

Yakima Valley Libraries History of Leadership

Helen Gilbert – Regional Librarian, Yakima Valley Regional Library

(August 1954 – December 1965)

Helen Gilbert (1896-1985) was appointed as Regional Librarian in August of 1954 and served until the end of 1965. A 1918 graduate of the University of Washington Library School, she came to Yakima well equipped to oversee the integration of the city and county libraries. She had served on the American Library Association (ALA) Council for 4 years and spent 2 years as National President of the Library Extension Division of ALA. In 1940 -1942 she had successfully integrated the Grays Harbor city and county libraries.¹

During Helen Gilbert's 11 years as Regional Librarian YVRL's Board of Trustees and community supporters achieved these goals:

- 1956 - A successful bond campaign was conducted, resulting in Yakima City and County voters passing an \$800,000 bond issue to build a new library.
- 1957 - The Yakima Carnegie Library building was demolished and the contents relocated.
- 1958 - A new library building was constructed on the site of the old Carnegie building. The new Yakima Valley Regional Library building was opened on January 7, 1959.²
- Three additional communities joined the regional library.
 - In 1955 Sunnyside Library contracted with YVRL for library services.
 - In 1956 Glead Library was organized as a YVRL community library.³
 - In 1958 Moxee Library was organized as a YVRL community library.
- Remodeled or built new quarters for 7 community libraries
- 1962 – A revised agreement between the city of Yakima and the Regional Library District was signed.⁴
- 1962 - Unified the 3 Boards of Trustees (City, County and YVRL) into a single 7 member board of trustees.⁵
- 1963 – Sunnyside voters passed a library bond campaign to replace the Carnegie Library in Sunnyside with a larger, more modern facility.

Helen Gilbert's many leadership roles in professional associations and her scholarly publications all testify to her status as a professional. Her prior success in county and regional library development validated her expertise. Thus, Gilbert was able to speak with authority on ways of moving past conflicts that had confronted her predecessor.

¹ "Librarian Sets Retirement date, Successor Chosen," *Yakima Republic*, March 31, 1965.

² "New Library Opened," *Yakima Republic*, January 7, 1959.

³ "Glead to get new library branch," *Yakima Morning Herald*, May 31, 1956.

⁴ Resolution No. D-461 "Resolution authorizing the City Manager and City Clerk to execute a Revised Agreement with Yakima County Rural Library District," October 15, 1962.

⁵ RCW 27.12.192. Accessed May 5, 2020 at <http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=27.12.192>