

Town of Apex Women's History



WOMEN VOTE IN A MUNICIPAL ELECTION FOR THE FIRST TIME

After the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, women in Apex could register to vote and participate in municipal elections for the first time. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 further expanded voting rights for all women by outlawing practices that created barriers for Black women to exercise their right to vote.

WOMEN IN EDUCATION

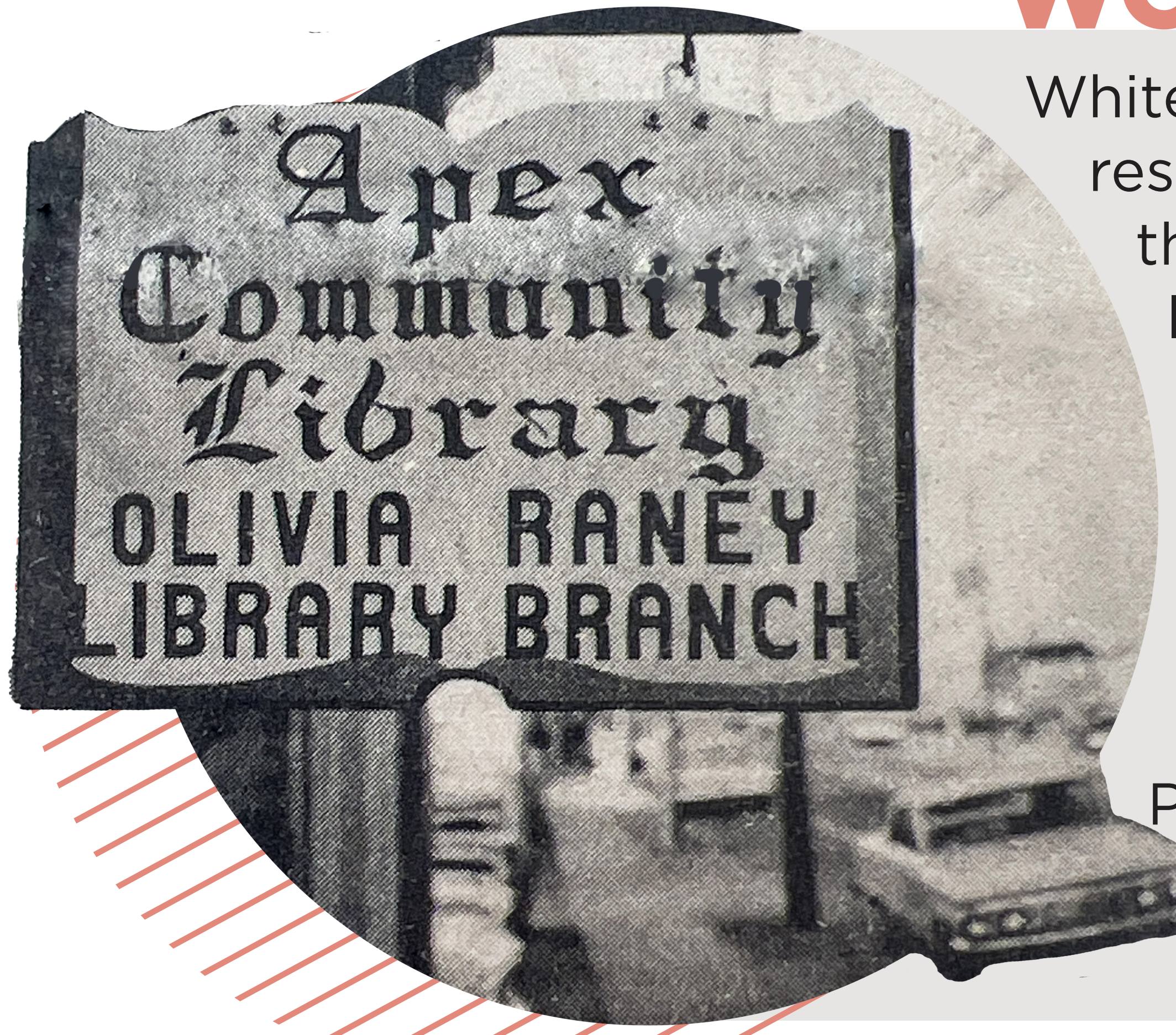
Apex women have a long-standing tradition of serving youth through education. The first Apex Public School, built in 1914, established a Ladies League to serve the needs of the students and school staff. Two well-known educators with long-standing tenures in Apex are Mildred Cooke and Jessie Ruth Cunningham. Both taught thousands of students and shaped the lives of countless families.



WOMEN ADVOCATE FOR LITERACY

White and Black women in Apex worked diligently to ensure the literacy of residents. In 1957, the Apex Public Library opened on South Salem Street through a federal grant with the help of Richard B. Harrison (Raleigh) librarian, Mollie Huston Lee. The Public Library, with Irene Stuart as librarian, served the Black residents of Apex with nearly 2,000 books.

In 1960, the Apex Women's Club established a modest library for white residents on North Salem Street with 250 books. In 1966, after much debate on location, the first desegregated library opened at 131 N. Salem Street with Rachel Lewter as head librarian. Long-time Apex resident Eva Perry passed away in 1986 and left a one million dollar gift to the Town of Apex to build a new library, which still stands today at 2100 Shepherds Vineyard Drive.



WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT

Women have served prominent roles in Apex local government throughout the last 150 years. Clarice Atwater was a pioneer for women in Apex government, serving as the Town's first female and Black elected official and Mayor Pro Tempore. Clarice was first appointed to the Board of Commissioners on March 10, 1981, which demonstrates the respected role she held within the Apex community. She was formally elected by voters to the Board later that year and served until her retirement in 1993. The Town's first female Town Manager, Catherine (Katy) Crosby (2021), continues that legacy of female leadership alongside many others in leadership roles.

Atwater Appointed First Black, Female Town Commissioner



Newly appointed Commissioner Clarice Atwater joined the Town Board last Tuesday night. Atwater (center) is flanked by Town Clerk Sonja Lumley and Commissioner Nolan Cooke.



FINDING THE PERFECT TOWN SLOGAN

A slogan competition in 1975 yielded the phrase "The Peak of Good Living" submitted by then Town of Apex employee, Elva Maynard. The now trademarked slogan still rings true today, with many businesses and organizations creating their own version of the slogan to appeal to customers and community members. Residents and non-residents alike recognize and remember the slogan, which has become as emblematic of the town as its own name.

WOMEN IN BUSINESS

Prior to 1945, many women operated businesses within their homes or provided services / trades around the town. In 1945, Addie Pegram, who was the first female to graduate from the UNC School of Pharmacy and one of the first female pharmacists in North Carolina, opened Pegram's Pharmacy at 119 North Salem Street. Soon after, Apex Pharmacy opened under ownership of Margaret Perry at 100 N. Salem Street. Today Apex is home to many women-owned and women-led businesses in apparel, cosmetology, grocery, and other services.

