

Periodization of Northeast Kansas Library System (NEKLS)

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The regional library system in Kansas has been around for almost seventy years. The Northeast Kansas Library System (NEKLS), established in 1967, has continued to campaign for regional libraries both on the state level, and on their regional level. During this time, changes and restructuring have occurred to allow them to provide the best services for their users. They have had to focus their efforts on resistance from state and local levels which try to limit their funding, through changes in tax levies or simply not approving for more funds. This research features ideas from Widdersheim (2018) with the purpose of the research to test a theory of public library development proposed by him. NEKLS was selected as the case because it seems to falsify the theory.

Methods

This research uses historical case study as a research strategy along with source triangulation. Sources include archival documents, interviews, social media posts, and newspapers. Sources were read with periods identified according to a key issue. Each period represents a decision cycle that results in either change or continuity. Research is looking at the whole history of NEKLS to see what decision pattern has been established.

Results

The results are from stage one of research. Eleven periods were identified with change or continuity determined for each one.

The first period, 1950-1965, covers the beginnings of the regional library movement. The regional library system idea first began in Kansas in late 1949, when Andre Nielsen was approved to conduct a survey of the libraries in Kansas for the state library (“Kansas Library Association District Meetings, 1950” 1950). By the end of 1950, he finished his research and suggested the state look towards regional libraries. Previous library partnership in the state

included the Coldwater District Library, made up of seven townships. This demonstrated regional libraries could be a strong possibility for the state (“The Nucleus of Regional Library Service Exists Here,” 1950). Concurrently, Dr. Frederic H. Guild made a statistical study of Kansas libraries, a focus on their finances. By 1951, eighteen statutes relating to libraries, with a focus on regional libraries, were passed by the legislature. These statutes laid out what qualified as a regional library, how they would operate, and the funds used to run the library system.

Many individuals in the library community helped actively campaign towards a regional library system. Zelia Jane French, editor of the *Kansas Library Bulletin*, discussed how “It is going to take an extensive process of co-operation and regionalization to stock-pile resources to build up proper, minimum support for economical service” (1952, 2). The Kansas Library Association (KLA) was one organization which helped with the efforts.

By 1956, work continued towards fully realizing an operational regional library system. This included creating regional branches of the Traveling Library which would support areas until a regional library system could be created (“Planning is Basic,” 1956; “Kansas Plan goes to Washington,” 1957). This was realized with the passing of Senate Bill 366 in 1957 (“Legislation for Libraries, 1957,” 1957). Tax levies changed with the passing of House Bill (HB) 47 in 1957 which allowed equal opportunity for tax-based support (“Legislation for Libraries, 1957,” 1957).

A pilot test was done with Wabaunsee and Pottawatomie counties to create a two-county regional library through bookmobiles. Started by the Traveling Libraries Commission, it ran for sixteen months from 1961 to 1962 (“Two Counties Cooperate in Regional Library Project,” 1961). Its success led to a proposal put on the November ballot which asked if a permanent regional library service should be established. The proposal was supported by voters two to one (French, 1962).

The State Library and Traveling Libraries Commission were integrated in 1963 and became the Library Extension Division of the State Library. HB 334 allowed for the state librarian to “organize, set up standards for, and advise in the management of county and regional libraries” (“All State Library Functions Incorporated by 1963 Legislation,” 1963, 7). The end of 1964 finally had legislation proposed which would permit the organization of a regional library system. It was completed in December by the Executive Council of KLA and the State Library Advisory Commission, and they recommended the proposal to the Education Committee of the Legislative council. It specifically would allow a “city, township, and county libraries to cooperate on a regional basis” (“State Plan Calls for Systems,” 1964). HB 621 allowed for the development of library systems was passed April 27, 1965 (“Kansas Legislature Passes System Law to Promote Library Development,” 1965).

With the passing of HB 621, the first period ended and the second period, from 1965-1967, began and continued to focus on the establishment of the regional library systems throughout the state, including NEKLS. The State Library provided grants in February and July 1965 (“Cooperative library services in NE Kansas 1966,” 1966). They began with a planning period before a formal organization was created. 1966 was spent on building a structure of organization, with an executive board elected at their July 21 meeting and the phase expanded to include thirty-one libraries, from the original six (“Cooperative Library Services in NE Kansas 1966,” 1966). A grant was given to the Northeast area worth \$35,795 to create a one-year program, leading to the creation of NEKLS. The *Broadside* newsletter was created in August so libraries in the area could know about workshops and plans (“NEKLS 1966 AUG,” 1966). Bylaws were distributed via *Broadside* after they were proposed by the bylaws committee and were approved at the February 23, 1967 meeting (“NEKLS 1967 JAN & FEB,” 1967; “NEKLS

1967 MAR,” 1967). The system would originally contain eight counties and nineteen libraries, but by April 1967 they had ten counties and thirty public libraries participating (“NEKLS 1967 APR,” 1967, 13).

NEKLS petitioned the State Library Advisory Commission for its creation on July 1, 1967 (“NEKLS 1967 AUG,” 1967). Planning grant money was given for the July 1, 1967 to June 30, 1968 period (“NEKLS 1967 AUG,” 1967). NEKLS was officially designated on November 16, 1967 and included Brown, Douglas, Franklin, Jefferson, Johnson, Leavenworth, Miami, and Wyandotte counties with Wayne Mayo of Lawrence Public Library serving as the administration librarian (“Two Regional Systems Designated,” 1967).

Period three, 1967-1974, focused on the formalization of NEKLS and the resistance regional libraries faced. Amendments were proposed to law in November 1967 over resistance to property tax levy (“NEKLS 1967 NOV,” 1967). In 1968, Senate Bill 498 officially acknowledged NEKLS as a system (“NEKLS Plan and Resolution,” 1968). K.S.A. 75-2547 et seq. was amended to allow school, community college, and college/university libraries to the regional systems if they wished (Stephens, 1968). An updated interlibrary loan policy for the state was announced in 1968 and incorporated regional systems (“Advisory Commission Announces Interlibrary Loan Policy,” 1968).

In 1968, each of the regional systems received \$8,613 after being authorized by the State Library Advisory Commission and State Librarian, with the funds going towards “support system resource centers development” (“Reference Grants Authorized,” 1968, 29). New rules and regulations were adopted for the regional library system and the cooperating libraries on August 2, 1968 (“Additional Rules and Regulations Adopted,” 1968). For FY 1969, through the LSCA Title I Grant, the system received \$21,500 and the system budget was funded for the first

time by local millage at \$85,000 (Kansas State Library, 1968; "NEKLS Budget 1968-1969," 1968). By 1969, they had thirty-two libraries participating in the system (Stephens, 1969).

A few bills were potentially damaging to NEKLS ("NEKLS Executive Committee Agenda, March 20 1969," 1969). Farm Bureau was resistant towards a tax levy towards the library systems, and librarians protested the proposed bills to reduce to 1/4, the second bill passed the House. The two bills were HB 1261 and HB 1436 and were related to property taxes and the inclusion of farm equipment ("Farm Bureau Policy Development, 1969," 1969). By 1971, the tax protests were resolved ("Librarians' Reports, 1969-1975," 1977).

LeRoy Fox became the System Librarian in the spring and the system's center moved to Johnson County Public Library ("NEKL Reorganizes," 1969). The Broadside newsletter ended in September 1968 and reimagined as NEKLS News ("NEKLS 1968 SEPT," 1968; "NEKLS 1969 MAY," 1969). Beginning in 1970, they worked on expansion with the help of a grant and created a library service on the Native American reservations within the region ("Library Services to the Disadvantaged," 1970).

A commission report was done in 1971 and stated regional systems needed more funding because at the time it was not equalized for Kansans ("Commission Reports to Governor," 1971). At the May 1971 assembly meeting, NEKLS changed the bylaws so "there shall be one Executive Committee member from each County in N.E.K.L." ("NEKLS 1971 JUNE," 1971, 6). The committees worked with individual libraries to provide support with their programs ("NEKL," 1971). Senate Bill No. 208 involved a proposal to amend system laws ("Senate Bill No. 208, Session of 1973," 1973). SCKL declined support of the bill and it appears NEKLS did the same ("NEKLS 1973 MAR," 1973). In 1974, Senate Bills No. 1005 and 1029, the Omnibus Appropriation Act, and HB 2209 all passed which established policy for state aid toward public

libraries (Gardiner, 1982). The formalization of NEKLS and fighting back against resistance led to a continuity outcome for this period.

With NEKLS more fully established the fourth period, 1975-1979, turned to restructuring of the system. Glen Plaisted became the System Librarian in 1975 after the resignation of Leroy Fox (“NEKLS 1975 OCT,” 1975). State standards for public libraries were proposed by the state, but NEKLS expressed concern (“Proposed State Standards for Public Libraries in Kansas,” 1975). At the 1978 regional conference, concerns were brought up about the lack of public relations programs for the libraries. They should improve access to information for everyone, increase funding and provide better use for the funds, encourage user participation in library programs, encourage continuing education for staff, and finally censorship “specifically it was suggested that the Kansas Obscenity Law (K.S.A. 21-4301) be revised to exempt librarians from criminal prosecution” (“Regional Conference Convened,” 1978, 3).

The fifth period, 1980-1986, saw the beginning of legislative action which was or would be detrimental to NEKLS. Assemblies and meetings focused to oppose these efforts, and newsletters featured op-eds from Plaisted about the issues. More legislation occurred in 1981 and 1982 (“Supplemental Note on House Bill 2005, Session of 1981,” 1981; “Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 1655, Session of 1982,” 1982). Plaisted (1982) stated in a letter for the September newsletter that 1983-1984 would be bleak because property value was leveling off, something funding was reliant on, and the increase of deliveries meant more funding would be needed, but not guaranteed. The passing of HB 2425 made the situation worse because it excused certain farm equipment from the property value, leading to the potential of a thirteen percent loss on funding (Plaisted, 1982). To alleviate the situation, during NEKLS’ Fall Assembly they voted to amend the system law to increase mill levy 1/10 mill per year for a max of 1 ½ mills to offset

HB 2425 (“NEKL Newsletter,” November 1982; “NEKL Newsletter,” December 1982). 1983 saw a four percent cut to the grants in aid (“NEKL Newsletter,” February 1983). Negatives from the 1986 legislative session was the passing of the State Library Appropriations Bill which did not give an increase for the Interlibrary Loan Development, state aid for public libraries, and no added funding for the blind and physically handicapped program (Plaisted, 1986). Plaisted (1986) stated these results were most likely due to state economics and this was a reminder that changes were an ongoing process and talking with legislators was important.

Positives were possible during this period. The Kansas Library Network was created by the legislature in 1981 after the passage of Senate Bill 14 and represented all types of libraries and helped with interlibrary cooperation (“NEKL Newsletter,” June 1981). HB 2166 passed in May 1983 and moved the mill levy authority to .75 mills, the first increase in fifteen years (“System Bill Passes House,” 1983; “NEKL Newsletter,” May 1983). NEKLS, along with twenty-two public libraries and the other regional libraries, received an Interlibrary Loan Development Program grant with a \$505,000 a year total amount (Kansas State Library, 1986). Positives from the 1986 Legislative session were the passing of Senate Bill 571 which increased the levy for district libraries from 1.5 mills to 3 and HB 3052 allowing public libraries to establish a Capital Improvement Fund (Plaisted, 1986).

After the losses faced in the fifth period, the sixth period, 1986-1993, turned to more activity at legislation with it becoming more prominent in the NEKLS newsletters with an overall positive outlook. Legislative activity became more important after the 1986 legislative session. KLA’s legislative goals for 1987 were printed in *NEKLS Newsletter* (September 1986) with one of the goals to increase state aid to regional libraries. Melanie Miller posted two letters encouraging people to become more active in legislation in the following year and reiterated this

in the December newsletter by recapping what NEKLS lost in state and local taxes along with once again encouraging individuals to contact legislators (“NEKLS Newsletter,” October and November 1986; Miller, 1986).

During the 1987 legislation, the grants in aid budget was returned to its original amount and a bill was killed in committee which would have encouraged a fee to be charged for “individual library cards by each local library” (“NEKLS Newsletter,” 1987). Positively, the Kanas Farmers Union’s policy included a section supporting regional library systems (“NEKLS Newsletter,” 1987). Representative Gross stated the 1988 legislation would “prefile a bill seeking to allocate some of the “windfall” state funds to library programs selected for the 1988 KLS legislative agenda” (Miller, January 1988, 3). Legislation that was potentially up included state grants-in-aid increasing to \$316,940 over a five-year period, which had not been increased since 1981 (Miller, February 1988). A two-page alert was included in the March NEKLS Newsletter urging people to call legislators in support for the library funding they needed, stating that this year was favorable. HB 2770 was a part of this funding, and Senate Bill 519 would allow regional library systems to retain the .75 mill limit. The April and May (1988) newsletters included letters urging people to call legislators about the funding. HB 2720 passed giving the library materials budget a five percent decrease, ILL Development Plan was restored to \$60,000, and the grant-in-aid increased thirty-one percent. Senate Bill 519 passed and amended reappraisal of tax lid law and would allow library levy in “subsequent years to increase by the ratio of the year’s valuation to the reappraisal year’s (1989) valuation (“NEKLS Newsletter,” July 1988). Plaisted (1988) included a letter in the December NEKLS Newsletter discussing why funds for system grants had slowed. Legislation was positive again in 1989 with “a 56 percent increase in the State’s contribution to a grant-in-aid program an 8 percent (\$50,000) increase in

the State's contribution to the Interlibrary Loan Development Program; a 78 percent increase in the State's contribution to the Talking Book Program; an additional \$40,000 for the State Library materials budget, and generally substantial increases in per capita funding for the next two fiscal years," ("News Flash!!!, 1989, 1).

Period seven saw the second restructure of NEKLS. A part-time automation consultant was added in 1994. Plaisted retired as Systems Director in March 1996, with Jim Minges assuming the position in April of that year ("NEKLS 1996 FEB," 1996; "NEKLS 1996 APR," 1996). Later in the year seven new members joined the Executive Committee, most of the System Staff was new, and NEKLS moved to a new office, once in 1995 and again in 1996 ("Loose Change," July 1996; "NEKLS 1996 SEPT," 1996). Ultimately, the new hires did not result in change, but continued continuity for the system.

Period eight focused on the tax lid, FirstSearch, and other legislation. NEKLS worked towards keeping members aware of harmful legislation and updates on the automation system. Their work kept continuity and the system from suffering budget cuts. Discussion on the tax lid began in 1996 with the hope that the regional library system could be exempt. In August, they requested an Attorney General's Opinion and received a response in February ("Loose Change," October 1996; "Loose Change," 1997). Later in 1997, the Legislature voted to extend the tax lid until 1999 ("Kansas Libraries," 1997). In 1999, it was proposed that the motor vehicle tax should be eliminated. NEKLS did not support this as it would affect the public libraries and suggested if passed the legislators should try and find other ways for funding ("Loose Change," 1999). The Senate Ways and Means Committee approved a request for state grant-in-aid funding equal to 10 percent which would be in increments over four years and be made with the Omnibus Appropriations Bill. Senate Bill 252 was proposed which would eliminate the property tax lid.

While this would not have immediate effects on NEKLS, if passed it could encourage more legislation to relax levy restrictions for district and systems libraries (“Library Legislative News,” April 1999). NEKLS continued to push senators to consider the recommendations proposed by the Ways and Means Committee (“Library Legislative News,” March 1999). The Omnibus Appropriations Bill and Senate Bill 252 both passed, allowing “an increase of \$400,000 in grants-in-aid to libraries,” and eliminate individual fund levy limits and the tax lid, appearing to “make it easier for library levies to increase with support from local government bodies...frees library districts and regional system from their library limits” (“Library Legislative News,” May 1999). NEKLS provided funding for FirstSearch, an automation-based system. They had multiple meetings discussing receiving legislative funding, although the state eventually did not approve of the funding (“1998 legislative report,” 1998).

Period nine from 1999 to 2004, focused on technology grants for libraries, this created change for how the system operated and what they could offer to their libraries. KAN-ED is a grant which provides technology for students. NEKLS spent many meetings discussing the legislation and what it would mean for libraries (“Legislative News,” 1999). They were supportive of the proposal, while telecommunication providers were opposed (“Legislative News,” 2000). A task force was created and during this NEKLS decided to talk with the Attorney General “to clarify the methods by which cities may limit library levies” (“Loose Change,” 2000). KAN-ED was signed into law in 2002 (Kansas Libraries, 2002).

LSTA gave NEKLS a grant which would allow them to provide high speed Internet access, this turned into a new grant program for NEKLS libraries to gain Internet access (“NEKLS Annual Report, 1999,” 1999). NEKLS had their KANREN network and added more libraries to the network (“NEKLS Annual Report, 1999,” 1999). Results from the FY 99 grant

showed that NEKLS connected internet access or expanded KANREN access to four libraries (Kansas State Library, 2000). In 2001, NEKLS changed their criteria for the public library grant to include more technology requirements (Loose Change, November 2001). NEKLS applied for another LSTA grant towards Internet access in 2003, but was not given the funding (Kansas State Library, 2003).

The Governor's 2000 budget proposal and the Senate Ways and Means Committee both suggested a cut of \$300,000 in state aid to libraries, despite them giving regional libraries an increase in state aid after the 1999 Legislature ("Legislative News," 2000). In 2001, the NEKLS newsletter discussed the legislative issues in detail and encouraged members to call their legislators and have them vote to increase funding to 10 percent for public libraries ("Loose Change," April 2001).

Period ten from 2005 to 2016 has NEKLS shift focus to statewide services, particularly automation courier services. NEKLS began with "Express" in 2005, which started with fifty libraries (Kansas State Library, 2005). In 2009, they changed courier services, now working with Henry Industries Courier Networks, and serviced 210 libraries from all regional library systems (Kansas State Library, 2010). A statewide courier system with NEKLS contracted to provide the services, began in 2010 (Kansas State Library Board, 2015). NEKLS' work with this changed how the systems provided interlibrary loan services.

Period eleven, 2016, focuses on HB 2719 and the resulting social media campaign. HB 2719 proposed to eliminate special entities, which would take the taxing authority away from library boards, allowing for the regional library system's budget be up for a public vote each year. This would make the systems inoperable (L. DeBaun and J. Mingos, personal communication, April 18, 2018; E. Gustafson, personal communication, April 4, 2018). Eric

Gustafson, Chair of Governmental Affairs Committee for KLA, wrote a draft against the bill and posted it to the KLA website. Heather Braun shared the draft through Twitter and Facebook, and Marcy Penner did through the Kansas Sampler. Those in the regional library system distributed the draft to their library directors who passed it on again to their users. Testimonials in opposition to the bill started coming in. There were two hearings, and by the second hearing the bill died. The work from NEKLS and other regional libraries provided continuity for the system and to continue to operate.

Discussion

The periods found demonstrate how regional library systems are viewed by the state whether implicitly or explicitly stated. NEKLS has an almost equal amount of change and continuity, although it is not a simple back and forth trade-off between the two. Most of the change stems from budget issues, whether it is gaining more funding or losing funding.

Period ten was difficult to establish due to the lack of access of materials as the formats and distribution of information changed. The information was becoming digitized and unfortunately, not always saved in a way that is still viewable.

The research will be moving onto stage two which will focus on analyzing the data quantitatively and further looking into the question of ‘can there be a general theory for public library development?’ and if so the possibility for administrations to follow these rules to establish change.

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