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Interest in libraries here nearly century old



Former Carnegie Library stands in foreground during construction of present library in background. *Kansan* file photo.

(Editor's note: This is the 19th in a series of "then and now" articles on places and things of interest in Kansas City, Kan., compiled by area historian Margaret Landis in observance of the 100th birthday of KCK in 1986. Much of the information has appeared in past editions of The Kansan.)

(Transcriptions are presented without changes except to improve readability.)

In the early 1890s, interest in founding a public library was the primary purpose of the City Federation of Women's Clubs of KCK. Various means were used to raise money to buy books. Perhaps the most unique was the dog license tax as revenue for the library.

The library was first formed in a room at 7th and Minnesota. Later the establishment was moved to a building at 5th and Minnesota.

Elizabeth May Dickinson was appointed the first librarian of the KCK Public Library in 1895. A plaque in the building was dedicated to her it read:

ELIZABETH MAY DICKINSON
1836 - 1931
Appointed 1895 as First Librarian of the
Kansas City, Kansas Public Library
(Placed here by the Wyandotte County Historical Society)

On Aug. 5, 1901, Andrew Carnegie donated \$75,000 to the KCK Board of Education for a library building.

An agreement was made with the board and the city to construct the library in the center of Huron Square in the place marked "Seminary Place."

The library was to be erected where the Central School had been built in 1867. The school remained here for 30 years then moved to 9th and Minnesota because of the need for a larger facility.

The cornerstone for the new library was laid Sept. 6, 1902. Inscribed on the top ledge was "LEARNING LIBERTY LAW." William W. Rose was the architect. He designed and supervised its construction. The building was completed in the spring of 1904.

One outstanding feature about the structure of the building was the design near the windows. The faces on the north side were those of Goethe, Isaiah, Emerson, Longfellow, Homer and Shakespeare. On the east side were Wordsworth, Dante, Virgil and Darwin. And the south side was composed of Dickens, Cooper, Hugo, Irving, Milton, Bancroft and Gibbon.

Mrs. Sarah A. Richart, first president of the City Federation of Women's Clubs, was known as the founder of the library because of her hard work toward its establishment and her support for education. A plaque in the library was dedicated to her. It read:

In Memory of
SARAH ANN RICHART
May 8, 1883
Jan. 13, 1901
She devoted to this Library
The latter years of Her
Life Bequeathing to it
Her entire estate
This tablet is placed by Club
Women and the
Children of the Public schools of this city
May 1913

Plans for a new library to include school administrative offices were drawn up in January, 1958. The library was funded by a bond issue supported by area residents. The new KCK Public Library, as it stands today at 625 Minnesota Ave., was opened to the public March 23, 1966. Carnegie Library building was razed in 1965 to make room for a parking lot for the new library.