

Yakima Valley Libraries History of Leadership

Esther Fleming – Librarian, North Yakima Public Library (July 1924 – February 1929)

Assistant librarian Esther Fleming (1891-1962)¹ was a 1914 graduate of the University of Washington's Library Sciences program. Fleming was appointed acting librarian in July of 1924 when Eleanor Stephens asked for a leave of absence because she had been offered an opportunity with the State Library in Olympia.² Stephens' decision to stay with the state library prompted the board to appoint Esther Fleming as librarian in January of 1926. Esther Fleming's period of service coincided with Prohibition, expansion of irrigated acreage in the valley³, and a 19% increase in the population of Yakima.⁴

Library Board meeting notes from November of 1924 through February 5, 1929 (the date Fleming's resignation was accepted by the Board) reveal a very cordial relationship between Esther Fleming and the library board. Board meeting notes show that Fleming made requests directly to the board, served on committees with board members⁵, and was accorded increasing autonomy.⁶ The library board and the librarian seemed to be of one mind on how the library should be managed. There were few changes in library services during this period of relative stability. Changes noted in the meeting notes addressed the status or public perception of the library, not services to the public. Changes included:

- Library staff members began attending regional library conferences.⁷
- An annual display at the (then) Washington State Fair.
- A Duplicate Collection of newer titles was initiated as a fee based service and overdue fines were increased.⁸
- New service desk requested and installed.⁹
- The board approved an ALA institutional membership.¹⁰

The Library Board monthly meeting notes for September 11, 1928 are signed by Esther Fleming as Secretary Pro Tem. She then disappears from the record until February 5, 1929 when the board accepted her resignation.¹¹

¹ "Find a Grave Index" FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q219-795J>) : 10 March 2017)

² Washington State Library Committee, "State Traveling Library," 8. Stephens went on to serve as Washington State Library Organizer, and finally as Oregon State Librarian.

³ GPO, "Hearings," 191. Due to the Bureau of Reclamation's Yakima Project, the Sunnyside Canal increased irrigated acreage by 10%.

⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930: Agriculture*, Vol. 2, Pt. 3: The Western States (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1932), 60-104, available at

(http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/03337983v2p3_TOC.pdf).

⁵ Board of Trustees, Yakima Public Library. "Minutes ... November 1924 – October 1938." 16.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 5, 24, 26, 31, 72, et al.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁸ Suzuki, "Foundations and Development," 57.

⁹ Board of Trustees, Yakima Public Library. "Minutes ... November 1924 – October 1938." 42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 85, 94.