

It permeates Wayne and Oakland Counties like water mains and utility lines.

It changes so constantly that awards for inventiveness and technological improvements roll in with great regularity.

It's housed in a simple and functional building that probably wouldn't even be recognized by thousands in Observerland who use its services daily.

It's the Wayne County Federated Library system, celebrating its 50th anniversary in 1970.

THE SYSTEM, WHICH counts the communities of Livonia, Plymouth, Plymouth Township, Farmington Township, Redford Township, Garden City and Westland among the 52 it serves, is located at 33030 Van Born, Wayne.

The multi-service complex is geared to process some 150,000 books annually and keep records on many times that number. Yet it's so individualized that a request made in the smallest library in the system can be carried to the Library of Congress in Washington if that's necessary to get the answer.

Presiding over this empire of books and cards, film strips and copying machines is Walter H. Kaiser, a genial gentleman who never stops looking for better ways to perform any of the library system's many operations.

Right now two of System Director Kaiser's favorite phrases are "automated paper back" and "pre-packaged reference."

"We're working to get an IBM card for every paper back book in print," said Kaiser. "More and more of the books we buy for our member libraries are going to be this kind."

"There are two good reasons. One, of course, is economy. The other is that some books now are being printed only in this way."

"These, after all, are the books that have stood the test of time. And I have a hunch that in about 10 years a special order will be necessary to get a hard-cover book." Better adhesives used in book construction also increase the practicality of paper backs, he said.

"PRE-PACKAGED REFERENCE" refers to a new concept of printing and putting together packets of material relating to a single subject likely to be in great demand.

"For instance," said Kaiser, "we printed up four sheets of information on Michigan trees to distribute to school children who had to make reports."

"We printed 5,000 copies for \$50," he added. "It's a lot cheaper to print them and give them away than to have that many reference books available."

On a larger scale, and for circulation rather than give-away, are envelopes containing an assortment of material on timely subjects.

The first, dealing with drug abuse, contains a detailed booklet on drugs. "We begged it from Blue Shield," Kaiser said; a chart on the effects of marijuana, LSD, barbiturates, glue sniffing and pop pills; and reprints of several recent periodical articles on the subject.

Future grocery-store type pre-packagings, Kaiser added, will deal with the generation gap, gun control, student revolts, capital punishment.

"We can impart more information to more people for less money with this sort of system," the library head added.

He's not worried about students not digging for their own material.

"I don't think it's the function of a library to teach people how to use it," he said. "Anyone who can use the yellow pages learn to use the library's reference materials."

"Our job is to dispense information." To that end, his organization keeps a large battery of service persons busy.

ONE OF ITS NEWEST AIDS is a cooperative arrangement with the Michigan Department of Education enabling the Wayne County system to receive a copy of all bills and resolutions introduced into the Michigan Legislature. Anyone living in one of the 52 member communities can request and receive a free copy of any bill not exceeding 24 pages, Kaiser said.

Bibliographies of life-saving information needed by police and fire department officers also are being compiled, the librarian said. These provide in-service training for officers and should be especially useful to members of volunteer departments.

The library's day-to-day operation is actually a vast string of service to its members. It provides lists of new books available and keeps up a constant ordering, processing and delivery service.

It also has on hand a complete file with a card for every book put into each member library since it joined the federated system.

Thus a library user in Farmington, needing a particular book or reference, could be told exactly where it is available, perhaps in Livonia.

That system is extended by telephone. The library has its own "hot line" and keeps in daily touch with the state library in Lansing and the Detroit public library system. The line also is available for whatever further calls are needed to locate a particular reference.



GROCERY - STORE PACKAGING -- Pamphlets, charts, magazine articles are reprinted and pagged in a single envelope for anyone wanting an in-depth study of drug use.

"We're like a utility," Kaiser said. "When there's a failure in one part of the system, another can fill in."

THE BUILDING ON VAN BORN also has a section for storing some 3,500 films available to the public without charge, and a library for the blind and physically handicapped that provides Braille and large print books and tape recordings to nearly 3,000 in the area.

Outside its walls, the system continues to serve library needs. It provides for all member libraries with an annual circulation of 150,000 or more books a discharging system done by bank computer instead of manually. Detroit Bank & Trust was the successful bidder for that operation.

The computer system is a glamorous way to check out books and it takes away tedium," Kaiser said. "It's more expensive, though, and not all libraries use it."

Nearly all local libraries have, however, done away with library cards. Kaiser's only regret at their passing is that the children always have liked them. "We're going to have to work out some sort of recognition system," he said.

The federated system also is putting copying machines into all member libraries, both for ease in dispensing information and as a public service for non-library needs.

And a brand-new concept, backed by federal money, is being tried in some disadvantaged areas where children may not have parents at home to help with their school work.

"We're going to have student teachers in the library two hours a day, not for remedial or tutorial work but just to help the kids when they get stuck," Kaiser said.

THE WAYNE COUNTY LIBRARY system began as part of the Detroit Public Library in 1920 and stepped out on its own in 1943. By last year it was serving 96% of the communities in Wayne and Oakland counties--excluding Detroit--and expects to reach 100% by 1971. At this stage it also provides books for 11 school systems, including Plymouth and Garden City.

The \$2-million service center has been open since 1960.

While the system marks its golden anniversary, Kaiser is noting 25 years of service here. Beginning as a teacher in the Ozark Country, he studied at Southeastern Missouri State College, St. Louis Library School and the University of Chicago.

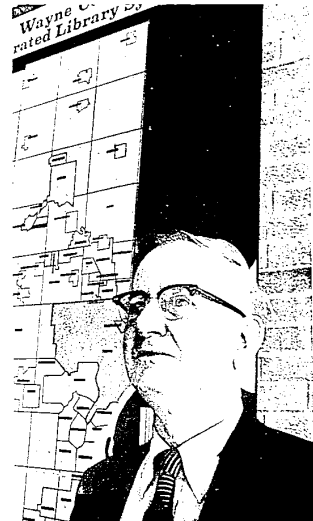
Kaiser has two married daughters, Mrs. Thomas Rose of Farmington and Mrs. Terry McTaggart of Philadelphia, and several grandchildren.

Kaiser and his system are holders of numerous awards.

The director was cited as the first Michigan "librarian of the year" in 1966, and the following year he was presented the Melvil Dewey Award by the American Library Association for "eminent achievements in behalf of libraries and librarians."

Synchronized conveyor book processing and the computerized charging system are among the innovations of the system to win special recognition.

The library system definitely is one 50-year-old not in danger of going old hat.



HIS DOMAIN -- Director Walter H. Kaiser and a map of the Wayne County Federated Library system he heads.

Story: Margaret Miller
Pictures: Harry Mauthe

Santa Arrives

at 11 a.m.
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 28
Livonia Mall (SEARS' COURT)

He will arrive in an old-fashioned car with Mother Goose and the Fiddler who will entertain the kiddies. Christmas Carol will pass out FREE candy canes.

- See Livonia Mall's Old-fashioned Christmas.
- The Munchkin People in their Village (Sears' Court).
- Enjoy Kiddie Rides and Cotton Candy.
- FREE Fish Pond where every kiddie wins a Prize (Crowley Court).
- It all starts Friday, November 28.

MALL OPEN SUNDAYS
Noon 'til 6 p.m.

Livonia Mall
open until 9:30
6 nights Monday
through Saturday

There's always
something going on at ...
LIVONIA MALL
3 MILE AT MIDDLEBELT



REELY BIG -- The collection of some 3,500 filmstrips available to the public is one major part of the library service. Clerk Dick Missig checks one of the reels.



PAPERBACK IS KING -- Hard cover books are giving way to the less-expensive, easily processed paperback. Roberto Battle helps sort and distribute them.