

History of the Fulton Memoir Project

In 2012, local writer Jim Farfaglia stopped in at the Fulton Library and asked to speak to its new director, Betty Mauté. “I had just published my first book of poems and was looking for ways to share them with the public,” Farfaglia remembered. “I thought the library would be a good place to have a reading.”

Though Mauté was busy acclimating to her responsibilities at the library, she welcomed Farfaglia into her office, where the two had a long talk about Fulton, its residents’ needs and the world of literature and writing. Farfaglia expressed his weariness at hearing so much negative talk about Fulton’s decline due to a major loss of its industry base. “I knew Fulton was still a good place to live, raise a family and make friends, so I was looking for a way to spotlight that through my writing.”

As Mauté and Farfaglia continued their conversation, they brainstormed ways to help Fultonians capture the good they remembered. “Eventually,” Mauté explained, “we settled on a project with a goal to help people share their stories of their time living, working and spending leisure time in Fulton. We would collect stories as memoirs, and if we got enough of a response, we’d publish them in a book.”

By 2013, the Library had a name for their endeavor: The Memoir Project. Mauté launched a series of presentations to explain the Project to Fulton service clubs and senior citizen residencies. Farfaglia offered to lead writing classes for those who had a story to tell, but weren’t sure how to go about it. A few Fultonians interested in the Project didn’t want to write, but were willing to tell their stories. They were audiotaped, with library volunteers typing the interviews and Farfaglia weaving their stories into memoir form. Several participants moved forward on their own to write a memoir, and by the end of its first year, The Memoir Project had collected 41 stories covering a variety of Fulton topics.

The book that resulted from that first year, “Fulton: The Stories From Our Past That Influence Our Future,” was a small town success. To celebrate, the library started a tradition of honoring the local memoirists with a party. In addition, the whole city was invited to a book launch event. Proceeds from book sales helped continue the Memoir Project, which in its second year decided to offer a theme for people to write about: Schools and Businesses. Another 44 people wrote a memoir (and some from the first year offered to share a second story). In 2014, “Fulton: The Businesses and Schools That Built Our Community” joined the Project’s first collection on bookshelves.

By the third addition of the Memoir Project, Farfaglia and Mauté were seeing the need to expand their two-person team. They recruited Kathy Andolina, who’d already been serving as a Project proofreader, to serve as co-editor. More volunteers were brought onboard to type memories that

people had about their beloved Fulton. In 2015, “Fulton: The Community Services That Built Our City” told 37 stories of firefighters, EMTs, recreation leaders and elected officials.

News of The Memoir Project spread and by 2016, more people were stepping up to help it continue to grow. Fulton writers Jo Ann Butler and Joe Abbate, both who’d contributed multiple memoirs to the earlier projects, joined. Among their talents were Butler’s research techniques and Abbate’s expertise in graphic design. Mary Cardinali Kimball, a retired teacher who’d contributed a memoir, approached Farfaglia at the celebratory event for her year’s book to offer an idea for the next Project theme: Fulton veterans of war.

Not only did Kimball come up with a winning theme, but she also agreed to conduct extensive interviews with many aging veterans who would have had difficulty writing a memoir. Mary sat with dozens of men and women to hear their stories, which were turned into memoirs by Abbate, Andolina and Farfaglia. Published as “The Heart of Fulton at Home and Abroad: World War II and The Korean War,” 52 veterans or their loved ones became part of the Memoir Project family.

The Project took yet another turn when it chose the topic The Dizzy Block, a look back on Fulton’s once thriving downtown. Library Activities Coordinator Dawn Myers was brought on to develop unique methods of promoting the theme, including a reenactment of the Dizzy Block streets, put on display at our city’s Municipal Building.

While the Dizzy Block’s single-block area was home to dozens of stores and gathering places, most people with memories of it in its heyday had brief stories, not full length memoirs. The decision was made to gather all stories, short or long, and weave them into a longer narrative of old-time Fulton. Sixty-six people told their stories of shopping and socializing in the book “...take a walk around the Dizzy Block,” published in 2018.

At the end of 2018, new library director, Caroline Chatterton took over and happily embraced the memoir project and its now 6 year legacy. The 6th book in the series is titled Echoes of Faith: Memories of Fulton Churches and explores the topic of Fulton churches, with Project members researching the grand buildings that are or were once home to parishioners, recalling the spiritual leaders who profoundly influenced their followers, and reasons why Fulton was a great setting for strong communities of faith.

As of 2021, The Memoir Project’s total number of participants tops 200, ranging in age from 15 to 102. The committee has set its sights on the topic of Fulton houses and neighborhoods, with Project members researching the homes and neighborhoods that they have fond and dear memories of from their childhood. Stay tuned for news on how this develops!