

History of the
Eastern Oklahoma
Library System

Margaret Rigney

Vol. II

Introduction to Muskogee

Prior to the Civil War, the Three Forks area was the commercial and business center of Indian Territory. The location near the junction of three rivers – the Verdigris, Grand and Arkansas – provided a transportation hub as early as 1719 when traders met and bartered with local tribes for goods.

After the Civil War there existed three settlements in close proximity that formed the trade nucleus prior to the development of the current town of Muskogee. They were Fort Gibson, Fort Davis and the Creek Agency.



A post office was established in December 1871 at Muskogee Station, as it was known originally, a mile north of its current location. A post office was established in January 1872. Shortly thereafter, the Missouri, Kansas and Texas (aka Katy) Railway relocated Muskogee Station to its current location because of the ground's unevenness at the original location.

In 1875 the cornerstone of the Union Indian Agency was laid on Prospect Hill, also known as Agency Hill, in west Muskogee and was completed in 1876. The Agency was for all Indian Territory tribes which served to make Muskogee the unofficial capital of Indian Territory at that time.

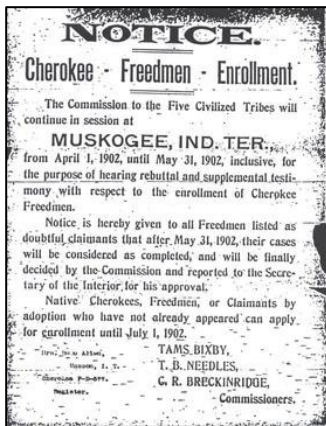
Muskogee is situated in eastern Oklahoma approximately fifty miles southeast of Tulsa on the Muskogee Turnpike and at the intersection of U.S. Highways 62, 64, and 69. The town was incorporated on March 19, 1898. Around that same time, the spelling of the community's name changed from Muscogee to Muskogee.



Postcards were used by many communities as early-day promotional tools. (Postcard History Series: Muskogee.)



Muskogee's Second Street was the center of Black commerce in Muskogee at the turn of the 20th century. The Jones Block Building was built in 1904. (Images of America: Muskogee.)



Dawes Commission notice posted in the Muskogee Phoenix newspaper.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s before statehood, Muskogee was a bustling community of Indians, Whites and Blacks. Blacks had learned that Muskogee offered excellent economic opportunities during this time. Muskogee's Second Street became a center for Black enterprise. By the early 1900s, Muskogee had several nicknames including,

"Magnificent Muskogee – Metropolis of Indian Territory," and *"The Queen City of the Southwest."* Corn, hay, wheat, cotton,

oats and livestock made their way to Muskogee's rail station for shipping up and down the Texas Trail.

The future looked so bright at that time that civic leaders initiated a 100,000 Club dedicated to the increase of the City's population to reach or exceed 100,000 residents. In 1889 Muskogee became the location of the first Federal District Court established in Indian Territory. In 1894 the Dawes Commission located in Muskogee to administer the enrollment of the Five Civilized Tribal members. A regional office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs was located in Muskogee as well. Around this time, it was claimed that

Muskogee had the largest concentration of federal employees outside of Washington D.C. At Statehood in 1907, Muskogee was Indian Territory's second largest city.

During this era of growth and prosperity, things were not all positive. Three fires interrupted the town's early development. The first fire in March 1887 destroyed most of the town's businesses. In February 1894 another fire burned eight downtown establishments and a third fire in February 1899 destroyed an additional 16 buildings. The *Muskogee Phoenix* newspaper took its name after the first fire, rising from the ashes as Muskogee itself would do in time.



Muskogee's Federal Court in session in 1897. (Images of America: Muskogee.)



Muskogee's 1899 fire. Many of the early commercial buildings and structures were wooden structures built close together on narrow streets, allowing fires to spread quickly and were harder to extinguish. (Images of America: Muskogee).



Oklahoma's first governor, Charles N. Haskell, 1860-1933. (Google Images).



Map of the proposed State of Sequoyah. (OETA, Back in Time: State of Sequoyah).

Charles N. Haskell, who became Oklahoma's first Governor, called Muskogee home after the Ohio native came to the area and became a railroad promoter and town site promoter for both Muskogee and nearby Haskell.

Haskell was instrumental in forming and promoting the Indian Territory's proposed State of Sequoyah. Sequoyah was to be composed of 48

counties in Indian Territory. It was to have a two-house legislature, a Supreme Court and a Judiciary with the Capitol to be, not in Muskogee, but in neighboring Fort Gibson to the east across the Arkansas River. The Sequoyah Constitutional met in Muskogee on August 21, 1905. The resulting Constitution was ratified on November 11, 1905, but it received no support in Washington, D.C.

Instead, President Roosevelt initiated the Enabling Act in June 1906 giving notice that there would be no consideration given to the formation of

two separate states. The Act called for a Constitutional Convention that included 55 delegates each from Indian Territory, Oklahoma Territory and two Osage Nation representatives. They were to meet in Guthrie, the Oklahoma Territory Capitol, in November 1906. The Convention ended in March 1907 and the new State of Oklahoma officially formed on November 16, 1907 with

C. N. Haskell, as the new State's Governor. While the proposed State of Sequoyah did not come to pass, its Constitution, hammered out in Muskogee in a few short weeks, became the foundation for the Oklahoma Constitution.

In 1900 Muskogee's population stood at 4,254. In 1910 its population rose to 25,278. The censuses of 1950-1990 remained relatively constant in the 37,000 range. Its population in 2010 peaked to 39,223, and in 2020 the population was recorded as dropping back to mid-century levels of 36,878.



The Port of Muskogee, east of town on the Arkansas River. (Google Images).

Historically, Muskogee was regarded primarily as having an agrarian-based economy. Currently it serves not only as an agricultural-based economy, but also, as the light industrial, transportation and distribution hub for east-central Oklahoma. Davis Field serves as the local, regional airport. Freight can be shipped by the Union Pacific Railroad or by barge at the Port of Muskogee on the Arkansas River.



Campus of Henry Kendall College, Muskogee. (Oklahoma Historical Society).

As an education center, Muskogee was once the home of Henry Kendall College founded in the late 1882 as a Presbyterian School for Girls. Two years later it became Henry Kendall College in 1894. The College moved to Tulsa in 1904 and ultimately evolved into the University of Tulsa.



Bacone College was founded in 1880 as Bacone Indian University and as of this writing still exists as a private, church-affiliated institution. Muskogee Junior College, regarded as the State's first municipal Oklahoma Junior College, was established in 1920 and eventually closed in 1962 due to financial problems.



Connors State College in Warner and Northeastern State University in Tahlequah both created as acts of the first Legislature in 1908 have branch campuses in Muskogee today.



NORTHEASTERN
STATE UNIVERSITY

Culturally, Muskogee is known for its Azalea Festival in April; the Garden of Lights in Honor Heights Park in December; the Three



U.S.S. Batfish, a World War II submarine commissioned in 1943, now resting at the Port of Muskogee. It is a 312' long and 27' wide, Balao Class submarine. (Google Images).

Rivers Museum; War Memorial Park, home of the submarine, *USS Batfish*; and the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame, to name only a few of Muskogee's many landmarks.

Muskogee's notables are far too numerous to list in detail. They include people from all walks of life known for contributions at all levels - locally, regionally

and nationally. They include historians, politicians, actors, athletes, educators, artists, educators, military and law enforcement, activists, U.S. and State Senators and Representatives, Civil Rights activists, scientists, judges and musicians, to name only a few.



*Alice Robertson,
1854-1931.
(Oklahoma
Historical Society).*

Historically, three names come to mind when thinking about Muskogee. They included Mary Alice Robertson who was the first woman elected to Congress from Oklahoma. She was born in Indian Territory at Tullahassee Mission. College educated in the east, Robertson returned to Indian Territory and taught at a couple of Creek schools before heading the Presbyterian School for Girls in 1882. In 1900 she was chosen as supervisor of all the Creek Indian Schools until she was appointed as the Muskogee Postmaster by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1904. In 1920 Robertson ran for the U.S. House of Representatives from the Second District and won a two-year term. In 1923 President Harding appointed Robertson to a position in the Muskogee Veteran's Hospital.



*Carolyn Foreman,
1872-1967.
(Oklahoma Historical
Society).*

Grant and Carolyn Foreman were noted Oklahoma historians. Both were born in Illinois but did not meet until then Carolyn Thomas's father was appointed a federal judge and the family moved to Muskogee, Indian Territory in 1897. Grant Foreman came to Muskogee in 1899 as a field worker for the Dawes Commission. After working with the Commission for four years, Foreman joined the private law practice of John R. Thomas, Carolyn Thomas' father. After their marriage in 1905, they both developed their interests in research led to both of them writing numerous publications on Oklahoma history and Oklahoma-related topics. In 1973 The Thomas-Foreman Home in Muskogee was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



*Grant Foreman, 1869-
1953. (Oklahoma
Historical Society).*

Limiting the list to some of the more recent notables active since the mid-twentieth century was still a daunting task, but, in the interest of brevity, the more recent notables will be limited to only a few. They include the Edmondson political dynasty, which included J. Howard Edmondson, the State's 16th governor from 1958- 1965; Edmond (Ed) Edmondson, U.S. Representative from 1953-1973; and, Drew Edmondson, Oklahoma's 16th Attorney General from 1995-2011.



*Ed Edmondson,
1919-1990.
(Google Images).*

Artist Joan Hill was a famous Native American artist of Creek-Cherokee descent. She painted in several styles and media beginning in 1952. By 2001, Hill had accumulated 270 awards, making her the most honored American Indian woman artist in the United States.



*Sandy Garrett, 1943-
(Google Images).*

Sandy Garrett, educator and to date, the longest-termed State Superintendent of Public Instruction was the first woman to hold the Oklahoma State Superintendent's office and the only woman to hold a statewide office for five consecutive terms from 1990 to 2010. Prior to her role as State Superintendent, Garrett served as Oklahoma's Secretary of Education from 1988-1995.



*J. Howard
Edmondson,
1925-1971.
(Google
Images).*

Larry Winget, the most famous former Muskogee Public Library aide and early EOLS bookmobile driver, is now a popular author and professional motivational speaker known as the "Pitbull of Personal Development" and "World's Only Irritational Speaker." After working at MPL and EOLS while attending NSU he later became Southwestern Bell's first male telephone operator in Muskogee.



*Joan Hill, 1930-2020
(Google Images).*



*Drew
Edmondson,
1946- (Google
Images).*



*Larry Winget,
1952- (Google
Images).*

Muskogee's Early Library History



Local WCTU members, 1888. Organizer, Laura Harsha, is in the front row, fourth from left. (Images of America: Muskogee).



Ora Eddleman Reed, age 13, was Muskogee's first volunteer librarian. She later attended Henry Kendall College and became a renowned journalist known for her contributions to American Indian literature and journalism. (Oklahoma Historical Society).

Muskogee's early library history was extensive, starting long before Statehood and, once again, with women playing significant roles in the establishment of the Muskogee Public Library.

Fourteen years after the establishment of the national Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1874, a local WCTU chapter was organized in Muskogee

in 1888 by Laura Harsha, wife of a local merchant. In 1894 WCTU Library services began with the donation of approximately 100 volumes to a volunteer group of the Muskogee chapter. Ora Eddleman, aged 13, was the group's first volunteer librarian.

In 1900 the Young Ladies' Reading Club was formed with the primary objective of starting a public library. The Library first began when Club member, Helen (Severs) Robb, started soliciting memberships and money for the Muskogee Library Association. Her husband, Andrew Robb, provided a room in the Patterson Building, even providing the use of one of his bookcases, and the first Public Library became a reality. As the number of volumes and usage grew the Library moved to a room in the C.W Turner Building, "upstairs adjoining Chief Porter's office," as reported by the Club's secretary and treasurer, Helen Severs, in the

"From Mrs. Harsha, President of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union we learn that the ladies have on hand for the library fund about \$130.00. They hope to raise and clear thousand with which to erect a suitable library and reading room."

*Muskogee Phoenix
September 11, 1890*

November 1, 1900 edition of the *Muskogee Phoenix*. (Creek Chief Pleasant Porter, was President of the Sequoyah Constitutional Convention in 1905). In the article, Severs also encouraged people to attend a meeting at 3:00 on Saturday, November 3, to "talk over the best plan to raise money" for the new library. She asked for even more members to join the Muskogee

Library Association, “to help in the establishment of the library and paying your two dollars or any sum you feel able to give.” A 1972 edition of the *Muskogee Phoenix* summarizing the early years of the Muskogee Public Library’s history, noted that Ora Eddleman once again served as the volunteer librarian.

Notice

“All persons having books belonging to the W.C.T.U. Library will greatly oblige by returning them to the librarian, Miss Ora Eddleman, living over the Business College in W.C.T.U. building, or to Mrs. Harsha on South Main street.”

Jennie Brassel. Secretary

*Muskogee Phoenix
July 12, 1894*

As early as 1903, the Club members solicited the Chamber of Commerce to correspond with Andrew Carnegie to see what assistance might be available to build a library building. Carnegie offered \$5,000 for the Library, provided the citizens would guarantee proper support, a condition of all Carnegie grants. Muskogee citizens resented his offer as an insult. “*Make your offer \$20,000 and we may take it under consideration,*” wrote the town officers.” And, at that point in the summer of 1904, negotiations stalled.



The Turner Building was built by Charles N. Haskell and named for businessman, Clarence Turner. It sat on the southwest corner of Court and Third Streets. (Postcard History Series: Muskogee).

In the meantime, the local newspapers debated the need for a public library for the “*Queen City of the Southwest.*” In 1905 the *Muskogee Democrat* noted that both Ardmore and Tahlequah had been awarded Carnegie grants for the construction of libraries and editorized that Muskogee deserved to have one as well.

In December 1905 Edgar Rulison offered to donate land located on Second Street, between Court and Denison, valued at \$5,000 for building a Carnegie Library. This was the first incidence of what turned out to be a series of searches for a suitable building location that lasted for almost ten years before city officials could agree on an appropriate library site because of location, cost or both.

While the negotiations were ongoing with the Carnegie Foundation, suitable building locations searched and City fathers looked for ways to maintain the proposed Library, the existing public library moved yet again. This time, it returned under the auspices of the WTCU in their building on 118 North “C” Street. The WTCU had remained a supporter of the fledging Library in the interim. In 1901 they had donated \$20 worth of books to both the public and

school libraries with the provision to “*put good literature in (the) hands of young people.*” An article in the *Muskogee Democrat* in August 1905 noted that the WTCU library was now open to the public at all times of day. There was a free public reading room with books, magazines and papers. Annual memberships were \$2 per family.

Editor’s Notes

“It is a good time to start an agitation for a city library. It is a shame and disgrace that a city of this size has neither a public reading room or a YMCA.”

Muskogee Times Democrat
August 17, 1908

Another early roadblock to obtaining a Carnegie grant for a Library appeared in late 1906 when local officials, including soon-to-be Governor, Charles Haskell, proposed to interest Carnegie in giving funds for the construction of public roads in the proposed new state instead of public libraries. In 1910 the *Muskogee County Democrat* noted that the “*Scotchman, or rather his secretaries, however, did not take kindly to the proposition.*”

Meanwhile, ten women organized the Women’s History Club on September 23, 1908, and merged with the thirty members of the Young Ladies Reading Club. The History Club’s cultural objective was to study ancient history. Their civic objective mirrored and expanded on that of the Reading Club, “*...is a broader culture, helpfulness toward others and to found and maintain a public library for Muskogee. The library having been established and given to it City*

Good Report From Library
(Abridged due to faded print)

Books bought – 123
Books donated – 28
Books loaned – 254
Visitors – 240
Average daily visits – 14

Revenue:
Sale of cards - 95¢
City Council – \$50.00

At this monthly meeting the group also decided to purchase \$75 of additional books and to “*install a system of cataloging and loaning books.*”

The Muskogee Evening News
March 3, 1909

of Muskogee, the Club has pledged to continue its civic work.” The combined group of forty civic-minded women hit the ground running, holding thirty-three sessions, sixteen study classes, fifteen business meetings and two executive meetings all in the effort to get a library going. One member gathered together the 300-400 books that had been acquired to date by all the previous efforts made to establish a public library. Another group interceded with the “*City Fathers*” and enlisted their financial help for a commitment of \$50 monthly for support of the Library.

By December 5, 1908 an announcement was placed in *Guilick’s Weekly Review* that the new library would be open December 9. The library would be returning to the Turner Building, this time in Room #7. Donations of

bookcases and furniture were acquired. Lettering was painted on the room's door and windows. At this point, it was also decided to post and receive applications for the position of librarian. The librarian would be paid a salary of \$15 per month and required to keep the library room open from 1:30 to 9:30 p.m. every day. Jessie Croom applied for the position and, by doing so, she became the first paid librarian of the Muskogee Public Library.

The library division of the Women's Club did not rest on their laurels after the library was established. Their ultimate goal was to turn the library over to the City for use by everyone. In the meantime, they advertised for subscriptions, a common method of obtaining funds for public libraries in the early days. They also sponsored operettas, the first one being the "Merry Milkmaid," and sponsored other musical performances for holidays such as St. Patrick's Day or during the Christmas season. Skating parties at the local Acme Rink were also among the most popular fund-raising events.

Moving forward, by November 1909 the Muskogee Library Association had made the preliminary steps to secure a Carnegie Library. They proposed to ask Carnegie's Foundation for a sum of \$75,000.

Several men were made auxiliary members of the Association to help them with the appeal to the City fathers for the required ten percent of the value of the building for maintenance and upkeep, the important first step needed to apply for a Carnegie grant.

In February 1910 Library Board President Irvin Donovan submitted a request to the City Council to support a resolution providing an appropriation of \$200 per month in support of the Library. He told the Council that Women's History Club members had reported to the Board that there were 1,700 volumes in the Library as well as twenty annual magazine subscriptions. He told the Council that when the City acquired a Carnegie Library, it should have at minimum of 50,000 volumes so it needed to build up to that number. He continued his report by proposing that the librarian should be employed for \$50 a month. Maintenance and other incidentals would make that total about \$100. The other \$100 would be expended for books. After Donovan's

Oklahoma Library Figures

"There are now twenty-seven libraries on Oklahoma listed with...the state library association.... Nine are college libraries, one a high school library and seventeen listed as Carnegie, public or city libraries.

*Muskogee Public Library –
1000 volumes; established last year
with 600 volumes."*

*New State Tribune
June 3, 1909*

report and request the Council voted unanimously in favor of the allocating the money to the fledging library.



One of the original tenants of the new Equity Building in 1910 was the City of Muskogee Library. It occupied rooms on the Building's 4th floor. At the time, the Library claimed to have had 6,900 volumes available. (Postcard History Series: Muskogee).

By mid-April 1910 the Library found a new home on the fourth floor of the downtown Equity Building. This Library utilized three rooms of the building due to the rapidly growing collection now estimated to be 2,000 volumes.

In September 1910 Carroll Bucher, an attorney affiliated with the Library Board, announced that Mr. Carnegie, in his first direct offer made the Muskogee, promised \$45,000 for a Library building pending the City's purchase of a suitable site. Earlier, Carnegie's



Muskogee Street scene, 1910. (Postcard History Series: Muskogee).

secretary had written to Bucher that... *"he wanted to wait until the 1910 census was taken and results posted in Washington, D.C."* before committing to a firm offer.

Besides providing a suitable building site, the City had to agree to maintain a free public library at a cost of not less than \$4,500 annually. The City Council had already provided a means for a special assessment of 1.8 mills for library purposes which would net more annually than the required \$4,500.

Several possible building sites had been identified over the years. Now it was time to find the most suitable site. A week after Bucher received the letter from Carnegie's secretary, the Library committee met in the Equity Building rooms to look at proposals for building site donations. Of course, along with those people the committee knew had made previous site donation offers there was the inevitable general public "discussions" as to where best the Library should be located. Some favored the east side of town while others favored a more centralized location to downtown. Still others thought it should be near the high school for the convenience of students. At that time Central High was on the corner of Dayton and "E" streets, which was also on the east side of town.

Six months after Carnegie's offer, the City still hadn't been able to obtain a donated site and, at that point, refused to purchase a site at any price. Even former Governor Haskell had offered a block of ground but City officials thought it to be too far from the City's center.

By mid-July 1911 the City Council budget included \$7,500 for the purchase of a building site. By this time, three sites located east of the MK&T tracks had been identified as possible locations. The City Council finally relented to the fact they would have to purchase a building site and approved the amount. In September 1911 a resolution to purchase Lot 6, Block 390, at the southeast corner of Broadway and "D" street owned by Robert L. Owen, was authorized in a City Council meeting, payable out of the Library fund levied for the current fiscal year. Immediately, the call went out for architects to submit drawings for the new library building to be received at the Library rooms in the Equity Building no later than November 1, 1911. Finally, a Carnegie Library for Muskogee was a reality - except there were still a few more issues before construction actually began.

Again, there were those who felt the east side location chosen did not best serve the community in general. Petitions were circulated among citizens to be turned over the the Library Board and the City Council requesting the library site moved to another location. It can only be assumed that the petitions did not gain traction overall with either the Library Board or the City.

Meanwhile, attorney Carroll Bucher had gone to New York in 1911 to see Carnegie regarding the fund for the new library to begin construction in 1912. The original fund quoted by Carnegie was \$45,000 in 1910 but when Bucher went to see Carnegie and his secretary regarding the Library plans, Bucher stated that Carnegie had signified his willingness to increase his donation to \$55,000 and plans were drawn accordingly. Then in 1912, with construction



Muskogee Public Library's Carnegie Building, Broadway and D Street, circa 1914. (Images of America: Muskogee).



Carroll Bucher, visiting the Library in 1952, was one of the original MPL Board members in 1910 and served as the Board's attorney. (Muskogee Daily Phoenix & Times Democrat).

PRESENT THIS CARD TO BE RECEIVED ENCLOSE THIS CARD WHEN MAILING CHECK		No Discount After 10th Inst.	
Muskogee Gas and Electric Co., Inc. 23-25 West Okmulgee Ave. Office Hours: 9:30 a. m. to 5:30 p. m.			
For Elec. Current from <u>OCT. 6</u> reading <u>NOV 14</u> reading		Electric	
Present Reading <u>34</u> 000	Meter Constant _____	4.67	4.67
Previous Reading <u>0</u> 000		.46	.46
Difference <u>34</u> 000		4.21	4.21
10 per ct. discount if paid before 10th inst.			
NET AMOUNT _____			
Dollars _____			
TOTAL \$ _____			
READ THIS: Bills are payable at our office on or before 10th inst. If not paid by 15th service may be discontinued without further notice. FAILURE TO RECEIVE BILL DOES NOT ENTITLE ONE TO DISCOUNT.			

looming, Bucher wanted to confirm once again the correct figures with Carnegie. Evidently, Bucher was a good negotiator because Carnegie ultimately agreed to a \$60,000 donation for the Library provided the City Council appropriated a correspondingly increased maintenance fund.

Report of Cancellations, Transfers or Endorsements on Policies issued by F.W. Badler			
Agent of _____ for the Northwestern National Insurance Co. of Milwaukee			
No. of Policy <u>753</u>	Name of Insured <u>Board of Directors of Muskogee Free Public Library</u>	Amount <u>\$500.00</u>	
Date of Endorsement <u>10-9</u>	Full Term of Policy <u>one year</u>	Rate <u>\$1.68</u>	
Date of Policy <u>Jan. 5</u>	Full Term Rate <u>1.98</u>	Before Prem. <u></u>	
Date Renewal _____	Why changed? <u>copy of endorsement</u>	Before Prem. <u></u>	
The property insured under this policy has been moved to a two story, brick building with composition roof, situated #107 North "C" St. Risk #1192, Muskogee, Oklahoma. All liability to cease in former location. On account of a higher rate in the new location, an additional premium of \$1.68 is charged the assured.			
The NEW Risk is shown on Reg. No. <u>64</u> Page <u>62</u> Serial <u>30</u> -Report Number <u>107 North "C"</u>			

Just ten months prior to the opening of the long-awaited Carnegie-funded Library to the public in a pouring rain storm on May 4, 1914, the name of the Library was formally changed to Muskogee Public Library. As such, it served the library needs of the

**NO DUST ON BOOKS
IN LOCAL LIBRARY;
USE 115,000 A YEAR**

Muskogee Now Second in State For Number of Volumes Read; Serves All Classes

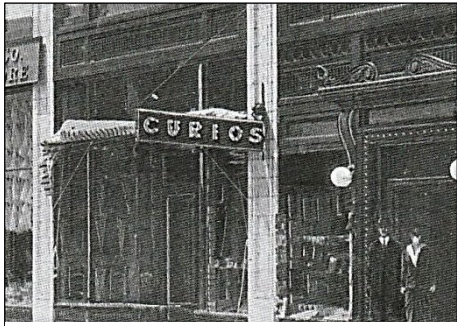
Muskogee and surrounding area in the then new Carnegie building not only for the next fifty-eight years but also into the twenty-first century.

LIBRARY FREELY USED BY PUBLIC

Steady Gain in the Reading Habit
Shown by Large Number of
Volumes Circulating.

While Attorney Bucher, the City Council and the local Library Board negotiated with Carnegie for a new building, Muskogee librarian, Jessie Croom, continued her work in the library, growing the collection, attending the State Librarian's Association's meetings where she served as the organization's first vice-president in 1911, seeing that the library's bills were paid, books were shelved, carrying on the daily duties of a one-person office and, once again, moving the library from the fourth floor of the Equity Building to yet another "C" Street location. This time, the library moved to 107 North "C" Street, in its final move prior to moving into the long-awaited Carnegie Library in 1914.

Librarians succeeding Jessie Croom in the first decade of the Library's existence included Emily Turner, Mary Radford and Sarah Noble. Not much is known about these ladies; however, in researching Eufaula's early library history, the *Indian Journal* reported in 1913 that Muskogee's Librarian, Mary Radford, came to Eufaula to help their women's group set up a library on the second floor of the Foley Building. Miss Radford set them up with a basic classification and circulation system and other library start-up basics. Mary



One of the Library's "branch libraries" in the 1920s was the downtown Curio shop. While it is unknown if this is the exact Curio Shop in question, it was a popular store, located on Fourth Street. It was discontinued as a branch in early 1925. (Postcard History Series: Muskogee).

Radford was also in charge of the move to the new Carnegie building in 1914. She was also involved in the State Library Association as well.

Ruth Hammond served the MPL halfway through the decade of the 1920's followed by Cora Case Porter who had one of the longest tenures of any of the Muskogee librarians, from 1925 to 1945. Gertrude Bryan Davis finished out the decade of the 1940s.

It should be noted at this point that the Muskogee Library and the librarians and staff from its inception in



Cora Case Porter was MPL's 6th Librarian. She served from 1925 to 1945, making her the longest tenured Librarian to date.

1908 were fully involved in the national, regional and state Library Associations. Many served as presidents or vice-presidents of the State Library Association now referred to as the Oklahoma Library Association. Others, like Cora Case Porter, also served as Oklahoma's representative in regional organizations such as the Southwest Library Association in 1926. The Oklahoma Library Association even met in Muskogee during the earliest years of statehood, even before the construction of the Carnegie Library in 1914. Meetings and attendees were spread all over town in available hotels and large



Miss Little Bo-Peep was the first prize winner of the 1926 Masquerade Parade in her age category. Spaulding Park, the closest park to the Library, was a popular site for Library programs for many years.



Tom-Tit-Tot, a character from an English fairy tale akin to Rumpelstiltskin, didn't win a major prize in the 1926 Masquerade Parade, but probably deserved an award for originality for portraying a relatively little-known fairy tale character. (Muskogee Times Democrat).

community halls since there was no room available in the existing Library to hold meetings of any type.

These twenty years of the Library's existence were challenging ones – from the expansive growth of the late 20s, to the Depression of the 1930s and the War years of the 40s, the Muskogee Library met the challenges of them all.

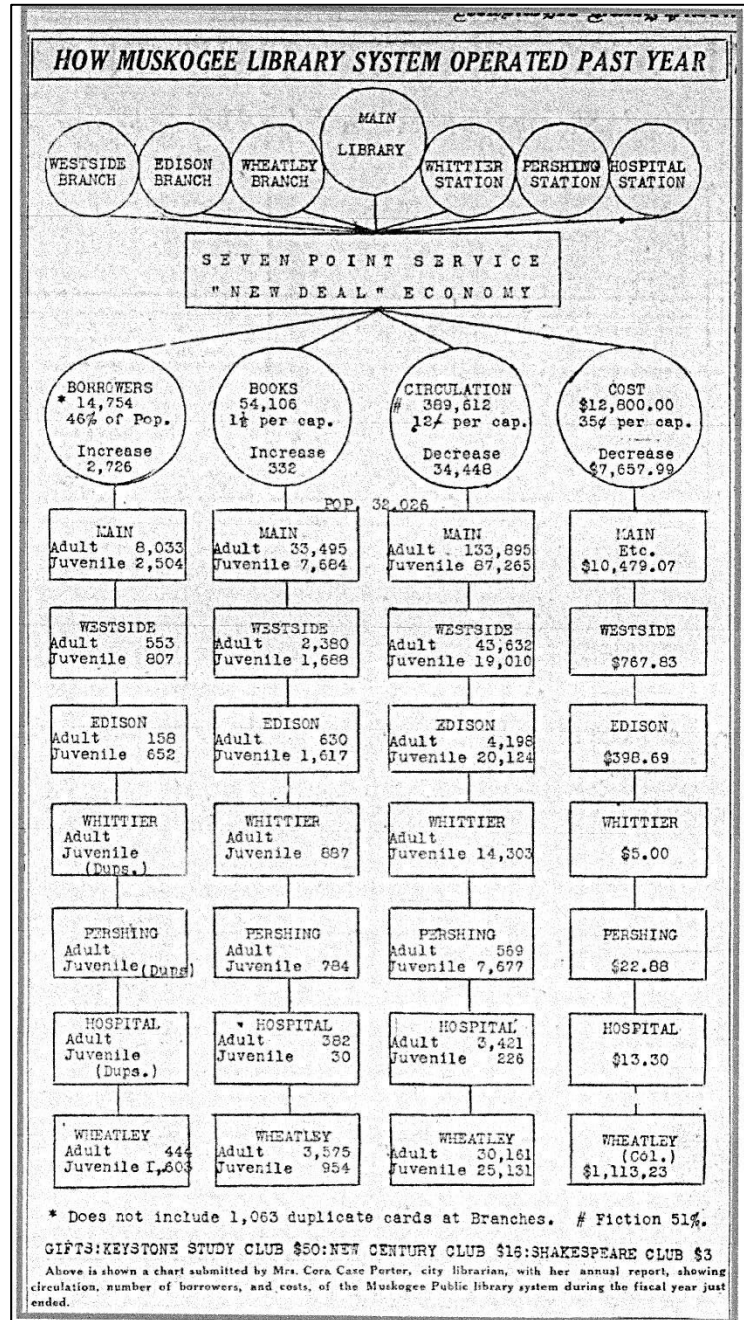
An article in the June 14, 1922, edition of the *Muskogee Times Democrat* noted that the Library now had 21,705 available



The Library's first book drop made its appearance in the summer of 1931. (Muskogee Daily Phoenix & Times-Democrat).

volumes compared to the fewer than 2,000 volumes Librarian Jessie Croom had when the Library's doors opened in 1908. The current Librarian, Ruth Hammond, had a staff of seven compared to Croom's staff of one, herself. Over 8,000 citizens had library cards. Ms. Hammond also noted in the article that the Library had one of the most complete geological collections in the state due primarily to the fact that area Congresswoman Alice Robertson had put the Library on the mailing list of the U.S. Geological Survey.

By the summer of 1922, the Library had two "substations" in town, West High School served primarily students and families and the downtown Curio Shop was geared more for



This chart was part of the published Annual Library Report for 1933-34. It showed the number of borrowers, total volumes, circulation and cost for each of the seven branch libraries making up the "Muskogee Library System." (Muskogee Daily Phoenix & Times Democrat).

businessmen and shoppers. By the end of the decade there were also Library substations at Whitter, Pershing, and Edison schools, the Hospital and at the Wheatley (Colored) Library.

Story Hours, reading clubs, summer reading programs, while not organized state-wide as they are now known, were as popular in the 1920s and 1930s as they are today. Spaulding Park served as a favorite meeting place, weather permitting, for many early library programs and special events. So much so that the *Muskogee Times-Democrat* ran a headline in the July 31, 1926, edition stating, “Almost a Riot at Park while Giving Prizes.” The occasion was a Storybook Masquerade Party, a combination of storyhour and the vacation reading club participants. Little Bo-Peep won first prize.

In 1928, the *Muskogee Phoenix* noted large circulation increases over previous years of the decade with the July 1, 1928, circulation figures topping out at 184,090, a 60 percent increase in circulation over the 1922 figures.

As was the case for many during the Depression Era by 1934 the Library was operating under reduced budgets, reduced staff and reduced hours. Even then, Library records indicate that the main library and its substations which by this time had been renamed branches, served half the town’s population. The Library’s registration numbers were up to 14,754 or 46 percent of Muskogee’s residents. Circulation figures dropped; however, because of the reductions in materials’ purchases, down to \$750 for all its locations combined. Several civic clubs donated funds to help with materials purchases such as the Keystone Study, New Century and Shakespeare Clubs. Donations were also made based on an appeal by the Lions Club, newspaper editorials and friends. Librarian Cora Case Porter, provided the newspaper with a detailed report of the Library’s 1933-34 year, entitled, “*Seven Point Service ‘New Deal’ Economy.*”



Muskogee Public Library’s circulation desk, date unknown. (Library files).

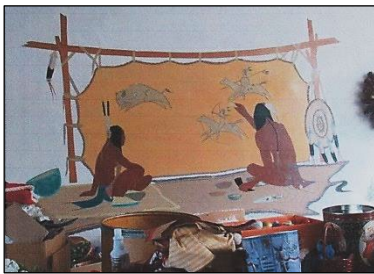
Toward the end of the decade, District 2 Congressman Jack Nichols, announced the allocation of \$20,700 in Works Progress Administration Funds (WPA) for Muskogee County to help in the organization and operation of branch library services. Haskell, Fort Gibson, Boynton, Warner, Braggs, Webbers Falls, Porum, Briartown, Summit and Taft communities were able to



Native American artist, Alex McIntosh, aka Acee Blue Eagle, 1907?-1959. (Google Images)

have public libraries as long as the funds lasted. In October of 1940, the Muskogee County communities had a total of 2,446 registered readers and had circulated 2,287 books and 2,477 magazines. Traveling libraries were made available for more rural routes. The Muskogee Public Library did not receive WPA funds directly under this particular WPA program.

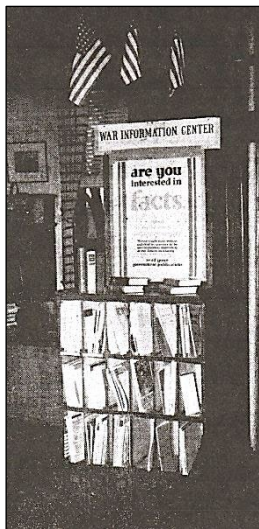
One way that the Muskogee Public Library did profit from WPA funds was through the WPA Public Works of Art Project. Creek-Pawnee artist and Bacone College Art Instructor, Alex McIntosh, otherwise known as Acee Blue



One of Blue Eagle's 1937 murals was under restoration in the former Carnegie Library Building in 2023. (Muskogee Daily Phoenix)

Eagle, joined the Project in 1934 and besides painting murals in several Oklahoma public buildings, he painted several murals in the Library's Carnegie Building in the spring of 1937. The murals were left to deteriorate when the Library moved in 1972. Local Native artist, Dana Tiger, worked to restore the murals in June 2023.

As the War years loomed in the 1940s, budget reductions continued to loom over the Library even though



The Library's War Information Center kiosk in the 1940s. (Muskogee Daily Phoenix)

pleas for larger budgets to the City from the Library were annual requests. By the 1942-43 fiscal year the total collection had grown to 66,239 volumes. More and more often the Library published extensive new book lists and notices of regular and special programs of all kinds. Ms. Porter was a firm believer in publishing the Library's annual reports in detail so the public knew where every dollar went and that the city government was aware of how much it took financially for Muskogee to have a top-rate library. She also conducted regular monthly radio broadcasts on various topics, generally library or programming-related, but, in reality, anything she thought would be of interest. In the summer of 1942, the Muskogee Public Library received the publicity award at the annual conference of the American Library Association, sponsored by the H.W. Wilson Publishing Company.

Also in 1942, the Library was deemed a “War Information Center” providing the public with monthly information about the organization of national defense, the armed forces and civilian participation in the war cause.

Besides providing the public with current information about America’s war effort, providing books and reading materials to soldiers and their families alike was a high priority of the Library in the early 1940s, too. The Library gathered donated books for the base libraries at Camp Gruber and the Army Air Field in Muskogee as well as providing books to local and regional USOs for soldiers’ families.



Gertrude Bryan Davis, was MPL Librarian from 1945 to 1952. (Muskogee Daily Phoenix)

In February 1945 the City Council approved purchase of a sixty-foot residential lot east of the Library to be used for a possible parking lot in the near future and perhaps for the eventual expansion of the building itself. The motion passed unanimously in the City Council.

Cora Case Porter retired in August of 1945. She had asked the City Council in July for a \$25 dollar raise from \$225 per month to \$250 and was denied. Porter was succeeded by Gertrude Bryan Davis, who served as Librarian until 1952.



Children’s Room in the Muskogee Public Library circa 1930-1940s. (Library Photo).



Dr. Grant Foreman, 1869-1953. (Library photo).

Bookmobile service to the Muskogee community was a dream of Davis from the beginning of her tenure. As early as 1946, she began campaigning for a Bookmobile to anyone, group, club, or local city official who would listen. She provided Bookmobile-related stories to the local newspapers. In 1949, she obtained a Bookmobile from Little Rock, Arkansas, and had it on display at the Library for the public to explore. It wasn’t until 1953 that a house trailer shell fitted with bookshelves built by Muskogee’s Central High’s shop class fulfilled Davis’ dream of a “Library on Wheels” for the community.

In October 1945 Davis and staff did some “interior renovations” of MPL and converted the west Reading Room on the Library’s first floor into the Children’s Reading Room. In March 1946, the former Children’s Area in the northwest area of the second floor became the Library’s first designated Grant Foreman Room, a Room dedicated not only to

the works of Dr. Foreman, but also, to Oklahoma and area history. Named after Grant Foreman who was a distinguished Oklahoma historian and author, lawyer, City Council member, Library Board member and avid library supporter. The Grant Foreman Room has been an integral part of the Muskogee Public Library ever since.

On December 9, 1948 the Library marked its fortieth birthday. Forty years earlier, on December 9, 1908 the Library opened under the sponsorship of the Muskogee Women's History Club. Since it originally was operated by a Club, it was not a free service, - \$1 memberships were required in advance. The first Muskogee Public Library became the Muskogee Free Public Library when it was presented to the City in December 1909 and on February 9, 1910 the History Club formally turned over its collection of books and equipment to the City. In 1908, approximately 400 books were available. By December 1948, the volume number had grown to 80,000.

Librarian Gertrude Davis ushered in the decade of the 1950s prior to her retirement, followed by three of the four men to have ever held the Head Librarian position at the Muskogee Public Library – Joe Templeton, Richard Covey and William Stewart. The three men served Muskogee for a total of fifteen years with Stewart serving the bulk of that time at eleven years.

Beginning with the postwar 1940s and into the decades preceding the arrival of the multi-county library system in the 1970s, news articles and accounts of library events, activities, news, etc., became more routine in the sense that the Library was an

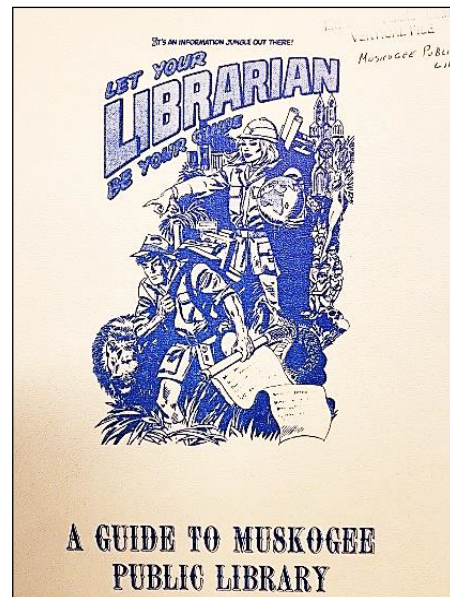
Library Installs Machine System of Checking Books

"A new deal in library operation has been inaugurated at the Muskogee Public Library, where a new machine, electrically operated, will check out books, saving time and eliminating errors."

*Muskogee Times-Democrat
July 8, 1946*



A Library staff member tried out the new street-side book-drop in 1959. (Muskogee Daily Phoenix & Times-Democrat).

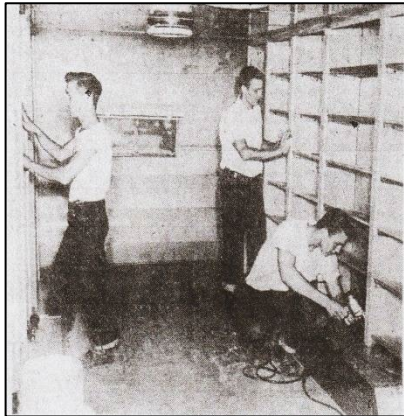


Cover of a Library Guide, date unknown. (Library files).

established institution in the eyes of the community it served much in the same way that most of the System's branch libraries are seen today in their communities. Their community libraries have always "been there" in the eyes of most who live there currently. There wasn't much news concentrated on library budgets, finance, or library-city politics. "New Books" notices were predominant and were regularly published. Club meetings, educational and



Joe Hayes Templeton, was MPL's Librarian from 1952 to 1954. (Muskogee Daily Phoenix & Times-Democrat).

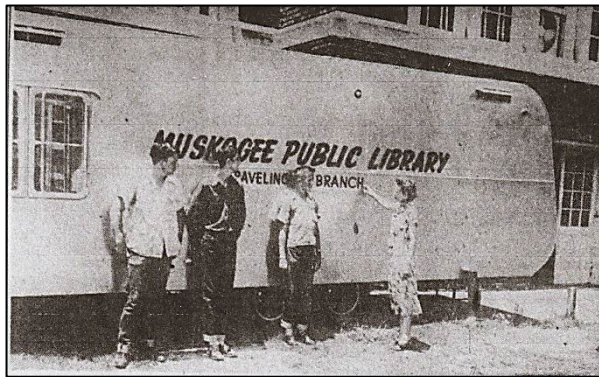


Bookmobile shelving construction underway, 1953. (Muskogee Daily Phoenix & Times-Democrat).

recreational meetings and workshops, displays, activities, speakers, holiday programming, children's storyhours, reading clubs

and vacation or Summer Reading Programs were the main Library news events. Library programming slowly began to favor children and youth over those of adults as the postwar years changed American society and family structure. Crimes against the Library, such as vandalism and petty theft, began to appear occasionally in the local papers.

Joe Templeton was the first male Librarian of Muskogee Public Library in 1952. He came from the Tulsa Public Library and served for two years before moving on. He was instrumental; however, in seeing that Librarian Davis' dream of a "Library on Wheels" become a reality.



Muskogee's first Bookmobile in 1953. Marguerite Bass, Children's Librarian and Bookmobile supervisor pictured talking with some of the Central High Shop Class students. (Muskogee Daily Phoenix & Times-Democrat).

Using the cost figures from Tulsa's Library of \$13,000 minimally for a new Bookmobile, Library Board member, Perry

Cleveland, obtained a house trailer shell, added \$50 worth of lumber and building materials and the labor of the Central High School shop classes and produced Muskogee's first Bookmobile for less than \$2,000 in June 1953. Originally, it was stocked only with children's books from the

existing collection of the main Library. A vehicle to tow the trailer was loaned to the Library by the Commercial National Bank.



Some of the first young patrons of the new Traveling Library service, summer 1953. (Muskogee Daily Phoenix & Times-Democrat).

The Bookmobile was originally designed primarily as a supplement to the area elementary schools' libraries and for bringing summer reading materials to the community's children. Children's Librarian Marquerite Bass, was placed in charge of the new mobile service.

By August 1953 the use of the "Traveling Branch" was beginning to pay off in increased circulation figures for the Library, especially in the



An outdoor display case graced the front lawn of the Library for several years. (Muskogee Daily Phoenix & Times-Democrat).

children's area. The books circulated since the first Bookmobile's summer visit in June was 2,424.

Approximately 850 new library cards were issued through the Bookmobile during the same time period. The average number of new cards issued at the main Library had routinely been around only 300 annually.

By February 1954 a weekly schedule for the Traveling Branch was posted in the newspapers that

included an east and a west stop for adult users in addition to the existing school stops. The east stop was at a drug store on East Okmulgee Street and the west one was at a Fire Station at Junction and Okmulgee. A wide selection of adult interest books were added to the Bookmobile's collection by this time.

Templeton, in his brief tenure, was credited not only for initiating the Traveling Branch library service, but also with the additions of adult education classes, adult reading courses, American Heritage discussion groups, film previews for clubs and for providing a classical music library for patrons.

Richard Covey followed Templeton as Head librarian in the fall of 1954. However, his tenure was brief and he resigned in the fall of 1956. Children's Librarian, Marguerite Bass, filled in as interim Head Librarian until William Stewart became Head Librarian in 1958.



Richard J. Covey was MPL's Librarian from 1954 to 1956. (Muskogee Daily Phoenix & Times-Democrat).

*Note: Marguerite Bass (1947-1971), Childrens' Librarian and Bookmobile supervisor, served as interim Librarian several times during her tenure as the Head Librarians moved on. So much so that many people believed she was the Head Librarian because of her constant presence and community involvement.

In February 1958 William H. Stewart became Muskogee Public's tenth Head Librarian. Prior to his arrival in Muskogee, Stewart had served as a reference Librarian at Oklahoma City and as Duncan Public Library's Head Librarian.



William H. Stewart was MPL Librarian from 1958 to 1969. (Library Photo).

Stewart began his advocacy of the Library within a month of his arrival. In a March 21st issue of the *Muskogee Phoenix and Times-Democrat*, Stewart pointed out the Library's budget deficiencies compared to other communities of similar size. According to Stewart, the Library's current budget of \$42,930 (1957-58) fell extremely short of the national standard of \$100,000. Books were wearing out on the shelves because of disuse, adult book circulation was a trickle of the total. Stewart pointed out



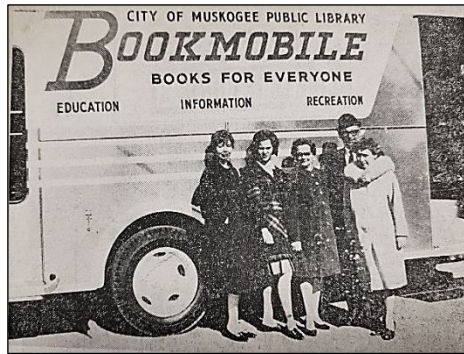
The first night of an experimental night route for the Traveling Library in 1961. Everett Morris staffed the trailer and Helen Carpenter was one of the first to use the new route. (Muskogee Daily Phoenix).

that the building had not been significantly renovated or improved since its construction in 1914. The basement leaked, there was no air-conditioning, upstairs' reading rooms and auditorium were unavailable during the summer due to the heat. Stewart summed up his newspaper interview by saying, *"If public interest does not demand a higher library budget, a drop in facilities will be very apparent in a few years."*

By June 25 in an article in the *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, Stewart urged for the *"initiation of a multi-county library system in northeastern Oklahoma."* He reinforced his request by having a Bookmobile from the Oklahoma State Library Extension Division (Oklahoma Department of Libraries) displayed in front of the Broadway Theater. After the Bookmobile visited Tahlequah the following day, it returned to Muskogee and the drivers, Esther Heneke and Virginia Owens, met with Muskogee Library Board members. Stewart was quoted as saying, *"at first Muskogee*



William Stewart discusses the possibility of a multi-county library system with Esther Henke, OK State Library Extension Librarian; Virginia Owens, Field Librarian; and, Leta Dover, Bacone College Librarian. (Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat).



A new City of Muskogee Bookmobile appeared on the scene during the mid-to-late 1960s. In its first week of service it served double the amount of people than the previous book trailer. Pictured with Librarian Stewart (back row), were Muskogee Library staff member, (left to right) Betty Mason, Person Unknown, Joyce Montgomery Braggs and Marguerite Bass. (Newspapers source unknown).

would take more the role of the leader by as a the system grew it would give local readers the advantages of a larger library system.” It would take twelve years for Stewart’s dream of a library system for northeastern Oklahoma to become a reality, but the seed was planted in June, 1958.

Muskogee Public Library noted its 50th anniversary in 1960 as a free, city-operated institution.

The two years prior to 1910, the Library was a volunteer-run, subscription Library requiring a fee prior to use. While a \$2 usage fee per family sounds

ridiculously affordable by twenty-first century standards, this fee was out of reach for the majority in the teen years of the early twentieth century.

The next step in the hoped-for establishment of a multi-county library system came on July 26, 1960, when Oklahomans voted on State Question 392, the establishment of multi-county library systems. The state-wide vote was positive as was the vote in Muskogee County – yes, 643; no, 440. Librarian Stewart’s dream of a multi-county library system was one step closer to fruition.

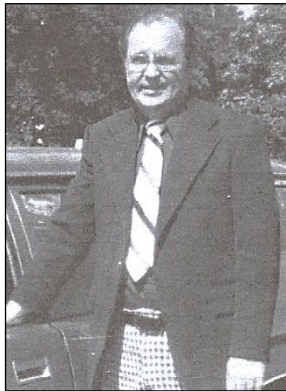
Sometime after 1963, exact date unknown, the Muskogee Public Library acquired its first, commercially-

built Bookmobile for use by the community and to replace the well-used and well-worn Traveling Branch trailer. The cost of this Bookmobile was \$12,500. After its first week of service, its daily attendance more than doubled that of the previous trailer vehicle.

By the mid-1960s, it had become readily apparent that Muskogee had outgrown the Carnegie-funded Library opened in 1914. In the fall of 1966 Librarian William Stewart presented a report to the Muskogee Metropolitan Area Planning Commission that he and the Library’s Board Chair, Owen Black, had prepared. The current Library, built to hold a maximum of 40,000 volumes, now held over 70,000 volumes. The location, centralized for community use in the

early 1900s, was no longer, as was the Building's design for the needs of the mid-twentieth century. Stewart's report was extremely detailed, covering the needs for every conceivable area of library service. Stewart predicted that a new building to serve the community would need to be minimally 35,000 square feet and cost \$792,500.

In early 1968, two library consultants from Columbia University were engaged by the State Library to do a feasibility study of a new Library in Muskogee. Stewart reported that he had received a letter from them indicating that they would, *"inevitably recommend construction of a new central library building in their final report."* The consultants' letter continued that in order to qualify for funds under state regulations, *"it would have to be designed to serve the needs both of the city itself and of the surrounding area – substantial sectors of four counties – for which Muskogee serves as a commercial center."* The final report, due later in the year, was expected to recommend establishment of a multi-county library system, centered in Muskogee that would serve the needs of Muskogee and several surrounding counties.



James R. Wilkerson, 1969-1978, was MPL's Librarian and EOLS's first Executive Director.

The local Library Board favored the development of a library system for two reasons: they believed that a system with state and federal financing would provide a better all-around Library for everyone; and without such a system, centralized in Muskogee, one of the cultural services of the City would ultimately be shifted to Tulsa at a lost to both Muskogee and surrounding counties.

In August 1968 Oklahoma State Library Consultant Allie Beth Martin presented City

Manager Earl Keaton and William Stewart the final report. It recommended a *"new million dollar library, with some of it financed by matching federal funds, be located downtown covering 100,000 square feet – a 40,000 square foot building and 60,000 square foot parking area."*

According to her report, the criteria for a good library site included: *"a location in the central business district, on a major throughfare, with good visibility (not hidden by other buildings) and with plenty of available parking. Preferably it would only be a single-story structure and not built near a school."* The report was shown to the City Council who had already applied for construction funds through the State Library (Oklahoma Department of Libraries).

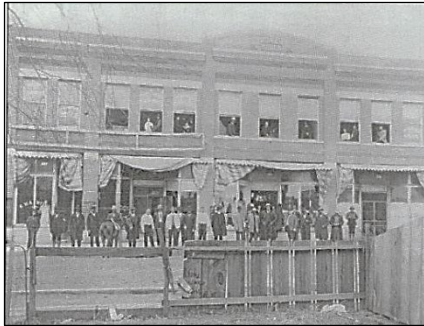
The \$750,000 bond issue election for the new City Library was held May 6, 1969 and it passed. Another \$485,000 in Federal funds was made available through the State Library. The foundation for the eventual existence of EOLS was now a reality. Librarian Stewart took this time to move on to a library system in Lubbock, Texas. His role in the eventual existence of EOLS should be noted. He advocated the existence of a library system from his first few months of his tenure until its end.

Stewart was followed on August 1, 1969 by James R. Wilkerson, who assumed not only the role of Muskogee Librarian, but also the role of Executive Director of the soon-to-be Eastern Oklahoma Library System.

The early history of the Muskogee Public Library is not complete, however, without mentioning the role of its most important branch, the Phillis Wheatley Branch Library. When the new Library was built and completed in 1972, the Wheatley Branch was absorbed into the new facility. The Wheatley Branch deserves its own story in the history of the Muskogee Public Library.

Phillis Wheatley Branch Library

The Muskogee Colored Library was founded in 1913 through the efforts of Muskogee teacher and civic leader, Lois E. Perdue. In 1911 Perdue called six friends to whom she detailed a plan to organize and maintain a Library for the benefit of the colored citizens of Muskogee. In 1913 the newly-charted Frances Harper Club with Perdue as president founded the beginnings of



The Jones Block Building on Muskogee's South Second Street, was believed to have been the first location of the Muskogee Colored Library in 1913. (Images of America: Muskogee)

a Library in a small upstairs room in the Love Building on South Second Street, an area of town considered the center for African-American businesses in the early 1900s.

In 1912 when the Muskogee Public Library's Board Attorney Carroll Bucher negotiated with Carnegie about funding the construction of a library, Carnegie originally offered funds for two separate libraries, one for the white community and one for the colored community. In this case, \$5,000 was offered toward the erection of a Negro Library pending approval of the City. Oklahoma, however, strongly influenced by its southern neighbors, supported the separation of the races. Between 1890 and 1957, Oklahoma passed eighteen Jim Crow laws. The City did not respond to Carnegie's offer to fund the Colored Library.

The Colored Library's early years were marked with a continuous struggle for money. A Library Board was formed and along with various Colored Women's Clubs such as the Royal Art Club, the M. C. Terrell Club and the Progressive Art Club joined with the Frances Harper Club and secured funds for books, rent and salary through dues, dinners, churches, library projects and donations. Della Blanton was the first Librarian, serving from 1913 to her death in 1918.

Coming Soon

"Beginning February 8, 1915, Joseph H. Douglass will make his first tour through the state of Oklahoma in violin recital.

Mr. Douglass is the grandson of late Fredrick Douglass and the world's greatest Negro violinist. He will appear in Convention Hall....

A part of the proceeds will be given for the support of the Colored library. Admission will be 25 cents, reserved seats 35 cents."

*Muskogee Daily Phoenix & Times
Democrat*

February 5, 1915

Colored Want Library

“Attorney H. T. Walker presented the petition of the colored people for a library.... The petition stated that nearly one-third of the population...was colored.... A library...would keep the boys and girls out of mischief and crime, and save the city far more than its cost. He asked the city for the present to appropriate \$85 per month for the support of the library and later for an appropriation of \$2,000 together with an agreement to help support a Carnegie library, if one is built for the colored people in Muskogee. The petition was referred to the mayor and Commissioner Boen.”

*Muskogee Times-Democrat
June 2, 1914*

Muskogee Colored Public Library

“...had 7,588 volumes and a total circulation during the year of 3,154...an average of 10 volumes each day.”

*Muskogee Daily Phoenix & Times-Democrat
December 27, 1925*



Main Room of the Wheatley Branch Library. (Library Photo)

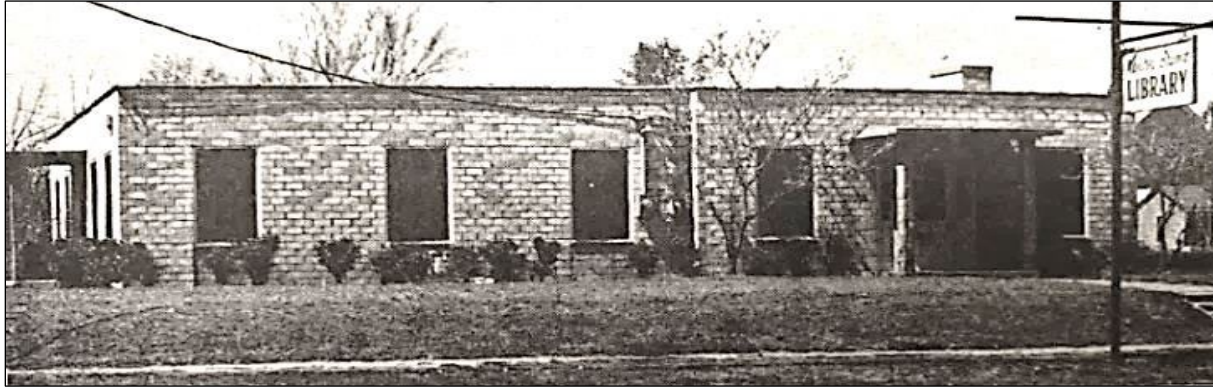
In 1914 when the Muskogee Public Library moved into the Carnegie Building, the Colored Library was finally able to obtain their first real library furniture in the form of old furniture donated by the Muskogee Library prior to their move into their new home.

Meanwhile, members of the Colored Business Men’s League and other Black professional organizations were in touch with the Carnegie Foundation in hopes that they, too, could get a permanent Library facility for the colored population of Muskogee.

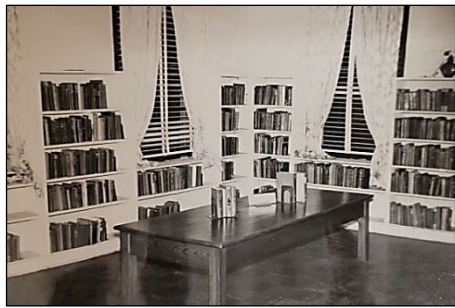
In 1916 the *Muskogee Times-Democrat* declared the “Negro Library (a) Popular Place.” *“On its shelves were 1,085 books, 1,728 magazines and many of the leading daily and weekly newspapers.”* The *Tattler*, a short-lived Black-owned local newspaper, reported in March 1916 that mayoral candidate, J. E. Wyand, secured a monthly appropriation of \$75 from the City for the Colored Library. Also, the City Library Board had assumed the salary of the Librarian at the Colored Library. Donations were still needed for rent, utilities and books. The Library moved to larger quarters on South Second Street that year as well.

In May 1917 the City Council passed a resolution providing a \$1,000 annual maintenance fund for the upkeep of the Colored Library. The motive was not as altruistic as it might sound. The move was more in response to Carnegie’s un-met offer in 1912 to provide money to build a Colored Library if the City would guarantee a sum equal to one-tenth of the proposed building’s yearly upkeep.

In 1918 the Negro Women’s City Federation, a combined group of all the local Negro Women’s Clubs including those listed previously and



The Phillis Wheatley Branch Library, the final location of Muskogee's segregated Black Library. It was built in the mid-1940s by German POWs held at Camp Gruber. It was a one-story, flat-roofed, buff-brick, commercial-style building, first built as a USO for Black soldiers and their families. (Library photo)



Reading Room of the Wheatley Branch Library. (Library Photo)



Children's Area of the Wheatley Branch Library. (Library Photo)

more, took on the Colored Library as a project. The two main objectives were fund-raising and a finding a permanent location for the Library. In 1920 the Federated Clubs under the director of Nellie W. Greene, one of Lois Perdue's original six founding members of the Frances Harper Club, purchased a four-room house for \$3,000 at 503 North 4th to serve as the Colored Library. This location also served as the meeting house of the Negro Women's Federated Club. According to the *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, the Federation needed to pay off the building's purchase price by November 1920 so that funds from the Carnegie endowment could be secured for the construction of a Library. If the story in the *Democrat* was true, it can only be assumed that the goal was not reached. Carnegie was never able to provide funds for the Colored Library in

Muskogee.

In 1921 the Mayor appointed a Negro Library Board and the City Council appropriated money for the Muskogee Colored Public Library (MCPL). Between the years of 1921-28, the MCPL was not yet a branch of the Muskogee Public Library. It operated independently with the exception of providing MPL with monthly and annual reports. Its annual budget in 1927-28 was \$1,513.



Engraving of African-American poet, Phillis Wheatley, 1753-1784. (Google Images)

In October 1929 the Colored Library was absorbed by the City and the Negro Library Board became an Advisory Board. The Negro Women's Federated Clubs leased the land and implemented a bill of sale of the building and equipment to the City and the MCPL became a branch of the Muskogee Public Library System. MCPL Librarian, Ethel Tucker (1921-1943), now officially reported to MPL head librarian, Cora Case Porter, on all matters related to the operations of the Colored Library, including budgets. In 1931 the Colored Library was renamed the Phillis Wheatley Branch Library in honor of the African-American poet.



The Martin Luther King Community Center today. (Google Images)

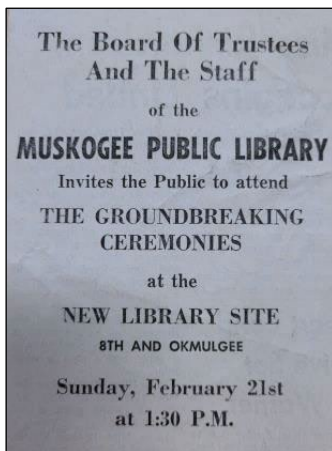
The Wheatley Branch moved the third and final time in 1946 to the former Negro USO Building on 627 North Third Street. It provided library services to the Black community in that location until 1972 when its personnel and materials were moved to the newly-built Muskogee Public Library at 801 West Okmulgee Street. The former Wheatley Branch location became home to the MLK Community Center and later in 2010 the Muskogee Chapter of the NAACP. Circa 2015-16, the Wheatley Building was razed to make room for the new MLK Community Center.

Muskogee Public Library – The Queen City’s Library



Current picture of the Muskogee Public Library on 801 West Okmulgee Street. (Library Photo)

As noted in both Chapter One and in the Library’s Early History Chapter, that the road to the formation of a library system for eastern Oklahoma and the building of a new Muskogee Public Library converged at the time James Wilkerson was hired as Librarian in 1969 and in 1970 when he also had become the Director of the Eastern Oklahoma Library System.



The Muskogee Public Library’s role in the early development of EOLS can’t be negated as an integral part of MPL’s history in the 1970s. Both the System and the Library were growing rapidly and MPL played a significant role in the System’s early growth. Perhaps former Muskogee Librarian William Stewart said it best, *“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.”*

Another factor in MPL’s increased involvement in the

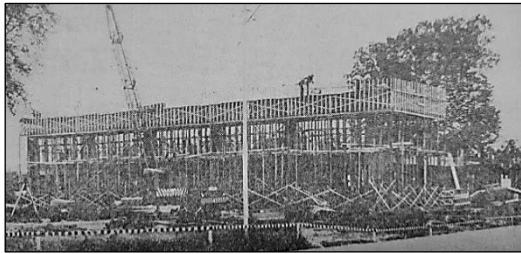


Rob Martindale, the Phoenix’s City Editor in 1972 complimenting on the beauty of the new Muskogee Public Library said of the former Carnegie Library, *“It had become a fading lady on vacation. She, too, was a beauty. But, time gradually threw in the wrinkles. Increased traffic chipped away at her strengths...the air to thin to sustain her breathing as a Library.”*
<https://eols.org/mpl-about-us>

System’s overall development was due to the fact that by 1972 the Service Center located in the former Langston Elementary School was experiencing vandalism issues with the two large Bookmobiles that were parked on the building’s grounds as well as having issues with the building itself. When the new Library opened in April 1972, Service Center and Bookmobile staff and the Bookmobiles moved to MPL. In retrospect, that was probably an advantageous move for the benefit of both.



The groundbreaking of the new Muskogee Public Library in 1971. Left to right: EOLS Director James Wilkerson; Muskogee Mayor Elmo Madewell; and Frank Borovetz, City Councilman and Library Board member. (Library Photo)



Library under construction, 1971. (Muskogee Phoenix photo)



Front cover of MPL's Open House flyer, April 1972. (Library Photo)

groundwork was being laid for a new public library building for Muskogee.

In 1967 legislation was passed and the former State Library Commission became the Oklahoma Department of Libraries and the Oklahoma Library Systems Act was created. In 1969 the Muskogee Public Library joined and became the headquarters for the soon-to-be named Eastern Oklahoma Library System. On May 5, 1969 Muskogee citizens voted for \$750,000 in bonds to match a \$465,000 grant from the Library Services and Construction Act to build a new and much-needed building at on West Okmulgee between 8th and 9th Streets. The ground-

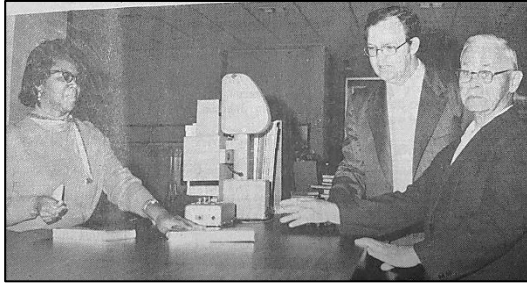
As Executive Director, Wilkerson spent a tremendous amount of time and energy, especially during the earliest years of his tenure, in each of the six counties establishing branch libraries. In order for Wilkerson to be able to get the System established and fully operational, both MPL and EOLS staff merged to fill administrative and other staffing needs at the new Library. Generally, the arrangement was a positive one for the benefit of MPL and the new branches alike. One such example of a less than positive interaction was that Muskogee's Adult Services Librarian was thought by many of the MPL and EOLS staff alike to have been MPL's Head

Librarian. Wilkerson's long hours out in the System's counties setting the groundwork for new branch libraries contributed to the misunderstanding.

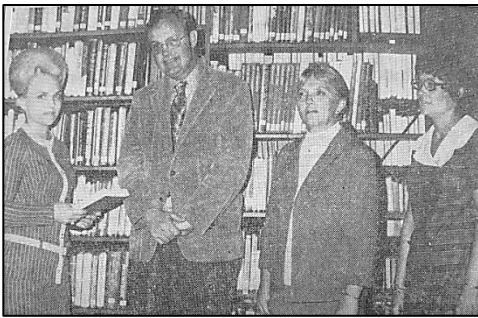
Regardless, the entire responsibility for both the operation of MPL and EOLS was solely on Wilkerson's shoulders during the majority of his

tenure. After the end of Wilkerson's tenure in 1978, the Head Librarian and Executive Director positions were split. In the 1980s and early 1990s a couple of MPL Librarians played the roles of EOLS Associate Directors during critical times.

As noted earlier, just before and during the early months of Wilkerson's tenure, the



Frank Kirkpatrick was the first to check out a book from the new Library from former Wheatley and now MPL staff member Frances Murphy. MPL Librarian James Wilkerson, looked on, April 1972. (Library photo)



Members of the 1972 Junior Women's History Club presented Librarian James Wilkerson, with a book about Oklahoma's Women's Clubs. The Women's History Club was considered to be the driving force in the creation of the Muskogee Public Library. (Muskogee Phoenix photo)

breaking ceremony was held in early February 1971 and construction begun on February 8, at a total cost of \$1,234,620.

Oklahoma City-based Zaroor & Davis were the architects and J.J. Cook Construction Company, also from Oklahoma City, was the contractor. Owen Neal, of Muskogee Transfer and Storage, handled the Library's move from the Carnegie Building to the new facility. The Open House was held April 9, 1972.

Just a month earlier on March 7, 1972 Muskogee County voted "Yes" on the library millage levy issue by a vote of 5,281 to 4,791. By December 1972 the new Muskogee Public Library was featured in *Library Journal's Annual Library Design Showcase* issue as one of the eight featured Libraries out of 191 recently-built U.S library buildings.

In the category of unexpected consequences with any new experience concerned who was going to pay the electric bill for the new Library. Electric bills began to pile up. Each entity involved – Library, City, OG&E - believed it was the other's issue to contend with.

To provide background – in 1951, the City of Muskogee and OG&E had worked out a franchise agreement that the previous Library, in the Carnegie Building, would not be charged for electricity. The assumption was that policy would continue since the new building's main function would continue to be that of the Muskogee Public Library. Thus, began a several years-long legal and public relations nightmare for the City, local Library Board, and the EOLS Governing Board.

In brief, OG&E's position was when the City decided to participate in the multi-county demonstration was to void the agreement between the City and OG&E for electricity. The System's stance was that MPL was not their building to maintain. It belonged to the City. Lawyers on all sides got involved, including the State's Attorney General. Mayor Lomax requested budget justification for Library's maintenance and operation. The *Muskogee*

Ode to a District Librarian on the Day before October 4

*On this your special day before,
Perchance a moment to reflect,
And wondrously rejoice the passing,
Exalt and wonder,
At the fruits of another year.*

*Perchance to wonder
Reflect and ponder
What went wrong
With the whole lousy year?*

*Why the budget?
Why the tax?
Why the ogre named Lomax?
Why the valleys?
Why the Hills?
Why the durned electric bills?
Why the hassle?
Why to groan?
Why the heck, John Lewis Stone?*

*Perchance too much reflection
Ravages the soul.
And ulcers, too, or so we're told.
With one last thought in mind,
We close this fair ode.
On this your special day before,
We wish you the best year yet
Beginning on October 4!*

*Margaret Whinnen Rigney
October 1973*

Phoenix's editor, John L. Stone, chastised Director Wilkerson in an editorial for not attending a City Finance Committee meeting in September 1973, which he didn't know about nor was invited to. Finally, after years of negotiating, a contract agreeable to both parties was adopted in June 1976. Lesson learned, and over time, contracts with branch library communities as to the responsibilities of both parties were initiated outlining the specific responsibilities of each party.

Muskogee Public's first decade of existence at 801 West Okmulgee and as EOLS headquarters may have looked to MPL patrons like a continuation of the past with maybe only with more new faces. Books were checked out and checked in. Staff provided assistance to patrons needing help. Children's librarians held story hours and Summer Reading Programs. Reference Librarians answered questions. Interlibrary loan requests were processed. The City Bookmobile continued its routes.

To the staff, the 1970s was a decade of profound change both for Muskogee Public Library and the newly formed System. The Phillis Wheatley Branch Library had

been absorbed into MPL with the move to the new building. That meant staff additions, the merging of collections and resources and the general upheaval that occurs when people experience significant changes in their routines and locations.

On top of challenges inherent in any major move, early work on getting the Library's collections ready for automation had already begun by the dawn of the 1970s. In today's fast-paced computer world, it's



Emmerine C. Moore, 1948-1981, served 24 years as the last branch manager of the Wheatley Library prior to its merging with MPL in 1972. She continued to serve another 9 years at MPL prior to retirement in 1981. (Muskogee Phoenix photo)



National Library Week in April 1973. Chairwoman Mrs. George Scott, Jr., (right); James Wilkerson, (center) and Muskogee Mayor Robert Lomax, (left) view the list of the Week's planned activities. (Muskogee Phoenix photo)



The last Muskogee City Bookmobile. (Library photo)



One of the two identical Bookmobiles that served the EOLS' rural communities. (Library photo)

hard to comprehend the challenges facing library staff to automate existing collections in the early 1970s. The first step in the process was a deep and comprehensive weeding of the MPL's and Wheatley's existing collections which included special collections that would need original cataloging . Afterwards, all remaining records were examined to determine if they had all the relevant information necessary for automating records. Incomplete records had to be researched and the relevant information added to it before it could become an automated record. The data record was then added to a mainframe computer record via the use of a keypunch machine.

By 1972 new materials' records provided by vendors were beginning to provide the required information needed for input as a computer record. In retrospect, using today's computer capabilities, it is hard to fathom how difficult and how time-consuming the early days of library automation were at the dawn of the use of MARC cataloging tools and services OCLC with its shared technology services.

In the early 1970s since neither Muskogee Public nor EOLS had any computer capabilities other than a keypunch machine; an agreement was made with local James Leake Industries to upload the Library's records after hours on Leake's mainframe computer. The mainframe capabilities of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries were also used. As each EOLS library branch that had an existing library prior to the arrival of the System came on board, the process of weeding collections and updating existing records was repeated.

While Muskogee Public Library had its relatively-new small Bookmobile for use in the local community, in the early days of the Library System, two larger Bookmobiles were added to serve communities in the rural areas in the System. The Bookmobiles were parked with the City Bookmobile on MPL's parking lot so, in reality, they were extensions of Muskogee Public Library as far as workload was concerned. Muskogee Library staff supported the Bookmobile



Current picture of Jeanette McQuitty. She was hired in 1977 Adult Services Librarian and served as MPL Librarian from 1978-1980. (Facebook)

crews with collection development, interlibrary loans, reference inquiries, materials ordering and other routine library procedures. In 1978 Mail-A-Book replaced the two rural Bookmobiles. Later, all three Bookmobiles were sold for salvage at various times through the early 1980s.

By the time Director Wilkerson's tenure ended in 1978, most of the System's branches had been established and many of the counties had voted at least once for the mill-levy to support their continued existence. Not all millage votes were successful with the first vote, but finally over time, all Counties were ultimately successful.

Jeanette McQuitty, who had originally been hired at Muskogee Public in 1977 as Adult Services Coordinator, became Muskogee's Head Librarian in 1978, the same year Monty Maxwell became the System's second Executive Director. McQuitty was followed by Sonia Bigus Long who also served two years. Carol Kochman followed Bigus as



Sonia Bigus Long served as MPL's Head Librarian from 1980 to 1982. (Library photo)

Head Librarian and was the first to hold the title of Associate Director when Marilyn Hinshaw became the third EOLS Director in 1982. Following Kochman was



Current picture of Carol Kochman. She served as Librarian and EOLS Associate Director from 1982-1987. In 2004-05, she served as president of the American Library Association. (Las Cruces, NM Quality of Life web page)

Marion Bryant in 1988. From 1992 to 1994 she also added EOLS Associate Director to her resume.

EOLS Director Marilyn Hinshaw assumed the MPL position briefly between the tenures of Marion and Jan Bryant (no relation) as a cost-saving measure circa 1995-98. Jan Bryant began working at MPL in

1996 but did not assume the role of Head Librarian until 1998. Jan Bryant has had one of the two longest tenures as MPL Librarian, from 1998 to 2015. During her tenure, Bryant was voted President of the Oklahoma Library Association in 2007. Prior to that, Director Jim Wilkerson had also served as the Association's President during his tenure in the 1970s. Bryant was followed by Rene Myers who served two years; and, Jessica



Marion Bryant served as MPL's Librarian from 1988-1994. The role of Associate Director was added in 1992. (Library photo)



Jan Bryant served as MPL Librarian from 1998-2015. To date, she is the second longest tenured MPL Librarian since Cora Case Porter, 1925-1945. During her tenure, Bryant was elected Oklahoma Library Association's President, 2007. (Library photo)



Rene Meyers moved from the Reference Department to Head Librarian where she served from 2016-2018. (Library photo)



Jessica Conley's tenure as Librarian covered the years from 2019-2021. (Library photo)

Conley, who also served two years. Each woman has made her own significant contributions to the Library in its service to the Muskogee community.

The first Great Decisions event was held at MPL in 1976. Since then, the programs have been extremely popular over the years. Great Decisions is America's largest discussion program on world affairs. Dr. Don Betz, former President of both Northeastern and Central State Universities had an avid



Dr. Betz leads a Great Decisions discussion at MPL in February 2014. (Library photo)

interest in political science and international studies and was credited with starting the popular Great Decisions program at MPL. He presented numerous Decisions programs over the years at MPL on a variety of related topics as have other experts in their respective fields.

In 1979 the Library's Adult Literacy Program at MPL was established. Since its creation it has offered area adults the opportunity to enhance their literacy skills, prepare for the GED

and Citizenship tests and to improve English proficiency. In more recent years, the Literacy Program has expanded to include computer literacy classes specifically for ages 60 and over to meet the need for developing digital skills for today's world. In 2006 an Early Literacy Coordinator was available to address reading and comprehensive skills as part of the "Every Child Ready to Read @ the Library" program.

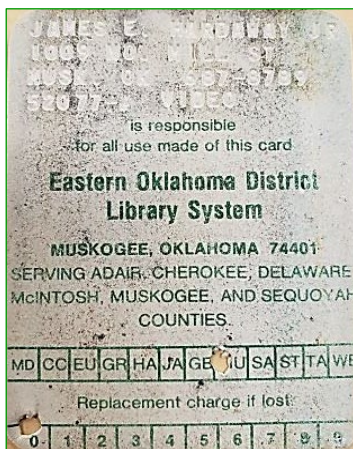


Over 40 years later, one of the most recent additions to the department has been the introduction of hybrid GED classes that allowed the opportunity for students to attend classes either online or in person.

By the second decade of EOLS' existence the concept of working cooperatively had been firmly established within the System's libraries. Muskogee's role as "leader" faded as cooperation became the desired objective of all. The branch libraries established in the 1970s were now more settled in their communities and in their roles within the System. Policies and procedures continued to be developed and implemented over time as needed but things became more routine in nature overall. The building stages were drawing to a close. All the counties

were now officially part of the System via passage of their two-mill levies. On the negative side, System-wide budget issues begun in the latter half of the 1970s continued. Budget cuts loomed large in the early years of the decade.

Marilyn Hinshaw was hired as EOLS' third Executive Director in May 1982. The 1980s were a time to address the evolving financial issues not only in Muskogee but across the entire System. As a result, comprehensive Long Range Planning was tackled for the first time in the System's history. The planning included input from the Board, Library staff and community members throughout the six-county service area over an eighteen-month time period.

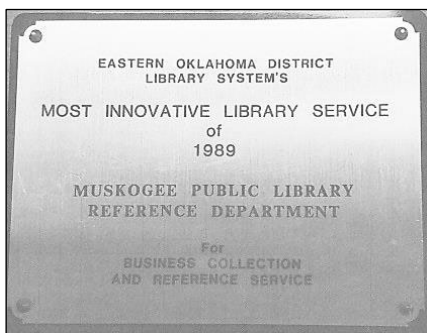


A 1980s era EOLS Library Card. (Library photo)

MPL celebrated its 10th anniversary at its West Okmulgee location in April 1982 with a special National Library Week recognition focusing on the events of the past ten years since the Library's move from the Carnegie building.

In July 1986 the System requested a vote to increase Muskogee County's millage levy from two mills to four. The millage vote was approved by voters making Muskogee County the first in the System to pass an increase from two to four mills. The increased millage allowed MPL and the other Muskogee County branches to increase their financial resources as identified in their

respective long-range plans.



A satellite hook-up for Muskogee became a reality in February 1987. This allowed both the Library and the community to access programs and resources that could otherwise be unavailable. This was Muskogee's and the System's first foray into the telecommunications age, the predecessor of the Internet Age.

In 1988 the Library learned that the four-mill allotted ad valorem levy that library officials had budgeted from Muskogee County had not been added to the County's tax bills for the year. The bookkeeping error left the Library about \$411,000 short of its revenue projections, leaving the Muskogee County libraries with unexpected budget shortfalls. A belt-tightening plan was immediately put into place.

In the mid-1980s Director Hinshaw had implemented an Award program to recognize the hard work being done and accomplished in the EOLS branch libraries. MPL's Business Collection and Reference Service won the District's Most Innovative Library Service Award in 1989 for the Library's Reference Department.

In 1990 the System Board approved the Automation Task Force Plan primarily at the time benefiting Muskogee County libraries because of the passage of the four-mill levy vote. The plan included the automation of MPL's circulation system, the installation of public access computers (PACs), and the addition of ten terminals at MPL. By 1992 Muskogee as well as Fort Gibson, Haskell, and Warner Libraries all had automated circulation systems made possible by the millage increase.

Muskogee's Farmers' Market began in 1995 during a time of a "comeback" of farmers' markets across the U.S. Muskogee's Market moved to MPL's parking lot in 1996 where it spent the next eleven years until the Market moved to the Civic Center in 2007 primarily to take advantage of the covered parking areas for the vendors. In 1998 the Library's Farmer's Market was opened three days a week during the season – Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, from 8am to 1pm. It was a very popular event for several years, filling the Library's parking lot on days the Market was open.

Beginning around the mid-1990s the Library began offering computer classes to the public. The classes ran the gamut of computer-related topics including both newer and older productivity as well as social media applications. The classes offered were determined by users' expressed needs. In the early 2000s a computer lab was created out of two previous offices whereby such classes could be conducted.

By 1997 the Library was showing its age and needed some freshening up with new carpeting, painting and minor renovations that gave the building some updating and refreshing. Taking advantage of the renovations, the Genealogy Department was established as its own free-standing department. It was moved to occupy both the Grant Foreman Room and an adjoining m room on the second floor. A grand re-opening was held after the remodeling.



A Farmer's Market vendor at the Civic Center in the mid-2000s. (Muskogee Phoenix photo).



EOLS Service Center across the street from MPL, late 1990s. (Library photo)

The EOLS Service Center staff took the opportunity presented by MPL's remodeling to move to the Hensley-Nichols Building across the street from MPL. EOLS Service Center staff had been housed in MPL since 1972 and space was becoming a critical issue for both the Library and the Service Center staff. The Service Center's move provided more workroom and office space for MPL's growing staff.



A sample of the types of painted furniture found in the Painted Furniture Auctions of the late 1990s, early 2000s. (Google Images)

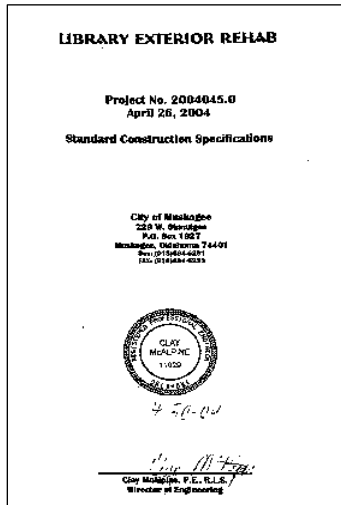
It would probably be more concise to note the ways that the Library did not serve the Muskogee community than to list all the ways it has served its community over the years since its creation in the early years of the twentieth century. The Grant Foreman Room, established in the mid-1940s in Muskogee's Carnegie Library, has been providing local history and genealogy materials to eastern Oklahomans for many years. Its popularity and renown extends beyond the boundaries of Muskogee County. In more recent years the square footage dedicated to the resources of the Foreman Room have more than doubled.

Other older resources have expanded as needed as well as the addition of numerous others as demand warrants. A modern library must be responsive to its publics and MPL has met each challenge to the best of its ability within the constraints of space and money.

The *Muskogee Phoenix* noted that MPL had launched a Brown Bag Lunch Series in 2000. The free program was designed to offer entertainment during the lunch hour for both library staff and patrons alike. Series subjects changed monthly. One month there was a travelogue on Tibet that had an attendance of 70. The following month, a one-man production on the *Witty World of Will Rogers* was held sponsored by a grant from the Oklahoma Arts Council.

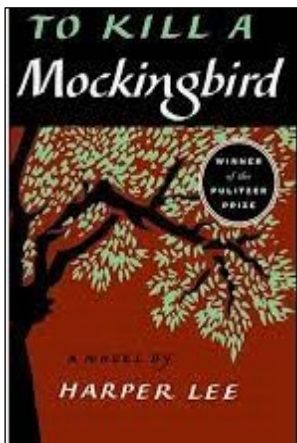
The dawn of the 2000s brought a web-based circulation system for MPL as well as for the other EOLS branches. The new circulation system was in place by the end of 2002. Along with the new software came new policies and policy updates System-wide.

In November 2000, a Painted Furniture Auction was held. Begun originally in 1996 as a fund-raising event to raise money to buy furniture and equipment for the Library, the auction had expanded into an even more elaborate event by 2000 under the auspices of the newly formed Muskogee Public Library Foundation. By then, besides the presence of the original painted chairs, the auction included other chairs, tables, prints and even a football signed by all the current members of the OU Sooners football team.



Cover page of the Library's Rehab Plans, 2004. (Library photo)

The Muskogee Public Library started the 2000s with building and renovation plans for the new century. Among other things, the staff focused on improvements to both the interior and exterior of the building. The twentieth century library building was becoming less and less able to handle the needs of the twenty-first century. The addition of computers and other technologies required spaces not even thought about in the early 1970s. The exterior needed a new roof, leak clean up and repair, general upkeep and exterior maintenance. In April 2004 the focus of a project manual produced for the City of Muskogee was on the exterior rehab of the library building. In 2006 another project manual prepared for the



City addressed renovations of the genealogy and conference rooms. In 2003 the Library closed while the HVAC system had a thorough cleaning to remove mold and other allergens that were becoming problematic to staff and patrons alike.

What began as the withdrawal of the book, “To Kill a Mockingbird” from the required freshman reading list by Muskogee public school administrators, turned into a community debate that garnered nationwide attention in 2001. From that attention grew the offering of a program entitled, “Scout Remembers Mockingbird”



Scene from the movie, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. (Google Images)

sponsored by the MPL and the Oklahoma Arts Council.

The program consisted of Gary Gackstatter, a Kansas music conductor, who chose Muskogee for an encore of his “*Scout Remembers....*” program after reading about the school district’s decision to withdraw the book from the required reading list. His program included the Winfield (Kansas) Regional Symphony playing the film’s original Elmer Bernstein score, while actors Mary Badham Wilt who played Scout, and Philip Alford who played Jem gave their remembrances about

the making of the movie.

Newspaper articles on the various facets of the Library's operations, services and programs written by library staff appeared regularly in a column entitled "Books and More" debuted in in the *Muskogee Phoenix* in 2004. With it, the branch manager and various library staff would describe services, programs, events and even the roles of various offices within the Library. "Books and More" ultimately served as the the Library's predecessor to the use of social media to inform the community.

MPL participated in the Oklahoma Reads Oklahoma program from 2004-2006. ORO was an official Centennial project which gave Oklahomans an opportunity to read and discuss books that explored the Oklahoma experience



prior to marking Oklahoma's Centennial held in 2007. The book selected for the 2004 year by an online vote was "The Honk and Holler Opening Soon" by author Billie Letts. In 2005 "Walking the Choctaw Road: Stories from Red People Memory" by Tim Tingle was the year's book choice. In 2006 Oklahoma native and author, Dayna Dunbar, brought her book, "The Saints and Sinners of Okay County" to MPL as part of her statewide tour. MPL had programs and book discussions every year of the program.



Among the first of the Christmas and other holiday book giveaways by MPL, 2008. (Google Images)

In 2006 MPL's Literacy Group added the services of an Early Literacy Coordinator to help serve children and youth. Over time as Coordinators came and went, the job was absorbed under auspices of MPL's Children's Department to the ultimate benefit of all children.



Muskogee Area Quilt Guild Display in MPL's Main Foyer, 2011. (Library photo)

In 2007 early local history and genealogy materials from the Grant Foreman Room were moved to the first floor to allow more room for researchers interested in either or both topics. The move allowed local history and genealogy materials that were previously in storage due to lack of space in the Foreman Room to once again become available for the public in the larger space.

Books, books, books are what libraries are all about.

"At this time of year it is wonderful to be able to give books to children who don't have one," stated Jan Bryant, MPL librarian. Circa December 2008 marked the first Christmas Book Give-



MPL also has resources for homeschoolers and their parents, 2010. (Muskogee Phoenix photo)

Away for children preschool through fourth grade at MPL. The giveaways continued for several years both at Christmas and other celebrations throughout the years. Money for the book purchases came from various sources including businesses, organizations, grants and foundations.

Displays of all types of media have been held at the Library over the years. The works of local and regional artists and photographers, library staff arts and crafts, collections plus presentations prepared by the Oklahoma Arts and Humanities Council and the Oklahoma History Center have all shared space within the walls of the Library. In March 2011 a popular Quilt Display provided by the Muskogee Area Quilt Guild decorated the Library foyer to the enjoyment of all.

Over the years local history and genealogy staff have held numerous programs on a wide variety of historical events to a wide audience, including those interested persons outside of the local area. The *Tulsa World* and other regional newspapers, as well as the *Phoenix* routinely advertised these programs to their readers and were well-attended. Examples of such wide-ranging programming over the years have included: *German Ancestry*, *Orphan Train Riders*, the *Indian Migration Trails* and *Land Records*, to name only a few. Meetings on genealogy topics also drew large crowds of people interested in exploring their family's roots.



Black History Month presentations held in the Grant Foreman Room, 2014. Left: Speaker Shakira Davis. Right: Dancer Larena Robinson. (Muskogee Phoenix photo)

Local, regional and state governmental units such as the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife routinely held public hearings and classes at the Library on a variety of upcoming legislative issues. Political meetings, candidate forums and Town Halls representing the views of all parties were routinely held as well. Non-profits including such groups as the Red Cross routinely hold classes in the Library as do organizations such as the NAACP and others who present events and programs open to the public for free.

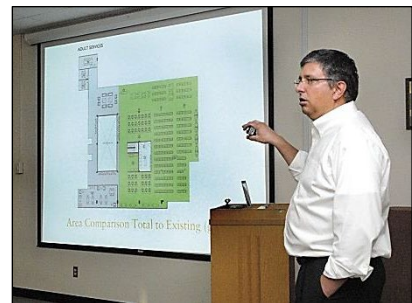
In December 2009, Bryant announced through the “Books and More” column in the *Muskogee Phoenix* that, “*exciting changes were happening at MPL.*” She reported that there were new services, new material formats, new space

configurations and new technology, including a new self-checkout machine for patron use whereby those with clear records could check out their own library materials without staff interaction, if desired.

August 2010 also witnessed the second season of the popular Third Thursday Book Club. Begun in 2009 by library staffer, Jeremy Jones, the group met on the third Thursday of the month from August to May, except December. Full reading and event lists were available for all interested. The second season differed in that the Club would not only meet in the Library but also at alternating locations such as the Arrowhead Mall Food Court.

Probably one of the most exciting events for the Library in 2010 was a City of Muskogee Foundation Grant that would help the Library hire an architect and/or planner to help them plan for a new building in the future. The Foundation awarded the Library \$290,000 over two years to develop the plans. The new facility would not incorporate any room for the Support Services unit that has shared facilities with Muskogee Library in the past.

By September 2011 the proposed building site was narrowed to two locations: the current site on West Okmulgee and in the Museum District. A decision about location when it does occur would be a three-way decision between the EOLS, City of Muskogee and the Muskogee Library Board. A Library consultant, Jack Poling, hired by the Building Committee in the spring of 2012, estimated that a new Library would cost in the neighborhood of \$15-16 million. As of the arrival of the pandemic in 2020, no further work or discussion on building a new Muskogee Public Library has been addressed.



Library Consultant Jack Poling shows a possible new floor plan for MPL in 2012. (Library photo)



A very friendly truck welcomed kids to the Library's first ever "Touch-a-Truck" program at Hatbox Field, April 2011. (Muskogee Phoenix photo)



One of the most popular and continuing fundraisers for not only MPL, but with most, if not all, the EOLS branch libraries started in Muskogee in April 2011 when "Touch a Truck" made its first appearance at the Love Hatbox Sports Complex. Co-sponsored by MPL and the City's Public Works Department, the event invited kids of all ages to climb into nearly 50 vehicles, including a helicopter. The money raised from the first event

supported improvements in Muskogee’s Children’s department. Children were allowed to climb into the vehicles, touch the controls and learn what each vehicle did. Touch a Truck has become, over the years, one of the most popular fundraising events for children’s programming and services both in Muskogee and throughout the EOLS service area.



A broken water pipe on the Library’s second floor resulted in a week’s worth of repair in October 2011. (Library photo)

As luck would have it into each life or Library some rain must fall, or pipes may burst. Over the Columbus Day Holiday weekend in October 2011 a second floor broken water pipe greeted staff the following Monday morning that caused extensive damage on both the second and first floors of the Library. The first floor children’s area received the brunt of the damage. Burgraff Disaster Restoration Services was called in to clean the building afterwards and the Library was closed until the following Saturday.



As part of the celebration of International Literacy the Muskogee Area Literacy Council invited the public to its first ever “Book Eats” contest in September 2012. By 2019 the “Book Eats” program was still going strong. Contestant entries



“Alice in Wonderland” was one of the “Book Eats” entries in the 2019 contest. (Muskogee Phoenix photo)

had to be at least 51 percent edible and book-related. Categories included Best Book, Best Pun and a People’s Choice category. In 2019 the exhibits included “Silence of the Yams,” “Ketchup in the Rye,” and shown, “Alice in Wonderland,” among others.

“Geek the Library,” an 18-month promotional campaign provided to libraries by OCLC, a nonprofit library cooperative with funding by a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Grant swept the Muskogee Public Library and all of the EOLS branch libraries beginning in January 2013. The “Geek the Library” was a community-based public awareness campaign that highlighted people’s passions and how libraries could support them. Muskogee’s “Geek the Library Week” began on a Saturday at Arrowhead Mall with library staff signing people up for library cards and learning from MPL staff about the events planned for upcoming Geek celebrations at the Library over the next year and a half.





MPL's first 3D Printer for public use. (Library photo)

MPL's first STEM/Makerspace Kids Technology Camp, "Learned-Create-Share @ MPL" made possible by a grant from the City of Muskogee Foundation introduced the Library's first Makerbot 3D printer to share with the public. Kids in the video game creation class used the printer to design 3D models and print them on the Makerbot. After the Camp the printer was made available to the

public.



Noon Year's Eve at the Library was first initiated in 2013 as a way for kids of all ages to celebrate New Year's Eve, but safely at noon instead of midnight. Programs would start around 10 in the morning, with



MPL's first Noon Year's Balloon drop, 2013. (Library photo)

a countdown to noon with a corresponding balloon drop in the lobby. Food, games and other activities were also provided. Over the years since, the Noon Year's Eve program has grown and expanded to meet even bigger and bigger crowds.

In 2014 and 2017 MPL stepped into the world of dinner theatre with two productions. The first, held in 2014 was

"The Icicle Twist Murder Mystery Dinner" held on February 1. The second, "Murder at the Mardi Gras Mystery" was held in February 2017. Both productions were directed by Adult Program Services Supervisor, Jeremy Jones.



Chelsey Simpson, Managing Editor of Oklahoma Living magazine presented the "Best Library in Oklahoma Award" to Librarian Jan Bryant in 2014. (Muskogee Phoenix photo)

The "Icicle Twist Murder Mystery Dinner" was held in the Grant Foreman Room. The cost was \$10 with limited seating due to room constraints. The play and accompanying light meal benefitted the Library's popular Adult Summer Reading Program.



Over 1,000 books were needed to assemble this Christmas Tree in the Library's Main Foyer in 2015. (Muskogee Phoenix photo)

The "Murder at the Mardi Gras Mystery" was held both as a



Saturday matinee in the first-floor meeting room and as a more elaborate dinner meal that evening in the Grant Foreman Room. Tickets for “Mardi Gras” were \$15. The proceeds from this production also went to benefit the Library’s adult services programming.



MPL front door repair, 2014. (Muskogee Phoenix photo)



Up on the Library roof in 2016 for repairs. (Muskogee Phoenix photo)

Some greatly needed repairs were undertaken at MPL between 2014 and 2016. The Library’s east parking lot was resurfaced first in November 2014 followed by the south lot behind the Library. In December the Library’s old automatic front doors were removed and newer automatic doors installed that could be worked either manually or automatically with a push button.

In March 2016 brave, non-height challenged workers, spent a minimum of two weeks installing a new long-awaited metal roof on the Library to curb leaks and to repair the natural wear and tear of the years.

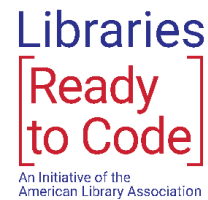
In November 2017 MPL received a \$16,350 grant from the American Library Association to design and implement coding programs for young people. Rene Myers, librarian, was “*thrilled for the*

...Library to provide coding programs for the youth in the Muskogee community.” MPL was



Captain America and Wonder Woman returned to MPL for Mini-Con 2022. (Muskogee Phoenix photo)

one of only 28 libraries around the county to receive the grant from Libraries Ready to Code, an initiative of the American Library Association. The grant provided laptop funding, STEM-related technology, resources for a monthly Coding Club and a Summer Coding Camp. The Coding Club met twice a month and the Summer Coding Camp took place in June 2018.



In 2018 the MPL brought the Muskogee Mini-Con, a cosmic convention experience, to town in October 2018. Jeremy Jones, MPL Adult Program Coordinator, got the idea for the Mini-Con one year when it was reported that Tulsa



Cooking class participants, 2017. (Library photo)



MPL Video Camp participants in 2013. (Muskogee Phoenix photo)



The Teen Room was a good place for cooperative projects, 2013. (Library photo)



Summer Reading Programs were often standing-room-only in 2016. (Library photo)

was not having its usual convention so he decided to have one in Muskogee. Muskogee's Mini-Con goal was to replicate as much as possible the feel of a larger comic and gaming conventions for a fraction of the cost. Tickets went for \$5 each. Events included panels on costume play and tabletop gaming, a cosplay contest, face painting, and two gaming tournaments. Attendees could also make origami animals and their own light saber. Younger children were given the opportunity to create a comic book as well as having a tea party with costumed princesses and superheroes. As the year 2020 drew near and the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic in mid-March changed the way MPL and the other EOLS branch libraries could conduct business for their communities. Please note that this brief history summary of the Muskogee Public Library since its move from the Carnegie Building on Broadway and D Streets to 801 West Okmulgee in 1972 represents only a very small sampling of all the events, programs, and opportunities afforded to its community in the time since then until mid-March 2020, the ending date for all histories in this book. This narrative of the Library's last 50 plus years could cover double the amount of pages presented easily and still not be able to cover all the programs, services, presentations, learning opportunities, classes, entertainment, exhibits, displays, literacy opportunities, online information for both information and entertainment, and the development of community relationships for the benefit of all and the good of the community.



FabLab participants, 2016. (Library photo)



You've got to have a fireman on hand for Halloween Story Time, October 2019. (Muskogee Phoenix photo)



The Legos Builder's Club met on the first Thursday of the month in 2014. (Library photo)



Freezing February temperatures brought three brothers into the Library to warm up with a video game, 2019. (Library photo)

Events in the twenty-first century library for children and youth alone have included STEM and STEAM activities at the Library. The Tulsa Mobile FabLab, digital photography classes, video, coding and First Maker camps. A teen area has been added. Various club activities have been added over the years such as computer and gaming sessions and even Legos. Traditional and bilingual story hours and the annual Summer Reading Programs remain popular. Kids cooking classes draw in interested and hungry kids. Book-based Holiday celebrations still draw interest. Sometimes just coming in from the cold is excuse enough to use the Muskogee Public Library.

Muskogee's Queen City Library has served its community for over a century. Even a pandemic couldn't slow it down.

To be continued....

Introduction to Warner

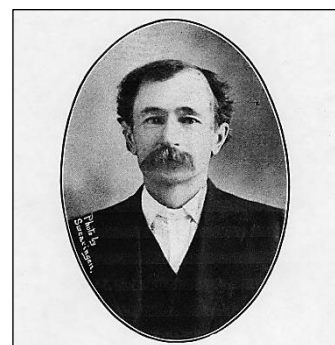
The community of Warner lies twenty miles south of the County seat of Muskogee on U.S Highway 64. State Highway 2 joins 64 for links to other southern Muskogee County communities. Interstate 40 links Warner with all

points to the east and west. Warner's history began with two small communities, Bennett and Hereford, in the southern part of the Cherokee Nation.



Bennett was a community about three miles southwest of Warner's current location. It had a post office from 1895 to 1904. As the story goes, the Bennett postmaster operated the post office from his home until it was robbed one night and he immediately resigned. The post office was then moved three miles east to the community of Hereford which was established in 1903 on the site of present day Warner.

Warner was founded by Campbell Russell. Russell was born in Alabama and came to Indian Territory in 1882 at age nineteen. Prior to statehood the area he settled in became known as Russell, I.T. In 1904 Russell himself renamed the area and post office as Hereford, I.T., after the cattle breed he brought into Indian Territory. Russell was considered to be the most passionate booster of early day Warner. He was Muskogee County's first State Senator after statehood and served in the first, second, fourth and fifth Oklahoma Legislatures.



Campbell Russell, 1863-1937.

Education was very important to Russell and was also credited with the establishment of a Secondary School of Agriculture in Warner in 1908 that later became Connors State College, a two year community college in 1927.

How the name Warner came about centers around two very different stories. The first story originated when statehood was on the horizon and the town council decided it was time to organize more formally and to find a permanent name for the town. The City Council Chair

Town of Warner Oklahoma



Prospering With Growth

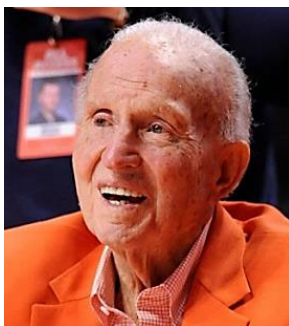


Campbell Russell was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1932 along with contemporaries Will Rogers, Governor C.N. Haskell, Thomas P. Gore and the first Chair of the State's Department of Agriculture, J. P. Connors.

suggested the name Garner, after a man who had built a hotel, lumberyard and drug store on the south side of town. Garner had also put a sign over the hotel's door that read "Gar Bank" where he charged sixty percent interest on his loans. People who didn't like Garner's loan tactics suggested that the letter "G" be cut and replaced with the letter "W".

In the second story, according to the book *Oklahoma Place Names*, Hereford's name was changed to Warner after Missourian William Warner, a former mayor of Kansas City and later representative and Senator from Missouri. Whichever story was true,

Warner finally received its town charter in 1908. In 1920 Warner's census reported 318 residents. The 2020 census reported a resident population of 1,593.



Lou Henson (1932-2020), retired from the University of Illinois as its all-time leader in basketball victories. He was also a winning coach at New Mexico State. He is a member of the National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame. (Hometown: Okay, Ok)

Considering Campbell Russell's interests in all things agriculture and his push to get a Secondary School of Agriculture in his home town as opposed to having it placed in the County's largest town, Muskogee, it's not hard to imagine that Warner's earliest economic commodity was agriculture and all things related. As the years passed and the State School of Agriculture became a two-year junior college and as I-40 made its way to Warner and further east, a more diverse economy developed to supplement the continued agriculture base. Today,

Connors State College is Warner's largest employer and primary economic driver. Cross Telephone and the Warner Public School System also serve as a major economic sources and employers. Agriculture continues to play a significant role in Warner's economy.

Campbell Russell was the most notable figure in Warner's past. Without him, the small community established near the



George Kottaras, (1983-) Former Connors' baseball catcher. He has played professionally for the Brewers, Boston Red Sox, Royals, Blue Jays and Cardinals during his Major League career. (Hometown: Toronto, Canada)



*Dr. Cassie S. Mitchell,
Associate Professor,
Georgia Tech & Emory
Universities*



*Mitchell at the 2015
Parapan American
Games.*

Missouri, Oklahoma and Gulf railway and Bennett, the community originally three miles to the southwest, would have both likely disappeared when the railroad closed.

In Warner's more recent history, some of the more well-known notables were products of the school that Russell established. However, one notable from the Warner community deserves special recognition, Dr. Cassie Mitchell.

Dr. Mitchell grew up in Warner. She was Warner High valedictorian and earned a full scholarship to Oklahoma State University. Shortly after graduating from high school she developed a neurological condition called Devics Neuromyelitis Optical which impacted her vision and paralyzed her from the chest down. While at OSU, Mitchell majored in chemical engineering. Later, she earned a PhD in biomedical engineering from both Emory and Georgia Tech universities. Currently, she is a research professor at Wallace H. Coulter Department of Biomedical Engineering at Emory and Georgia Tech.

Mitchell has participated in the Paralympic Games in 2012, 2016, 2020 and 2024. In the 2016 Rio Paralymics she medaled in both the discus and the club throws. [Besides the Paralympic Games, Mitchell has participated in and medaled in some of the World Championships, Parapan American Games, Road World Championships and National Para-Cycling Championships.]

Warner's Early Library History

During the Open House and Dedication of the new Warner Public Library in 1990, Warner resident Virginia Kauble, representing the Friends of Library in Oklahoma (FOLIO) and an avid Warner library supporter and literacy advocate, presented the new Library with a framed photograph, donated by the local Warner Chamber of Commerce, of Warner's first Library. The community's first Library was funded by the Works Progress

Administration (WPA), one of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs of the 1930s-1940s.

Muskogee was the regional office of the WPA's Library Services Project for eastern Oklahoma. Muskogee County had ten such WPA-funded community libraries. Besides Warner, there were WPA libraries in Fort Gibson, Braggs, Boynton, Haskell, Webbers Falls, Porum, Briartown, Summit and Taft. In addition to the Muskogee County community libraries there were also WPA libraries in Checotah, Stilwell, Vian, Sallisaw and Muldrow. All were under the supervision Muskogee's regional WPA office.

Pearl Burton was Warner's WPA librarian. She is pictured to the left in the photo that was presented to the Warner Public Library in 1990 and where it remains to the present time. With Mrs. Burton were approximately thirty children at a Saturday afternoon story hour.

Originally, the WPA Library had been housed in a one room building rented from the local Roy Trimm family who had originally purchased the building from the Midland Valley Railroad and had it moved to their property. In 1990 the WPA Library building was still intact and had been incorporated into a private home. The entire WPA program was dissolved in 1943. While we don't know exactly when the WPA-funded Library began in Warner, we do know it didn't exist beyond mid-1943.



Saturday Story Hour attendees at Warner's First Public Library, funded as part of the WPA Library Services Program in the early 1940s. Mrs. Pearl Barton was the librarian.

Warner Public Library – Have We Got a Story for You!

Warner was the first of the three smaller communities to apply and become an EOLS branch library. Warner Public Library held its Open House in the spring of 1990. Hulbert opened its doors in 1996 and Kansas in 1999.

Connors State College's president, Dr. Carl O. Westbrook, was the primary instigator in the creation of Warner's Public Library. As a result, Dr. Westbrook was the 1991 recipient of the Citizen's Award presented by the Oklahoma Library Association to people outside the library profession for their contribution to libraries in the state. He was cited for his years on the EOLS Board, as well as the building of a new academic Library on



*Carl O. Westbrook,
EdD, Connors State
College President,
1978-1994.*



The Warner Public Library served the small communities in the southernmost section of Muskogee County.



Roy Rains, Muskogee County Commissioner addressed the crowd as (left to right) Warner Councilman Ed Tatum; Dr. Carl Westbrook and Warner Mayor, Irlan Bullard look on during the Dedication Ceremonies of the new Warner Public Library. (Five Star News)

Connors' campus, and for laying the ground work in the creation of the Warner Public Library.

With Westbrook's urging, Muskogee State Representative Bill Settle was instrumental, as Appropriations Chair of the Oklahoma House, in getting funding for small rural library projects. Settle was assisted by State Senators Barbara Staggs and Ben Robinson.

Ultimately, the grants for small rural library projects played a significant role in the creation of the Hulbert and Kansas community libraries in the System as well.

The community of Warner embraced the Library from its beginning and has continued to do so in the years since. A recurring theme in the Warner Public Library's story is the importance and presence of community support that extends beyond the city limits of Warner to the surrounding rural communities of Porum, Webbers Falls, Keefeton, Martin and McClain. The Library has kept the needs of those communities in their long-range planning goals and objectives.



Dr. Westbrook also addressed the crowd during the Dedication Ceremony as (left to right) Mayor Irlan Bullard and EOLS Director Marilyn Hinshaw looked on. (Five Star News)

Warner Public Library's story began in 1987 when the Warner Chamber of Commerce set aside \$1,000 for the construction of a Library in the community. A ground-breaking ceremony was held two years later on March 3, 1989. On Sunday, April 29, 1990 the Warner Public Library was dedicated on a bright, sunny spring day in an event the local *Five Star News* noted with the headline "*The Sun Shone on Dedication.*" Mayor Irlan Bullard welcomed the crowd and praised the funding efforts of Dr. Westbrook, Marilyn Hinshaw, EOLS Director and State Representative Jim Barker for their efforts in making the Warner Public Library a reality. Dr.



The Warner Chamber of Commerce officially opened the Warner Public Library with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on April 3, 1990. Branch manager Shirley Thomas (fourth from left), and Councilman Ed Tatum, (seated, center) who also served as Chair of the Warner Public Library Advisory committee, cut the ribbon. (Five Star News)

Westbrook, who was also at the time Chair of the EOLS Board of Trustees, complimented the Warner community for carrying both precincts in the passage of the Muskogee County library millage from two to four mills four years previously. Ed Tatum, Chairman of the local Library Advisory Committee and Town Councilman was the Master of



Warner Public Library's first building in 1990. (Library photo)

Ceremonies and Muskogee County Commissioner Roy Rains addressed the crowd.

The 1990 Library structure was a 1,200 square foot octagon-shaped building. Architect Bill Stiger of Muskogee adopted the design from models of small Virginia branch libraries. The Library was built by Joe Hunt from the neighboring community of Gore. The total cost of the building was \$100,000. Except for the reference materials all the books in the Library were initially paperbacks. At the time of the Library's dedication there were 5,000 books ready for public use, furniture for both adults and children's needs, and a public use copy machine. On the first day the Library was open, eighteen days prior to the official Dedication, one hundred and thirty-eight library cards were issued and fifty-one books checked

out. In 2004, fourteen years later the addition to the original building, the number of available volumes was over 14,000.

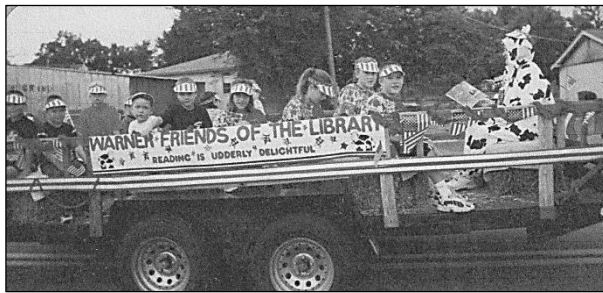
One of the additional benefits of building a Library in the community included an effort to revitalize downtown. After the Library's construction, City Hall moved to a renovated building next door to the Library and a new post office was built on the north side of the Library sharing the same parking lot.



Warner Public Library's first branch manager, Shirley Thomas, 1990-1994. (Library photo)



By May 1990 the Library was already inviting input from the community in its first five-year plan. Along with members of the Warner Library Advisory Committee which included a City Council member, a Warner Friends member and the College's librarian, the Library also requested input from



One of the Library's Cow Chip Day parade floats, "Reading is Udderly Delightful." (Five Star News)



The first Easter Egg hunt sponsored by the Greater Warner Area Friends group. Since then, the Hunt has become an annual Friends-sponsored event. (Library photo)

the High School librarian, recent Warner graduates, president of the Warner Student Council, a college employee and local library patrons. "Input from the community has been important to us from the very beginning," according to Warner Branch manager from 2014-2022, Holly Hughes, "We always are on

the lookout for programs and services that will benefit the community and increase the library's value in the community as I know did my predecessors Shirley Thomas, Shirley Noisey and Peggy Matthews."

The fourth annual Warner Cow Chip Day celebration in September 1990 included the Library's first parade float submission. Branch manager Shirley Thomas, with help from young readers, put together a float entry entitled, "Let a Good Book Race Your Engine Homeward." The float came in third place. The Library also sponsored an *Instant Poetry* booth. Leif Olson of Park Hill charged 1¢ for personalized verses. The money was used to support the children's library programming.

In 1991 the Library's Cow Chip Day float was a pirate ship that included an overflowing treasure chest covered with banners reading, "Discover the Treasures in Our Town – Warner." This float was also a third place winner in the non-profit public service category. The Library has participated in every Cow Chip Day since 1990 not always with a float but always sponsoring an event or program of interest to the community.



The Annual Turtle Race in 1995 hosted 73 participants who entered their turtles in the race that year. (Five Star News)



The Friends also host the Library's Annual Christmas Open House. In 2016, Santa read to the children. (Library photo)



When it rains, the Annual Turtle Race moves indoors, 2011. (Library photo)

In the fall of 1991 the Oklahoma Department of Libraries granted \$500 to Warner's two active local literacy tutors, Virginia Kauble and Helen Brown. The grant was predicated on the formation of a local Literacy Council. On September 18, 1991 seventeen persons met at the Warner Public Library to organize the Greater Warner Area Literacy Council. The

Council's service area included the communities of Warner, Porum, Webbers Falls, Keefeton, Martin and McClain. Eddie Ogdon, Superintendent of Warner Schools served as the Literacy Council's first president. Ed Tatum, Warner Councilman and Chair of Warner's Library Advisory Board was named vice-president. Warner Student Council member Amy Aldridge was the secretary and branch manager Shirley Thomas served as the Council's treasurer.

The organizational meeting included educators from Warner, Porum and Webbers Falls, several Lauback tutors, high school and retired educators, members of Connors' Phi Theta

Kappa (PTK) Honors fraternity and the library staff. PTK members quickly organized a Tutor Training Workshop to be held on Connors' Warner Campus, November 8-9.

The purpose of the newly formed Council was twofold, to recruit and tutor non-reading and under-educated adults in reading and writing, and to tutor English as a Second

Language participants in reading, writing, speaking and listening in English.

The Literacy Council provided services and training for tutors. The Library provided a secure area for participant records and the needed literacy materials. Training sites included the

Warner Community Center, Connors State College, area churches and schools. This was yet another example of the Warner Public Library's commitment to the communities it serves.

While the fledging Literacy Council was gaining momentum, a loosely organized group of Library Friends wrote and received a FOLIO grant of \$75 to organize a local Friends group for the Warner Library. Monetary support was also provided by the Warner Chamber of Commerce (\$100), Kiwanis (\$25) and Lions (\$75).

The Greater Warner Area Friends of the Library was organized on October 22, 1991. The group also included members from the communities of Webbers Falls, Porum, Keefeton, Martin and McClain. The group met again on November 19, 1991 to adopt the by-laws. Those who wished to be Charter Members had to pay dues on or before January 21, 1992 according to the organization's first president, long-time Warner resident, Leo Smithson.

The Friends held their first book review in March 1992. Due to the lack of meeting space in the Library itself, the book review was held in the Warner City Hall. Oklahoma author, Ken Jackson, reviewed his fifth book, "Carry Up My Bones," a story about the life of an Okie family during the Depression. Warner

Extension Homemakers provided the refreshments.

The Library's Friends have lived up to their name over the years since its organization. Along with providing funds for items not provided in the Library's budget, the Friend's group has assisted with photo contests, book reviews and signings, Books-Sandwiched-In, Pinterest parties, pet shows, pumpkin decorating, scrapbooking and other craft and art activities and bake sales to name only a few. The Friends have assisted with annual story time activities and



Will Hill, storyteller, grabs his audience with his Native American tales at the Summer Reading Program in 2009. (Library photo)



Touch-a-Truck is one of the most popular library events System-wide. Warner is no exception, 2017. (Library photo)



Mr. Scarecrow welcomed everyone to the Library, in the fall of 1999. (Library photo)



Peggy Matthews, Warner Library's third branch manager, 1998-2014. (Library photo)



It's a full house at a Summer Reading Program in June 2009. (Library photo)

Summer Reading Programs, book sales, Easter Egg hunts, the Christmas Open House activities, plant exchanges, Cow Chip Day events and even the annual Turtle races. Some of the other, less than routine, Friends' activities over the years included incentivising Library-patron weight loss by asking for a pledge of \$1 per pound of weight loss during an eight-week marathon as a fund-raising activity. Over the years the Friends

have initiated or assisted with such programs as the "Valentines Cards' for Veterans" program that started circa 2005 and continued for several years. They also assisted with the "*Free Community Breakfast Saturdays*" held at the Library one Saturday per month sponsored by the Methodist Church.

The Friends have also helped to sponsor informational programs of interest to the community over the years. Examples of such programs included "*Identity Theft*" which was presented in 2005 and provided by a presenter from the local bank. "*The Battle of Honey Springs*" program was in 2010 presented by a representative from the Honey Springs Battlefield Museum, and a "*Disaster Preparedness*" program was presented in 2011 by a representative from the local American Red Cross.

By 1993 storyhours were expanded to the preschoolers attending the local daycare centers who couldn't attend the in-library storyhours. Library staff were welcomed to the various Day Care Centers with open arms by both the children and the staff. Starting in 2015 the storyhour programs for three and four years olds were revisited and revised and ran until the arrival of the pandemic in 2020.

Being established in 1990 the Warner Public Library spent relatively a brief time period without computers and automated circulation systems. In 1992, the manual card catalog and circulation system became obsolete with the System's adoption of the *Dynix* automated circulation system and catalog. In 2002 the *Dynix* system was upgraded to *Horizon*; *Dynix's* web-based circulation and catalog system.

By 1994 most of the System's libraries found themselves purchasing shelving and furniture to accommodate more computers and new media formats such as videos and CDs. Public-access computers were first introduced to Warner's patrons in 1995. In 1998 the Internet came to the Library and afforded a new level of access to the small rural communities in the



The new roof line for the original Warner Public Library under construction, 2001. (Library photo)



The new west front entrance under construction in December 2001. (Library photo)



Finished project, 2002. (Library photo)

Library's primary service area. Many people in the area had no Internet access at their homes due to either distance or cost. For some, those access issues still exist in the Warner area and in other rural Oklahoma communities. In 1999 the System received a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation through the Oklahoma Department of Libraries for the purchase of computers and software for all the branch libraries.

An already crowded library became even more crowded. The standing joke among staff at the Library was that for every new book that arrived a current book had to be taken off the shelf so there would be room for the new one. Adding computers and the necessary furniture required was soon to reach critical mass. The need for more room to serve the Warner and surrounding communities was becoming readily apparent.

On April 24, 2000 the Warner community celebrated the Tenth Anniversary of their Library with a special week-long celebration culminating in an Open House. There were multiple story hours, "Reading for Fun" activities plus the Annual

Easter Egg Hunt. One hundred twenty people attended the Open House and reflected on the progress of the Library and its role in the community over the past ten years.

Later in the same year, the Warner Friends of the Library established a Memorial fund in memory of Ed Tatum, Warner City Councilman and long-time Library supporter. Ed was instrumental in the establishment of the Library and served on the local Library's Advisory Board since the Library's beginning. Donations to the fund were to be put in a building fund for expansion of the current Library.

On May 3, 2001 ground-breaking for the expansion of the Warner Public Library was held. The addition would add 2,900 square feet to the existing 1,200 square feet in the original octagon-shaped building. The expansion was funded by a Rural Economic Action Plan Grant



The Yumare Folkloric Dancers (OKC) helped the Library celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month at the Library in 2015. (Library photo)

(REAP). The grant’s purpose was to improve economic conditions in rural Oklahoma. The original building was incorporated into the expansion to be used as a much-needed meeting room. The new area became the Library itself with additional shelving and room for computers, children’s and adult library furniture. No longer would a book have to be taken off the shelf so a new one could be put on it. Summer Reading Program activities could be held in the Library itself instead of in the community building or

outside. The Open House for the new and bigger Warner Public Library was held May 3, 2002.



Holly Hughes was shared branch manager of both the Warner and Haskell Libraries from 2014 to 2022. (Library photo)

Later in 2002 the Warner Public Library was named the winner of the local STAR Project’s V. David Miller Award. The objective of the STAR Project was to provide parental and family resources in southern Muskogee County. The Project provided programs and services that included free GED classes, Summer Day Camps, parent education, free child care and the promotion of postsecondary educational opportunities.

The Library was “*honored for their efforts and dedication to Warner and surrounding communities,*” noted Daphne Baeza, co-director of the STAR Project. “*The Library has been involved in every event hosted by the STAR Project involving the community.*” The V. David Miller Award was created in 2001 and presented for community service and commitment to the community.



Plenty of room for story time now in 2018. (Library photo)

In the summer of 2007 another Gates-sponsored Public Access Computer Hardware Upgrade Grant of \$84,816 was awarded to the System to purchase fifty-seven computers for all branch libraries. Over time, Library staff throughout the System added more opportunities for their respective library users to learn more about computers and computer programs.

In 2008 the Warner Public Library participated in the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey “*Reading with Ringling Bros.*” summer program along with the Hulbert Community



Standing-Room-Only at a music-filled Summer Reading Program in 2015. (Library photo)



Branch manager Holly Hughes with Black History Month presenter Jimmie White. (Library photo)

Public Library. Children aged 2-12 could earn a free Ringling Bros. circus ticket by reading library books. The Library also participated in the program in 2012 and were also treated with a visit by the Ringling “Ambassadors of Laughter” who entertained the group with songs, jokes, and juggling.

The Library celebrated its Twentieth Anniversary in November 2010 with an Open House. The original 1,200 square foot octagon-shaped building was now a 3,900 square foot library resource for Warner and its surrounding communities.

In the 2017-2018 fiscal year, the entire System won the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science Blue Ribbon Award for Health Information Services. EOLS was the first library system to receive such an award in Oklahoma. The purpose of the award was to help increase awareness of health lifestyles and to honor public libraries as providers of trusted

health information. As a result most, if not all, EOLS branch libraries have sponsored health-related programming in the years since. Warner Public Library, in conjunction with the Oklahoma Healthy Aging Initiative (OHAI), presented the six-week *Eat Better, Move More* program in March 2017. In 2018 again in cooperation with OHAI, the Library provided a six-week *Tai Chi for Better Balance* program in July. In 2019, the Library once again co-sponsored another six-week program entitled “*Walk With Ease*”. This time the Library was in collaboration not only with OHAI but also by the EODD Area Agency on Aging and SAC Nutrition.

By 2019 public access computers in a library were commonplace. By the end of the year the Warner Library was able to offer mobile hotspots for check-out for the first time. The program was an instant hit since many patrons in Warner and the other the small area communities had little direct or reliable Internet connections in their homes.

In February 2020 as part of Black History Month a week-long exhibit entitled the “Tulsa Race Massacre and Spirit of Greenwood” created by the Tulsa Historical Society and Museum was on display at the Library. Connors State College’s Social Sciences Chair, Jimmie White closed the exhibit with a presentation that provided context to what had been called the Tulsa

Race Riot. White talked about events and the prevailing social climate that had preceded years before the 1921 riot.

In the decades since the headline in the *Five Star News* stated that “*The Sun Shone on the Dedication*” of the Warner Public Library on a Sunday in 1990, the Library has continued its dedication to Warner and the surrounding communities. All programs and services provided and every long-range plan written is focused on the needs of the small, rural communities of southern Muskogee County. In mid-March 2020 the ability of the Warner Library to meet the needs of their service area was put on hold when the Covid-19 pandemic interrupted all of the EOLS branch libraries future plans. But, after health protocols were initiated the Warner Public Library came back even stronger than before.

To be continued....

Introduction to Delaware County Libraries



*The current Delaware County Library.
(Library Photo)*



The current Grove Public Library. (Library Photo)



*The current Kansas Public Library.
(Library Photo)*

There are three EOLS branch libraries in Delaware County. The first one to open to the public was in Jay on January 10, 1971. The Delaware County Library in Jay has the distinction of being the first of the newly-created, six county multi-county library system rural branches to open.

The next Delaware County branch to open was Grove on April 18, 1971. Prior to its reincarnation as an EOLS branch, the Grove Public Library had been founded by the area's Business & Professional Women's Club in 1964 and inhabited space in Grove's Community Building.

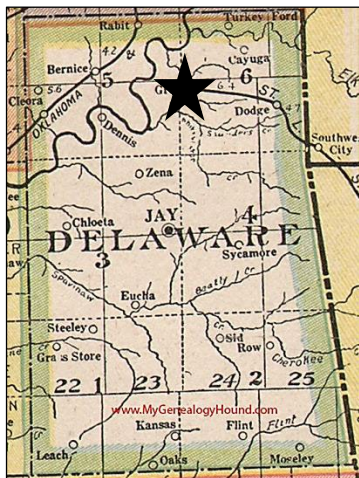
The third branch to open was in Kansas, a small community to the south of Jay, close to Delaware County's

border with Adair County. The Kansas Public Library opened in July 1999, the dream of one woman in particular. The existence of the Kansas Public Library in Delaware County, the Hulbert Community Library in Cherokee County and the Warner Public Library in Muskogee County all owe their origins in large part not

only to local women's groups and local civic and government leaders, but also to the vision of some eastern Oklahoma legislators in the late 1980s and early 1990s who worked to get state monies set aside for the development of rural library service and the establishment of small community libraries.



Introduction to Grove



On December 27, 1888 Treadwell S. Remsen, a former Union soldier from New York, received approval to build a post office in an area called Grove Spring located in northern Delaware County in the Delaware District of the Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory. Delaware County rests on the western slope of the Ozark Plateau. It is hilly and forested with many remote valleys and populated with small, isolated communities.

It is estimated that the town was incorporated sometime around 1895, but the date is uncertain. The 1900 census listed it as the “incorporated town of Grove.” The official plat of the town was approved on November 22, 1902 by the U.S. Department of the Interior. Town lots began selling in 1904-05.

With Statehood in 1907 Grove, the only incorporated town in the County at the time became the default County seat. The placement of the County seat in Grove, only five miles from the northern boundary of an area covering 792 square miles, became problematic to those living in the middle and southern ends of the County who felt that a seat closer to the middle of the County would be preferable.

Central and southern residents found a site closer to the center of the county and platted a town specifically built to be the Delaware County seat. The soon-to-be built post office was named Jay. Needless to say, Grove residents were less than pleased with the actions of the group that called itself the Delaware County Improvement Association. Ultimately, the location of the County seat forced a vote on the issue in late 1908. Jay received more votes than Grove so Jay became the County seat. Grove pursued several legal actions to retain the status of County seat, including petitioning

CAPT. T. S. REMSEN FOUNDER OF GROVE DIES.

**Was Grove's First Postmaster, and
He Started The First Store
In Our Town.**

The entire population of Grove was made sad Monday when it was learned that Captain T. S. Remsen had passed away, about noon, January 16, 1922, cause of death being a complication of paralysis and Bright's disease. The Captain had reached the ripe old age of 78 years and three months.

Capt. Remsen was Grove's first P. M., being appointed in 1890, just a few days after his return from a visit and business trip to New York. He served his very few patrons at that time very creditably. The Captain was also the first man to start a store in Grove, the postoffice and store being combined.

The Grove Sun, January 19, 1922.

the Oklahoma Supreme Court, deploying the National Guard and fielding several suspicious fires, but in 1918 the official County records were moved to Jay permanently.



Jack Chrisman (1928-1989), was the 1961 American Drag Racing Champion. He was instrumental in the development of the Funny Car Class of racing vehicles. Chrisman's 1964-65 Mercury Comet car was considered to be one of the first Funny Cars. (Wikipedia)



Pensacola Dam, built by the WPA in the late 1930s is the longest multiple-arch dam in the world. It is one mile long and ten stories high. (City of Grove History)



Two main bridges provide access to Grove after the arrival of Grand Lake. Sailboat Bridge, built in 1938-39 and rebuilt in the 1990s, was considered to be the most picturesque. (City of Grove History)

2020 census.

Grove has since become a retirement and tourist destination with the development of Grand Lake, also known as the Lake O' the Cherokees. Homes and developments occupy miles of lakeshore in the Grove area making it the center of economic development in northern Delaware County. Tourists now flock to the Grove area for lake recreational activities of all

Grove kept one important asset, however, and that was the railroad. It was the main means of moving people, industrial and agricultural products prior to the arrival of improved roads and motorized vehicles. Before statehood, locals found oil and minerals in the surrounding area. The oil was basically a byproduct of the intended search for water resources. While the oil served a purpose of providing the community with a means to light their homes, it was not considered a particularly important commodity. Crops, especially fruit, like peaches, apples, tomatoes and strawberries were popular in the 1910s through the 1920s. Cotton played a small role as well during this time.

In the 1930s news of a dam to be built across the Grand River brought hope to the community that it would help Grove grow and prosper. It did, but the results were not immediate.

About the time railroad service ended in the early 1940s, the gates of the newly completed Pensacola Dam were closed and

Grove became a peninsula with water surrounding the town on three sides.

The dreams of community development and growth based on the construction of the dam and creation of Grand Lake were sidelined in the 1940s by World War II, but in the decades since the 1950s, Grove has steadily grown from a population stubbornly held for decades since statehood in the 800s to a population of 6,956 in the



Grove resident Robert M. Weaver (1979-) is a consultant specializing in Native American Healthcare. He is a member of the Quapaw Tribe. (Google Images)

kinds, including the annual Bassmaster Classic Fishing Tournament, riverboat tours, and Pelican Festival, as well as for other lake-based activities for both individuals and families. Other types of entertainment found in Grove include music and comedy shows, shopping and Har-Ber Village, an early frontier town re-creation including turn-of-the-century cabins and village shops.

Area notables calling Grove and the area home include several baseball and football players and coaches, local and state politicians, a drag racer and Native American healthcare consultant.



Sam Pittman, (1961-) attended Grove High School. He became the head coach of the University of Arkansas Razorbacks football team in 2019. (Google Images)

Grove's Early Library History

Grove's library history began in earnest in the early 1960s, however, there were earlier attempts to provide "readers and book lovers" with books and reading materials. As early as 1906, *Grove Sun* Editor and Manager, O. E. Butler, noted that among other "must haves" Grove needed, "Public library and reading rooms."

In 1912 under the "Local News" column in a September issue of the *Grove Sun*, J.F Hampton, Agent, Book Readers Club, posted an ad which stated, "Buy any book in the library for 60¢ read it and return it with 5¢ and get another one and so on as long as you wish." It must be assumed that people knew where Mr. Hampton and the Book Readers Club could be found because it wasn't included in the notice.

GROVE MUST HAVE

Better Sidewalks,
More Graded Streets,
An Opera House,
A new Frisco depot,
Manufacturing Plants,
500 Practical Farmers.
More Good Roads,
Public library and reading
rooms,
All public spirited citizens
And more men and women
to fight the mail order
houses.

The Grove Sun, April 20, 1906.

To Readers and Book Lovers

I have started in the little building beyond the Peyton building a Magazine and Book Store and Reading Library. While my stock is not large, yet I have a good assortment of books ranging from magazines to standard novels and encyclopedias and am adding new books to my shelves every day.

It is my purpose to soon build up a good magazine and book store—one in which can be found all the best and latest novels and magazines and literature of every sort.

In my shelves are now represented authors, such as E. Marion Crawford, Marie Cor-elli, E. P. Roe, Mary J. Holmes, Geo. Barr McCutcheon, F. Hopkinson Smith, Thos. E. Dixon, Dumas, Will N. Harbin, Harold Bell Wright and Augusta J. Evans.

You have a Cordial Invitation to call and look over my line. I may have something you would like to read.

Respectfully,

R. G. CAYWOOD

EAST END OF THIRD STREET, GROVE, OKLA.

Delaware County News, September 25, 1914.

Two years later in 1914, R.G. Caywood did tell readers and book lovers where to find his new Magazine and Book Store and Reading Library in an ad in the *Delaware County News*. He told readers to look for the little building beyond the Peyton Building on the east end of Third Street in Grove for a "good assortment of books ranging from magazines to standard novels and encyclopedias."

What is seemingly different about Grove's early experiences with books and other reading materials in a more organized setting is that they were commercial enterprises run by men rather than the more common origin story of women or women's club involvement. If there was any type of lending library in the Grove community prior to the early 1960s, it remains a mystery. But when the Grove Public

Library had its earliest beginnings it was through the efforts of a group of women, in this case, the Grand Lake Business and Professional Women's Club.

Prior to the involvement of the Business and Professional Women's Club in the creation of a public library in 1964, the *Delaware County Journal* posted several articles about Bookmobile service coming to Delaware, Ottawa, Mayes and Craig counties in June 1959, for a three-day demonstration period to acquaint residents with its services. Citizens would be able to inspect the \$10,000 truck that carried 1,500 books. At this point the Bookmobile's visit was solely for exhibition purposes and was sponsored by the Oklahoma State Extension Library's (now Oklahoma Department of Libraries) outreach to towns and rural areas.



The Library created by the Grand Lake Business & Professional Women's Club was located in a small room in the northwest corner of the town's Community Center. (Library photo)

Much interest was reported to have been sparked by the Bookmobile's visit to the area but its continued service required financial commitments on the part of the interested counties to be part of an eighteen-month trial. An article in the *Journal* quoted Jay Superintendent, Jay Earp, encouraging everyone to visit the Bookmobile as an "*encouragement for the State to furnish one for us.*" Needless to say, the Bookmobile project was not funded. The closest public libraries remained in Pryor and Miami located in Mayes and Ottawa counties respectively.

In 1964 the Grand Lake Business and Professional Women's Club, with the consent of the town trustees, allocated a portion of the northwest area of the Community Building as the public library. Book donations poured in, shelves were built by volunteers and hours of work by B&PW members and volunteers resulted in a public library that officially opened on October 17, 1964. B&PW members and other interested volunteers served as library staff. On opening day 138 library cards were issued.

By the following year, it was evident the fledging library had already outgrown its space. On June 1, 1965 the Town Council approved the use of a larger room in the Community Building previously used as an auditorium. Again, after months of hard work and donations from various individuals and local businesses, the Library re-opened



By mid-June 1965, the Library had outgrown its original location in the Community Center, and was moved to a larger room previously used as an Auditorium. This second location was the first location of the Grove branch of EOLS. (Library photo)

on April 16, 1966. The first salaried librarian was Elfie Richards.

In January 1967 the Grove Library Board was incorporated following a generous donation from the estate of Elinor Egee. The need for a local governing board was also realized and the Grove Library Board was incorporated with Dick Locke serving as legal counsel. The initial board members were named by the B&PW. The Library Board was responsible for the librarian's salary, materials, building maintenance and utilities. Prior to its incorporation into the library system, the Grove library charged 25¢ for each library card and for annual membership. Additional donations and estate contributions helped in the continued growth of the new Grove Public Library.

In June 1970 the City of Grove entered into agreement to, *“provide good library service to the residents...with the Oklahoma Department of Libraries...for a demonstration period of two years a multi-county library...in accordance with the Oklahoma Library Code.”* According to the agreement, *“the governing boards of Delaware County and relevant Cities (as defined in the Code) would join the governing boards county and relevant city boards of Adair, Cherokee, McIntosh, Muskogee, and Sequoyah to create a library district.”* On June 16, 1970 the Grove City Council signed Ordinance No. 174 indicating their intent to participate in the newly formed multi-county library district. (Note: Ordinance No. 174 was signed by the Mayor, Daryl Gray and City Clerk, Elfie Richards, who had previously served as the first paid librarian of the B&PW's original public library).

In 1972 during the multi-county demonstration period, the Grove Library realized the benefits that joining a multi-county system had brought them and voted for a two-mill ad valorem tax that allowed both the Grove and Jay libraries to become a part of the Eastern Oklahoma Library System.

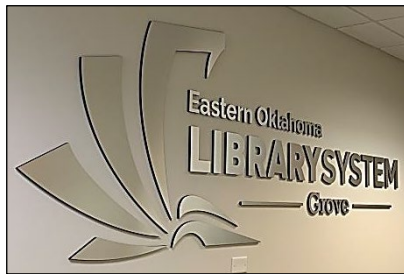
Grove Public Library – A Grand (Lake) Library

The Grove Public Library opened as an EOLS branch in the Grove Community Building on April 18, 1971, joining the Delaware County Library in Jay



The current Grove Public Library, 2020. (Library Photo)

that had opened January 10, 1971. The first Grove branch manager of EOLS record was Carol Wise. Later in the same year, Delaware County was one of three counties approving the required two-mill levy for multi-county establishment by a vote of 930 to 741.



Many county groups, clubs, organizations and individuals were instrumental in seeing that both the Grove and the Jay libraries were successful. In Grove, the public library the Business and Professional Women's group established in 1964 continued as an EOLS branch.



Har-Ber Village Museum is an early frontier town re-creation, pioneer-era village located on the shores of Grand Lake. (<https://har-bervillage.com>)

The growth and acceptance of the Grove Public Library by its community was measurable in numerous ways. Two of the most significant include its participation in and with the community and County as a whole. The local newspaper, the *Grove Sun*, in its weekly local news column, *Sunspots*, routinely listed the Library's events and Summer Reading Programs. The Library also participated in community sports and Fun-Run sign-ins, book drives, job fairs, hunter education programs, historical-based programming in cooperation with Har-ber Village and various Chamber of Commerce activities. Grove and Jay also shared Library resources in order to offer services and programs to the entire County. The sharing continued when Kansas joined the System in 1999 and continues to this day. The Grove Library also served as a local history hub and as a center for the community's non-profit organizations.

Grove Library Celebrates 10th
Anniversary

“There was no public library in Delaware County before 1964. The Grand Lake Business & Professional Women’s Club was the first organization to successfully do something about it.

...the library was aided in 1970 by a one year trial period when the EODL financed the library through state funds.

On December 7, 1971, voters approved by a 930 to 741 margin, a levy which meant that Delaware County joined EODL on a more permanent basis.

Now, Grove Public Library receives \$2,156 per year to purchase new books. Today’s book inventory stands about 5,000 (books).

The...Library offers several services to the reading public....Inter-library loans...magazines...newspapers...summer reading programs....

Our new registrations are just tremendous, says Mrs. (Carol) Wise. The average is about 60 to 75 per month.”

*The Grove Sun
October 24, 1974*

Another measure of the Grove Library’s importance to the community was the actual physical growth of the Library from 1964 until now. In its fifty-plus years of existence the Library moved locations three times and expanded square footage in two of the three locations. In every instance, the expansions and/or moves were precipitated by the necessity for a bigger facility to meet the growing community’s library needs.

After the 1966 move to the larger space in the Community Center, approximately nineteen years passed before the Library again outgrew its allotted space. In 1984 the City held a groundbreaking for an addition to the Library at its location in the Community Building.

By 1988 the need for more space was evident again. The City of Grove applied for and received a building grant in the amount of \$60,000 from the Oklahoma Department of Libraries on the condition the City could match the funds and finalize building plans.



Construction underway in 1984 on the building that doubled the Library’s original square footage from 2,500 square feet in the Community Center location to 5,000 square feet. (Library photo)



The finished Grove Public Library in 1988. (Library photo)

Ultimately, Grove received the full construction amount requested, \$100,000, because of another library’s default. The City then finalized the arrangements to purchase the town’s Utilities Building and move the Library into that space doubling

the square footage from 2,500 to 5,000 square feet. The City also had some expansion acreage behind the Utilities Building in case of the need for future library expansion. The utilities operation then moved into the space previously occupied by the



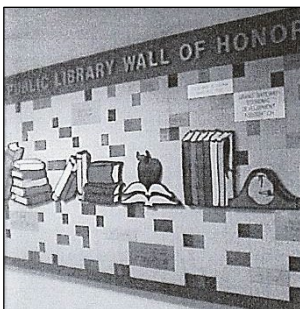
Ground-breaking for the current Grove Public Library, December 2002. (Library photo)



Current Library under construction, 2003. (Library photo)



Marcia Austin, Grove branch manager (1991-2007) at microphone, spearheaded the construction of the current Library. Library staff recognized at Open House (left to right) Peggy Cook, Barbara Cross and Glendia White. (Library Photo)



The Library's Wall of Honor saluted all those who made the current Library possible. (Library photo)

library in the Community Building.

By 1993 only five years after the doubling of the square footage, it began to become apparent that the need for even more space was rapidly becoming not just a pipe dream but a necessity. Grove branch manager Marcia Austin, in her report to the Grove City

Council in October 1998 noted that since 1993 the number of library materials had increased from 20,219 items to 30,861 items; registered patrons had grown from 3,291 to 4,925

and circulation had grown from 47,266 to 63,955. Also, the popular genealogy section was being crowded out by increased usage and while there was money for emerging technologies and increasing internet and computer use there was no place to put the computers necessary to meet the demand.

“Right now we have one computer with Internet access that is available to the public

and it is in constant use. I have money in my budget for more, but no place to put them.” Austin also reported that she had had discussions with the City Manager Richard Ball, and they were awaiting an architect’s opinion on what could be done with a possible expansion of the current ten-year -old library facility and acreage located at 206 South Kilcarney. Instead, in meeting with the City Council in April 1999, the architect recommended building a new building altogether.

Library moves, while generally looked forward to, include their own moments of drama. Some of the drama is minor while other

dramas can cause some nail-biting moments. An example of the former is the move from the Community Building to the former Utilities Building in the late 1980s. A large plant that resided



Adult and general seating area. (Library photo)

in the Library for many years fell off the flatbed truck that city workers used to move Library's contents. The plant ended up in a ditch but ultimately survived and



Public Access Computers. (Library photo)

cuttings from the plant made the journey to the existing Library in its 2004 move.

An entirely different level of drama occurred during the construction of the current Library, however. In 2001 organizers of the Grove Public Library Fund faced the need to raise \$771,233 to build the current Library located across from the NEO Higher



Kids' Cove Children's area. (Library photo)

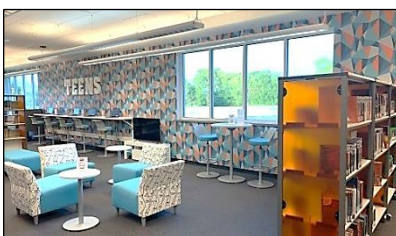
Education Center. The City received a \$50,000 Rural Economic Assistance Program grant through the Grand Gateway Economic Development Authority that also supplemented the total amount needed for construction. The City Council awarded the contract for the building November 19, 2002.



Monk, a White Pelican, keeps watch at the Grove Public Library from a safe perch. Monk was donated to the Library by Sharon Michel who has a collection and passion for white pelicans. (Library photo)

By 2003 it was apparent that a funding shortfall would cost the City an additional \$120,998 to complete the Library's construction. The construction had already begun in December 2002. The City noted that the money needed to complete the project wasn't in the City's proposed budget for 2003. The actual total cost of the library project was projected to be in the \$860,000 range instead of the earlier \$770,000 projection.

The lower budget figures were the result of omissions in the earlier cost projections. No provisions had been made for basic electrical service, for a parking lot, utility connections, landscaping and what became an unforeseen soil issue. To fix the issues, an additional \$120,998 had to



Teen Area. (Library photo)

come from the City budget's cash reserves. But finally, the new Library was open to the public January 5, 2004 and on February 29, 2004 the Grove Public Library held its Grand Opening in a 10,200 square foot building that more than doubled the previous location's square footage. Today, the Grove Library stands as a

testament to the City's commitment to the community it serves.



Main Circulation and Information Desk. (Library photo)

The current Grove Public Library’s décor reflects its location on the shores of the Grand Lake with the use of a lakeside theme complete with a white pelican mascot named Monk keeping watch.



Children can make their own videos at the Library. (Library photo)



Touch-A-Truck is a popular event at Grove Public Library, 2019. (Library photo)

Kid’s Cove, the children’s reading area includes a boat for the kids to read in. The adult and teen areas also sport a marine-like theme of cool blues, greens and teal. There is now enough room for relaxation, genealogy research, public access computers, adult and children’s programming including Summer Reading Program activities; and an enlarged circulation and services area for ease of staff and patron access to resources.



Branch manager Brenda Newnam (2008-), demonstrating how to use the Wi-Fi hotspots available for checkout. (Library photo)

The increased room provided by the Grove Library has continued to allow and provide for new library programs and services for old and young alike in the years since its construction.

Community support is the lifeblood of all the branch libraries in EOLS. In Grove, a Wall of Honor recognizes all those – government, businesses, trusts, groups, agencies, organizations, individuals and more who contributed to the Grove Public Library Building Fund.

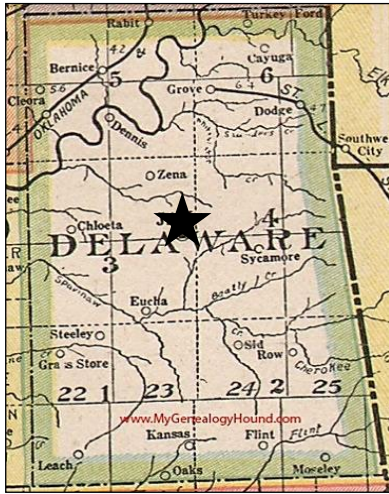


Teen Art Contest in 2018. (Library photo)

New programs, services, technologies and activities continue at the Grove Public Library as they do in all EOLS branch libraries. A few of them are pictured here prior to the arrival of the Covid pandemic in 2020. Like all of the EOLS branch libraries, Grove weathered the pandemic and continued to serve its community.

To be continued....

Introduction to Jay



Jay is located in mid-Delaware County at the junction of State Highways 59 and 20. It is approximately eleven miles from the State's border with Arkansas in the forests of the Ozark Plateau. Jay is unique in Oklahoma's history because the town's original site and layout were purposely located and platted to be the Delaware County seat. At Statehood, the only incorporated town in Delaware County was Grove, north of Jay. Grove already had a newspaper and a railroad terminal but the one thing it didn't have was a centralized location. Because of poor road conditions and hilly terrain it took citizens in the central and



Grave of Claude L. (Jay) Washbourne, nephew of Stand Watie and namesake of Jay, Oklahoma, 1859-1917.

southern parts of the county a minimum of two days to make the 30 mile trip to Grove for any legal business. As a result, the citizens of central and southern Delaware County formed the Delaware County Improvement Association in 1908 with the stated mission of moving the County seat toward the middle of the County.

Therein began a fight between the two towns that included contested elections, the Oklahoma Supreme Court, the Oklahoma National Guard and at least two Oklahoma governors.

Early on, a survey team identified and selected the land of Thomas Oochalater, a full-blood Cherokee, as the site for the County seat. Acquiring title to the land of a full-blood Cherokee proved legally difficult because of Federal restrictions so the Association turned their focus instead on land owned by Claude L. "Jay" Washbourne. As a mixed blood, Washbourne's land was exempt from the Federal restrictions that hampered the acquisition of Oochalater's land. The Association built a post office on Washbourne's land and submitted three town names for the U.S. Postal Service's consideration. Those names were "Center", "Jay" and "Washbourne". The postal service chose the name Jay for its brevity.



Delaware County News (Grove, Oklahoma), August 11, 1911.



Delaware County Court House. Lewis A. Danner Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.



Welcome to the Huckleberry Capital of the World! (Google Images)



The Association petitioned Oklahoma’s first governor, Charles Haskell, to call an election to locate the County seat in Jay in 1908. The election’s vote was in Jay’s favor. Grove’s residents appealed to the Oklahoma Supreme Court to keep the County seat in Grove. In 1911, the Court ruled the 1908 election legal even though Jay didn’t officially exist yet as a town. Further complicating the issue was local resident William J. Creekmore. While the legal issues played out between Grove and Jay, Creekmore bought and developed property north of the proposed town (Creekmore Addition) and built a two-story concrete court

house and offered to donate it to the County adding even more confusion to the issue.

The Supreme Court also rejected Grove’s second appeal but still Grove refused to move the County’s records to Jay. The state’s second Governor, Lee Cruce, sent the National Guard to force the move but the

County Sheriff and seventy-five deputized men blocked the move. To further complicate matters; a fire destroyed both wood-framed Courthouses in Jay in 1914. In total the County records were moved five times between Grove, Jay and the Creekmore Building before finally finding a permanent home in Jay in 1918.

In 1939 Jay was finally incorporated as a town. Jay’s early economy was centered primarily on timber, farming and stock-raising. As Delaware County grew, State, County, Federal offices and the school systems became important employers in Jay as did the development of the chicken growers and processing industry.

Jay’s first Federal Census was in 1940 and it reported 741 residents. Originally, the construction of the Grand River Dam and Grand Lake in the northern part of the County did not have the same economic impact in the middle and southern parts as it



Buzz Wetzel, 1894-1941. (Google Images)



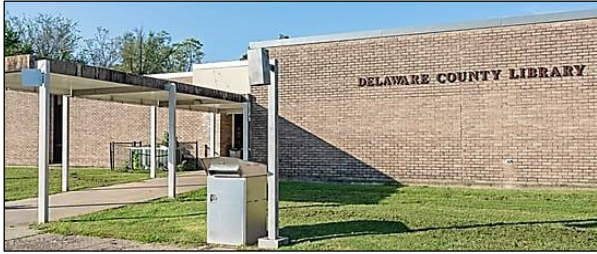
Tommy Morrison, Born in Arkansas, Morrison spent his teen years in Jay, 1969-2013. (Google

did in the northern part early on. Later, as the County's hilly terrain was conquered by improved roads and transportation, Grand Lake's recreational activities and tourism slowly spread southward. As of 2020 Jay's census reported 2,425 citizens. Almost forty percent (39.3) of the residents were Native American.

In 1967 Jay was celebrated as the Huckleberry Capital of the World and has hosted an annual Festival around July 4th ever since.

Notable people from Jay include sports figures in boxing and baseball. Buzz Wetzel was a pitcher for one season in 1927 for the Philadelphia Athletics. Tommy Morrison's heavyweight boxing career spanned the years of 1988 to 2008. He won the WBO heavyweight title in 1993. He even appeared alongside Sylvester Stallone in the movie, Rocky V.

Delaware County Library, Jay – The First

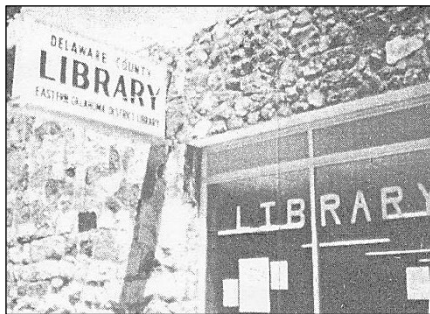


Unlike Grove's Library whose existence is credited with its establishment by the Business and Professional Women's organization in 1964, no record was found that Jay had any type of public library prior to the arrival of the Eastern



The Delaware County Journal in the November 19, 1970 edition, noted these individuals as the "Leaders in The Drive for Library". Standing third from left is Vivian Wheat, the Delaware County EOLS representative. Others included board members and branch managers from other EOLS libraries. Also included was District Librarian, James Wilkerson (fourth from left) and ODL Consultant, Esther Mae Henke (fifth from left).

Oklahoma Library System. However, the June 25, 1959 edition of the *Delaware County Journal* noted that a visit of the Bookmobile operated by the Oklahoma State Extension Library was well attended by Jay residents and that many expressed an interest that the service becomes available to residents. Approximately eleven years later, it was the interest of two women whose dream of library service in Jay helped bring the Delaware County Library into existence when the opportunity to join the multi-county library demonstration became a reality.

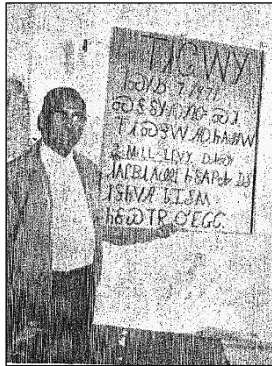


Jay's first Library location was in the City Hall Building. The signage was installed on July 13, 1971 (Delaware County Journal)

In 1970 with the creation of the Eastern Oklahoma Library System, Vivian Wheat was appointed Delaware County's first representative on the Board of Trustees (1970-75). Mrs. Wheat and Mrs. Mariee Wallace, who was also soon became a multi-county board member herself, had collaborated years earlier to initiate a drive for library service in Jay. Their dream was about to come true. A local library committee was formed and they immediately went to work soliciting funds and community support for a library in Jay. Organizations and clubs contributed through money-raising projects such as bean dinners and by soliciting donations from all over southern Delaware County. Residents responded eagerly.

Soon, funds were available to renovate an unused space in the north end of the Jay City Hall building. The Jay High School carpentry class set about renovating the space with new

wooden wall paneling, a suspended ceiling and new lighting. Wall-to-wall red carpeting was added as well as a new central HVAC system. The front of the building and entrance were completely remodeled. The System provided the shelving, equipment and furniture. The initial set-up included 4,000 books plus music albums, 16mm film access, magazines, newspapers, story hours and summer reading programs, interlibrary loan availability and other library services new to the Jay community.



Sam Hilder holds a Cherokee language sign in support of the December 7, Delaware County millage election. (Delaware County Journal)

The Delaware County Library opened formally on January 10, 1971. The Open House was held on January 11, according to System records. It was the first newly-created public library facility to open in the Eastern Oklahoma Library System. Judy Anderson was hired as Jay's first EOLS branch manager. The library was open part-time, 20 hours per week in the beginning. Also, during the same week of the Library's Open House, Bookmobile service began in Delaware County with Kenwood School being the Bookmobile's first stop in the County which was also on Monday, January 11.

It didn't take long for the Bookmobile service in general to overwhelm expectations. In total, the two assigned Bookmobiles made 74 stops in the six counties every two weeks. Delaware County did its share in the success of Bookmobile service overall.

LET'S DO SOMETHING NICE FOR
DELAWARE COUNTY
*The Cost is so Small for the Great,
Wide Range of good it does in every
Community in the County.*
LET'S ALL JOIN IN THE EFFORT

Delaware County Journal,
December 2, 1971

The Bookmobiles were widely accepted and greatly appreciated in the

"6. A library to be constructed in Jay to provide social, cultural, educational and general facility sources for Delaware county." Grant awards: Sept. '77; Start construction: Dec. '77; Estimated completion date: Sept. '78; Architect: E&R Assoc.

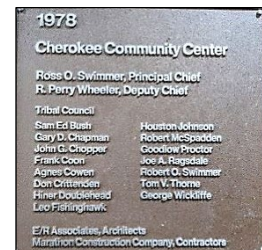
"Cherokee's Building Program Begins in Three-County Area."

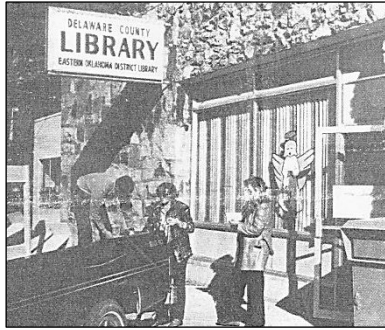
Stilwell Democrat Journal
December 22, 1977

hills and more remote locations of Delaware County.

On December 7, 1971

Delaware County residents voted the two-mill levy to support the two county libraries (Jay and Grove) even though voters were in opposition to the other five questions on the same December ballot. The measure did pass by majority in both Grove and Jay communities. Vivian Wheat, Marie Wallace and

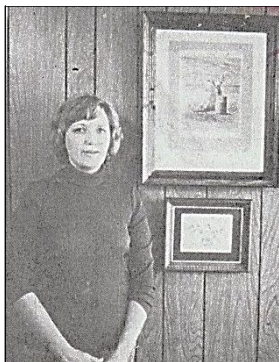




Library staff moving out of Jay's City Hall to their new location in the Community Center, December, 1978. (Delaware County Journal)



Volunteers and library staff, including EOLS Director Monty Maxwell, center, spent two days during the Christmas Holidays moving and reassembling shelving and restocking the shelves in the new Library. (Delaware County Journal)



Deanna Smith became Jay's branch manager in 1975 and served in that capacity for 31 years, retiring in 2006. Here she showcases a local artist's work on display in the Library. (Delaware County Journal)

members of the community's local Library Board were instrumental in the measure's passage in Jay and in the County.

In 1976 a coordinated effort of the Cherokee Nation, Delaware County Commissioners and the Jay City Council combined to give Jay's Library a building that included a larger space. Preliminary plans called for the County to lease the Cherokees a building site near the County's Health Clinic. The Tribe would then submit a federal grant through NECO, a regional development agency headquartered in Vinita. In turn, the tribe required commitments for the local administration of the Library.

After eight years of rapid growth, a long wait and hard work, the Delaware County Library moved to its larger home in the Jay Community Center in late 1978 during the latter weeks of the Christmas holiday season. The Community Center was built with EDA and Cherokee Nation funding and was located on leased county land as stipulated in the funding grant.

Even though the move occurred during holiday week a large number of volunteers showed up to move the Library's contents from the old building to the new. It was a scene reminiscent of the large number of volunteers who initially set up the original library in the unused space in City Hall in record time back in 1971.

A Friends' group was first organized in 1979, and reorganized in 2012. From its beginnings in 1971 as a part-time library to a full-time 40+ hour facility in 1978, the Delaware County Library, as stated by then branch manager, Deanna Smith, quickly became one of the "hubs of the community."

In 1984 the Delaware County Literacy Council was established and a Literacy Grant was awarded to the Library from the Oklahoma Department of Libraries to serve the needs identified in southern

Delaware County. In 1986 the Library celebrated its 15th anniversary on April 6 with an Open

House event. By then, the initial collection of 4,000 items had expanded to more than 13,500 and open hours expanded from 20 to 46 hours per week. Circulation also grew with over 300,000 items being checked out. Branch manager Deanna Smith, noted that the Library had *“so many more services to offer than ever before.”* She also noted that, *“the establishment of the Delaware County Literacy Council stands out as one of the most exciting projects early in the decade.”*

Other services noted by Smith since the Library’s opening in January 1971 included: 16mm films for use by non-profit organizations, projectors, magazines and area newspapers, story hours, school-aged Summer Reading Programs, adult programs, including book reviews. The Library also had available an electric typewriter and a computer, both purchased through local donations, for public use.



The 2003 expansion allowed for more room to display new book arrivals in the Library. (Library photo)



In 2015, a new sign was installed on the Community Center’s grounds. (Library photo)



Along with the expanded services noted during the 15th Anniversary in 1986, the first System-provided public use computers were added in 1990. In May 1996 the Library received a Department of Commerce Telecommunications Grant. Jay was one of only 33 funded applications out of 63 submissions. It wasn’t long before more room was needed once again in the rapidly growing Library. This time the space was needed for the computers and additional shelving for the ever-expanding and ever-popular book collections.

The new addition’s groundbreaking occurred on June 27, 2003. The new planned space included a 1,000 square foot addition, a new roof and some internal revamping to improve service to the community. Along with the computer area, the Library planned to add another 10,000 books requiring around 17,000 feet of additional shelving to be included. The Circulation Desk would also be increased to enable better customer service.

The Friends of the Delaware County Library spearheaded the fund-raising for the Library’s renovation. The Grand Gateway Foundation in Big Cabin, Oklahoma, offered the first \$50,000. Another \$130,000 in grants was also made available as of the first months of 2003.

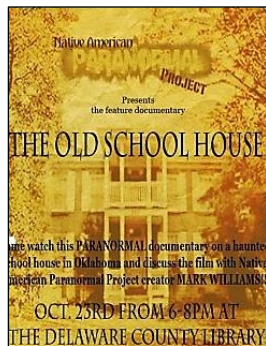


In 2018, storyteller and author Sequoyah Guess provided an evening of scary stories in preparation for Halloween. (Library photo)

The remodeling was completed and staff moved into the new available spaces in early 2004. An Open House was held for the public on April 23, 2004.

As earlier noted, the Friends of the Library originally organized in 1979, but over time interest waned in the organization. The Friends reorganized in late 2012. The group hit the ground running and held its first “Books and Buffet” meeting in January 2013.

In 2013 the issue of who was in charge of the Community Center’s Meeting Room was front and center to the community and Library as well. The issue was first brought to the Delaware



Snakes, even plush ones, always draw big crowds at Jay’s Summer Reading Programs. There were some real snakes in the tanks, too! May 2013. (Library photo)

County Commissioners attention in 2009. The System’s position was that without the Meeting Room the Library didn’t qualify as a “full-service library” as defined by the Oklahoma Department of Libraries and as such lost \$38,000 in state aid during the previous three

years alone, according to branch manager Karen Alexander. After

discussion, the Commissioners voted to give Meeting Room control back to the Library so it could qualify for state funds.

Like its neighbor to the north in Grove, Jay Library’s programming ran the gamut of both “traditional” library programming – Summer Reading Programs, book reviews, story hours, book sales, Friends’ events etc., to various community and county events placing it at the center of the Jay community. The Delaware County Library has participated in the annual



One method used to keep the public notified about the Library’s programs and events was the new Community Center sign. (Library photo)



Make-a-Car contest winners got to ride in the Library’s float during the July 2014 Red, White and Boom parade. (Library photo)



Louie Lightning Bug, a friend of the Delaware County Library, gave books to Head Start kids celebrating “Week of the Young Child” in 2014. Louie was a frequent and popular Library visitor. (Library photo)



Branch manager Karen Alexander (2012-2020), center, surrounded by Library staff in 2018. (Library photo)



Ahoy, Book Pirates! It's amazing what a creative staff and a pumpkin display box from the grocery store can become for Halloween 2018. (Library photo)

Huckleberry Festival, the annual Cruise Night, Red, White and Boom activities, job fairs and skills-training, exercise/health programs, after school programs, retirement programs, Little Mr. and Miss programs, Recipe Club, and Master Gardener programs to highlight just a few.

The community was kept informed about library programs and activities through regular postings in "Sunspots," a regular column in the local *Delaware County Journal* newspaper and also with the Community Center's signboard.

In 2016 to illustrate the point of the Library's commitment to the community, branch manager Karen Alexander was given the Coalition for Community Recognition Award. She was the first recipient for this award and was selected for her spirit of volunteerism. The County Commissioners praised Alexander for her work in the Library and for the community.



Native dress display in March 2015. (Library photo)

In 2018 library staff member Clara Proctor received the Traditions Keeper Award from her tribe, the United Keetoowah, for her work in promoting the Cherokee language and also for her work on *The Old School House Project*. *The Old School House* was a documentary from the Native American Paranormal Project Series about an old building that was once a Cherokee orphanage after the Civil War.



Library Clerk Clara Proctor received the "Traditions Keepers Award" from the Keetoowah Tribe in November 2018. (Library Photo)

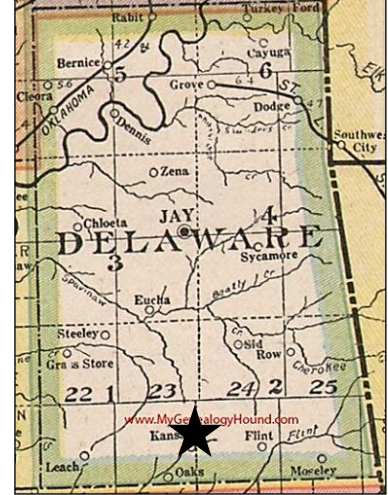
In mid-March 2020, the arrival of Covid-19 briefly closed the Delaware County Library for the protection both its staff and its community alike. As soon as it was feasible, the Library reopened to serve its community as it had since 1971.

To be continued....

Introduction to Kansas

Kansas is located in south central Delaware County, south of the Cherokee Turnpike, and thirteen miles from the Arkansas state line. Oklahoma State Highways 412 and 10 intersect within the community's city limits.

There are two theories as to the origin of the town's name. One theory was simply that many of the town's early residents came from the state of Kansas even though census records don't substantiate the fact. A more charming and more favored story by locals was that *"there was a man of small stature who came to Siloam Springs, Arkansas, by train from Kansas City, Kansas. He rented a hack and stocked it with light household goods, pots and pans, bolts of cloth, sewing machine parts and needles, etc. He drove out (west) to Indian Territory, stopping at the farm*



"Kansas, Okla. A TOWN OF 250 GOOD HOSPITABLE PEOPLE,

Nestling in the heart of the Ozarks, The Fruit Garden of the World, where Climatic conditions are unexcelled, surrounded by a fertile country of Timber and Prairie land now open for settlement offers the homeseeker unparalleled (sic) opportunities.

Come and locate in a country where land is still cheap, a country which in a few short years will be traversed by railroads and filled with manufacturing industries.

"come to Okahoma (sic) Young Man and Grow Up With the country."

*The Delaware Tribune
January 27, 1911*

homes along the way. When in this area he always camped at the spring on Spring Creek just under the hill south and west of the present town site and south of the present Highway 33 (now Highway 412). Because the Indians couldn't pronounce his name, everyone just called him Little Kansas City. The town was named for this unknown but well-remembered man...."

Regardless of the true origin of the community's name, Kansas, Indian Territory, was a boomtown while still a part of the Cherokee Nation prior to Oklahoma statehood. On December 2, 1902 the federal government appointed Tom Caywood and A.K. Wright to plot out a town site with the stipulation that the town have a post office. The government paid the Cherokee Nation twenty-five dollars to purchase the forty-five acre town site. The town grew

immediately.

Early Kansas' businesses included several general stores, grist, flour and saw mills, pool halls, print shop, two newspapers, numerous churches, drug stores, hotels, boarding and rooming houses, a doctor, dentist, and the Cherokee Land Office, to name a few. In 1907 a fire broke out on Main Street and burned most of the town on the north side of the street. The town was rebuilt and by 1910 a bank was established. Local churches established schools and in many ways provided most of the town's social life. Outlaws and shootings were also common occurrences, too, prior to and after Statehood.

In 1911 there were estimated to be 200 Kansas residents. By 1980, the population grew to 491 and climbed to 685 in 2000. In 2020, the US Census Bureau listed Kansas with a population of 711. Many of the residents are the descendants of the town's early-day settlers. Over the decades, the racial makeup of the town has remained steady with the vast majority being either White or Native American and less than ten percent all other racial groups.

Tourism and recreational activities have played a key role in Kansas' growth in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Natural Falls State Park and the Illinois River recreation areas are two popular area attractions. Along with recreational activities, the largest employers in Kansas currently are educational institutions, including the Kansas Public School System and the Northeast Technological Center's East Campus. Food preparation and serving related occupations, fire-fighting and prevention, office and administrative support, ranching, and agriculture continue to be important economic contributors to the Kansas economy as well. Born Again Pews, a church furniture company that specializes in the manufacturing of church pews and other church furniture, is located west of Kansas.

You may not know the name but you do know the face. Darrell Winfield, better known as *The Marlboro Man* and star of the most successful ad campaign in tobacco history, was born in Kansas in 1929.



Darrell Winfield, 1929-2015.

Kansas Public Library – A Library for Good, Hospitable People



Prior to the creation of the Kansas Public Library, two other small community libraries were already in existence in EOLS. The Warner Public Library came into being in 1990 and the Hulbert Community Public Library in 1996. As of 1999, no known public library existed in the Kansas



Kansas' Native American heritage was often on display at the Library. (Library photo)

community prior to the Library's opening in February 1999. The Library's Open House was celebrated at a later date, April 17, 1999.

The Kansas story differs from the creation of most of the others in the System in that it was primarily the hard work and resources of one woman, Christa Carlton, who felt that a Library was needed in her small community. Noting that Warner and Hulbert had branch libraries already established, Carlton wanted one for her community so much that she bought a building and sold it to the City



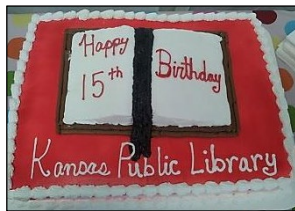
All families were welcome to visit at the 2018 Dinosaur Tea Party! (Library photo)

for \$1. She provided whatever else was needed to make the building into a library including a commercial (Follett) library management (circulation) system. The Oklahoma Department of Libraries also furnished some financial aid for its establishment. During the late 1990s, Carlton was appointed the Delaware County representative on the EOLS Board – and the rest is history.

With Carlton's urging, a group of Kansas citizens interested in having their small library included in EOLS as a branch requested a hearing with EOLS's Executive Director, Marilyn Hinshaw. In May 1997, a public hearing was held in Kansas. As was the case with most, if not all, of the communities requesting library services, the main concern of Town and County officials was the role that the community needed to play in a library's establishment. Once there was agreement as to the role of the community and the role played by EOLS, officials were given a copy of the newly-created Branch Establishment Measurement Tool application developed by staff (New



The parking lot sign was one effective way to let the community know about the Library's birthday party plus other important happenings and events. (Library photo)



Happy 15th Birthday to the Kansas Public Library in 2019! (Library photo)



You never knew who was going to greet you at a Summer Reading Program. (Library photo)



Artists of all ages attend a standing room only art session in 2018. (Library photo)

Library Task Force) with the assistance of the Board of Trustees to assess a community's ability to support a library branch, more specifically, the building and related services to support the structure.

By August 1998 Kansas officials had completed the assessment with a score of 1,785 out of a minimum score required of 1,800. The EOLS Trustees voted that the results of the library establishment measurement assessment of the Kansas community merited a positive response overall since the major key indicators of success were answered affirmatively. This action then led to how to support the already existing library in a County of two existing branches with the minimum two-mill levy ad valorem. It was hoped that the addition of Kansas would help the County pass the maximum four-mill levy for its County's libraries but it did not and has not happened to date.

The years between the completion of the assessment of the Branch Management Assessment Tool and the addition of the Kansas Library to the System's fiscal budget in 2004 was used to find acceptable means to support the Library amenable to the System and Town Council alike. It was decided in 2001, after considerable communication among all parties involved, that the best split was to let the System administer salaries and that the Town Council would continue funding the Library at the then current amount until such time the project was funded and became a full-service library branch.

The Grove and Jay Libraries worked to restructure their state aid budgets to provide Kansas a share of resources equal to its size and needs. The Oklahoma Department of Libraries recognized Kansas as meeting the qualifications for state aid and provided an additional dollar amount earmarked for Kansas. Deanna Smith, the Jay branch manager, was



Branch manager Cherokee Lowe (right) reads to the children at Story Time. (Library photo)



The Library's Circulation Desk was the focal point of the 2019 Christmas celebration. (Library photo)



The county-wide Zine competition based on the Grove Community Players 2015 production, The Haunting. (Community Players Facebook page)



Kansas and Hulbert Library's combined staff development session held in 2019. (Library photo)

appointed as the Kansas library supervisor since Jay was the closest library community. Smith oversaw a small library support staff led by Betty Phillips as head clerk that ran the day to day operations in Kansas for several years.

By May 2003 the fourth year of the Library's existence, after a roughly three-year demonstration period,

Kansas requested full formal admittance into the System. An operating agreement between the Kansas community and the System was signed on September 23, 2003 and approved by the EOLS Board in November. Kansas came under the System's fiscal budget in 2004.

In May 2004 computers for public use were made available. The original library management system was removed and in July and the System's Dynix Library Circulation

computers and software were installed bringing the Kansas Library fully into the EOLS fold.

By 2008 the need to have someone solely in charge of the smaller community branches of EOLS such as Haskell, Hulbert, Warner and Kansas was readily becoming apparent as the libraries grew and matured in their communities. Those managers with shared responsibilities were finding it harder and harder to maintain two locations without detriment to one or the other. In 2008 the Small Branch Library Coordinator position

was created for the purpose of managing those three community libraries. The first coordinator was Susan Engelman in 2008, followed by Kathleen Ryan in 2010.

In 2012 Shelly Cook became the manager of both the Kansas Public Library and the Hulbert Community Public Library followed in 2013 by Cherokee Lowe who also headed both libraries, which were approximately thirty-eight miles apart.

On July 21, 2014 a pickup truck left the roadway and slammed into the front entrance of the Kansas Library creating a 12-foot wide hole. In addition to structural damage, two shelves of



External damage to Library caused by 2014 truck accident. (Library photo)

juvenile fiction, new books and movies were damaged as was the circulation desk, one computer, copy machine and kitchen/break room. There were five staff members and five patrons in the building at the time. Two staff members sustained minor injuries.

Afterwards, the Library was closed and boarded up for a while awaiting an insurance adjuster. Staff were assigned to other nearby libraries until repairs were made. The driver was charged with inattentive driving and outstanding warrants.

Driving dramas aside, the Library has, over the years, become an important center of life in the Kansas community. Like all the branch libraries, Summer Reading Program activities were well attended by children and adults alike. Bead work and art classes are extremely popular every time they were offered. Social media, word of mouth and the trusty sign board in the parking lot were all ways that the Library communicated with its community.

In the fall of 2015 a prime example of cooperation among the Delaware County Libraries was illustrated by the hosting of a Zine contest in conjunction with the production of the Grove Community Playmakers, *The Haunting*, based on the ghost stories of Charles Dickens. The play ran from mid-October to Halloween. Each of the Libraries had contest entry forms. The contest was open to two age groups: 12-14 years and 15-18 years. Each submission had to include an



artistic Zine containing a ghost story in the style of a Penny Dreadful or the dime novels of the 19th century. Prizes were awarded to the first place winner in each of the age groups plus a “People’s Choice” award.

The Kansas Library’s story ends where it began, with Christa Carlton. A reception honoring Carlton, a long-time educator in the Kansas Public School System, was held on October 29, 2017 in the town’s Community Building hosted by members of the Senior Citizens Center. Besides being a dedicated school teacher and civic leader, instrumental in fundraising, school, civic and community projects, her claim to fame and proudest moment involved the establishment of the Kansas Public Library. Carlton was quoted as saying, *“I liked to read and I think the town needed a place to get books.”*

To be continued....

Introduction to Adair County Libraries

Some Oklahomans believe that the first lending library in Oklahoma began in 1832 at Fairfield Mission in Adair County, Indian Territory, 8 miles southwest of Stilwell. Fairfield was a Presbyterian church and school founded in 1828 among the Cherokee Old Settlers. Often, the missions founded by Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists would open schools and churches but libraries as we know them today were nonexistent. What few libraries that did exist were reading rooms in which the available materials did not leave the premises and could not be checked out or taken home.



No record of any library in Stilwell can be found before the arrival of EOLS in the 1970s, but founding a public library for the community was on the minds of various newspaper editors and civic organizations for many decades before. There was a WPA Library established in Stilwell in the early 1940s, but no evidence of its existence was found in any materials obtained from Stilwell for this history. The eastern Oklahoma regional coordinator of the WPA library project was stationed in Muskogee and local newspaper accounts of the time noted that the WPA project had established libraries in Muskogee County as well as in Stilwell, Sallisaw, Vian, Muldrow and Checotah.

In 1938, the Chamber of Commerce discussed the establishment of a library in Stilwell. The Kiwanis Club also expressed interest in establishing a public library nine years later in 1947. When neighboring Westville announced that they were starting a volunteer community library in 1960 there was once again renewed interest in establishing a library. The Stilwell Study Club adopted the formulation of a public library as a project. By then, State Question 392 had passed in 1960, laying the groundwork for the establishment of multi-county library demonstration projects.

Stilwell's city and civic leaders were in contact with the Oklahoma Department of Libraries as soon as they were aware of intent of State Question 392 and before the Question had passed. Officials were promised that Adair County would be among the first counties to be considered for inclusion as part of a multi-county library demonstration as soon as the Legislature released the funds. In March 1971, the Stilwell Public Library opened its doors.

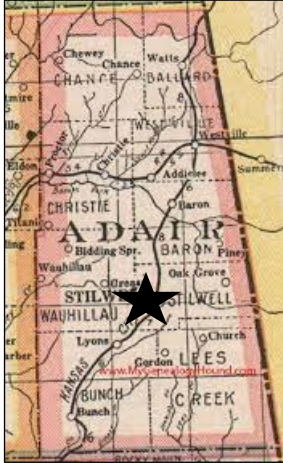
On September 15, 1960 a group of community women in Westville opened the Westville Community Library downtown on the corner of Williams Avenue and Division Street. It was Adair County's first public circulating Library. The Library

was totally supported by donations of books, magazines and even furniture. The Happy Circle Women's Club soon set up a fund at a local bank for book purchases. The Library was staffed by volunteers and operated in the community for eight years until Mrs. John F. Henderson and Mrs. W. C. Bost,

widows of two prominent Westville businessmen, built a combined library and community center in memory of their husbands in 1968. The formal dedication of the John F. Henderson Public Library and W.C. Bost Memorial Community Room was held on November 17, 1969. Approximately a year later, the Henderson Library was part of the Eastern Oklahoma Library System.



Introduction to Stilwell



Stilwell, the county seat of Adair County, is located in southern Adair County eight miles west of the Arkansas state line and approximately fifteen miles south of the community of Westville. The county is part of the Ozark Plateau uplift, the tree-covered foothills of the Boston Mountains in western Arkansas.

Stilwell's history began in 1838 as an end point of the Trail of Tears when the U.S. government relocated thousands of Indigenous people to the area from their original homes in the southeastern United States. The government set up a disbandment depot outside what is present-day Stilwell in early 1839 to distribute food and supplies to the newly-arrived people.

The town is named after Arthur Edward Stilwell, the founder of the Kansas City, Pittsburg and Gulf Railway, later renamed the Kansas City Southern Railway. The railway's proposed original route through western Arkansas turned out to be too difficult to pursue through the Boston Mountains so Stilwell decided to reroute his line through Indian Territory in the 1890s. Upon completion of the line, railroad officials established a point at the foot of Davis Mountain as the site of a possible town. On January 2, 1897 the town of Stilwell was incorporated.

By 1900 the population of the new town was 779. By 1906 the entire business district was destroyed by fire, a common occurrence with wood-built structures. The town was rebuilt with stone and brick buildings. In 1907 the Going Snake and Flint districts of the Cherokee Nation combined to form Adair County, named for the prominent Cherokee citizen, William Penn Adair.



Arthur E. Stilwell, the founder of the Kansas City Southern Railway, was the namesake of Stilwell as well as of Port Arthur, Texas.



From 1901 to the end of the decade, Westville and Stilwell competed to become the Adair County seat. After three hotly contested elections, Oklahoma's first Governor, Charles N. Haskell, declared Stilwell the Adair County seat in 1910.

Agriculture was the foundation of the early Stilwell economy. Ranching was also an important contributor. During the Great Depression and World War II, strawberries emerged as a major crop and cornerstone of the local economy. Strawberries seemed to flourish in the climate and in the flint rocks and thin soil of Adair County. The first Strawberry Festival was organized by the Kiwanis Club in 1948. It was an immediate success and Stilwell and Adair County became known to this day as the “Strawberry Capital of the World”.



*Samuel Mayes,
Principal Cherokee
Chief from 1895-1899.*

The 1940 census reported 1,588 residents. During the post war years of the 1950s and 60s Stilwell saw a population decline. In the 1970s the population began to slowly grow through the decades since. The 2020 census recorded a population of 3,700. Native Americans make up almost fifty percent of the town’s population with Whites making up 33 percent and all others approximately 14 percent.

Notable people from Stilwell included Samuel Mayes, the principal Cherokee Chief in Indian Territory from 1895 to 1899. Athlete Sam Claphan, was a former Oklahoma Sooner football player and was drafted by the Cleveland Browns in 1980. He continued his career with the San Diego Chargers until he retired from the NFL in 1988.



*University of
Oklahoma and NFL
football player, Sam
Claphan, 1956-2001.*

Stilwell Public Library – Where Opportunities Grow

No record can be found of a public library existing in the Stilwell community prior to the arrival of the Eastern Oklahoma Library System in 1970. But, that’s not to say that the establishment of a public library for the town hadn’t been on the minds of various newspaper editors and civic organizations long before the 1970s.



Stilwell Public Library. (Library photo)

The *Democrat-Journal* in January 1938 noted that Stilwell’s Chamber of Commerce, in planning a civic program for

Stilwell Needs a Library

“It would be an excellent idea if Stilwell could...promote a public library. It would be a distinct cultural step forward for the town....

One of Stilwell’s women clubs could have no better or more constructive program than the sponsoring of such a movement.

The advantages of such a movement are obvious. Aside from the actual help to school children, the presence of a library in Stilwell will tend to create a civic-development motive; it will open up realms of education and thought that many of our citizens never dreamed existed.

It will just make Stilwell a better town”.

*The Standard-Sentinel
November 12, 1936*

1938, discussed the possibility of securing a public library for the town because there “*has never been a public library here.*” However, in the early 1940s, Muskogee newspapers noted the establishment of a WPA Library Project office and coordinator in their town to cover eastern Oklahoma communities. Among the Muskogee County communities involved in the project supervised by the WPA coordinator, the newspaper noted Stilwell, Sallisaw, Vian, Muldrow and Checotah were also included.

In 1947, one year after the creation of a Kiwanis Club in Stilwell, a suggestion that the Kiwanis Club “*sponsor a public Library in a down town location, was favorably received. A book week inviting all to contribute some phase of reading material to form nucleus was also in the plan.*” The matter was turned over to a special committee for an early report. Dr. C.W.

Mehegan outlined the possibilities for a library in the meeting. Thirty-four years later, Dr. Mehegan would play a key role in the Stilwell Public Library’s history.

In an article in a March 1958 edition of the *Journal* on the topic of Library Week observances in the public schools, noted that while “*Stilwell doesn’t boast a public library,*” students were not without access to well-stocked ...elementary, junior high and high school libraries.

In July 1960 the *Democrat Journal* reported that Adair County was one of the ten areas in eastern Oklahoma to be visited by a “Bookmobile tour” including a stop in Stilwell. Named the “*No Library Week Tour,*” the Bookmobile was scheduled to visit twelve towns during the week of July 4-8, 1960. The tour was set to occur just before a state-wide vote on State Question 392, scheduled for July 26. State Question 392 was a library amendment to the Oklahoma Constitution which would make Bookmobile service via Multi-County Library Systems easier for most counties to finance.

Journal editor, Wade Zumwalt, via his *Smoke Signals* column in the newspaper’s July 21 edition, encouraged Stilwell voters to approve State Question 392 saying, “*this is especially important in a county such as ours where there is NOT ONE PUBLIC LIBRARY in existence.*” Zumwalt continued by saying, “*While it is true that an effort is now being made in Westville to install a town library – in the county seat town of Stilwell, one cannot secure a book from a library unless he gets his or her child to check one out of the school library.*” State Question 392 ultimately did pass in a state-wide vote in 1960.

The establishment of a public library was a community effort and the result of five years of effort when the Study Club adopted the formation of a public library as its project. The library committee chair of the Stilwell Study Club reported that petitions supporting a campaign to obtain a public library in Stilwell and an expansion to the community library in Westville were currently being circulated in the area in hopes of obtaining a minimum of 2,000 county

signatures. The signed petitions were then forwarded to the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. ODL promised Stilwell would be in line for funding as soon as it became available.

The State Library would finance the demonstration library with state and federal funds. During the demonstration period, there was to be no cost to the local area – except for providing

Petition

“We, the People of Adair County, Oklahoma, do hereby petition the request that the Oklahoma State Library, the Board of County Commissioners of Adair County, and the City Council of Stilwell, Oklahoma, provide our area with a Multi-County Demonstration Library as authorized under the Laws of the State of Oklahoma.”

a building. Early in the planning, it was envisioned that the multi-county demonstration would take place in four eastern Oklahoma counties - Adair, Cherokee, Sequoyah, Delaware and the headquarters library would be located in Tahlequah. However, before the multi-county

*With LOVE
By Sam*

"It's great news to hear that Stilwell is getting a public library. It's been needed for years.

Once the library is open here and the bookmobile is making its rounds throughout the rural areas of the county, folks will start wondering how they managed to get along without a library for so long."

*Stilwell Democrat Journal
July 9, 1970*

demonstration finally came into being, Muskogee and McIntosh Counties were added and the proposed headquarters moved to Muskogee. Adair County was among the six counties in the state that received multi-county library system grants totaling \$400,000.

When all was said and done, Stilwell's and the other Counties' chances for getting a Multi-County Demonstration Library depended solely on the actions of the Oklahoma Legislature. It was in April 1970 when Stilwell finally found out what they needed to do to obtain a Demonstration Library. Esther Mae Henke, the Associate Director for Public Library Services at the



Retired High School Librarian Fannie Lewis, was Stilwell's first branch manager and life-long library supporter, 1971-72. (Stilwell Democrat-Journal)

Oklahoma Department of Libraries (ODL), explained in detail what to expect at a meeting held in Stilwell on April 15. The County had recently been approved as eligible to receive multi-county demonstration services. Henke told those who attended the meeting that ODL would finance the area's library services for a two-year period, including Bookmobile service to rural areas, in cooperation with local library boards and relevant government officials. By the end of the two-years, the area was expected to assume financial responsibility for continuation of services by voting for the special ad valorem tax.

City officials and interested citizens got together to procure a building to become Stilwell's first public library and to get it ready to assume its new role in the community. The building chosen was located at 16 South First Street. The building was a storefront, 24 feet by 90 feet. Fannie Lewis was hired to be the community's first branch manager. Previously, she had worked at the Stilwell High School where she served as the librarian.



The first Stilwell Public Library building was located at 16 South First Street. Branch manager Josie Harris stood at the building's entrance. (Library photo)



Dorothy Worsham was Stilwell's first representative on the EOLS Board. She was instrumental in the Library's establishment as well as in the building of the current Library. (Stilwell Democrat-Journal)

The building's owner provided the all the materials for the interior renovation, and the High School students' carpentry class and Key Club members provided the labor. The City provided the building's rent and numerous individuals and organizations contributed to a library fund to pay building maintenance and utilities. The Stilwell Kiwanis Club assisted with the project. By early February 1971 the interior work was completed and carpet installed. Shelving and books quickly followed. The Library held its Open House

on Sunday, March 7, 1971. The Open House was attended by nearly 250 people, surpassing all expectations. Members of the Stilwell Study Club acted as hostesses for the event. At the end of the first day of business on Tuesday, March 9, 202 items were checked out to adults and youth. It was the beginning of "a dream come true," as noted in the March 11, 1971 edition of the *Democrat Journal*.

Dorothy Worsham was the community's first EOLS board member along with Vol Woods from neighboring Westville. The Stilwell Library Corp. was also formed with J. L. Hallford as president; H.D. Gound, vice-president; and Mrs. Frank Garrett as secretary-treasurer.

On Monday, March 22, approximately two weeks after the Library's Open House, a campaign to collect donations for the operation of the Stilwell Library began in earnest. The president of the newly formed Stilwell Library Corp. noted that funds were needed to pay the Library's utilities and other expenses not covered by the City or by Multi-County Demonstration funds.

The campaign began in the business district and spread to the residential areas of the community. Accompanying the fund campaign was a poster contest held in the Stilwell and in the surrounding community's schools. The posters were then placed in store front windows to promote the funding campaign.

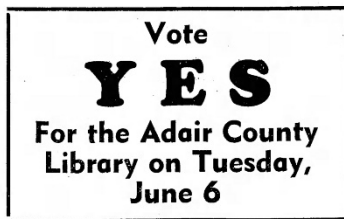
The month of March hadn't come to an end when the *Democrat Journal* reported that Lily Catron was in the process of buying the library building from its current owner. The Library

was assured that it would remain as a Library at least until July 1972. As it turned out, the Library's tenure in its first location lasted much longer.

By September 1971 the Stilwell and Westville Libraries and concerned Adair County citizens began preparations on how to promote the two libraries, including the Bookmobiles, in advance of the two-mill levy elections scheduled for a vote in December 1971. State Senator Robert Medearis conducted the meeting and asked the group for suggestions. He is quoted as saying, "It will take a united effort – a 200 percent effort – to safely put over the two-mill levy in this county." He pointed out that more and more counties were beginning to turn down mill-levy elections. The group proposed a variety of suggestions which were put to use immediately.

One of the suggestions was to get endorsements from interested groups. Early in November endorsements came from the Stilwell Chamber of Commerce, the Kiwanis Club and Stilwell Ministerial Alliance for the millage election to be held December 7, 1971. The demonstration funds were scheduled to expire in the summer of 1972.

The December 7th vote for libraries was on a ballot that included six other state questions.



Only the library millage question was of local interest so voting was expected to be light. As it turned out, voting was heavier than expected and all seven measures, including the library millage question, were turned down. The total vote was 635 for the levy and 869 against. Three other demonstration counties – Delaware,

Cherokee and McIntosh – all passed their levies on the same day.

Dorothy Worsham, the Stilwell representative on the multi-county Board, was quoted as stating that the Stilwell Library would remain open until the end of the demonstration period on June 30, 1972, so people who voted "No" on the initial vote were invited to drop by and see what they would be giving up with their vote. She also stated that it might be possible to get a second chance to vote on the Library by getting the approval of the County Commissioners. So, the group set about getting approval.

**How to Keep Your
Stilwell Public Library
Vote YES For The Library
December 7, 1971**

Question: How Much Will It Cost Me?

ANSWER: The proposed Library Levy is ONLY 2 MILLS per dollar of net taxable valuation on your real estate and/or personal property.

—A majority of the citizens of ADAIR COUNTY will pay a Library Tax of just a few pennies or nothing at all.

—HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION protects ALL Oklahoma home owners. For instance, if your home is new on the tax rolls for a net taxable valuation of \$1,000 or less, thanks to Homestead Exemption, you would pay no Library Tax.

—If your home has a net taxable valuation of, say, \$1200, your Library Tax would ONLY BE 40¢... also thanks to Homestead Exemption.

—If your net taxable valuation on your real estate and your personal property is \$2,000 (and your home is included in this sum), your Library tax would only be 8¢.

—How many of your readings this have a net taxable valuation of \$1,200 including the home you own? If you come in this bracket, remember... YOU WOULD PAY ONLY 40¢ Library Tax.

Q: What can I do to insure that library service will continue in Adair County?

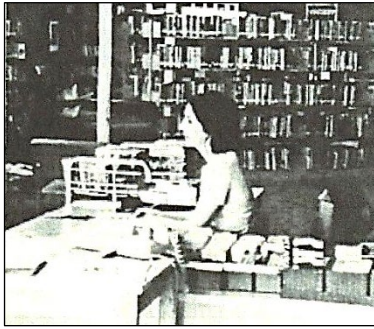
- ★ First of all, be sure to vote YES for the Proposal on December 7, 1971.
- ★ Call all your friends and urge them to vote YES for the Proposal.
- ★ Take someone without transportation to vote YES for the Proposal.

YOUR LIBRARY LEVY BALLOT WILL BE PRINTED IN GREEN INK

A YES vote on the Library Question is endorsed by the following:

- Stilwell Chamber of Commerce
- Stilwell Kiwanis Club
- Adair County Education Association
- Stilwell Study Club
- Adair Oils & Gas Society
- Stilwell Ministerial Alliance
- Adair County Chapter, Young Mothers/Parents of Children
- Adair County Association for Retarded Children

For A Ride
TO THE POLLS
on Tuesday, Dec. 7
... Call
774-7512
Stilwell Public Library

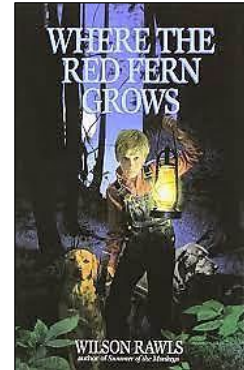


Josie Harris was Stilwell Library's second branch manager, 1972-75. (Stilwell Democrat-Journal).

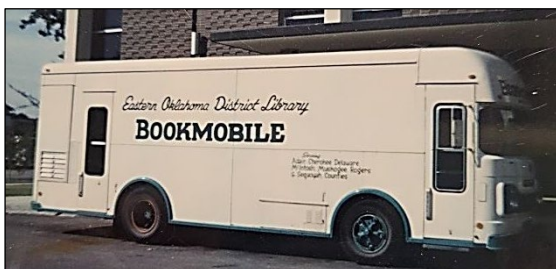
The Adair County Commissioners agreed to call another election prior to the end of the demonstration period in June 1972. Stilwell and Westville held several joint meetings in April and May of 1972 concerning another election resulting in another library levy vote scheduled for June 6, a few short weeks before the demonstration period was to end. This time the vote was successful. Library supporters breathed a collective sigh of relief, becoming the 24th Oklahoma County to approve a library levy since the passage of the law in 1960.

In November Fannie Lewis, Stilwell's first branch manager, resigned and was replaced by Josie Harris, a former teacher. Ms. Lewis, a life-long library supporter, continued working for the betterment of the Library many years beyond her resignation on both the local and Multi-County Library Boards.

In early 1973 proposed federal budget cuts impacted the Oklahoma Department of Libraries, therefore, by extension, all public libraries and library systems in Oklahoma, including newly formed EOLS and its member libraries. Federal funds received by ODL were then and are still distributed to Oklahoma's public libraries and library systems through a formula that includes population served and other factors. Branch manager Harris alerted area organizations and civic groups about the proposed cuts and their impact on the community's first public library and encouraged the members to contact the Oklahoma Congressional delegation about the impact of reduced funding to Adair County's two public libraries.



In September Branch Manager Harris noted in the *Journal* newspaper that during the



One of the two Bookmobiles serving all EOLS counties in the 1970s. (Library photo)

Library's first full fiscal year of operation (July 1, 1972 - June 30, 1973), that a total of 13,912 items had been circulated. This number did not include Bookmobile circulation in the County. She also confirmed that the Library contained 5,794 books, including children's titles. The book currently most in demand, she affirmed, was, "*Where the Red*

Fern Grows,” by author Wilson Rawls. The book was presently being made into a movie locally in Adair and Cherokee Counties which piqued the interest of local adults and youth alike.

The Bookmobiles were especially popular in the eastern counties of the System. It is hard to realize in the 21st century just how remote the rural communities in those eastern counties could be due to the hilly, remote terrain of the foothills of the Ozark Plateau. In the early 1970s, rural isolation was an issue and the new Bookmobiles provided library access that would have been denied otherwise.



Circus! Circus! was the theme of the Library's 1974 Summer Reading Program. Nine-year-old Shawna Hill set the scene as she stood in front of the Circus Carousel made by Library staff. (Stilwell Democrat-Journal).

By mid-1974 Director Wilkerson met with the local Library Advisory Boards notifying them that due to high repair costs and high gas prices the System had rescheduled some no or low attendance Bookmobile stops that had proven to be impractical. Instead, the Bookmobiles would be routed to the larger rural communities that have utilized the Bookmobiles successfully and would make longer stays in those locations. Wilkerson also noted that the practicality and cost of a book mail-order service was being reviewed as a future substitute for the Bookmobiles in the rural areas.

Wilkerson also told the local boards that he felt that funds may again be available in the near future for library renovations and construction. At a meeting with the Adair County local Advisory Board, Stilwell Mayor Harold Moten expressed Stilwell's desire to win approval of a plan to build a new Library with revenue-sharing funds.



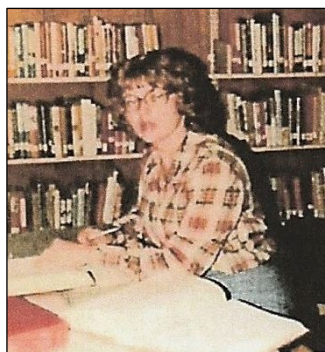
The old Kansas City Southern Railway Depot was once considered a possible site for the new Stilwell Public Library. (Adair County Historical Society photo)

In October 1974, at another meeting of the local Advisory Board, EOLS Associate Director Mary Beth Ozmun told the group that \$55,000 in federal matching funds was now available for library construction but communities could not use revenue-sharing funds as the match. They could, however, get a ten-year FHA loan at five percent to finance library construction. The desire for the community to build a new library facility had begun as early as 1973 within months of the successful millage levy. It would take a few more years for the dream to become a reality for the community.

The first tangible solution in obtaining or building a library for Stilwell occurred in December 1974, when matching funds in the amount of \$54,662 was

offered to the Library for the remodeling of the old Kansas City Southern Railway Depot or for building a new facility. The offer was made by the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. The drawback to the offer was that the amount had to be matched by local funds, not revenue-sharing, government or in-kind funds. An ODL representative estimated that it would take in the neighborhood of \$100,000 to bring the Depot up to library specifications. The representative also recommended that the City obtain an architect, whatever the final plan of action was determined to be.

Stilwell's Mayor doubted that the City could come up with the matching funds at the time. Hopes were not totally dashed when a committee was formed to determine the reaction of local persons capable of making sizeable monetary contributions. Plans were also made to make both an application for funds and to seek contributions. Ultimately, due to the expensive renovations needed to turn the Depot into a Library, it was deemed too expensive to pursue.



Jan Gallaway served as Stilwell's third branch manager, 1975-1979. (Library photo)

However, in retrospect, this event marked the beginning of a demonstrable search for a suitable building and/or location for a new public library.

Several other opportunities for a new Library location came to the City's attention between the years of 1975-77. One such opportunity came with the construction of a new Adair County Hospital. The City Council approved that the Library could move into the former Stilwell Municipal Hospital when it was vacated. Funding was considered. Floor plans made. The Library would only use a part of the structure. Possible city offices could be placed in other parts of the building. After much planning and preparation, a lack of financial resources and a long construction time for the new hospital stymied the project.

In the midst of looking for a new location, the Library's second branch manager, Josie Harris, resigned to accept a position with the Stilwell Public Schools as a kindergarten teacher. The assistant branch manager, Jan Gallaway, became Stilwell's third branch manager in August 1975.



The Library took every opportunity to participate in the annual Strawberry Festival activities. (Stilwell Democrat-Journal)

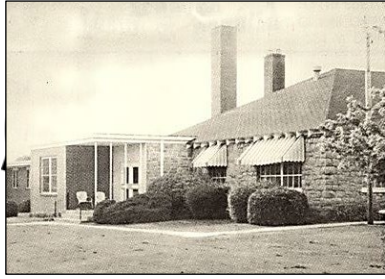
Early in 1976 three significant programs were initiated at the Stilwell Public Library. Automation first appeared in January with the issuance of Library identification cards. As with all the EOLS branch libraries, automation of library records was the first tenuous step into the digital world. In February, the Library applied for and received a \$500 grant to conduct Cherokee language courses. The money was used for an instructor's salary, and to purchase tapes, handbooks and other necessary materials. The program proved to be successful and was offered many times in the ensuing years. The Library also initiated the *Reading Blitz* program, as did other EOLS branches in mid-March to help adults who wanted to learn to read or to improve their reading skills. The program was sponsored by the Oklahoma Department of Libraries, the State Department of Education and the Stilwell Public Schools.



*Dr. and Mrs. C.W. Mehegan, circa 1981.
(Stilwell Democrat-Journal)*

In early preparation for a November 2 millage election in Adair County to increase the Library's millage from two to four mills, the *Democrat Journal* outlined the Library's growth over the past five years and its impact on both the community and the surrounding areas of southern Adair County. The Library's collection of materials in mid-1976 was now over 6,000 items. The newspaper noted that there was a Children's Hour held Friday mornings and there were routine outreach programs to the local nursing homes, Headstart and the Granny programs. Audio-visual equipment was available for groups and organizations to use and staff were available to assist both individuals and groups needing information. The newspaper also urged the community to "boost" their Library.

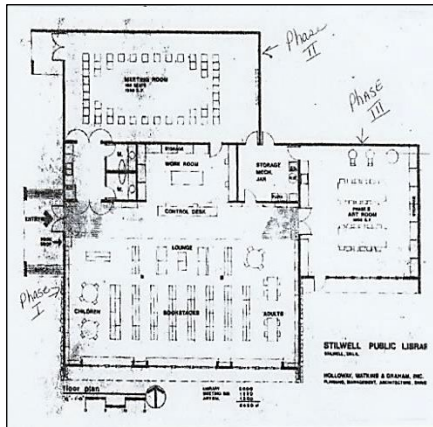
State Question 507, the millage increase vote on November 2, 1976, was defeated in Adair County by a vote of 1,802 "yes" votes to 3,399 "no" votes. It wasn't until the late summer of 1992 that Adair County successfully passed a four mill levy vote. Open hours were immediately increased after the millage vote passage after years of budget cutbacks due to lack of adequate funding.



Dr. Mehegan's Clinic, circa the 1980s. (Library photo)



Formerly Sharpe's Department Store, the then empty building was chosen as a temporary location for the Library prior to the construction of the new building. (Library photo)



The Floor Plan of the Library illustrated the locations of Phase II, the Meeting Room, and Phase III, the proposed Children's Wing, in relation to Phase I, the Main Room. (Library photo).

In 1977, the Library received an award from the Social Responsibilities Roundtable, a division of the Oklahoma Library Association. The award was in response to the Library's Cherokee Outreach Program funded by the 1976 grant. It included oral and written Cherokee lessons given free to the public. Classes were held at both the Bell Community Building

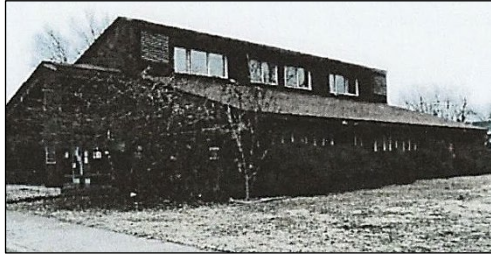
and at the Stilwell Library. The Library had also purchased Cherokee language and history books and tapes. The award was presented at the annual Oklahoma Library Associate Conference held in April.

In the fall of 1977 the construction of a new Library once more seemed attainable when the Library was named as an heir in the will of Mary Pauline Steele whose parents were from Stilwell. Mrs. Steele had

specified in her will that half of her estate be given to the Stilwell Library and that any construction that might result should be named in memory of her parents. It was estimated that the Library's share of the Steele estate was \$140,000. A major obstacle to the monetary gift from the estate was the opposition by the State of Colorado to the release of the generous bequest. Nevertheless, not to be deterred, local library supporters pressed on as the issue wound its way through legal channels.

Dr. Mehegan had in 1975 offered the City property he owned as a possible library construction site. The property had been appraised at \$73,500 but Dr. Mehegan had indicated that with his offer he would be willing to contribute half of the cost to the Library. One drawback to the property was that the square footage of the property was deemed to be the bare minimum needed for the Library. At the time, the old hospital building was deemed to be the better site.

There were two main issues with the old hospital site, however. First, while it was a sound building, it didn't meet current fire codes; and second, the new hospital was going to take



Phase I of the Stilwell Public Library was completed in 1986. Phase I was primarily composed of the Library's Main Room. (Library photo)



This picture illustrates the completed Phase II Meeting Room on the building's north side. (Library photo).



Patricia Gordon was branch manager of the Stilwell Public Library twice (1980-1990, 1992-2004). She was manager when Phase I of the Library was completed and dedicated in 1986. Attending the opening of the new Library were (left to right): Patricia Gordon; Mrs. and Dr. C.W. Mehegan; Bessie Moore, American Library Association Trustee; and EOLS Director, Marilyn Hinshaw. (Stilwell Democrat-Journal)

approximately two years to build after receiving approval which as of June 1975, was still pending. In a meeting held after all the discussion of the pros and cons of using the hospital, Dorothy Worsham suggested that the group write a thank you to Dr. Mehegan and his wife thanking them *“for their very generous offer.”* She followed up her suggestion by asking the members of

the City Council, Mayor and Library Board members in attendance a question, *“If the hospital ended up not being available for the Library for some reason would the City be interested in the Mehegan property?”*

In the summer 1981, Mrs. Worsham’s

question was answered in the affirmative. Stilwell’s dream of a new Library was the beneficiary of a grant from Dr. and Mrs. C. W. Mehegan in the form of the Mehegan Medical Clinic Building and the surrounding half city block on 5 North 6th Street as the building site for the new Stilwell Public Library. The construction of a new Library for the community had finally become a reality.

At the same time the Mehegan family was gifting the City with property to build a new building the need for the current Library to move out of its original facility due to mold infestation had become critical. The EOLS Board agreed with the local Library Board members that the situation required immediate attention and requested recommendations from the

City and local businesses. Sharpe’s empty retail building located on First Street and Oak was chosen as a temporary, stop-gap library location and the move made in October 1981.

In June 1982 an architect was hired with an August groundbreaking planned. Foundation issues and a standing water issue were then found on the property and the proposed groundbreaking delayed until December. Bidding issues with the out-of-state construction

contractor ensued and the bidding process re-opened in October. In November a construction company from Poteau was hired to build Phase I. Phase I was dedicated September 23, 1983 and through the efforts of several fund raisers, grants, gifts and contributions, the Stilwell Public Library opened August 17, 1986.

Through contributions to the Square Foot Club, the Phase II groundbreaking was held on Tuesday, December 1, 1987 for the proposed \$64,800 Media Center addition. Phase II included 1,200 square feet added on the north side of the building. It was a combination art, exhibit, film and meeting room. A matching grant of \$31,187 for the project was received from the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. Other funds came from the Pauline Steele estate, individuals and clubs. Contractor for Phase II was G&B Construction from Muskogee. Phase III, the proposed Children's Wing, was put on hold until additional funds could be raised.

Because of the gift of land and the medical clinic to the City for use as the location for the new Stilwell Public Library, Dr. and Mrs. Mehegan were the recipients of the American Library Association's Major Benefactor Award in 1986. A plaque honoring Dr. and Mrs. Mehegan's gift to the City can be found in the Library's Meeting Room.

The 1980s also saw the Library receiving System awards for "Most Improved Branch" (1985), "Outstanding Public Relations Event" (1987) and "Most Improved Library Programming Efforts" (1989).

The early 2000's turned into years of turmoil in the Library. As the Age of Digital Information access arrived so did the rise of fears among some quarters as to what kind of information could be accessed on the Library's computers. In this case, it was the perception, real or otherwise, that some individuals were viewing pornography on the Library's public use computers housed in an area separated from the Library's main room.

The issues accelerated in March 2001 when the branch manager locked the Library's doors unexpectedly when local Library Board members tried to move some equipment with the authority of the City Council. The City owned the building where the Library was housed as do all the communities with EOLS public libraries. Prior to the unscheduled closing, the City had



The Library's Awards and Honors proudly on display in the Library. The Library also received the Oklahoma Consumer Health Informational Award in 2004; and in 2006, received an award from the National Endowment for the Humanities for its "We the People" program. It was also the recipient of the Oklahoma Library Association's Citation of Merit for their expansion of library services to the entire community. (Stilwell Democrat-Journal)



Karen George was hired as the Library's 8th branch manager from 2004 to 2014. (Stilwell Democrat-Journal)

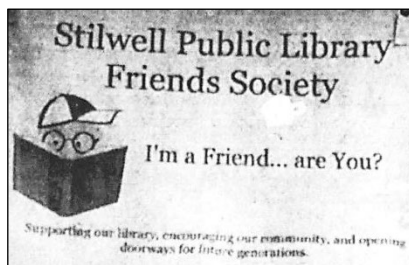
passed a resolution to reopen the room where the computers currently were as an open Meeting Room. A member of the local Advisory Board reported to the *Tulsa World* newspaper that there were a lot of issues surrounding the closing centered on people viewing child pornography in the enclosed room. "As far as we know, the board member said, "this is the only library in the district where internet computers are in a private room. The computers need to be out in the public's view."

In 2003, additional concerns from local citizens about "porn" in the Library were raised. Petitions signed by 275 citizens



Energy-saving renovations in 2004 to helped reduce utility costs. (Stilwell Democrat-Journal)

were signed and presented to the EOLS offices in Muskogee. News articles and opinions were published in the *Democrat-Journal*. The issue continued into early 2004. Some locals were "frustrated" with the System's efforts to control the "porn" in the Stilwell Library. Complaints were made that the branch manager and the System, "had not done enough." It was also implied that local staff were "part of the



Stilwell Public Library Friends Society's notice as it appeared in the Stilwell Democrat- Journal in March 2012.

issue." The issues continued to stir up controversy.

In February 2004 City Councilors passed a resolution to sever the City's relationship with EOLS if the matter wasn't settled once and for all. Both the City's and the System's attorneys worked on a resolution. Computer filtering processes and procedures were explored.

A month later, a resolution was agreed to. Karen George became the eighth Stilwell branch manager on an interim basis in March until all parties were satisfied with the results. The current manager was reassigned to another location within the EOLS system. The communication channels among all parties involved were improved and secondary issues addressed and resolved. Slowly, things got back to normal. By 2005, the Meeting Room was reopened for full public use.



The Kiwanis donated \$3,755 to the Friends Society for the proposed Children's Wing. The Kiwanis and Key Club members have been faithful Library supporters and volunteers since the organization began in 1947. (Stilwell Democrat-Journal)



Construction underway on the Children's Wing in 2017. (Library Photo)



Other Library renovations in 2012 included new carpeting and the painting of the Meeting Room. (Library Photo)



Finished Children's Wing interior, 2017. (Library Photo)

The Library's physical plant underwent several energy-saving changes in 2004. To reduce utility costs, parts of the exterior of the building were covered in a light-colored siding replacing the original dark wood exterior but leaving the rock walls exposed. The City replaced some air conditioning units and installed sun-reflective screens on the large southern-facing upper windows. The City and the Vietnam Veterans of America donated paint to freshen the

interior walls. In 2007 the City contracted the re-landscaping of the Library's entrance and replaced the Meeting Room's air-conditioning.

In 2006 the City Council and local Library Advisory members, EOLS trustees, the Friends' group and branch manager, Karen George, met to finally address the issue of completing Phase III of the Library's construction project – the building of the Children's Wing.

The dream of a separate Children's area in the Library started simply when the branch manager approached Grace Ferris for help in raising funds for the 2006 Summer Reading Program. Other Library needs became apparent as the year progressed and by the end of 2006, Ferris announced the formation of a Library Friends group and the community response was positive. An organizational meeting was held on January 8, 2007. Within their first year, the Friends were incorporated and obtained their 501c3 status. They also raised over

\$6,000 the first year with the help of group and individual donations, a book sale, a garage sale, and an arts and craft fair. The Friends' first major goal was the addition of a Children's Wing to the Library. After all was said and done, the Friends' raised approximately half of the \$400,000 projected cost for the Children's Wing.



The 2018 Strawberry Queen visits the Library during the annual Strawberry Festival. (Library Photo)



Children and adults both utilized the new and improved library spaces resulting from the 2012 renovations and the addition of the Children's Wing in 2017. (Library Photos)



Stilwell's branch manager, Kathleen Conley-Brown, 2016-2021 (right); Westville's branch manager, Stephanie Freedle (left); and Superman were ready to talk about libraries at the 2017 Adair County Health Department Cooperative Fair. (Library Photo)

In 2008 the Friends organized a Farmers' Market held on the Library's parking lot Wednesday and Saturday mornings during the growing seasons as one fund-raising project. The Friends Society also became active with other community organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Community Food Pantry, Spruce-Up Stilwell and other community projects. Ten years after the first organizational meeting of the Stilwell Public Library Friends Society and after lots of work, networking, grant writing such as obtaining grant funds from the Sarkeys Foundation (\$50,000), and Carson Foundation (\$14,000) fund-raising, individual and group contributions such as the Cherokee Nation, the Children's Wing groundbreaking was held on January 12, 2017, and on May 23, 2017, the dream of a Children's Wing finally became a reality.

As the fund-raising for the Children's Wing progressed over the ten years, necessary repairs and upgrades to the existing building were undertaken thanks to a grant by the Oklahoma Department of Commerce – Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant in 2012. The City was able to install new central heat and air, lighting, windows, tank-less water heaters, and new energy-saving entry doors. The grant also saved the City enough money to pay for new carpeting and interior painting. Originally, this work was to be included in the Children's Wing construction but the grant allowed the renovations to be completed in a timelier manner.

Before, during and after the entire process of fund-raising, renovating, and building the Stilwell Public Library as it exists in its current form, staff continued to serve the community with programs and services in the form of children's and adult programming, the latest reading materials for both study and pleasure, Summer Reading

Programs, Cherokee language classes, adult programming and short-term classes, Early Childhood education programs as well as Adult Literacy programs and free Wi-Fi access, to name only a few of the many activities made available over the years.



Summer Reading Program participants enjoyed a puppet show in the Library's Meeting Room years prior to the 2012 renovations. (Library Photo)



In 2016, the Library held Pickle Palooza! to acquaint the community with the new sport of Pickleball. (Library Photo)



Stilwell City employees prepared the Story Walk at Carson Park in the spring of 2019. (Library Photo)

As is true with all businesses whether profit or non-profit, staff changes happened over the years. Stilwell branch managers other than those already featured in pictures include, Arlene Burton and the current manager as of this writing, Rachele Horney. (No photo could be found

Library staff also took every opportunity possible to interact with the community and area residents such as participation in the annual Strawberry Festival for example. The Stilwell Library has participated in the Festival in one form or fashion since its creation in 1971.

Over the years, Stilwell and Westville branch managers have participated jointly in county-wide events such as the Adair County Health Fair and the Adair County Extravaganza and others at every available opportunity.

Besides cooperative events with its northern neighbor, staff at the Stilwell Library took opportunities to serve its patrons both inside and outside the confines of the Library building. In the summer of 2016 the Library sponsored a tournament in the Library's parking lot of what at the time was a new recreational sport for all ages - Pickleball. Not only could people pick up some information about the sport but they could watch demonstrations and even play a game or two themselves.

In 2019 the Library installed a Story Walk at the community's Carson Park for the pleasure of the young and young at heart. City

employees installed the story boards in the early spring and the Story Walk opened to the public on April 9. Summer Reading Programs were popular in Stilwell as they are in all EODLS branches. The renovated Meeting Room and the new Children's Wing provided more room for children's programming of all kinds and the crowds grew to fill the new spaces as the years went by.



Summer Reading Program participants enjoying a program in the new and larger Children's Wing, 2017. (Library photo)



*Stilwell's Branch manager,
Arlene Burton, 2014-2016.
(Library photo)*



*Branch manager, Rachele
Horney as of 2020.
(Library photo)*

of Vicki Irwin, 1990-1992). All have served to make the Library a valuable resource for Stilwell as well as to people in the rural communities of southern Adair County.

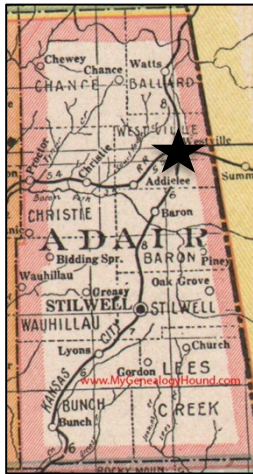
As with all the EOLS branches, 2020 brought Covid to Oklahoma's rural counties as well as to the urban ones. Adair County was no exception. The Library was closed for a period of time. And, as all the branches had to do when restrictions began to lift, it had to find ways to serve the community in ways that protected the safety of both staff and patrons. And as with all the community libraries in the System they managed to do just that.

To be continued....

Introduction to Westville



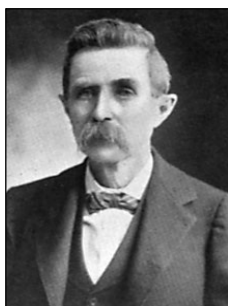
Downtown Westville.



1895. The town was named after a local resident, Jim West, and whose son Jim West, Jr., was an attorney for the railroad. Westville was located in the Going Snake District of the Cherokee Nation approximately two miles from the Arkansas state line.

The town originally was composed of 175 acres but it was expanded with the William D. Williams and Pat Dore additions. Town lots were sold to Cherokee citizens at half their appraised value and at full value to non-citizens.

In 1902 a second rail line, the Ozark and Cherokee Central (later known as the Frisco), that ran from Fayetteville, Arkansas, to Okmulgee, Oklahoma, began operations through Westville giving the town a rail junction and additional economic opportunities for several decades. The second rail line eventually discontinued its service to Westville in the late 1940s.



*Clement Van Rogers.
(1839-1911)*

Westville grew quickly during its yearly years with a reported population of 956 in 1920. At statehood, Westville became the Adair County seat. In a storyline that mirrors that of Delaware County bordering Adair County to the north, Adair County's southern residents protested the Westville location. A vote was taken in 1908 and Stilwell won by 101 votes. The citizens of Westville protested. A suit was filed in the Oklahoma Supreme Court. In 1910 another vote was held, and Stilwell won again, this time by 30 votes. Again there were protests. Oklahoma's first Governor, C.

N. Haskell, finally declared Stilwell to be the county seat.



John L. Lively. (1943-)



Jim Ross. (1952-)

During much of the twentieth century Westville served as the hub of the surrounding farming community in northern Adair County. The town's population through the decades of the 1930s-80s wavered but generally stayed below the 1920 population figure of 956. However, in 1990,

the population jumped to 1,374. In 2020, Westville's population was recorded as 1,364.

Westville's notables include Clement Van Rogers, Indian Territory politician, judge and father of Oklahoma icon, Will Rogers. John L. Lively rose to national prominence in horse racing as a jockey with 3,468 career wins between the years 1963-1992. Lively was inducted into the Oklahoma Horse Racing Hall of Fame in 2011. Jim Ross is a professional wrestling commentator, analyst and senior advisor, currently working with All Elite Wrestling but he also was a play-by-commentator for the WWE.

U.S. Senator Markwayne Mullin was born in Tulsa and graduated from Stilwell Public Schools. Some sources claimed the Westville area as his home while other sources claimed that the Stilwell area was. Prior to his forays into government, Mullin expanded his fathers' plumbing company into one of the largest service companies in the region. Mullin also was a former undefeated Mixed Martial Arts fighter with a 5-0 record.



Markwayne Mullin. (1977-)

Westville's Early Library History

Early library development in Westville was credited to a group of citizens who established the Westville Community Library, the first free public library in Adair County, in the fall of 1960. However, the establishment of a public library was on the mind of some local citizens as far back as 1904, prior to statehood. In one of the earliest editions of the *Westville American* there was a notice of the intent to

Westville is to have a circulating library. If you hav'nt got your name on the list see Mr. Allison at the post-office and sign up at once. It will furnish you with much good reading matter for the long evenings this winter.

A quote from a 1904 edition of the Westville American announced that Westville was to have a circulating library.

WHAT THE DEMOCRAT STANDS FOR

INDUSTRIALLY

- 1—All the local news told in good English and in plain type.
- 2—The industrial, commercial and social development of its home city, county and state.
- 3—The interests of the working man.
- 4—The public school, the public library, chautauqua, the lecture course.

POLITICALLY

- 5—The cardinal principles of government as represented by Thomas Jefferson.
- 6—An unpurchased ballot and business economy in administration.

SOCIALLY

- 7—The family home as the place for the highest possible physical, intellectual and moral development of the citizen.
- 8—The church, the lodge.

MORALLY

- 9—The decalogue.
- 10—"A square deal for every man."

The Adair County Democrat newspaper's statement of purpose published in 1907. (May 24, 1907).

have a circulating library.

In 1907 the *Adair County Democrat* published what the *Democrat* stood for and published it numerous times thereafter during the newspaper's run. Item #4 listed the *Democrat's* commitment to a public school and a public library. Unfortunately, we may never know the results of the efforts of Westville's early citizens in establishing a public library.

It is known, however, that Edna Wall, Louise Cabe, and Mabel Wheelchel, among others, established the Westville Community Library in the Comfort Building (aka Sellers Building), located on the southwest corner of Williams Avenue and Division Street. There was no money for books and materials. Local citizens donated the books, magazines and furniture for the new Library. The Happy Circle Club also set up a fund at Peoples Bank to buy books. The Library's Open House was held on September 15, 1960. The Library was staffed totally by volunteers and remained at the location for eight years.



The Sellers Building, (aka Comfort Building) on the southwest corner of Williams and Division Streets before it was destroyed by fire. Westville's Utility Building currently inhabits the location. This Building served as the home for the Westville Community Library from 1960-1968. (Library photo)

In 1968, Bessie Henderson and Nola Bost, widows of two prominent Westville businessmen, combined resources to build a new modern library facility that included a meeting room for the community.

Both husbands had passed away in 1965.

John F. Henderson had owned a chain of



John F. Henderson, 1899-1965. (Library Photo)

photography studios plus interests in several businesses. William Clyde Bost was a civic leader and former president of Peoples Bank. Mrs. Henderson donated a lot of her property located at 116 North Williams Avenue for the building plus a portion of the construction funds as a memorial to her husband. Mrs. Bost donated \$15,000 for the construction of a community center. Both women felt that the community center should be combined with the library. The result was the John F. Henderson Public Library and the W.C. Bost Community Room began construction in 1968.



William Clyde Bost, 1895-1965. (Library Photo)

While the Henderson Library was under construction, petitions were circulated in 1967 both in Westville and Stilwell for two libraries to be built, one in each town respectively, under a program of the Oklahoma State Library Commission (now known as the Oklahoma Department of Libraries). The petition drive hoped to expand Westville's Library as well as establishing a public library in the county seat in

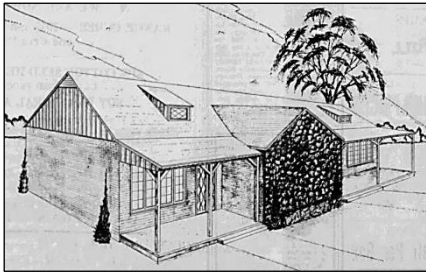
Stilwell. According to an article in the *Westville Reporter*, similar petitions were being prepared for circulation in Cherokee, Sequoyah and Delaware Counties. In 1970, the arrival of a multi-county library demonstration in six Eastern Oklahoma counties, that included Adair County, was soon to make the petitioners' dreams a reality.

“As president my main goal for the Westville Community Improvement Club is the library. We have a beautiful and much needed building, but it has no books. My goal is to see the completion of this library by filling it full of books. To do this, each citizen in this community must contribute his fair share.”

Bill Templeton
December 9, 1968



On November 17, 1968 Mrs. Bessie Henderson (left) and Mrs. Nola Bost (right) presented the Library and Meeting Room deed to the City of Westville. (Westville Reporter, 1968)



Architect's drawing of the proposed combined John F. Henderson Library and W. C. Bost Meeting Room, circa 1967. (Library Photo)



Library under construction, 1967-68. (Library Photo)



Helen Bynum was one of the Westville Community Library volunteers (1960-1968) and the first EOLS branch manager of the John F. Henderson Public Library, serving from 1970 to 1985. (Library Photo)

The new Henderson Library and Bost Community Center opened to the Westville community on October 22, 1969. The formal dedication was held November 17, 1969. The building was 2,950 square feet and was designed by Mrs. Henderson. It had double brick construction and included a central façade of black Obsidian stone from Colorado. The south wing was to be known as the W. C. Bost Memorial Community Room. The north wing contained the John F. Henderson Library. At the dedication, Mrs. Bessie Henderson and Mrs. Nola Bost presented the Library and Meeting Room deed to the City of Westville. The *Westville Reporter* noted that over 500 people attended the building's dedication. It was declared by city officials that a book fund would be established and fund-raising projects planned for the new Library.

In December 1968 the Westville Community Improvement Club met in regular session and set as a main project the procuring of books for the Library and voted to sponsor the John F. Henderson Memorial Book Fund. They started the Fund with \$350 from the group's treasury plus \$100 already given to the project. It was estimated that it would take \$20,000 to fund an adequate book supply for the new Library.

In October 1969 Helen Bynum, a volunteer at the former Westville Community Library, was hired as the first librarian in the new Henderson Library through a training program called Operation Mainstream, sponsored by the U.S. Labor Department. Less than a year later, the John F. Henderson Public Library would become a part of the multi-county library demonstration and Helen would ultimately become Westville's first EOLS branch manager. She would



Like Helen Bynum, Nell Murray was one of the Westville Community Library volunteers between the years of 1960-1968. (Library Photo)

serve the Westville community a total of twenty-five years in her capacity as both a volunteer in the Westville Community Library and as branch manager of the John F. Henderson Library.



The completed John F. Henderson Public Library and W.C. Bost Community Room. A dream of a library for the community was now a reality, 1968. (Library Photo)

The John F. Henderson Public Library – The Dream Continued....



The John F. Henderson Public Library. (Library photo)

In 1960 around the time the earlier Westville Community Library came into being; the *Stilwell Democrat Journal* reported that Adair County was one of ten eastern Oklahoma counties to be visited by a “Bookmobile tour.” Named the “*No Library Week Tour*,” a bookmobile was scheduled to visit twelve Oklahoma communities during the week of July 4-8, 1960. The tour was set to occur just before a state-wide vote on State Question 392, scheduled for a vote on July 26th. Question 392 was a library amendment to the Oklahoma Constitution which would make bookmobile service and multi-county library systems easier for most counties to finance.

The *Stilwell Democrat-Journal* editor, Wade Zumwalt, encouraged Adair County voters to approve of State Question 392 saying, “*This is especially important in a county such as ours where there is NOT one public library in existence.... While it is true that an effort is now being made in Westville to install a town library – in the county seat town of Stilwell, one cannot secure a book from a library unless he gets his or her child to check one out of the school library.*” State Question 392 did pass state-wide in 1960.

Westville had its own community library manned by volunteers since 1960 and was getting ready to build a library and community room in 1967 through the generous donations of two prominent Westville citizens. Other Adair County citizens joined the efforts of the Stilwell Study Club in supporting petitions to obtain a public library for Stilwell and to help expand on Westville’s plans to build a new library. Signed petitions were forwarded to the Oklahoma Department of Libraries (ODL). ODL promised that Adair County would be in line for library funding as soon as it became available.

ODL would finance demonstration libraries in Stilwell and Westville with state and federal funds. During the proposed demonstration period, there would be no cost to the local area except for providing suitable buildings in both communities. Westville was to have their new library building in place by the time the demonstration period was to go into effect.

Early in the planning for a multi-county demonstration, it was envisioned that it would take place in four eastern Oklahoma counties – Adair, Cherokee, Sequoyah and Delaware, with the proposed headquarters library located in Tahlequah in Cherokee County. However, before the demonstration library system actually came into being, Muskogee and McIntosh counties were added and the proposed headquarters library moved to Muskogee.

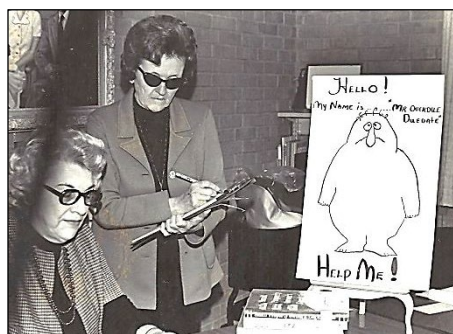


Library assistant, Flora Brooks, checking out books to library patrons in the early 1970s. (Library photo)

When all was said and done, Adair and the other counties' chances for getting a demonstration library depended solely on the Legislature's actions. It wasn't until April 1970 that Adair and the other five counties that were to make up the Eastern Oklahoma Library System found out what they needed to do to obtain a multi-county library demonstration. Esther Mae Henke, the associate director for Public Library Services at ODL, explained in detail what to expect at a meeting in Stilwell on April 15, 1970. Henke told those in attendance that the Oklahoma Department of Libraries would finance the county's library services for two years, including Bookmobile service to rural areas. This would be in cooperation with local library boards and relevant local government officials. By the end of the two years, the county was expected to assume financial responsibility for the continuation of services by voting for a special ad valorem tax.

As noted in the Early Library History section, while waiting for the multi-county library system to become a reality, the Westville Community Improvement Club set as the Club's goal to fund the purchase of books to fill the new but empty Henderson Library building. In March 1970 ODL provided grant funding to Adair County to participate in a two year multi-county library demonstration. In May, the Siloam Springs Public Library in neighboring Arkansas

donated 111 books to Westville's new Library and it held its first children's Summer Reading Program with 69 participants.



Helen and her assistant, Flora, help Mr. Overdue Due Date keep track of the Library's overdue materials. (Library photo, 1972)

In July 1970 the Henderson Library began its two-year demonstration program as part of the newly established library system. Vol Woods was the first Adair County EOLS Board member, In October Helen Bynum continued on in her role as Westville's first EOLS branch

manager after participating in a brief training period. Through the remainder of 1970 and into 1971, the System added more books and other types of media to the collection already begun by interested citizens. It was also the continuation of the dream of a group of community women who established the first public library in Adair County.

By September 1971 library supporters in Westville and Stilwell as well as those in the rural areas began preparations on how to promote the two community libraries and Bookmobile in advance of the levy elections for both libraries continued financial support. The demonstration funds were scheduled to expire on June 30, 1972.

State Senator Robert Medearis conducted a meeting of library supporters in September. He is quoted as saying to the group, *"It will take a united effort – a 200 percent effort – to safely put over the two-mill levy in this county."* The group

Many Books, Records Loaned

"Patrons of the Westville and Stilwell Public Libraries have checked out 24,457 books, records, magazines and films since the libraries opened in March, 1971.

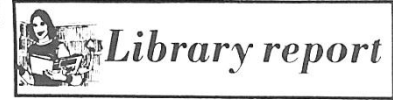
In addition, 2,316 books...were checked out during the same time period from the two bookmobiles that make regular stops in Adair County."

*Stilwell Democrat-Journal
February 10, 1972*

proposed a variety of suggestions to get out the vote for an election to be held on December 7, 1971. If the vote failed, the Library would have to close. All staff and materials would be dissolved.

The December 7th vote for libraries was on the ballot with six other state questions. Only the library millage question was of local interest so voting was expected to be light overall. However, voting turned out to be heavier than expected and all measures, including the library millage, failed.

The millage question failed by 234 votes - 635 votes for the millage and 869 votes against. The majority of the negative votes came from rural areas in the county. Library supporters in both Westville and Stilwell would not be deterred. They got approval from the Adair County Commissioners who agreed to call another election prior to the end of the demonstration period, June 30, 1972. So on June 6, 1972, a few weeks before the end of the demonstration, the measure passed narrowly with 919 votes for and 838 votes against the measure. The passage of the measure allowed both communities to remain in the library system, continue Bookmobile service to the rural areas and to generate the necessary funds for operating expenses and salaries.

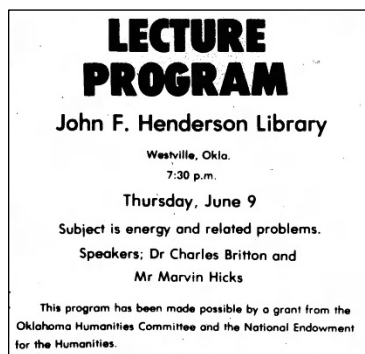


The Library's newspaper column in the Westville Reporter, 1980s.

Prior to, as well as immediately after the positive millage vote in June, both the Westville and Stilwell libraries' usage and circulation stats began to increase at a faster rate. Open hours increased and while *Westville Reporter* newspaper slowly began its demise as the community's newspaper over time, the *Stilwell Democrat Journal* became the County's newspaper. It provided information about the activities of both libraries such as routine circulation figures, open hours and Bookmobile schedules, meeting and special programs and events notices, keeping the



Area musicians welcome in the Holiday Season with some guitar music in the Bost Room. (Library photo)



The first ever lecture series held by the Library was scheduled for June 9, 1977. (Stilwell Democrat-Journal)



In 1980 Helen received a citation from Head Start for her commitment to northern Adair County's Head Start Program. (Library photo)

events, programs and services of both County libraries in the public eye.

The Henderson Library generally prospered during the rest of the 1970s and through the 1980s. The addition of the Bost Community Meeting Room was almost as big of an attraction to the community as was the library. With a population of less than a thousand people, Westville was without meeting facilities outside of the local churches' fellowship halls or business conference rooms – neither of which were readily available for general

community use. It didn't take long for the space provided by Nola Bost to be the most popular venue in town. Besides library activities, Summer Reading Programs, classes and special events, the Bost Room was used for school and class reunions, wedding and baby showers, birthdays and anniversaries, non-profit meetings and organizations, to name just a few of the activities.

In the spring of 1976, the Henderson Library along with fifteen other Oklahoma public libraries, including neighboring Stilwell and Tahlequah, received grants under "Project Gentle Nudge." The goal of "Project Gentle Nudge" was to provide programs for preschool children using educational toys and games. It included informing and instructing parents on the importance of play in a child's early learning process and development. The program was funded

by the Library Services and Construction Act, enacted in 1964, by Congress and awarded through the Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

Months later in May 1976 the Library received its first copy machine for public use. The City of Westville contributed \$800 toward the cost of the machine. While the arrival of a copy machine is routine in the 21st century, it was a very big occurrence for the community worthy of its own newspaper article!



Helen retired in 1985 after 25 total years of library service to the community. Here she welcomed Westville's new branch manager, Sue Ann Ghormley. (Library photo)



Sue Ann Ghormley was Henderson Library's second branch manager. She served the Library for 31 years, 1985-2016.

Branch Manager Ghormley hit the ground running and in 1986 was honored by the EOLS Board of Trustees for the outstanding work accomplished in her first year of service. Accomplishments included representation of the Library with a parade float, plus setting up a booth at the Adair County Fair. One of the most popular programs of the year was a quilt display and presentation. Ghormley also made several presentations to civic groups and visits to community institutions such as the public school and nursing home. Not only did she increase the visibility of the Library in the community, but in doing so, she increased the attendance and usage of the Library.

In the summer of 1988 Senate Bill 374 was passed by the Legislature. The bill doled out \$189,000 to ten of Oklahoma's public libraries. The EOLS Libraries in Warner and Westville were among the public library recipients. The bill's money was earmarked for repair, maintenance, construction, equipment, furnishings and improvement of library services. The Henderson Library received \$34,000. The funds were used primarily for handicapped access renovations plus other physical

May 19, 1988
Dear Mrs. Ghormley,
Thank you for letting us visit you.
Your friend,
Laromie

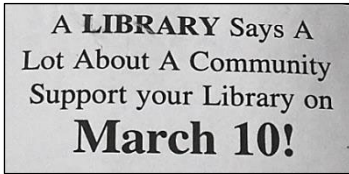
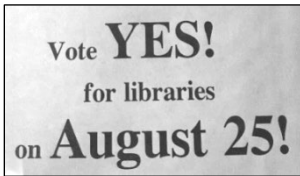
plant improvements due after twenty years of building occupancy and use.

In early 1990 both the Library and the Town of Westville honored Bessie Henderson and Nola Bost for their outstanding contributions to the community with a Founder's

Tea celebration held in the Library's Bost Community Room.



Honoring the two founders of the Henderson Library were, left to right: Judy Kuykendall, Associate EOLS Director; Nola Bost and Bessie Henderson; Marilyn Hinshaw, EOLS Director; and Shirley Sharp, President of the Westville Library Board. (Library photo)



The Senior Girl's Spring Tea was a popular annual event. Senior Boys decided they wanted a Tea as well. The Girl's Tea was scheduled for a morning session and the Boy's Tea was scheduled for the afternoon. Each Tea had its own speaker on topics of interest to that group. (Library photo, 1997)

The 1990s brought on the computer and Internet age. In July 1991 many of the EOLS branch libraries suffered budget cuts just as computers were rapidly becoming “must haves” in libraries. Westville’s Library was no exception as were branch libraries in most other EOLS counties. The Henderson Library had suffered a cutback in hours and a \$7,000 decrease in funding to purchase books and materials as costs for such materials increased across the board. It became readily apparent that if the local Adair County libraries and the other

System libraries who had not yet moved to the four-mill funding cap wanted to move into the future, more funding was needed. A millage vote for an additional two mills in was scheduled for March 10, 1992.

There had been no changes in the library tax rate since it was originally voted for in 1972, twenty years prior. Despite the need, the vote failed by a mere 17 votes in Adair County but the County

defied conventional wisdom and called for another vote in the very next election. That time the vote passed with 845 votes.

Initial steps toward computer automation of all the System’s library records actually began when the System was created but it wasn’t until the fall of 1990 that technology needed



Left: Stilwell branch manager, Patricia Gordon, and Sue Ann Ghormley met and reviewed their 1994-1995 statistics. Both were pleased with the increases in attendance and circulation figures in their respective branch libraries.

in replacing existing library records with computer-based cataloging and circulation became more feasible. In the process of computerizing all library records, it became obvious from that point on that personal computer use in libraries was here to stay and that soon library patrons would want similar access to information via automation and networking as soon as possible.



State Representative Larry Adair, right, presented the Department of Commerce's grant to, from left to right: Adair County Board Member, George Jan Ross; Westville Branch Manager, Sue Ann Ghormley; and EOLS Director, Marilyn Hinshaw on Library Legislative Day, April 8, 2002. (Library photo)

Public-access computers were first introduced to EOLS branch library patrons around 1994-95. At first, the number of available public-access computers was limited in all libraries but expanded as funds and grants allowed. By 1998 Internet access was available for the Henderson Library, and in 1999 the Library received a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to purchase two additional computers combined with related software.

In 1995 branch managers, Patricia Gordon from Stilwell, and Sue Ann Ghormley, Westville, celebrated both libraries' circulation increases in fiscal year 1994-95. Both credited the passage of the new mill levy and an increase in public access



Along with the grants set aside for the Library's renovation, Library Friends and volunteers pitched in with bake and book sales, bean dinners and several other fundraising ventures to raise money for the cause. (Library photo)

computers with helping with the increase. "We started to receive our mill levy funds in 1994," stated Ghormley. "We were also able to go to automation, which was a direct result of the levy."

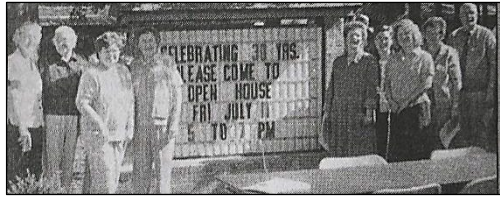
Friends of the John F. Henderson Public Library was formed to support the Library and to aid in the fundraising for a proposed expansion and renovation project. The project began in earnest in the late summer of 2002 with Friends and volunteers moving equipment and

furniture to make way for the project.

The overall project cost was \$288,063. The Town of Westville awarded its 2001 REAP grant to the Library in the amount of \$50,000 to be administered by the Eastern Oklahoma Development District. This grant and \$25,000 provided in the will of Bessie Henderson were the foundations of what was to be a two-year effort to raise money for the Library's



Mayor Mary Adair presented the local Library Board with the REAP Grant confirmation on March 1, 2001. Pictured left to right, back row: Norma Hill, local Library Board President; Mig Hamilton, Board Member; front row: Virginia Adair, Secretary; Nell Murray, Vice President; Sue Ann Ghormley, Branch manager; and Mayor Mary Adair.



On July 11, 2003 local supporters and state library dignitaries celebrated the Library's Dedication Ceremony with an Open House. (Library photo)



Ghormley wasn't wearing a Halloween costume in October 2002, only necessary protection during the Library's renovation. The Library closed to the public November 1 to complete the construction. (Library photo)



Adair County library supporters and branch managers concluded their April, 2005 Library Legislative Day visiting the office of Adair County Representative John Auffett. Left to right: Stilwell Branch manager, Karen George; Westville Library Board Member, Mildred Tillery; Westville Branch manager Sue Ann Ghormley; and EOLS Board Trustee, Patsygail Calhoun. (Library photo)

new and necessary addition. These two funding sources were used to apply for a matching building grant from the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. The ODL grant was awarded but funds were still short of the goal.

Adair County State Representative, Larry Adair, stepped in and helped obtain another grant from the

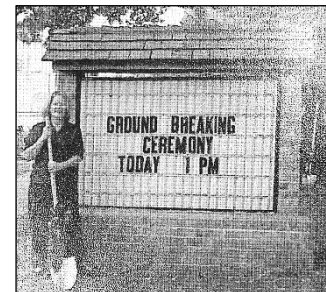
Oklahoma Department of Commerce. The \$175,000 Commerce grant completed the fund-raising for the expansion in May 2002. Groundbreaking for the expansion was held on September 16, 2002. The Library remained open until the construction became unsafe for the public to access the building. The Library closed in November and reopened six months later.

The project doubled the square footage of the building by adding onto the back of the building expanding room not only for books and shelves but also the staff work area, maintenance closet, staff restroom, janitor's closet and storage closet. At the front of the building the former Children's area became the branch manager's office. A meeting room closet, a hallway between the Library and the meeting room with restrooms and a study room were also added. Enough square footage was added that two more HVAC

units were needed as well. The Library reopened to the public in March 2003 and the Dedication was held July 11, 2003.

After the building remodeling and expansion project the Library continued to grow and prosper. In June 2005 the Library's circulation was a record high of over 5,000 books and other materials. Public computer usage grew as well with almost 1,000 users in June alone with only nine public use computers available.

The Library's next planned project was to move into wireless computer delivery so more users could access the



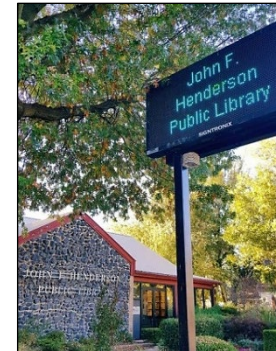
Ghormley had her shovel ready for the Library's groundbreaking Ceremony in 2002.

Library's wireless network with their own devices such as laptops and PDAs. Often there existed a waiting list for use of the public use computers. With a wireless network, users would be able to use meeting rooms to conduct meetings and conferences with their own computing devices via the Library's network while reducing stress on the Library's fixed PCs. In the mid-2000s there was no other known public Wi-Fi available in the entire County.



The Memorial Wall Bricks are visible on the west wall of the Bost Room during a 2019 senior exercise class (Library photo)

In October 2006 the Friends of the John F. Henderson Public Library honored those who had supported the Library through the renovation and expansion of the building with a Memorial Wall of honorary bricks imbedded in a wall of the Bost Community Room. The dedication of the Wall was held on October 7 with a Reception.



A new electronic sign graced the Library's front lawn in 2008. (Library)

An electronic sign made its appearance on the Library's front lawn in 2008. The Friends' group partnered with the Tom J. and Edna Mae Carson Foundation. The Foundation was new and connected to Peoples Bank (now called the Carson Community Bank). The Bank was a big supporter of the Library's projects. As a result, Henderson Library was the first System Library with digital signage.



Participants in an early 1980s Summer Reading Program in the original Bost Community Room. (Library photo)

The Henderson Library, like all branches in the EOLS system, have held numerous workshops, computer classes, Summer Reading Programs, youth and adult craft classes of all kinds, holiday programs, participated in local events, book reviews, cooperative ventures with the Stilwell Library, book sales and hosted both local and rural school library visits. Westville's Bost Room was also the host site for local anniversaries, wedding and baby showers, reunions and birthdays.



New branch manager Stephanie Freedle, left, with Sue Ann Ghormley at the Library's 50th Anniversary Celebration on November 17, 2018. (Library photo)



Library Friends can always be relied on to make any celebration special. (Library photo from 50th Anniversary Celebration, November, 2018)



The finished results of an adult craft class held in the Bost Room in 2018. (Library photo)



Library staff and a special guest begin their preparation in the Library's parking lot for the 2017 Halloween Trunk or Treat festivities. (Library photo)

novels became more popular. Westville senior citizens and other age-group health-related information, classes and exercise classes became popular as the System placed emphasis on health issues in 2017 as part of its system-wide outreach on health. There were other System-wide initiatives such as “What Do You Geek” in 2013 and “Ready Player One” in 2019. Adult crafts became popular throughout the System during this time and Westville was no exception.

In 2016 Sue Ann Ghormley retired after 31 years of service to the community. Westville’s third manager was Stephanie Freedle. She served the community for six years prior to her move to the Siloam Springs Public Library in 2022.

On November 17, 2018 Henderson Library celebrated 50 years of service to the Westville community, 1968-2018. In Mayor Tony Barker’s Proclamation during the celebration he also recognized the work of the early citizens and volunteers who started the Westville Community Library in 1960.

Branch manager Freedle continued the Library’s tradition of service to Westville and Adair County. The Westville and Stilwell branch libraries took every opportunity to share resources and to attend county-wide activities together such as Coop Farmers Markets, parades, and health fairs, to promote the resources of each community’s Library.

Summer reading programs continued as they had since the 1970s. Computer and Internet classes and programs continued to be in demand as technology changed and improved.

Computer games and graphic



Freedle and Stilwell’s branch manager, Rachelle Horney, stand ready to participate in a county-wide event. (Library photo)



Always expect a full house when the animals come to town during a 2019 Summer Reading Program. (Library photo)

As the pandemic became an unavoidable fact of life in March 2020, EOLS responded by closing the libraries and in finding ways to provide resources safely. In December 2020 a Blood Institute employee standing in the Library's parking lot held up a shirt with a message that best described the feelings of all concerned at the time: **2020-2021, Fingers Crossed.**

To be continued....



On December 2020 a Blood Institute Bloodmobile employee shared a popular sentiment appropriate for the times. (Library photo)