

The Joy of Reading

Glade, a farming community, did not have a public library. Nor was one available at Pine Log or Garfield, but its residents knew the value of learning and supported education for children in their communities. They recognized the importance of teaching younger generations to read and expand critical thinking, increase empathy, improve decision making, and develop a sense of collective identity.

The books at Coal Gap school were old, as were the large maps. Unrolled, those charts revealed mysterious new places. After lessons, they were safely recoiled to the top of the blackboard, situated behind the teacher's desk. Both the instructor and the maps remained on the stage above us through the school year. Each map unveiled places far away, and revealed a bigger world. Students learned they were not alone on the planet. Many of those countries would be visited during their lifetimes. Students learned of different backgrounds and time periods and developed compassion for different viewpoints.

Children in country schools were given the opportunity to develop skills for lifelong learning. Many people loved to read and share. Book festivals flourished for that reason, as people's interests grew, and local and state book festivals developed around the nation. In the 1980s and 1990s, state book festivals blossomed.

In 1995, Laura Bush, the First Lady of Texas co-founded the Texas Book Festival, and it became a model for other states that continue today. The oldest state book festival is the Southern Festival of Books in Tennessee. The largest is the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books at the University of Southern California.

The Texas Book Festival inspired the creation of the Library of Congress National Book Festival in 2001, also spearheaded by First Lady Laura Bush, and the 13th Librarian of Congress, James Billington. They wanted to celebrate America's creative spirit, love for reading and commitment to a lifetime of learning. Over the years, it has evolved.

A lover of books and festivals found me at the National Book Festival in 2010 on the mall in Washington D.C. on a lovely September day. White tents dotted the mall as people mingled to hear famous, and almost famous, authors speak. Participants picked their favorites and hurried to one of the many tents to listen to each speaker for 30 minutes. Then, we moved to another tent and a different author.

Laura Bush's book, Spoken from the Heart, had just published and she was presenting. I was eager to hear her. Only her tent was enclosed by a temporary chain-link fence. A black caravan was parked outside the tent, near the stage. Before we entered the tent, our handbags were checked, and we were searched for hidden weapons. I found a seat near the stage. When the

crowd was seated, a male secret service agent came inside and checked again. Assured of safety, Laura Bush was escorted from the black caravan to the stage by another male agent.

A petite female, our speaker appeared even more attractive in person. She spoke of her youth in Midland, Texas, graduating from Southern Methodist University, teaching elementary students before becoming a librarian. George Bush appeared in her life at age thirty before her entry into a prominent political family. He became governor of Texas, then president of the United States. She shared some stories from the White House and her travels as First Lady. Her compassion and sense of humor were obvious.

By 2014, the damage to the lawn at the mall was too much, and the National Book Festival was moved to the Washington Convention Center. In 2020 and 2021, the festival was virtual because of the pandemic, but it returned to the Convention Center in 2022 with virtual attendance possible. Attendance increased from 25,000 in 2001 to more than 200,000 in 2019. Around 60 authors participated at the first festival. In 2025, more than 90 authors were featured. Storytelling and interactive events have been added. The festival is funded by private donors and corporate sponsors. Over the 24-year history, the festival has become one of the most prominent literary events in the nation.

There is much joy in reading. It builds background knowledge (history), helps build and maintain memory, strengthens language and communication skills. It provides a sense of support and belonging, and it can reduce stress as it takes us anywhere in the world. It's wonderful that reading can inspire and broaden our perspective.

Grab a book!

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Glade Community Historical Society: Board Members: Patricia Heck, Darcie Heinrich, Dorothy Williams, Judi Walter, Ruth Billingsley, Gary Blackburn.

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Membership Dues: \$20 annually

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Mark your calendar for Music in the Park at Garfield, Sunday, September 28, at 2 pm

and

Join us at the fourth GCHS General Meeting, Sunday, October 26, 2025 at 2 p.m. at Garfield City Hall with guest speaker, Serena Barnett from the Rogers Historical Museum.