

Notes on the Ancestry of the Kentucky Room

Daviess County Public Library, Owensboro, KY

By Jerry Long

Kentucky Room Assistant

Guy M. Deane of Thruston, KY donated several notebooks to the Kentucky Room of the Daviess County Public Library in April 1999. The pages from these have been copied and organized into a three volume set entitled The Papers of Mary Hale Dean: Traveling Library of the Gen. Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR, Owensboro, KY. Mr. Deane said Lucy Head Dean (1900-1989), widow of the late John Allen Dean, Jr. (1883-1943), had given the notebooks to him shortly before her death. J. A. Dean, Jr., a prominent Owensboro lawyer, left no children and he and Guy M. Deane's father were second cousins.¹

The papers of Mary Hale Dean are historically significant for several reasons and served as an impetus to these notes about the development of the Kentucky Room. They are in a sense a predecessor to the Kentucky Room and its historical and genealogical collection. Mary Hale Dean (1857-1955), mother of John Allen Dean, Jr., had compiled the papers. The old notebooks in which they were bound contained a title page with "Traveling Library from Gen. Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR, Owensboro, KY, by Mary Hale Dean, 1933." The papers consist of various family articles and genealogies, biographies, wills, other public records and cemetery listings. Many of these had been compiled and contributed by various members of the Owensboro DAR chapter. A few of the pages had the name of the compiler but most did not. Some of those who had contributed to the collection were Laura Little Hawes, Lee Belle Cravens, Mamie Watkins, Ada Dean White, Nancy Lampton Allen and Emma Dunn Mastin. The latter had compiled many of the cemetery listings. Several of the pages were dated between 1930-1932.

Mary Hale Dean was an early member of the General Evan Shelby Chapter of the DAR in Owensboro. For several years she had served as librarian for the group.² The daughter of Dr. Josiah Hale & Nancy Jane Willis she was born in Ohio County, KY on 7 May 1857. Her mother died when she was four. When she was about five years old her family moved to Owensboro. On 5 August 1878 she married John Allen Dean (1852-

¹ Interview of Guy M. Deane, 5760 Highway 405, Owensboro, KY, 20 Sep 2002; Mary Hale Dean & Emma Dunn Mastin, "Dean Family Data", Kentucky Family Records, Vol.4 (Owensboro, KY: West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association, 1975), 69-72; Judge Charles Kerr, History of Kentucky, Vol.3 (Chicago & New York: The American Historical Society, 1922), 315-6.

² General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR, Owensboro, KY Minute Books 1897-1930 (1 Jun 1923, elected) & 1930-1944 (1 Apr 1932, resigned), General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR file cabinet, Kentucky Room, Daviess County Public Library, Owensboro, KY.

1926), a member of the Owensboro bar.³ Her stepmother, Emily McHenry Hale, was one of the twelve charter members of the Gen. Evan Shelby Chapter of the DAR, organized in Owensboro on 23 October 1897.⁴ On 7 January 1898 the chapter's first meeting was held in the Hale home at 413 Frederica Street; the home was subsequently the residence of Mrs. Dean for many years.⁵

Mary Hale Dean joined the Gen. Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR in 1920. She qualified on the military service of two of her ancestors, William Haynes (1740-1827) and James McGuire (1747-1838).⁶ In 1915 the Gen. Evan Shelby Chapter had been given a small room in Owensboro's Carnegie Free Public Library. In this closet they stored one bookcase with the DAR Lineage Books; it was kept locked and only members had access.⁷ In the DAR chapter's minutes for 2 February 1923 it was noted that the Library Board had offered a larger meeting room for their private use and Mrs. R. W. Owen was instructed to move the DAR bookcase to this room. The establishment of the DAR Library room in 1923 was also cited in an early history of the Library.⁸ The room was on the first floor of the old library building at Ninth & Frederica Streets. In the hallway at the entrance to the library it was the first room on the left at the northwest corner of the building. The room was to be used solely by the DAR and only its members could have access.⁹ At this time the group had 75 members. Mary Hale Dean on 1 June 1923 was elected to serve as librarian and historian for the Gen. Evan Shelby Chapter.¹⁰ Subsequent minutes for the Chapter refer to her arranging their library room and adding various sources to their collection there.¹¹ In that year's annual report at the Kentucky DAR conference it was written:

With great pride we announce the opening of a reference room in the Public Library in charge of our Historian, Mrs. J. Allen Dean, whose untiring efforts have sufficed to make this a stepping stone to a very valuable collection of historical books, papers, and records.¹²

³ Gravestone at Elmwood Cemetery, Old Hartford Road, Owensboro, KY, section A, row 11; Judge Charles Kerr; History of Daviess County, Kentucky (Chicago: Inter-State Publishing Co., 1883), 232-234.

⁴ "Past Regents Give Interesting Events Marking Their D.A.R. Terms Of Office", Owensboro Messenger (Owensboro, KY: 5 Jan 1946), 8; General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR Minute Book 1897-1930 (23 Oct 1897).

⁵ Mrs. Oral Williams, Beginning Of A Legacy: Chapter Histories of Kentucky Society Daughters of the American Revolution (Utica, KY: McDowell Publications, 1980), 27-8; General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR Minute Book 1897-1930 (7 Jan 1898); "Mrs. J. Allen Dean Dies In Louisville", Messenger & Inquirer (Owensboro, KY, 19 Oct 1955), 1.

⁶ General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR Minute Book 1897-1930 (5 Nov 1920); DAR Applications, General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR file cabinet, Kentucky Room, Daviess County Public Library, Owensboro, KY.

⁷ General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR Minute Book 1897-1930 (5 Feb 1915, 3 Sep 1915, 6 Sep 1918).

⁸ General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR Minute Book 1897-1930 (16 May 1923); "Carnegie Free Public Library, Owensboro, Kentucky: History of the Library", no author listed (unpublished manuscript in Owensboro Libraries vertical file, Kentucky Room, Daviess County Public Library, Owensboro, KY), 5.

⁹ General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR Minute Book 1897-1930 (5 Oct 1923).

¹⁰ General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR Minute Book 1897-1930 (1 Jun 1923).

¹¹ General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR Minute Book 1897-1930 (7 Sep 1923, 1 Oct 1926).

¹² General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR Minute Book 1897-1930 (annual report May 1923 to Mar 1924).

In the 3 January 1931 issue of the Owensboro Messenger it was noted that at the DAR's meeting the evening before Mrs. J. A. Dean, historian, reported that "copies of wills and genealogical records have been made for the traveling library by Mrs. Dean. She also reported the traveling library of the D.A.R. is in Owensboro and in charge of Mrs. William Mastin, registrar. The books may be had from Mrs. Mastin."¹³

The "Traveling Library" of the Owensboro DAR apparently consisted of other volumes in addition to the Papers of Mary Hale Dean. An article about the DAR program of 5 December 1941 stated

Six volumes of data concerning Daviess and McLean pioneer families, compiled by Mrs. W. T. Mastin, were presented by Mrs. Mastin to the traveling library of the D.A.R. at Duncan tavern in honor of Mrs. G. Bright Hawes, state regent and member of the General Evan Shelby chapter. Genealogies of the Greathouse, Glenn, Ruby, the Rev. Alexander Miller, Thompson and allied families are given in the six volumes.¹⁴

In a memorial to Mrs. Emma Dunn Mastin (1889-1973) by the West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association, Owensboro, KY it is mentioned that Mrs. Mastin with Mrs. Mary Dean "compiled several volumes (unpublished) of wills, graveyard and lineage records which have been cited in manuals of how to do genealogical research as good resource material."¹⁵

For one reason or the other none of the volumes of the "Traveling Library" by either Mrs. Mastin or Mrs. Dean are in the library of the Gen. Evan Shelby Chapter today. The Kentucky Room of the Owensboro library also did not previously have any of the papers of Mary Hale Dean or any of the volumes by Mrs. Mastin referred to above. However, the Kentucky Room does have four volumes by Emma Dunn Mastin on her own family (including Dunn, Ashby, Bell, Monroe, Thomson, Bristow, Barnhill, Mastin, Toler and others) and two volumes of records by the General Evan Shelby DAR chapter. The title pages of the latter two contain the following inscriptions: "Gen. Evan Shelby Chapter D.A.R., Owensboro, Ky, Genealogical Data, prepared & presented by Mrs. Emma Dunn Mastin & Mrs. Mary Hale Dean, 1925-1931" and "Ancestor's Honor Roll of General Evan Shelby Chapter, 1925-1930, compiled by Mrs. Emma Dunn Mastin, assisted by Mrs. Mary Hale Dean & Mrs. Nancy Allen."

Mary Hale Dean resigned as historian of the DAR chapter on 1 April 1932. The following month the group sent a letter of appreciation to Mrs. Dean in recognition of her many years of "splendid work". She subsequently served as assistant historian and chairman of the genealogical research committee for the chapter.¹⁶ On 2 March 1934 the

¹³ "D.A.R. Chapter Has Dinner Meet", Owensboro Messenger (3 Jan 1931), 3.

¹⁴ "D.A.R. Program Given By C.A.R.", Owensboro Messenger (6 Dec 1941), 8.

¹⁵ "Mrs. Emma Dunn Mastin 18 October 1889 – 24 October 1973", The Bulletin, Vol.6 (Owensboro, KY: West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association, Nov 1973), 57.

¹⁶ General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR Minute Book 1930-1944 (1 Apr 1932, resignation), (6 May 1932, letter of recognition) & (3 Mar 1933, chairman of genealogical research committee); "Endorsements of Mrs. Hawes Read", Owensboro Messenger (2 Mar 1940, assistant historian), 8A.

Gen. Evan Shelby Chapter passed a resolution making Mary Hale Dean honorary Historian for life and Mrs. W. T. Mastin honorary Registrar for life.¹⁷

Mary Hale Dean was a matriarch of the Daviess County Public Library and gave many years of service to its cause. She was elected president of the newly formed Owensboro Library Association in 1896. The Owensboro Messenger reported that “Mrs. Dean, the president, has taken a deep interest in the organization and her selection to preside over the association is an excellent one and an assurance of success.”¹⁸ Mrs. Dean served on the first Board of Directors of the Owensboro Carnegie Free Public Library. Her term was from 30 April 1914 until 30 April 1918.¹⁹ She also was a member and former president of both the Owensboro Woman’s Club and the Married Ladies Reading Club.²⁰ The Owensboro Woman’s Club was organized on 9 March 1908 and Mary Hale Dean was elected its first president.²¹ The goal of the group was “mutual sympathy and council, and united effort to further improvement in the community in which we live.”²² The first project they dedicated themselves to was reviving interest in establishing a local library.²³ In a 1924 article about the history of the group the following was written

In 1903 the Owensboro Business Men’s Association solicited from Mr. Andrew Carnegie a donation of \$30,000 for the establishment of a Free Public Library in Owensboro, which donation Mr. Carnegie agreed to make provided a site for the Library was secured and the City would obligate itself to give a certain sum annually for its support. In December 1903 the City accepted Mr. Carnegie’s offer, the Board of Trustees were unable to secure a lot for a library site and discontinued meeting April 18, 1904. Realizing the great need in Owensboro for a public library the Woman’s Club by donations and from other sources raised \$3,297.12 and with this sum a lot 50 x 128 feet on the southeast corner of Frederica and Ninth street was purchased and deeded to the Board of Trustees of the Public Library December 8th, 1908. Mr. Carnegie having previously renewed his offer. The city funds not being available at this time the Woman’s Club bore the expense of the Library for 2 years, employing a janitor, soliciting between 800 and 900 volumes of books and their members serving as Librarians in a most creditable manner.²⁴

¹⁷ General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR Minute Book 1930-1944 (2 Mar 1934).

¹⁸ “Organized: The New Library Association Elects Officers and a Librarian”, Owensboro Messenger (1 Mar 1896), 1.

¹⁹ Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Book 1914-1928 (Kentucky Room, Daviess County Public Library, Owensboro, KY, 20 Jul 1914), 8.

²⁰ “Mrs. J. Allen Dean Dies In Louisville”; William Foster Hayes, Sixty Years of Owensboro (Owensboro, KY: Messenger Job Printing Co., 1944), 341 (Mrs. J. Allen Dean president of the Woman’s Club of Owensboro in 1908-1909 & 1915-1917) and 312 (Mrs. J. Allen Dean president of the Married Ladies Reading Club in 1907 & 1910-1912).

²¹ “Organization Of Women’s Club Has Been Completed”, Owensboro Messenger (11 Mar 1908), 2.

²² “Women’s Club Has Been Active In Civic Betterment: Raised Funds To Purchase Site And Thereby Secured Carnegie Donation of \$30,000 For Library”, Owensboro Inquirer (“Club and Development Edition”, 29 May 1924), 8B.

²³ William Foster Hayes, 303.

²⁴ “Women’s Club Has Been Active In Civic Betterment: Raised Funds To Purchase Site And Thereby Secured Carnegie Donation of \$30,000 For Library”.

The Carnegie Free Public Library was opened at 901 Frederica Street on 26 April 1912.²⁵ The building had been ready for occupancy the previous April but the Mayor and the City had stalled on its funding. It was not until 1913 that the City approved funding of the library and a full-time librarian was hired.²⁶ Until then volunteers from the Owensboro's Woman Club opened the building on a limited basis. Mrs. Dean's daughter, Miss Hannah Dean, served as temporary librarian during this interim.²⁷ Ellen Hart Smith in a history of the Library wrote that the Library during this time was not quite empty and idle.

The Woman's Club had not raised all that money for a library lot with the idea of seeing it come to nothing. They asked the Board of Trustees to let them open the Library once a week, staff it themselves, collect what books they could and check them out and in... There are some people who remember Mrs. John Allen Dean, in particular, sitting in great dignity at the librarian's charging desk, dispensing the books the Women's Club Book Reception had collected.²⁸

In the obituary in 1955 of Mrs. J. Allen Dean reference was made to the fact that the DAR room at the Owensboro Carnegie Library was named the Mary Hale Dean Genealogical Library.²⁹ On 7 February 1947 the General Evan Shelby chapter announced that it had named its library the "Mary Hale Dean Genealogical Library" in honor of Mrs. Dean's many years of service.³⁰ A brass plaque was placed on the door to the room with the inscription "Mary Hale Dean Genealogical Library – General Evan Shelby Chapter, N.S.D.A.R." This plaque is today mounted on a wood frame and is on display in the Kentucky Room of the Daviess County Public Library.

On the architect's original floor plan for the library building the two front rooms on the first floor were designated as club rooms.³¹ In an article about the planned library structure it was stated "On the first floor there will also be two rooms each 19 x 24 feet in size one designed for an historical and the other for an art society room. These will be among the prettiest apartments of the whole building."³² They were opened frequently for meetings and lectures of a literary and civic character.

²⁵ "Formal Opening Of The Library", Owensboro Messenger (26 Apr 1912), 2.

²⁶ "Mayor Gives Up Library Fight", Owensboro Messenger (25 Jan 1913), 5; "Miss Davis, New London, Conn. Woman Is Chosen Librarian For the Owensboro Carnegie Library", Owensboro Messenger (13 Jul 1913), 1B; "Carnegie Library To Be Open Every Day", Owensboro Messenger (4 Oct 1913), 2.

²⁷ Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Book 1914-1928 (20 Jul 1914), 9.

²⁸ "Welcome To Your New Library: Owensboro – Daviess County Public Library, Owensboro, Kentucky, Guidebook and Annual Report of the Board of Trustees, 1968", Kentucky Room, Daviess County Public Library, Owensboro, KY, 7-8 [Note no author is listed in this booklet but Alice Gene Lewis, Library Director during this period stated it was written by Library Board chairman, Ellen Hart Smith].

²⁹ "Mrs. J. Allen Dean Dies In Louisville".

³⁰ "D.A.R. Names Delegates To Meets, And Establishes 'Mary Hale Dean Library'", Owensboro Messenger (8 Feb 1947), 8.

³¹ Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors file cabinet, Kentucky Room, Daviess County Public Library, Owensboro, KY.

³² "Both Substantial And Beautiful: Carnegie Library Will Be An Imposing Structure". Owensboro Messenger (17 Oct 1909), 2A.

In a history and chronology of the library for the period before 1940 it is stated that the Library started an effort in 1922 to collect materials related to Kentucky. The following year the DAR Chapter was given permission to use a room on the first floor for their library. This room contained

a number of Kentucky Histories, Historical papers, Lineage books and scrap books. One book of interest is the Minute book of the Married Ladies Reading Club, the oldest Woman's Club in Kentucky, established in 1872. The Memoirs of Col. Charles S. Todd is of local interest.³³

In 1924 the Green River Historical Society was given permission to use the front hallway outside the DAR room for a museum display. They maintained four display cases containing relics, natural history and other items of local interest there for several years.³⁴ Cecelia Laswell, of the W.P.A. Writers' Project, wrote in 1936 that in one of the display cases was a "graphic map giving a Birdseye view of Owensboro as it was in 1881, published by J. J. Stoner, Madison, Wisc."³⁵ In the library's board minutes for 3 June 1949 it was noted that a copy of this map was donated, courtesy of Jack Keeley, Owensboro City Engineer, and a resolution was passed to have the map framed.³⁶ This framed 1881 Owensboro map is today on display in the Kentucky Room.

The room across the hallway from the DAR room for many years had been known as the museum room. Here the library displayed some museum items that had been donated and that were on loan. Joe Ford's museum collection was also housed here during 1956-1958. The Audio Visual department moved into this room in 1959.³⁷ Joe Ford and the Owensboro Area Museum a decade later moved back to the Carnegie Library building when the Library moved to a new location.³⁸

According to the article on the chronology of the library the collections of Kentucky books and those of Daviess County and Owensboro were assembled in one room known as the Kentucky Room in 1935. The article continued

A small room on the north side of the second floor is now known as the "Kentucky Room". All histories, fiction, maps, newspapers and other materials about Kentucky, and by her authors is assembled there. A shelf is reserved for Owensboro. This is most interesting as it contains two of the three novels by James Weir, Sr., a directory of the

³³ "Carnegie Free Public Library, Owensboro, Kentucky: History of the Library", 4-5; The Kentucky Room still has the latter two books. The Memoir of Col. Chas. S. Todd has an inscription that it was donated to the Gen. Evan Shelby Chapter DAR by Rose Griffith Watkins on 8 Feb 1930.

³⁴ Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Book 1914-1928 (15 Jan 1924), 162; Wendell Foster Hayes, "The Green River Museum and Art Society", Sixty Years of Owensboro (Owensboro, KY: Messenger Job Printing Co., 1944), 308-310.

³⁵ Cecelia Laswell, Daviess, Hancock, Ohio and McLean Counties, Kentucky: Early Settlement, Customs, Superstitions, Sketches, etc. (unpublished manuscript, Kentucky Room, Daviess County Public Library, Owensboro, KY, 1939), unpagged.

³⁶ Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Book 1934-1951 (3 Jun 1949).

³⁷ Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Book 1951-1962 (20 Nov 1958, 12 Feb 1959).

³⁸ Interview of Joe Ford (curator of museum room at the Owensboro Carnegie Free Public Library from Feb 1956 until Aug 1958), 1917 Merriewood Dr., Owensboro, KY, 29 Apr 2002; Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Book 1951-1962 (1 Feb 1956, 20 Mar 1958).

city for 1871-72, Tom Power's "Flights" illustrated by him. Judge Little's "Ben Hardin" and others.³⁹

At the DAR meeting of 2 Feb 1945 it was reported that

the D.A.R. library at the public library has been moved from the first to the second floor, to become part of a genealogical research library, the D.A.R. cooperating with the public library in this project. Several new lineage books have been added. Mrs. A. D. Kirk during the month contributed a series of Kentucky Register and Virginia Historical magazines, which are to be bound for the library.⁴⁰

In December 1945 the DAR chapter was cataloging the books in the DAR room. The room at this time was open to the public but the books could not be taken from the library.⁴¹ At the DAR's meeting at the library in March 1947 Miss Edna Lee, DAR librarian, gave a program on "Our D.A.R. Library". "She stated there are now 1,066 bound volumes in the DAR section of the library. She has catalogued all of the volumes and material except miscellaneous records and genealogical data of the membership. One of the books contains a record of marriage licenses from the time Daviess county was organized in 1815 to 1854."⁴² It was reported in June 1947 that copies of the William & Mary quarterly had been added to the DAR library and will be bound, the Swem's Index, Hening's Statutes and other books have been purchased, and 10 members have provided copies of their coats of arms.⁴³ In December 1948 it was announced that the coats of arms had been hung in the Mary Hale Dean DAR room at the library.⁴⁴

When the DAR moved its materials to the second floor in 1945 they were placed near the library's collection in the Kentucky Room on the second floor but the two collections continued to be considered separate. The two collections were described as being side by side and were not totally integrated. Both the DAR and library had cataloged and labeled their books to distinguish their separate holdings. The Kentucky Room is described as being a small room on the north side of the second floor toward the east end of the building. The room was about 12 by 14 and had a small library table with about four chairs in the center and there was barely enough walkway between the chairs and the bookcases around the walls. There was a glass window in the door. Mrs. Helen Danhauer used the room frequently in the late 1950's to research her husband's family. The door, she said, was usually shut but not locked. There was no register for visitors but she usually told them at the front desk when she was going to use the room. While there she liked to keep the door open. She thought there was a sign on the door identifying the room but could recall no restrictions on who could enter. One could not get very many books out at one time due to the size of the table. Two of the walls contained a section of metal bookshelves. At that time there was no copy machine or microfilm reader there. The room was well lit but an old radiator heater in the winter usually kept the small area

³⁹ "Carnegie Free Public Library, Owensboro, Kentucky: History of the Library", 8.

⁴⁰ "D.A.R. Delegates Named To Meets", Owensboro Messenger (3 Feb 1945), 8A.

⁴¹ "D.A.R. Chapter To Adopt By-Laws", Owensboro Messenger (8 Dec 1945), 8A.

⁴² "D.A.R. Library Has 1,066 Books", Owensboro Messenger (8 Mar 1947), 10.

⁴³ "Judge Clarence Bartlett Gives History of Flag at D.A.R. Observance of Day", Owensboro Messenger (15 Jun 1947), 2A.

⁴⁴ "D.A.R. Holds Christmas Program", Owensboro Messenger (4 Dec 1948), 3A.

to warm. The room was infrequently used. The second floor did not have much traffic and consequently the room was very quiet. The solitude seemed to accentuate the creaking sounds of the old wood stairs and hardwood floors. The room would not have been able to accommodate more than 8 to 10 people at one time.⁴⁵

The Kentucky Room had no attendant and books there could not be checked out of the library. Only a few mentions of the Kentucky Room at the old Carnegie Library appear in the minute books of the Library's Board of Directors. The following references or resolutions pertaining to the Kentucky Room or to items in its collection were found in addition to those already mentioned:

- 18 Sep 1923, John L. Foust reported that the State War Historian, Fred P. Caldwell, had sent a three volume War History of Daviess County [History of Daviess County, Ky. In The World War, 1917-1919, prepared by Daviess County War Historian, John L. Foust].
- 1933, Compendium of American Genealogy and Dictionary of American Biography to be purchased in honor of George V. Triplett, former head of the Board of Directors.
- 5 Jul 1935, board placed an order for 5 copies of "Boz", the Dickens biography, written by two local boys, J. C. & M. H. Boarman.
- 10 Apr 1936, an additional copy of the History of Daviess County, Kentucky to be purchased.
- 12 June 1936, a history of Hardin County, KY is to be purchased from Mrs. R. C. Davis for \$7.00.
- 1 Feb 1944, Rev. Wendell H. Rone donated 2 copies of his History of the Daviess-McLean Baptist Association.
- 1 Aug 1944, John L. Foust reported that advance orders for W. Foster Hayes book on the History of Daviess County were now being taken.
- 4 Nov 1946, John L. Foust was directed to investigate the possibility of buying a volume of Daviess County marriage records prepared by Emma D. Mastin.
- 6 May 1947, letter received from Mrs. John Gilmour, regent of local D.A.R., expressing their appreciation for the past courtesy uses of the library and cooperation of the library in the purchase of needed genealogy books. D.A.R. allocated \$200 for the purchase of the Virginia Magazine of History & Biography. Board voted to allocate an additional \$200 for the purchase of this set with the stipulation that the set would be the property entirely of the library.
- 3 June 1949, Mrs. J. C. Hoover presented thirty-four volumes of the National Cyclopedia of American Biography to the library as a memorial gift.
- 7 July 1953, Miss Lee Belle Cravens donated a set of the Filson Club magazines; library did not accept her offer of the Kentucky Registers since the library already had them.
- 4 May 1954, Beckham Triplett donated a framed photograph of his father, George V. Triplett. "As Judge Triplett was not only a Board member for 28 years but was chiefly responsible for Owensboro having a Library the present Library Board was pleased at this gesture of Judge Triplett's son."
- 8 June 1954, books in the D.A.R. room belonging to that organization are to be inventoried and labeled in order to distinguish them from those belonging to the library.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Interview of Helen W. Danhauer, 2015 Clinton Pl. E., Owensboro, KY, 10 & 18 Feb 2004; Interview of Evelyn N. Triplett (head librarian of the Owensboro Carnegie Free Public Library from Jan 1956 until Oct 1960), 500 Owen Court, Owensboro, KY, 30 Jun 2000 & 7 Oct 2002; Interview of William O. Shelton (custodian at Daviess County Public Library since 1965), 7126 Highway 81, Panther, KY, 8 Oct 2002.

⁴⁶ Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Books 1914-1928 (18 Sep 1923), 1934-1951 (5 Jul 1935, 10 Apr 1936, 12 Jun 1936, 1 Feb 1944, 1 Aug 1944, 4 Nov 1946, 6 May 1947, 3 Jun 1949),

After the move of some of their materials to the Kentucky Room the DAR continued to maintain their meeting room on the first room in the same location they had been given in 1923. The DAR minutes continue to refer to them having the room. There they kept member files, the chapter's minute books, scrapbooks, and other books and materials not placed in the Kentucky Room. These were kept in several glass bookcases that were kept locked.⁴⁷ A large conference wood table surrounded by chairs was in the center of the room. Several flags were on display. Framed family coat of arms donated by members lined the walls. In 1960 it was reported that 29 coats of arms were on the walls of the DAR room.⁴⁸

In 1947 the DAR room at the front northwest corner of the library was christened the "Mary Hale Dean Genealogical Library". Several have said that during the 1950's the brass plaque with the inscription "Mary Hale Dean Genealogical Library" was on the door to the DAR room on the first floor. Alyce F. Hicks said that when she started working as a student assistant at the library in 1950 the plaque was then on the doorway to the DAR room in this location. Evelyn N. Triplett said that when she was appointed head librarian in January 1956 the plaque and DAR room were still there. She said that the library had nothing to do with the room. The DAR chapter maintained it and the sole doorway to the room was kept locked except when members were there. The Kentucky Room at that time housed books both of the DAR and the library.⁴⁹

The two genealogical collections at the Owensboro library were referred to in a newspaper article in 1956. The article stated

The reader who is interested in genealogy will explore the Kentucky Room and the Mary Hale Dean Genealogical Library of the DAR. The latter room contains family, church, county and state histories, a book which lists 30,000 immigrants who came to this country after 1683, and several volumes on American genealogy and British heraldry.⁵⁰

The Carnegie Library board on 1 August 1960 sent the following letter to the local DAR regent, Mrs. John S. Wright, requesting that the group give up their room at the library.

1951-1962 (7 Jul 1953, 4 May 1954, 8 Jun 1954); "Carnegie Free Public Library, Owensboro, Kentucky: History of the Library", 7.

⁴⁷ General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR Minute Book (4 Mar 1958); Interviews of DAR members, Mary Gray Ralph, 1907 Griffith Ave., Owensboro, KY, 30 June 2000 & Rachel C. Taylor, 1844 Stratford Dr. Owensboro, KY, 23 Sep 2002.

⁴⁸ "Judge Clarence Bartlett Gives History of Flag at D.A.R. Observance of Day", Owensboro Messenger (15 Jun 1947), 2A; "D.A.R. Holds Christmas Program", Owensboro Messenger (4 Dec 1948), 3A; General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR Minute Book 1959-1968 (5 May 1961).

⁴⁹ Interview of Evelyn N. Triplett, 30 Jun 2000 & 7 Oct 2002; Interview of Alyce F. Hicks (student assistant at the Owensboro Carnegie Free Public Library from 1950 until 1958), 2174 Tamarack Road, Owensboro, KY, 19 Sep 2002; Interview of Mary Hilda McFarland (student assistant at the Owensboro Carnegie Free Public Library from Aug 1953 until Aug 1963), 2506 Elder Dr., Owensboro, KY, 29 Apr 2002; Interview of William O. Shelton, 8 Oct 2002.

⁵⁰ "Three Nights A Week: Carnegie Public Library Visitors Find New Source of Information", Messenger & Inquirer (23 Sep 1956), 3D.

Dear Mrs. Wright:

Due to phenomenal expansion of our Library Service to Owensboro and Daviess County and the good fortune to become a Regional Library with Henderson cooperating, we find we are sorely in need of all the library space. At the last meeting of the Board of Trustees I was instructed to notify you that we should appreciate your releasing the space you occupy as the D.A.R. Room at your convenience.

We assure you that the valuable genealogical volumes which your members have been using will remain available to them, and we hope that their transfer to another section of the library will render a continued service to you.

Sincerely yours,
Elizabeth M. Smith, Secretary⁵¹

In the minutes for the executive board meeting of the Gen. Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR on 19 August 1960 the following entry was made

Request of Owensboro Public Library that Chapter surrender the room presently occupied by the Mary Hale Dean Genealogical Library, because of growing need for expansion of the library facilities, and the tender by the library of the room on the second floor called the Kentucky Room, was presented to the Board by Mrs. Bogard. After discussion, the Board recommended acceptance of library's offer. Removal of contents of the present room was considered. It was unanimous voice of the Board that books, papers, etc. be cataloged when moved, a list being kept with the records of the Chapter, for reference and ownership purposes.⁵²

Mrs. D. D. Bogard, librarian for the DAR chapter, reported at the chapter's meeting of 5 May 1961

The DAR room had been removed to the second floor to comply with the request of the Public Library; that bookcases had been sold, and the proceeds of \$27.50 credited to the Library fund; also \$3.55 proceeds of flags sold; that 6 volumes of magazines had been bound; that a \$25.00 book entitled "Owensboro Directory and List of Property Owners in City and County, 1892" was purchased; a \$10.00 edition of Cemetery Records of Ky. Vol. 1, was bought; that a volume "The Descendants of Giles Rogers" was donated to the Chapter by Mrs. Lawrence W. Hager. Librarian also reported that 29 framed coats of arms belonging to the Chapter are on the walls of the present DAR room. Mrs. Bogard brought to the attention of the meeting the fragile condition of the 166 Lineage books presently owned by the Chapter, and stated these volumes should be bound, whereupon motion was made by Mrs. Lelia T. Brannon, properly seconded, that the Chapter bind a minimum of five volumes annually. Upon vote, the motion carried.⁵³

The Carnegie Library was working towards an expansion of the library by joining the regional library program at the time they requested the DAR to give up their room. The Regional Library had been proposed and they were hoping that the regional office would be enticed to locate here. By joining the program the library became a joint city-county enterprise and funding was thus improved. The contract for the Audubon Regional Library was signed on 25 August 1960 and approved on 12 September 1960.⁵⁴ Owensboro was selected to be the headquarters of the region and the office of the Audubon Regional Library moved into the then vacated DAR room. The following year

⁵¹ Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Book 1951-1962 (1 Aug 1960).

⁵² General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR Minute Book 1959-1968 (19 Aug 1960).

⁵³ General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR Minute Book 1959-1968 (5 May 1961).

⁵⁴ "Regional Library Status Highlights 1960 Activities", Messenger & Inquirer (1 Jan 1961), 8B.

the Regional Library was moved to the second floor, where it was placed in an open area in the center of the 9th Street side between the book stacks in the front and the Kentucky Room. The former DAR room was then used as a Library Board and meeting room. When a leak developed on the second floor in 1965 the Regional Library was moved back downstairs to the old DAR room.⁵⁵

During the 1960's the Kentucky Room was kept locked and one had to request to use it. Children could only access it if supervised. To accommodate the expansion of the vertical files an additional file cabinet was purchased for the Kentucky Room in July 1963. In the weekly newspaper column, "Library Corner", it was announced two months later that

In addition to recataloging the books, a Kentucky vertical file has been added in the Kentucky Room. Pamphlets, folders, documents and historical papers are filed in it under related subjects. The file includes material on such topics as the history of Owensboro and Daviess County, its churches, civic clubs and organizations, industries, and education. There is also some literature on Joseph Hamilton Daveiss, from whom our county gets its name, and other early settlers of the surrounding areas... Owensboro City Directories dating back as early as 1886 provide interesting browsing.⁵⁶

The library obtained a photocopy machine (Docustat) in 1963 and a microfilm reader in 1964. Both of these were on the first floor. The self-service copy machine was in the entrance hall on the left, copies were 25 cents.⁵⁷ To make copies of materials in the Kentucky Room it was expected that one take it to the check out desk and ask one of the staff to make copies for you. The microfilm reader for a time was in the AV department at the entrance of the library on the right. The microfilm reels were kept at the check out desk and one had to request them.⁵⁸ The library had housed original copies of many of the old Owensboro newspapers for the period of 1862 to 1908. In 1966 these were donated to the Margaret I. King Library of the University of Kentucky. They were microfilmed and the library and the newspaper received microfilm copies.⁵⁹

In August 1963 the library board submitted a report on the needs of the library to the Owensboro mayor and city commissioners. Among seven essential categories outlined was the need for more emphasis on and expansion of the historical collections. The report stated

The late president of the library board of trustees, William J. Wiggington, appreciated the importance of the library's historical collection and was especially interested in the Kentucky room. Primarily as a result of his interest and foresight the board has been encouraged to develop a legacy of Kentucky historical materials that will provide a

⁵⁵ Interview of Evelyn N. Triplett, 30 Jun 2000 & 7 Oct 2002; Interview of Hellen J. Hurd (Regional Librarian 1960-1986), 1220 Woodmere Lane, Owensboro, KY, 30 Jun 2000.

⁵⁶ "Library Corner", Messenger & Inquirer (29 Sep 1963), 8C.

⁵⁷ Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Books (24 Jul 1963 & 12 Aug 1964); "Library Corner", Messenger & Inquirer (1 Dec 1963), 10 C.

⁵⁸ Interview of Evelyn N. Triplett, 30 Jun 2000 & 7 Oct 2002; Interview of Alice Gene Lewis (head librarian of Owensboro-Daviess County Public Library from 1 Sep 1965 until 19 Feb 1995), 1312 West Parrish Avenue, Owensboro, KY, 27 May 2000, 20 Sep 2002 & 18 Feb 2004.

⁵⁹ "Cache of Historic Newspapers Found At Library", Messenger & Inquirer (23 Feb 1966), 1A.

reference source of Kentuckiana and will also encourage the bequest of historical collections if the library is to fulfill its needs to students, industry and to the public at large. The major item here involves purchase of costly reference materials.⁶⁰

William J. Wigginton, 54, a prominent Owensboro attorney and community leader, died unexpectedly on 10 July 1963. At the time he was chairman of the library board, a position he had held since 1959, and he had been a member of the board since 1947. He started his career as a history professor at the Western Kentucky State College and was an advocate for the expansion of the library's historical collection in the Kentucky Room.⁶¹ The library board, one month after Mr. Wigginton's death, proposed to commemorate his service by commissioning a memorial plaque.⁶² The brass plaque with the inscription, "Kentucky Room - The William J. Wigginton Memorial", was shortly afterwards placed at the entrance to the Kentucky Room.⁶³ Today this plaque and the nameplate formerly on the old DAR room are on display in the Kentucky Room.

In the library board minutes for 9 September 1964 it was noted that the Kentucky Room had been moved to the first floor.⁶⁴ It had been in its prior location about 30 years. In a year-end review of changes and additions at the Library during 1964 it was stated that the move had been made to make it more accessible.⁶⁵ The move closely coincided with the arrival of the library's first microfilm reader, which may have contributed to the reorganization. Richard Weiss, former professor and librarian at Kentucky Wesleyan College, visited the Kentucky Room during 1964-65. He accompanied the late Dan King, who was trying to get ideas for organizing and developing the history collection at Kentucky Wesleyan College. At the time of their visit the Kentucky Room was located on the first floor in the first room on the right at the southwest corner of the building.⁶⁶

The Kentucky Room was featured in the library's newspaper column on 22 November 1964. The article stated that this special room contained books, periodicals and vertical file material about Kentucky and by Kentucky authors. The books were divided into two major categories – those with an R could be checked out and those with KR were irreplaceable items that had to be used in the library. The vertical file it noted was kept locked because of the scarcity of many items in it. One could easily use this material by asking permission at the desk. The column ended with the following entreaty:

One thing we would like to get is pictures to hang up in it – about Kentucky, by Kentucky painters, portraits of famous men of Kentucky, etc. If anyone has any appropriate materials they would like to donate: such as pictures, books, documents, old

⁶⁰ "Library Board Submits Report to City Officials", Messenger & Inquirer (18 Aug 1963), 8C.

⁶¹ Ibid; "Bill Wigginton, Veteran Attorney, Dies Unexpectedly", Messenger & Inquirer (11 July 1963), 1A; "Welcome To Your New Library: Owensboro – Daviess County Public Library, Owensboro, Kentucky, Guidebook and Annual Report of the Board of Trustees, 1968", 21.

⁶² Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Book (14 Aug 1963).

⁶³ Interview of Alice Gene Lewis, 27 May 2000 & 20 Sep 2002.

⁶⁴ Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Book (9 Sep 1964).

⁶⁵ "Library Adds 6,396 New Books", Messenger & Inquirer (31 Dec 1964), 11B.

⁶⁶ Interview of Richard Weiss, 808 Frederica Street, Owensboro, KY, 24 Feb 2004.

newspapers, even fair programs, etc., we at the library would be glad to look them over to see if they could be added to the Kentucky Room shelves.

It is our desire to make the Kentucky Room a place where one can learn of all phases of Kentucky life and culture, business, government, education, recreation, history and geography.

If our patrons can help us fulfill these aims, through old materials lying around attics or in old trunks, we will appreciate it very much.⁶⁷

The Kentucky Room was on the first floor only a short time. Within a few months it had been returned to its former location on the second floor. Mrs. Alice Gene Lewis said that when she became head librarian in September 1965 the Kentucky Room was on the second floor.⁶⁸ Some of the moves of various materials and departments from the second floor during the mid 60's had also been precipitated by structural problems that were first identified in 1963. A structural engineer reported that part of the library's second floor was 22% overloaded and the floor was sagging under the weight of the books.⁶⁹ The problem persisted until it was decided that the library would be closed on 30 September 1965 to make needed repairs. The library reopened two months later on December 13th.⁷⁰

In October 1965 during the period when the library was closed for repairs Mrs. Lewis, the recently hired head librarian, presented a request for a new library to the Owensboro Board of Commissioners.⁷¹ In March 1966 the City and the Library Board took steps to ensure that Owensboro would have a new public library. The old library building faced mounting criticisms of being outdated, inaccessible, over crowded, uncomfortable and unsafe. New state and federal funding became available at this time and the Library Board decided to move forward. A lot at the corner of Griffith and McCreary Avenues was purchased and plans for a new modern structure were drawn. The new library facility, five times larger than the former, was opened on 1 December 1968 at 450 Griffith Avenue.⁷² Shortly after the decision to build a new library the name of the library was changed on 11 May 1966 from the Carnegie Free Public Library to the Owensboro-Daviess County Public Library.⁷³ The library has since undergone another name change. In July 1995 Owensboro and Daviess County officials had resolved a long-running dispute about financing and ownership of the library by creating a new countywide library-taxing district. When a new countywide library board assumed

⁶⁷ "Library Corner", Messenger & Inquirer (22 Nov 1964), 8C.

⁶⁸ Interview of Alice Gene Lewis, 27 May 2000 & 20 Sep 2002.

⁶⁹ Vicki Sims, "History of the Owensboro-Daviess County Public Library", Daviess County Historical Quarterly, Vol. VI (Owensboro, KY: Daviess County Historical Society, Oct 1988), 88.

⁷⁰ "Local Library To Be Closed Today Until Further Notice", Messenger & Inquirer (1 Oct 1965), 1A; "Back In Business: Public Inspects Library Repairs", Messenger & Inquirer (13 Dec 1965), 1A; "From Rags to Riches or Report from the Public Library's Board of Trustees" (Owensboro, KY: Aug 1966), 1.

⁷¹ "Mrs. Ralph Lewis New Librarian At Public Library", Messenger & Inquirer (3 Sep 1965), 1A; "Commissioners Told 'Library Falling Down'", Messenger & Inquirer (2 Oct 1965), 1A.

⁷² "Plans Being Drawn: New Library Is Assured For City-County Patrons", Messenger & Inquirer (31 Dec 1966), 4B; "Owensboro-Daviess County's New Library Opens Its Doors To Public", Messenger & Inquirer (1 Dec 1968), 1D.

⁷³ Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Book 1966 (11 May 1966).

control of the library on 1 January 1996 the name officially became the Daviess County Public Library.⁷⁴

In September 1967 the Library Board requested that the DAR chapter transfer ownership of their books to the library. The Gen. Evan Shelby DAR Chapter approved a resolution on 6 October 1967 “that the Mary H. Dean Genealogical Library books, the property of Gen. Evan Shelby Chapter, be housed in and incorporated with the Kentucky Room of the new Library, the Library assuming full responsibility for the care and cataloging of the books.”⁷⁵ The library does not have an inventory of the DAR books that became the property of the Kentucky Room. It possibly was in the vicinity of 500 volumes based on earlier book totals given for the DAR library and interviews of older DAR members.⁷⁶ The DAR labels and inscriptions still can be seen on the inside covers of many of the older books in the Kentucky Room today. Among these are the 166 volumes of the Lineage Books series of the National Society of the DAR.

After the commitment of federal, state and local funds for the construction of a new library, head librarian, Mrs. Lewis, outlined some plans for the expanded service in an article in the Owensboro Messenger & Inquirer on 26 September 1966. Among a dozen items that she highlighted were the following: “Enlarging the Kentucky collection (books about the Commonwealth) and enlarging the genealogy collection for persons interested in tracing their ancestry.”⁷⁷ A March 1968 article in the Madisonville, KY newspaper described some of the genealogical holdings at the Owensboro library and stated “they are constantly adding to the genealogical section”. The Kentucky Room was described as having many Kentucky histories and biographies, city (phone) directories from all over the US, and two microfilm readers for the many reels of microfilm they now have. Among their microfilm are all the population censuses of Kentucky from 1810 to 1880; vital statistics for Kentucky for the years 1852-1862, 1894 & 1904; and early tax lists for Daviess and the surrounding counties.⁷⁸

The Kentucky Room in the new library was located on the first floor behind the Reference department at the southeast corner of the building. An article about the grand opening of the new library reported “A set of impressive paneled wood doors lead from the rear of the main area into the dignified ‘Kentucky Room’. Available here are special materials dealing with Kentucky history and the Kentucky chapter of the DAR.”⁷⁹ The room did not have its own attendant and help had to be secured from a staff member in the Reference Room. It was expected that one request to use the room and sign the register. Only adults over the age of eighteen could use the room. The Kentucky Room

⁷⁴ “A Resolution to Amend the Articles of Incorporation of the Owensboro Daviess County Public Library Foundation, Inc.”, Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Book 1995 (21 Dec 1995).

⁷⁵ Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Book 1967 (Sep 1967); General Evan Shelby Chapter, DAR Minute Books 1959-1968 (6 Oct 1967) & 1968-1971 (4 Oct 1968).

⁷⁶ “D.A.R. Library Has 1,066 Books”, Owensboro Messenger (8 Mar 1947), 10; Interview of Mary Gray Ralph, 30 June 2000; Interview of Rachel C. Taylor, 23 Sep 2002.

⁷⁷ “Librarian Unveils Plans For Expanded Service”, Messenger & Inquirer (26 Sep 1966), 1B.

⁷⁸ Marian Hammers, “Daviess Genealogical Library One Of Finest”, Madisonville Messenger (Madisonville, KY, 5 Mar 1968).

⁷⁹ “New Owensboro Library Grand Opening Celebrated”, Messenger & Inquirer (2 Dec 1968), 1A.



Carnegie Free Public Library, 903 Frederica Street, Owensboro



Daviess County Public Library, 450 Griffith Avenue, Owensboro

did not have a separate card catalogue at this time and had to be searched by using the library's main catalogue. A diagram of the floor plan and a selected inventory of the Kentucky Room by Ron Logsdon were presented at the June 1974 meeting of the West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association in the Kentucky Room. The diagram shows that the room had 16 sections of book shelves around the back and two side walls, three microfilm readers on the front wall opposite the entrance, in the center of the room were two large library tables and between them were three file cabinets of reference vertical files, two microfilm cabinets, a map-atlas cabinet, and a cart for books to be reshelved; the room had a total of 16 chairs.⁸⁰

Since September 1971 the Kentucky Room has been the repository for the books purchased by the local genealogy society, the West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association (WCK:FRA).⁸¹ In the library board minutes of 21 July 1971 it was noted that a research and genealogy group had asked permission to place their collection in the library. It was agreed that the group would place their books in the Kentucky Room on an indefinite loan and with the stipulation that they could be withdrawn with a 30-day notice.⁸² Their books are catalogued by the library and contain a label of ownership by West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association. By the end of November 1971 WCK:FRA's first installment of thirteen books had been delivered to the library and by April 1973 a total of one hundred eighty volumes, not including periodicals, had been placed in the Kentucky Room.⁸³

For the period between July 1976 and April 1978 the placement of books in the library by WCK:FRA was temporarily halted until new guidelines and policy were worked out between the group and the library board. The interruption had been initiated by the library board's request that the group give up ownership of all books placed in the library and their proposal of a new guidelines policy that placed restrictions on what could be accepted. Several on the library board believed a private collection should not be maintained in a public library.⁸⁴ A compromise was worked out and it was agreed that the books placed in the library by WCK:FRA were like before on indefinite loan and could be removed with a 30 days written notice, but the library could reject any materials that did not fall within their new guidelines policy.⁸⁵ Margaret Alford, one of the four founding members of West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association, has served the group since its inception as librarian, acquisition chairman and editor of their publication The Bulletin. In 1985 Mrs. Alford reported that the group had donated about \$30,000 in books to the Kentucky Room.⁸⁶ A recent count of WCK:FRA books in the collection showed a total of 1,712. In addition to this they also have 495 hardbound and

⁸⁰ Ron Logsdon, "Materials in the Kentucky Room of the Owensboro Library", The Bulletin, Vol. 6 (Owensboro, KY: West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association, Fall 1974), 28-32.

⁸¹ "Library Depository For Our Books And Papers", The Bulletin, Vol. 5 (Jan-Feb 1972), 2.

⁸² Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Book 1971 (21 Jul 1971 & 11 Aug 1971).

⁸³ "Library Depository For Our Books And Papers", The Bulletin; "Book Acquisitions", WCK:FRA Workshop pamphlet (26 May 1973), 13-23.

⁸⁴ Interview of Alice Gene Lewis, 18 Feb 2004.

⁸⁵ "Kentucky Room Guidelines and Policy Established", The Bulletin, Vol. 11 (Summer 1978), 19.

⁸⁶ "Branching Out Into Genealogy: Expert says detective work can bring the past to life", Messenger & Inquirer (7 Apr 1985), 1E.

51 loose bound volumes of periodicals.⁸⁷ The total cost of these materials would be in excess of \$50,000.

Thomas W. Westerfield, a 14-year employee of the Library, was made departmental head of the Kentucky Room on 19 February 1975 and immediately commenced working there. Previously there had been no director or regular attendant for the department. He was supervisor of the library's Audio Visual department from 1960 until being transferred to the Kentucky Room.⁸⁸ He had formerly worked as a driver for the Owensboro Fire Department for nineteen years. During the years of 1960-1972 he alternated between the two jobs, working two days at the library and then was on duty at the fire department for the next two days.⁸⁹ When he first started working at the library he was one of only six employees. Former library director, Evelyn Triplett, said that the 60's were a turbulent period for the Library. Things were very unsettled because of many changes and a rapid succession of directors. During this period, she said, "Mr. Westerfield was the glue that helped to keep things together."

In the years previous to him being officially appointed in charge of the Kentucky Room T. W. Westerfield had assisted in improving the collection there and periodically had helped patrons using the room. In an autobiography he noted "I worked as director of Audio-Visual Service and head of the Local History and Genealogical sections of the Carnegie Free Public Library, Owensboro, KY since Sept. 1960 on my days off from the Fire Dept."⁹⁰ His role in the Kentucky Room prior to 1975 was informal and on an as needed basis. During a special family night at the Library during National Library Week in April 1962 he was in charge of a history & genealogy display related to Owensboro and the vicinity.⁹¹ A 1967 newspaper article chronicled his research documenting that characters in "Uncle Tom's Cabin" had been residents of Daviess County.⁹² He was a member of the Daviess County Historical Society and a life member of the Kentucky Historical Society. He was an avid genealogist and was the founder of the West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association. He had conceived the idea for the organization and named its two publications, The Bulletin and The Kentucky Family Records. In a

⁸⁷ Jerry Long, October 1-19, 2002, counted labels of the West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association inside the front covers of all books in the Kentucky Room. Each volume of a series was counted separately. The 546 bound books of periodicals consist of 968 yearly volumes of periodicals from eight states (Kentucky, Tennessee, Illinois, Virginia, Missouri, Indiana, Maryland & North Carolina) and several national publications.

⁸⁸ Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Books 1951-1962 (13 Oct 1960) & 1975 (19 Feb 1975); Obituary of Thomas (T. W.) Westerfield, Messenger-Inquirer (9 Apr 1980), 2C; Interview of Evelyn N. Triplett, 30 Jun 2000 & 7 Oct 2002.

⁸⁹ George M. Gordon, List of Personnel of the Owensboro Fire Department (unpublished manuscript in Owensboro Fire Department vertical file, Kentucky Room, Daviess County Public Library, Owensboro, KY, 11 May 2001), Thomas W. Westerfield, driver, was hired on 3 Sep 1952 & resigned on 1 Aug 1972; Interview of Alice Gene Lewis, 27 May 2000 & 20 Sep 2002.

⁹⁰ Jerry Long, Papers of Thomas W. Westerfield (1926-1980) (Owensboro, KY: Daviess County Public Library, 1990), 95.

⁹¹ "Library Corner", Messenger & Inquirer (1 Apr 1962), 10C; "National Library Week Being Observed Here", Messenger & Inquirer (8 Apr 1962), 1B.

⁹² "Little Eva, In Stowe's 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' Could Have Been Another Daviess Countian", Messenger-Inquirer (12 Nov 1967), 1C; "Daviess County May Polish the Uncle Tom Image", Courier-Journal" (29 Mar 1968).



Mary Hale Dean
(1857-1955)



Emma Dunn Mastin
(1889-1973)



Margaret Alford
(1930-2008)



Thomas W. Westerfield
(1926-1980)

memorial to him by WCK:FRA it was stated “In his work at the library he observed persons working on the same families who did not know each other, and he envisioned an organization to bring them together to share data and to help each other.” The group was organized at a meeting at his home with three other founding members in May 1968.⁹³

On 10 January 1969 Thomas W. Westerfield, president of WCK:FRA, was the speaker at a meeting of the DAR chapter at the Owensboro Public Library. At this meeting he outlined the purposes of this new organization as: To encourage and to further genealogical research; to collect and to preserve family genealogical records of Western Kentucky; and to encourage public officials to make genealogical records available to persons who wish to do research.⁹⁴ In 1969 he published the first of five volumes of Kentucky Genealogy and Biography. This series was a reprint of the biographical sections of Kentucky: A History of the State, originally published by Battle, Perrin & Kniffin in 1885-6. This made available information from this scarce and previously unindexed cornerstone of Kentucky genealogy.⁹⁵

T. W. Westerfield, of the Kentucky Room, was interviewed in April 1975 for an article that was published in the Evansville, IN newspaper, Courier & Press. He stated “In its Kentucky Room, the Owensboro library has what is probably the area’s premier collection of genealogical materials and local history.” In the article he listed some of the materials found there and ended by saying

The library’s more than 4,000 volumes of material now occupying the Kentucky Room have outgrown their space and will occupy an area of about 2,000 square feet on the lower level when construction is completed in late summer. This mass of material has been accumulated through purchases by the library and contributions and loans by the Daughters of the American Revolution and the West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association.⁹⁶

On 14 August 1974 the Library Board passed a motion that a part of the basement would be used for future expansion of the Kentucky Room.⁹⁷ Three months later T. W. Westerfield addressed the Board about the need for expanding the Kentucky Room and discussed his vision for the room.⁹⁸ The Kentucky Room was opened in the basement of the library on 13 February 1976. One hundred people attended the dedication ceremony at which US Senator Wendell H. Ford spoke. During his term as Kentucky Governor, Ford, in 1974 had approved \$35,000 from his contingency fund for the project. The new room (about 2000-sq. ft.) was 2½ times the size of the former room on the first floor

⁹³ Obituary of Thomas (T. W.) Westerfield; “In Memory of Thomas (T. W.) Westerfield, 23 October 1929 – 7 April 1980” [note – his birth year as given here was in error it should be 1926], The Bulletin, Vol. 13 (Summer 1980), 19 (three other co-founders of WCK:FRA were Michael J. Edgeworth, Elizabeth S. Cox & Margaret S. Alford).

⁹⁴ General Evan Shelby Chapter D.A.R Minute Book 1968-1971 (10 Jan 1969).

⁹⁵ “In Memory of Thomas (T. W.) Westerfield, 23 October 1929 – 7 April 1980”.

⁹⁶ “Libraries growing source in genealogy research”, Courier & Press (Evansville, IN: 13 Apr 1975).

⁹⁷ Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Book 1974 (14 Aug 1974).

⁹⁸ Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Book 1974 (20 Nov 1974).

(800-sq. ft.) and over 10 times the size of the Kentucky Room at the old library.⁹⁹ T. W. Westerfield, the director of the Kentucky Room, in a newspaper article on the day of the opening was quoted as saying that the room contains the largest reference works on Kentucky history to be found in a public library outside of Louisville. “The ancestor of the spacious modern room”, he said, “was the Daughters of the American Revolution Room” at the old Carnegie Library at 9th and Frederica streets. “By 1960, it had expanded somewhat to become the Kentucky and Genealogical Collection.” He added that: “The West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association has \$10,000 worth of books on indefinite loan to the room”. A card catalogue of its own was created for the new room. With the opening two new assistants, Debbie Mesplay and Karen Potter, had been added to assist Westerfield.¹⁰⁰ Ms. Mesplay, an assistant in the Kentucky Room for 10 months, was appointed the director of the Daviess County Public Library in 1996.¹⁰¹

On 3 May 1978 T. W. Westerfield retired from his position in the Kentucky Room. Karen Potter, an assistant, succeeded him. She left in 1981 to become the director of the Nelson County Public Library in Bardstown, KY. Shelia Heflin, who has a Masters in history, started working in the Kentucky Room as an assistant in 1978 and in 1981 was appointed its director.¹⁰² The current staff of three fulltime employees has a combined work experience of 70 years. Bettie Spratt started in 1979 and Jerry Long, a professional genealogist and author of several genealogical works, started in 1989.

Additions in recent years that have helped add to the uniqueness of the Kentucky Room collection include:

- Several art and museum items, including grandfather clock made by local craftsman Anthony A. Averitt, miniature of Owensboro City Railway car built by Bill Mattingly & Jim Eaton in 1988, portrait of Gov. Wendell H. Ford, paintings of old Carnegie Public Library & other local landmarks, and other art work by local artists.
- Extensive vertical files on Owensboro & Kentucky subjects and family surname files.
- Kentucky Register of Births and Deaths (1911-1969), a 130-volume set was added in 1992 after efforts to save the books from destruction by the Kentucky Bureau of Vital Statistics was originated by Kentucky Room staff member, Jerry Long.¹⁰³
- Microfilms of many major categories of records found at the Daviess, McLean and Ohio County Courthouses.

⁹⁹ Blueprint of Kentucky Room in the basement shows dimensions as 51 feet 10 inches x 37 feet 10 inches minus a 12 x 14 workroom.

¹⁰⁰ “Gov. Ford delivers gifts to Owensboro”, Messenger & Inquirer (25 Dec 1974), 1A; “Kentucky Room to open”, Messenger & Inquirer (13 Feb 1976), 4B; “Day for dedication... Library expands Kentucky room”, Messenger & Inquirer (14 Feb 1976), 1B; “Kentucky Room Expansion Planned”, The Bulletin, Vol. 8 (Spring 1975), 3; “New Kentucky Room Construction Progressing At Owensboro-Daviess Co Library”, The Bulletin, Vol. 8 (Summer 1975), 14; “Library Expands Kentucky Room – Day For Dedication”, The Bulletin, Vol. 9 (Summer 1976), 32.

¹⁰¹ “Mesplay chosen to replace Lewis”, Messenger-Inquirer (5 Jan 1996), 1C; E-mail from Debbie Mesplay, 26 Jan 2006.

¹⁰² Daviess County Public Library Board of Directors Minute Books 1978 (17 May 1978) & 1981 (17 Jun 1981).

¹⁰³ “Kentucky Register of Births & Deaths”, The Bulletin, Vol. 24 (Summer 1991), 23-32; “Two Valuable Additions to the Kentucky Room”, The Bulletin, Vol. 25 (Summer 1992), 13-14.

- Microfilms of all available Federal Census records for Kentucky and many pre-1892 tax lists for 77 Kentucky counties.
- Military records, including Civil War (Union & Confederate microfilms from Kentucky State Archives), World War I (Owensboro draft board records & 1917-18 draft registration cards for local counties) & WPA's inventory of local veteran's graves.
- Microfilms of Kentucky death certificates, beginning in 1911 and that are 50 years old.
- The Kentucky Room has compiled volumes of local history and genealogy. These include books on Owensboro Mayors, Daviess County & Circuit Judges, Presidential & VIP visits to Owensboro, and a continuing series under the title of "Papers of..." that organize and preserve papers of local genealogists.
- Microfilms of 150 years of all known Owensboro newspapers and some years for newspapers at Beaver Dam, Calhoun, Hartford & Hawesville.
- Owensboro Obituary Index went online on 27 Jan 2006 (at <http://obits.dcpplibrary.org/>). It currently includes the years of 1890 to 1919 and 1980 to the present. Indexes of the obituaries for 1920-1979 are also available in book form and in the future will be added to the online database. This project was begun by the Kentucky Room in early 1977 and now includes approximately 177,000 individuals. The pre-1920 database compiled by Jerry Long is an abstract of all vital data found in the original article(s) and because of standardization in form numerous keyword searches in addition to name search or available. In the future abstracts of other early Owensboro newspapers will be added to the database.

Today the Kentucky Room continues to expand its collection and services. Since its beginnings as one small bookcase in a closet of the old Owensboro Library in 1915 the growth of the collection that is now the Kentucky Room has been phenomenal. Hopefully that will also be true of its future.



Kentucky Room staff – Jerry Long on left, Shelia Heflin in center, and Bettie Spratt on right, with Anna & Maria, two visiting librarians from the Czech Republic. Taken in the Kentucky Room in May 2000.