

**JUDITH ANN
CARTER
HORTON
1866-1948**



**HER
LIBRARY
DREAM
REALIZED**

African American librarian Judith Horton believed “there is no better way to hasten the education and uplift of our people than the establishment of reading rooms, and libraries in every community”. She founded the first Oklahoma public library for African Americans.

Judith Ann Carter was born in May 1866 in Wright City, Missouri to recently freed parents. She finally attended school at age ten. She left home at age thirteen to perform domestic work in order to further her education. She saved enough money to earn a teaching degree from Oberlin College in 1891. As Judith neared graduation, she promised herself “in spite of the fact that you are a nobody without culture, social standing or money, you must one day accomplish what no Negro woman has ever attempted”.

Judith taught in Columbia, Kansas in 1891 before teaching in Guthrie for sixteen years. In 1894 she married Favor High School principal Daniel Gibbs Horton. Like her Progressive Era sisters, Horton’s activism revolved around raising her children. In early 1906, Horton finally organized the Excelsior Club, Oklahoma’s first African American women’s club.

Guthrie Public Library was established in July 1900 by the Federated Women’s Clubs. It was renamed Carnegie Circulating Library with a \$26,000 Andrew Carnegie grant. The city council soon passed a mill levy for all citizens to fund its maintenance. But Daniel Horton was turned away when he tried to get a library card in 1907 because “no provision had been made for Negroes”.

Judith knew the time had come to “do something unusual”. Though prospects looked very dim, Judith solicited help from community leaders from both sides of the color line. She secured a library building, and funds with the help of “white Club Women of Guthrie”.

Horton petitioned the city council for tax support to maintain Excelsior Library. The mayor said it would be difficult to justify their exclusion because “a tax levied on all citizens for the Carnegie Library”. The City Council eventually agreed and Excelsior Library and Industrial Institute was dedicated in September 1908, becoming a gathering place and educational hub for the next four decades.

In 1910 Horton participated as a founding member and later president of the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. With a \$100,000 appropriation, they founded the State Training School for Boys at Boley and Industrial Institute for the Deaf, Blind, and Orphans at Taft. In 1923, Governor Walton appointed her to the board of regents for both schools.

In 1919 Horton left Excelsior Library to teach Latin and English at Favor High School until retiring in 1936. Judith Horton died at age 81 in February 1948 in Guthrie.

In 1955, a new Excelsior Library was built as part of a bond issue, citing the building’s poor condition. In 1970, desegregation established Guthrie Public Library replacing both libraries. Excelsior was saved from demolition in 2014 by citizens wanting to restore it. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2016 with a brick monument honoring Judith Horton.