

History of NKCP (1965-1989)

In the 1960's Frances Wuest became active in the improvement and expansion of library services in Clay, Jackson, and Platte counties. In the spring of 1965 she served on an advisory committee to study library service in the Kansas City metropolitan area. In September 1965 she met with other Clay County library directors in Liberty to discuss the possibility of either joining the Jackson County Library or establishing an independent county library.

Frances Wuest accepted a position as Coordinator of Clay and Platte Counties with the Mid-Continent Public Library in 1966. Her new position paid \$10,000 a year and was responsible for establishing new branch libraries in Platte and Clay counties. She retired in 1973 after fifty years as a librarian. In her twenty years at the North Kansas City Public Library, the collection had grown from 4,000 to 45,000 volumes. Prior to her resignation, Mrs. Wuest established a sick and vacation leave policy for the Library staff. With Frances Wuest's recommendation, Assistant Librarian Edna Gatton was promoted to Library Director.

In 1966 the Mid-Continent Public Library opened new Clay County branches in Antioch Shopping Center and on North Oak Trafficway in Gladstone under the direction of Frances Wuest. The new libraries caused a two-thirds drop in North Kansas City Public Library circulation. Many part-time employees at the library left for jobs with Mid-Continent.

Mrs. Gatton expanded the Library's hours in October 1966 in response to Mid-Continent's longer hours. The North Kansas City Public Library remained open until 5:00 p.m. on Saturdays, instead of 1:00 p.m.

North Kansas City Councilman Ernest Mosby suggested reducing the Library's tax levy due to decreased circulation. The Library responded with an expansion of services. In January 1967 the Library purchased a record player and began adding records to its collection. In the summer, a film projector was purchased; the Library joined the Missouri Film Cooperative and began receiving films in July 1967. They showed fifty to ninety films a month. A shut-in service was started providing books to homebound residents. Later in the year, the Library purchased three compact cassette tape players, along with Berlitz language tapes, and a Library art collection was purchased for check out. In March 1968 the City Council decided not to push for a decrease in the Library levy.

The Jackson County Public Library, under the direction of James Leathers, had merged with the Platte County Public Library and libraries in Clay County to form the Mid-Continent Public Library. Mid-Continent also provided services to Cass County Public Library. A proposed merger of the Mid-Continent Public Library with the North Kansas City Public Library was placed on the ballot in a June 1971 special election in North Kansas City. Former North Kansas City Public Library Director Frances Wuest personally collected the required signatures.

During Mrs. Gatton's tenure, the Library Board voted to join the Missouri Local Government Employees Retirement System (LAGERS) (in 1969) and provide Library employees with Blue Cross & Blue Shield hospitalization insurance.

In May 1971 Edna Gatton retired from her post the month prior to the June special election. Jacquelyn Rush Hershewe, who had been the Library's Assistant Director since the previous September, was promoted to Director.

The Library Board, City Council, and Chamber of Commerce all strongly opposed the merger. The *North Kansas City Dispatch* ran many local editorials against the merger. The measure would have doubled the

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City's library levy. The existing Library's land and building also would have reverted back to the North Kansas City Development Company. North Kansas City attempted to block the election in court and City Council members lobbied door-to-door against the measure. Supporters of the merger campaigned very little and the proposal was soundly defeated 949 to 22.

When hired as director in 1971, Jacquelyn Hershewe expressed an interest in increasing the number of children visiting the Library. Since the opening of Mid-Continent Public Library's branches in 1966 the North Kansas City Public Library's Summer Reading Program attendance had steadily decreased each year. Throughout Hershewe's tenure, the Library displayed elaborate decorations for Summer Reading Programs and other events in an effort to draw area children.

The 1971-1972 budget included funds for an expanded business reference collection. Popular titles published by Standard & Poor, Moody's, and Dunn & Bradstreet were purchased for the Library.

Jacquelyn Hershewe also continued the Library's involvement in regional library organizations. She donated the Library's weeded books to area hospitals, prisons, and schools. In 1977, she received an award in recognition of the donations. The Library also sponsored a float in the 1976 Clay County Bicentennial Parade held in North Kansas City during Mrs. Hershewe's tenure.

The Library's first interlibrary loan system was established through the Northwest Library Network in 1977. The system consisted of a telephone loop with Park College, William Jewell College, Mid-Continent Public Library, Central Missouri State University, and other area libraries.

In 1977, the Library hired an architectural firm and underwent extensive remodeling which culminated in an open house in July of that year.

The Library began purchasing 8mm and Super 8mm films in the early and mid-1970's, and in 1978 purchased a video-cassette player for programs. They also continued to receive 16mm films through the Missouri Film Cooperative.

In August 1978, the Board approved the Library's first written personnel policy. They also approved Censorship Guidelines, which amounted to the Library's first collection development plan.

In October 1978, Mrs. Hershewe announced her resignation. She remained in her position until the end of the year and assisted the Library Board in screening candidates for a new director. Walter J. Hartmetz, of Harrisonville, was named the new Library Director effective January 1, 1979. He had previously been the Cass County Public Library Director.

In 1979, the Library's former director Frances Wuest passed away. Her brother and nephew donated money to create the Frances Campbell Wuest Memorial Library Scholarship Fund. A Board was established consisting of members of the Library Board to administer the fund and scholarship.

In 1979 the City conducted a study of the swimming pool after concern about the condition of the facility. The Swimming Pool Committee determined that the facility would require \$80,000 in repairs. The City considered closing the pool. The Library expressed an interest in expansion should the pool area become available.

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The Library joined the Kansas City Metropolitan Library & Information Network (KCMLIN) in 1979. The following year KCMLIN paid for the equipment and installed the Library's first teleprinter for interlibrary loan.

In 1980, the Library purchased a microfiche reader and 1600 microfiche. It was also awarded a state grant for the purchase of a microfilm reader.

The State of Missouri phased out the Library Services Center for centralized processing and cataloging in 1980. It was replaced by the Southwest Missouri Cooperative in Bolivar, but the organization dissolved after a year. In 1981 the North Kansas City Public Library began processing its own books and using Springfield-Green County Public Library cataloging cards. In September 1982 the Library purchased an Apple II microcomputer for staff use.

A recession in the early 1980's resulted in a 50% reduction in state aid. The cutbacks resulted in financial problems for the Library. In November 1982 the Library Board decided to put a levy increase on the April 1983 ballot. North Kansas City residents approved the levy increase from 10 cents to 20 cents. The City loaned the Library \$50,000 the following year as a stopgap measure until the new tax funds could be collected.

The Library Board discussed the possibility of purchasing video cassettes in June 1983. In July 1983, the Library began leasing books from McNaughton. Leasing books were a popular way for public libraries to temporarily provide patrons with bestselling titles.

The Library Director was advised by the Board to explore the possible purchase of a library automation system for circulation.

In 1985 Mayor Clark Ferguson requested that all City departments and the Library be placed under the supervision of the City administrator. The Library Board rejected the proposal.

The North Kansas City Public Library signed a reciprocal borrowing agreement with the Kansas City Public Library which went into effect May 1, 1986.

The City provided the Library with \$75,000 to make the Library building handicap accessible, which included the construction of a wheelchair ramp. The improvements were completed during the 1985-1986 fiscal year.

The same year, the Library levy was rolled-back from 20 cents to 13 cents per \$100 assessed valuation due to reassessment and the loss of the Merchants and Manufacturers tax.

The Library also purchased a 25-inch television and VCR for public use in 1986. With the purchase, the Library began adding videotapes to its collection. The collection began with 30 videotapes. Patrons could also request videotapes, which the Library was able to borrow through the Missouri Film Cooperative. Around the same time, the Library also purchased a microfilm reader-printer.

In the mid-1980s the Library Building, which belonged to the City, was in need of extensive repairs. The Library was also in need of additional storage space. There were extensive discussions about the issue with the City, and the Library considered the possibility of buying a nearby church for additional storage space.

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Much-needed renovations were made to the building's exterior, including new gutters, for which the City reimbursed the Library. Inside the building, downstairs basement storage space in the pool area was renovated and converted into office space.

In 1987, the Library increased fines from 2 cents to 5 cents per day, per item. All the other metropolitan area libraries were already charging 5 or 10 cents per day.

The Library Director created a Five-Year Strategic Plan in 1987. The plan included the purchase of a library automation system for circulation, an electric typewriter for staff use, a personal computer, and to seek a 5 cent levy increase in the April 1989 election.

The Library also began a public awareness campaign. Two hundred informational brochures promoting the Library's shut-in service and large print books were sent out in January 1987. In May 1987 the Library mailed a survey to all North Kansas City residents. In the summer, a promotional brochure was distributed to local businesses.

In 1988 the Library received a free personal computer from the State. The Library also purchased two personal computers and acquired Microsoft Works software free from the State.

By the late 1980s the Library had developed an extensive print business reference collection which was used by local business people.

The Library purchased several hundred dollars of advertising in several local newspapers to publicize National Library Week. It also began giving "goodie" bags to new patrons in June 1988. They contained a Library magnet, two emery boards, bookmarks, two pencils, and information about the Library.

A popular tradition every year was the Library's fire safety program for children, which featured "Smokey the Bear" and the North Kansas City Fire Department. Children's Librarian Marie Jackson orchestrated the program for over two decades.

The Library's fiftieth anniversary arrived in January 1989. The Library Board and Director agreed to delay an official celebration until the spring.