The Information Community of Public Libraries

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Abstract

Public libraries are the hub of the community and this research paper looks into public libraries

and the ways they connect people to the information they want and need. Public libraries are not

a place to just check out books, get an Internet fix, read the newspaper or catch up on the local

gossip. Public libraries often serve as education centers with programs on growing berries,

mushroom identification, and local history or provide space for a chair yoga class. They connect

people with the information they need whether it is help for their e-readers, job information,

information on the latest best sellers, etc. Public libraries also work together to how they can

better help their patrons get the information they need. This paper highlights how the Nicolet

Federated Library System and the Outagamie Waupaca Library Systems, as part of the wider

community of public libraries work together to get people connected to the information they

need.

Introduction

"Alexandria was built on a dream, a dream that all knowledge can be stored in one place, and that the caretakers of that knowledge would have extraordinary power..." (Pollard, 2010) is how host Bettany Hughes introduced the city of Alexandria in her TV series *Bettany Hughes' The Ancient World.* Bettany explores the ancient city and the famous library where all the knowledge of the known world was organized and stored. When the first civilizations invented writing, people have felt the need to organize those writings in an easy to use and logical way. As time passed, libraries developed as a way to store, preserve, and share information with the community around them.

Public libraries are important because of the ways they connect their patrons to the information they need. They are often are the first line of tech support for someone who is trying to restore a Facebook account or downloading a book from Overdrive onto their iPad. If a passing tourist needs directions, they stop at the local library. Public libraries often partner with local historical or genealogical societies to build up local collections, provide local history research rooms, update cemetery search databases, or digitize local newspapers. When a university extension program or technical school class is ended, libraries step in to provide meeting room space in order to continue the learning process.

Public libraries come in different shapes and sizes. They can be built in former Wal-Mart's, in municipal buildings, or former storefronts. Libraries can also be mobile, whether on the back of a donkey or carried in a van. Libraries can be as big or as small as one wants and are limited by vision, imagination, and budget. They can be located in large cities or small towns in the middle of nowhere. No matter what size or where they are located, public library's function remains the same: to get people connected to the information they need.

Each library, no matter how small or large is piece of a puzzle: a puzzle that is a picture of the public library information community. The libraries that make up Nicolet Federated Library System and Outagamie-Waupaca Library Systems are each a piece of the puzzle. Those libraries come in different shapes and sizes. They range from the mobile library station at the Luxembourg Bank in Luxembourg, Wisconsin to Shawano County Library's bookmobile to the library in a former bowling alley in Coleman, Wisconsin to the bigger in Oconto and Appleton, Wisconsin. In order to provide the best service possible, the big wigs at Nicolet Federated and Outagamie-Waupaca Library Systems often turn to a variety of different sources in order to be well informed in order to determine what would work for both systems.

Literature Review

There are many sources out there discussing public libraries, their future, and how they are adapting to changing landscapes. Everyone has an opinion on public libraries from scholars to librarians to grad students to the patrons they serve. There have been countless of studies done on public libraries, such as the study Xizoai Ren from the University at Albany and her study on New York Public Libraries in her article "New York Public Library Systems and Their Public Services" or the investigation Otis D. Alexander did on funding for public libraries in his study "Free Public Libraries Charging for Survival." There have also been countless of articles and blogs coming from librarians about what they are doing in their libraries, such as Katherine Pennavaria in her "Genealogy Gems: Obituary" column for *Kentucky Libraries.* They are taking what scholars and theorist study and dream about and try to make real life applications.

It is not just individuals performing and writing conclusions about their studies, it is also organizations, government or private, such as the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the

Rural Library Project, and the Association of Rural and Small Libraries (2014) "a network of persons throughout the country dedicated to positive growth and development of libraries." Each state also has a library association that tirelessly advocates on behalf of their state's public libraries. There are also "Friends of the Library" groups that work with their local libraries to help with fundraisers in order buy new technology or help pay for programs.

Another area where information can be found on public libraries is in the area of laws and statutes that are issued by individual states or by the Federal government. In Wisconsin, Statute 43 is the one stop statute dealing with public libraries, their roles, funding and policy. In New York, statutes dealing with libraries overlap with many areas of law such as funding, education, municipalities, civil rights, etc. Wyoming's library laws are under Statue 18. Nebraska's library laws are under Statute 53. It is fascinating to see how individual states' deal with libraries and give a glance at how states treat libraries. The state can make it as easy as it can or as difficult as it can for libraries to get patrons connected to the information they want.

Unfortunately, there have not been many studies done on rural and/or small libraries. This is a surprising gap because it seems like the majority of libraries in the United States are rural and/or small libraries. Perhaps the reason for lack of studies done on rural library is the fact that the definition of "rural" is can be in the eye of the beholder. What is rural for one person can be completely different for another person. Louise Greene, a member of the Association of Rural and Small Libraries commented on the Association of Rural and Small Libraries blog that one of her students suggested a city with a population of over 100,000, a few hours away from an interstate is rural (ASRL, 2014). Rural for others mean a community in the middle of nowhere with one road in where everyone knows everyone. The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) has three different ways to define rural as fringe, distant and remote. The IMLS

defines fringe rural as "a Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to five miles

from an urbanized area... (Swan, September 2013). Distant rural is defined as "a Census-defined

rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized

area... (Swan, September 2013)." Finally, remote rural as "a Census-defined rural territory that is

more than 25 miles from an urbanized area... (Swan, September 2013)." That said, it is really

unfortunate that rural and/or small libraries have not been studied because they are the focal

point in the communities they serve in the quest to connect people with information.

Methodology

As I started researching this paper, I cast a wide net in my search efforts and used the

King Library Databases to search for information on public libraries in general. I knew that I

wanted to write something involving the library systems I am a part of: Nicolet Federated

Library System (NFLS) and Outagamie-Waupaca Library System (OWLS) and how they work

together to connect people with the information they need. So I started reviewing the Nicolet

Federated Library System and the Outagamie-Waupaca Library System websites, especially the

Outagamie-Waupaca Library System for advisory meeting minutes and other information about

the libraries that make up both library systems. After I did that, I searched for what NFLS and

OWLS was doing in comparison to other libraries.

As I pressed forward with my investigation into public libraries I kept mind Karen E.

Fisher and Joan C. Durrance's (2003) definition of information communities as:

"formal an information partnerships of individuals and/or institutions-they are united by a

common interest in creating and increasing access to a set of dynamic, linked, and

varying information resources. By cultivating interest around the creation, provision, and

exchange of distributed information…"

By keeping this definition in the back of my mind, if I got off track in my research I was

able to come back and focus on how public libraries connect their patrons to the information they

need and how that cycle can be interrupted or stopped. As I researched I jotted down what I

could potentially write about, and ideas ranged from writing about rural public libraries,

technological issues in libraries, billing disputes, to how Amazon is affecting libraries. After I

jotted down my thoughts, I would jump on Google for more information. Other times I would

go to the newspaper to jog my memory about a situation or glean more information.

Finally, some of my research is on the job observation, talking with other library

directors, going to other libraries, and observing how they operate, or gained from attending

OWLS advisory meetings in Appleton. After those meetings I would go back and look at the

minutes of those meetings to review what was discussed, especially if they had any links to items

that were discussed in the meetings. Some of the examples in this paper come from my

observation of what Oconto Falls Library has done or the projects I took part in since I started

working there.

Discussion

A Joint Library System

The Nicolet Federated Library System (NFLS) was first established to provide technical

support and training to the libraries in Oconto, Shawano, Brown, Marinette, Kewaunee, and

Door Counties and the Oneida and Menominee Reservations in Northeast Wisconsin.   In the late

1980's, the libraries in Brown County suddenly switched to an automated system so the patrons

in Oconto, Shawano, Marinette, Kewaunee, and Door could no longer use Brown County

Libraries unless they got a separate library card. This caused a rift between Brown County and

the rest of the Nicolet Federated Library System libraries. Discussing this with members of

NFLS one is left with a bad impression of the Brown County Library System.

       In the mid 1990's, the State of Wisconsin pushed the systems to start working together

and as a consequence the libraries in the Nicolet Federated Library System joined to form one

online catalog. This meant that libraries in the Nicolet Federated Library System had to become

automated in order to better serve their communities, so library members replaced their

laminated cards with hard plastic cards with barcodes. The plan was for Brown County Library

to serve as the resource library, providing an additional source for information for the other

libraries. At the last meeting before the relationship was formalized, Brown County Library

pulled out of the deal that would have allowed the patrons in Shawano, Door, Marinette, Oconto

and Kewaunee counties and the Oneida and Menominee Reservations to request books from

Brown County Libraries. The Brown County Library Director had concerns over their resources

not being available to their residents due to being sent to other counties. As a result of Brown

County Library pulling out it left NFLS without a resource library. Fortunately, the Outagamie-

Waupaca Library System (OWLS) stepped up and said that the Appleton Public Library would

be the resource library for both systems. It has turned out to be a good partnership between the

two systems, benefiting the residents of seven counties and two reservations by making a variety

of information resources available in helping get people connected to the information they want.

       Working together the way Nicolet Federated Library System (minus Brown County

Library) and Outagamie-Waupaca Library System do provides roughly a half a million people

access to a variety of sources in different service points throughout the counties that make up the

systems. The joint system created the "InfoSoup" OPAC with the tagline "when you're hungry

for answers (InfoSoup, 2014)." Utilizing InfoSoup and the Waltco van delivery system, a patron

from Marinette or Peshitgo Libraries can put a hold on a book in Appleton or Kimberly Libraries

and expect it to arrive to the Marinette Library in a couple of days. Another benefit of NFLS

and/or OWLS is that it provides a central location for training, technical support, cataloging, and

printing for items such as posters for the Summer Reading Program, library card applications,

InfoSoup bookmarks, and barcode labels. This allows libraries to focus on other areas such as

collection development and programs, without having to sacrifice space or budgets to work on

upgrading computer software, computers, train catalogers, or print barcode labels.

Libraries without the support of a system may find themselves having to pick and choose

areas where to spend their limited funds. Those library directors may choose to sacrifice in one

area of technology for another because in doing so they would be better able to serve their

communities in connecting patrons with the information they need. For example, the tiny public

library in What Cheer, Iowa despite having a Wi-Fi connection and three computers the

librarians still check books out the old fashioned way with stamp and due date slip and have the

physical card catalog. If members of What Cheer Public Library want eBooks, they may have to

drive thirty minutes to the next library to join a library that has eBooks available. The Oskaloosa

Public Library would be that library and outfitted with the latest in technology. What Cheer and

Oskaloosa are municipal supported libraries and do not have a system to support them. Does this

mean they fail in connecting their patrons with the information they need? No, it is just they feel

that by being independent they would better serve their patrons. In fact, both libraries push their

interlibrary loan program. So if one of their patrons cannot find a book in either library, they can

request it from another Iowa library and have it sent to that library.

The one thing that unites Oskaloosa Public Library, member libraries of NFLS and OWLS, and other libraries is the struggle to find its place in the world of eBooks. Instead of backing down from this challenge, many libraries have embraced them. Overdrive, a company that deals with digital content bridges the divide between libraries and the digital world. Iowans whose libraries, like the Oskaloosa Public Library, are members can access eBooks through WILBOR: Blue Ribbon Downloads (WILBOR, 2014) while NFLS and OWLS are part of the Wisconsin Public Library Consortium to provide access to eBooks. As a perk to being a member of a NFLS or OWLS library: as a joint library system they can purchase extra copies of books, thus shortening the wait list time for their patrons. Having this access enables the technologically inclined patron to be able to check out books. However, a NFLS or OWLS patron still has to search for eBooks and the InfoSoup catalog is behind the times.

Discovery Layers

Last summer, a discovery layer exploration committee was formed by the Outagamie-Waupaca Library System and the Nicolet Federated Library System in order to explore the viability of incorporating a discovery layer into the InfoSoup catalog. So what is a discovery layer? A discovery layer according to Marshall Breeding of Library Technology.org states a discovery layer "consists of an interface directed toward the users of a library to find materials in its collections and subsequently to gain access to items of interest through the appropriate mechanisms (Breeding, 2010)." A discovery layer in a library catalog is how a patron can narrow their search results after they perform a search. On the InfoSoup Catalog, a patron has to know what they are searching for and there is no way to narrow those results. This leaves both librarian and patron frustrated because they cannot easily find a book, DVD, or CD they want.

A second advantage to incorporating discovery layers into the catalog is the ability to search all online library collections. With discovery layers patrons will be able not only search for items on the catalog, but also other items that are part of the InfoSoup online collection. For example , if a patron wants to search for information about Scandinavia, Wisconsin books and online photos will be displayed on the results page. OWLS-NFLS has encouraged the libraries in the system to contribute to a memory project on InfoSoup. The InfoSoup Memory project contains photos, diaries, city directories and other local history items. So far the libraries in Oconto Falls, Algoma, Kaukauna, Kewaunee, Scandinavia, Appleton, Clintonville, Sturgeon Bay, Marinette County have contributed to the memory project. Each library that contributed to the InfoSoup Memory Project took the time to scan the items themselves and add them to the website. The InfoSoup Memory Project is a voluntary effort on the part of individual libraries and they decided what to contribute to the digitization project. However, this brings up a whole host of issues like what to post online and what falls under copyright.

Wright R. Adams highlights those issues in his article "Archiving Digital Materials: An Overview of the Issues." There are issues of what to digitize, funding, software and copyright issues. Even though Adams works in the academic library sphere many public librarians find themselves with donated or lent old photos, school yearbooks, or church histories and wonder how to digitize these items and if they could share them with the general public. Bobby Glushko with *American Libraries Magazine* highlights another issue when it comes to digitization: a vague copyright law. Glushsko (2011) writes:

> "technology has vastly outpaced both the law and digital librarianship. Any library with
>
> a good scanner and some staff hours can make high-quality copies for online distribution

or provide patrons a place to comment on and discuss materials online. Many libraries

don't, though, because they are unsure whether they can legally do so."

Glushko recommends that librarians should know the basics of copyright law such as fair

use, where libraries falls under copyright law and the library's responsibilities under copyright

and carefully plan any project that involves digitizing. When it comes to patrons donating family

photographs, a librarian can draw up a document for them to sign giving the library permission

to scan and use the photos for any project that comes up. Digitization, despite the issues that

surround it, is still a way that libraries can get people connected to information they need.

Information Flow Interrupted

Connecting their patrons to the information they want is the job of the library.

Unfortunately, that flow between patron and library can be interrupted. Information flow can be

interrupted by various means including construction, decisions on budgets, or terminating the

library all together. At the start of the paper the library on the Menominee Indian Reservation

was mentioned. The public library was in Keshena and it was a member of NFLS. However,

two years ago the public library shut down because tribal government felt the community would

be better served by moving the library's operations to the College of the Menominee Nation. The

public can still access the library, but can no longer easily get their items that they used to get.

Instead, the College of the Menominee Nation has to put the request through the WISCAT

interlibrary loan service to request items through InfoSoup Libraries. Though the public may

visit the Shawano City Library, in Shawano, or the Tigerton Public Library, in Tigerton , but

might find those locations inconvenient and would prefer to continue to use the college's library.

Another reason for the interrupted flow of information is when one county bills another county for library services.

Unfortunately, the flow of information can be interrupted when one county decides to bill another county for library services. This is happening currently in Northeast Wisconsin due to a statute in the section of Wisconsin law dealing with libraries. Wis. 43.12 reads

> "County payments for library services. (1) (a) By March 1 of each year, each of the following payments of not less than the minimum amount calculated under par. (b) shall be made: 1. Except as provided in subd. 2., by a county that does not maintain a consolidated public library for the county under s. 43.57 and that contains residents who are not residents of a municipality that maintains a public library (Libraries (1985))..."

In 2012, the counties of Outagamie, Oconto, Calumet, Manitowoc, and Kewaunee received bills from the Brown County Library System for non-residents using their libraries. Oconto County was billed about $126,000; which came down to $2.90 per item checked out. In 2006, the State of Wisconsin enacted a law that allowed consolidated or county run library systems to bill counties that do not have consolidated library systems to bill those counties that do not pay a "library tax" to support the library, even if the county does give a stipend to support municipal libraries. The county then forwarded the bill to the municipalities that do not support a library through a "library tax" and expected them to pay their equal share of the bill. The equal share of the bill was determined by property values. This means the towns in the northern part of Oconto County, where property is more expensive, had to pay the same as the towns along the border of Brown County, even though it was the residents of those border towns who were using the Brown County Libraries the most.

Oconto County paid the bill, as did Kewaunee, Calumet and Manitowoc Counties, but encouraged their residents to use their local libraries instead of Brown County libraries as a way to lower the bill for next year. This was done through either word of mouth or through mailers. Oconto Falls Library went the mailer route and sent to everyone in the county informing people of the bill and to use libraries in Oconto County. However, patrons who work in Brown County but live in the counties that were billed may not be able to find a convenient library in either of those counties. They have two choices: continue to use those libraries in Brown County or quit using the library all together, ending the cycle of connecting people with the information they want. In the meantime, while other counties paid in 2012, Outagamie County planned to take a different approach to the billing dispute.

Outagamie County fought back in what Northeast Wisconsin media dubbed as a "library war." They refused to pay the bill and planned to continue to do so as long as Brown County kept billing. Since Brown County residents with InfoSoup library cards check out more items out of Outagamie county libraries, blocks were put on all InfoSoup library cards belonging to Brown County residents. When Brown County patrons went to check out items they were refused. Stopping non-Outagamie County residents from using their libraries interrupted the flow of information to those who want it. Even though the director of Brown County Library encouraged the residents that work in Outagamie County but live in Brown County to use their libraries, those residents might not be able to find a convenient Brown County Library location and would still prefer to use the Appleton Public Library or the Kaukauna Public Library, or one of the other libraries in Outagamie County. The battle continued through summer, and then Outagamie County changed strategy.

By the end of summer Outagamie County allowed Brown County residents who held InfoSoup library cards to check items out, because of the Outagamie County argument of "we borrow more items to Brown County residents then Brown County residents borrow from us so we should not be billed," would not has been as effective in their fight against the library bill. In 2013, the Wisconsin Legislature tried to remedy the situation by attempting to pass a law that allowed nonconsolidated library systems to bill consolidated library systems. The resolution was eventually tabled for the time being. While the Wisconsin legislature tries to figure out a solution, Outagamie County and Brown County worked together to come up with its own: Outagamie County will pay 75% of the bills for 2011 and 2012 and will pay the full amount $31,977 billed in 2013 (Outagamie, 2014). Outagamie County will pay the bills in the future, "as long as the billing is accurate and consistent with State Statue 43.12(1) (Outagamie, 2014)."

Conclusion

Each public library is unique and serves a unique set of patrons. They each have a special place in the communities they serve. The libraries that make up the Nicolet Federated Library System and the Outagamie-Waupaca Library System, though united under those two banners serve their unique communities throughout out Northeast Wisconsin. From the open one day a week Goodman Library in Goodman, Wisconsin to the open seven days a week Appleton Public Library in Appleton, Wisconsin, the libraries that make up NFLS and OWLS range from the rural to the urban and everything in between.

With technology advancing at a breathtaking pace, libraries must adapt in order to prove their value to the community in order to survive. Through the Nicolet Federated Library System and Outagamie-Waupaca Library System the member libraries are better able to adapt to the

changes and prove that they make a valuable contribution to the communities they serve. The two systems were brought together by NFLS's need for a resource library and the wish by the State of Wisconsin to get the libraries to work together. Even though each system caters to different patrons, the need is the same: to connect people with the information.

Nicolet Federated and Outagamie-Waupaca Library Systems do this through the InfoSoup card catalog, allowing patrons who are members of the various libraries in the systems to place books on hold and be able to receive those items at their local libraries. NFLS and OWLS are also members of the Wisconsin Public Library Consortium, an eBook service giving patrons the option to request eBooks. The InfoSoup catalog was the height of technology and easy to use when it was first developed. However, with the development of discovery layers, the InfoSoup catalog looks like it was developed in the Stone Age. NFLS and OWLS plan to update the InfoSoup catalog with a discovery layer by next year. The incorporation of the discovery layer will help NFLS and OWLS help their patrons find the information they need whether it is a book from New London or digitized collections of local photographs, quickly and easily. Discovery layers are another tool libraries can use in getting people the information they want.

In the mean time, the flow of interruption can be interrupted by libraries closing due to lack of use or a government decision. It also can be interrupted by perceived library wars, when county library systems go after other counties for payment of library services. This causes patrons to review their habits. They may switch libraries, continue to use libraries, cut down on library use or quit using libraries completely. If patrons quit it means that libraries are not doing their jobs in connecting people with the information they want.

As time goes on, people questioning whether or not libraries will be needed in the future. There are plenty of questions and issues that enter people's mind:

- What is in store for the Nicolet Federated Library System and the Outagamie-Waupaca Library System?

- What changes are in store for libraries as technology continues to evolve? Will libraries be able to handle those changes?

- Will libraries choose to dump or shrink physical collections in order to have room for more room for computers? Will libraries have to expand WiFi capabilities?

- How will copyright law continue to impact libraries as they start digitizing local collections? Will copyright law catch up with the times?

- How will Brown County Library billing counties without consolidated library systems continue to impact each county? How will libraries prove their value to the communities they serve as long as Brown County continues to bill?

There is no one size fits all method in when it comes to libraries connecting patrons with the information they need. Each library is unique and is limited by who they serve and by uncertain budgets. This paper discusses how NFLS and OWLS work together in order to provide the best service with the tools that are available to their patrons. In the end, NFLS and OWLS take their place among other public libraries as places where people can find the information they need.

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