

History of the
Eastern Oklahoma
Library System

Margaret Rigney

Prologue

The Eastern Oklahoma Library System held its first Board meeting on August 8, 1970. The System encompassed six eastern Oklahoma counties – Adair, Cherokee, Delaware, McIntosh, Muskogee and Sequoyah. In the beginning the System incorporated the five existing public libraries in the communities of Westville, Tahlequah, Grove, Muskogee and Sallisaw. Also in the early 1970s, EOLS created five public libraries in Stilwell, Jay, Eufaula, Checotah and Haskell. By the end of the decade two more public libraries were created in Fort Gibson and Muldrow. It wasn't until the 1990s that the last three libraries were created in Hulbert, Kansas and Warner. This history covers the time period between August 8, 1970 to mid-March 2020, when the world-wide Covid pandemic brought unforeseen and unimagined challenges to not only society in general, but also to EOLS.

“The publicness of the library is an increasingly rare commodity.

The commitment to inclusion is so powerful that many decisions hinge...on serving the public good.”

Susan Orlean
The Library Book

The early library histories of the five communities that had public libraries when they were incorporated into EOLS are included. Also included are the early histories of three of the five newly-created libraries that had had libraries at some point in their history but not immediately prior to the arrival of EOLS. Of the last three libraries created in the 1990s only one had a previous library in its community's history.

Some communities had libraries only briefly in their earlier histories. Several had WPA Libraries in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Two EOLS libraries have long library histories going back to the late 1890's and early 1900s.

What was the most impressive find of the history project was the desire, commitment and perseverance the communities in the EOLS service area displayed to obtain or keep a public library throughout the years of each community's history. Various women's clubs and organizations played key roles in whatever library origin and development there was in a community both prior to the arrival of multi county library systems and when the System was a reality. Several communities were fortunate enough to obtain a library in their histories but lost them due to various circumstances with economics being the main factor. Most of the

community and area newspapers of the time also supported library development, sometimes leading the charge even before community members picked up the challenge.

“The communal nature of the library is the essence of the library.”

Susan Orlean
The Library Book

In this history of EOLS, each library’s story ends in mid-March 2020 with the arrival of the Covid pandemic.

The challenges to System libraries included building closures, curbside service, limited attendance, meeting and programming bans, virtual Summer Reading programming, extra cleaning protocols, limited computer use, the need for

Zoom meetings, and an immediate need for an increased social media presence – impacting the entire System in numerous and varied ways.

As the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began to lift health restrictions, the System and its individual branch libraries found new ways to serve their communities that protected the health and safety of both library staff and the people they served. The System survived to continue its mission of *“empowering people by creating opportunities that enrich their lives with information, activities, and services.”*

Brief History of Oklahoma's Public Libraries

Public Libraries defined: *“By definition a public library exists through the levy of municipal taxes and governed by a board of trustees, serves as a repository for books, newspapers, magazines and journals, and is free to the public.”*

Perhaps an even more definitive definition of public libraries can be found in author Susan Orlean's national bestseller, *The Library Book*: *“Libraries are physical spaces belonging to a community where we gather to share information. Nowhere else fits that description in society.”*

The manner in which public libraries in Oklahoma developed mirrored the way public libraries were established nationally. Early US libraries were usually privately held collections of wealthy individuals or families. Social and Club libraries also existed in early America and in Oklahoma's history, however, membership in these various Club libraries usually meant subscriptions or fees limiting access. Ultimately though, Women's Clubs played the most significant role in the development of American public libraries both in Oklahoma and nationally.

“If you want something spoken about ask a man. If you want it done, ask a woman.”

Meryl Streep, Actress



*Guthrie's Carnegie Library built in 1901.
(Google Images)*

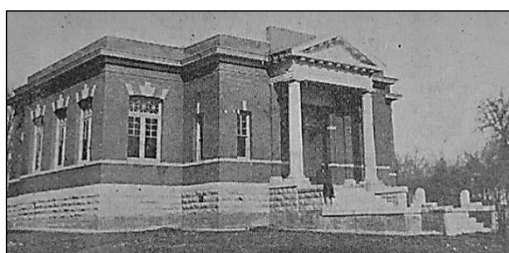
The first tax-supported public library in the nation is the still existing Peterborough Town Library in New Hampshire founded in 1833. Oklahoma's first public libraries didn't appear on the scene until 68 years later. Guthrie, as the State's first Territorial Capitol, had Oklahoma's first public library. Guthrie's Carnegie Library was established in early 1901 followed shortly by another Carnegie Library established in Oklahoma City in August of the same year. The first public library in Indian Territory was established in Chickasha in 1905. It was created through the efforts of several local Women's Clubs as was the case in other public libraries created prior to and after Oklahoma Statehood. In 1907 there were 17 public libraries. An article in the *Muldrow Sun* in September 1921 noted that

there were 130 libraries which were considered public in some way according to Mrs. J.R. Dale, then Secretary of the Oklahoma Library Commission. This number included denominational, institutional, free and public libraries by a broad interpretation of the word “public.” In 1937 another report noted that the number of public libraries by definition above was a more modest 70. It also still meant that the vast majority of Oklahoma’s citizens were without any type of public library service. Sixty-six percent of Oklahoma’s 77 counties still were without access to public library service 30 years after statehood.

The Library movement in the US was aided in the early 1900’s by retired business man and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. Between the years 1883-1929 Carnegie provided grant funds to build 1,689 libraries in the United



Oklahoma City's Carnegie Library, built in 1901. (Google Images)



Tahlequah's Carnegie Library, built in 1905. (Library photos)

States, including twenty-four in Oklahoma. Seventeen of those libraries still stand today. Of the seventeen only nine still serve as public libraries. The others now serve as museums, office buildings or as meeting spaces. Two of the Carnegie-funded buildings are in the EOLS service area.

Tahlequah was granted \$10,000 in 1905 from the Carnegie Foundation to build a Library at its current location on College Avenue. A new addition to the original Carnegie building was built in 1977-78 and it now serves as the primary library building while the original structure serves as a community meeting space. The original Carnegie building is on the National Register of Historical Places.

Muskogee’s first library building was the Carnegie Library located on East Broadway. In 1910 Muskogee was granted \$60,000 to build a library that opened to the public in 1914. That Library was closed in 1972 when the



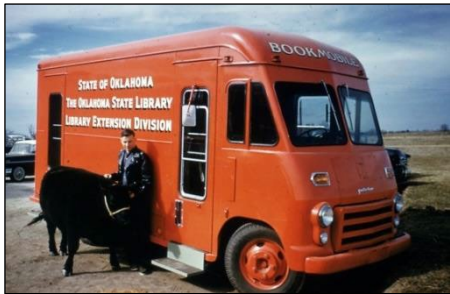
Muskogee's Carnegie Library, built in 1914. (Library photos)

Muskogee Public Library opened at its current location on West Okmulgee. As of this writing the original Carnegie building houses the non-profit Ark of Faith Foundation.



The Allen Wright Memorial Library, current home of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. (Google images)

Throughout Oklahoma’s public library story the Oklahoma Department of Libraries role has been significant especially since the early 1950’s. The need for a library to serve the needs of Oklahoma Territory was evident as early as 1890 when the first Legislative Assembly passed an act that provided for a Territorial Library. In 1893 the name was changed to Oklahoma Library. At Statehood in 1907 the “Office of State Librarian” was established. When the Capitol moved from Guthrie to Oklahoma City in 1910 the Library moved as well. The State Library set up temporary quarters in a building in downtown Oklahoma City before moving to the Capitol building in 1917.



An Oklahoma Library Extension Division Bookmobile. These red vehicles toured the state in the 1950-60s. (ODL photo)

The role of Oklahoma’s State Library has grown and evolved through various legislative mandates over the years. The primary mandate of the original Territorial Library was the “*care and custody of statutes, reports, documents, books, federal publications and to serve lawmakers and the public alike*”. In 1913 materials purchased at State expense were to be housed at the State Library. In 1978 this mandate was expanded to include a Depository Library System to preserve materials for use by Oklahoma’s citizens. The Archives and Records Commission also had its beginnings from legislative mandates in 1939, 1947 and 1953.

In 1919 the Legislature established the State Library. The mandate of the State Library included the following: help establish public libraries; to receive monetary and property gifts; to operate traveling libraries; publish lists and information; and, conduct children’s summer reading programs. In 1953 the Oklahoma Library Commission, which had also been created in 1919, became the Library Extension Division of the State Library. The beginnings of federal library funding in 1957 gave the State Library some of its most visible missions: encouraging the establishment of *new public libraries* and *public library systems* and improved access to information to all Oklahoma citizens through resource sharing.

The Traveling Libraries provided an important service to Oklahoma's rural population. Materials for the traveling libraries came from women's clubs, fraternal lodges and organizations as well as from the larger urban public libraries. Bookmobiles became increasingly popular in the 1930's.

County Libraries also helped to fill the void in the more rural areas of the state. The Oklahoma Legislature passed the County Library Law in 1929 authorizing the establishment of County Libraries to assist in providing services to rural Oklahomans. This law also extended library service to hospitals, jails, county homes and African-American libraries.

STATE QUESTION 392

Shall a Constitutional Amendment permitting recurring additional county ad valorem tax levies of less than one nor more than two mills on assessed valuation of county for public libraries and library services, proceeds to be used in (1) in counties of less than 250,000 population, only in cooperation with one or more other such counties, and (2) in counties of more than 250,000, only for joint city-county public library purposes....be approved by the people?

*Eufaula Indian Journal
July 14, 1960*

With the passage of State Question 392, rural county libraries would begin to join with their neighboring counties to form multi-county library systems. The first rural multi-county system was formed in southern Oklahoma in 1960. The Southern Oklahoma Library System that encompassed Johnston, Love, Murray, Atoka, Coal and Carter counties was the first Library System created after the passage of State Question 392. The Pioneer Library System, created in 1958, comprised at the time of Cleveland, Garvin, and McClain counties was the only Library System that preceded the approval of the State Question in 1960.

The passage of the Oklahoma Library Code in 1967 not only created the Oklahoma Department of Libraries as it exists today, but also provided for the establishment, development and operation of libraries and library systems throughout the state. It also provided financial support for libraries "*with guidelines...in use of all funds and cooperation with other state...federal agencies and private organization in effecting the purposes of the 1967*

Code."

Over the years since, federal funds have provided library construction funds, state-wide interlibrary loan and summer reading programs for children, training and certification programs for librarians, and staff to help all public libraries state-wide on a variety of issues. In the 1990s state library staff expanded their role to include the provision and training of the new state-wide databases and other emerging technologies.

Currently, the remodeled and repurposed Allen Wright Memorial Library, built in 1926, houses the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. The building was named in honor of the Choctaw Chief who coined the name “Oklahoma”. The State Library’s Law and Legislative Reference Division remained in the Jan Eric Cartwright Memorial Library in the Capitol Building.

As the table below illustrates, the passage of the Oklahoma Library Code in 1967 was key in the formation of three additional rural library systems that serve 32 predominately rural communities in eastern and western Oklahoma, including the Eastern Oklahoma Library System.

Oklahoma Public Library Systems by Date Established

Name	Date Established	Counties Included
Pioneer Library System	1958	Cleveland, McClain, Pottawatomie <small>(Garvin County was originally a part of the Pioneer System)</small>
Southern Oklahoma Library System <small>(formerly Chickasaw Library System)</small>	1960	Atoka, Carter, Johnston, Love, Murray
Tulsa City-County Library System	1961	Tulsa
Metropolitan Library System <small>(formerly Oklahoma County Library System)</small>	1965	Oklahoma
Western Plains Library System	1966	Custer, Dewey, Roger Mills, Washita
Southeast Oklahoma Public Library <small>(formerly Choctaw Nation Library System)</small>	1967	Choctaw, Coal*, Haskell, Latimer, LeFlore, McCurtain, Pittsburg <small>(*Coal County was originally part of the Southern System)</small>

Eastern Oklahoma Library System (formerly Eastern Oklahoma District Library System)	1970	Adair, Cherokee, Delaware, McIntosh, Muskogee, Sequoyah
Southern Prairie Library System	1972	Harmon, Jackson

Source: Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma Public Libraries and Library Systems Map, <https://libraries.ok.gov/we-content/uploads/OK-Public-Libraries-Systems-1.pdf>

According to the Oklahoma Department of Libraries, there are currently 214 legally-established public library sites in Oklahoma. This number includes both county or multi-county library system branch libraries and independent libraries administered by cities and towns.

Bookmobiles - Boom & Bust

According to an article in *American Libraries* in March 1, 2018, the first Bookmobile in the US was introduced in 1905. The “library wagon” as it was called in Washington County, Maryland, had exterior shelves for books and was drawn by two horses. Muskogee’s and the System’s Bookmobiles don’t go back that far but the Muskogee Public Library did have Bookmobile service long before the formation of EOLS.



The dream of Gertrude Bryan Davis, MPL librarian from 1945 to 1952, was to provide Bookmobile service to the Muskogee community. As early as 1946, Davis had begun campaigning for a Bookmobile to anyone who would listen. She wrote Bookmobile-related articles for the local newspapers. She even borrowed a Bookmobile from Little Rock in 1949 and put it on display in front of the Carnegie Library for the public to see and explore.



It wasn’t until 1953 under the tenure of Librarian Joe Templeton (1952-1954) that the Muskogee Public Library obtained an Airstream house trailer shell, fitted it with bookshelves built by Central High School’s shop class that Davis’ dream of a “Library on Wheels” was realized. Muskogee’s first Bookmobile cost less than \$2,000 for the trailer shell

and building materials.

The trailer was towed by a vehicle loaned to the Library by the Commercial National Bank. It served as the City’s mobile library for at least 10 years. Sometime in the mid-1960s prior to the end of Librarian William Stewart’s tenure in 1969, the Library acquired its first commercially-built Bookmobile at a cost of \$12,500 to replace the well-used and well-worn trailer. After the arrival of the System Bookmobiles A & B, the



City's Bookmobile became Bookmobile C in staff communications.

Bookmobile C remained in use as the City's Bookmobile for several years after the arrival of the System Bookmobiles A and B that served the rural communities in the newly formed Library System. Bookmobiles A and B were provided by the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. New, they cost \$25,000 each. Today, the American Library Association lists ten different types and sizes of bookmobiles. Those similar in size to Bookmobiles A & B are now in the price range of \$70,000 to \$150,000. The costs for Bookmobiles A and B seem quite reasonable in retrospect.

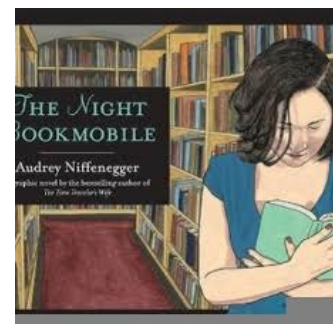
Bookmobile service began in the rural communities of the System in April 1971. Scheduling of the two rural Bookmobiles took many hours of planning with paper, pencils and maps as well as many miles of "dry runs" on the six counties' highways and rural community



backroads to time runs between communities. Originally, all stops were planned to be visited twice each month. During school summer vacation months schedules were adjusted from their regular routes. As time went on, non-productive

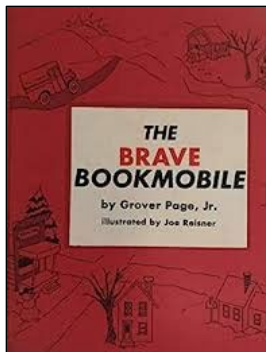
stops were dropped, schedules redone and routes rerouted. Virtually every change required additional planning and scheduling not to mention the need for publicity in area newspapers and in flyers posted at regular stops.

By the 1973-74 fiscal year Bookmobiles A and B spent as much time in repair bays as they did on the road. Monthly Board meetings routinely mentioned that either Bookmobile A or B, sometimes both, were in repair either at the Muskogee City Garage,



Parkers' Garage in Tulsa or the most visited place, the Onan generator shop also in Tulsa.

The two Bookmobiles' generators were the subject of a major portion of the repairs.



It is hard to imagine now just how difficult it was to maneuver those top-heavy, manual transmission behemoths that A and B were. There were instances of scraped and dented sides - the most egregious being put

there by the Executive Director himself as he gouged the side out of one with the spikes on a telephone pole in MPL's parking lot. A close second would be taking a corner too short and leaning the Bookmobile into a ditch off of Shawnee Bypass. Icy roads, the eastern counties' hilly inclines coupled with sluggish engines set to go no faster than 55 mph regardless of the terrain, all made for the adventurous life of the Bookmobile drivers and the librarians accompanying them. Regardless, the Bookmobiles were revered in the communities they served but time and money began to take its toll on Bookmobile service by the mid to late 1970s.

The demonstration period for rural Bookmobile service ended in June 1972. That meant that the cost of running the Bookmobiles A and B were totally the System's responsibility from that point on. By June 1977 the need for adequate money to meet the needs of both the existing branches and the Bookmobiles had reached critical mass. Many Board meetings during this time spent a considerable amount of time discussing external funding sources to meet the needs equitably for all branches and Bookmobiles. County representatives from both Adair and Delaware counties approached the Board requesting more money in their respective branch budgets. Branches in the remaining counties had also voiced their need for additional funds. For the branches to survive, the Bookmobiles' budget was cut in half. Shortly thereafter in August 1977 Bookmobile service was reduced to one rural Bookmobile due to high costs and vehicle maintenance. The number of communities served was greatly reduced as well as were the number of trips per community per month.

In early 1978 the Board hired an ODL consultant to do a feasibility study on the System's Bookmobile service. The study found that the service was not being utilized effectively as it once was. In the May 1978 meeting the Board agreed to discontinue rural Bookmobile service but to continue the City Bookmobile.

The ultimate fates of Bookmobiles A, B and C may never be truly known. The Board



minutes in November 1981 indicated that because of continued vandalism of the one remaining Bookmobile the Board decided to sell it for salvage. In January 1982 it was sold for \$500. The Bookmobile wasn't identified in the Minutes nor

was any of the three vehicles mentioned in any Minutes since the end of rural Bookmobile service in 1978. It can only be assumed that the last remaining Bookmobile sold at that time was “C”, the City’s Bookmobile.

As it turned out the late 1970s wasn’t the end of Bookmobile service in EOLS. In the early 1990’s the various counties’ millage-increase election losses and the post mortem analysis of those losses resulted in the purchase of a used Bookmobile from a California library in 1993-94. The purpose of the Bookmobile’s purchase was to provide library services and programs to the System’s small, rural communities since it was determined that the millage losses were primarily in the rural parts of the EOLS service area. The Bookmobile was headquartered in Tahlequah and spent the majority of its brief existence serving the more remote eastern counties. It was especially useful providing Summer Reading Programs and materials in the 1990s. Upon its retirement as a Bookmobile it was donated to Muskogee County as an Emergency Management Mobile Command Center.

Chapter 1- In the Beginning, 1970-1979

Ever since the 1956 passing by the U.S. Congress of the first Library Services and Construction Act, it was deemed that the most economical approach to public library service was through serving larger units of the population. The Oklahoma Department of Libraries decided that the establishment of multi-county library systems via the vehicle of demonstrations was a practical approach in bringing library service to a large portion of Oklahoma's citizens. The Library Services and Construction Act funds contributed a major source of the funding for these demonstrations. To date, eight library systems, both metropolitan and rural, serve Oklahoma.

"A library is an intricate machine, a contraption of whirring gears."

Susan Orlean
The Library Book

Grants for Library Systems Awarded 6 State Counties

"Six Oklahoma counties have received demonstration multi-county systems grants totaling \$400,000 for the next two fiscal years.

Esther Mae Henke, associate director for library services, Oklahoma Department of Libraries said...all six counties have agreed to vote on a mill levy taxation of ad valorem taxpayers to continue the libraries at the end of the demonstration period.

Included in the grant are Adair, Cherokee, Delaware, McIntosh, Muskogee and Sequoyah counties. Also planned is acquisition of two new bookmobiles....

Henke said ten counties initially requested grants."

*The Daily Oklahoman,
June 25, 1970*

Before EOLS went into its demonstration in 1970 formal library service in the area was limited to the communities of Grove, Muskogee, Tahlequah, Westville and Sallisaw. Both Muskogee and Tahlequah had libraries built with Carnegie Foundation grants in the early 1900s. Citizens in the small community of Westville established the Westville Community Library, the first free public library in Adair County, in 1960. It was staffed by volunteers only until it became a part of the System's demonstration eight years later. It is safe to say that it is a rarity for any size community to make such a commitment to library service on a volunteer basis. In 1964 and 1968, respectively, Grove and Sallisaw had begun the ground work for the establishment of tax-supported public libraries for their communities insofar as contacting the Oklahoma Department of Libraries for information and support.

**System Board Holds First Meeting
August 8**

“The Eastern Oklahoma Library System Board of Trustees met for its first meeting...in the Grant Foreman Room of the Muskogee Public Library, August 8, 1970. Those present were:

Members:

Mrs. Ernest R. Anthis, Jr., Muskogee
Mrs. Oleta Crumpler, Checotah
Claude Harris, Muskogee
Mrs. Barbara Mayo, Sallisaw
Mrs. Charles W. Pates, Muldrow
Mrs. Mary Tolleson, Eufaula
Mrs. Vivian Wheat, Kansas
Vol Woods, Westville
Mrs. Dorothy Worsham, Stilwell

...ODL representatives included Esther Mae Henke; Ralph Funk, Director; and Freda Gillman....

Claude Harris was elected Chairman of the Board; Jim Wilkerson, Adm. Librarian; Vol Woods, Vice-Chairman; Barbara Mayo, Secretary-Treasurer....”

Eufaula Indian Journal
September 17, 1970

EOLS’ origins and the resulting access to library service for almost a quarter of a million eastern Oklahomans as of the 2020 Census is the result of the efforts of many who have worked diligently and waited patiently for the opportunity to access library service in their communities. As James Wilkerson, EOLS’ first Executive Director noted, “*The groundwork, knowledge and the understanding of the program by those who have worked and supported it, made the beginning months developing the program operate smoothly. This includes the support of County Commissioners, Mayors, City Managers, City Councils, Women’s and Civic Clubs, interested and committed citizens.*”

EOLS was organized according to the provisions of the Oklahoma Library Code 65, Oklahoma Statutes 1969 Supplement. This Code gave the Oklahoma Department of Libraries the responsibility for implementing public library development state-wide. As stated earlier, ODL saw that the establishment of multi-county library systems

as the primary method of realizing public library development. ODL’s Board had extended an invitation to ten eastern Oklahoma counties where initial local interest implied that a successful library demonstration could be successful. Six counties responded to ODL’s invitation.

In order for a county to participate in the library demonstration, each individual county’s Board of Commissioners had to adopt a resolution confirming their willingness to participate and to call for an election for a library support levy and the end of the two-year library demonstration period.

In addition, each community with a population of 2,000 or more adopted an ordinance stating that they would like to participate in the demonstration. Library Boards in towns with existing libraries adopted resolutions that they presented to their local town councils agreeing



Muskogee Head Librarian William Stewart discusses the possibilities of establishing a multi-county library system with Esther Mae Henke, ODL Extension Librarian, Leta Dover, Bacone Librarian, and Virginia Owens, ODL Field Librarian. (Muskogee Daily Phoenix)

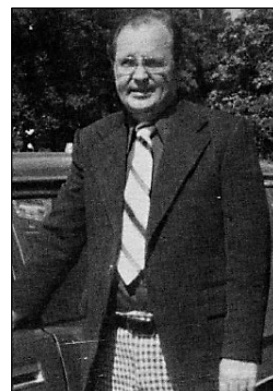
that the towns would continue to support their local libraries at the same funding levels during the demonstration periods.

The System was organized to be governed by a Board of Trustees composed of the following: (1) Each Board of County Commissioners appointed one person to represent the County at large. (2) Each town of 2,000 or more in a County appointed one person to represent the town. (3) If a County did not have a town of 2,000 or more the Library Code allowed that the county seat's town council could appoint one person to the Board.

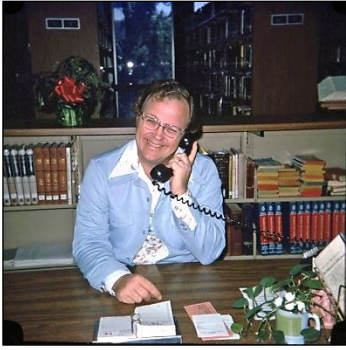
The System's first board meeting took place on August 8, 1970. Prior to that first multi-county board meeting in 1970, the citizens of Muskogee passed a bond issue to build a joint City/Regional Library in 1968. In 1969 the Muskogee Public Library received a planning grant to extend library service beyond Muskogee County. During the same time period, the Oklahoma Department of Libraries' consultants had completed an initial survey of nine eastern Oklahoma counties as possible multi-county demonstration sites.

It should be noted that much of the ground work had been done before the multi-county library demonstration had begun. As early as 1958, Muskogee Librarian William Stewart was in discussions with representatives from the Oklahoma Department of Libraries (then known as Oklahoma State Library Extension) about the establishment of a multi-county system in eastern Oklahoma. In a move to further this plan, an ODL Bookmobile was put on display in both Muskogee and Tahlequah and ODL staff met with local library board members. According to a quote by Stewart in the *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "At first Muskogee would take more the role of the leader, but as the system grew it would give local readers the advantages of a larger library system".

ODL, in anticipation of the multi-county library demonstration, had already purchased several thousand dollars -worth of books as well as two large Bookmobiles, valued at approximately \$25,000 each, to be used both during and after the proposed demonstration. With



James R. Wilkerson, EOLS Executive Director, 1969-1978. (Library photo)

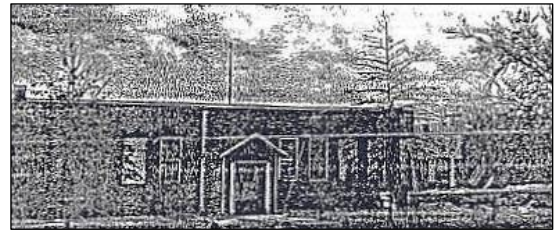


In spite of the pressures of his job, Director Wilkerson usually could be seen with a smile. (Library photo)

books and equipment on hand amounting to approximately \$70,000, work began in earnest to organize and develop the newest multi-county library demonstration period in the State at that time.

At that first board meeting a resolution was made and seconded to become a multi-county library demonstration including Adair, Cherokee, Delaware, McIntosh, Muskogee and Sequoyah counties. (Note: an agreement dated in April 1970 signed by Adair County officials did not include McIntosh County as part of the proposed library demonstration project. However, by the August meeting McIntosh County had been included).

At the August 1970 board meeting, James R. Wilkerson, Muskogee City Librarian, was also named as the first Executive Director of the newly formed multi-county library system. The name of the proposed library system was voted on to be the Eastern Oklahoma District Library System until such time as a final name was to be determined. In October 1970 the Board voted that the name Eastern Oklahoma District Library System would remain the official name for the fledgling multi-county library system. (Note: In 2019, the System's name was formally changed to Eastern Oklahoma Library System). It was also at the August meeting that the Oklahoma Department of Libraries provided an additional \$20,000 for the purpose of the library system demonstration project.



Langston Elementary School, built in 1912, was the first location of the EOLS Service Center. (Manual Training High School, 1965)

Decades later it may be difficult to comprehend that every existing System rule, regulation, by-law, policy, procedure, and job description had its genesis in the decisions made by the Board in its second meeting held on September 9, 1970. Items addressed and adopted included the following:

- ALA's Library Bill of Rights
- System Library Goals and Objectives
- Personnel Policies and Salary Schedules
- Furnishings and equipment procedures and purchases

- Job descriptions for all positions including: District Librarian, Library Technician, Assistant Librarian, business and clerical, bookmobile driver/librarian and community librarian.
- Initial bookmobile schedules



OTIS was the "mascot" of the Oklahoma Teletype Interlibrary System. (ODL)

As Director Wilkerson noted earlier, a willingness of area citizens and communities to cooperate and an eagerness to get the library demonstration up and running was evident when he was having a difficult time finding a suitable building to serve as the headquarters of the library demonstration. The existing Muskogee Public Library in the Carnegie building had no extra room and the new proposed library facility was still in the planning stages. It was suggested that he look into the possibility of leasing one of the older school buildings that had been closed the previous year in the Muskogee School District.

Through the cooperation of the Muskogee Board of Education and the Muskogee City Council, the old Langston Elementary School on the corner of Euclid and Sandow was leased to the Board of Trustees for \$1 a year. In the fall of 1970, the System negotiated a sub-lease with the City of Muskogee and the Board of Education for the use of the property for a dollar a year provided the System assumed adequate insurance to protect both the City and the Board. In December 1970 the sub-lease for the 4,500 square foot Langston School was approved by the System Board. (Note: The building has since been razed and replaced by Langston Park).



First location of the Grove Public Library in the City Complex. (Library photo)

Another example of cooperation with the City of Muskogee allowed the newly-acquired Bookmobiles to be serviced at the City Garage at a considerable savings on gasoline, oil, minor adjustments and repairs.

In early 1971 construction bids for the new Muskogee Public Library were requested. The new structure was to contain spaces and offices not only for Muskogee Library staff but also for System staff.

MPL's staff had been transferred to the System's payroll by the end of 1970.

Meanwhile, a tremendous amount of paperwork and accrued mileage by System staff was required to get the community libraries in the demonstration counties up and running. Also, in

December 1970 the size of the System's demonstration service area grew by one when Rogers County petitioned the Oklahoma Department of Libraries to become part of the multi-county demonstration. The library supporters in Rogers County had been unable to get their legal requirements fulfilled by the earlier June 30 deadline to join in the library demonstration with the others. Shortly thereafter, they completed their legal paperwork and petitioned ODL for permission to participate. Initially, the System Board approved the Rogers County action but requested that work in the County be delayed until the work in the existing six counties had been accomplished. Actual work in Rogers County began in August 1971.



First location of the Delaware County Library. (Library photo)

In the midst of all the physical work and detail it takes to set up any library coupled with setting up several at once in six counties, the story of the "bootleg librarian" came to be. Mae Jennings, the System's Technical Services head, charged with much of the initial set-up of the various community libraries, drove an older ODL-furnished station wagon loaded with boxes of books and other supplies needed at the various

soon-to-be libraries. On one of her trips to the far eastern branches she was stopped by a



First location of the Eufaula Public Library. (Library photo)

Highway Patrol officer. The officer asked her why she happened to be transporting liquor in a state-owned vehicle, her grandmotherly appearance notwithstanding. She exited the vehicle, lowered the vehicle's tailgate and showed him that the liquor he was referring to was really cartons of library books. She told him that liquor boxes made the best type of boxes to use when moving books. They were

smaller, easier to carry, for women especially, and were generally sturdier since liquor bottles were made of glass. The officer agreed that her argument made sense and sent her on her way to drive another day.

The Delaware County Library, the first completely new community Library, opened in Jay on January 10, 1971, in a garage which was formerly a part of City Hall. The opening was followed the next day by an Open House celebration. Jay's commitment to providing library service to its citizens by soliciting funds, conducting money-raising projects in southern Delaware County and obtaining labor provided by the high school industrial arts class are prime examples of the lengths to which the communities in the six county demonstration area did to

make library service a reality in their respective communities. The pride and accomplishment of the Jay supporters rubbed off on library supporters in the other communities and soon new community libraries were opening in McIntosh, Adair and Sequoyah counties.



First location of the Stilwell Public Library. (Library photo)

The Eufaula Public Library opened shortly thereafter with an Open House on Sunday, January 31, 1971, and opened for business the following day, February 1, in a small three store strip mall in which the Library occupied the middle storefront.

Stilwell Public Library had its Open House on March 3, 1971, in a downtown store-front building. The Grove Public Library, the second library in Delaware County, held their open house on April 18, 1971, after an extensive renovation of an area in their community's City Complex.

On May 2, 1971, the Checotah Public house in a store-front on the town's main City Library also opened in May 1971 as an to the Grove Public Library, the Sallisaw located in the City's government complex.



First location of the Sallisaw City Library inside the Sallisaw City Complex. (Library photo)

Library had its open street. The Sallisaw EOLS branch. Similar City Library was also



First location of the Jim Lucas Checotah Public Library. (Library photo)

While the libraries were raising, and renovating their new libraries, the J.J. Cook Construction Company out of Oklahoma City was awarded the contract for the construction of the new Muskogee Public Library on February 8, 1971. After the contract was awarded there continued to be meetings with the architect as well as numerous meetings with designers and furnishing contractors. In March, the Library's architect took the new library specs to the Muskogee City Council meeting for approval.

various community organizing, fund



Both the established and the new community libraries in the demonstration were also privy to a wealth of new services and programs. Magazine and phonograph record service was begun. Reciprocal borrowing privileges were created whereby any citizen in the six-county service area could borrow materials from any of the other System's branches or the Bookmobiles. A no-fine policy was implemented for overdue

materials. The System participated in ODL's 16mm film program. Each month fifty 16mm films were made available to the Muskogee Public Library to be distributed free to any requesting club, organization, church or school in the System's service area that requested them. While by twenty-first century standards the equipment and services offered in the early 1970's seem old-fashioned and antiquated technologies, at the time they were state-of-the art and definitely above anything available in the communities at the time.



Record albums, 16mm films and newspapers were welcome additions to the recently established branch libraries. (Library photos)

Interlibrary Loan was another important service in the library demonstration. The Muskogee Public Library was a regional transmission site for OTIS, the Oklahoma Teletype Interlibrary System. If any branch library got a request for a book they did not have, a request would be made to Muskogee to see if it was available anywhere in the System. If it was deemed that the System didn't have the material then the request was sent by teletype to ODL. If ODL didn't have it, a request was made state-wide. If the material wasn't available state-wide the request went nationally. With OTIS, each community library, no matter how large or small, served as a gateway to virtually the entire world. While the teletype system and the cute OTIS mascot

are now a past-tense technology, Interlibrary Loan is still a valuable resource for EOLS branch libraries.

It's hard to believe in the current age of library technology that in 1971 fledgling EOLS had to lease computer time from a private Muskogee-based company. In March 1971, Director Wilkerson met with officials of Leake Industries about leasing computer time from them on an as-needed basis. Leake Industries was agreeable to the Library's proposal. This agreement for use of Leake Industries main frame computer marks the System's first foray into the use of computer technology.

The April 1971 Board Minutes noted that an ODL consultant informed the Board that each community library should have a part-time assistant. All the new community libraries were on record as being virtually swamped with citizens anxious to use their new libraries from the moment their doors opened for the first time so the need for assistants was crucial. Soon, community branch managers had assistants to help provide library service to their citizens.



Mary Ann Wentworth, Oklahoma Department of Libraries Children's Coordinator. (ODL photo)

The first system-wide participation in the State-sponsored Summer Reading Program via ODL occurred in April 1971. The program's theme that year was "*Magic Maze*" and it was introduced to the library staff by Mary Ann Wentroth, Children's Consultant for the Department of Libraries. *Magic Maze* had a castle-knight-prince/princess-fairy tale-atmosphere with a pink and purple color scheme.

There had been two System staff meetings held by April 1971. One of which was the introduction of the Summer Reading Program, *Magic Maze*, as described above. It was



Groundbreaking of the new Muskogee Public Library in February 1971. Left to right: EOLS Director, James Wilkerson; Muskogee Mayor, Elmo Madewell; and Frank Borovetz, Muskogee City Council Member. (Muskogee Daily Phoenix)

determined at this time that staff meetings would be held on the final Monday of the month and would last around two hours plus possible instruction and training at various times.

Along with the various community library openings throughout the multi-county area and Muskogee Library construction issues, Bookmobile service began in earnest in April 1971. The months prior were focused on numerous visits and "practice runs" to the rural communities in the six county service area to ascertain the

need and desire for Bookmobile service. All scheduled Bookmobile stops were to be made twice a month barring weather and mechanical issues. It was also determined that there would be modifications to Bookmobile schedules during summer months to accommodate school vacations.

With the construction of the new Muskogee Public Library in its beginning stages, Director James Wilkerson received notice that OG&E wanted out of the 1951 agreement with the City of Muskogee to provide free electricity for the new Library when it was completed as it had done with the old Carnegie Library. OG&E's reasoning was that the Library, as part of the multi-county system, was no longer the City's responsibility.

Not everyone in the System's service area was excited about being a part of the multi-county library demonstrations. Although Cherokee County was part of the original

demonstration agreement, the librarian at Tahlequah, the only public library in the County at the time, was less than enthusiastic about the changes on the horizon. She had been the Tahlequah's librarian since 1922. Director Wilkerson and others met with the librarian in June with the intent of reaching an agreement on her participation in the demonstration. According to Board Minutes, no agreement was reached at that time.



Original Circulation Desk area of the old Tahlequah Carnegie Library. (Library photo)

In August 1971, the Cherokee County and City System Board Members and Tahlequah City Library Board members presented a resolution to the Tahlequah City Council on August 2 and it was accepted. The System Board then approved the resolution allowing for the library demonstration in Tahlequah/Cherokee County on August 5. Immediately, work began on rearranging the old Carnegie Library, updating the collection, and in making the collection more accessible to the public. Tahlequah held its Open House as a member of the demonstration on October 3, 1971.

While the drama in Tahlequah was taking place, Rogers County petitioned the Oklahoma Department of Libraries to become a part of the library demonstration and the System Board approved their request. Claremore already had the Will Rogers Library. Catoosa and Inola requested that libraries be added in their communities as well. In the fall of 1971 potential Bookmobile service stops were also explored in the rural communities of the County as part of the preparation. Rogers County officials were told that if a two mill levy election was not held by June 30, 1973, that the System would withdraw their support from all three of the County's libraries.

Meanwhile, in December 1971, Adair, Cherokee, Delaware and McIntosh Counties held the vote for the millage tax levy to support continued library service. The vote was held December 7, 1971. Three counties – Cherokee, Delaware, and McIntosh – voted for the levy. Adair County missed passing the levy by 234 votes. Immediately, Adair County supporters got busy preparing for the next vote on library service that they intended to win next time around.

By the end of 1971 the following counties and communities were part of EOLS either as demonstrations or as levied members:

County	Town/City	Millage Vote in 1971
Adair	Stilwell	Not passed
	Westville	Not passed
Cherokee	Tahlequah	Passed
Delaware	Grove	Passed
	Jay	Passed
McIntosh	Checotah	Passed
	Eufaula	Passed
Muskogee	Muskogee/Wheatley Branch	Demo
Rogers	Bookmobile only	Demo
Sequoyah	Sallisaw	Demo

Early in 1972 thoughts turned to the coming millage elections to be held in Muskogee and Sequoyah Counties on March 7, 1972. Adair County agreed to call another millage election in 1972 as soon as funds were available. Joint Westville and Stilwell meetings were held in April and May with concerned citizens from both communities. Another millage election was scheduled in Adair County for June 6, 1972.



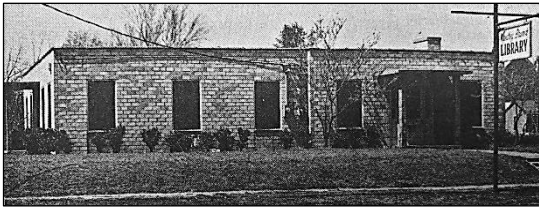
First location of the Haskell Public Library. (Library photo)

Meanwhile, the construction of the new Muskogee Public Library at its current location on Okmulgee Street was completed and the final inspection concluded on February 25, 1972.

Discussions on how to move the equipment, supplies, books, equipment, and furniture from the old Carnegie building as well as moving the Service Center from the former Langston Elementary School and moving the Phillis Wheatley Branch Library into the new facility began in late 1971. It was finally determined that the moves should be entrusted to a professional moving company. In March 1972, the System Board approved Muskogee Transfer and Storage with the job of moving all three entities.

While the final details of the Muskogee Public Library were being addressed, the citizens of Haskell in eastern Muskogee County petitioned the Board in February 1972 for a branch library in their community pending the location of a suitable building. Quickly, the Haskell

citizens found an old bank building on the town's main intersection and Haskell held its Library's Open House on April 1, 1972 just eight days before Muskogee's Open House. The Children's Room of the Haskell Library was located in the bank's vault, unique to say the least. Haskell's new board member was to begin board service on July 1, 1972.



The incorporation of the Wheatley Branch's materials and staff into the new Muskogee Public Library in 1972 marked the end of library segregation begun in 1913. (Library photo)

The new Muskogee Public Library held its open house on April 9, 1972 and on April 10, 1972, the staff of the Phillis Wheatley Branch began their work as members of the Muskogee Public Library staff.

A month later, the first steps in automation of the System began in earnest with the keypunching of borrowers' registration information. Originally, the work began at ODL but it soon moved to Leake Industries where the System had worked on some earlier automation projects. It was reported that there were only three errors out of 1,969 entries in the initial keypunching run – an impressive feat in the early days of computing!

The Rogers County voted failed in June 1973. The reason given was that the County was afraid of losing "local control". Truth be told, it was the Claremore Library and supporters that feared the loss of control the most and their votes carried the County. All EOLS materials, equipment, furniture and services were withdrawn and re-routed to other EOLS libraries. As of this writing the Rogers County communities of Claremore, Chelsea, Catoosa, Talala and Inola all have locally-funded, independent public libraries.

It is at this point in the System's history that Board meetings became less about new library development and more about routine governance as the new libraries settled into their communities and those libraries already in existence settled into their new way of being. In late 1973, the Board adopted revised By-Laws. In early 1974 Director Wilkerson solicited bids for a comprehensive insurance plan for the contents of all branch libraries. The Jim Fuller Agency in Muskogee provided the lowest bid.

In mid-1974, the Oklahoma Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) presented a program to the Board about their retirement plan. In September 1974 the Board voted to accept their plan proposal for the System's full-time employees.

Mid-1974 and into the early months of 1975 witnessed a reorganization of the System administration as a result of the resignation of the former Assistant Director/Muskogee Adult Services Librarian, Jerry Walker. The head of Technical Services, Mae Jennings, became the Assistant District Librarian in charge of the general operation of the System and its branches while Director Wilkerson, who was also the Muskogee's Head Librarian, could concentrate more on local issues.

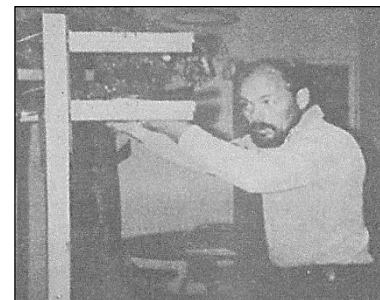


Bookmobile Story Hour under a tree in the summer of 1976. (Library photo)

By late summer 1974, as it became more readily apparent that Bookmobile service was becoming more expensive to operate, Bill Strain, Executive Director of the Choctaw Nation Library System (now the Southeast Public Library System) headquartered in McAlester, was invited to address the Board about their System's Mail-A-Book program which was at that time unique to them in the State. However, it wasn't until mid-1975 until the library staff and Board began to explore the Mail-A-Book program in detail as a possible answer to Bookmobiles in the more rural areas of the System's service area.

The years of 1976 and 1977 witnessed tightening branch budgets, reductions in staff, a further reduction in Bookmobile service and a possible discontinuation of the automation project until more money was received. Various sources of grants and other outside funding sources were explored. The two Bookmobile's budget was cut in half in 1976 only to have service cut down to only one Bookmobile in late summer 1977 due to the high maintenance costs. Limits were also added to Bookmobile service to the rural communities.

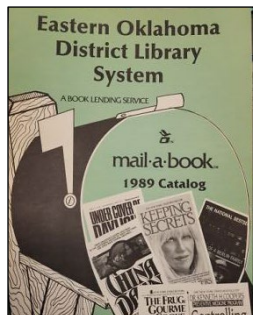
In August 1977, the Board felt that Director Wilkerson needed prepare a reorganization plan to improve System staff efficiency in view of limited budgets. The Board requested Wilkerson to have a revised organization plan addressing various personnel issues that the Board had become aware of. They felt the Director should delegate more responsibility to the appropriate System staff and spend less time with Muskogee Public and more on branch activities and issues.



Monty Maxwell, EOLS Director, 1978-1981. (Source unknown)

In January 1978, the Board approved the Director's reorganization plan which included moving MPL's current Adult Services Librarian, Jeanette McQuitty, to the position of MPL

Director. Assistant Director/Tech Services Head, Mae Jennings, resigned and became Director of the Choctaw Nation Library System, and the branch library coordinator, Mary Beth Ozmun Webb, resigned and became Head Librarian at Bacone College in Muskogee.



In April 1978, Director Wilkerson accepted a position in Pueblo, Colorado as Director of the Arkansas Regional Library System effective in May 1978. The Muskogee Public Librarian added the job of EOLS Acting Director to her duties until the position was filled.

In July 1978 Monty Maxwell was employed as EOLS' second Executive Director effective August 28, 1978. Maxwell came from academia where he had been Acting Head of the Undergraduate Library of Indiana University in Bloomington.

Budget issues remained front and center during Maxwell's four-year tenure. If there was a theme for Maxwell's term as Director it would be his attempts at library cooperation with Systems outside EOLS as one method of cost-cutting. In his first Board Meeting he presented ideas for possible cooperation with ODL outside of the usual venues which the Board allowed him to explore. The first such effort was to finally bring the Mail-A-Book service into being in the fall of 1978.



The value of the Mail-A-Book service can be seen in the boys' smiles. (Library photo)

In an article appearing in the *Muskogee Phoenix* on September 1, 1978, Director Maxwell explained how the Mail-A-Book Service worked as a service to rural residents of the System. Catalogs would be mailed to each EOLS County on a staggered basis. Adair and Delaware Counties would get the catalog first in late September. Cherokee and Sequoyah County residents would get their catalogs in later October and Muskogee and McIntosh Counties would come on board in late November. The main catalog consisted of 800 paperback titles with three supplements a year with 100 titles each. Library cards were not required to use the Service, Maxwell explained, and all shipping costs between the System and recipient were paid by the System.

Maxwell also explained that while mail order library books was not a new concept, the more recent availability of low-price paperbacks in popular titles made Mail-A-Book a more feasible service than ever before.



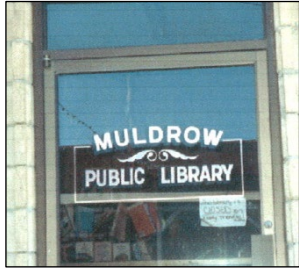
Esther Mae Henke was the powerhouse behind the development of multi-county library systems in Oklahoma, EOLS included. (Library photo)

Wagoner County, specifically the mayor and the citizens of Coweta, approached ODL in 1978 to with a request to join the EOLS as a demonstration with a millage vote to be held later that same year. The Wagoner City Librarian and Library Board were much more hesitant. In fact, they were not in favor at all. Again, the perceived “lack of local control” was the primary issue.

Director Maxwell and the Board asked ODL consultant Esther Mae Henke if EOLS had to honor the request Coweta made to ODL for a demonstration. Henke explained that the Board had complete veto power over any counties that may want to join. The fact that ODL accepted the application from Coweta in no way meant that EOLS had to approve it. It should be a joint effort between the System and the county or counties in question. The Board had final approval. Sensing that Wagoner, the largest community in the County, was not in favor of joining EOLS, the Board decided to deny the request from Coweta. Today, Coweta does have a locally-funded community library.

In early 1979 Maxwell suggested cooperative efforts between the Choctaw Nation Library System and EOLS only to find those efforts tabled early on. By mid-1979, budget issues coming from outside representatives of Adair and Delaware counties were in the forefront. The representatives stated their cases for more money for their branches in monthly Board Meetings during the summer and early fall. Their pleas were met with empathy because many Board members echoed the concerns of the Adair and Delaware citizens for their branch libraries as well. At this point in time, however, there were more needs than money to meet those needs.

As the first decade of the System drew to a close, Maxwell noted a milestone. By April 1979 all existing EOLS branches had local Library Advisory Boards to act as liaisons between their respective communities and the Library in that community. Library Advisory Boards can be an important tool in alleviating the fear of loss of “local control” which was the chief fear of the existing libraries in Wagoner and Rogers Counties. A two-way flow of information is important to the success of a multi-county system especially in the early developmental years.



The first location of the Muldrow Public Library was also in the City's Town Hall. (Library photo)

The biggest possible negative to local Library Advisory Boards can happen if: (1) An existing local library board brought into a system resists the change from being a governing board to an advisory board; and, (2) A newly formed library in a system incorporated people who misunderstand the advisory nature of their role on a local board in a multi-county system. Over the years, EOLS has had its share of both such situations.

As the System's first decade drew to a close the addition of the Muldrow Public Library to EOLS reached fruition after a process that had begun in 1976. On October 28, 1979, the Muldrow Public Library located in the community's Town Hall was dedicated to a community that had eagerly awaited its creation.

A Muskogee issue that began in the early 1970s with OG&E's questioning of its former contract to provide free electricity to the older Carnegie Library but not to the then newly built Library on West Okmulgee continued as the City struggled to determine their responsibility for the Muskogee Public Library within the EOLS framework. It was a struggle that continued for several years. By January 1980, MPL's contract with the City was revised to include the elimination of the City's responsibility for the Bookmobiles (for the use of City Garage, etc.). The City finally recognized the EOLS Board as the governing body and not the MPL Board; and, it was finally decided after numerous legal battles that Muskogee Public Library's OG&E costs would be split half and half with the City and the System.

Chapter 2, Budget Woes as Buildings Grow, 1980-1989

Modern Library Budgets

“...library budgets are constrained by many forces – size and inflexibility of personnel budgets; annual increases in the price of materials; the need to purchase more electronic resources and hardware; maintaining print collections; uncontrollable costs such as postage and telecommunications; and, the fact that the budget (source) is usually not the library’s to control.”

Our Singular Strengths
Michael Gorman

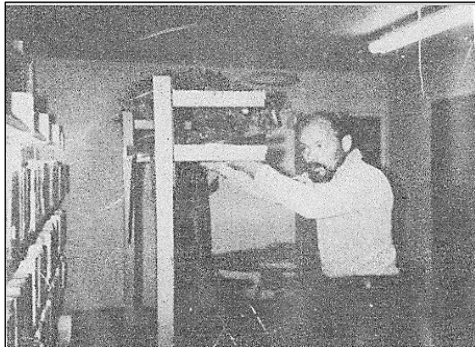
Budget issues continued into the 1980s. Inflation was identified as the major cause. Director Maxwell felt that one way to save money was to invest in multi-county library cooperation; in this case with the Choctaw Nation Library System (now Southeast Public Library System) that bordered the southern counties of EOLS. As an initial step, in November 1979, the Boards of both Systems signed a resolution concerning Reciprocal Borrowing Privileges between the two Systems. Basically, registered library users of either System could borrow and return library materials at member libraries in either System, and could otherwise have full user privileges at any Library in either System. As of 2009, the Agreement was still in effect.

The Agreement had been especially advantageous to persons living in northern parts of Haskell and Pittsburg Counties that bordered on McIntosh County who used Eufaula as their primary shopping venue.

In January 1980 Director Maxwell proposed to the Board a Library Cooperation Plan between the two Systems. He felt there would be cost savings to both Systems by sharing the following:

- Physical delivery systems.
- Central Reference Service for both headquartered in Muskogee.
- Interlibrary Loan transmission headquartered in Muskogee.
- Reciprocal borrowing privileges for both systems.
- Mail-A-Book headquartered in McAlester.
- Cooperative collection development.

The EOLS Board was a bit leery at the possible cost of Maxwell's proposal not to mention the reaction of some members of the public and even of EOLS staff. The Board wanted additional information. The Director applied for and received an ODL study grant to gather additional information, especially about costs. In May 1980 the Board accepted the results on the feasibility of forming a multi-library co-op but tabled the formal proposal to establish it.



EOLS' second Executive Director, Monty Maxwell, 1978-1981. (Library photo)

In August 1980 the Board did vote to accept the idea of a Central Reference Service (CRS) for EOLS for one year pending the availability of funds either via grants or budgeting. If funds were not available it would be dropped.

The proposed Central Reference Service plan as viewed by Director Maxwell would have consisted of a toll-free number, highly-trained reference staff and collections at the Muskogee Public Library, access to sophisticated and extensive data bases and a rapid-delivery service. According to Maxwell, the same toll-free number could be used to access the Mail-A-Book Service directly. Persons could make reference requests directly using the toll free number or make them through their local branch library. Needless to say, budget issues scraped the CRS plan before implementation.

The impact of budget cuts loomed large on the horizon in the 1980-81 and 1981-82 budget years. Maxwell reported that budget cuts would impact the System in several areas. There would be a reduction in Interlibrary Loan service, cuts in the financial secretary's position, a reduction to clerical staff only in technical services and the loss of the OCLC terminal, important for use in cataloging, and the conversion of some of the smaller branches into reading rooms only.

Meanwhile, back in 1975, Senate Joint Resolution 8 provided the vehicle for a state-wide vote of up to 4 mills for library support, up from the original 2 mills. In view of the perceived hope that there was a light at the end of the financial tunnel, in late 1980 the Board began discussions of millage increases extending well into 1981. Unfortunately, the Joint Resolution did not come into being at that time. State Question 666 concerning millage increases did not come to a vote until 1994. By June 1981 budget issues were foremost in the Board members'

minds. Branches were asked to poll their patrons and the community about proposed millage increases and received these responses. Below are the recorded responses from the counties or individual branches:

Community or County	Response to Millage Increase
Delaware	No
Muskogee	Yes
Haskell	Yes
Stilwell	No
Tahlequah	No
Eufaula	Yes
Westville	No
Sallisaw	No

In August 1981 Director Maxwell resigned citing his reluctance to be involved in fund-raising and millage elections. The Board members, unsatisfied with the status of the budget through most of Maxwell’s tenure, discussed ways to improve the budget. Some members called the existing budget arcane, others felt it needed a format change with less emphasis on “County lines”, while a few others thought a change in format might be enough.



John Hinkle was on the ODL consultant staff. Prior to his appointment to ODL, John was the Choctaw Nation Multi-County Library System’s first Executive Director. (Google)

John Hinkle, representing ODL, sat in at one Board meeting. He volunteered to provide a draft of the ways other System directors in Oklahoma handled their budgets at the next scheduled Board meeting. In September the current budget was finally approved with the stipulation that the Board would examine what others were doing to find a better approach.

The hunt for a new Executive Director began immediately after Maxwell’s resignation. The Board wanted someone with not only relative library experience, but also with budget and fundraising experience being of paramount importance. In the interim, the Tech Services Supervisor, Barbara Proctor, served in the role of acting Director for seven months because at the time she had the most overall System experience of any of the EOLS staff



Barbara Proctor was acting Director during the months between the resignation of Director Maxwell and the hiring of Director Hinshaw. (Library photo)

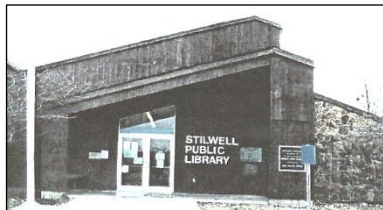
then currently on board. She had been hired in 1972 at the time of the move from the Carnegie building to the new Muskogee Public Library. Seven months later, Marilyn Hinshaw was hired as EOLS' third Executive Director in May 1982.



*Marilyn Hinshaw,
EOLS Executive
Director, 1982-2008.
(Library photo)*

By the time Director Hinshaw assumed the leadership role the System was maturing out of its early years of rapid growth and development. More time was spent by the Board on routine, recurring issues as opposed to new matters and new library development. The Director and Board continued to deal with budget issues, staff reorganization, and the development of performance objectives and measures. Comprehensive long range planning (LRP) was tackled for the first time in the System's history.

The planning included input from Board Members, Library staff and community members throughout the System. Over roughly a 16 month period, the Long Range Planning Committee met to develop the first-of-its-kind LRP. The System's new Mission Statement was accepted by the Board in December 1984 and the Long-Range Plan itself was accepted in April 1985. In the summer of 1986, EOLS was recognized as a leader in the state in performance measurement and in long-range planning.



An early picture of the new Stilwell Public Library, circa 1983. (Library photo)

Policies on such items as book selection, materials donations, collection development, vehicle use, staff grievance, visitors, phones and child care were addressed. While some policies were merely updated to meet evolving issues other policies were developed as new issues arose over time. The Board tackled insurance issues related to employee health, retirement, personal liability of Board and staff and library contents, to name only a few. Contracts with branch communities were

Policies on such items as book selection, materials donations, collection development, vehicle use, staff grievance, visitors, phones and child care were addressed. While some policies were merely updated to meet evolving issues other policies were

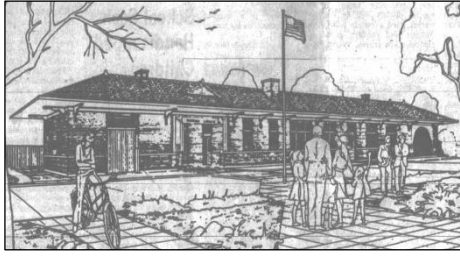
"We (EOLS) look good in these reports because we are good."

Marilyn Hinshaw



The Eufaula Memorial Library in the final stages of construction, circa 1985. (Library photo)

either updated or initiated. State-wide budget cuts loomed large. System budgets were passed but questions still remained as to how to best utilize the available funds.



Architect's reimagining of the former train depot as the new Sallisaw Public Library later renamed the Stanley Tubbs Memorial Library, circa 1983. (Library photo)

Not all was gloom and doom, however. The first half of the decade of the 1980's was a time of library growth in the EOLS communities of Stilwell, Haskell, Sallisaw, Grove and Eufaula. Grove broke ground for a new addition to their current building in February 1984.

Stilwell, Haskell and Eufaula built new library buildings. The Stilwell Library was dedicated in September 1983.

Haskell's Library was dedicated in September 1984 and

Eufaula's was dedicated in August 1985. Sallisaw moved from its cramped space in the City Complex to the town's former train station in February 1985.

All three communities were the recipients of generous land or financial donations from local donors – Eufaula, a \$100,000 from fund-raising efforts; Sallisaw, \$75,000 from the City and local donors; Grove, \$25,000 from the City and Haskell; \$62,290 from a private legacy donation.



The Rieger Memorial Library in Haskell under construction, 1984. (Library photo)

The communities also received construction grants from

Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) funds through the Oklahoma Department of

Libraries. The communities had to raise 100 percent matching funds

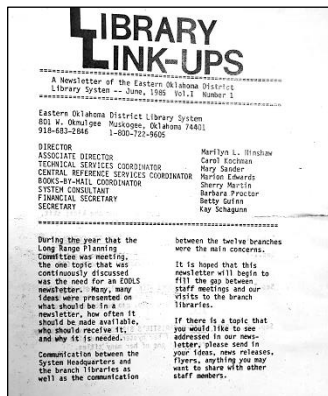
within 120 days or default the ODL grants. In May 1985, Oklahoma Governor George Nigh signed HB1246 – Library User's Records Act

into law. The law protected the privacy of library users' records from public disclosure unless the person permits disclosure or with a valid

court order that would force the release of the information. The law took effect in November 1985 and it applied to all Libraries supported

in whole or part by public funds. Oklahoma was the 27th state to pass a

library users' confidentiality law.



The Library System's Newsletter, Library Link-ups, was created in June 1985. (Library photo)

In late 1985 the Wilson Rawls Book Trust was formed and approved by the Board. Expenditures from the Trust were to be limited to books and materials within the System. With the permission of his widow, the Trust was named after author Wilson Rawls whose book, "Where the Red Fern Grows," was set in Cherokee County. Mr. Rawls had died on December 16, 1984.

The continuing education of EOLS' Library staff was important to Director Hinshaw. She was quoted as saying as she presented a plan to the Board for staff continuing education in early 1986, "*We will grow our own librarians.*" From that point on, EOLS staff was encouraged to participate in staff development activities and was provided with the resources to do so by the Board.

In May 1986 the Board addressed two major issues identified in the Long Range Plan. The first issue was the need for a Staff Classification System and Salary Schedule. A Salary and Classification Study had been on hold since 1985. The primary reason for the hold was lack of staff and Board member time/representation to commit to a detailed analysis of a rather complex issue.

Director Hinshaw approached the Board with the idea of hiring outside consultants versed in staff and salary issues in similar organizations to start the study of salaries and classification. After a regular bid process, Plante & Moran were offered the job. Their first visit was scheduled for April 13-15, 1987. A staff advisory committee was formed made up of a varying staff levels and geographic distribution within the System.

In August 1987 Plante & Moran presented their plan to increase salaries by 20 percent of the current salary budget for a total dollar amount of \$155,000. The salary classification system would consist of three steps: 0-<3 years = minimum wage; 3-5 years, a step-one increase; 5-6 years, a two-step increase; and, 6+ years, a three-step increase. The Board accepted the Plante & Moran plan in August 1987 for implementation to begin October 1, 1987.

The second issue was concerned with millage levy issues. After much discussion, the Board allowed counties to go for millage increase votes with the income generated, if the vote passed in their respective counties, to be reserved for use in those counties that had generated the funds. The thinking was that counties would more likely vote for the extra two mills if they believed the funds would remain local.

The Muskogee County Libraries in Muskogee and Haskell began work on a mill levy increase in the summer of 1986. Fort Gibson joined the effort shortly thereafter. Director Hinshaw and Muskogee County Board representatives met with the County Commissioners and Excise Board Members and received approval to put the mill levy on the November 4th ballot. After a tremendous effort on behalf of many library supporters all over Muskogee County, the mill levy passed.

One of the talking points included in the Muskogee County mill levy request was the proposal to place a Library in the southern part of the County. Muskogee, Haskell and Fort Gibson were all in the northern part of Muskogee County. In March 1987 the City of Warner contacted EOLS about putting a branch library in their community either free-standing or as part



The original Warner Public Library ready to open in 1990. (Library photo)

of the City Hall Complex. In November, Warner prepared a building project application and submitted it to the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. The EOLS Board also approved a Library for the Warner Community during the same time frame. The Warner Community's initial intent was to also serve the rural communities of Porum, Webbers

Falls, McClain, Keefeton and Martin as part of their service area, which in fact, included all of southern Muskogee County's rural communities.

Westville received a grant from ODL in early 1986 to remodel the John F. Henderson Public Library to meet handicap access standards. The project included the building of a ramp at the building's entrance and the remodeling of the public access restrooms and the repositioning of the water fountain.



The John F. Henderson's remodeled handicapped accessible entry, circa 1988-89. (Library photo)

Grove continued to look for funding sources to expand on its existing structure in the City Hall Complex. In early 1987 Grove attempted a sales tax increase with the proposed library expansion that initially broke ground in 1984 as one of the recipients if the tax passed. The sales tax vote was in June 1986 and it was unsuccessful. In November 1987 the City of Grove proposed giving another building to the Library in trade for its current space in the City Hall Complex. Using the *Guidelines for Branch Building & Building Site Selection*, the "traded" building was ranked by using the evaluation scale approved by the Board earlier. The building met the criteria for location, size, square footage, staff work space, lighting, ventilation, and possible growth potential to name a few of the important elements. The building met the necessary criteria and was recommended for use as the Grove Library in exchange for the City Hall space.

Around the same time, Sallisaw received Board approval for an addition to the back of their Depot building to provide more square footage. It was hoped that in the not-too-distant future that the community would be able to build a more suitable, and less noisy, facility.

Building projects continued into 1987 in several branch library communities. Because of the growth of building projects in existing Library communities and the possibility of other communities requesting branch libraries like Warner, the Director researched and prepared a document entitled *Guidelines for Branch Buildings & Building Site Selection*. It was approved by the Board in July 1986. This document would allow for an objective, fact-based evaluation of buildings and properties offered as possible Library sites by existing System communities and those yet to be.

Along with the various building projects System-wide and routine library activities, the Director and Board initiated an Awards Luncheon to be held annually beginning in December of 1986. A potluck or picnic would be scheduled during a regularly scheduled December Board meeting. Library staff was invited and awards given such as “Most Innovative Library Program”, “Outstanding Children’s Program”, “Outstanding PR Event”, “Outstanding Branch”, and “Most Improved Library Service.” This proved to be a popular event that continued for several years. The recognition of the activities of the branch libraries by the Board was greatly appreciated by the library staff.

With the passage of the Muskogee County millage in late 1986, the System seemed poised to be able to finally implement the new job classification and salary scales, hire a new Muskogee Librarian to replace one that had moved on, and other much needed Library initiatives that the increased ad valorem in Muskogee County would provide in the 1987-88 fiscal year. As the calendar year turned into 1988 the tax money did not appear as expected. It seems that the Muskogee County Commissioners had forgotten to add the new millage rate to the tax bills as they went out to residents at the end of 1987.

A long-awaited financial plus rapidly turned into a minus for Muskogee County’s libraries and the System in general. A crisis plan was approved by the Board in March 1988 retroactive to February when the plan was implemented by the Director. The crisis plan addressed staffing, supplies, equipment and materials purchases. In order to keep materials purchases going albeit at a reduced level, staff positions were left open and only the most necessary purchases and repairs were authorized for payment.

On the advice of a lawyer, the System initiated a “friendly lawsuit” against the Muskogee County Commissioners “to recover monies as a result of the County’s failure to levy the two additional mills as approved by the voters of Muskogee County.” The lawsuit between EOLS and the County centered on the following conditions:

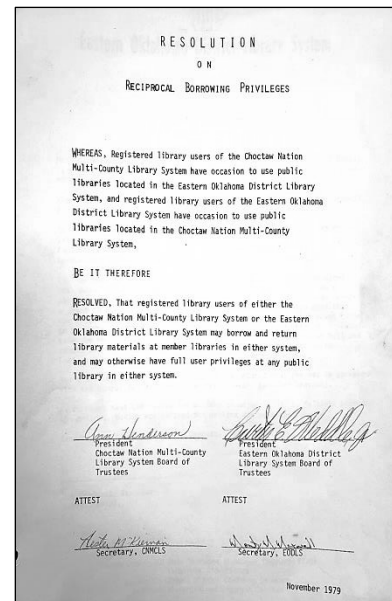
1. It was a no-fault issue.
2. An assurance from EOLS that the two mills would be used for Muskogee County.
3. The County Commissioners would not appeal, and
4. EOLS forgoes the interest on the settlement amount.

The issue went before a judge in April 1988. The judge ruled that EOLS should receive the interest; however, the interest would be paid over a three-year period. It was a partial victory for the System but it did not help with the current fiscal crisis at hand. Finally, in December 1988, the collection of lost tax money began. It would be many months before the impact of the Commissioners mistake would have a positive impact on the System’s budget.

As far as some of the branches were concerned, calendar year 1988 and into 1989 signaled new beginnings with new building projects on the horizon or already coming to fruition. Warner and Checotah were in the beginning stages of planning, land procurement, architect selection and funds acquisition for their new Libraries. Grove was raising grant money and finalizing their arrangement to purchase the utilities building and trade locations with them and the City Complex. All three locations received Board approval during this time frame for continued development.

In October 1988, the Mail-A-Book program which had been an in-house operation from its inception was changed to a commercial vendor, American Companies, with a pre-packaged selection of paperbacks and a pre-printed catalog. The change allowed for staff downgrades and cost savings overall. The Mail-A-Book program had slowly been losing readership over the years but was still popular enough to support.

In February 1989 Cherokee County put the millage



The original Reciprocal Borrowing Privileges Agreement with the Choctaw Nation Multi-County Library System, 1979. (Library document)

Chapter 3 - Automation, Education & New Libraries, 1990-1999

As the EOLS story continued there was System growth on one hand and the ever-increasing need for funds on the other. In the early months of 1990 the Board approved the Jim Lucas Checotah Public Library's building plan and contract. Checotah received a \$108,663 building grant from ODL to be matched by the community, individual donations and the County's sale tax initiative to fund a project estimated to cost \$421,050.

Also in early 1990, the Board approved the Automation Task Force Plan. The Plan consisted of three parts: (1) The automation of Muskogee Public Library's circulation system; (2) The addition of public access computers and terminals for the Muskogee Library. It also included the addition of public access computer computers, scanners and printers for each Muskogee County branch; (3) Circulation systems, personal access computers and other required equipment for all other EOLS branches as money allowed. The *Dynix* Company won the bid to provide the System's circulation software. By March 1992, Muskogee, Fort Gibson, Haskell and Warner branch libraries had automated circulation systems.

The beginnings of the System's Automation Plan began with Tech Services early work in the 1970s with Leake Industries and the use of their mainframe and subsequent policies and procedures put in place to be ready to automate as soon as resources became available. In the 1970s, many, many hours were spent by staff to prepare pre-computer era existing records for automation. At the time, that meant obtaining LC numbers for every piece of material in all collections in all branches. Later, as new materials were added to the System's collections, obtaining critical cataloging data for the automation goal continued as a priority.

"The right and effective political thing to do would be to boost both books and technology and argue that we need the yin of one and the yang of the other."

Michael Gorman
Our Singular Strengths

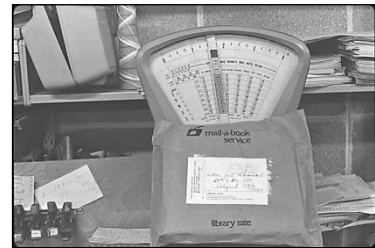
*"Technology is sublime and horrific,
divine and satanic, inevitable and
unpredictable."*

Edward Rothstein,
The Future Works, Sometimes
1997

Summer 1990 saw a new method of data transmission become available for staff and library users

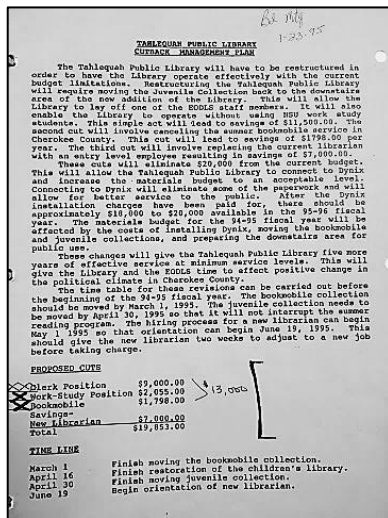
alike. The System obtained an ODL grant to purchase facsimile (fax) machines for the branches outside of Muskogee County. It is hard to imagine now with fax machines considered a business and library service staple as common as paper clips of how the addition of these machines enhanced valued-added service to the branch libraries' communities especially in the rural areas.

The fall of 1990 witnessed a reorganization of the Mail-A-Book service. As early as 1988 it became apparent that Mail-A-Book circulation statistics had begun to decline. In 1988 circulation was 122,000 a decline from previous years. By 1990 the number dropped 70 percent to 37,000. It was proposed and approved by the Board to reorganize and restructure the service in hopes of reducing costs, improving the service and reversing its perceived decline. The reorganization plan included a return to a locally-selected collection and catalog as opposed to using an outside vendor. It also included in-house book selection, local printing of the catalog, a reduction in staff and a move of the operation to the Tahlequah branch.



The Mail-A-Book postage meter in the processing room. (Library photo)

By the spring of 1991 budget concerns were on the mind of both the Administration and the Board once again. Costs were going up and the budget was stagnant. Only Muskogee County had voted and passed the mill levy from two to four mills at this point. The Board passed a



Tahlequah Public Library's Cut-Back Plan proposal prepared by then branch manager, Robert Finch, was an example of the planning and work put in by the branches to meet budget deficits at this point in the System's history. (Library photo)

resolution to call for a mill levy increase by March 1992 in Adair, Cherokee, Delaware, McIntosh and Sequoyah counties.

Meanwhile, Cut-Back Plan discussions began with the April 1991 manager's meeting. The purpose of these discussions and resulting plans would allow the branches to operate effectively within current budget limitations. The proposals made in the Plan would impact all the branches in all the counties except for Muskogee County.

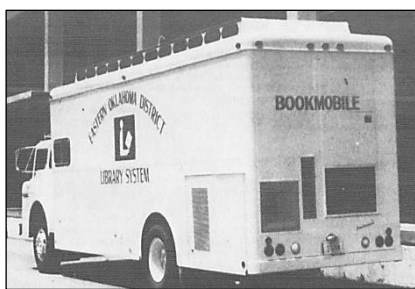
The Cut-Back Plan was implemented in the summer of 1991. It was used as a starting point to get operating budgets within range of budget projections and included a reduction of open hours at all branches. The budget cuts likewise precipitated adjustments in the branches' long-range plans on any goal or objective with a budgetary component.

That summer the Board also adopted an “intention to restore” budget cuts immediately after the vote for those counties that passed their mill levies. Since the time lag between a vote and the actual accrual of funds by the Counties can be as much as eighteen months, it was agreed that the System could borrow against expected revenue, if necessary. Unfortunately, as explained later, the need to borrow funds was not necessary.

At the September 1991 Board meeting, representatives from the Hulbert community approached the Board about its desire for a Library. Attending the meeting was a Cherokee County Commissioner from Hulbert who said he was willing to provide a building, Hulbert and Tahlequah school librarians, Tahlequah’s branch manager, Oklahoma State Senator Herb Rozell and Representative Culver, and Hulbert City representatives. Due to budget constraints and cutbacks in Cherokee County, Hulbert’s request couldn’t be honored at the time but it did mark the beginning of Hulbert’s request to be an EOLS Library.

Early 1992 was consumed with “get out the vote” millage campaigns in all EOLS counties except Muskogee. Local branch managers and system staff attended all and any community meetings held concerning the vote. Unfortunately, their efforts were all for naught, because the mill levy failed in all five counties. There were post mortem discussions at the May Board meeting. Cindy Ball, ODL special consultant, told the group that since the millage failure was overwhelmingly due to the voters in the rural areas of the counties – the towns generally voting yes – that the rural voters needed to feel more of a connection to the Library. Visibility was important, she added. Also, elections with negative issues involved should be avoided.

According to Ms. Ball, the next millage levy vote campaign should concentrate on library card users, Super Tuesday voters and those who voted in the last two out of three elections in their respective counties.



The 1990s Bookmobile headquartered at the Tahlequah Public Library. (Library photo)

More budget cuts were needed. Three of four of the counties – Adair, McIntosh, and Sequoyah – would continue to run in the deficit for the time being. In view of the election results, additional budget cutbacks were approved by the Board for implementation in the counties impacted by the negative vote.

Efforts to increase visibility in the rural areas of the System began immediately. Director Hinshaw put forth a plan to purchase a used bookmobile to use in rural areas if one could be

found for \$5,000 or less. Since book budgets were at a minimum, Hinshaw recommended getting adult books from the Mail-A-Book collection leaving only the children's books having to be purchased at a cost no greater than \$2,500. Additional resources for the Bookmobile, including staff, would come from the counties traveled by the vehicle. A mobile summer story time and books to rural communities of Cherokee County would serve as a pilot project to test community reception of the service.

Budget issues aside, in the summer and fall of 1992, two educational initiatives, one System-developed and one on the State-level, dovetailed at approximately the same time. Legislation passed by the 1992 Oklahoma Legislature provided for the Oklahoma Department of Libraries to conduct Certification programs for all public librarians and staff.

Concurrently, a certification/education committee made up of library staff as a response and in addition to the System's comprehensive Classification and Salary Plan approved in 1987, advanced their proposed qualifications to meet hiring requirements for the job held.

Along with ODL's Certification Program, and based on staff recommendations, the Board approved a plan that required those who didn't meet the qualifications for their employment level to complete three credit hours of education relevant to the position held or the certification sought.

The purpose of both the State's Certification Plan and that of the System was to provide staff with practical tools to better serve their communities and to "grow our own" library professionals. In the spring of 1973, the scholarship plan approved above was revised to include a scholarship fund whereby the System would pay employees for one college-credit class per year. Certain conditions were outlined for the scholarship recipients such as getting time off to take the class, persons already receiving other scholarships weren't eligible, and unsuccessful completion required the employee to reimburse the System, to name a few.

During the summer of 1992, Director Hinshaw requested a leave of absence and a reduction of hours to part-time as she took the opportunity to pursue a doctoral degree out-of-state. Consequently, this plan also contributed to some budget savings in personnel costs during this lean time. Current employees, MPL branch manager Marion Bryant and Technical Services Director Mary Moroney served as acting Associate Directors in Hinshaw's absence.

By late summer 1992, Adair County successfully passed their four mill levy vote. McIntosh County was successful with its penny sales tax vote, part of which provided funds to

the two branch libraries in the County. As a result, in September the Board immediately restored the opening hours of the branch libraries in those two counties as per earlier Board decisions made in the implementation of the earlier Cut-Back Plan.

In early 1993 a plan was put in place to phase out the Mail-A-Book service by the end of June upon the retirement of the service's coordinator. The M-A-B budget was then transferred to the Bookmobile for Summer Reading Programs to be held in various rural areas in the System's counties.

The first time a branch manager was hired to serve two branches at once came about upon the retirement of the Eufaula branch manager in the summer of 1993. The position was upgraded to a Community Librarian with the intent to have the person serve both of the two McIntosh County Libraries. After only a few months the newly-appointed branch manager returned to her home state and the plan was scrapped for the time being.

Building projects in Warner and Muldrow took center stage in the summer and fall of 1994. Warner and Muldrow made the Oklahoma Department of Libraries "Notice of Intent" list for construction funding. Warner needed meeting room space and Muldrow was ready to purchase and renovate a building to serve as a library. Muldrow received LSCA grant funding in early 1995 while seeking other possible grant avenues. A building site and \$10,000 were donated as well. In July 1995 the Board accepted Muldrow's contract with ODL and in March 1996 Muldrow held their groundbreaking.



The expansion of the Warner Public Library in 1994 (Library photo)



Muldrow's branch manager, Bethia Owens, standing in the new Muldrow Library's construction debris. (Library photo)

While Warner and Muldrow were having funding successes in their need for new facilities, Cherokee County was struggling financially with the failure of their two mill levy increase election. County and City officials stepped in to continue partially funding the Bookmobile and some of the library staff. Meanwhile, the Bookmobile's service to other counties was discontinued and monies needed to run it were transferred back to the respective counties' branches. By the

spring of 1995 the Bookmobile was declared surplus and sold marking the end of Bookmobile service in EOLS to date.



In the midst of Cherokee County’s library funding crises Hulbert again presented the Board with a request for a branch library and a percentage of Cherokee County’s ad valorem to support it in April 1995. After tabling the request for a couple of months, the Board accepted Hulbert’s request for a new branch in July 1995. In September 1996, Cherokee County’s mill levy increase finally passed by a vote of the people and the Board accepted Hulbert’s contract between the System, City, and County for a branch library.

As part of the FY 1995-96 Long-Range-Plan arose the question of changing the System’s name from the Eastern Oklahoma District Library System to the Eastern Oklahoma Regional Library System. A committee of staff and Board members addressed the issue and decided to leave the name as it was and ultimately where it remained for another twenty-five years.

In early 1997 it was determined that the System offices needed to move from the Muskogee Public Library where it had been since 1972 when the Library was built. Both the Library’s needs and that of the System for increased space requirements necessitated the move. After considering all options including rent vs. purchase, System space needs and available buildings in Muskogee, it was decided that the best option for System offices was across the street from the Muskogee Library in the Hensley-Nichols Building. The Board approved the move in April 1997.

The System’s third Service Center location in the Hensley-Nichols Building across the street from the Muskogee Public Library. (Library photo)

The request by another small community, Kansas, in Delaware County, for a branch library in

May 1997 started a discussion on how best to determine the viability of a community to support a Library. A New Library Task Force committee was formed to develop guidelines on the establishment of new branches in the System. The committee discussed the development of a rating system with points rewarded on such items as the educational, cultural, and economic institutions available in the community, the number and type of active businesses,

BRANCH ESTABLISHMENT MEASUREMENT FACTORS		Points attributed
Eastern Oklahoma District Library System		
District		
Incorporated?	Range 50 - 100	
Population	Range 10 - 200	
Distance from EODLS outlet	Range 25 - 300	
Educational factors	Range 25 - 300	
		Sub Total
Community analysis factors - measures indicate community stability/growth, likelihood of cost/benefit equalizing.		
A. Governmental centers	Range 15 - 100	
B. Service Business	Range 20 - 100	
C. Retail Business	Range 10 - 50	
D. Plants/Prod. Centers	Range 25 - 150	
E. Medical facilities	Range 25 - 50	
F. Religious facilities	Range 25 - 50	
G. Civic Clubs	Range 25 - 50	
H. Restaurants, Drive Ins	Range 25 - 75	
I. Entertainment	Range 10 - 50	
J. Hotels/Inn	Range 25 - 75	
		Sub Total

A page from the Branch Establishment Measurement Scale, approved by the Board in 1998. (Library document)

recreational facilities, etc. It was determined after a lot of work, input and discussion, that the key to branch establishment was “*having an economically viable community that could meet its partner obligations.*” The committee’s recommendation of an objective Branch Establishment Measurement Scale was approved by the Board in June 1998. In August 1998, Kansas completed the application and received a score of 1,785 out of the minimum required score of 1,800. At only 15 points short of the minimum score, the Board decided that Kansas could proceed with its request to join the System.

As the decade grew to a close the Internet and all its accompanying baggage, both good and bad, became hot topics both among staff and the Board alike. Open-access computers in all the Libraries increased as budgets allowed and became more commonplace. The increased computer useage by patrons necessitated the System’s first Internet Use Policy approved by the Board in June 1997. There was no shortage of information provided Board members about all aspects of internet useage including filters as a pro-active approach to possible complaints. Steps were taken by staff to mitigate possible problems by the use of screen filters and desks with monitors hidden below eye level. While there were complaints in a few EOLS communities, the proactive stance of the System concerning the Internet kept problems to a minimum.



Construction on the much-needed expansion of the Warner Public Library in 2001. (Library photo)

By 1999, money for library capital improvements was difficult to find. The problem was especially critical in rural communities with limited financial resources. The Warner Public Library, only open nine years at this point, was bursting at the seams. The Library’s success in southern Muskogee County had exceeded all expectations.

Director Hinshaw, the Warner Mayor

and branch manager Peggy Matthews, approached local

State Representative, William (Bill) Settle about bringing the issue before the Oklahoma Legislature. In November 1999 Settle introduced legislation to create a revolving fund for library capital improvements. The funds would be administered through ODL and would be structured similarly to the USDA’s Rural Energy for America Program. As time wore on, the Legislature stopped providing funds for this program although Warner was fortunate enough to receive funding for their expansion.

Chapter 4 - Expanding Technology & Recognitions, 2000-2009

The creation and updating of new policies and procedures continued with the dawn of a new century. Long Range Plans and planning continued. The operating agreements with EOLS communities were updated as new library facilities were built or renovated. Ultimately, all



“With the only certainty in our daily existence being change, and the rate of change growing always faster in a kind of technological leapfrog game, speed helps people to think they are keeping up.”

Gail Sheehy, *Speed Is of the Essence*



operating agreements were updated to be more comprehensive and uniform. Some agreements had not been revised since the 1970’s or 80’s.

The library staff and Board created policies for Internet use, library registration, staff dress code, patron behavior, assistive animals in the library. Circulation and overdue notices for the computer age were addressed. There were new policies crafted for

collection development and materials selection, exhibits and displays, donations and even for Board attendance.

The 1995-2000 Long Range Plan outlined some of the perceived forces and trends that would shape the twenty-first century and, in turn, impact library service. Long-Range Plans that followed in the 2000’s kept these trends forefront in the planning process.

The trends highlighted in the 1995-2000 Plan included the following:

- An aging population
- Growing diversity
- Expanding technology
- Continuous learning
- Outsourcing of services
- Accountability
- A library manpower shortage



The upgrading of the *Dynix Integrated Library System* was a primary focus in the early 2000’s. The original circulation system was purchased in 1990 for \$200,000. Muskogee Public Library began utilizing the System in January 1991 with Haskell, Warner and Fort Gibson

coming onboard in April 1992. Slowly, as funds and telecommunication installation allowed, the remaining branch libraries came online with Muldrow completing the cycle in 1998.

Rapid changes in computer and information technology created the need for the latest library circulation system update. ISDN lines needed to be updated to frame relay. Dumb terminals (terminals without access to the Internet) needed to be replaced with personal computers. Text-based access had been replaced with graphical interfaces that made it easier for the public to use. The Board approved the *Dynix* upgrade request in November 2001. The new system was in place by the second half of 2002.

In September 2003 a singular honor was bestowed on EOLS when Director Hinshaw received the 2003 Distinguished Service Award from the Mountain Plains Library Association, a twelve-state library association covering Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming. While the award letter itself didn't outline the reason for the honor it is believed to have been for Hinshaw's work with the establishment of the organization's leadership institute.

The coming of the Internet Age brought with it some new policies and policy updates that included an updated Internet User's Agreement and the inclusion of new Internet Safety policies. The Internet Age also brought with it some uncomfortable moments in a few branch libraries as the issue of real or perceived pornography access and children's safety became an issue to a vocal few.

The Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) enacted by Congress in 2000 helped to address these concerns by imposing certain requirements on libraries and schools that participated in the e-rate program that provided discounts for Internet access. In 2003 the Supreme Court ruled that to receive E-rate funding discounts it would require libraries to have Internet safety policies in place that included protection measures such as filters. It also required that said filters must be turned off for any adult who requested them to be. Filtering software had to be in place by June 30, 2004. For the System libraries it meant that the filtering software needed to be compatible with the *Dynix* system in place, easy to operate and compliant with the law. After extensive research, the staff recommended the Board purchase the filtering software, *Content Watch*, from *Dynix*. The filtering software was indeed compatible with the *Dynix* software but not with the personal computers owned by the System at the time. The second

choice of filtering software, *Content Manager* also available through *Dynix* was substituted at no extra cost to the System. It was purchased and installed in early 2004.



Dr. Barbara Staggs, 1940-2014. Long time Muskogee educator and Oklahoma State Representative from 1994-2006.

In March 2005, as a result of a rocky beginning in the Hulbert Library including frequent staffing changes, the Library became a sub-unit of the Tahlequah Public Library in order to provide some continuity of service to the Hulbert community. In November a finalized Operating Agreement with the System was signed by Hulbert City officials.

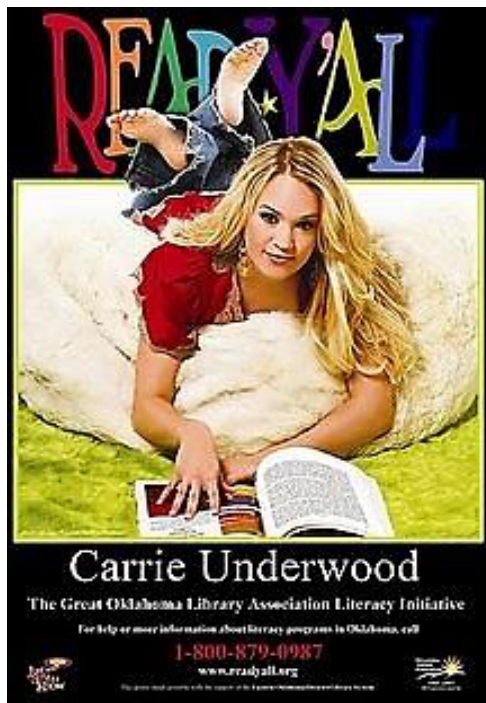
Also, in 2005, Muskogee County State Representative Dr. Barbara Staggs was honored by the American Library Association for her support of libraries. She was recognized among 300 honorees from forty states and DC at the Association's Annual Conference held in Chicago and was included in the organization's National Advocacy Honor Roll.

In 2006 as part of the Oklahoma Library Association's celebrity poster campaign, *Read Y'All*, used to promote the importance of literacy and celebrate the joy of reading, EOLS sponsored a poster of the 2005 American Idol winner and Oklahoma's own, Carrie Underwood, of Checotah. Prior *Read Y'All* celebrity posters had included Oklahoma authors, actors, sports figures, poets, visual and vocal artists as well as a governor. Dr. Maurice Payne, local Checotah physician and Board Chair at the time of Underwood's Idol win, joked that since he delivered Carrie that he felt he was partly responsible for her success.

As 2006 drew to a close the issue of how to best manage the three smallest branches was addressed. Earlier efforts included the Hulbert Library coming under the auspices of the Tahlequah branch manager and staff of the Kansas Library being overseen by Jay's branch manager. Haskell's Library had recently undergone rapid turnover after a stable period of 32 years between 1972 and 2004 under two branch managers. The creation of a Small Branch Coordinator was established to address the issue. The first person hired in the Coordinator position in 2008 worked half-time in Support Services and half-time in the libraries.

In mid-2007 the search for larger headquarters for the Service Center began as it became readily apparent that the current location in the Hensley-Nichols Building was already becoming too small. Initially, the recently abandoned downtown OG&E office building on Court Street

was considered. After months of paperwork and discussion, the price asked for by OG&E was too high and EOLS's offer was withdrawn in May 2008.



Carrie Underwood, American Idol winner 2005 and an Academy of Country Music, Grammy, and Country Music Association award winner graced the Read Y'all poster sponsored by EOLS in 2006.

With no suitable buildings available in Muskogee at the time that included the requisite parking, delivery and shelving space, conference rooms, computer and telecommunication space, the future looked bleak as far as finding adequate housing for a growing organization. However, help came in the following spring. The owners of the then current location in the Hensley Building offered the System a five-year lease on the entire building, including an offer to remodel the structure to meet the Service Center's needs. The Board accepted the owner's offer at the March 2009 meeting. A move would ultimately happen in the future but a five-year reprieve was welcomed nevertheless.

Another reason, besides the high asking price, with the possible OG&E building purchase was the fact that the System did not have 501c3 status. OG&E preferred working with nonprofit, tax-exempt, charitable organizations. Even though the System was a non-profit organization it did not meet the requirements of the IRS as having 501c3 status. In the early spring of 2008, EOLS's lawyer, Betty Williams, was called upon by the Board to draw up documents to create the EOLS Charitable Trust which was voted on in the March meeting. The first order of business was to move the existing Red Fern Trust account to the Charitable Trust. The following spring on a recommendation by a relatively new board member with experience in applying for 501c3 status, a vote was made to rescind the Trust and replace it with an Endowment Fund to actually allow the System to apply for 501c3 status. The member had notified the Board that a Trust couldn't accept donations whereby a Foundation could. Being able to accept donations was ultimately the goal of the newly-formed Foundation. The paperwork to acquire 501c3 status was sent to the IRS in May 2010.



*EOLS Executive
Director Mary Moroney,
2009-2023.*

Calendar year 2008 drew to a close with the retirement of Director Hinshaw after twenty-six years of service to the System. A retirement party was held on the Muskogee Campus of Northeastern State University in November. Mary Moroney was offered the position of Acting Director for a six-month trial period and was ultimately hired as Executive Director in May 2009.

In the late fall of 2009 as the decade drew to a close, the policy on scholarships was updated and renamed the Hinshaw Honorarium. Monies from the Exempt Manufacturing Funds were used to open a Money Market account to fund scholarships for library staff. The dollar amount in the initial deposit was \$50,000.

Chapter 5 - A New Home & A New Name, 2010-2020

As 2009 drew to a close and into early 2010 policies, procedures by-laws continued to be revised and updated as needed by a rapidly changing society. The need to change, update and create new policies and procedures seemed to accelerate during the decade. As in the earlier decades the need to revise and update existing policies and procedures as well as write ones

for newly occurring issues continued through this decade as well. Continued updates to existing policies continued as follows:

1. Personnel policies to include stronger technology requirements.
2. Revisions in Meeting Room policies.
3. Revisions in staff training, education and travel policies.
4. Revisions in computer usage policies to include Wi-Fi.
5. Revisions to include records management and collection development policies to include non-traditional library materials such as guitars, batons, weights, yoga mats, sewing machines, garden tools, etc.
6. Updates to policies about animals in the Library and service animals.

The decade also saw the need to develop policies for new and evolving situations and circumstances unknown of just a few years before such as:

1. New Acceptable Use Internet policies.
2. Social networking and media policies for library users including library staff and the public.
3. New exhibits and display policies.
4. Policies on the distribution of free materials and public postings in the Library.
5. Background checks for new employees and library volunteers.
6. Use of tobacco/e-cigarettes policy.
7. The creation of a Notary Public policy.

“Libraries...are both timeless and modern...living islands in the sea of eternity – adrift in time, eternal, always dynamic.”

Michael Gorman
Our Singular Strengths

8. An off-site equipment use policy.
9. A staff military leave policy.

Prior to 1987 there was no System Salary Scale until Plante and Moran developed the System's first salary scale during that year. In 1992 the pay scale was increased to reflect the increased minimum wage followed in 1996 by a re-organization and simplification of the staff classification system. Pay scales increased in both 1996 and 1997 to follow minimum wage increases that occurred in those two years. The last

...the rare role libraries play, to be a government entity, a place of knowledge that is nonjudgmental, inclusive, and fundamentally kind."

Susan Orlean
The Library Book

major salary scale revision happened in May 2010, when the Singer Group was hired to do a comprehensive classification, performance evaluation, compensation and staffing study of the System that included job descriptions and market studies. Their report was scheduled to be presented to the Board in November.

The Group's work plan included three phases: (1) Classification – how does each job relate to others in the System? (2) Compensation – how the System pay in relation to area employers? (3) Staffing – how is staffing aligned with the System's goals?

The Singer Group's report was finally presented to the Board in January 2011, rather than November 2010. The Board approved a new position hierarchy that included fifteen grade steps. The previous hierarchy had eight. Two new positions were added: Technical Assistant and Library Assistant II. The new salary structure had no steps attached. The salary scale was a sliding one with a beginning dollar amount and an ending one. The Executive Director's position was raised. An appeals process for staff was added. The review committee would be made up of the current board chair, personnel committee chair and the Executive Director.

On the Internet front, OKConnect with faster broadband speeds and video conferencing capabilities improved online capabilities in the branch libraries in early 2011.

In 2011 the branch managers voiced their concerns about the number of overdues they were experiencing with hundreds of overdues reported per month. The Board voted in March to begin using Unique Management Services (UMS) for overdues and to purchase the Debt Collect module from *Sirsi/Dynix* to add to the Library Management System. Also, a processing fee was added to those borrowers whose names were turned over the UMS.

In the fall of 2011 the Hinshaw Honorarium was amended to include financial incentives to those staff earning advanced degrees. The incentive excluded Public Library Certification work.

Along with financial incentives for educational achievement the Board also provided library Staff Performance Awards based on outstanding performance in their respective jobs relative to goals set in 2012. In 2016 the awards were expanded to twenty hours of pay or three days of vacation for outstanding performance of full-time staff and one half of a normal week's pay for part-time staff.

The issue of how best to manage the smaller libraries in the System for the benefit of the communities they served - Kansas, Hulbert, Warner and Haskell – became an issue again in 2012. The Small Branch Coordinator position was eliminated and borrowing on the success of Sequoyah County's shared branch manager for Sallisaw and Muldrow, the Board voted to have a shared branch manager for Warner and Haskell and to have another one for Hulbert and Kansas. To date, the shared manager mergers have generally worked better than the earlier Branch Manager Coordinator position for to the benefit of the communities served.

The Northeast Oklahoma Regional Alliance (NORA) presented EOLS with a "Successful Collaboration Award" and \$2,000 at the 2012 Regional Summit held in November 2012. NORA was a nonprofit organization served as a catalyst and collaborator for finding opportunities and solutions to the challenges facing Northeastern Oklahoma. Besides EOLS, regional champions include organizations such as the Cherokee Nation and the Grand River Dam Authority. According to Director Moroney, *"Our libraries provide support of economic development, education and cultural enrichment – and they are fun places to be."* The award money was used for the System's marketing campaign to begin the following year.



The EOLS Service Center since 2015 located at 14 East Shawnee. (Library Photo)

In 2013 the Board approved an upgrade to the *Sirsi/Dynix Library Management System* moving from a locally-owned service-based system to a Cloud-based option referred to as a Software as Service Cloud (SaaS) option.

Since the creation of Oklahoma Multi-County Library Systems in the mid-1960s the law stipulated that Board membership would include

one County representative plus one member from the County seat and one member from each community with a population of 2,000 or more. In 2013 the law was changed to include board membership from all communities in which there was a Library thereby opening EOLS Board membership up to people from Warner, Westville, Kansas and Hulbert.



The original logo and name created and voted on at the first System Board meeting in 1970. (Board Minutes)

of 2015 two properties were identified that met the needed space requirements, the old Comprehensive Rehabilitation Building on South York and the former John Michaels Music Store on the Shawnee By-Pass. After numerous committee visits, discussions with each building's owners, and comparisons of the leasing and remodeling costs/responsibilities, the Board chose a ten-year lease with the music store owner on Shawnee in November 2015. The Service Center moved to its current location in February 2016.

Since the early 1980's, formalized long-range planning had become a routine EOLS experience. The preparation for the FY 2016-2019 Long-Range Plan was no exception. The focus of the LRP for the 2016-2019 cycle centered on marketing the libraries and the System as a whole. Donna E. Fletcher Consulting, Inc. was hired to assist with the marketing emphasis. Fletcher had advertising experience with major



The current logo and name debuted in 2020. (Board Minutes)

national brands such as General Mills and Procter and Gamble as well as personal experience with libraries. Local marketing surveys found that the public felt children's services and programming to be extremely important as was computer and Internet access.

An outgrowth of the marketing aspect of the Long Range Plan was a name and logo change for the System. The former name, Eastern Oklahoma District Library System, was created and voted on at the first board meeting of the System on August 8, 1970. A new name and logo was long overdue. The new name and logo debuted to the public on January 28, 2020

eight months short of fifty years after the System's creation. A new and improved System website and public access catalog interface also resulted from the emphasis on marketing the System.

Another significant outgrowth of the 2016-2019 Long Range Plan was the "Budget follows Mission" component. In the 1980's it was determined that the best way to handle the budget due to the disparity between the four counties with a four mill levy and the two with only the two mill levy for library service was to have, in effect, six different budgets all contributing a portion of their respective budgets to the operation of the Service Center. Much time and



Even the New York City Public Library Lions wore masks during the Pandemic! (Google Images)

discussion was done between 2016 and 2019 with both the staff and the Board on the concept of "One Budget One Mission".

In September 2019 the Board voted on a new budgeting policy that combined all System revenues and budgeted each branch library's expenses based on the prior three years historical usages. The change was difficult for many for whom the previous budgeting

system had been the norm for their entire working career.

Out-of-district borrowing fees were increased from \$10 each to \$30 each in November 2019. The last increase from \$10 per family to \$10 per person happened fifteen years prior.

In January 2020 the Board approved, based on staff input, the elimination of all fines on all materials accrued before March 1, 2020. EOLS was the first Library System in the state to eliminate all overdue fines. Perhaps the timing was fortuitous because....

In March 2020 a world-wide pandemic brought everything to a screeching halt presenting the System with a whole new set of circumstances to navigate. The country had, for all intents and purposes, shut-down. All EOLS branches were closed to the public on March 8 then closed to everyone, including staff, on March 20. On May 4 library staff returned to their branches and by June 1 provided limited service, including curbside pickups, to their communities. In May, the System launched an EOLS app for public use providing another access point to the libraries during the pandemic.

Masks were required at all locations, open hours reduced and computer use eliminated for a time then reinstated on a limited basis. Cleaning protocols were initiated for hardcopy materials

and electronics. Meeting Rooms were closed to the public. Summer Reading Programs were limited to “Grab & Go” packets that were delivered curbside. Storytelling and adult programming such as quick cooking segments were done via Zoom and Facebook. Despite these precautions and more, the Westville and Muskogee branches both experienced closures due to positive Covid tests with staff members. Fortunately, no serious illnesses resulted.

In July 2020 the Board approved the “Now Card” for children aged six to eighteen to be able to check out materials without parental signature. The parents or guardians would, however, receive a letter notifying them of the issuance of the Card. The parents would not be responsible for lost items on the Card but the usage of the Card would be blocked after the loss of two items checked out using the Card.

One issue the pandemic brought to the surface that had not been addressed prior in the System’s history was the question of succession if the Executive Director was stricken with Covid-19 or any other illness/accident for a period of at least four weeks. In the plan approved by the Board in July, the Board president would be able to sign checks for bills and payroll during the absence of the Director. The senior support staff team would make other decisions as needed.

The System’s first fifty calendar years ended with the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020. It wouldn’t be until early 2021 that vaccines became approved for emergency use and made available to the public and then only in a measured step by step approach with some towns, counties and states more vaccinated than others. By June 2020, however, the EOLS libraries had slowly begun opening up to more people but still on a limited basis. Meeting Rooms were opened but attendance was restricted. Summer Reading Programs met with either limited group numbers or the activities were held outside. The EOLS community libraries survived and were ready to take on its next fifty years.

Since all the branch libraries experienced the same issues in dealing with the pandemic as outlined in the narrative above, the end of each library’s individual story will only note the pandemic briefly. But rest assured that all followed the same policies and procedures as outlined above.

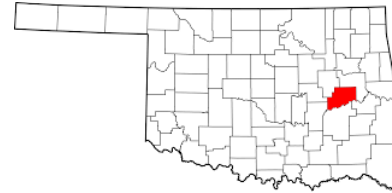
Singular Strengths

“It is often asserted that no two snowflakes are alike.... It is also true that no two libraries are alike..., but each library has at least one particular strength – something that sets it apart and makes it uniquely valuable. Even the smallest library contains something special.”

Michael Gorman
Our Singular Strengths

Introduction to McIntosh County Libraries

McIntosh County's two largest communities, both small towns by any measure of population, have early library histories. While their respective library histories don't go back as far as either Muskogee's or Tahlequah's, their histories do begin with or in the decade after Oklahoma Statehood in 1907. Again, women's groups played key roles in both towns' early library histories. And, as was custom in those days, the resultant libraries were subscription libraries whereby fees were paid to support and to use them.



Current Jim Lucas Checotah Public Library. (Library photo)

In Checotah, the ball started rolling for a public library with the first meeting of the Ten Thousand Club as reported in the *Checotah Times* on February 1, 1907 a few months prior to Oklahoma Statehood. The library committee of the Ten Thousand Club turned over the establishment of a public library to the New State Women's Club. On January 3, 1908 the New State Club Library formally opened in the High School building. The last mention of a public library in Checotah before the arrival of EOLS was in 1945.

A 1911 edition of the *Indian Journal* newspaper dedicated a paragraph on the need for a library in Eufaula. In late 1912 the Charity Union Musical Club (CUMC) held a benefit for a public library fund. The Club had also written Andrew Carnegie's secretary asking how to prepare a library construction grant. A Carnegie grant for a library building never materialized but, not to be deterred, the Club opened a public library on the second floor of a downtown building in January 1913. The last mention of the existence of a public library in early Eufaula history was in 1916 when the Library had moved from its second floor location to the offices of the *Eufaula Democrat* newspaper. Shortly thereafter, neither the Library nor the *Democrat* newspaper was heard about again.



Current Eufaula Memorial Library (Library photo)

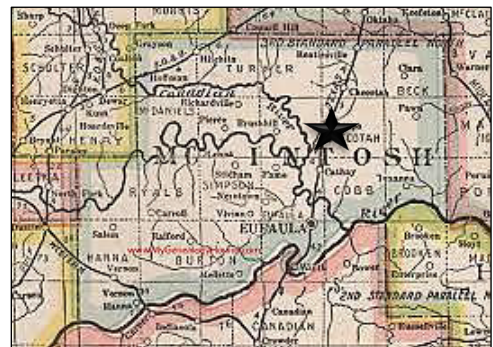
Introduction to Checotah

Checotah is located in northern McIntosh County just north of the junction of Interstate 40 and U.S. Highway 69. During 1872 as the Eufaula railhead came into existence in the southern part of the County, the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railway also established a terminus on the old Texas Road in the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and named it Checote Switch after Creek Chief Samuel Checote. Later, a mapmaker incorrectly spelled “Checote” as “Checotah” and the name stuck. At first there was no more to the Switch than a tiny depot that included a post office and the home of the telegraph operator.



Creek Chief Samuel Checote, 1819-1884. (Checotah Historical Highlights)

Checotah soon became the gateway to the Muscogee grazing lands. Stockyards and loading pens were built east of the railroad tracks. Slowly, the section of land near the tracks became the Checotah town site on land donated by Judge E. H. Lerblance and W. E. Gentry. Checotah soon began to attract farmers to the fertile prairie. Along with cattle, cotton, wheat, rye, tree nuts and orchards thrived in the fertile soil. In 1888 Robert Burton, credited as being the town founder, opened the first general store and in 1893 Checotah was chartered by the Muscogee Nation. Natural gas wells and coal seams were found east of town early in the twentieth century.



Mel McDaniel, 1942-2011. (Google Images)

In 1900 the town had a population of 805. Ten years later the population had doubled to 1,683. Checotah’s industries – gas smelter, glass plant, cotton oil plant, cotton gins – peaked in the 1920s. Following the creation of Lake Eufaula in the mid-1960s, recreation became a part of the local economy. Boat manufacturing joined trucking and ranching as important aspects of the economy.



The Duvall family was among rodeo royalty in steer wrestling, Left: Roy Duvall 1942, and right, Bill Duvall, 1941-. (Google Images)

In addition to Checotah’s early Native American heritage, cowboys and music have played an important role as well. The Checotah area is often referred to as the “Steer Wrestling Capital of the World” producing six national champions with a total of eleven Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association titles (PRCA). County singer Mel McDaniel was born in Checotah and until his death in 2011 was known to frequent many local shops and restaurants when he visited his hometown.



Carrie Underwood, 1983-. (Google Images)

Checotah’s most current claim to fame, is as the hometown of Grammy, Country Music Association, American Music Association and 2005 American Idol award winner Carrie Underwood. On the sports scene, Tracy Scroggins, former Detroit Lions football player also claims Checotah as his hometown. Native



Paul Henry Carr, 1924-1944. (Checotah Historical Highlights)

American artist Woody Crumbo was also from the Checotah area. Paul Henry Carr, Gunners Mate 3rd Class, gave his life in October 1944 following heroic action firing over 300 rounds in



Native American Artist Woody Crumbo was a Checotah resident.

close range and destroying a Japanese vessel. Carr is in the Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame and the USS Carr was named after him.

Last, but certainly not least, was Jim Lucas, the 1954 Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and namesake of the Checotah Public Library.



Jim Griffing Lucas, 1914-1970. (Checotah Historical Highlights)

North and east of the City is the Honey Springs Battleground where the largest Civil War conflict in Indian Territory was fought on July 17, 1863. Annual reenactments are held on the battlefield and a museum/educational center has been added in recent years.



Detroit Lions linebacker and defensive end from 1992-2001, Tracy Scroggins 1969-. (Google Images)

Three McIntosh County towns were in the running for the County seat in the early days of McIntosh County – Checotah, Eufaula and Stidham. Checotah received the most votes but early records were in North Fork Town (east of present-day Eufaula) and were moved to Eufaula instead. Gunfire was exchanged but the records stayed put. The conflict continues to this day but now only with the Checotah and Eufaula high school sports teams.

In 2020, the population of Checotah grew to 3,018. A large percentage of the town’s population, including business owners and merchants live outside the city limits. Geographically, Checotah has one of the largest school districts in the state covering 299 total miles. The “Single Stoplight Town” Carrie Underwood sang about in her first best-selling album in 2005 currently boasts four stoplights, a Super Walmart,

over two dozen restaurants, new businesses on each of the town’s four entrances as well as vibrant downtown and a growing economy.



Honey Springs Battlefield & Museum. (Google Images)

Checotah's Early Library History

The *Checotah Times* newspaper for February 1, 1907 reported that on Monday, January 28, the Ten Thousand Club met to conduct business. The Club was made up of members from the community and surrounding area, with the stated purpose of making, "*Checotah a good place to live, an unexcelled market for all farm products, a prosperous city of 10,000 inhabitants, a garner of wealth and prosperity...traversed by good roads,*" met to conduct business. One of the slated committees to meet that goal was the public library committee made up of J. G. Mitchell, Cheesie McIntosh, and Mrs. M. C. Livingston. There were numerous other Ten Thousand Club committees. Several of the named committees included membership, bridges, streets, entertainment, publicity, trade, finance, water, and commerce.

The public library committee got busy and as reported in a *News Brief* in the Women's section of the *New State Tribune* on Thursday, October 17, 1907 that the New State Women's Club decided to get, "*five or more subscribers each at a dollar a year a piece and buy books at*

"The ladies (of the new State Club) have about completed their list of books for the new Library and have sent off the order for same, they hope to be ready to issue the books to the patrons before Jan.1908..."

Checotah Times
November 22, 1907

once. Every-body will be eligible to membership but only members will have access to the books." The local school board gave permission to use a room at the high school for the time being and a committee was appointed to buy books and book cases. The Club women were charged with taking care of the books for a year and raising money for more books. The *Checotah Times* dated October 25 simply noted that the "*public library scheme was discussed and all arrangements made.*"

According to the *Checotah Enquirer*, the New State Club Library was formally opened in the high school building on Friday, January 3, 1908. The following week the *Enquirer* added information about the Library's Open Hours (2:30pm-5:00pm), information about membership and the fiction books currently available. New books were to be added every month. At this time, Club member Laura Beeler was acting librarian. Bessie Kniseley was elected librarian for the time period of February to July 1 during a February Club meeting. Early Club fund raisers for the

Library included dinners with admission being a book, book receptions whereby Club members portrayed various books for guests to deduce the titles, book-related plays, and ice cream socials. By February 1910 the library had 219 titles. By April 1910 the number had already grown to 396 titles.

Not long into 1909 the success of the library was already apparent by the women of the New State Club and a committee was appointed to find a suitable room downtown for the new library. In 1911 the Club women approached the City Council with the proposition of a free public city library provided that the city officials would make arrangements for a suitable room and to

have someone in charge of it. A *News Brief* in the *McIntosh County Democrat* in October 1914 told of the transferring of books and other items to a new room in the McIntosh Building located downtown on South Broadway. At the time there were a variety of office and retail spaces in the building including a doctor's office, pharmacy, a lawyer's and real estate offices. (Note: The McIntosh Building burned in March 1921, and was bought at public auction by Orville Wiser in 1937. He removed the top story and remodeled the first floor into a grocery store. The McIntosh

The New State Club

“The New State Library club gave a reception in Tuckabatchee hall Saturday night that was well attended. All who received invitations were asked to bring a book that was suitable for the library, and the greater number of those asked responded in the manner required.”

Checotah Enquirer
February 26, 1909

Building is believed currently to be the location of Printy Please.)

Meanwhile, Checotah City officials accepted plans for the building of a City Hall in the fall of 1915. The proposed two story structure was built to include a Library room on the second floor along with the Mayor's office, Council Chamber and Court Room.

News about the Library was infrequent between the years 1915 and 1919 but it reappears in the *Checotah Times* in November 1919. The article

New Rules

“At a call meeting of the New State Club...the following rules were adopted for the new library:

1st. No book shall be kept out of the library longer than two weeks.

2nd. No book can be renewed from the library more than once.

3rd. All books must be brought to the library before being transferred (to another reader).

The library will be open each evening from 4 to 6 o'clock until further notice.”

Checotah Times
July 17, 1908



Checotah City Hall, circa 1916-17. (Checotah Historical Highlights)

opens with, “*The ladies who have charge of the Library have decided to open it up again on Friday, the 14th.*” The Library was noted as being on the second floor of City Hall, according to the article. From the 1919 article until 1924 the Library is again referred to only sporadically in the local newspapers and what news there was included only brief listings of new books or

operational information such as open hours. Most library news during this time period seemed to focus more on the local school libraries instead.

An article in the June 1924 edition of the *Checotah Times* entitled “The City Library” discussed the merits of the Library, its location in City Hall, its open hours and gave the name of the librarian as Marian Rankin. In the article was a sense that interest in the Library was on the wane and that the purpose of the article was to regenerate interest. A *News Brief* in the *Checotah Times* of January 25, 1925 called for donations from the public. The previously perceived lack of interest in 1924 was verified when the Library formally closed May 1, 1925. The stated reason was lack of patronage.

An article in a January 1926 edition of the *McIntosh County Democrat* announced that the “Public Library” would open to the public from 3:00 to 5:00 in the afternoons under the supervision of the local Delphian Chapter. The Delphian Society was a national organization founded in Chicago in 1910 that promoted the education of women in the US.

508 Readers Listed At Checotah Library

“The Checotah WPA Library with...508 registered readers, has checked out 7,340 books to readers in North McIntosh County since the library was taken over by WPA several months ago.”

McIntosh County Democrat
October 23, 1941

The Delphian Chapter would continue to keep the Library open from 1926 until the fall of 1940 when the administration of the Library was assumed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). During the Delphian’s tenure there were regular postings in the *Democrat* about the Library’s open hours and new books, and even a profile article about the Library’s two book cataloguers, Mary Anna Young and Louvenia Berry. In April 1936 the

Library was moved into the Courtroom on the second floor while a portion of City Hall was being repaired. The Library returned to its designated room in November of the same year.

In October 1940 the *Democrat* announced that the Library would now be operated under

“Boston librarian: “I’m thinking of taking a library position in Oklahoma. However, if it means riding horseback to and from my job, I can’t take it because I’m getting too old for that.”

*McIntosh County Democrat
March 6, 1952*

the direction of the Works Progress Administration with Doris B. Stroud in charge. The Library would be open daily from noon until 5:00pm and would remain on the second floor of City Hall. The article notes that there would now be no charge to check out books. The loan period was seven days subject to renewal if it was not on hold for someone else.

In 1941 under the guidance of the WPA, the Library organized the first reported summer Vacation Reading Club for children. Each child was required to read ten books during the summer session. Books were to be furnished by the Oklahoma Library Commission now known as the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. Story hours were also organized during this time.

The last entry found about the Checotah WPA Library was in the October 8, 1942 edition of the *Democrat*. It consisted of a list of new and donated books. The Works Progress Administration program officially ended February 1, 1943 and was liquidated nationally on June 30 the same year. The last mentions of the early local Library were in 1943 and 1944. In August 1943 the former cataloguer, Mary Anna Young, assisted by the Girl Scouts, opened the Library on Monday afternoons from 4:00 to 5:30. In April 1944 the Girl Scouts once again opened the Library at City Hall every Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons from 3:30 to 5:00. A small fee was charged to check out books as was the case prior to the WPA years.

“I want a doll and I want a typewriter and a brown coat and a nurse suit. I want a library book and I want money. I will leave you some milk and cookies.”

Ophelia Ann Hayes

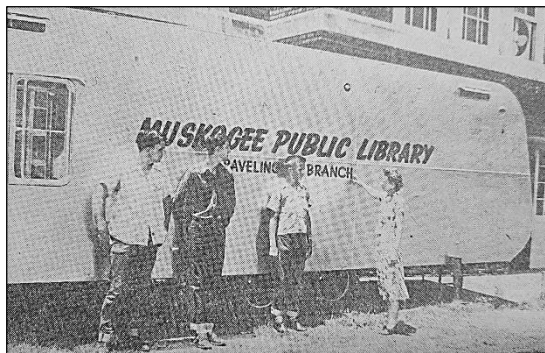
*McIntosh County Democrat
December 20, 1956*

During the years between 1945 and 1959 libraries were mentioned in the *Democrat* only in reference to the local public school libraries, university libraries, fiction stories, or in news items from other towns or countries. The next time public libraries were addressed that could have local impact was in December 1959 in reference to the scheduled upcoming vote the following year on State Question 392 – the establishment of multi-county library systems.

Ordinance No. 382
“(City) Council passed an ordinance providing library service for the City of Checotah.”
McIntosh County Democrat
July 9, 1970

In May 1960 Esther Mae Henke, Extension Librarian from the State Library, visited town to talk with civic leaders and other interested individuals on library service. She met with the noon Lions Club members and with other Club women at a local church afterwards. Henke had been invited to Checotah by Fred Ogle, Checotah Superintendent of Schools. Ogle was a member of the citizen’s advisory committee for library development in Oklahoma. Henke told the group that the first step in obtaining local public library service was the passage of State Question 392 in July. The question was defeated in McIntosh County by 105 votes, 1,083-1,188.

Not to be deterred in the quest for local library service once again, Checotah’s Jaycee Jaynes sponsored the Muskogee Bookmobile to make twice a month stops in Checotah



Muskogee Public Library’s pre-1960s Bookmobile under the direction of librarian, Marguerite Bass. (Muskogee Daily Phoenix)

beginning June 5, 1965. The mobile library service cost \$25 per trip. One local citizen donated \$300, enough to guarantee a minimum of one trip per month for an entire year. The City also agreed to contribute to the fund. Several local citizens provided resources such as the Bookmobile’s parking space, another provided an electric hookup and yet another publicity and posters in addition to the financial support already noted.

“A book returned to a public library in Missoula, Montana contained a fried egg which had been used as a bookmark. A story is being looked into that the book was Bacon’s Essays.”

*McIntosh County Democrat
June 09, 1927*

In 1966 Martin Odom, the McIntosh County State Representative, chaired a house committee which authorized the codification of all laws pertaining to state libraries and branches. Odom’s interest in the project followed an earlier effort to secure a public library for Checotah. His intent was to help write new laws that would put both Checotah and Eufaula in the

position to get public libraries.

As the decade drew to a close, the Jayce Jaynes, in cooperation with the Checotah School Library, sponsored a weekly story hour for ages 5-7 every Wednesday morning during the 1967 summer recess. The school library also opened on Tuesday and Thursday mornings for children to check out books, during the summer recesses of years 1967 through 1970. After the summer of 1970 the need for the school library to open was no longer necessary.

Jim Lucas Checotah Public Library – There’s More to Our Story



*Current Jim Lucas Checotah Public Library.
(Library photo)*

McIntosh County was approved as an eligible county to receive multi-county library demonstration services by a formal action of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries (ODL) at its regular meeting, March 6, 1970. City Ordinance No. 382 opened the door for Checotah to formally become a part of the newly-created library system now known as EOLS on July 6, 1970.



Checotah’s first EOLS library building has had many reincarnations over time serving as a wholesale grocery, bus station, post office, café, various offices, the American Legion Hall, etc. (Library photo)

Oleta Crumpler was Checotah’s first EOLS board member appointed by City officials. By November a local building was approved by Director Jim Wilkerson on South Broadway as the site for the demonstration library. The building’s landlord had the building’s interior paneled, lowered the ceiling, added additional lighting and added a new front to the exterior, The Chamber of Commerce furnished carpeting. The City provided heat and air conditioning. After the renovations, the Library System installed shelves, provided books and furniture and hired a branch manager.



*James Griffing Lucas, 1914-1970.
(Library photo)*

On a bright and sunny spring Sunday, the Jim Lucas Library was dedicated May 2, 1971. After the Dedication Ceremony, the enthusiastic crowd filled the building afterwards to see their new public Library.

The Jim Lucas Library was named after the 1954 Pulitzer Prize winner who graduated from Checotah High School in 1931. He was a 25-year reporter for Scripps-Howard as a Washington and foreign correspondent. He was a Marine Corps volunteer who won a battlefield commission and saw action in the battles of Tarawa, Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima in the Pacific in 1943. He was selected for two Ernie Pyle awards – the first in 1953 for the Korean War, and in 1964 for the Vietnam Conflict. He also was a member of Admiral Richard



Checotah citizens get their first look at the Library's remodeled interior, 1971. (McIntosh County Democrat)

E. Byrd's 1947 Expedition to the South Pole. Lucas authored three books during his journalism career. He was buried with full military ceremony in Checotah on July 21, 1970. One wall of the Jim Lucas Library was dedicated to the man and his career.



Checotah's first branch manager, Kathy Mitchell (1971-72), photographed helping a patron. (McIntosh County Democrat)

Katherine (Kathy) Mitchell was Checotah's first EOLS branch manager. The new Library's average circulation during its first four months of operation was over 1,100 items per month. The Library's first Summer Reading Program, *Magic Maze*, which had begun only a few weeks after Checotah's open house recorded 429 enrollments.

It didn't take long for the Jim Lucas Library to become the community's focal point. Even though space was limited, community groups flocked to the library to hold their meetings. The very active local artists group conducted art shows in the Library. Locals vied for the opportunity to show off their various collections in the Library's new display case. Displays ran the



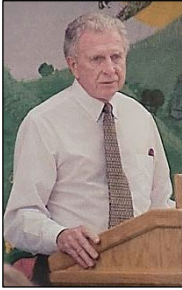
Branch manager Nina Stewart (1974-1997) attempts to shelve just one more book on already cramped book shelves. It's time to move on! (Library photo)

gamut from historical significance to crafts. Summer Reading Programs and children's programming of all kinds attracted local youth to the Library in droves.

In 1974 the Library's Books-Sandwiched-In Program was initiated during the Christmas season. Over fifty years later, Books-Sandwiched-In continued to be one of the most popular programs at the Library.

Checotah's Literacy Council held its first meeting November 14, 1985. The purpose of the group was to teach non-reading adults to read. After the construction of the new Library the Literacy Council would have a designated office and part-time coordinator.

An organizational meeting of the Friends of the Jim Lucas Memorial Library was held on March 22, 1988. According to branch manager Nina Stewart, *"We know that the library has many friends...who have given us their support in numerous ways over the years but...the time*



*Dr. Maurice Payne,
Chair of the
Library's Building
Committee, 1988.
(Library photo)*

has come to organize the support of our friends in a way most beneficial to the future of the library." A steering committee requested and received a seed grant of \$75 from the Friends of Libraries in Oklahoma (FOLIO) to assist in the organizing the local Friends group.

By the late 1980s the need for a bigger building for the Library was without question. The current building was old and in need of repairs. The Library was bursting at the seams. Meetings overflowed the small designated meeting room space and spilled out at times into the Library itself. Shelves were full and no more room for additional shelving was available.

By June 1988 building discussions began in earnest. Local physician and avid library patron and reader, Dr. Maurice Payne, served as Chair of the Building and Site committee. Architects were interviewed beginning in September. In September, Britton Tabor, a long-time friend of Jim Lucas and local landowner, lawyer, historian and world traveler, donated land for the proposed new Library on West Gentry Street.



The following 6 pictures were of various stages of construction and the moving of materials from the old Library to the new. City workers did the heavy lifting as volunteers and library staff shelved materials at the new location. (Library photos)





Library groundbreaking, January 1991. EOLS Director Marilyn Hinshaw, center in black coat; Dr. Payne next on the right; local and EOLS library board members and Checotah dignitaries make up the rest. (Library photo)



EOLS Director Jim Wilkerson officiated at the new Library's Dedication Ceremonies. Dignitaries included Congressman Ed Edmonson, a long-time friend of Jim Lucas; Mayor Dr. Charles Mitchell; another long-time Lucas friend, Britton Tabor; and siblings,



EOLS Director Marilyn Hinshaw delivered the Dedication address to a standing room only audience. (Library photo)

In March 1989, Checotah received a \$25,000 grant from the Kerr Foundation to initiate fund-raising activities. Funds began accumulating in earnest in 1990. In January, Checotah received a \$97,000 building grant from the Oklahoma Department of Libraries that the EOLS Board approved in February. By February \$174,000 in grants, donations, and from the City's sales tax had been raised. By May an additional \$108,663 ODL building grant funds had been received to be matched by the City. The project total was estimated to be \$421,050.

In the midst of all the funding raising activities a kerfuffle arose concerning the naming of the proposed Library building. Some felt that the name Jim Lucas Library, while honoring a local hero of the past, didn't give enough credit to the people who were currently making the Library possible. Jim Lucas' name and career was more associated with the past in the view of many of those born post-WWII. Others felt Lucas' contribution to journalism and his many accolades were worth preserving. On October 1, 1990 the City Council voted to officially rename the Library as the Jim Lucas Checotah Public Library, in an effort to satisfy both parties. The compromise was accepted by the majority concerned.

On a blustery cold winter's day on January 25, 1991 the groundbreaking for the new Jim Lucas Checotah Public Library was held for the proposed 6,500 square foot building. Construction began within weeks of the groundbreaking. After construction came the long-awaited move – a necessary and overwhelming job. However, volunteers, city workers, and library staff chipped in and tackled the job.

The Dedication and Open House of the new Jim Lucas Checotah Public Library was held Sunday, December 15, 1991. At the Dedication Ceremonies held in the spacious new meeting room, EOLS Director Marilyn Hinshaw noted in her address that, *“In Checotah... they are still investing in family.... In Checotah.... people can work together and get things done.... In Checotah...the spirit of community still exists.”* Local Library Board member and Literacy supporter, Madalyn Davis, was honored at the Dedication by the naming of the new Literacy/Conference room in her honor.

In 1991 when County voters failed to pass a needed mill-levy increase for the two McIntosh County Libraries, personnel budgets became stagnant, book budgets were reduced and open hours cut in both communities’ Libraries. By 1993 in an attempt to help stretch budget dollars more effectively, the System experimented with a new type of library management for both Libraries. For a two-year trial period one person would be the branch manager for both the Checotah and the Eufaula Libraries.



Carol Albin, shared branch manager of Checotah and Eufaula from 1993-1994. (McIntosh County Democrat)

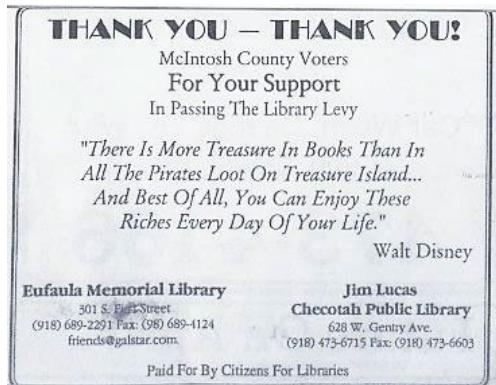
The Eufaula branch manager had recently retired and the timing seemed right to try this experimental approach. The current Checotah staff remained in place. The person hired for the trial was Carol Albin, from Des Moines, Iowa. After the trial period the project was re-accessed and was not continued. Job listings for new branch managers were posted for both communities’ libraries in September 1994. See the Eufaula Memorial Library’s story for additional details on the shared branch manager experiment.

Just as predicted the move to bigger quarters and the community’s generous support the Library continued to grow and provide programs and services to its public. Online computers replaced the card catalog in 1992. In 1995 computer capabilities were expanded so that all System libraries were linked together with the *Dynix* online circulation system. In 1997, Internet services were made available to the public. Years later, Wi-Fi became commonplace in the Library for use by anyone with a personal computer, laptop, tablet or smartphone. In March 1996 McIntosh County voters voted affirmatively to raise the library millage from two to four mills providing increased budget support in both Checotah and Eufaula Libraries.



Muscogee Nation Head Start kids enjoyed their regular story hour visits in 1999. (McIntosh County Democrat)

In 2002 the two McIntosh County Libraries benefited from the passage of a permanent one penny County sales tax. A portion of the penny tax was divided equally for use by both communities' libraries to help with staff salaries. It was a tremendous boost to both libraries' budgets as overall library budgets decreased and needs for materials, programs and services increased.



The years 2003 and 2004 were notable for its variety of events, services and programs for the public to enjoy and reflect upon. In 2003 the Library celebrated its 30th anniversary with an ice cream social. The guest of honor was Kathy Mitchell, the community's first EOLS branch manager. She entertained the



Eufaula's first branch manager Margaret Rigney and Checotah's first branch manager Kathy Mitchell share memories and laughs at the 30th Anniversary.



Local library board members Dr. Maurice Payne, Margaret Rigney, Priscilla Thomas, and Dr. Kay Kindt look over the newly-acquired Spanish language materials purchased with grant funds. (Library photo)

audience with her experiences as the first branch manager in the library's first building location.

Other important events in 2003 included the Library receiving a \$750 grant from the Library Services and Technology Act to purchase reading and other library materials for the area's growing Hispanic population. Spring and fall school break activities at the library became routine during



Kathy Mitchell shares her experiences as Checotah's first EOLS branch manager at the Library's 30th Anniversary. (Library photo)

this time and continue to today. DeLois McGee, long time Checotah Public Schools reading instructor and tutor became the Checotah Literacy Council Director until her retirement with the arrival of the pandemic in 2020.



DeLois McGee, a former Checotah Public School teacher, served twenty years as the Checotah Literacy Council Coordinator. (Library photo)



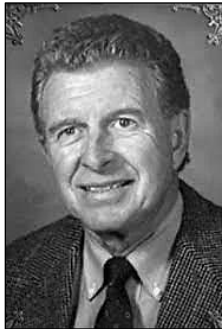
Dr. Jacob Howland. (Library photo)

The County's two libraries' participation in the *McIntosh County Read Thing* in the winter of 2004 was a highlight of the year in both communities. In one presentation conducted in turn at both library locations, Dr. Jacob Howland, a Tulsa University Professor of Philosophy spoke on the times and conditions in



Eva Uterman. (Library photo)

post-WWI Germany that contributed to the atmosphere that created "The Final Solution". In a separate presentation, Holocaust-survivor, Eva Uterman, also from Tulsa, spoke of her experiences in a German concentration camp to standing room only audiences at both libraries.



Dr. Maurice Payne, 1934-2012. (Family photo)

In 2007 during the *Oklahoma Centennial*, the Library was treated to a visit from Oklahoma's current Miss America, Lauren Nelson, from Lawton. Birthday cake and the singing of the state song, *Oklahoma!*, were among the day's festivities with Miss America. Her Miss America platform was concerned with protecting kids online in a program called, *Be NetSmart*.

On much lighter notes, story hours, Summer Reading Programs, Halloween, Christmas and other holiday-themed celebrations were and are always on the Library's schedule.



Miss America 2007, Lauren Nelson. (Google Images)

In November 2013 the Library's meeting room was named in honor of Dr. Maurice Payne, physician, City Council and School Board member, avid library supporter, Chair of the Library Building Committee, and former EOLS Board member and Chair. His contribution to the Checotah Library was pivotal to its success and he will never be forgotten.

In 2015 a surprise monetary bequest to the Library from area citizen, Trinkka Anne Wallace, in honor of her late husband, Eli Wallace, was presented to the Library. The bequest funds were used by the City to purchase a lot and empty house immediately east of the Library's property. In June 2016 a metal bench was dedicated to Eli Wallace. It was



The family of Eli Wallace surrounded the bench dedicated in his honor on June 2016. (McIntosh County Democrat)



Mayor Daniel Tarkington presented Eli Wallace's daughters with a proclamation declaring Eli Wallace Day in Checotah, June 30, 2016. (McIntosh County Democrat)



McIntosh County branch managers, Kathe Smith, left, and Margaret Collins, right, prepare for the McIntosh County Read Thing based on Elie Wiesel's book, Night. (Library photo)



Frosty made frequent appearances at Checotah's annual Christmas parades. (Library photo)



Checotah City Maintenance Department employee uses a ShopVac to rid the Library of the rain water that seeped in through a wall and a window. (McIntosh County Democrat)

placed under a tree that faced the property his bequest allowed the City to purchase for use by the Library. The plaque on the bench read, *"In Honor of Eli Wallace, looking toward a bright future for our public library"*. Checotah Mayor Daniel Tarkinton, declared June 30, 2016 Eli Wallace Day in Checotah.

As foretold by the Mayor, within the next two years the lot was cleared, leveled and paved with asphalt for additional Library parking lot as a first step. The lot also provided the Library with a *"wall to the future"* for possible future expansion.

In 2017 the Checotah Literacy Program began holding Family Fun

Nights for both adults and children in the program. The fun nights were widely popular and were held for several years prior to the pandemic. Also, in 2017 the Library began checking out guitars to persons interested in taking the free guitar lessons sponsored by the Library and held by Selby Minner, local blues musician and widow of Blues legend, D.C. Minner, whose *Down Home Blues Club* in nearby Rentiesville is home to the *Blues Hall of Fame*.

The years 2017 and 2018 also brought the Library its first major storm damage due to high winds in 2017 which caused some roof damage and intense rains in 2018 that brought with it flood damage to not only the Library but to the public schools and businesses. In both cases, the City came to the Library's rescue and damages fixed quickly.



Local Blues legend D.C. Minner (1935-2008), his wife Selby and band, Blues on the Move, performed at the Library's Christmas Open House in 1999. Since then, Selby has taught guitar lessons at both the Checotah and Eufaula Libraries. (Library photo)



Family Fun Night poster. (Library photo)



The first and current Checotah branch managers share more than experiences. They also shared the same first name. Left: Kathe Smith and right: Kathy Mitchell. (Library photo)

Also, in 2017 the Library had the opportunity to help the public schools with the US Department of Agriculture's summer food program. Breakfast and lunch was made



available to Checotah's youth at community sites that included the high school cafeteria, Bessie Tabor Park, several churches' Vacation Bible School programs and, for its first year participating, the Library. It was a successful venture for all that participated. The program averaged 125-150 breakfasts and 120-300 lunches per day.

In 2018 the Library participated with the Oklahoma Health Aging Initiative (OHAI) to provide local senior citizens with driver safety, medical and safety topics to help them maintain their independence. Classes included safe driving, tai chi for balance and diabetic management.

In 2018, the Texanna Lady Crafters (TLC) made a \$1,000 donation to the Library. It was used as seed money for the Library to be able to purchase a Krayon Kiosk, an iPad stand filled with learning and early literacy apps. TLC is

made up of crafters of all kinds who make and sell their crafts in a small shop on Texanna Road. All proceeds from their craft sales are granted to McIntosh County non-profits to fund worthy programs and services.

Throughout 2019 guitar lessons, literacy and GED programs, Books-Sandwiched-In, Book Club, story hours, Christmas programs and other special events as well as regularly scheduled events continued as normal. In 2020, however, it all came to a halt....

As it was in all the EOLS branches, March 2020 brought with it the Covid pandemic and



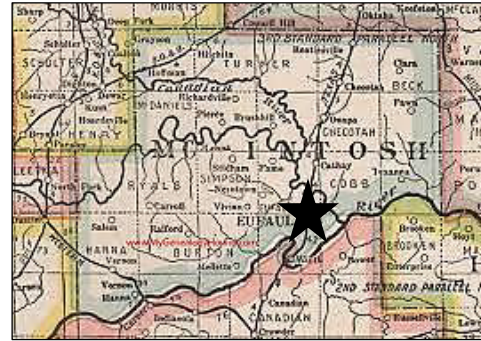
Animals are always a hit at Summer Reading Programs. This young boy met his first fennec fox up close at the Library, 2016. (McIntosh County Democrat)

unforeseen challenges – closures, curbside service, limited attendance, meeting bans, extra cleaning protocols, Zoom meetings and Facebook story hours, etc. As the Jim Lucas Checotah Public Library slowly returned to normal insofar as the pandemic allowed, its future remained as bright as its past.

To be continued....

Introduction to Eufaula

Eufaula is the County seat of McIntosh County. It is located at the intersection of U.S. Highway 69 and State Highway 9. The 1832 Treaty of Cusseta provided land allotments and federal compensation for the Muscogee (Creek) removal from Alabama to Indian Territory. This allotment included land between the North and South Canadian Rivers.



North Fork Town Historical Marker. (Google Images)

Originally, the settlement was called North Fork Town. It was situated within the fork of the two Canadian Rivers, approximately three miles east of current day Eufaula. North Fork Town was located at the intersection of the Texas and California roads so the town thrived as a trade center for travelers going to Texas and the gold fields of California.

In 1850 the Methodist Church established the Asbury Manual Training School northeast of North Fork Town. In 1853 a post office was established there. Albert Pike, the Confederate commissioner to Indian Territory, negotiated treaties with the Muscogee, Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations at the Town in 1861. The Town was also a Confederate supply base during the Civil War.



A masthead from the Indian Journal newspaper. (Indian Journal)

Eufaula emerged as a town in 1872 when the Missouri, Kansas and Texas (Katy) Railway established a terminus, not at North Fork Town, but at a site three miles west. Many early Eufaula businesses originally started in North Fork Town, so when the Depot was established in Eufaula, North Fork Town businesses followed.

George W. Ingall, Indian Agent for the Five Civilized Tribes, suggested the name Eufaula after a Muscogee tribal town of the same name located on the Chattahoochee River in Alabama. There are many theories and stories as to the origin of the name, Eufaula. According to one source, it depended on both where the name came from and its spelling. Yufala, meaning



Current picture of downtown Eufaula. (Google Images)

“they separated here and went to other places” was one interpretation. Another source stated that Eufaula was named for a Creek Tribe called “the Eufaulas.” Yet another source stated that Eufaula translated into “high bluffs” Whatever its origin, by 1898 Eufaula had incorporated and the population had grown to around 800 residents.



Lake Eufaula Dam. (Google Images)

Eufaula’s *Indian Journal* newspaper is the oldest continuously published newspaper in Oklahoma. It began publication in May 1876 in Muskogee. Chicago newspaperman Myron P. Roberts and Cherokee Chief William Ross served as first editor and publisher, respectively. Creek poet, journalist and political humorist Alexander Posey became its owner-editor from 1902 to 1904. The paper circulated among all the Tribal Nations in Indian Territory. The *Indian Journal* made Eufaula its permanent home in 1887.



Alexander Posey, 1873-1908. (Google Images)

In the early 1900’s cotton was the main crop in the rich soil between the two rivers. At one time there were five cotton gins in Eufaula. Corn was also an important crop as was dairy and beef cattle operations. Agriculture was the main economic force in the Eufaula area until the building of the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System. The original beginning of the navigation system began post World War II in 1946. In 1964 the Dam was completed and Lake Eufaula came into being.



Selmon Brothers, left to right: Dewey, 1953-; Lucious, 1951- ; Lee Roy, 1954-2011. Dewey and Lee Roy played for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Dewey played for the Buccaneers and the San Diego Chargers. (Google Images)

The main purpose of the Lake was to provide both flood control and hydroelectric power. It also provided water for several area communities. The Lake covered the agricultural land on three sides of the town. In the years since the Lake’s construction, tourism has become the main economic base in the Eufaula area. Eufaula’s population peaked in 1980 at 3,159. In 2020, the census reported a population of 2,766.

Eufaula citizens of renown included several Native American artists, star football players, Congressmen from Oklahoma’s 2nd and 4th Districts and a University of Oklahoma



"Spear Dance" by Fred Beaver, 1911-1980. (Google Images)

chemistry professor.

Eufaula-based artists included Jerome and Jon Tiger, Fred Beaver, Solomon McCombs and Jackson Narcomey. The Selmon brothers - Lucious, Dewey and Lee Roy - gained national recognition not only as OU football stars but successful professional football players and businessmen.

J. C. Watts, Jr. was a quarterback at OU then served four terms as U.S. Representative from Oklahoma's 4th Congressional District. Years earlier, John C. Nichols served as a U.S.



"Two Girls Seated by Water with Baskets" by Jackson Narcomey, 1942-2012. (Google Images)

Representative from 1935 to 1943 from Oklahoma's 2nd

Congressional District. More currently, Dr. Donna J. Nelson, Professor of Chemistry at the University of Oklahoma, served not only as the president of the American Chemical Society in 2016, but also as the science advisor for the hit TV series, *Breaking Bad*.



J.C. Watts, Jr., 1957- , University of Oklahoma quarterback and Oklahoma's 4th District Congressman from 1995-2003. (Google Images)



John C. Nichols, 1896-1945; Oklahoma's 2nd District Congressman from 1935-1943. (Google Images)



Dr. Donna J. Nelson, 1954- ; University of Oklahoma Professor of Chemistry. (Google Images)

Eufaula's Early Library History

Eufaula's quest for a public library started early, before statehood, but it wasn't until the following decade that it became a reality.

A paragraph in a November 1911 edition of the *Indian Journal* was devoted to the need in Eufaula for a public library. "A public library is needed in Eufaula and no doubt could be made a go if the business men would take a little stock in it....The start could be made with a little work at a very small cost, and we believe greater things could be accomplished...giving the coming generation an insight to the better things in life than most anything we could undertake at this time."

A news article in a November 1912 edition of the *Eufaula Republican* reported on a party held by the Charity Union Musical Club (CUMC) for the benefit of the public library fund. The article also reported that a letter had been written to Andrew Carnegie's secretary requesting information on the requirements necessary to apply for a library construction grant. The article ended with a plea for the donation of possible building sites for the hoped-for Carnegie Library.

"Great oaks from little acorns grow. We are satisfied to grow slowly, but grow we must and will. Only one month old and 450 books on the shelves. \$114.00 in the bank and nearly 40 subscribers. Do your part and join the Eufaula Public Library. Now your name will look well on the corner stone of our "Carnegie Library."

Indian Journal
February 21, 1913

Local Notes:

"Eufaula needs a public library – the entertainment next Tuesday night is for the purpose of supplying such."

Indian Journal
March 28, 1902

A Carnegie Library for Eufaula didn't materialize but that didn't stop those with the vision that Eufaula should have a public library. Surprisingly, in the January 1913 edition of the *Indian Journal* announced a "Library for Eufaula." The Library was located in the Foley Building on the second floor over Vanderpool & Gleason's store. Open hours were on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays from 2:00 until 5:00 in the afternoon. The subscription fee was \$1 annually. The librarian was Margaret J. Foley, sister of C.E. Foley, an early Eufaula



The Foley Building as pictured in 1907. It was built in 1899. Eufaula's first Library was established on the Building's 2nd floor in 1913. (Indian Journal)



The Tully Building was also built in 1899. It was located directly across the street from the Foley Building. It burned to the ground in 1970 as a result of a suspected arsonist. (Indian Journal)

civic leader and the building's owner.

In June 1913 the Library Board invited Mary Radford, the current librarian of the Muskogee Public Library, to address Eufaula's citizens at the Court House on June 13 at 3:00 in the afternoon. The purpose of Radford's visit was to inform interested citizens on how to improve their new Library. In November 1914, Radford returned to Eufaula and helped "*Miss Foley and Mrs. Brown, Library Board Chair, in installing the filing system used by all large libraries.*" The article reported that the Library's holdings were nearing the thousand mark by then.

Also in June 1913 the Charity Union Musical Club (CUMC) changed its name to the Woman's (sic) Club of Eufaula. Along with the name change, a change in the Club's Constitution was made to reflect its intension to "*promote intellectual and civic improvement, philanthropy and maintenance of the Eufaula Library.*"

By August 1913 the Library had moved to the second floor of the Tully Building directly across the

street from the Foley Building. By October 1913 the Library was open only on Tuesdays and Fridays and the librarian's job split between Margaret Foley on Tuesdays and Marguerite Bunge on Fridays. The same article lamented the fact that children weren't using the Library "*where only wholesome books are kept.*" Mrs. Phil Brown, President of the Library Board, also encouraged people to subscribe their dollar to "*the most worthy enterprise in your city.*"

In November's *Library Notes* column in the *Indian Journal*, it was announced that a "*story telling hour*" would begin on Saturdays from 2:00 to 4:00 o'clock. The projected start date was November 29. The article explained that this was "*a new feature that is being inaugurated in many larger libraries in the country and is especially for children.*"

Fund-raising activities for the Library included dances, bake sales, musicals, drama and comedy mini-plays, bazaars, picnics, raffles and dinners. In 1913 the Woman's Club held a

“Penny Day” for the Library. They borrowed the idea from Tulsa Club women who had succeeded in having their City’s mayor designate December 12 as “Penny Day” for the Tulsa Library. A February 1915 edition of the *Eufaula Democrat* reported that the proceeds from the Court House dinner for the Library held by the Woman’s Club raised \$28.85.

At the one year anniversary of the Library in January 1914, an article in the *Eufaula Democrat* noted the “determination of the Woman’s Club...to provide wholesome reading matter for the boys and girls, and the men and women of the city.” The article also reported that while the Library’s growth has not been phenomenal it has been remarkable in light of the disadvantages “under which it has labored.” At the time of the article’s writing, the Library had amassed approximately, “600 volumes, not including a thirty-one volume set of encyclopedias.” The Club women estimated the value of the collection and equipment to be \$1,000 and the Library’s membership to be 65 and growing.

An article in the *Indian Journal* of January 28, 1916 stated that the Eufaula Library had

THE LIBRARY BOARD

“If there are any books overdue, we would kindly ask that they be returned.... A penalty of one cent a day for overdue books is attached and we must collect it. If your subscription has run out we would be pleased to have you renew it.”

*Eufaula Democrat
May 8, 1914*

moved to its new quarters in the *Eufaula Democrat*’s office. That was the last mention of the early Eufaula Public Library in any and all of the online sources researched until a brief notice appeared in a March 30, 1922 edition of the *Indian Journal*. The notice announced that the City Treasurer reported that there was \$2,050 left from an ad valorem levy for library purposes in the City coffers and that it was to be appropriated to the City’s general government fund for use during the current year.

Two questions come to mind at this point. First, the *Democrat* seemed to have folded in 1916 or not long after.

Even the Library of Congress gave the *Eufaula Democrat*’s publication dates as being from “1913 to 191?” If that was the case, where did the Library go from the newspaper’s office or did it fold when the newspaper did? Second, up until 1916, the

County Man Selected to U.S. Library Post

“Appointment of Larry Cates, 31 years old, formerly of Eufaula as librarian for the United States house of representatives (sic) was announced this week.”

*The Indian Journal
January 23, 1941*

Library was funded by subscriptions and donations. If the City began to support the Library via ad valorem levies, when did it start? If that is the case, then it seemed that the Library continued beyond 1916. However, the Library was not mentioned in local newspaper articles after the May 1922 reference.

In 1937 the *Indian Journal* reported that a Library was possible if the plans of the National Youth Administration (NYA), a New Deal program, were carried out. Marshall Foley, son of C.E. Foley, was the local NYA supervisor. The proposed Library building was to be located on a triangular lot facing Highway 69 on High Street. The outside dimensions were 30x40 feet and would be made of native stone. The building's cost estimate was \$900 with the stone being donated and the work to be done by NYA youth. The fly in the ointment was that \$500 had to be raised locally since the NYA would pay for only a portion of the cost. Afterwards the NYA would assist financially with staff as long as the program existed. Thereafter, the City would be totally responsible for the Library's operation.

Needless to say, in the middle of the Depression, this plan did not bear fruit. In early 1940 the City did obtain an NYA grant to add a community building to the rear of the existing City Hall. The Jaycees voted to contribute \$500 as their share in the raising of sponsor's funds for the construction of the community room during a meeting held in early February 1940.



Overton Turner

In March 1940 Overton Turner, a 19-year-old senior at Eufaula High School took the initiative to obtain a library for the community. Overton saw the possibility of obtaining aid from the WPA in establishing a Library and explored the options including contacting area WPA officials. The Jaycees heard about Overton's ideas and plans and set about exploring the possibility of establishing a public library with the assistance of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Two women connected with WPA library who worked in Tulsa told those present how WPA libraries have been started. Checotah, Warner, and Ft. Gibson all had WPA libraries during this time in their early library histories. A WPA office had been set up in Muskogee for the express purpose of providing library service. Nothing else was found about the search for a WPA-sponsored Library for Eufaula. An article in the *Muskogee Phoenix* newspaper during the time period, listed all ten of the WPA-funded libraries funded by the Muskogee area's office and Eufaula was not included.

New Postal Rates in
Effect August 1

Library Books
1st pound = 4¢
Add'l pounds = 1¢
Newspapers
1st 2 ounces = 2¢
Add'l ounces = 1¢

The Indian Journal
July 24, 1958

As only small-town newspapers can do, a cryptic announcement was made in the June 13, 1946 edition of the *Indian Journal* that stated that the, “*summer reading library opened Thursday, June 6 with several books checked out. At the close of the Library period Tuesday afternoon, June 11, a total of 50 books had been checked out to 32 individuals.*” The journalistic “who” and the “where” were missing from the article only to be followed up on August 15 with the following brief announcement: “*According to Mrs. C.J. Malloy, August 22 will be the last day for books to be checked in at the library.*” In an unrelated article, it was discovered that the Summer Reading Library was a project of the Eufaula Homemakers Club in the summer of 1946. The “who” question was now revealed. No answer to the “where” question was ever found.

In early 1966 the “Eufaula Bookmobile Society” began making arrangements for the Muskogee Bookmobile to come to Eufaula. The final arrangements had the Bookmobile arriving for the first time on Saturday, March 12 and to appear every second and fourth Saturday from 10:00 in the morning to 3:00 in the afternoon thereafter. In a quirk of history, the Bookmobile would park at a church’s parking lot directly across the street from what would later become the first location of the EOLS branch of the Eufaula Public Library. The cost for the Bookmobile to come to Eufaula from Muskogee was \$26 per trip. Individuals, clubs, organizations and “Bookmobile Society” members all chipped in to make the Bookmobile stops a reality.

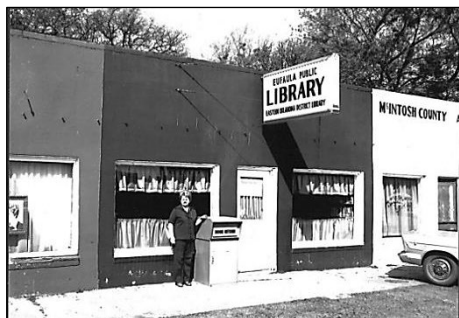
Also in 1966 the “Eufaula Library Association” (it’s highly likely that the “Bookmobile Society” and the “Library Association” were one and the same), sponsored a Story Hour to begin June 11 in the First Baptist Church. The program was scheduled to continue during the six Bookmobile Saturday stops during the summer.

As the summer of 1966 drew to a close, Muskogee’s Bookmobile service to both Eufaula and Checotah did as well. The Bookmobile’s last visit to Eufaula was August 27. While the service discontinuation was hoped to be temporary, it was not. But, as history would later record, something bigger and better for Eufaula was on the horizon just a few years later.

Eufaula Memorial Library - @ the Library

The Eufaula Public Library held its Open House January 31, 1971 the second of the multi-county branch libraries to open (the first was Jay's). As with all the Libraries in the early multi-county library demonstrations much of the early leg work was done in 1970. EOLS Director, Jim Wilkerson, along with Oklahoma Department of Libraries representatives met with City and County officials in the summer of 1970 to outline what a library demonstration entailed and the rights and responsibilities of all participants.

In September 1970 Mary Tolleson joined Oleta Crumpler from Checotah as the two McIntosh County City representatives on the multi-county Library Board. By December Eufaula Mayor Tully O'Reilly



Eufaula's 2nd branch manager, Doris Bivins, stands by the new book drop in front of the first Eufaula Public Library. The Library was sandwiched between the McIntosh County Abstract Office and a Beauty Shop. (Indian Journal)

declared that the Harry Cates building at 116 South First would be the site of the new Library and that it would be operational by January 1971. And, with a lot of work by many people, it was.

Eufaula's first branch manager was

Margaret Whinnen (Rigney). Eufaula embraced its new Library from the very beginning. The *Indian Journal* reported a record-breaking 800 books issued to borrowers the first week of operation beating the previous branch-opening record in Jay by 300 books. On the first day of operation, over 300 registrations were processed in one afternoon. At the beginning the Library was only open part-time, twenty-two hours per week, with only a single employee, the branch



Today's Eufaula Memorial Library, 2020. (Library photo)



Eufaula's first branch manager, Margaret (Whinnen) Rigney, 1971-1973. (Indian Journal)



Eufaula Mayor Joe Johnson signs a proclamation celebrating the Library. Standing, left to right are local Library Board members: Mary Alice Pinney, Irene VanZandt and branch manager, Doris Bivin. (Indian Journal)

*Clay Tablet Reflections –
Millage Vote*

“I admit that I am prejudiced in the cause of libraries. I can not see how anyone could doubt the worth of a library in any town. A library is not a luxury. IT IS A NECESSITY. Learning does not begin in kindergarten or end with high school or college graduation. Learning, too, is not a privileged right for the few.... A library is open to ALL.”

*Margaret Whinnen
Eufaula Indian Journal
December 2, 1971*

*Value of Our Library?
Just Ask The Kids*

“Thank you for letting us see the film. Thank you for letting us check out a book. My book is Gloomy Gus. It is a good book and good to read. I’ll bring my book back on time.”

*Richard Rouland

“I got to the library to check out some books. Some times we get to see film about animals, different countries and the people. There are many books in the library.”

Sarah Brady

manager. By March, an additional hour was added to each open day except Saturday for a total of twenty-six hours open per week.

The Clay Tablet, the Library’s weekly column also debuted in March. Prior to social media, *The Clay Tablet* was used to post notices of the new Library’s programs and services, new books, open hours, new library traditions, and the Library’s (and Eufaula’s) first observance of National Library Week, April 18-24, 1971.

By December 1971 Eufaulans, in their Library of only ten months, had circulated 15,898 items and had registered 1,030 people. By the Library’s Second Anniversary in February 1972, there were 1,371 registered users. On December 7, 1971 McIntosh County residents voted for the two-mill ad valorem levy in a light voter turnout (830-396) and continued to be a part of the multi-county library system.

In 1974, Eufaula Public Library was chosen as the trial in an automated circulation project. The trial entailed an assessment of the entire current collection prior to implementation, labeling everything that remained, and entering all materials and registered users information into a computer database. This project would ultimately relieve staff of the daily clerical work such as daily records, statistics, and overdues. It also

upgraded the collection. Ultimately, as a result, Library users would be issued library cards to be used in checking out library materials. Library staff would have more time to serve the public with programming, story hours and Summer Reading Programs. However, it would take until the 1990s and beyond to truly reap the rewards of this early automation trial.



The first of the Library's temporary locations was in the National Guard Armory. The two garage doors mark the Library's entrance, 1980. (Library photo)

Library's Theme Song While in the Armory

*"We're in the Armory now.
We'll manage here somehow.
We're checking them out,
Then checking them in.
We're in the Armory now."*

Marguerite Bridges Schmitt
Branch Manager, 1980-1993



A patron using the "drive-in" Library. (Library photo)



Eufaula's 2nd temporary location was in a double-wide mobile home on a residential street a block from Lake Eufaula Cove. (Library photo)

In 1980 a Reciprocal Borrowing Agreement with the bordering Choctaw Nation Multi-County Library System (now the Southeast Oklahoma Library System) was voted into being by both Systems' governing boards. Nowhere in the System was more

appreciative of the borrowing agreement than library users in northern Pittsburg and Haskell Counties who lived on or near Lake Eufaula and who used Eufaula as their primary market place. They paid ad valorem taxes for library services in their respective counties but lived too far from the Libraries their millage levy supported. Since 1980 the Reciprocal Borrowing Agreement has been re-visited several times. Sometimes Agreement updates were to the benefit of library users in northern

Pittsburg and Haskell counties and sometimes not so much.

In January 1980 Victor Savings and Loan purchased the Cates Building and the Library had to be moved by September 1. After several delays graciously granted by the loan company, the Library was relocated to the National Guard Armory while a new library site was found and

prepared for occupancy. As a result of the move to the Armory, the Eufaula Library became known to locals as the state's first drive-in library. The staff wore Army fatigue hats and roller skates so they could move quickly on the Armory's concrete floor and out to the

driveway. The doors had to be closed when it rained though. The lighting was so poor in the Armory that while there the Library had to close at 5:00 in the afternoon.



You know you are cramped for space when the break room refrigerator was visible next to all the Library's guest speakers! (Library photo)

The planned few weeks in the Armory grew into months but on January 18, 1981 the Library reopened in a double-wide mobile home located on Broadway and "G" Streets, purchased by Victor Savings and Loan, State National Bank and Farmers and Merchants Bank and deeded to the City. EOLS Director Monte Maxwell dedicated the Library which was its home for the next four years.



Summer Reading Programs had to be held outside during the time the Library was in the mobile home location. (Library photo)

Being a Library in a double-wide mobile home had its limitations to say the least. By 1983 local Library Board members and Civic leaders began an aggressive fundraising campaign, courting benefactors large and small, for a new, permanent home for the

Eufaula Public Library.



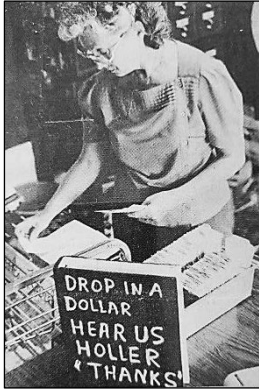
Dorothy Follansbee Day was proclaimed in Eufaula on December 6 by Mayor Joe Johnson for her \$100,000 donation to the building of the Eufaula Memorial Library, 1983. (Indian Journal)

The Library campaign began successfully. Matching grants were received from the Oklahoma Department of Libraries (\$100,000) and the Kerr Foundation (\$50,000). Charles L. Follansbee, a former Eufaula attorney, left in his estate a bequest of \$100,000 to be used for a Library. The land for the Library was donated by Mary Lauhon Wendell and her family on behalf of her parents, Fred and Ruth Lauhon. The donated land was two blocks south of the Library's original location on South First Street.



Dr. W.E. and Mrs. Mary Lauhon Wendell provided the land for the new Library. (Indian Journal)

A \$100,000 Club was formed to match Mr. Follansbee's bequest of the same. For everyone who contributed \$1,000 that ultimately made up a total of \$100,000 their names were placed on a plaque at the Library's entrance. A list of all contributors was maintained in the Library itself.

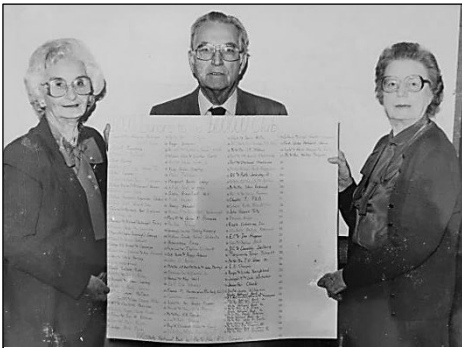


Every fund-raising possibility was utilized by the Library and staff to raise money for a new Library building. (Library photo)

Funds were raised by a wide variety of activities. The “Penny-A-Pound Donation Day” and a “Bike-A-Thon” raised over \$4,000. A pie supper was held by the Stidham community, west of Eufaula. Other fund-raisers included a \$10/plate luncheon; a kick-off banquet for \$100/plate which raised \$10,000; chances on quilts, prime beef, a car, and University of Oklahoma football tickets. There were seafood parties, pizza parties and memorial donations. Private citizens, organizations, clubs and businesses contributed to the fund. Dances were held.

Fund-raisers were referred to by staff as “*Ways and Means*.”

” The individual categories were called “*Donations, Memorials and*



The \$100,000 Club Members List held by left to right: Nadine George, EOLS Board Member, Bank President, R. L. Simpson, Jr., and Dorothy Follansbee. (Indian Journal)

Honoring, Grants, Contributions and Activities.” In 1983 people in town and in surrounding areas, through a myriad of ways and means “*gave donations in memory of, in honor of, formed clubs, walked road, ate, baked, weighed, auctioned, sang and danced their way into a new library.*”

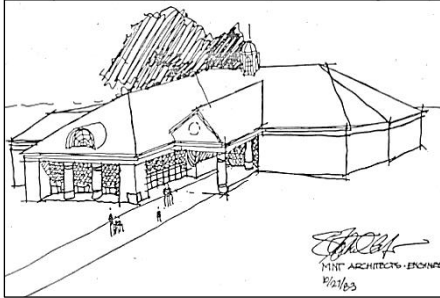
The fund-raising and publicity for the new Library was so creative and unique that the scrapbook of the



Left to right: Dorothy Follansbee, Mary Alice Pinney and branch manager Marguerite Schmitt were in attendance at the American Library Association in Dallas, Texas, as Leo Weins, President of the H.W. Wilson Company, presented the John Cotton Dana Award. (Library photo)

campaign won the prestigious “John Cotton Dana Award,” recognizing the unique fund-raising efforts that the people of Eufaula made in such a brief four-month period. The H.W. Wilson Company and the American Library Association, who together sponsor the Award, noted in their presentation that, “*The Eufaula Memorial Library has won this award due to a successful and incredibly ambitious fund-raising campaign that involved the entire community...in an outstanding four-month building-fund program. Their*

project was exceptional and outstanding.” The total amount raised during the campaign was over \$400,000.



Both the local Library Board and Finance Chairs Mary Pinney and Dorothy Follansbee respectively, and branch manager, Marguerite Schmitt, were recognized at an award dinner and ceremony at the American Library Association convention in Dallas, Texas, on June 25, 1984 where they accepted the John Cotton Dana Award. The



The crew responsible for preparing and submitting the documentation for the John Cotton Dana Award included, from left to right: Barbara Proctor, EOLS Tech Services; Marguerite Schmitt, Branch Manager; Bonnie Berry, Library Assistant; and Marilyn Hinshaw, EOLS Director. (Library photo)

Eufaula Library was also recognized in 1986 at the Oklahoma Library Association meeting in Oklahoma City by the Oklahoma Department of Libraries as well as by the Eastern Oklahoma Library System itself.

Bids on the Library's construction were posted in the *Indian Journal* in March 1984. Initially, there were some construction issues with the contractor and the City's contract with the contractor was ultimately terminated. Construction delays ended at the point of termination and the building was completed.



The Library's groundbreaking ceremonies held in 1984. Mayor Johnson, center, with his back toward the camera, addresses the group.



The construction of the atrium off the children's wing of the new Library, 1984. (Library photo)



Bank President, R. L. Simpson III, cuts the ribbon for the new Eufaula Memorial Library, July 18, 1985. (Library photo)



The construction of the new Library's front entrance, 1984. (Library photo)



The new Eufaula Public Library renamed Eufaula Memorial Library in 1985.



EOLS Director, Marilyn Hinshaw, introducing Governor George Nigh, the keynote speaker at the Library's Dedication ceremony on August 23, 1985. (Indian Journal)



Oklahoma Governor George Nigh, 1979-1987. (Indian Journal)

In July 1985 the *Indian Journal* posted that the Library on Broadway was “checking out” and soon to be on “First” in the new library building on 301 South First Street. The last day for checking out books on Broadway was June 29.

The Library reopened on July 15, 1985 as the Eufaula Memorial Library honoring all who gave in all

the ways they gave to have a public library worthy of the name. Until now the only thing Eufaula hadn't had was a good building. The first building, two blocks from the new Library, was cramped between a beauty shop and abstract office in a single building. The roof leaked when it rained. When the Savings and Loan bought the building, the Library was relegated to the drafty, cavernous Armory. Lastly, there was the double-wide mobile home. It, too, was very cramped. Books and library materials were stored everywhere – in cabinets, under chairs, in the bathtub – everywhere possible.

As part of the July 15 reopening, there was a ribbon-cutting, awards presented to Library staff, local Library Board Members, and fund-raising volunteers. According to Marilyn Hinshaw, EOLS Director, the Eufaula building project was the outstanding project in the System for the year. Dorothy Follansbee checked out the first book, *The Flower and the Nettle*, which she said signified both the happiness and problems that went into the building the Library.

The Summer Reading Program that had been discontinued at the mobile home Library due to space constraints was immediately initiated in the new Library home even though most libraries in the system were winding their summer programs down in preparation for the start of school. Branch manager Marguerite Schmitt was determined to get at least two children's Summer Programs in before school started. The formal dedication of the Library was held August 23, 1985. Oklahoma

Governor George Nigh was the Keynote speaker and he also formally dedicated the building.



Carol Albin, McIntosh County's shared branch manager, 1993-1994. (Indian Journal)

Awards for the Eufaula Library continued to pour in. In 1987 at the System's Christmas staff luncheon, Eufaula's Library garnered two of the five presented Awards. The first Award was for conducting the most innovative program of the year in which popular Tulsa meteorologist Don Woods presented a program on storms and tornadoes held in April. The second Award was for a 17 percent increase in circulation over the preceding year.

The Eufaula Friends of the Library group was organized in 1987 to continue the support the programs and activities of the Library. It could be argued that at this point there's no doubt the Library had many friends, but nonetheless, a formal Friends group was organized to support the Library, its programs and services. The Friends' first meeting was held February 24, 1988.


On March 10, 1992 the voters of McIntosh County along with voters in Cherokee, Adair and Sequoyah Counties were asked to approve an increase of ad valorem from two-mills to four. The Libraries in those counties were all operating at a deficit. Cuts in individual budgets, open hours and services had been occurring and would continue without the additional two-mill increase.

McIntosh County voters struck down by only 138 votes the proposed two-mill tax increase by a vote of 2,296 to 2,158, in the March 10 election. The System's Board of Trustees was then forced to approve additional budget cuts for the McIntosh County Libraries for the 1992-93 fiscal year. Marilyn Hinshaw told the *Indian Journal* that, "There is a direct relationship between the library tax and the service it supports." While McIntosh County's Libraries were included in the share of revenue to be gained from a sales tax question that will be on the August, 1992 ballot, the amount allocated to the Libraries would be one third of the amount that would have been raised by the increase in the millage levy. With the loss of the increased millage, the Eufaula Memorial Library lost an additional five open hours per week added to the fifteen hours it lost during the 1991-92 fiscal year. That brought the number of open hours down to 30 per week, just a few hours more than when the Library first opened in 1971. The passage of the county-wide sales tax in August did allow a small increase in open hours and book budgets for both County Libraries but not enough to bring them back to pre-1991 levels. McIntosh County voters made the sales tax permanent in 2002.




Eufaula's branch manager from 1994 to 2000 was Shirley Thomas. Here she showed library staff, Vivian Knight and Kay Drabeck, how to use the new Dynix automated library management system. (Indian Journal).






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-  **Great Reference Materials:**
The World Book Encyclopedia, Oklahoma Statutes
Turn of the century local newspapers (on microfilm)
-  **Today's Newspapers:**
Muskogee Phoenix, McIntosh County Democrat,
The Indian Journal, and the Wall Street Journal.
-  **A Wide Selection of Magazines:**
National Geographic, Consumer Reports, Family Circle,
Highlights for Children, Sports Illustrated, and the list goes on....

Vote YES for Libraries on March 12, 1996
Paid for by Citizens for Libraries

The "Vote Yes" poster for the 1996 millage levy vote.

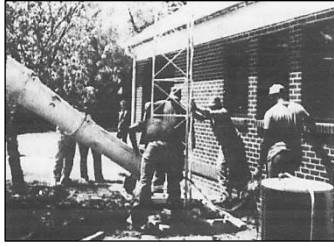
that both libraries will have to spend on services." Support for the Library levy came mostly from Checotah and Eufaula. The measure was defeated in the rural areas of the County. This effect was also noted in the other counties that held millage elections during the same time period and would be addressed by the System board. Passage of the levy gave both towns' Libraries more money for library materials and longer open hours beginning with the 1996-97 fiscal year.

However, the non-passage of the millage increase in 1992 had ramifications for both the Eufaula and Checotah libraries. It was decided to tie the two McIntosh County libraries together with shared staff as one cost-saving measure. Carol Albin of Des Moines, Iowa, was hired as County Librarian in late 1993 to head both Libraries. Ten months later, Albin resigned and a joint planning meeting was held to divide staff and hire new branch managers at each location. Other shared staff was reassigned to work in only one location to save travel times. The County's sales

tax came in handy to help with the tight budgets. What sounded like a good idea in the beginning simply didn't pan out.

Also, in 1994 computers started to arrive at EML followed in 1995 with Internet access and an automated circulation system and computerized catalog. The early seed work with automation in 1974 was finally bearing fruit. In 2002 the circulation system moved to a web-based system.

It wasn't until March 1996 that the two-mill tax levy increase was revisited by McIntosh County voters. This time, County votes passed the Library levy with a vote of 2,463 to 2,141. Eufaula EOLS board member, John Harkey, was quoted as saying, "In effect, the levy doubles the amount of revenue



After Eufaula became a master OneNet site and received a Department of Commerce Grant, a tower was erected on the Library's south side. (Indian Journal)

In the summer of 1996 Eufaula was named as an additional hub site joining 33 original hubs as part of Oklahoma's public-private partnership expanding information and telecommunications network for education and government called OneNet. The Library was a member of the Eufaula Telecommunications Coalition that included the public school systems of Eufaula and Stidham, the OSU Extension Office, the Lake Eufaula Association, City of Eufaula and the American Indian Language Center.



The Library sign donated by the Hudson family in honor of their parents in 1998 made a popular picture-taking site. Just ask Spiderman and the Library's Teen Advisory Group members. (Library photos)

In the fall of the same year the Oklahoma Department of Commerce awarded an \$80,000 grant to the Eufaula Friends group for a telecommunications hook-up. This action came about when one of the original 33 hubs dropped out of the OneNet system which then allowed Eufaula to receive a Master Site Grant. The Library was designated as the local network's central site.



In 1998 the Library was the recipient of a beautiful and much-needed sign given in honor of Jo and Winston Hudson's fiftieth wedding anniversary by their children. It was a welcomed and much needed addition to the Library's landscape. The sign arrived in November to await the construction of the brick base. In the spring of 1999 the sign was in position on the Library's front lawn.



Margaret Collins, Eufaula's branch manager from 2000-2014. (Library photo)

The branch manager for the next fourteen years, 2000-2014, was Margaret Collins. Under her leadership many programs and activities begun by others not only survived, but also expanded or evolved over the next twenty years.

There were both afternoon and evening book clubs for adults. Computer classes specifically for adults and seniors were held as personal computers became more prevalent. The Story Catchers Writer's Guild was formed and met in the Library as did the Quilt Guild. There were children's, teen and adult reading programs. A Teen



Summer Reading Programs were always popular at the Library. Pictured is Muskogee Creek Storyteller, Will Hill and friend, during a 1999 Summer Reading Program. (Library photo)

Advisory Group (TAG) was formed. A variety of classes were held from genealogy to GED to guitar lessons. The Library participated in the *Let's Talk About It* reading and book discussion series. The Friends' group (FEML) continued to meet and sponsor programs on a variety of topics as well. Fund-raisers were held by the local VFW, Masons and other groups to help support the Library's Summer Reading Programs and other special programs. Many of the events mentioned above have continued to the present day.

In 2004 the *McIntosh County Read Thing* featured Elie Wiesel's book, *Night*, about the Holocaust (See also the story of the Jim Lucas Checotah Public Library). The program series was shared by both the



A Eufaula sixth-grader asked Eva Uterman a question about her experiences during the Holocaust. (Muskogee Phoenix)

Checotah and Eufaula Libraries and included presentations in both communities. The first presentation was by Dr. Jacob Howland, Tulsa University Professor of Philosophy, who spoke on the times and conditions in post-WWI Germany that contributed to the atmosphere that created "The Final Solution." The second presentation was with Holocaust survivor, Eva Uterman, also from Tulsa, who spoke of her experiences in a

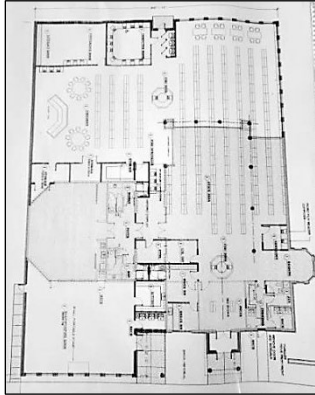
German concentration camp to standing-room only audiences in both communities.

By 2005 the twentieth anniversary of the Eufaula Memorial Library, Library staff and local Board Members alike felt the need to renovate and expand the current building constructed in 1985. A fund-raising bean dinner held in June 2005 served the kick-off event for the Library's expansion and "extreme

makeover." The expansion plan called for doubling the current floor space, filling the entire available lawn space at a cost estimated at the time to be \$1.2 million. A fund-raising committee, the Friends of the Eufaula Memorial Library (FEML) Building Fund Committee, was formed



Tom Kiester, left, EOLS Board Member representing Eufaula, accepts the Blue Ribbon Award for Health Information Services for the Eufaula Library from Amy Berg, field representative from the District 2 Congressional Office. Also attending were Kathe Smith, Checotah's branch manager; Susan McVey, State Librarian; and Dr. Maurice Payne, EOLS Chair, accepting on behalf of the Checotah library. (Indian Journal)



Expansion plans for the Eufaula Memorial Library created in 2005. The “greyed-in” area represented the current floor plan. (Indian Journal)

with branch manager Margaret Collins and businessman, Charles Urquhart, as co-chairs. The committee was made up of twelve members representing the Library, the Friends group, business and community members.

Eufaula’s Masonic Lodge #1 was among the first to contribute to the expansion with a check to the Library for \$1,317. The \$100,000 Club was re-initiated with six members. Other fund-raising opportunities included personalized bricks for \$100 each, grants, breakfasts and bean dinners, “murder” mysteries, names on book spines at \$50 each, etc. After an initial push, fund-raising slowed down.

Large foundation and government-related grants were not as prevalent or forthcoming as they were in the 1980s. To date, expansion funds have been utilized to replace the original entrance doors with automated doors for easier access, re-paved the sidewalks, made roof and dormer repairs, installed outdoor lighting, replaced air conditioning and remodeled the restrooms. A much needed storage shed was purchased as well as additional shelving and improvements to the Teen Area. The expansion ground-breaking originally scheduled in 2005 remains in the future.

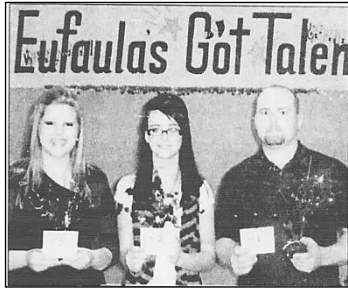
In 2010 the Library was awarded a Broadband Technology Opportunities Grant for upgrading telecommunications capabilities and equipment. In December of the same year, high-speed Internet came to the Library as well as to the EOLS libraries in Grove, Muskogee, Sallisaw, Tahlequah and Westville.

In 2014, Eufaula’s 7th branch manager, Peggy Jordan, a retired school librarian from the Norman area, came on board. The Library continued to expand its programs and services including an expanded Teen Area in the Library and the first videography class for teens. The Friends hosted a card tournament for kids to raise money for the Summer Reading Programs that was so popular it was held twice in 2015 and held at least once per year for several years afterward.

Into 2015 and 2016 the Friends of the Eufaula Memorial Library continued to be extremely active in their support of the Library with fund-raising and using those funds for the betterment of the Library as well as for programming of interest to the community. Local



Eufaula branch manager Peggy Jordan, 2014-2018. (Indian Journal)



The Eufaula Friends initiated the "Eufaula's Got Talent" competition in 2012, a popular event in town for several years. . (Indian Journal).

businesses, organizations and individuals continued their support of the Library as well. They included McDonald's, Sonic, the Masonic Lodge, VFW Auxiliary, and the Stephen Russell Smith Foundation that presented the Friends with a \$10,500 check to support programming. The Library also received a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) grant for \$3,000+ for continued programming in those fields.

In the fall of 2015 the Eufaula Memorial Library celebrated its 30th Anniversary and its move to its existing location with an Open House on September 24, 2015. From its origin as part of EOLS in 1971 to 1985, the Library was known as the Eufaula Public Library. By 2015, Eufaula had been a branch Library of EOLS for 44 years.

From 2015 to branch manager Peggy Jordan's retirement on June 1, 2018 the Library continued to serve the community with adult, teen and children's programming. The Friends continued to fundraise and the Building Fund Committee continued to look for solutions to building needs. In 2016 the Eufaula City Council, at the request of the Library, voted to begin the procedure of abolishing Eufaula's local Board of Trustees because it had served its original purpose to handle fund-raising and other library-related finances. Over time, the Friends of the Eufaula Memorial Library had taken over that function and the City no longer needed to remain in control of the Trustees. The Board would continue, however, in an advisory and as a liaison between the Library, City and the community.



Brittany Moore was Eufaula's branch manager from 2018 to 2023. (Library photo)

Brittany Moore became Eufaula's 8th branch manager in late May 2018 upon the retirement of Peggy Jordan. Moore came to Eufaula from the Muskogee Branch where she had served as the head of reference. While existing programs and services continued including the talent contest and card tournaments, Moore, an accomplished dancer and instructor, held the Library's first dance classes in July 2018. She also taught ballroom dancing at Eufaula's *Legacy on Main*, a local show and entertainment venue, in November and December. A young writers program, *NuNoWriMo*, was begun in September and a crochet club was initiated in November of 2018.

National Friends of Libraries Week celebration planned at Eufaula Library

In October, the Friends of the Eufaula Memorial Library (FEML) celebrated their 30th anniversary as part of the Library's National Friends of Library Week (NFLW) promotions and celebrations during the week of October 21-28, 2018. Established in 1988 the Friends had worked hard to raise funds to support the Library in various ways - book reviews, adult programs, and building renovations, but, the largest piece of the pie was earmarked for the Library's Summer Reading Programs. The Friend's fundraising efforts included basket giveaways, card tournaments, auctions and the Eufaula's Got Talent competitions. During the National Friends of Library Week celebrations, the Friends posted an

FEML receives state honor

easel in the Library's foyer that listed current Friend's events and activities. The postings would be updated regularly and kept current. Members manned a table in the Library's foyer under the banner, "I'm a Friend, Are You?" to inform library users about the group and to accept memberships at either the Individual, Lifetime or Corporate levels. The *Indian Journal* published a headline article about FEML and Eufaula's mayor issued a proclamation declaring October 21-28 as National Friends of Library Week.



Branch manager Moore followed the System's Covid health protocols when the Library reopened to the public. (Library photo)

The Library's National Friends of Library Week celebration was noted with an honorable mention from the Friends of Libraries in Oklahoma (FOLIO) for their excellence in the observance of Eufaula's Friends group during National Friends Week.

The year 2020 started on a positive note. Branch manager Brittany Moore, taught a few Charleston dance steps to an enthusiastic group at the Eufaula Area Chamber of Commerce's annual Banquet on March 6 on a "Rip Roarin' Twenties" evening. Shortly thereafter, like all the other branches in the System, the Eufaula Memorial Library had to adapt to the protocols brought forth by the Covid-19 pandemic.

To be continued....

Introduction to Muskogee County Libraries

There are four EOLS branch libraries in Muskogee County. Three are located in the northern part of the County and one is located in the southern part. The Muskogee Public Library is the “Grande Dame” of all the EOLS branches. Its origins trace back to the late 1890s when the Women’s Christian Temperance Union established a Library in 1984 with a thirteen-year old girl volunteer as the Librarian. Its origin as a City-funded Library began in 1910. In 1912 construction began on a Carnegie-funded building that became the Library’s home for the next fifty-eight years. In 1972 the current Muskogee



Muskogee Public Library (Library photo)



Q.B. Boydston Public Library in Fort Gibson (Library photo)

Public Library was opened as both Muskogee’s new Library but also as the focal point of the Eastern Oklahoma Library System.

The remaining three branch libraries in Muskogee County were all fortunate enough to have had WPA-funded Libraries in their histories in the late 1930s and into the early 1940s when the WPA Library Service program was defunded. Fort Gibson had a Women’s Club Library that began in 1922 prior to the

arrival of the WPA Library Service Program. In the beginning years of EOLS Fort Gibson was an EOLS Bookmobile stop. It wasn’t until 1977 and the construction of a new Community Center that Fort Gibson had an EOLS branch library.

Haskell’s quest for a community public library started as early as 1914. That, plus the WPA Library Service Program in the late 1930s and early 1940s and a Summer Library program held in a local church in 1958 mark the three recorded instances Haskell had libraries in the community’s history prior to the arrival of the EOLS in 1971.



Rieger Memorial Library in Haskell (Library photo)

The only record of the Warner community having a Library prior to the arrival of EOLS was a WPA Library Service Program Library in the late 1930s and early 1940s. The Connors State College Library was and still is always available to the Warner community but its mission as support for the College's curriculum limited its use to high-school age teens doing school-related research and adults.

For many decades Connors purchased adult fiction titles for not only

the faculty and staff that lived on the College's campus during those years, but also for the community in general.

In 1990 Warner became the first of the smaller communities in the EOLS service area to become an EOLS branch.



Warner Public Library (Library Photo)

Introduction to Fort Gibson

Fort Gibson is a community of firsts. It is believed to be the oldest non-Native settlement in Oklahoma. It also is believed to have had the first telephone, first drama theater, first steamboat landing, first school for the blind, first highway to Fort Smith, Arkansas, the first interurban between the community and Muskogee, and had one of the first post offices. At one time in the early twentieth century, Fort Gibson had seven newspapers of which only *the Fort Gibson Times* remains as part of the *Muskogee Phoenix* newspaper.



The construction of Lake Fort Gibson began in 1942. Construction was suspended during WWII, restarted in 1946 and completed in 1953. Its main purpose was for flood control/hydroelectric power but also provided drinking water and recreational opportunities (Google Images)

Fort Gibson is approximately nine miles east of Muskogee on U.S. Highway 62 and State Highway 80. Colonel Matthew Arbuckle established Cantonment Gibson, later renamed Fort Gibson in April 1824. The Fort's initial purpose was to settle conflicts among area Indian tribes. In 1857 the Fort was abandoned and returned to the Cherokee Nation only to be manned again during the Civil War years. In 1872 it was reoccupied again to protect railway workers building the Missouri, Kansas and Texas (MKT or Katy) Railroad from Kansas to the Red River.

In 1898 the Articles of Incorporation for the town were established and in 1904, years after the Fort was abandoned for the final time, the town was surveyed and platted. In 1907 its population was recorded as 1,063. In 1930 the community's population was 1,159, an increase of less than 100 individuals in 23 years. By 2020 the population had grown to 3,814.

Today, manufacturing, health care, the Cherokee Nation, tourism, the public-school system, the Fort Gibson Dam and lake-



Jazz Singer, Lee Wiley, 1908-1975. (Google Images)

related recreational activities are the town's main employers. Fort Gibson is the home of the Fort Gibson National Cemetery. It also serves as a bedroom community for both Muskogee and Tahlequah.

Perhaps one of the most notable figures in Fort Gibson's history would be jazz singer, Lee Wiley. Wiley was popular mostly during the 1930s



MLB pitcher, Frank Linzy, 1940-. (Google Images)



The Fort Gibson Historical Site located on the north edge of the town. (Google Images)

and into the 1950s. She left home at age 15 for New York City. She sang with famous bands during the Big Band era and recorded the songs of songwriters such as George Gershwin, Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart, Harold Arlen and Irving Berlin during her career. In 1963 Wiley was



NFL Lineman, Teddy Lehman, 1981-. (Google Images)



The Fort Gibson National Cemetery Entrance. In 1868, the U.S. government established the Cemetery on a 7-acre section of the Military Reservation outside of the Fort. (Google Images)

portrayed by actress Piper Laurie in an episode of the Bob Hope Theater on NBC.

Frank Linzy was a major league baseball player who called Fort Gibson home. During Linzy's career, he pitched for the Giants, Cardinals, Brewers and the Phillies.

Teddy Lehman was a Sooner linebacker and played in the NFL for seven seasons with the Lions and the Bills, then with a minor league team, the Las Vegas Locomotives. Lehman attended Fort Gibson High School. He now lives in Norman and works as a sports radio talk analyst and commentator.



Television Reporter/Emmy winner, Sara Sheffield Forhetz, 1982-. (Google Images)

Sara Sheffield Forhetz, a 2000 graduate of Fort Gibson High School, won an Emmy for her series "Heart for Haiti" for television station KY3 in Springfield, Missouri in 2015. She earned her journalism degree at Oklahoma State University and joined the KY3

news team in 2005 as lead reporter for the "Ozarks Today" program.

Fort Gibson's Early Library History

A column in *The Fort Gibson Post* newspaper dated September 3, 1903 noted that, “after the new school house is constructed...the public enterprises needed in Ft. Gibson will be a public library for diffusion of knowledge. The building need not be an expensive one – in fact, a room might be hired, and books put in as means might admit.”

In 1906 the newspaper reported that J. S. Holden, the *Post's* editor, followed his own advice and had took the initiative in establishing a public library for the community. He donated 40 items from his own library and the use of one of his houses, rent free, for a brief period. He solicited additional items from local and area colleagues, including people, businesses and organizations in Muskogee. At the end of the article, it was noted that his public library, “had 80 books available and a fine lot of magazines.”

Despite the early newspaper's opinions and trial efforts to begin a library in Fort Gibson prior to statehood, it wasn't until 1922 that Delphin Club women were able to provide Fort Gibson with a semblance of a functioning library for the community.

In 1922 the *Fort Gibson Times* reported that a branch of the Muskogee Public Library was “now in operation under the auspices (sic) of the Delphin Ladies.” A book collection was reported as being currently available and other materials and books could be supplied on short notice. The membership fee was one dollar. In 1931 the *Times* editor chided the community on the fact that only, “a comparatively small part of our population avails itself of the superb facilities of the public library....”

“Several of the most popular young ladies of Fort Gibson are establishing a town library and are succeeding well. Such a move would be appreciated in Muldrow, too.”

The Muldrow Press
December 4, 1908

Library News

“Everyone having library books are asked to please return the books as soon as possible. We are preparing to exchange these books for new ones.”

Ada Stanridge, Librarian

Fort Gibson Independent
September 9, 1937

Library News

“New Books in the W.P.A. Public Library: Mayer—Jungle Beasts I Have Captured. Morris—Heroes of Progress. Nicolay—Abraham Lincoln. Owen—Denmark Caravan....”

Fort Gibson Independent
January 4, 1940

“They have plenty of the NYA girls helping in the WPA library in the Legion hut, wonder why they do not have some of the NYA boys mow the lawn around the hut. The new shrubbry (sic) scarcely has a chance with such a ragged lawn.”

Fort Gibson Independent
March 24, 1938

In early November 1937 Cornelia Dagenet, Superintendent, Area 8 of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) announced that a Library Service Project in Fort Gibson would be open within the next few days. She noted that the service would be on a somewhat different basis from the “reading rooms” library model. It would serve as an educational unit for

relief workers as well as serving the general public. It would also provide a traveling service for shut-ins.



WPA-era Library poster.
(Google Images)

Muskogee served as the regional headquarters for the WPA Library Project in nineteen eastern Oklahoma counties. Besides Fort Gibson, the Muskogee office supervised libraries in the communities of Braggs, Boynton, Haskell, Webbers Falls, Warner, Porum, Briartown, Summit and Taft. It also supervised WPA libraries in Stilwell, Sallisaw, Vian, Muldrow and Checotah.

The exact locations of the early attempts to create a library in Fort Gibson prior to the arrival of the WPA Library were unknown. However, in a 1938 edition of the *Fort Gibson Independent*, a “News Brief” column named the town’s Legion Hut as the location of the WPA library. The federal WPA program ended nation-wide in 1943. No mention of any public library in Fort Gibson was found again until EOLS began providing Bookmobile service to the community in the early 1970s. The establishment of the current Q.B. Boydston Public Library began with the construction of a new Community Center for the town in 1977.

Q. B. Boydston Public Library – What’s New at the Q?



The current Q. B. Boydston Public Library, 201 East South Avenue. (Library photo)

The establishment of an EOLS branch library in Fort Gibson began with the construction of a new community center for the town in September 1977. The new Community Center included space for a public library. In October, city officials approached EOLS



Fort Gibson Community Center, the first location of the Q. B. Boydston Public Library, 1978. (Google Images)

primarily for information and assistance with shelving and materials purchasing. Ultimately, the request for information and assistance blossomed into a formal request to join EOLS as a branch library. Prior to the Community



Q.B. Boydston (center) cuts the ribbon on the new Community Center that included the Library that would bear his name. He is surrounded by Mayor Cooper, far left; and to the

Center’s construction, Fort Gibson was an EOLS Bookmobile stop.

The Library within the Community Center was named after Q. B. Boydston, a local attorney in the firm of Mountcastle & Boydston. Boydston was born in Caddo, Indian Territory in 1898. He graduated from the University of Oklahoma in 1919 and came to Fort Gibson to practice law. Boydston was admitted to the Bar in 1920, lived and raised a family in Fort Gibson until his death in 1986. Over the years,

Boydston served as Fort Gibson mayor, Justice of the Peace, was a member of the Chamber of Commerce and the Oklahoma Historical Society. He was instrumental in the restoration of the Fort and wrote articles for the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* on the Fort’s history. Last, but not least, Boydston was the person who was instrumental in obtaining the land for the Community Center and in procuring the funds to build the combined library and community center at 200 Hickory Street.

Open House for the new 2,400 square foot Library in Fort Gibson’s new Community Center was held on June 24, 1978. In August, the Oklahoma Department of Libraries awarded



Children's area at the original Q.B. Boydston Library. (Library photo)



Behind the circulation desk at the original Library location. (Library photo)



Boydston, his wife Floy to the left, surrounded by his adult daughters, Mary Lou to the far left and Betty, to the right. (Library photo)



Bill and Melinda Gates of the Gates Foundation. (Goggle Images)

\$11,860 to the new Library. Approximately \$6,585 was provided in cash and the remaining \$5,275 was provided in equipment and materials from ODL's Library Development Collection. In October, the Library was added to the System's insurance plan. The first EOLS branch manager was Rhonda Austin who served approximately one year. Gayle Ledford became branch manager in 1978. She retired in 2012 after 33 years in Fort Gibson and 45 years overall with EOLS.

On October 9, 1984 Ordinance No: 1984-10-1 was signed by the Fort Gibson Board of Trustees, which formally authorized the establishment of the Q. B. Boydston Library as a branch of the EOLS.

In 1988 and through 1990 the Library added microfiche readers and a copy machine with enlargement and reduction capabilities. A large print collection was added for limited sight patrons' use.

In 1992 the manual card catalog and circulation system became a thing of the past with the System's adoption of the *Dynix* automated circulation system and catalog. In 1997 during one upgrade, receipt printers were added so patrons could have in hard copy a list of the

materials they had check-out. In 2002 the *Dynix* system was upgraded to *Horizon*; *Dynix*'s web-based circulation and catalog system.

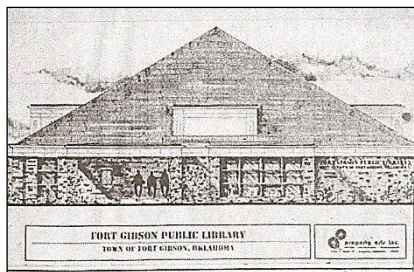
In 1994 new shelving and furniture was purchased to accommodate more computer desks and chairs. Shelving was needed not only to shelve new books but also to meet the need for specialized new media formats such as videos and compact discs.

Public-access computers were first introduced to the Library's patrons in 1995. At first there was only one public use computer available. By 1998 Internet access had been made available in the Library, and in 1999 the Library received a grant from the

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation through the Oklahoma Department of Libraries for the purchase of four new computers and software.



Original Boydston sign from the Library's first Community Center location. (Library photo)



The architect's rendition of the proposed Library building's exterior. (Fort Gibson Times)



The Library's walls were up and so was the excessive moisture at the building site. (Library photo)



Library's groundbreaking ceremony, 2003. (Library photo)

but would go toward programs and services not provided for in the Library's current budget and to expand existing programs such as the ever-popular Summer Reading Programs.

By 2001 after approximately twenty-three years of service to a growing community, the Library was bursting at the seams. Branch manager Ledford, along with Town Clerk and part-time library employee, Debbie Daniels, talked to city officials. In response, the women were told that the City would sponsor a bond issue, and if it passed, the City would commit to build the

In the summer of 2007 another Public Access Computer Hardware Upgrade Grant of \$5,952, again provided by the Gates Foundation, was used to purchase an additional four computers with equipment and software for use by the Library's users. This grant was part of \$84,816 awarded to EOLS for the purchase of fifty-seven computers for Boydston and fourteen other branch libraries. Over time the Library offered more computers and several online databases with both in-house and remote access for public use such as SIRS, an Encyclopedia and other reference compact discs were purchased for patron use.

By 2000 the Boydston Library had outgrown its 2,400 square feet in the community center. The Fort Gibson Friends of the Library was formed on August 17, 2000 to support the goals and mission of the Library. The first Friends' president, Theda Rowan, was quoted as saying "*its long been felt that there is a need in our community for a citizen's organization dedicated to the support of our library....*"

The Friends' first concern was to either expand the present facility or build a new Library Building to accommodate the growing town. Money raised by the Friends would not only be set aside for a building fund



Early in the Library's construction, 2003. (Library photo)

community a new stand-alone Library building. So, in 2002, the town passed a \$1,000,000 bond to build a new Library at 201 East South Avenue. The proposed bond issue passed the first time, if only by one or two votes. True to their word, the City began preparations to build a new Library facility.



Library walls were up ready for the roof, 2004. (Library photo)

During the last scheduled meeting of Fort Gibson's Board of Trustees in December 2002, a bid was accepted from Hoey Construction of Tulsa to build the new Library on the Corner of South Avenue and Lee Street at a cost of \$516,650. The actual cost of all construction services was anticipated to be closer to \$750,000.

Town officials and other dignitaries gathered on January 17, 2003 to break ground for the new Q. B. Boydston Library. Attending the ground breaking from left to right, was the general contractor, Phil Hoey; Darrell Byrd, Architect; Mayor Bob Peebles; EOLS Director, Marilyn Hinshaw; Vice-Mayor Theda Rowan and Branch Manager, Gayle Ledford.

By mid-February construction was halted to address the issue of the necessity of a Federal Flood Plain permit that was needed before construction could continue. A second obstacle addressed was unexpected soil stabilization problems that occurred unexpectedly because of excessive moisture at the building site. It was determined that the site needed two feet of fly ash laid down to compensate for the moisture plus the removal of trash when the site served as a trash pit. That required a change order in the amount of \$13,886.25. The Flood Plain permit was issued the following week and construction continued as planned.

In December, more stumbling blocks concerning the Library's construction were addressed by the town's Board of Trustees. A rainy spring and summer delayed construction due primarily to the soil's continued instability. The first issue addressed by the Board was a request for OG&E to re-install electric service to the site. The initial electrical service was damaged by



Just one of the many loads of library books and equipment moved from the Community Center. (Library photo)

the heavy onsite equipment. The electrical line needed to be moved two or three feet in order to stabilize the soil underneath it.

The second item of concern involved asphalt and soil compaction in the area of the two driveways onto the library property. The construction company asked the Board to pay for the electrical service



The empty shelves at the new Boydstun library ready to be filled. (Library photo)

move in the amount of \$964 and more fly ash stabilization at a cost of an additional \$8,548.65. After an initial negative response by the Board of Trustees and much discussion in executive session, the City decided to pay for the two disputed items and the, “responsible party for these charges can be decided at the end of the project.”

In mid-January 2004 the subject of soil stabilization was an issue once again. The construction company and town officials were still at odds over the soil stabilization issue at the entrances to the parking lot. The issue had been before the Board of Trustees several times since February 2003. Since the construction contact did not address soil stabilization, the contractors believed they were not responsible to pay the fly ash bill.



Packing up and moving out of the Community Center. (Library photo)

By early July moving day was on the horizon awaiting a walk-through by the town’s Board of Trustees and a mediation



One of the still-smiling moving-day volunteers. (Library photo)

meeting to be held on July 12 to see if a settlement can be reached by the City and the construction company about the soil stabilization issue. In the meantime, Library staff and supporters were making plans for the move by procuring boxes, getting volunteers to help pack at the old location and unpack at the new one, and finding transportation for moving day.

Both Library locations were closed from August 23 through September 6 for moving. Shelving at the new Library was installed first while students from the Talking Leaves Job Corps in Tahlequah went to the old Library to help with packing.



The Library's new extra space in the children's area allowed room for a new Story-Time hour for preschoolers. (Fort Gibson Times)



It's a busy time at the new Library's Circulation Desk. (Library photo)



Dedication Day dignitaries included, from left to right: Cathy Van Hoy, Oklahoma Department of Libraries representative; Theda Rowan, Fort Gibson Vice Mayor; Gayle Ledford, branch manager; and Marilyn Hinshaw, EOLS Director. (Fort Gibson Times)



Part of the children's area after the expansion in 2006. (Library photo)



The teen's area occupied the south end of the 2006 expansion. (Library photo)

Books were removed from the shelves, in order, and packed into boxes labeled to make the unpacking at the new Library easier.

Later, after all the shelving was in place at the new Library, OG&E employees volunteered their free time and their own vehicles to get the book boxes transported from the old location to the new one. The estimated day for opening the Library to the public was September 7, 2004.

The new Q.B Boydston Public Library's formal Open House and Dedication Ceremony was held on December 6, 2004. Twenty-six years after the community's first Public Library was

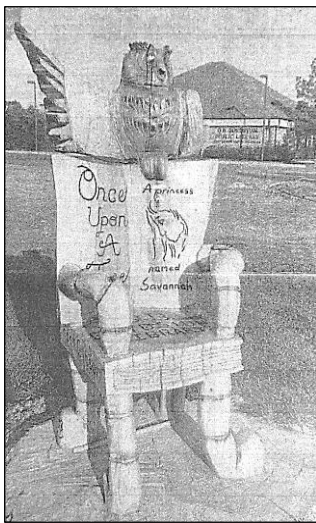
dedicated in June 1978, it now had a beautiful, 5,700 square foot free-standing Library Building with room to grow.



Native Story Teller Will Hill shares stories and the customs of his tribe. (Library photos)

It wasn't long before the Library needed more growing room. In the fall of 2006, 900 square feet of floor space was added to the east and south sides of the building with bond money left over from the building's original construction. Originally, the additional floor space expanded the computer area and movie and digital collections but, over time, morphed into expanded children's and teen's areas allowing more space for both books and technology resources geared primarily for those age groups.

The new, larger Library provided more room for the annual Summer Reading Programs as well as numerous other activities and events previously limited due to lack of space. Story hours became routine. The number of activities and programs for adults and youth alike increased with the addition of meeting and conference rooms.



Popular, but short-lived wood sculpture on the Library's front lawn. (Fort Gibson Times)

In 2012 the long-time branch manager Gayle Ledford retired and Rhonda Lee became Q. B. Boydston's branch manager for the next ten years. In 2013 as part a long-range plan objective, the "What's New at the Q" newspaper column that regularly appeared in the *Fort Gibson Times* was initiated. The purpose of the column was another way to keep the town apprised of the Library's various activities along with the Library's Facebook page and the System's web pages.



Native Story Teller Megan Kelley shares stories and the customs of her tribe. (Library photos)

Also in 2013, Library staff was saddened when one of the Library's big ash trees on the front lawn succumbed to disease. But, their sadness turned to joy when local chainsaw artist Ben Sparks came to the rescue and made a book-themed sculpture out of the tree's remaining trunk. The



"Mad Scientist" intrigued the audience during a 2010 Summer Reading Program performance. (Library photo)

sculpture, estimated to be 1,100 pounds before carving ended up being around 400 pounds, included a wise owl and bookworms sitting on a chair. The chair's back was made to look like a book with the title "My Little Princess" in honor of the artist's daughter. Unfortunately, despite all the efforts made to keep the tree sculpture free from further disease, it died a couple of years later and was destroyed.



In 2016, arts and crafts were popular with all ages. (Library photo)

Along with the more routine library activities and programming, branch manager Rhonda Lee continued branching out with a range of activities and collaborations with the community and various groups begun before her tenure as branch manager. Computer classes for beginners began being held in 2013. "Book a Librarian" programs for one-hour one-on-one sessions for help on a



Who else but a man named Hugo Kringle should present a Christmas program? (Library photo)



Beginning around 2017 an emphasis on health-related programming for adults became popular. Here a yoga class learned about the importance of stretching. (Library photo)

computer or any topic of the patron's choice were also offered. Teen programs continued as did after-school activities for elementary-age children. The Library also participated in System-wide programs such as "What Do You Geek" in 2013 and "Ready Player One" in 2019.



The kids were excited to meet and have their picture taken with the albino boa constrictor in 2019. (Library photo)



The message here is don't mess with branch manager Rhonda Lee as she handled an albino boa constrictor as part of the 2019 Extreme Animals Program. (Library photo)



By 2019, adult painting classes were popular at the Library. Florence Smith followed the examples artist Nancy Edscorn presented to the class. (Fort Gibson Times)

The Library hosted a “True Grit” Chili Cook-Out in 2014 at the Library and a Juneteenth celebration in 2018. The Library regularly participated in the Annual Sweet Corn Festival in downtown Fort Gibson. In 2017-18, the entire System won the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science Blue Ribbon Award for Health Information Services. EOLS and its branches were the first to receive such an award in Oklahoma. The purpose of the award was to help increase awareness of healthy lifestyles

and to honor libraries as providers of trusted health information.

As a spin-off most, if not all, EOLS branches, including Boydston, have sponsored health-related programs such as Seniorcises, SAIL, Tai Chi, yoga, nutrition and other health-related topics. Painting classes for young and old alike have been extremely popular in all the EOLS branches and Boydston was no exception. Of course, Summer Reading Program activities are among the most popular programs that Boydston and the other

branches have, especially those programs involving animals and science. Separate STEM and STEAM activities were also very popular with Fort Gibson youth.

Along with all branches, the spring of 2020 and the arrival of the pandemic changed the way library service was conducted for a time. After restrictions were lifted, the Q. B. Boydston Public Library continued to serve the Fort Gibson community with the exceptional library service as it had since its inception in 1978.

To be continued....

Introduction to Haskell



*Aerial view of current day Haskell.
(Wikipedia)*



*Charles N. Haskell, namesake of Haskell
and Oklahoma's first Governor, 1860-
1933. (Oklahoma Historical Society)*

Haskell is located in Muskogee County approximately nineteen miles northwest of the City of Muskogee. The town is served by US Highway 64 and Oklahoma Highways 72 and 104.

Haskell was established in 1904 in Indian Territory on the Midland Valley Railroad line. It was named after the town-site developer, Charles N. Haskell, who later became Oklahoma's first governor. Haskell was born in Ohio and was active in Ohio politics. After unsuccessful bids in Ohio for the offices of State Senator, U.S. Congressman and governor, Haskell came to Oklahoma. He quickly became involved in the Sequoyah movement to make Indian Territory a separate state. However, President Theodore Roosevelt declared that there would be only one state of Oklahoma so Haskell served as a delegate to the new state's Constitutional Convention in 1906 representing the City of Muskogee. On March 26, 1907 Haskell announced he was a gubernatorial candidate. He was elected on September 17, 1907 and served as Oklahoma's first Governor from 1907 to 1911. Prior to Haskell's interest in Oklahoma politics, he was a promoter and developer of the Haskell Town



*The Midland Valley Railroad
Line merged into the Texas &
Pacific RR in 1967 and was
absorbed into the Missouri
Pacific Railroad in 1983.
(Wikipedia)*



site Company. Haskell's original 80 acre tract was purchased from Amos Rolland, a Creek tribal member. Less than two miles southwest of Haskell's town site was the Creek town of Sawokla. When the Midland Valley Railroad was built near Haskell the main



What was left of the Nancy Taylor #1 oil rig. (Oklahoma Historical Society)

Sawokla’s businesses, a general store and a cotton gin, relocated to Haskell. Haskell’s first post office was established in 1902 as was its first bank. Along with the general store and cotton gin from Sawokla, other businesses soon followed – a mill and elevator, clothing store, hardware store and a few more banks. Agriculture was the foundation of Haskell’s economy through the mid- twentieth century.

The discovery of oil and gas in 1910 brought oil tycoon, J. Paul Getty, to Haskell to drill his first oil well in 1916. The well was named the “Nancy Taylor No. 1.” The well was, in time, put on the National Register of Historic Places.



Land and Loan Company brochure touting the benefits of life in Haskell, Indian Territory in the early 1900s. (Library photo)

In 1907 the year Oklahoma became a state, Haskell’s population was 720. Haskell’s population boomed after the oil and gas discovery. By 1920, its population was 2,196. However, a big loss of revenues and consequently, population, began in the late 1960s when the opening of the Muskogee Turnpike bypassed the once heavily-used Highway 64 corridor from Muskogee to Tulsa. By 2020 Haskell’s population was down to 1,626.

Haskell’s notables included a Hollywood actor, its first black mayor and a local newspaper publisher credited with bringing businesses to the town.

William Benedict was born in Haskell. He acted in Haskell’s school plays and also in nearby Tulsa as a youngster. He set out for Hollywood after his high school graduation. Benedict was best known for his juvenile roles in the 1930s and 1940s when boy-gang movies like “The East Side Kids” and “Bowery Boys” were popular movie fare. In later years, he did television



Actor William Benedict, 1917-1999. (Google Images)

commercials, and appeared in television series such as *The Andy Griffith Show* and *All in the Family*.



*Mayor Charles B. White,
1905-1977. (Google Images)*

Charles B. White was born in Texas but was raised in Haskell. He moved to Seattle and worked for Boeing for 32 years. He returned to Haskell upon his retirement and became the community's first Black mayor.

William M. Guy, 1930-2008, owned and published *The Haskell News* from 1962-2012 – the longest owner and publisher in the newspaper's history. He purchased the *News* in 1962 and was within 10 issues of seeing the *News* reach its 100th birthday when he passed away in 2008. He was a fervent Haskell booster and of small town living in general. He is credited with bringing businesses into town. He also served as the town's last Justice of the Peace. (No photo found).

Haskell's Early Library History

There were at least three documented instances during the first half of the twentieth century of Haskell establishing a public library. The first documented mention of a public library was from 1914 to 1919. The physical location of the library was not noted. The second mention concerned a WPA-sponsored library in 1933-34, housed in a city-owned storage building. The

Way to Get a Public Library

*“\$250 for books.
\$100 for equipment, such as book cases, chairs, tables and other essentials.
\$150 for maintenance for one year.*

WILL NOT

*4 men give \$25.00 equal \$100.00
10 men give \$10.00 equal \$100.00
20 men give \$5.00 equal \$100.00
40 men give \$2.50 equal \$100.00
100 men give \$1.00 equal \$100.00
A committee of young men will solicit your subscription. Monday and every day next week until - \$500.00 is raised.
You can give your money to no better purpose.
Every person who contributes one dollar or more will be given a library card which will entitle him to library privileges for himself and family for one year.”*

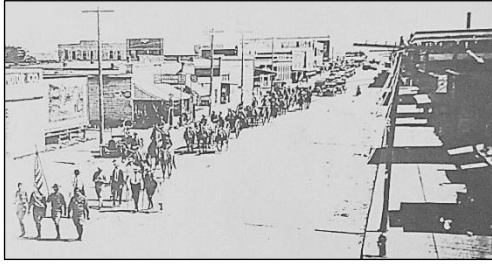
Advertisement in *Haskell News*
March 19, 1914

third mention was of a summertime library housed in the local Christian Church's Sunday School Rooms in 1958.

The first mention of any type of public library service was found in the *Haskell News* on April 4, 1912. It concerned the use of the Muskogee Public Library. “*People can obtain books from Muskogee Public Library by keeping a standing deposit of \$1.50, which they can withdraw when they stop taking books.*” An assumption could be made that only the more mobile and financially-able Haskell residents could avail themselves of library services in Muskogee, 19 miles from Haskell.

The ad featured to the left was in the March 19, 1914 edition of the *Haskell News*. This ad may or may not have been the impetus for the creation of the first public library in Haskell. No other mention of how this earliest Haskell Public Library could have originated or

even where it was located has been found in the available resources researched. However, on August 20, 1914 an article appeared in the *Haskell News* entitled Books in Public Library: “*The following volumes in history, poems, fiction, and miscellaneous works will be found in the Haskell Public Library for those who wish good literature to read....*” Such lists appeared monthly in the newspaper in 1914.

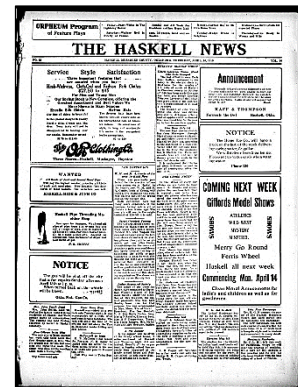


An early day parade in downtown Haskell.
(Library photo)

By November 1914 announcements of library programs and events were published in the *News* under the *Personal and Local News* section. Examples of such notices included: “Remember, the Japanese Tea and Bazaar at the Library. First Tuesday and Saturday in December from 2:30 to 5:30. Benefit Public Library.”

In December 2014 it was posted that, “The library would be open Tuesday evenings for the benefit of the boys and young men who wish to read or study. Mr. Wilson will be in charge.”

The *Personal and Local News* section announcements about library activities continued into 2015 and 2016. “Commercial Club meeting at Library. ... (for the purpose of) organizing a brass band,” appeared in May 1915. In July there appeared an announcement about children’s story hours in the Library. “Story hour for children (younger) than third grade...for the children of patrons of the public library... Wednesday afternoons, 4:00–5:00. And, third to sixth grade on Thursday, same time.... (accept) donations or purchase annual library card.”



An early issue of the Haskell News circa the second decade of the 1900s.
(Newspapers.com)

Another benefit for the Haskell Public Library was held on January 20, 2016 at the high school “by the Blind Boys Glee Club of the Oklahoma School for the Blind. Adults 35¢, Children 25¢.” In November 2016, “Miss Fisher is teaching china painting and watercolor in the Public Library. Terms (are) 65¢ per lesson.”



The next announcement about the Library in the *Personal and Local News* column appeared on December 5, 1918. Briefly, it stated “...it has been suggested that the public library be turned over to the school.” In January 1919 the last post in the *Haskell News* concerning the Public Library stated, “The public library, recently moved to the school house, will be open to the public and the school children every Friday afternoon at 4 o’clock.” From that point on, the only mentions about libraries in the *Haskell News* were generalities about other in-state, regional and/or national public libraries.

On a website devoted to the topic of “Waymarking” defined as a site that “*provides tools to share and discover unique and interesting locations on the planet.*” The site is divided into numerous categories for people to explore and post their finds and thoughts about categories of interest to them. The site also includes libraries of all types. The information concerning Rieger Memorial Library was posted in 2005 and included a bullet point list of important dates in the Library’s history between the years of 1933-1999. Much of the accuracy of the included data or the sources can’t be verified whereas the more recent posts after the establishment of EOLS in 1970 can be verified.

The bullet point list on the “Waymarking” site started with a reference to an early WPA-funded library in Haskell, located in a small city-owned storage building in 1933-34, near the city park as of 2005. The National WPA Library Services Program didn’t actually begin until 1935. Also, other sources do not mention the creation of eastern Oklahoma WPA Libraries Services Project until the early 1940s. However, a precursor to the WPA Library Program was the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) which began in 1933. FERA morphed into the WPA Program in 1935. If the “Waymarking” dates are correct, perhaps it may have been possible that Haskell’s 1933 Library began as part of a FERA program, and then transitioned to a WPA Library Services Project Library later.

Several of the communities in EOLS had WPA-sponsored libraries in their history. Muskogee County had ten such libraries. They included Fort Gibson, Warner, Braggs, Boynton, Webbers Falls, Porum, Briartown, Summit, Taft and Haskell. In the early 1940s Muskogee was eastern Oklahoma’s regional location for the WPA’s Library Services Program offices. Muskogee’s WPA service area also included communities in Adair, McIntosh and Sequoyah Counties.

Another discrepancy in the “Waymarking” list of dates was the listing of a Library opening in the Town Hall in 1957. No other documentation could be found verifying that occurrence. However, in the June 19, 1958 edition of the *Haskell News*, an article entitled, “*Public Library Opened Here in Christian Church,*” was posted. The article reported that the *Alpha Tau Chapter* of the *Kappa Kappa Iota* of Haskell was the Library’s sponsor. Approximately 400 adult and children’s books were furnished by the Oklahoma State Library Commission (now called the Oklahoma Department of Libraries) and free to all residents to read. The sorority members served as the librarians. “*Summer Library now open for public...located*

at the First Christian Church. The library is located in the Sunday School rooms at the southwest door. Tuesdays and Fridays 10:00 – 11:30 and 1:30 – 4:00.” Whether the Summer Library was only a one-time event or continued for several seasons is not known.

No further mention of a library in Haskell was found until the City formally requested a branch library from EOLS in early 1971, pending the search for a suitable building.

Rieger Memorial Library – Pledged to Progress

In January 1971, the Haskell City Council formally requested EOLS for the establishment of a branch library in the community, pending the City's success in searching for a suitable building. A former 1930s-era bank that had had several reincarnations over the years



Originally built as a 1930s bank building, Haskell's first Library location from 1971 to 1984. (Haskell News)

since its origin, including as a drug store and as a family clinic, was selected to be the community's new public library's location. The Haskell Jaycees, at the request of the City Council, took on the job of cleaning, plastering, painting and an overall renovation of the building for use as a library. This



Current picture of the Rieger Memorial Library. (Library photo)

first Haskell Public Library had the distinction of being the first and only Library with a walk-in vault serving as a children's area.

April 1, 1972 was the first business day for the Haskell Public Library. LaRae Polk was the first branch manager, followed a few short months later by Marie Lechner, who served as Haskell's branch manager for the following nine years, 1972-1981. Luckily, only a month before on March 7, 1972 Muskogee County had voted yes to permanently become a part of the newly-formed multi-county library system.



Haskell's first long-term branch manager, Marie Lechner, assists a new library patron in filling out a registration card in 1972. (Haskell News)

The Library's location in the bank building contained 1,500 square feet and housed 3,000 volumes. It was open 22 hours per week with a \$600 books and materials budget.

In December 1976 the owner of the bank building notified the City that he intended to sell the bank building in the near future. After that announcement, no more was heard from the owner for several years. It was into the 1980s before the owner once again notified the City that he intended to sell the building.

In November 1977 after closing hours, there was a natural gas explosion in the Library. The explosion destroyed the Library's interior ceiling. Library furniture and shelving were either

“A visitor from out of town recently walked into the Haskell Public Library, unnoticed by custodian Robert Blan who was in another portion of the building, during a time when the facility was supposed to be closed. The custodian, unnoticed by the visitor, left, and locked the door.

When the visitor realized he was locked in the building he began making calls from the library telephone to locate someone who could unlock the door. After an hour or so someone with a key was located. Librarian Marie Lechner was quoted later as saying “I hope he found the information he wanted.”

*Haskell News
1972*

Note: In a system-wide staff meeting, Marie reported to the group that the visitor had called the business next door to the Library who then called the local funeral home thinking, for whatever reason, that they may have known how to get in touch with Marie to have her return and unlock the door. Before the business person could relay the story, the receptionist asked him *“Why did you call us? Is the person dead?”*

EOLS Staff Meeting, 1972



*Theodore A. Rieger, 1894-1978.
(Library photo)*



Neva D. Rieger, 1901-1981. (Library photo)

damaged or destroyed as well. After some discussion as to whether it was the responsibility of EOLS or the City to pay for damages, the City finally assumed responsibility for the damage to the building and had it repaired. It was at this point that the EOLS Board of Trustees determined there was a need for a formal policy outlining the responsibilities of each party - EOLS and the community and county governments, in the management of each EOLS branch to minimize misunderstandings about which party is responsible for what aspect of the library branch in their respective communities.

In the summer of 1981 the City of Haskell was named a beneficiary in the will of Neva D. Rieger who willed money from her and her late husband's estate for the use by the Library. The exact amount was determined after all taxes were paid on her estate and that of her husband who had passed away in 1978. For several months, the exact amount of the remaining funds, after taxes, was estimated to be anywhere from \$100,000 to

\$200,000. Whatever the amount, it was determined the funds would be used to build a new Library building.

In April 1982 the owner of the existing building once again notified the City of his intent to sell the former bank building that housed the Library. City officials decided to call his bluff this time and leave the Library in its current location until evicted while they looked for another suitable location. The local Library Board received word on June 21

that the building would be auctioned off on July 10. As it turned out, the people who purchased the building did so with the intention of keeping it as the Library.



Harold A. French, 1918-1990. (Library photo)



Verna Marie French, 1915-2003. (Library photo)

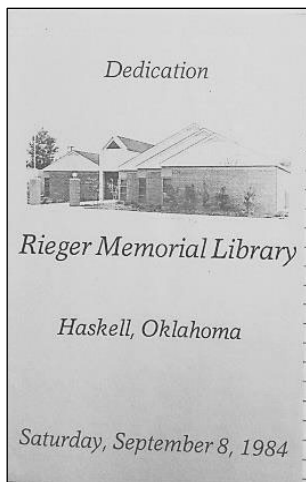
However, in January 1983 former Haskell bankers, Harold and Marie French, donated property for the construction of the new Library. The property was located one block north of the original Library and was also on the town's main thoroughfare. The groundbreaking for the new Rieger Memorial Library was held on December 16, 1983. Funds for the construction of the building came from the estate of Theodore and Neva Rieger plus an Oklahoma Department of Libraries construction grant. The 4,209 square foot building was opened to the public for the first time on August 7, 1984 and was formally dedicated on September 8, 1984. The Library celebrated its 25th anniversary on April 1, 1997.



Under construction, 1984. (Library photo)

The Rieger Memorial Library, like all EOLS branch libraries, grew in services, programs and technological advantages over time. Technologies that are now taken for granted in the twenty-first century

library were welcomed in the EOLS branches beginning in the 1980s. Copiers, fax machines, automated library catalogs and checkout procedures, printers, and public access computers were welcomed with open arms and used extensively by the Haskell community. Large-print book collections made their appearance to serve limited sight patrons as did videos, CDs, and other various media platforms as they became available.



Library's Dedication flyer, 1984, (Library photo)

In 1981 Marie Lechner retired from her job as branch manager and Helen "Tena" Kirk was hired and served as Library's branch manager for the next twenty-three years, 1981-2004.

The early 1990s witnessed the end of the manual card catalog and card-based circulation system. In 1992, EOLS adopted the *Dynix*



A new circulation desk was installed in the summer of 2010. (Library photo)

automated circulation system and catalog. In 1997 a *Dynix* system upgrade introduced receipt printers so that library users could have in hard copy a list of the materials they had checked out. In 2002 the *Dynix* system was upgraded to *Horizon*, *Dynix's* web-based circulation and cataloging system. The upgrade allowed more and faster communication between the branches making materials in Grove or Sallisaw as accessible to Haskell's patrons as the materials in Haskell were.



The Library's public access computers were a hit from day one, 2011. (Library photo)

Public access computers were introduced to the branches beginning in 1995, resulting in the need to purchase new shelving and furniture to accommodate more computers. New shelving was needed for new media formats such as videos and compact discs.



Community collaboration in the form of a display in the Library's foyer in support of the 2015 school bond election. (Library photo)

By 1998 Internet access had been made available in all the branch libraries, and in 1999 the System received a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation via the Oklahoma Department of Libraries for the purchase of computers and relevant software for all branches. The Foundation provided funds for two public access computers and Internet access for the Rieger Library.



Full house for a June 2010, "Make a Splash" Summer Reading Program. (Library photo)

In 2004 branch manager Tena Kirk retired and Mandy Lemons briefly became the Library's next branch manager followed by Angela Thornton, 2004-2008, and the Systems' first Small Branch Coordinator, Susan Engelman, in 2008-2010 followed by the second Small Branch Coordinator in 2010-2012. In an article in the *Muskogee Phoenix* published on August 15 about Lemons becoming Haskell's new branch manager, she noted that the Library now

contained 13,029 volumes, significantly more than the Library's original volume-count of 3,000 volumes in 1972. Also, now there were seven public access computers available plus a printer,



The Library hosted some eager gardeners on Earth Day, 2018. (Library photo)



A VIP was in attendance for a "On Your Mark, Get Set...Read!" in June, 2016. (Library photo)

fax machine and copier, none of which were available in the 1980s, not to mention in 1972. The objectives of the Library's most recent long-range plan at the time were to expand the Library's video collection and to target more programming for adults.

In the summer of 2007 another Public Access Computer Hardware Upgrade Grant provided the Gates Foundation was used to purchase an additional four computers and software for public use in Haskell. The grant was awarded to EOLS for the purchase of a total of fifty-seven computers for Rieger Library and the fourteen other branch libraries.

Along with the more routine library activities and programming as the years passed by, Rieger branch managers and staff continued to expand the library's outreach to the community



with an ever-expanding array of activities and collaborations. In 2000 a Friends of the Library group was organized for the Rieger Memorial Library. The purpose of the organization was to offer support to the library in whatever capacity needed. Organizer Naomi Morgan and the group's first elected president stated that the group's support could include "...the supplying of books, volunteering for book sale ...hosting an author or speaker once a month and providing lunch...."



System-wide programming appeared in the 20-teen years starting with programs such as "What Do You Geek" in 2013 and "Ready Player One" in 2019. In 2017-18 the entire System won the National Commission of Libraries and Information Science Blue Ribbon Award for Health Information Services. EOLS and its branches were the first to receive such an award



A Monarch Butterfly display was part of Teen Program called, "Monarchs, Milkweed and Mystery," held in the fall of 2019. (Library photo)



Adult programming also included crafts of all kinds. Wreath-making was a popular event during the 2017 Christmas Season. (Library photo)



The children's area of the Library is always a popular place, 2018. (Library photo)



Holly Hughes, Haskell's branch manager from 2014-2022, made friends with one of the stars of the 2019, "A Universe of Stories" Summer Reading Program. (Library photo)

in Oklahoma. The Award's purpose was to help increase awareness of healthy lifestyles and to honor libraries as trusted providers of health information. As a spin-off most, if not all the library branches sponsored health-related programs and exercise programs such as Seniorcises, SAIL, Tai Chi, yoga as well as fundamental nutrition and cooking classes.

Also, in March 2017 the Library System and the Oklahoma Healthy Aging Initiative (OHAI) Northeast Center of Healthy Aging collaborated to provide the "Eat Better, Move More" program. The program lasted six weeks and was designed to fit the interests and needs of older adults who wanted to maintain or improve their quality of life. Each week, the program focused on a different aspect of nutrition and physical activity.

Other activities that evolved in most of the branch libraries, including Rieger Memorial, included introductory classes or individual instruction opportunities on computers or other emerging technologies, teen-related programming, instructor-driven adult craft and painting classes.

Summer Reading Programs have been among the most popular programs at all branch libraries since the System began in 1970. The smaller town libraries reap some of the biggest benefits as well as some of the biggest audiences. As the years passed, the programs have become more extensive and varied. More recently, separate STEM and STEAM programs and activities have become more extensive and popular among the youth.

In February 2020 as part of Black History Month, the Library sponsored a weeklong traveling exhibit "Tulsa Race Massacre and Spirit of Greenwood" created by the Tulsa

Historical Society and Museum. The exhibit was accompanied by a presentation on the Race Massacre by Connors State College's Social Sciences Chair, Jimmie White. The exhibit and



*Left: Branch manager, Holly Hughes
with 2020 Black History Month
program presenter, Jimmie White.
(Library photo)*

System-wide protocols, policies and procedures to protect the community's health, Rieger Memorial Library reopened to serve its public.

White's presentation provided the context of what had been referred to as the Tulsa Race Riot. White had been named to the Tulsa Race riot Commission by Governor Frank Keating in 1997.

Approximately one month after the Race Massacre presentation in February, Covid's arrival as a major health concern for staff and library patrons alike necessitated the closing of Rieger Memorial and all other System branches for health and public safety reasons. Upon the development of

To be continued....