

# Nettie Barcroft Taylor, retired Maryland State Librarian, dies



Nettie Barcroft Taylor was a retired Maryland State Librarian credited with forging an effective state library network and who was much esteemed in her profession. (HANDOUT)



By **Jacques Kelly**  
The Baltimore Sun

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**N**ettie Barcroft Taylor, a retired Maryland State Librarian credited with forging an effective state library network and who was much esteemed in her profession, died of respiratory failure Oct. 21 at her Gwynn Oak-area home.

She was 102.

"Nettie Taylor was a driving force in making public libraries in Maryland some of the best in the nation," said Librarian of Congress Carla D. Hayden.

"I always looked up to her in awe on the impact she has made on the profession," said Ms. Hayden, who formerly headed the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore. "Her tenacity and tireless efforts in providing library patrons with educational opportunities should be applauded by generations to come. She was my mentor and dear friend."

In 2005, the American Library Association awarded her its highest honor "in recognition of outstanding contributions of lasting importance to libraries and librarianship."

"She was a life force. She was not introspective. She always knew what she wanted," said her nephew, John S. Bryan of Washington. "There was no looking back once she made a decision. She was always in control, and she gave to the point of excess."

"She was responsible for creating the really superior system of libraries in Maryland," said Judy Cooper, an Enoch Pratt programs coordinator. "We call Maryland a library heaven, and much of the credit goes to Nettie."

Born in Brownsville, Tenn., she was the daughter of Charles Taylor, a grocery store owner. She was raised by her grandmother after her mother, also named Nettie Barcroft, died.

"She read every appropriate book in the public library — her Aunt Rose was the librarian who made sure Nettie picked appropriate books," said Lynn Wheeler, a friend and the director of the Carroll County Public Library. "Her grandmother gave her 25 cents for ... memorizing a poem. Nettie memorized every poem in the available poetry anthology ... and remained a lifelong poetry lover, reciting [poems by] Mary Oliver at 100."

Ms. Taylor was the 1932 valedictorian of Haywood County High School, where she played basketball.

She earned an English degree, with a minor in library science, from Florida State College for Women in Tallahassee, now Florida State University.

She started her five decades of library work at Taylor County High School in Perry, Fla.

"She talked her brother into driving hundreds of miles on July 4, 1936, to Monticello in Virginia," said her nephew. "It became one of her fondest memories — sitting in the front row of folding chairs when President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave a speech on the lawn. She was so close, she could reach out and touch the president."

In 1942, she earned a master's degree in library science from the University of North Carolina. In 1967, she added a master's degree in liberal arts from the Johns Hopkins University.

She joined the Women's Army Corps and became a librarian assigned to Army hospitals in Butler, Pa., Washington and Heidelberg, Germany. She served as command librarian during World War II and while in military service, she attended the Nuremberg war trials.

"She had a driver and a jeep, and she went to towns with American troops," said her nephew. "It was like a bookmobile. She had an inventory of books she handed out."

"Another big moment in her life was standing on a dock in New York City where she met her brother, Charles 'Chuck' Taylor, as he disembarked from ship after having spent four years as a prisoner of war in Germany," he said.

Ms. Taylor became director of a library system in Virginia before being hired by the Maryland State Department of Education in 1948 as supervisor for county and institutional libraries.

Over the years, she rose to become the state's top librarian, uniting small community libraries to become county library systems. She also worked in schools, helping transform schoolbook collections into media centers.

She championed the early use of computers and pushed for Maryland's public and academic libraries to make their resources available to users through the Maryland State Library Resource Center network.

"Under Nettie Taylor, the per-capita state support for public libraries rose from 10 cents to \$6.75," said Ms. Wheeler. (It is now \$14.54.) "She fought for other legislation that improved library service.

"She dragged every library director in the state together in one room. She said, 'You will agree to play well with others, and you will share your resources statewide.'

"Everybody said, 'OK, Nettie,'" recalled Ms. Wheeler.

Ms. Taylor appeared before Maryland General Assembly committees to make her case for the libraries.

"She lobbied hard her whole life, both on the state and national scene," said Ms. Wheeler. "She worked tirelessly to increase federal funding for libraries and was instrumental in the development and passage of the first Library Services Act in 1956 — and in lobbying for what is now the Library Services and Technology Act."

Ms. Taylor retired in 1988.

In 1995 she was named to Maryland Women's Hall of Fame. She received many other honors, including the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Library Council Outstanding Service Award in 1986; the American Library Association's Joseph W. Lippincott Award in 1984; an honorary membership in the Maryland Educational Media Association in 1983; and the Maryland Library Association's Distinguished Service Award in 1979.

In 2005, when Ms. Taylor received the American Library Association's Honorary Membership Award in Chicago, she shared the stage with then-Sen. Barack Obama.

"She met with him backstage that day. It was so amazing," said Ms. Wheeler.

Ms. Taylor played tennis for many years. She spent time at a home on Frenchman Bay in Lamoine Beach, Maine.

"Personally, she was a generous person," said Mr. Bryan, her nephew. "She sent my father money to help him make ends meet during his final year of college, and she declined receipt when he attempted to begin

returning the funds. She also taught him to drive."

He said she also paid full or partial college tuition bills for a number of people "she felt might need a boost."

He recalled her becoming a bit bored during a family graduation ceremony. "She brought along a pocket novel and during the ceremony tore off a page at a time so everyone in her family had something to read," he said.

She always had a book in her hand — most likely a mystery story.

A memorial service will be held at 11 a.m. Nov. 19 at the Ruck Towson Funeral Home, 1050 York Road.

In addition to her nephew, survivors include a brother, Fred E. Bryan of Louisville, Ky., and other nieces and nephews.

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