo-o-oring."

Her favorite declaration about any public library: "It's the last bastion of American freedom. It's the only place where you can actually come to find out anything you want to know. And you don't have to be well-dressed, you don't have to be clean. We like it if you don't smell, but you don't have to give your credentials at the front door. You don't have to be from posh parts of town."



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 21 July 1995, p.1A:

Library director plans to retire

By Greg Kocher, Messenger-Inquirer

Alice Gene Lewis, director of the Owensboro-Daviess County Public Library for three decades, will retire at the end of the year.

Lewis gave notice Thursday afternoon to the library's board of trustees.

"The timing is right," Lewis said in an interview before the meeting.

Last year, while the library was in the midst of lawsuits over government funding, Lewis had repeatedly said she did not want to leave until those matters were resolved.

Then, on Wednesday, Daviess Fiscal Court approved a library taxing district, something Lewis had hoped to see for years. The district means the library will have a stable, assured source of revenue without having to ask for money from local governments.

Lewis, who turned 66 in May, said she'd thought about retirement "for a good five years." She acknowledged that libraries are moving into the age of the "information superhighway" – and she wants to take the nearest exit ramp.

"I hope not in my lifetime and I hope not in yours will the library not be books," she said. "I cannot conceive of anyone ever being comfortable enough with a personal computer in their lap." The library board, which hopes to have a successor in place by Jan. 1, appointed a partial search committee Thursday. Library trustee G.G. Talbott Jr. will chair the committee.

Also on the seven-member committee will be Library Board Chairwoman Libby Alexander and trustee Jane Haase, plus four other people from the community at large. Three of those four will be noncity residents, and Alexander said she has asked the three county commissioners to recommend one person from each fiscal court district.

Alexander hopes to have the committee in place by July 31. The committee will review library goals, establish a budget for the search process, review applications, conduct finalist interviews and recommend a preferred candidate to the full board.

Alexander said the new director should "have the vision that Aggie brought to this library 30 years ago."

Management of a taxing district requires really good analytical budgeting and forecasting skills," Alexander said. "And I think that increases the responsibility of the library's leadership, and that begins with the director."

Lewis will continue as a consultant to the library through March. Her primary responsibility will be to assist her successor in the transition.

Known as "Aggie" to friends, Lewis came to Owensboro in September 1965. She'd been the assistant librarian at Alice Lloyd Junior College in eastern Kentucky. She'd also held jobs at Fort Knox and Frankfort.

Lewis broke the stereotype of a prim librarian with a silencing finger pressed to her lips. Witty and outspoken, she welcomed everyone into the library and delighted in pricking the balloons of the self-important. A haughty patron once told Lewis, "I pay your salary." Lewis retorted, "How 'bout a raise?"

At the time of her arrival in Owensboro, the library was in the Carnegie building at Frederica and Ninth streets. That is now home to the Owensboro Museum of Fine Art.

Lewis remembers the Carnegie as "dingy, dirty, crowded." The ceiling in the children's library sagged, and was found to be in danger of collapsing. Lewis played an important role in the design and construction of the present library on South Griffith Avenue, which opened in 1968 on Griffith Avenue.

Alexander said, "No one has had more influence on what this library means to this community than Aggie Lewis. . . . In many ways, she has been an institution, just like the library itself."

Connie Buchanan, head of circulation, said she "can't imagine what it will be like" without Lewis. "She's been our leadership. It's hard to put into words," Buchanan said.

Lewis has been an example that learning doesn't stop after school.

"Within the last 15 years, I've taken probably 15 years worth of French," she said. "I've taken belly-dancing lessons, ballroom-dancing lessons, singing lessons, horseback-riding lessons. Surely to heaven there's something out there for me."

And for anyone interested in teaching her, Lewis still wants to learn fly-cast fishing. "I've always wanted to be in a mountain stream in waders to fish."



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 27 December 1995, pp.1A & 2A:

► 1995 in Review: The Library

City-county agreement closes the books on budget controversy

By Greg Kocher, Messenger-Inquirer

The key word for the Owensboro-Daviess County Public Library in 1995 and into 1996 is new.

The library gained a new funding source and a new board of directors in 1995. And early next year, a new director will take over the helm from 30-year-veteran Alice Gene "Aggie" Lewis.

The library will hold a public retirement reception for Lewis from 3 to 6 p.m. today.

That newness lends excitement and apprehension to the institution - excitement about changes to bring the library into the 21st century; apprehension for employees waiting to see what the new boss is like.

But the big news is the stable source of money instituted - a tax of 4 cents per \$100 of valuated property that should generate \$1.2 million annually for the library.

Equitable funding for city and noncity residents has been a political issue for more than three decades. Both governments shared in library funding, but Daviess Circuit Judge Joseph McKinley Jr. ruled in 1994 that the library is a city creation and is primarily a city obligation.

Then, on June 28, after weeks of negotiation, Daviess County Judge-Executive Buzz Norris and Owensboro Mayor Waymond Morris announced a compromise.

Trash brought them together.

The city had threatened to terminate its trash-disposal contract with the county over a \$3 monthly fee fiscal court imposed on all city and county residents and businesses to pay for the debt on a new landfill in western Daviess County.

The county answered with a lawsuit charging the city with breach of contract.

City officials had hoped that fiscal court would abandon its plans for the \$3 fee. But when fiscal court voted to proceed with building a new landfill, the city decided to compromise.

The compromise was this: The Owensboro City Commission would drop its opposition to the landfill fee and Daviess Fiscal Court would create a countywide library taxing district.

County commissioners agreed because the city of Owensboro provides more trash to the landfill than any other source.

With a library tax, the library is assured of long-term funding and will not have to beg local governments each year for money.

And, with no more opposition to the landfill fee, fiscal court had guaranteed revenue to help pay the debt of the multimillion-dollar landfill.

On June 28, the day the compromise was announced, Norris said: "The county cannot go forward and meet those mean challenges of the 21st century unless it is accompanied by the city. We must go forward together." The city is now in the process of turning over the land and library building to the county. The city commission voted last week to convey the city-owned real property to the new library district.

In September, fiscal court named a new board of trustees for the library. The new trustees - Robert Graham, David Rhinerson, Cindra Stiff, Joe Tanner and Carolyn VonLehman - will take over Dec. 31.

The old library board will likely vote to dissolve in January.

Libby Alexander, chairwoman of the outgoing library board, said her experience during the past two years affirmed her confidence in the democratic process.

"This is an example of the community speaking out," Alexander said. "When the community speaks up, the process does work."

While the debate was arduous and tiring, Alexander said she never wished she hadn't accepted the job on the board, yet she was glad it was over.

Soon, the library will get a new director. The day after fiscal court voted for a library taxing district, Lewis, director of the library since 1965, announced she would retire at the end of the year.

Lewis will continue as a consultant to the library through March to help her successor in the transition.

Grant Talbott Jr., chairman of the search committee, said he hopes to have a new director named by mid-January.

He said the committee has about 25 applicants from around the country.



Alice Gene Lewis is retiring as director of the Owensboro-Daviess County Public Library.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 28 December 1995, pp.1A & 2A:

**Closing a Chapter
Lewis gets chilly
parade but warm
reception at
retirement party**

By Stewart Jennison, Messenger-Inquirer

Not really believing she'd ever retire as director of the Owensboro-Daviess County Public Library, Alice Gene "Aggie" Lewis often joked with co-workers, saying she wanted a parade when she retired.

When the day finally arrived, 30 years and four months after joining the library's staff, retired Owensboro Fire Chief Ozzie Maglinger was waiting in front of the library with an 85-foot ladder truck.

Lewis donned a firefighter's hat and coat, gamely climbed into the bucket of the ladder truck, and led a parade of six cars on a long, cold drive around Owensboro's busiest streets.

She returned 30 minutes later, cheeks reddened, but she was quickly warmed by several hundred friends and patrons who lined up for coffee, cookies and a chance to wish Lewis well in her next adventure.

The witty, outspoken librarian has never been one to read about life when she could be writing new chapters of her own. In the past few years, Lewis, 66, has taken lessons in French, horseback riding, singing, ballroom dancing and belly dancing.

Now Lewis is working on her second master's degree and starting a new consulting business as an excuse, she explains, to have a fax machine in her home.

Lewis announced her retirement in July, shortly after Owensboro and Daviess County officials resolved a long-running dispute about financing the library. Their solution – creating a countywide library taxing district – means the library will have a stable, assured source of revenue for years to come.

It's not a unique solution. Daviess County's library district will be the 102nd one formed in Kentucky, according to State Librarian Jim Nelson, who attended the Wednesday afternoon reception.

Lewis admits she's ready to leave the library profession while most books are still published on paper, not computer discs, even though she pushed hard for years to get the library's dog-eared card-catalog system replaced with a computerized tracking system.

Still, Lewis said her greatest satisfaction came from the personal bonds formed between staff members and library users.

"I think we do more by accident than a lot of libraries do on purpose," Lewis said. "It's because we like our customers. My motto has always been: 'Treat everybody as if he's the mayor and you can't go wrong.'

Patrons such as Eula Mitchell, a longtime member of the Present Tense Reading Club, say they'll miss Lewis' omnipresent interest in the library, whether it's decorating the entrance for Christmas or sitting in on the monthly meetings of her book club.

"She's just tremendous in every way," Mitchell said. "I know she'll be missed."

Finding a successor for Lewis has been the first major project for the new countywide library board, which officially assumes control of the library on Jan. 1.

A screening committee advertised in national library journals and received applications from 25 people who met the initial criteria, according to board member Carolyn VonLehman. Four of them – three men and one woman – have been invited for interviews.

VonLehman said the committee may be ready to make its recommendation for a new library director when the board holds its next scheduled meeting Jan. 18, or at a special meeting called before that.



Left: While listening to several songs played by first-year violin student Justin Hamilton, 11, retiring library director Alice Gene "Aggie" Lewis laughs Wednesday during a reception for her. "She's always wanted me to play for her," said Hamilton, whose grandmother, Betty Spratt, works at the library. Right: During a surprise parade for her Wednesday, Lewis gets a ride in the bucket of an 85-foot ladder truck with retired Owensboro Fire Department Chief Ozzie Maglinger, right. Several cars followed the firetruck as it was led by a patrol car from the Owensboro Police Department.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 13 September 2013, p.1C:

Roses a symbol of library friends

By Suzi Bartholomy, Messenger-Inquirer



Former Daviess County Public Library Director Aggie Lewis, left, and her friend Connie Buchanan, who was the circulation director at the library, look out Wednesday toward a new rose garden Buchanan and her husband put in next to Lewis' screened-in back porch.

The rose garden beside Alice Gene "Aggie" Lewis' screened-in back porch reminds her daily of her friendship with Connie Buchanan, the former circulation director at Daviess County Public Library.

The women were friends f when they both worked at the library, but they did not socialize because Lewis, who retired in 1995 as director of the library, didn't want to appear she had favorites among her staff. Buchanan worked at the library for 20 years before retiring in 2002.

When Lewis stepped down, Buchanan said in a 1995 Messenger-Inquirer article that she "can't imagine what it will be like" without her. "She's been our leadership. It's hard to put into words," Buchanan said.

Lewis, who is recuperating from back surgery, spends a lot of time on her back porch. To improve her scenery, Buchanan and her husband, Eddie, planted knock out roses and replanted lilies in a rock garden beside her porch.

"I can sit here and watch them grow," Lewis said of her roses.

According to The Knock Out Family of Roses website, they really don't require a lot of care and the best part is that they "will bloom throughout the season (every five to six weeks) , continuing until the first hard frost."

Buchanan visits Lewis a couple times a week. After Lewis retired, the friends met every Friday for coffee and grocery shopping. The former librarian doesn't drive and since her surgery, she's been staying close to home. Buchanan does her weekly shopping.

"She doesn't need to give me a list. It doesn't change much from week to week," Buchanan said.

Besides looking in on her former boss, Buchanan is active at her church. She is treasurer of First General Baptist Church and participates in the church ministry. Lewis defines a friend as someone "you can spill your guts to and know it won't go any further," as well as someone who lifts your spirits. Buchanan said they cheer each other up when the need arises..



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 1 January 2014, pp.1B & 3B:

Former library director Lewis dies

By Rich Suwanski, Messenger-Inquirer

Alice Gene "Aggie" Lewis, the director of the Daviess County Public Library for more than 30 years before retiring in 1995, died Tuesday at Hospice of Western Kentucky's Heartford House. She was 84.

"Aggie was the kindest, most generous person I've known," said Connie Buchanan, who worked with Lewis for 13 years and visited with her regularly in the ensuing years. "She never met a stranger.

"Her priority was to always make sure everybody felt welcome to come to the library."

Lewis had a reputation for being outspoken and fought fiercely for library funding before Daviess County Fiscal Court established a library district tax rate in 1995.

Prior to that, Lewis was quoted as saying she had to take her "tin cup" to local government officials every year for funding.

"Anybody who knew her knew she was a unique kind of person," Buchanan said. "People involved in her care in the last few weeks said they learned so much from her and will never forget what an interesting person she was."

Lewis came to Owensboro in September 1965 after being assistant librarian at Alice Lloyd Junior College. She'd also held jobs at Fort Knox and Frankfort.

When she took over as director here, the library was in the Carnegie building at Frederica and Ninth streets, now the Owensboro Museum of Fine Art.

A section of the ceiling in the children's library sagged and was found to be in danger of collapsing, the Messenger-Inquirer reported at the time.

"Then she started working toward getting a new public library built," said Shelia Heflin, who worked with Lewis for 16 years.

Lewis played a key role in the design and construction of the then-new library on Griffith and McCreary avenues, currently the home to the Owensboro Public Schools Central Office.

That library opened in 1968. "She did a lot of things to improve the library for the community," Heflin said.

When she retired, Lewis told the Messenger-Inquirer she was "ready to leave the library profession while most books are still published on paper, not computer discs."

However, Lewis pushed to get the library's aging card catalog system replaced with computerized tracking.

Lewis was quoted as saying her greatest satisfaction came from the personal bonds formed between staff members and library users.

"When she called to ask something, she usually always asked how our family was doing," Heflin said. "And she loved to travel. She went to England and Scotland several times, and she wrote a diary on one of her visits to England. It made it into book form, and a copy of it is in the library's Kentucky Room."

The memorial service for Lewis will be at 11 a.m. Saturday at First Presbyterian Church. Glenn Funeral Home and Crematory is in charge of arrangements.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 3 January 2014, p.2B:



Alice Gene "Aggie" Lewis died Tuesday, Dec. 31, 2013, at The Heartford House in Owensboro. She was preceded in death by her beloved daughter and best friend in her age bracket, Cindy Lewis Boone.

For the curious, interested or just plain nosey, she was a year younger than Mickey Mouse. Years ago, she would have said to call the library, now, you can just look it up on your computer.

She is survived by two nephews; a number of cousins; a son-in-law, Michael Boone; some very dear friends; Harry, her steady companion; and thousands of other people.

Memorial services will be at 11 a.m. Saturday at First Presbyterian Church. She asks that if you come to her memorial service and if she knitted something for you, a scarf or a shawl, that you please wear it. The congregation would look very colorful.

She had a good run with few pitfalls and she prays that Cindy will meet her on the other side.

Aggie was a very generous contributor to local charities. If you are thinking of some sort of remembrance, please consider the Boulware Mission, Spay-A-Stray, Owensboro Salvation Army, Lions Club, EO.P 16 in Owensboro, Western Kentucky Hospice or some purpose in which you believe. Messages of condolence may be placed at www.glenngeneralhome.com.

