

On December 14, 1869, twelve years after the founding of the town, the original Library of Emporia was brought into existence. A group of leading citizens formed the first library association. It worked on a subscription basis: dues were \$3 a year for men and \$2 a year for women. The first directors met on January 19, 1870, and decided to rent the front rooms over the Bates and Perley Drugstore, 163 Commercial Street, at a price not to exceed \$15 a month.

The library was popular from the start. By March of 1871, the Library Association had 31 life members and 145 annual members. They had 764 books and subscribed to six monthly magazines. But the road wasn't always smooth for the new library: By 1874, the annual report showed a debt of \$140. Many fundraising projects (such as a strawberry festival and a masquerade ball) were held, but hard times continued.

Membership sank to 75 while the debt continued to increase until it reached \$203. In 1884, a city ordinance was passed, which established a tax-supported base and gave Emporia a public library in the modern sense. The library grew and soon needed room for expansion. Mrs. Amanda Wicks, a librarian in 1893, learned of the Carnegie funds available to establish public libraries and immediately applied for a grant. However, because of the Carnegie library already located on the College of Emporia campus, the request was denied. A second application resulted in a \$22,000 donation for a building. Mrs. Preston B. Plumb, wife of one of the founders of Emporia and the first president of the library association, donated land at 6th and Market for the building site as well as money for the architectural services.

The new facility opened to the public on February 23, 1906, with a reception. Over the coming years, many exciting developments came about; Dr. Clyde Meredith, an Emporia State music professor, began the record collection by donating both records and money. Also during this period, the microfilming of newspapers was begun. The annual budget increased twelvefold from its original \$2,000 to \$27,000.

With the advent of federal funds, the Emporia Public Library attempted to expand their information resources. Mrs. Beryl Liegl was the director of the

library when the first of these federal funds became available. She reported that this money allowed her to begin many new services for Emporians. She instigated a framed art reproduction service of quality prints, updated the record collection started by Dr. Meredith, began the services for the homebound, and increased the large print collection. Telephone books were added to the collection as well as a copy machine. The genealogy, business, and reference departments were also upgraded under Mrs. Liegl's guidance. The Memorial Book Program, in which community members donate funds in honor of special events such as marriages, births, or deaths, began at this point as well.

At this time, Mrs. Liegl began to update the library's collection, which had grown to the point of overflowing. She invited several people in the community to organize a Friends of the Library group to raise money, work on publicity, and coordinate activities with the board of directors. The first Friends group, in 1973, was comprised of 237 members who paid \$1 each for membership. Their first summer book sale raised \$479. From these funds, the Friends invested \$700 in a film projector and screen. They began brown bag lunches accompanied by a film, which they then used to establish a building fund. They managed to raise \$500 toward a new building.

The new building—our current building—has a spacious atrium, the checkout desk, the children's room, adult and children's DVD collections, audiobooks, an area for mending and processing materials, and the large meeting room on the main floor. Upstairs is the adult collection (which includes fiction and nonfiction), the Spanish language collection, the young adult area, and microfilm. Another upstairs feature is the Kansas Room, which houses the magazine and newspaper reading space as well as books about Kansas. The library also provides computers for public use and free Wi-Fi.

In 2001, the library removed the card catalogs and purchased an automated library system. The new system gave patrons online access to the digital catalog and modernized processing internally. In 2017, the library moved to a newer, more streamlined automated library system, giving patrons even more access to their accounts and allowing the integration of the catalog and digital resources with the website. In 2019, the library celebrated its 150th anniversary. In 2020, the library went fine-free for most items, making our

library more accessible to patrons. With funds from the 2019 Match Day fundraiser, the library was able to purchase a van to visit more sites in Emporia and expand the library's outreach capabilities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the library added RFID technology to make it easier for patron to access library services and materials. The library's building has had a number of improvements, including skylight repair (2021), new front doors (2023), and new book drops for the parking lot (2024). The library continues to adapt its services and resources based on the needs of the community and continues to upgrade the building when possible.