

## History of Kenton County Public Library

The roots of the Kenton County Public Library can be traced back to 1899 as several distinguished citizens of Covington, Kentucky, convened to discuss the need for a public library for its citizens. In 1901 a newly appointed library Board passed rules that declared there be free library service to every man, woman, and child in Covington, making the Covington Library one of the first in the south to provide racially integrated service. With a \$75,000 contribution from philanthropist Andrew Carnegie the new Carnegie Library opened on March 16, 1904 to the citizens of Covington.

In 1914 the Erlanger Library was established by the Erlanger Women's Club. This library was operated by volunteers and one librarian. Despite its struggles and many location changes over the years, the community embraced the Erlanger Branch Library.

As the years passed each library continued to grow. On March 22, 1953 the residents of rural Kenton County received bookmobile service. By 1967 Kenton County had three independent libraries, the Covington Library, the Erlanger Library, and the bookmobile. In order to secure reliable funding for library service for the residents of Kenton County it was determined that a county library system be established. To do so the library would need to get 14,865 signatures for the tax rate to be approved. More than 16,000 signatures were obtained.

The Covington Library, the Erlanger Library and the bookmobile merged under the newly formed Kenton County Public Library District. With secured funding the Library flourished. A new main library was constructed in Covington, a beautiful new library was established in rural Kenton County to replace the bookmobile and the Erlanger Branch has grown to be the busiest branch library in the state of Kentucky. Construction of a new, large rural library in Nicholson is complete and now the William E. Durr Library meets the needs of the fastest growing community in Kentucky. As the Library embarks on a new century it continues to provide the best library service possible to readers all over the world.



## About the Kenton County Public Library - Library History 1900's



In late 1899, several distinguished local citizens convened to discuss the need for a public library for the citizens of Covington. At that time, the only library service in Covington was in the form of subscription libraries. Anyone wanting to use these libraries were charged a \$3 annual fee.

After numerous attempts to establish a public library in Covington, the Mayor of Covington appointed a board of prominent citizens to organize a free public library for residents of the city. This first board included Senator William Goebel, Judge James P. Tarvin, Bradford Shinkle, Professor Melchor Abele, and Dr. J. T. Dodd. The deaths of Senator Goebel and Dr. Dodd resulted in the reorganization of the board in early 1900 and the board began the work of creating a library. Joseph L. Rhinock was nominated to serve on the library board and was selected as the new Board president.

In the 1900's an enterprising philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie, embarked on a nationwide campaign to fund public libraries. The Library Board used this as an opportunity to request funding for a public library in Covington.

Mr. Carnegie agreed to contribute \$40,000 for the construction of a library in Covington provided that the city budgeted support for library operations. The Kentucky General Assembly responded by passing a special act requiring perpetual support of the library by the city.

While plans for the new library were being developed, the board found temporary quarters for the new library in Ideal Hall at the corner of Seventh and Madison Ave. Rules passed in March 1901 that declared there be free library service to every man, woman, and child in Covington, making the Covington Library one of the first in the south to provide racially integrated service. Kenton County residents were offered service for \$2.00 per year with free service provided to students and teachers at any school in Kenton County. Users were allowed one book at a time. Fines for non-returned

items were 2 cents per day. Mrs. Helen Lansdown was head librarian and Mrs. Anna Spears was assistant librarian.

The temporary quarters at Ideal Hall, however, were less than ideal. The fire marshal called the new library "a fire trap" and threatened to close the building unless an additional exit was opened. The book stacks were open only to staff and only adults were permitted to enter the main reading room. The first book catalog was delayed at the printers and was not delivered until late 1901.

It was determined that more money was needed to create a state-of-the-art facility. Mr. Carnegie was approached twice more by the Board and gave a combined total of \$75,000. Board members purchased the property at the corner of Scott and Robbins to house the building. Architects Boll and Taylor were hired to design the library. Construction began in April 1902.

As the new library neared completion, the Librarian informed the board that the library had an inadequate catalog, an inaccurate accession book, and incomplete borrower records. The library in Ideal Hall closed on December 19, 1903 to work on these problems and to prepare the collection for moving to the new library. While closed, the library staff carefully examined every book in the collection, which included 8,017 volumes. Membership at that time was 8,196. Fines collected during 1903 totaled \$275.90.

The cornerstone was laid on Tuesday, August 5, 1902. The new Carnegie Library, constructed at a cost of \$87,170.94, opened on March 16, 1904. The new library boasted plenty of space for books, a rotunda resembling the version in the Library of Congress, and a grand auditorium. The first program in the auditorium that evening was a performance of the Polyphonic Choral Society. The first books were circulated from the new library on March 28, 1904. At the time of the library's opening, there were six employees, with Mrs. Spears as head librarian. More than 1,000 people registered to borrow items at the new location.

Throughout this first decade of the 1900's, the library continued to grow. In 1906, Librarian Anna M. Spears asked the Board to modify the rules to allow users to check out two books - one fiction and one "solid reading." In June 1908, the board asked the local health officer to fumigate the library as often as seemed necessary for protection of the public. In December 1908 the library began story hours for boys over 12 years of age. The librarian reported that these story hours were very popular. In order to accommodate increased usage, the board retained an architect to develop plans for remodeling the auditorium in 1909. Unfortunately funds were not available for the renovation.

Both the number of items available and the number of users grew throughout the 1900s. By 1910, 14,867 volumes were available to the 10,590 registered borrowers. The library was only in its first decade of operation and was growing ever popular as the 1920's approached.

## About the Kenton County Public Library - Library History 1910's



At the end of the first decade of the 1900s, head librarian Anna Spears wanted to experiment with a library "station" in Latonia. Ms. Spears arranged for 150 books to be available for check out at Pope's Drugstore. If interest proved sufficient, a branch library would be considered for Latonia.

In February of 1910, the Library Board submitted a request that the representatives of Kenton County in the Kentucky Legislature "use their utmost influence to secure the passage of a bill pending before the Legislature to create a Library Commission for the state of Kentucky." A Library Commission would support and lobby for libraries throughout the state. This Library Commission was the forerunner of today's Department for Libraries and Archives.

In 1911, the circulation for the Library was 84,914. With new books arriving all of the time, more people became interested in library service. The auditorium was in great demand for use by groups such as the Board of Education and the Covington Lecture Club. Children's services were growing and becoming more popular. Funds were spent to purchase display cases, photographs and other items to improve the appearance of the Library. In the following years, the Library contracted to have a pay phone for public use and a public drinking fountain was also installed.

The big story in December of 1911 was a robbery at the Covington Library. Covington officers noticed the break in and soon discovered that \$10 in small change was missing. The week prior, the Newport Library was also burglarized.

With the start of 1912, Covington Mayor Pat Phillips declared his wishes for everyone in Kenton County to enjoy library service. He emphasized that he wanted "country people" to have equal library benefits as those who lived in the city. During that time, non-

residents of Covington paid a fee of \$2 to use the Library. If county commissioners agreed to supplement the Library's funding, all Kenton County residents could use the Library with no fee assessed. Additionally, with more funding, the Library could purchase more books and a suburban branch library could be considered.

In 1912, Miss Kate Scudder and Reverend J.A. Hagin were appointed to the Library Board. Miss Scudder was a highly regarded socialite and philanthropist. Reverend Hagin was the very popular pastor of First Covington Church.

Slides became a popular item for checkout, primarily to local educators. More than 2,300 were checked out from January to September in 1912. Overall, the amount of slides circulated was not surpassed by any other library in the state of Kentucky. As popular as they were, the Board approved a motion for a dark room to be installed in the basement of the Covington Library to produce slides of a local nature.

In October 1912, an epidemic of diphtheria forced the city's Health Department to close the Library. Books that had been in homes contaminated with diphtheria were burned. All books in circulation were fumigated. A motion was brought before the Board to purchase sulfur candles for fumigation purposes. During the same period, the Anti-Tuberculosis Society was granted permission to place a health information flyer in each Library book.

The Library opened a book deposit station in Seventh District School, giving school children the opportunity to use library services. Several months later, similar stations were established at Latonia High School and Lincoln Grant School was granted.

Letters to the editor of the Kentucky Post urged the Library Board to consider being open on Sunday. An excerpt from one letter stated, "Sunday.....is the only day in the week in which the laboring man has the time to avail himself to visit...". No action was taken by the Board to open on Sunday until the mid 1990s.

One major problem for the Library was the condition of the highly popular auditorium. The city building instructor inspected the auditorium and noted that it was in dire need of major reconstruction. He sited that fireproof walls needed to be added, steps needed to be modified, additional exits added, red light exit signs installed, rails rebuilt and ventilation improved. At least \$10,000 would be needed to repair the auditorium. In August of 1914, the auditorium was ordered closed until repairs could be made.

As a requirement for his original contribution to build the Library, Andrew Carnegie insisted that the city support the Library with adequate funding. Throughout the years, the city had been deducting the amount received by the Board for rental of the auditorium. The Board requested full funding of \$8,500 from the city to comply with Carnegie's request. These additional funds were used in part to repair the auditorium which was repaired and reopened in June 1915. Unfortunately the repairs caused great strain on the Library's finances so no funds were available to purchase books and periodical subscriptions were curtailed.

A request was made to display artwork from local artists and Mr. Duveneck's work was under consideration. However, Mr. Duveneck was not able to donate any of his artwork during this period of time.

The Library continued to grow in popularity as the decade progressed. The Library participated in the war effort during World War II. In 1917 an appeal was made for books to be sent to soldiers. It was asked that each person who donated a book put in his or her name and address in the book so the soldier knows he has a friend in Covington who is willing to help. More than 2000 books were collected and sent to the troops. Third Assistant Librarian Schramm was drafted and abruptly called to service. Patriotic organizations regularly used the auditorium.

As a tribute to his support of libraries everywhere, the Board purchased a bust of Andrew Carnegie for the Covington Library. Upon his death in August 1919 the Library closed in honor of his memory. He would have been pleased to know that in 1919, the Covington Library circulated more than 100,000 books.



## About the Kenton County Public Library - Library History 1920's



As the 1920's began the Library continued to grow in popularity. Books on religion soared in popularity as circulation of these items increased 200 percent. Circulation of children's and science books continued to grow as well.

In August 1920, assistant librarian Joseph Maloney, Sr. resigned from the Library. The Board suggested that an effort be made to secure the services of an older gentleman for the position. The Ministerial Association was contacted for their assistance.

The auditorium was still in great demand for use by local organizations. In an attempt to raise funds, the Board considered the idea of selling "reserved" seats. Although it was a good idea, the cost of printing the tickets was extreme therefore ticket prices would be out of reach for many citizens.

Groups using the auditorium included: Epworth League, Friends of Irish Freedom, La Salette Academy, Kenton County Equal Rights and the Woman's Suffrage League. In 1928, the auditorium was the site of an appearance and speech by Kentucky Governor Flem Sampson.

At this time, Ms. Anna Spears was the head librarian, Miss Carrie Norvell was her first assistant, Miss Emma Stahel was second assistant and Mr. Cyril Schramm was a staff member. Former third assistant Joseph Maloney described his co-workers in a paper he wrote in 1967. The following are excerpts from that paper:

Anna Spears: She was always at ease with the men and women of all stations in the community and with the young patrons of the Library of all ages. She had tact when dealing with employees, keeping all working in harmony without friction. Her method of management was by suggestion, rather than ordering. While every employee felt free to voice opinions and suggestions, and none were hesitant about doing so, Mrs. Spears

calm good judgement and management ideas prevailed. She never raised her voice, but her soft voice could get action when necessary.

Miss Carrie Norvell: A native of the Carolinas, Miss Norvell moved to the Covington area with her family before the turn of the century. She could be very stern in face and voice when talking to a person she did not approve of, or when talking on an unpleasant subject. But she rarely held the stern look for long, invariably her natural cheerfulness broke through and her face changed to a jovial smile.

She was fond of the teenagers and took special interest in them and their school activities. She enjoyed the friendly bantering with them, which she instigated at the slightest provocation.

Mr. Cyril Schramm: One of the most popular staff members at the Library, Mr. Schramm's enthusiasm exuded throughout the entire city of Covington. He would walk down the street greeting everyone by name and bowing to the ladies passing by. Mr. Schramm brought all his energy and intellect to his work at the Library. His interests varied from athletics to the sciences which made him an excellent reference librarian.

Although Mr. Schramm loved everything about the library, he knew he could not stay because his salary could not afford him to take care of a family. He had fallen in love with the Children's Librarian, Emma Stahel. He left the library to work for an automobile agency in Cincinnati. Years later he opened the Latonia Motor Car Company, a repair shop.

Miss Emma Stahel: A very attractive young woman, Miss Stahel loved working with the children and their books. She was always ready with a suggestion when a child was looking for something good to read. When the tidy librarian noticed a boy with dirty hands touching the books, she would tell him to wash his hands before picking up his books.

Miss Stahel met the charming Cyril Schramm while they were both working at the Library. Shortly after he entered the business world, the two were married.

These Library staff members helped the Library to grow and find its niche in the community. The Library staff made the most of little funding and provided good services for the city.

Throughout the 1920s, circulation increased and thoughts of expanding the service area were discussed. A request for more funding from the city was made (nothing noted as to whether it was granted). Also in 1920, the year women were given the right to vote, the Covington Library was first used as a voting place.

The custodian, Mr. Voller, qualified as a private policeman and was allowed to wear a police badge while on duty at the Library. The Board thought that this would help keep older boys in line. In 1921, cost of reserving a book was set at five cents due to excessive demands of students reserving books.



The Library was the scene of another robbery. In April of 1926, the Kentucky Post reported that two rugs and three draperies were stolen. It was thought that the burglar entered the Library during business hours and hid on the second floor until closing. A side door only accessible from the inside was found open the following day.

In 1927, Library officials determined it was necessary to take action against those who chose not to return library items. A large list of names of boys and girls not returning books was given to the Kenton County Probation Officer. Adults were also urged to return books at once. That same year, residents outside of Covington were granted Library privileges for \$2 a year.

According to the Covington city officials, the auditorium was "a disgrace to the city" due to its appearance. The city gave the Library \$200 to repair and redecorate the auditorium.

In March 1928, the county agreed to pay \$1,500 a year towards the support and maintenance of the Library. As a result, all residents of Kenton County were granted permission to use the Library.

The Library's longtime head librarian, Mrs. Anne Spears, retired from the Library in the latter part of the decade. She served the community with commitment and enthusiasm for more than 27 years. Finding her successor proved to be quite a challenge.

In 1911, the Erlanger Woman's Club asked to create a station of the Covington Public Library. In July of 1928 the Club turned over its collection of donated books to the Covington Library and the Board, in turn, agreed to add more books and magazines to the collection.

In July of 1928 the Club turned over its collection to the Covington Library and the Board, in turn, agreed to add more books and magazines to the collection. The new branch library was opened formally on September 8, 1928 in the Erlanger News Building on Dixie Highway with about 1500 volumes. The librarian of the branch was paid \$15 per month. This was the first step in creating a combined city-county library system.

In 1929 the children's room in Covington was closed because of a flu epidemic. Later that year, the Erlanger Library was briefly closed due to a scarlet fever outbreak.

To purchase more of the popular books, new head librarian Alma L'Hommedieu created a system in which patrons could "rent" one of the copies of the more popular books for 3 cents a day. This small fee would give the Library funds to purchase more of the most popular books.

At the end of the decade, the Library was formally promoted on a new radio station, WCKY. One Saturday each month, the Librarian would be on the radio for "literary hour."

## About the Kenton County Public Library - Library History 1930's



In the beginning of the 1930's, the Library continued to grow in both books and users. More than 107,000 items were checked out, 58 percent being adult titles 42 percent being children's literature. Items checked out at the Erlanger Branch and book deposits at local schools totaled almost 19,000 items.

According to the annual report filed by head librarian Alma L'Hommedieu in February 1931, the greatest growth was in the Library facilities outside the city of Covington. "This rapid growing use of agencies indicates how great is the need of expanding our means of service to outlying districts of the city, such as Latonia, Rosedale and Ludlow." By the mid-1930's, 12 schools were being served by the Covington Library, with many more requests from other schools. Unfortunately the Library did not have the funds to purchase books for these schools.

Throughout the 1930's, Children's Librarian Miss McKenna worked tirelessly to ensure that every child knew about the Library. She visited every classroom twice a year, made sure the Children's room was bright and inviting and created dozens of new exciting programs to get children interested in coming to the Library. She would also distribute library card applications which brought a tremendous number of children into the Library to receive Library cards. Monthly storytimes at the Library were presented as well with an average attendance of 75 children.

In 1931, Miss McKenna organized a "Library Vacation Reading Club." Children who read at least 5 books during the summer were given a certificate of accomplishment. The two boys and two girls who read the most books were each given a prize.

A reading club for teens was instituted in April 1935. The purpose of the club was to "interest the boys and girls who are about to receive adult cards in the books best suited for their age."

The Library continued to grow as a place in the community for education and entertainment. Use of the auditorium declined as a result of its condition but the University of Cincinnati, Kentucky State University and Eastern State Teachers College used the Library's lecture room to teach extension classes.

While looking in a storage room one of the Library staff members discovered a collection of Edmund Hoyle's Works on Whist dating from 1746, two of which bore the author's autograph.

The rise in the unemployment rate during this era of the Great Depression caused an increase in Library usage. The librarian's report dated February 5, 1931 states "Many times not a single vacant chair can be found. These people always read. We find that many men are reading up along the line of their work, really putting this time to advantage."

The Erlanger Branch received some much needed additional space in 1932. New rooms were added with more space for shelves and books, much to the delight of both the patrons and the staff.

As in previous years, the Library was in dire need of additional funding to hire more staff and to purchase more books. Although there was not adequate funding to keep several copies of the popular books at least one copy was purchased so when a patron asked for it, the librarian could say that the Library actually owned a copy. However, popular books were hard to keep on the shelves. In an attempt to get people to bring back Library books, head librarian Alma L'Hommedieu declared fine cancellation week which resulted in the return of 136 books.

In December 1933, Ms. L'Hommedieu resigned her position as head librarian. Ms. Hilda Glaser was selected as her replacement. The following year Erlanger librarian Mrs. Thomas Stevenson resigned. Mrs. Mayo Taylor was named as her replacement. Mrs. Taylor later resigned in 1936 and Miss Mary Kalker was named as her replacement.

The Erlanger Branch moved to a new home at the Erlanger Citizens Bank Building in September 1934. In order to align with the library in Covington, the staff at Erlanger changed several of their procedures. By the end of 1934, the Erlanger Branch circulated 21,588 books. The following year circulation doubled.

Reference requests kept Library staff extremely busy throughout the 1930's as well.

Some of the more common requests included:

How old is President Roosevelt?

The genealogical table of the present ruling house of Great Britain

A list of all the Pulitzer prize awards

Why rabbits are protected by game laws

The jewel for the 40th wedding anniversary

The County Seat of twenty counties in Kentucky

Some of the more unique uses of Library materials in the 1930's included: the use of Japanese prints by a local interior decorator in designing murals for a hotel dining room; an architect who remodeled the Bavarian Brewery used pictures showing the interiors of

Bavarian Taverns; and numerous requests for costume materials from different organizations throughout the area.

In 1936, the popular circular desk at the Library was moved under the building's dome to create more space. As an added bonus, the new placement of the desk was thought to discourage theft of the books.

Also in 1936, the Library Board proposed using the room of a shelter house at the Ludlow Playground to provide Ludlow area children an opportunity to have Library service during the summer months. The Ludlow Park Board rejected this idea.

The flood of 1937 closed the Library from January 25th to February 8th. Fifty-three books were reported lost in the flood with many more reported missing. The Board voted to thank the Library employees for their service during the flood.

Use of the auditorium dwindled in the late 1930's, however the Library Board of Trustees in cooperation with the University of Kentucky conducted monthly forums in the auditorium. Each forum was a hotly debated topic such as "The Constitution and the Supreme Court" and "Can the United States Stay Out of the Next War."

Miss Hilda Glaser, head librarian of Covington, resigned in October 1937. Mrs. Catherine Lyons Towers was named as her replacement. During the same meeting, the resignation of Erlanger Librarian, Miss Kalker, was accepted. Miss Sallie Brown was named as her replacement.

The Library was robbed again in March 1938. This time the thief stole the Library's specially-equipped typewriter and several checks. On the morning following the robbery, the folder containing the checks was flung on the librarian's desk, with all checks intact. The typewriter was recovered at a Cincinnati pawnshop.

The Library began checking out magazines in November, 1938. The librarian visited the Cincinnati Public Library to determine out how the magazine system worked and devised it to work for the residents of Covington.

In 1939, the Erlanger Branch moved once again. Located at the Community Bank of Erlanger, the Erlanger Branch was moved to 8 Garvey Avenue in Elsmere. Shortly after the move, there was a fire at the Branch. Approximately 500 books were burned and 1,500 were water soaked. Many books were repaired for use while others were discarded completely. Despite this disaster, the Branch was only closed one day, yet another tribute to the tireless work of the staff which once again exemplified their commitment to Library service during this decade.

## About the Kenton County Public Library - Library History 1940's



The Library began the decade of the 1940's with a growing number of patrons and a monthly book circulation averaging of 10,000 per month. The Library began the very first week of the new decade by swearing in two new Board members. One of those board members, Rebecca Cox, would later become a much larger part of the organization.

During 1940, 200 new books were added to the Library's shelves each month. Between 300 and 400 new card holders were added each month as well. The Library's typists created, on average, 800 new catalog cards each month. The Library's total book budget was \$2,000 per year and the librarian's salary was \$135 per month. The Covington location of the Library was open from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Monday through Saturday. The Library was closed on Sundays. In most cases, two staff people were on duty in the main reading room and one person was on duty in the Children's Room. The Children's Room was not open the same hours as the rest of the Library. Instead, its hours varied, changing to late afternoons and evenings during the school year and to late mornings and early afternoons during the summer.

Although most Library users resided in Covington, the Library offered services for the entire county. For residents living outside of Covington, the Library provided special services to the children attending schools in the county. The use of sub-stations, keeping small collections of the Library's books in another building, grew quite steadily in the 1940's. Most of these sub-stations were kept in schools for the students to enjoy the Library's books when travel to the Library was impossible. The expansion of the sub-station program also helped the Library alleviate its space problem. Already in 1940, the Covington Library was outgrowing its space in the Carnegie Building.

In addition to sub-stations, the Library still supported the Erlanger-Elsmere Library. Having outgrown the space in the Citizen's Bank on Dixie Highway, the Erlanger-Elsmere Library soon moved to a room in a house on Garvey Avenue. The Covington Library had funds for one employee in Erlanger with the remainder of staff being volunteers. The number of checkouts at the Erlanger-Elsmere location numbered about 1,000 per month. The collection of the library was around 3,500 items. During the early 1940's the hours of the Erlanger Library were from 2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. on Mondays,

Wednesdays and Saturdays. There was also a short-lived experiment leaving the library open from 3:00 p.m.- 9:00 p.m. on Wednesdays to attract more users.

As 1942 began, the Library re-examined its budget and discovered the \$25 monthly contributions from the cities of Erlanger and Elsmere were not sufficient to run the Branch location. Each year, the Library was spending \$800 of its own funds to keep the Branch open, an amount that made it impossible to purchase any new books. In March 1942, a meeting was scheduled among the Library Board and the Erlanger and Elsmere Councils to discuss an increase in their contribution. No amount was decided on at that meeting, and as months passed, the Library Board became restless.

On June 5, 1942, the decision was made to close the location if no new funding was promised. None came. The Erlanger Woman's Club agreed to take over full possession and full responsibility of the Erlanger-Elsmere Library. The Library turned all responsibility to the Club, and the cities of Erlanger and Elsmere continued their \$25 a month contribution to the Erlanger-Elsmere Library, thus temporarily ending the 14-year-old cooperation between the two libraries.

Children's Services continued to be a large part of the Library's mission during the 1940's. The Children's Librarian, Eleanor McKenna, continued to increase programming for children and also continued to visit the large numbers of students in each school throughout the county. Miss McKenna also started the program allowing teachers to have a library card that was independent of their own personal card. With this Teacher's Card, teachers could have a small collection of books on any topic in their classroom. The Summer Reading Club continued each July and August and was especially popular in 1942 when the club was called the Aviation Reading Club. Ninety-six children participated in the program with an obvious wartime theme. Upon reading 5 books, each child received a pair of wings and his/her name was displayed on an airplane cutout on the walls of the children's room.

The Library had wartime affiliations during World War II. In addition to losing a valued employee, Duncan Hazelwood to the Signal Corps, the Library hosted many meetings of the Civil Defense Group. Covington's Library also served as a clearinghouse for the collection of books called the Victory Book Campaign. Kentucky's goal for that campaign was to collect over 250,000 used books for distribution. The Library was also one of 200 locations chosen in the United States to distribute defense materials. It is not indicated in the records what these materials were. The Library often waived its auditorium rental fee for organizations like the Red Cross that raised money for the war effort. This included a Red Cross fundraiser in 1940 for a program entitled "Bundles for Britain." Also, in December 1942, the Head Librarian's monthly report mentions the difficulty in finding able men to employ in several jobs in the Library due to their service overseas.

The staff of the Covington Library changed dramatically during the 1940's. The three top positions in the Library were vacated during the decade. In addition to many shelving positions and the Works Progress Administration employees, many key figures left. Only one was a direct result of the war.

In September 1940, head librarian, Catherine Lyon Towers left her position to become the Assistant Librarian in Providence, Rhode Island. Her replacement, as acting librarian,

was Board member Rebecca Cox. Miss Cox was to remain acting librarian through the rest of the decade.

The longtime assistant librarian, Lucy Blackburn, remained an employee through the early years of the 1940's. She was, however, often ill and had to take many extended leaves to regain her health. She died after several lengthy illnesses and the Library closed on the day of her funeral in honor of her service to the Library and to allow the staff to attend her funeral.

The librarian that helped define children's services in Kenton County, Eleanor McKenna, resigned her position in November 1943. She left to take a position as a Children's Librarian at the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County. Her replacement was Jane Edward.

The age of the Carnegie Library began to show during the 1940's. Much expenditure was requested for repairs and refurbishment of the building. Longtime custodian, Joseph Voller, was responsible for the task of painting, varnishing and sprucing up the building and its grounds. More extensive work was done inside and outside the building. A company was contracted to completely clean the walls, the shelves, the dome and all the books in the building. A lighting company was employed to replace the building's chandeliers with brighter lighting and to install the older chandeliers in locations of the building such as the auditorium. New floor runners were placed in each doorway. During July 1941, in response to the refurbishment, the Library held a celebration to show off the renovations. Members of the Board greeted visitors. Local florists donated floral displays and there was extensive news coverage of the event. In addition, the Library hired a professional photographer to preserve the new look on film.

During the rest of the decade, many repairs were necessary in the building—especially broken windows. Many other upgrades in the later part of the 1940's included a new furnace, new caulking around windows and the removal and replacement of many trees around the building. The roof was replaced in late 1949 and into 1950. Several pieces of furniture were donated to the Library during this time as well.

The Library experienced some crimes during the decade. Two months in a row, the fine money was taken by vandals. On another occasion, two typewriters were stolen. Another burglary resulted in the loss of \$2, 84 3-cent stamps and two knives. In all cases, the police never caught the thieves, but the police agreed to patrol the Library at closing to assure the building's safety.

The Covington Library finished the 1940's by checking out fewer items per month than when the decade began. Despite this, the Library had expanded its services. Children's programs, community visits, marketing of Library collections and responding to the public's desire for new information were evident during the entire decade. The citizens of Kenton County were very supportive of their Library during the 1940's, but the need for expanded services throughout the county was voiced as early as 1941. The need and desire to serve the citizens in the more rural sections of Kenton County will become a stronger theme of the Library in the 1950's. The need for a unified county system had started to become evident. It will, however, be almost 20 years before that dream becomes a reality.



## About the Kenton County Public Library - Library History 1950's



The decade of the 1950's opened with Kenton County having two separate libraries operating in the county. The Covington Library was entering its sixth decade of service to the residents of Covington and to many users outside of the city who paid an annual fee to the library. The Erlanger-Elsmere Public Library provided service from a house on Garvey Avenue in Elsmere. Since 1942, this library had been under the management of the Erlanger Woman's Club. Before the decade ends, the county will have a third source of library service as well.

During the 1950's, although not a part of the Covington Public Library, the Erlanger-Elsmere Library was growing. The Erlanger Woman's Club oversaw the daily routine of the library. The cities of Erlanger and Elsmere contributed a minimal amount to support library service. In the early 1950's this amount was about \$200 per year. This amount of funding was woefully inadequate for the library's survival. Throughout the year, the Woman's Club held fundraisers at the library and around the city to obtain money to buy new books. All staff members were volunteers. In addition to members of the Woman's Club, many area high school students worked as volunteers at the library. Together, their dedication brought dependable service. As the decade began, the Erlanger-Elsmere Library housed more than 7,500 books and checked out over 1,000 books per month.

Although the library was known as the Erlanger-Elsmere Public Library, the population served by this small library was quite large. Library users hailed from all the surrounding suburbs including Crestview Hills, Edgewood and Florence.

Mrs. Mayo Taylor, the librarian of the Erlanger-Elsmere Library developed plans to make the library a more permanent fixture in the area. While the library was operating out of a room of a house located at 3 Garvey Avenue, the Woman's Club planned to form a library board and to raise funds to purchase a permanent home for the Library.

In 1955, the Woman's Club asked the cities of Erlanger and Elsmere to each provide the names of two people to serve on the Board of Trustees for the Erlanger-Elsmere Public Library. These four, in compliance with the state laws governing public libraries, would appoint the fifth and final board member. The State Library Extension Division then officially recognized this board.

Immediately after the Board's formation, the Library began a drive to find a permanent home for the Library. A little more than one year after the formation of this Board, the Erlanger Woman's Club purchased a home at 9 Bartlett Avenue. Funds for this building were raised by the Woman's Club, the Erlanger Lion's Club, the Tuesday Evening Woman's Club and the Bettie Carter Morgan Woman's Club. Mr. and Mrs. Roy Klein, the previous owners of the house at 9 Bartlett also contributed. Contributions of supplies and building materials such as lumber were received from many businesses in the area.

During the same period, the Covington Library continued to grow. Both the adult and juvenile collection increased in circulation and the school deposit libraries expanded in use. Eleven major and six minor deposits were housed in both public and parochial schools.

A minor setback occurred for Covington Library users. The County did not appropriate funds for the use of the Library by residents outside of Covington, so free Library service was withdrawn for those not living in the city. A Covington businessman sent a letter to the Board stating how upset he was that he, as Covington business owner but non-resident, should have to pay for the use of the Library.

In 1950, the Covington Public Library was established under the provisions of the Kentucky Revised Statutes which covered public libraries in cities of the 2nd and 6th classes. By-laws and rules were established that set guidelines under which the Library must operate. These articles included: the selection of officers, the date of annual and monthly Board meetings, formation of various committees, the hiring of librarians and the order of business. The Library was to also follow two rules: to be open to every man, woman and child in the city of Covington and to others in Kenton County (with a fee) and to guarantee any County resident all Library privileges upon the presentation of an application and proof of residency.

Also in the 1950's, the Covington Library increased the variety of materials it offered. In 1950 a microfilm reader was purchased for \$298. In 1957 the Library received a big boost as more funds were appropriated from the city. These funds were used to purchase much needed reference books. 1957 was the busiest year of the Library to that date. Phonographs and records were purchased and started circulating in 1959.

Physical changes to the Library included converting the Lecture Room into an adult reading room. The Christopher Gist Society purchased 24 folding chairs and gray shelving for the room and the Society began to hold its monthly meetings in this room. Additional changes included redecorating six of the Library's second floor rooms in 1954. That same year the Children's Room obtained new shelving, a new desk and new tables.

In October 1954 the Covington Library was given special mention at the Kentucky Library Association's Annual Conference for "its progressive work during the years of 1953 and 1954."

In 1953, there was great discussion about the use of bookmobiles to serve those living in rural areas. During the annual meeting of the Kentucky Library Association, several county libraries signed up for book mobile service. According to an article published by the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, 80 percent of rural Kentuckians had no free public library service and 47 of 120 counties in Kentucky has no access to books. The need to serve these outlying areas generated a great deal of interest by several of the state's wealthiest business leaders. In November 1953 a "Citizens March for Books" was organized in Louisville. More than 600,000 books were collected that evening to fill the bookmobiles.

Many librarians across the state however were reluctant to apply for a bookmobile due to the \$3,000 needed for annual support. Librarian Rebecca Cox was undecided about the service at this time. But on March 22, 1953 with funding from the Kenton County Fiscal Court bookmobile service was established for rural area of Kenton County. The bookmobile contained more than 3,000 books and made stops at a variety of areas throughout the county.

The other major development during this decade was the hiring of a librarian from Cincinnati. In 1958, Ms. Rebecca Cox retired after 18 years of service as head librarian. Ms. Mary Ann Mongan, a graduate of the University of Kentucky and former librarian for the city of Newport, was hired to replace Ms. Cox. There was quite an outcry from Covington area residents that an "outsider" was hired for Covington. Ms. Mongan would direct the Library for the next 40 years.

## About the Kenton County Public Library - Library History 1960's



By the end of 1960, total circulation reached 129,853 for the year, with a daily average of 433 items borrowed.

In 1961, the Library Board decided to replace the old wooden front doors of the Carnegie Library with new aluminum framed glass doors and place a new sign in the front of the building. The Board also decided to install air conditioning in the children's room and in the staff offices.

By 1963, the beautification process of the Covington Library continued when 1,200 tulips were planted in the front of the Library. Also in 1963, adult book circulation had more than doubled over the previous two years and books most in demand included science and biographies.

The popularity of the Erlanger/Elsmere Library continued to grow. Only in its new quarters on Bartlett Avenue for a short time, the library already needed additional space. Due to this rapid growth, the Bartlett Avenue house was purchased in 1962 and an addition to the building was constructed at a cost of \$12,250. Once again, the community supported the library with donations of materials and time.

During the 60's the popularity of the Bookmobile continued to grow. In 1962, the Bookmobile Board decided the Bookmobile would increase the number of stops at in the community such as shopping centers and neighborhoods. The Bookmobile served all parochial and public schools in the county and made 28 different community stops at places such as Pleasure Isle, the Winston Park Fire House, the Park Hills Civic Building and St. John's Orphanage. By 1964, more than 150,000 books were circulated by the Bookmobile. That same year a small library was established in Crescent Springs Presbyterian Church. This library was open only once a week for six hours, but it circulated more than 4,000 books in 1964.

By 1966, the Library began losing patrons to the Cincinnati Library. The Covington Library, which seated only 78 people, had less than one book for each of the city's 60,326 residents. The Library was not adequate for the growing community. In an evaluation, the Covington Library was well below the minimum standards set by the American Library Association. The Covington Library had a staff of only 8 people, while the standard was 48. The Covington Library added over 3,000 books each year while the

standard was 25,000 each year. The Library had only 100 periodicals and no films, while the standard called for 400 periodicals and 250 films.

Galvin and Associates, library consultants from North Carolina, conducted a survey for the Covington Library in 1966. The consultants reported that the Library had only 11,000 square feet, whereas the amount needed was 46,000 square feet. This survey also made recommendations for the type of library needed for Kenton County.

In January of 1967, the Library liberalized some of its circulation policies. Rather than a limit of six books, an adult could now check out an unlimited number of books. Children could now check out six books instead of just four. The loan period was extended from 14 days to 28 days. Fines for overdue adult books were increased from \$.03 to \$.05 a day and non-resident library card fees went from \$3 to \$5 a year.

In April of 1967 the Library began a campaign to form a county library district and establish sufficient reliable funding. A county system, unlike the city library, would be eligible for state and federal aid. Thousands of free books, records and films from the Kentucky Department of Libraries would be available to a county system. The new public library system would allow for the construction of a new \$1.1 million main library, expansion of the Erlanger/Elsmere Library and an addition of another Bookmobile. The library would be free to everyone in Kenton County. Prior to this decision residents living outside Covington had to pay \$5 per year to use the Library. The new main library would also have a collection of 240,000 books and seat 530 people.

The petitions called for the Library District to be funded by a tax, .06 for every \$100 worth of property, which was only .01 more than the existing .05 tax for the Covington Library. The Library District could be established in two different ways: the Library could collect 100 signatures in order to put the proposal on the ballot, or the Library could obtain signatures of 51 percent of the voters casting ballots in the last election. The Library opted for the second method in order to create community awareness and get people involved.

Clyde Middleton and Laurence Grause were co-chairmen of the committee that asked for 1,000 volunteers to help obtain signatures from the county residents for the petition drive. The week of April 23-30 was designated as Library Week. During this time, businesses placed messages about the campaign on their outdoor signs and volunteers went door to door asking for signatures. The petition would require 14,865 signatures.

On April 25, a 20-ft. bookmobile owned by the Kentucky Library Department arrived in Covington to show the voters what they would get free from the state if they approved the \$1.1 million library plan.

The Library campaign received excellent publicity from the Kentucky Post, Enquirer and the Dixie News. Reporter Bob Fogarty of the Kentucky Post published two articles each week concerning the campaign.

The campaign was successful and in the summer of 1967, over 16,000 signatures were obtained. The Kenton County Fiscal Court accepted the petition and the Library tax would appear on the October County tax bill.

Also in the summer of 1967, the Covington Library constructed a gallery in the reference

room on the second floor for a collection of Frank Duveneck paintings. The Frank Duveneck Art Museum Society and the artist's son and his wife, Frank Boott and Josephine Duveneck donated several of the paintings to the Library. The Cincinnati Art Museum also loaned some paintings to be used in the gallery. The gallery was named, "The Duveneck Memorial Art Gallery." At the opening of the art gallery 250 people attended including Gov. Edward T. Breathitt, who was one of many speakers. The Duveneck Gallery was the first public art gallery in Northern Kentucky.

By October of 1967, the Covington City commissioners approved the agreement to transfer the Covington Library operation to the Library District. The new District combined the Covington Library, the Erlanger/Elsmere Library and the bookmobile to form the Kenton County Public Library. Judge Dressman then appointed a new Library Board with Joseph Gausepohl, Mrs. Harry Carl, Mrs. Ruth Eubank, Laurence Grause and George Weidner as the new board members. By January of 1968, Mary Ann Mongan had been appointed the head librarian and the name of the Covington Public Library changed to the Kenton County Public Library. Also that year, a new \$21,000 bookmobile was given to the Library by the state.

The end of 1967 proved tragic when on New Year's Eve six of the oil paintings in the Duveneck Gallery valued at \$22,000 were stolen. The thief also took \$50 from the cash drawer and an electric typewriter. A few days later, however, police recovered all six of the paintings. The artwork was found wrapped up in a dirty blanket behind a Covington apartment. The thief was identified and sentenced to five years in the state penitentiary. The paintings were returned to the Library.

Toward the end of the decade, there was much discussion by the Board and the community as to where a new Covington Library should be located. In 1969, architect Robert Ehmet Hayes presented plans to the Board for the design of the new Library. Also that year, the Library received a beautification award for the plantings outside of the Carnegie building.

## About the Kenton County Public Library - Library History 1970's



Only formed as a Library District for three years, the Library Board set ambitious goals, including the construction of the new main library and construction of a new Erlanger Branch.

Construction of the new main Library came to a standstill in 1970. In May, Covington City commissioners and library officials disagreed over the property of 540 Scott Street. The City demanded that part of the property be taken as part of the new Library site. The property, a former loan company, was an eyesore and in need of demolition. The Library Board did not want to become involved in condemning the property so the City of Covington, through their Urban Renewal program, would take care of condemning the building. The Library agreed to this and would pay all acquisition costs and expenses. However the Library Board thought that the estimate of the land's worth, \$100,000, was not financially feasible for the Library to pay. The City commissioners delayed bidding for demolition until a decision could be reached on the disputed property. In June, Mayor Claude Hensley said the vacant property between 5th and 6th streets was unsightly and dangerous to people who lived or passed through the area. He asked the City commissioners to take action and demolish the vacant buildings. By November of 1970, the City of Covington sued the Library Board. The City claimed the refusal of the Library to buy the disputed property was in violation of their contract.

At this point, citizens of the community were upset that the new library was not under construction. Finally in September of 1971, with the suit still pending, the City commissioners agreed to accept bids for construction of the library, but they insisted that a permit not be granted for the south half-block until the courts decided whether the Library was obligated to purchase it. In December of 1971, the official groundbreaking ceremony took place and construction of the new Covington Library was under way. Library records and newspaper clippings do not mention the City's suit against the Library after November 1970 so it is assumed that the lawsuit was dropped.



Other events taking place in the early 1970s included the collaboration between the Kenton County Public Library and the Northern Kentucky Regional Library. These two organizations began a free delivery and pick up service at the St. Elizabeth Hospital. Patients in the hospital were able to request certain books and have them delivered to their rooms.

Also in 1970, April was Fine Free Month, in which people could bring back their overdue Library books at no charge. Sixty books returned were more than a year overdue and the oldest book returned was 12 years overdue.

In September of 1971, Frances Wilhoite retired after 27 years as the Children's Librarian at the Kenton County Public Library. Sister Alberta Hoffer, a Roman Catholic Nun, became the new Children's Librarian at the Main Library and the Erlanger Branch. Sister Hoffer created a new storytime featuring a sing-along with guitar music.

In 1972, the Carnegie Theatre Library was listed in the National Registry of Historic Places. By the end of 1973, the Carnegie building closed down, but later became the Center for the Northern Kentucky Arts Council in 1975.

In September of 1973 while the new library was still under construction, vandals broke in, sprayed paint on the walls, and emptied contents of the fire extinguishers. Mysterious animal tracks were also found by the police, which they said resembled those of a monkey. Construction continued and a few months later the library opened.

Also in September 1973, Michael Averdick, later the Library's Associate Director, joined the staff. Mr. Averdick was responsible for developing the Library's local history and genealogy into one of the region's finest collections.

On Monday, January 21, 1974, the new Main Library at 502 Scott Street opened its doors to the public. Master of ceremonies for the event was George Weidner, Kenton County Public Library Board Vice-President. Judge James A. Dressman installed a date stone with several artifacts and documents in the cornerstone. In November, the new \$1.4 million Library won the prestigious Honors Award of the Kentucky Society of Architects for its designer Robert Ehmet Hayes and Associates.

By the end of 1974, the Kenton County Library was setting its sights on a new venture. A new Erlanger Branch library. In December, the Kenton County Library Board received a \$225,000 grant to help pay for building the new branch. The new building would replace the branch located in an old two story converted home on Bartlett Avenue. Several different sites were considered, and in early 1976 the area at Dixie Highway and Montgomery Street was chosen because it had the greatest volume of traffic and good visibility. The new site, however, drew criticism from the members of Concerned Citizens for the Erlanger-Elsmere Library. They believed the new site would be hazardous to children and that this location would result in traffic tie-ups. Also in 1976, Nancy Mohr was hired as the Branch Librarian at Erlanger.

Due to the popularity of the Main Library and the Erlanger Branch, the Library closed its branch in the basement of the Crescent Springs Presbyterian Church in the mid-70s.

Because of many outreach activities the Kentucky Library Association honored the Library Board for its excellent service to the community in October.

The new Erlanger Branch was completed and opened to the public in September of 1978. The new \$1 million, 15,800 square foot building at 3130 Dixie Highway held five times the capacity of the old branch. On October 1, the new branch held a cornerstone laying ceremony, attended by more than 150 persons. Judge Dressman installed the cornerstone which included a letter from the Board thanking the residents of Kenton County along with newspaper clippings about the new branch, a list of best-selling books for that day, a set of 1978 coins and other memorabilia.

The Library budget was limited in 1979, which led to cutbacks in Library service. The large bookmobile stopped operating and the Erlanger Branch reduced hours by closing at 6 p.m. on Fridays.

In 1979, the Kenton County Friends of the Library organization was formed, with Kathy Baker elected as president. Kathy Baker had worked on the petition drive in the 1960s, then worked part-time in the circulation department. Her goal for the Friends organization was to promote community awareness and create support for expanding library programs.

The Friends would also collect donated books and hold book sales, with proceeds going towards Library programs. Also that year, Wayne Onkst, who would be a key person in the Library system, began his career at the Library as assistant head of adult services.

By the end of 1979, more than 588,000 items were circulated at the Library.

Interesting Facts about the Library in the 1970s.

In 1976, the Covington Lions Club donated phone books printed in Braille to the Library to be circulated to blind patrons

By 1977, the Kenton County Public Library had one of the largest collections of Vietnamese books in the United States.

In the summer of 1977, the Kenton County Public Library had one of the largest collections of Vietnamese books in the United States.

In the summer of 1977, the Library received a grant from CETA for employment of help during the summer. Young people would be doing various jobs, such as indexing newspapers, cleaning and doing yard work.

## About the Kenton County Public Library - Library History 1980's



As the Library welcomed the 1980's, the decade began with an unfortunate incident. One of the paintings by local artist Frank Duveneck was stolen from the Children's Department of the Main Library. The painting portrayed the artist's nephew Joseph and was painted at the turn of the century. Although bolted into a brick wall, the thief managed to steal the painting in the middle of the day. Newspapers covered the incident widely but no trace of the portrait has ever been seen again. It was valued at \$7,800.

Circulation of materials continued to rise throughout the 1980's at both the Main Library and the Erlanger Branch. The Erlanger Branch was circulating as many, if not more, items than the Main Library. Summer programs in Erlanger were so popular with families that the meeting room often had triple the amount of people it could hold. The problem was so great that tickets needed to be distributed for future programs. Regular children's programs at Erlanger were also often filled to capacity. As the 1980's progressed, it was clear that the Erlanger Branch library was going to be very popular. On February 19, 1980 the Erlanger branch set a new record circulating 1,777 in a single day.

Growing increasingly popular as well, the Bookmobile increased the length of time spent traveling in southern Kenton County. In one year the bookmobile traveled 7,197 miles. Most of those served by the Bookmobile lived in the rural parts of Kenton County. Increasing circulation of materials on the Bookmobile made it clear that patrons in southern Kenton County used the Library.

In the mid-80's, the Board asked Library staff to do a feasibility study for constructing a branch library in the southern half of the county. A branch in the Independence area seemed likely but there was hearty debate whether a building should be located in "downtown" Independence or near the Cherokee Shopping Plaza, which was a popular spot on the Library's Bookmobile route.

Free delivery of Library materials to those who were homebound was another service created for Library patrons. Unlike the Bookmobile, the librarian would select books for the homebound patrons and deliver them directly to their homes. The outreach librarian also delivered materials to senior centers each month so residents would have new books to read.

Although the Library offered a wealth of products and services, a statistical report "Statistical Report of Kentucky Public Libraries, February 1981" stated that the Kenton County Public Library had the highest circulation per capita and the lowest cost per circulation of the state's larger libraries. This was great news to the Board. This report proved that the Library Board was using taxpayer money and providing the kind of programs and materials the residents of Kenton County demanded.

And the Library Board and staff were always looking to fulfill the needs of patrons. Library staff conducted a survey asking what types of programs people would like to see. Responses included co-op food buying, making your home energy efficient, nuclear power, genealogy and burglar-proofing your home.

The Library's staff made great efforts to reach those who did not visit the Library on a regular basis. Community outreach flourished as the head of Covington's Adult Services, Mike Averdick, worked with a variety of organizations. He conducted many seminars on researching one's family tree, worked with the Kentucky Post on creating a series entitled "Pieces of the Past" and presented workshops for teachers in the Covington School District. The material he used in these presentations was available at the Main Library in Covington, which was becoming widely known for its local history and genealogy department.

The Main Library's local history and genealogy collection were in constant use. People from all over the United States called upon the help of the history department and its resources. The department received a big boost in its photo collection when the Kentucky Post donated a large portion of their photographic files dating from 1963 to 1980.

During the eighties there was much discussion on expanding cardholder services. Regional Librarian Phil Carrico suggested that a regional library card be instituted. This card would allow residents to use libraries throughout the region. A grant to pay for this was project was awarded and regional library cards were made available in January of 1981.

Another unique service discussed was opening a library for the visually impaired. A representative from the Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives discussed the agency's proposal to establish a sub-regional library for the blind and physically handicapped that would serve 8 counties in Northern Kentucky. This project would be state funded and supplied with materials from the Library of Congress. Although the Board was enthusiastic about the project, they voiced concerns over funding. They wanted to ensure that if the sub-regional library opened, it would be adequately funded for many years ahead. The state allotted \$30,000 per year to run the library and on November 3, 1980 the Northern Kentucky Talking Book Library opened.

The popularity of the Talking Book Library grew dramatically. Open for less than a year the library was mailing out thousands of books each month and new readers were added in increasing numbers. During the first year more than 300 new readers received Talking Books and 22 institutions were registered for the service. The Northern Kentucky Federation for the Blind placed an illuminator in the Library that allowed the visually impaired to magnify images up to 40 times their regular size. Records indicate that the

Talking Book Library was used by people of all ages, the youngest reader being 2 1/2 and the oldest patron being 102 years old.

Library funding became a great concern throughout the eighties. Under President Reagan's administration, the proposed federal budget in 1982 included no funds for public libraries. The recession made it difficult to purchase books and in her report to the Board in March 1982, Ms. Mongan stated that there were no funds to purchase any new books. Best sellers would be the only items purchased for the remainder of the fiscal year. However the books that seemed the most popular this decade were self-help books. Many of these items had long "hold" lists and the staff encouraged the Library to purchase more when funds became available.

Automating the Library's circulation system was discussed in the 1980's. Automating Library services was a topic of discussion throughout the state. There was interest growing to automate the Kenton County Public Library, however, no funds were available to undertake such a task.

After a local tax rate increase, more funds were available to the Library and in 1984 the Library was able to extend its hours of operation. The new hours, beginning January 1, 1985 would be Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., Friday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Later that year, the staff of Erlanger had a minor scare as black smoke came pouring into the Branch. The Erlanger Fire Department was called and it was discovered that a person in a nearby home decided to burn brush and the smoke from the fire went into the Branch's air intake. No one was harmed but the staff and patrons were quite shaken up.

The Main Library also had a scary incident in the afternoon of March 10, 1986. A violent storm with hail and strong winds exploded through the windows of the Library. Automation coordinator Alice Clay was credited with saving several patrons seated near the windows from injury as they were ordered to move seconds before they exploded inward. The Main Library was closed for one week while books, shelves and furniture were cleaned of glass.

In May 1986, the Library began to circulate videos. Films of feature and classic movies circulated more than the informational videos. Also in the later half of the eighties computers were being used by the staff throughout the Library. The Technical Services Department used the new equipment for cataloging items while the book keeper performed in accounting procedures. The reference desk received a computer in 1988 to help answer questions that could not be found in the materials in the Library.

As the 80's progressed, so did the Library's use of computer technology. In the summer of 1989 the staff began to prepare for one of the biggest projects the Library had undertaken - automating the system so that all facets of the Library would be technologically linked. As the world was becoming more "system" oriented, so was the Library.

## About the Kenton County Public Library - Library History 1990's



As the use of computers became more common place in the business world in the 90's, the Library was a leader in providing computer services for the public. One of the largest projects undertaken by the staff would be to automate the Library's record keeping system along with access to its collection. All records of materials purchased, ordered, processed and shelved for patrons had to be converted into machine-readable format in order for the entire Library system to be "linked" by technology. This process was extremely tedious and time consuming. The Library was closed from August 6 through August 18, 1990 so items could be fitted with a barcode that the computer software could scan for record keeping.

In February 1990 the Erlanger Woman's Club proposed a gift of re-landscaping the Erlanger Branch. The landscaping was donated in honor of the Club's 75th anniversary. The Erlanger Woman's Club had started the first public library in Erlanger in 1914, which eventually became the Erlanger Branch.

There was still much discussion about building a branch library in the southern part of Kenton County. One potential site on Mills Road in Independence was discussed, however the Board wanted a more visible site.

After reviewing copies of best selling books, several reporters from The Cincinnati Enquirer began donating the books to the Library. The Board was very appreciative of this gesture. Retail value of the books donated were estimated at \$5,000 per month and resulted in great savings for the Library. If the Library already had several copies of the book it was donated to the Friends of the Kenton County Public Library to sell in their book sales.

Throughout the 1990's circulation at all locations continued to climb. In April of 1991, Covington adult items increased in circulation by 20 percent, children's materials increased by 44 percent in circulation and Erlanger's check outs increased 15 percent in adult items and 30 percent in children's materials. The Bookmobile also had a large increase of 68 percent. Reports showed that 83 percent of items at the Erlanger Branch

had circulated to the public at least one time. This indicated a strong and popular collection that fit the needs of the community.

The Main Library was the focus of an upgrade in 1993 to comply with the American with Disabilities Act. Associate Director Mike Averdick spearheaded this project which included remodeling restrooms, creating ramps, and modifying furniture. A total of \$103,000 would be spent on improvements in accordance with the Act. For going above and beyond the requirements to make the Library more accessible to those with disabilities, Mr. Averdick was presented with the A.D.A. Honor Roll award.

In the November 1992, the Board proceeded with the purchase of land on Taylor Mill Road for a southern branch library. The construction of this long awaited facility began in 1994.

The Library added several new items to its collection including compact discs, videos and CD-ROMs. The Library also established the first Internet connection for the Reference Department in 1994.

In February 1995, the Board and staff were busy preparing for the opening of the new Independence Branch. The Friends held an art and essay contest for school children and received more than 800 entries. Items to be put in the cornerstone were selected.

As excited as the community was about the new branch, there was also a bit of sadness. The bookmobile, which had served so many rural residents for many years, would discontinue service since the majority of popular stops were in the same service area as the new branch. However, service to homebound patrons would continue.

As May approached, staff was hired to work at the Independence Branch. Anita Owens was selected as Branch Librarian.

The grand opening was scheduled for May 21, 1995. At the opening event, more than 600 residents came to celebrate the new library. State Librarian Jim Nelson, who spoke at the opening ceremony, remarked that he had never seen such an outpouring of community support at a library opening. Children's Librarian Cecilia Horn secured entertainment for the day, which included a mime, a clown, a person portraying Mother Goose and a tall-tale singer. Outside the Branch a large teepee was set up to promote the Summer Reading Club. The winners of the art and essay contest were also named. During the first full month of operation, the Independence Branch checked out more than 18,000 items.

In the mid-1990's, the Library Board of Trustees instituted the first long-range planning process for the Library. Directed by Board Vice-President Richard Gibeau, a planning committee appointed sub committees to study various aspects of the Library's program and services. The goal of the committees was to develop plans to "achieve a new level of excellence" in regards to Library service. Community members and Library representatives worked on a variety of issues and made their recommendations to the Board in 1997. An ambitious program of improvements was adopted by the Board and presented to the Library staff and the public.



A group of 27 artists lead by Northern Kentucky University professor Kevin Booher painted a mural entitled "Local Heroes" which depicts local community representatives that had made a difference in Northern Kentucky. In 1995 the mural was donated to the Kenton County Public Library. The 40' by 10' mural was too large to fit on any wall of the library, so it had to be separated into two parts and was hung on an overhanging wall at the entrance to the Kentucky section in the Main Library. The estimated value of the mural was \$150,000.

In 1996, a parcel of property located on the southwest corner of the Main Library's property, which housed a Domino's pizza restaurant, was vacated. The Library Board purchased the property in order to provide more parking for the popular Covington library.

In April of 1997, Associate Director Mike Averdick retired. Mr. Averdick had been with the Library for 23 years and was responsible for the development of the Library's art and local history collection. Wayne Onkst, Head of Adult Services, was named as his successor. A few months after he retired, Mr. Averdick was awarded the Margaret Willis Outstanding Library Service Award by the Kentucky Library Association.

Throughout the decade the popularity of the Erlanger Branch continued to soar. The Long-Range Planning Committee reported that the Branch was unable to meet the needs of its users. Particular concerns included parking, an inadequate children's room and lack of shelf space for items. The Board initially looked into acquiring land adjacent to the building for expansion however the building was not constructed for expansion and additional land was not available. For the remainder of the decade Board members and the Library staff looked at more than 20 potential sites in the Erlanger area where a new branch library could be built. It would not be until the third month of the 21st century that land was purchased to build a new branch.

The Erlanger Branch was not the only library in need of improvements. During the summer of 1998, the Main Library underwent a major renovation project which not only included repainting every wall and recarpeting but also creating more office space for administrative staff. However the most dramatic change was in the Children's Department. The entire room was emptied of all contents and a temporary children's library was set up in the meeting room. For three months workers tore down walls, created new entryways, painted and installed new flooring. The Board hired local artist Charles Grund to paint one of the walls with a giant mural of a child-like scene from medieval England. The remainder of the room was painted as well and when completed the room represented an old castle with colorful walls and fun places for children to sit and read.

In 1998, the first comparison survey of libraries throughout the United States was conducted. The Hennen's American Public Library Rating (HAPLR) index was established to allow comparison of libraries serving similar population sizes based on annual report statistics. The rating index is similar to an ACT or SAT score, with a minimum score of 1 and a maximum score of 1,000. Scores were based on criteria for circulation figures, staffing, materials and reference service. The Kenton County Public Library received a rating of 685 and was listed in the top 20 percent of libraries serving a population of more than 100,000 residents. However in comparison to other Kentucky libraries rated

in the same category, the Library rated number one. The following year, the Library again received the same honor and was also ranked the top library in the state.

In the summer of 1999, Library Director Mary Ann Mongan announced her retirement. Ms. Mongan had served the Library for more than 40 years, starting when the Covington Library was in the Carnegie building. Ms. Mongan was credited for her dedication to library service and for the growth and success of the Kenton County Public Library system. On the day she retired the staff, Board and Friends celebrated her tenure with the Library by creating scrapbooks, producing a video tour of the Library and showering her with gifts. She was also recognized by representatives from the State of Kentucky, Kenton County, the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives and the City of Covington, which presented her with a key to the city and proclaimed the day "Ms. Mongan Day." She also received a note of congratulations on her retirement from President Bill Clinton. Ms. Mongan was truly the backbone of the Library in second half of the 20th century. To show appreciation for her dedication to the residents of Kenton County and Library service, the Board renamed the Main Library the Mary Ann Mongan Library - Covington. Shortly after Ms. Mongan retired, Mr. Onkst was named as the new director.

Through the 1990's technology played a major part in the growth of services at the Library. The development of the Internet made information once only found in books available at the click of a mouse. Originally, only the Reference Department had access to the Internet. By the end of the decade, each library, Covington, Erlanger and Independence not only had computers for each staff member, but also made computers available to all patrons. With a grant from the Gates Foundation, the Library was awarded dozens of additional computers in 1998 outfitted with a variety of software from publishing programs to reference materials.

Technology would continue to shape the Library as it ventured into the 21st century. Video cassettes were joined on the shelves by DVDs. Although audio books were still popular, compact discs were rapidly making their way onto the shelves. And there was discussion in the media if electronic books read with hand held computers would make paper books obsolete. Whatever the future holds for the Kenton County Public Library District one thing is certain, the needs of the residents will always be a primary concern. Providing the programs and services to fit their educational and recreational needs will always be top priority.

## 2000-2019

During the late 1990s, the Library Board of Trustees approved a strategic plan that called for a three phase building improvement program. The construction of a new Erlanger Branch, the busiest public library in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, comprised phase one. Phase two called for the construction of a new Independence Branch, which had been quickly outgrown. Finally, phase three called for a complete renovation and addition to the Covington Library.

The Board of Trustees conducted a comprehensive search for a building site for the new Erlanger facility. After appraising a number of locations, the Board approved the purchase of property at the corner of Kenton Lands Road and Hulbert Avenue in Erlanger. The firm Robert Ehmet Hayes and Associates was commissioned to design the facility. The new 34,294 square foot building was officially dedicated on October 13, 2002 with thousands in attendance. The facility featured a large adult meeting room that could be divided into two separate spaces, a spacious children's activity room, three small study rooms, a large computer lab, a beautiful reading garden with fountain and the system's first drive thru window. During its first ten years in operation, the new Erlanger Branch welcomed 4,632,364 visitors and checked out 10,660,340 items.



In 2001, The Kenton County Public Library Foundation Board was established as a result of a generous donation from the estate of Mary Cundiff. The Foundation Board was created to build an endowment and to raise funds for special projects and programs. The Board is a 501(c) 3 and accepts donations from individuals, corporations, granting agencies and other foundations.

In 2003, Library personnel began a cooperative effort with the Covington Independent Schools and Ashland Oil to develop an early childhood outreach program. The result of these efforts was the Read Racer, a refurbished recreational vehicle fitted with pre-school aged appropriate books and other materials. The goal of the Read Racer was defined "to introduce children to books and reading so they are prepared to learn how to read when they enter kindergarten." The new vehicle and staff were introduced to the public at Holmes High School in Covington on September 8, 2002. At that time, the Read Racer was visiting 27 day-care centers throughout Kenton County. Within a decade, that number rose to over 40 centers.



With the completion of the new Erlanger Branch in 2002, the Board began focusing on a new facility to replace the Independence Branch. Following an extensive search, the Board selected a nine-acre site on Walton-Nicholson Road near Kentucky Route 17. Ground was broken for the new facility in August 2005. The new 39,000 square foot building was designed by the firm of Robert Ehmet Hayes and Associates and featured a large adult meeting room, a separate space for children's programming, a large reading garden and patio, a computer lab, small study rooms and a drive thru window. The new library was named in honor of William E. Durr, a long-time resident of the Independence area. The new William E. Durr Branch was officially dedicated on a bitterly cold January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007. During the first decade in the new building, the Durr Branch circulated more than 3.8 million items and welcomed more than 1.4 million visitors. During that same time period, the branch offered 13,614 programs with 351,930 people in attendance.



In October 2006, Kenton County Public Library Director Wayne Onkst was appointed Kentucky Library Commissioner by Governor Ernie Fletcher. The staff celebrated Mr. Onkst's long tenure at KCPL with a surprise breakfast at the Erlanger Branch. At that time, the Kenton County Public Library Board of Trustees appointed long-time staff member Dave Schroeder as Interim Director. He had begun his career at KCPL in 1986 as a shelver. Following an extensive nationwide search, Schroeder was named Executive Director of the system on April 1, 2007.

In 2009, Executive Director Dave Schroeder approached the Library's Foundation Board with the idea of sponsoring a literacy award. The goal was to recognize individuals and groups in the community who work to increase the level of literacy and reading in the county. The award was named after the Kenton County Library's first Director, Miss Mary Ann Mongan. Wayne Onkst, the system's second director was the first recipient in 2009 and the award has been presented each year since.

The Read Racer, which was donated to the Library by the Covington Schools in 2003, had begun showing its age. In the spring of 2010, the Library ordered a brand new, custom built, Read Racer. The funds to purchase the vehicle were raised through the Foundation Board's annual Racing to Read 5K, which had been established in 2004, and the Library's general fund. The new Read Racer was officially debuted to the public on August 8, 2010.

By 2005, the need to remodel and expand the Covington Library had become apparent. The architectural firm DesignGroup of Columbus, Ohio was selected by the Board to redesign the structure. Plans called for a new Kentucky History and Genealogy Department, complete with temperature and humidity controlled archive room on the second floor; a larger children's room with a separate activity room and outdoor programming space on the lower level; the main floor contained a new adult reading room, teen space, vending area, outdoor reading area, computer lab and a spacious meeting room for adult and teen programming. The re-design also included a two-story addition that housed staff space, a mechanical room, and a new circulation department with drive thru window. The addition increased the building from 52,000 square feet to 61,900 square feet. The exterior of the building featured a large light-filled lobby connecting the three floors and the construction of a decorative zinc curved shingle wall which wrapped across the north and west facades. The project was officially kicked off with a groundbreaking on April 15, 2011. The building was rededicated on October 26, 2013.



The administrative offices of the system had been housed in the Covington Library since the creation of the system. In order to add space to the Covington Library and not lose valuable parking, the administrative offices were temporarily relocated to the Chamber Center Office Park on Buttermilk Pike in Ft. Mitchell in February 2010. These offices included the Executive Director, Human Resources, Public Relations, Information Technology, Business Office and Collection Services.



In November 2013 *Library Journal* ranked the Kenton County Public Library for the first time. KCPL was the first library in the Commonwealth of Kentucky to be ranked by the prestigious publication and continued to be ranked each year since that time.

Plans to expand the Erlanger Branch and to build a permanent home for the administrative offices began taking shape in early 2016. The architectural firm Robert Ehmet Hayes and Associates was commissioned to design the new space. The addition to the Erlanger Branch included a large meeting room with raised stage and seating capacity of 450. The addition also included several new small and medium sized meeting rooms and a large makerspace designed with an elegant curved exterior wall of windows. The maker space was named the STREAM Center of Learning and contained dozens of items and pieces of equipment to assist patrons in creating and to learn about science and the world around them. The new addition was officially dedicated on January 11, 2018.

The Erlanger expansion project also included the construction of a new Administration Center on the Branch property on the south side of the parking lot. The new 12,000 square foot facility included a large Board room, staff lounge, and offices for the Executive Director, Human Resources, Public Relations, Information Technology, Business Office and Collection Services Department.



New Children's Department - Erlanger



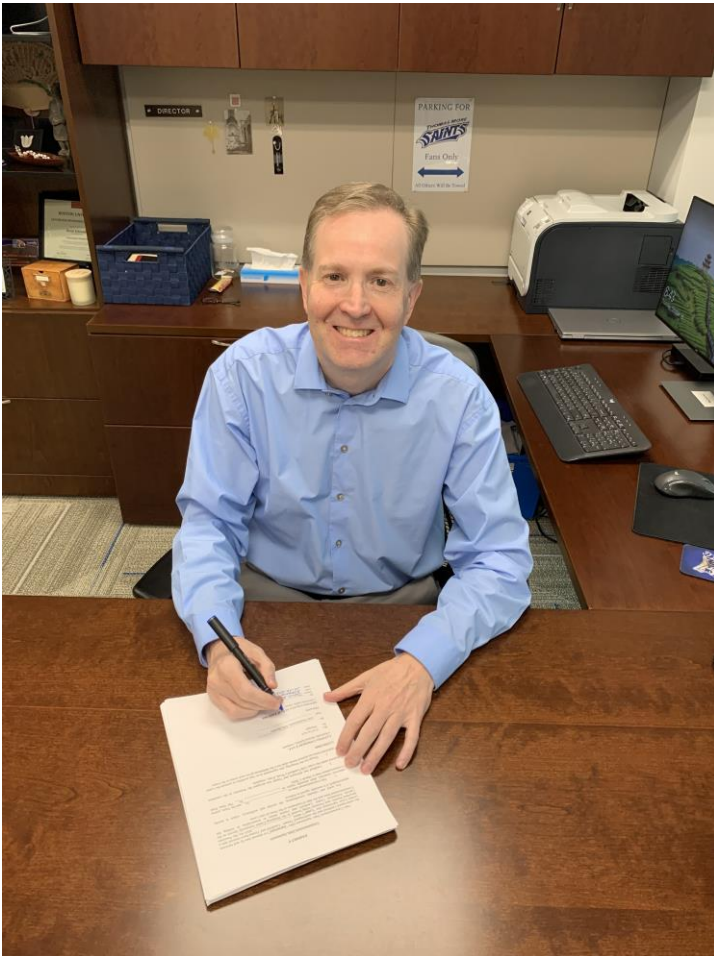


New Children's Department - Erlanger

The Kenton County Public Library has grown and prospered for more than a century. Generations of Board members and staff have dedicated their lives to enriching the people of our community with excellent library services and resources. These efforts have led to the creation of a nationally recognized system that is the pride of Kenton County.

## Latonia Branch

Beginning in 2022, Dave Schroeder, Executive Director, received approval from the board of trustees to investigate the opening of a fourth branch in the county to better serve the community. Working closely with county, city and planning and development officials, Schroeder prepared a plan for a new branch in the Latonia neighborhood of Covington. A location was leased in the Latonia Commerce Center with the assistance of the city of Covington in October 2023. Soon after, the board hired the architectural firm of REH and Associates to design the facility. Paul Duryea, a longtime administrator in the system, was named the first branch manager.



Director Dave Schroeder Signing Latonia Lease  
October 26, 2023

On June 10, 2025, the Kenton County Public Library celebrated the grand opening of its fourth branch, located at 3911 Winston Avenue in the Latonia Commerce Center. This is the first time the library has leased a space in a retail complex to serve the public. The 11,500-square-foot facility marks the first permanent library presence in the Latonia neighborhood, fulfilling a vision over a century in the making. The branch features an art deco-inspired design with a cozy, living room atmosphere, offering a large meeting room to accommodate up to 50 guests, two study rooms, and dedicated spaces for children, teens and adults. Its collection includes approximately 15,000 items, emphasizing popular and children's literature. Strategically situated near five schools, two senior centers, and major employers, the Latonia Branch enhances access to library services for over 20,000 residents. This expansion aligns with the library's strategic plan to serve underserved communities and foster lifelong learning.





Latonia Branch 2025



Latonia Branch 2025