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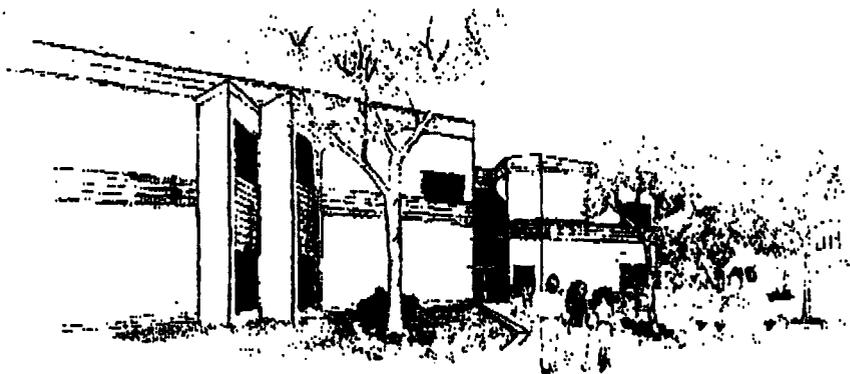
Edward F. McGinn

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**TESTIMONY OF HOWARD F. MCGINN
DIRECTOR, EMPORIA (KANSAS) PUBLIC LIBRARY
SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, ARTS, AND HUMANITIES.
APRIL 19, 1994.**

My name is Howard McGinn. I am the Director of the Emporia Kansas Public Library. My testimony this morning will be based on my experience as a public librarian, former State Librarian of North Carolina, and as a visiting professor in several Schools of Library & Information Management. My testimony will also be based on 15 years experience in the corporate sector as a sales manager for the J.B. Lippincott Publishing Company and as Managing Editor and General Manager of a New York Times Company subsidiary.

The Emporia Public Library is the oldest library in continuous operation in the State of Kansas. It was founded 125 years ago by a man named Preston Plumb and a group of businessmen in Emporia. It was founded as a tool for economic development. The logic was simple. Emporia, in 1869, needed to lure people travelling on the nearby Santa Fe Trail. Preston Plumb knew that a town with a library was civilized; a town with a library founded by the business community would use the library's information to support businesses and provide jobs. And Mr. Plumb's effort succeeded. Emporia grew and prospered. Mr. Plumb also prospered. At the time he founded the library he was serving as the Speaker of the Kansas House of Representatives. He would soon leave Topeka to serve as a member of this great institution. Preston Plumb served three terms as a United States Senator and died while in office in 1891.

125 years after its founding, the Emporia Public Library continues to serve the information needs of the city and the surrounding seven county area, and the needs are substantial. In the past few weeks, for example, city and county governments have had to confront these information intensive topics: water quality, water supply, waste treatment, toxic waste disposal, cable television licenses, compliance with the Americans for Disabilities Act, expansion by major industries, public school funding, crime control, and a wide variety of zoning issues.

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Emporia Public Library

McGinn. Page 2.

In the past week the public library has provided information to an investment group about opportunities in Puerto Rico, tracked state legislative action through an online database, helped 26 people find employment opportunities through a national job database, helped a plant manager find an executive search firm in Chicago to fill an opening in her company, helped a sixth grade student learn "everything he needed to know about dinosaurs", enabled a woman who had recently undergone surgery for breast cancer obtain information about chemotherapy, assisted local governments with their information needs, and answered several hundred other questions.

This is the information of real life. This is information needed to make life decisions. This is not ethereal data flowing from one supercomputer to another, from one research center to another. This is the type of information provided by public libraries in communities of every size across the United States. But many think that the provision of this information is not important. It is too simple; it serves no research purpose. They think it has no place in the national information infrastructure.

Senator, I suggest the opposite is true. Public libraries and the information they provide must be the driving force behind the development of the information infrastructure. If the investment of public tax dollars in these information assets are to produce a long term profit, the investment must be made in the public libraries. Only public libraries provide the information to local companies and citizens that helps produce the tax dollars to invest, that produces a quality of life that lures industry and soothes the spirit, that gives communities new economic hope and a chance to be a player in this global economy.

In a recent report in NEWSWEEK MAGAZINE, the President of the Japanese corporation NEC was asked how the United States had been able to regain the lead over Japan in broad areas of technology. The Japanese executive's response was very direct. "I keep asking our government to speed up the creation of an Information Highway, like America is doing, but they aren't paying attention." 1.

I am pleased that this committee has given me and others the opportunity to speak. You are paying attention. Many others are not. We must gain their attention. I suggest the following steps be taken to bring attention to the imperative of placing public libraries at the forefront of the development of the national information infrastructure.

First - include public librarians in all information policy discussions. Public libraries represent the information needs of the people of the United States.

McGinn. Page 3.

Secondly - through legislative and regulatory action make it possible for the people to receive information through their local public libraries. Lift the burden of exorbitant telecommunications costs that exclude so many from the information networks. Make the information generated by the federal government, and paid for by the people, available to the people at no cost.

Thirdly - provide scholarships and other financial assistance for the education of librarians. Massive amounts of information delivered to a town without a library or a trained librarian is useless. We had the will to face educational needs at the dawn of the space age. We must show that same will to face the educational needs at the dawn of the information age.

Finally - help stop the death of public libraries in many parts of the country. If we cannot find the financial resources to preserve public libraries, how will we ever find the methods necessary to inject the raw material of information into the personal and economic lives of our communities.

Senator Simon, I know you often use the analogy of the wagon wheel to describe the role the public library plays in its community. I think the wagon wheel is an excellent symbol because the wagon wheel has been a symbol of the hopes of Americans for over two hundred years. And that symbol lives. Last week I experienced a convergence of all of the symbols we use to describe the national information infrastructure. Just north of Emporia is the Santa Fe Trail. The ruts in the trail caused by the wagon wheels are still visible. I was driving on a rural road that parallels the Santa Fe Trail. The road wound through the Flint Hills prairie lands of Eastern Kansas. There was a bridge ahead of me. The bridge crossed the Interstate Highway that runs from Wichita to Topeka. I crossed the bridge and travelled farther into the gently rolling hills of the prairie. As I reached the peak of a hill, just having passed over the Interstate, and riding next to the wheel-rutted Santa Fe trail, in the middle of the prairie, I passed a cellular telephone tower.

The Santa Fe Trail and the Interstate Highway system helped change the United States because they became the property of the common person. No one was excluded. I urge this committee to assure that no one is excluded from the electronic information symbolized by that prairie cellular telephone tower. You almost have no choice. If electronic information is to be brought to all of the people all of the time there is only one avenue - the public library. Senator Preston Plumb realized this in 1869 when he started the Emporia Public Library; I urge the Senate in 1994 to follow his example.

McGinn. Page 4.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I'll be glad to answer any questions you might have.

1. Powell, Bill. "Losing Their Lead", NEWSWEEK, December 13, 1993, p. 51.