



Ella Mae Gratts Shamblee

1903-1981

Ella Mae Gratts Shamblee (1903-1981) is considered by many to be Fort Worth's first African-American librarian.

Mrs. Shamblee was working as a custodian at the downtown library when she asked if she could take discarded books to share with her neighbors. She would take boxes of those books on her ride home on buses and in streetcars. Then, she would find places to house mini libraries in her community in South Fort Worth, including in the Stevens Grocery Store, the Federated Women's Club, a nursery school and a neighborhood home. Eventually, she convinced her husband to fix up an old bus for her to use as a bookmobile before there were branch libraries in Fort Worth. Mrs. Shamblee eventually drove an official Fort Worth Public Library bookmobile to spread literacy across Fort Worth.

The Ella Mae Shamblee Branch Library was dedicated in June 2008, built onto the front of a former school – Our Lady of Mercy School (1931-1958) and the Little Tommy Tucker School (1959-1978).

Watch Fort Worth native Erma Bonner Platte – a child who grew up around Mrs. Shamblee – share some of her memories in this video.

