

Petty, Annie Florence ^[1]

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Petty, Annie Florence

By J. Isaac Copeland, 1994

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Annie Florence Petty, pioneer North Carolina librarian was born in the Bush Hill community (now Archdale) Randolph County ^[2], the daughter of William Clinton, a successful businessman, and Mary Victoria Petty. She was the fifth of seven children in a Quaker ^[3] family, one in which books and a desire for knowledge were deemed important and religion was a part of everyday life. At the close of the Civil War ^[4], her father began to manufacture building supplies such as sashes, doors, blinds, and mantels; he also was engaged in building construction.

Annie Petty received a sound education at New Garden Boarding School ^[5] and Guilford College ^[6], where she earned a degree in 1894. The following year she was employed as a teacher in Red Springs, then joined the staff of the State Normal and Industrial School in Greensboro (now the University of North Carolina at Greensboro ^[7]). Though her title was that of librarian, as Miss Petty once explained, her duties were more nearly those of a general utility person because she found herself receiving and sorting mail, signing for express packages, and ringing the bell for the change of classes. The library was located in the Administration Building in a room of modest size; there were shelves around its walls and six tables to accommodate readers.

During the academic year 1898–99 Miss Petty attended the Library School of Drexel Institute ^[8] in Philadelphia; after completing her studies she returned to Greensboro, where she remained as librarian for more than two decades. Active in efforts to promote libraries and library service beyond institutional boundaries, she was in 1904 one of the seven people—three women and four men—who founded the North Carolina Library Association ^[9], and she was promptly made a member of the executive committee. When the American Library Association and the North Carolina Library Association met jointly in Asheville in 1907, Annie Petty was elected second vice-president of the state association during its business session. In November 1908 she was elected president, and in 1913, at the annual meeting held that year in the town of Washington, she was reelected to that office.

On 8 Mar. 1909, while she was serving her first presidential term, the North Carolina legislature ratified a bill establishing the North Carolina Library Commission ^[10]. Miss Petty was appointed to the commission in April 1918 at the recommendation of the North Carolina Library Association ^[9]. In its issue for June 1918 the *North Carolina Library Bulletin* referred to the appointment as a peculiarly fitting one, stating that Annie Petty was not only North Carolina's first trained librarian but also had been identified closely with every movement for library development in the state, including the establishment of the Library Commission. She was reappointed for another three-year term in 1921 but resigned in September to accept the position of associate secretary for the commission. In her new work Miss Petty used her energy and intelligence to publicize the need for improved library service and to enlist citizen support. Indeed, one of the things in which she must have taken considerable pride was the beginning of bookmobile service to rural areas.

In 1933 Annie Petty retired and returned to the family home that she shared with her sister Mary in Greensboro ^[11]. There she attended the First Friends Meeting, though her membership remained at Springfield Friends Meeting near High Point. At one time she was secretary of the North Carolina Friends Historical Society ^[12]. Miss Petty was buried in the Springfield Meeting Cemetery. She was survived by two nephews, David and James Petty.

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