

Blue Volkswagen & Knott



“Tall, thin
young”
William A.
Knott, county
librarian,
in 1977

Stability arrived with Knott, and that allowed steady progress for the library system, rather than the short highs and long lows of the past. Knott celebrated 30 years as the Jefferson County librarian in 2001. For the celebration, Kay Pride, library director of public information, and Terri Bailey, extension services manager, wrote of his arrival:

Thirty years ago, a tall, thin young man came riding into Jefferson County from Hutchinson, Kan., in a dusty blue Volkswagen...

In 1971, Knott began his tenure as CEO with 11 small libraries, of which six were one-room locations, and a bookmobile. The largest was the Villa Library with just 11,000 square feet. Serving a population of 235,000, Knott had a staff of 70 and 207,517 items to offer library users.



Timeline continued

1968

- Villa Library construction begins—the first library building owned by Jefferson County Public Library.

Today (in 2001) the Jefferson County Public Library has seven full-service libraries, four extension libraries, a bookmobile and an impressive Online Library. The countywide library serves a population of more than 560,000 with a staff of 190 and more than 1 million items—not only books, but also audio and video tapes, CDs and DVDs. The more than 300,000 people who have Jefferson County Public Library cards are checking out these items about 3.3 million times a year.

Former state legislator and Library Board member Laura Miller was part of the board that chose Knott. In 2001, armed with hindsight, she said:

When the Library Board was hiring a new library director to replace Hank Fontaine, we interviewed a bunch of big-shot urban librarians because that's what we thought we wanted. But this young guy from Kansas was the only one who showed any vision about how this library should move forward. He sure made a believer of me, and I am so proud of our library today!



Laura Miller, former state legislator and Library Board chairwoman

Knott—a family man and collector of books who enjoys gardening, wine, gourmet cooking and bicycling—guided the library system from its newly righted footing in 1971 through to online services in the 21st century. It was not without obstacles. The 1980s were particularly challenging, remembered as being “when the libraries went dark.”