

Government Information at the University of Kansas

The year 1869 was a pivotal one for the University of Kansas Libraries. Francis Snow was elected faculty librarian that year and KU was designated a federal document repository, by Kansas Senator Edmund G. Ross. Senator Ross was immortalized in John F. Kennedy's 1956 book, *Profiles in Courage*, for his principled vote during Andrew Johnson's impeachment trial.

KU was founded in 1865 and government documents formed the "nucleus" of the early library, as described in the first course catalogs. John Nugent, in his epic work, the *History of University of Kansas Libraries*, wrote: "The duties of librarians, until 1873 were little more than... to be custodians of the public documents and private gifts." In 1873, the Legislature approved funds for the purchase of library materials for the first time.

Government documents were housed in Frasier Hall until Chancellor Snow championed the construction of Spooner Library, which opened in 1894. Government documents remained in Spooner until they were moved to Watson Library in 1924. Government resources can be found throughout the KU Libraries, but are housed primarily in Anschutz Library and in the Library Annex.

In 1895, Congress passed the Printing Act (Public Law 68-538), establishing the Federal Depository Library Program, before amending it with the Depository Library Act of 1962 (Public Law 87-579). In 1976, Kansas Senator, Robert J. Dole, designated KU to be the regional depository for the State of Kansas, charged with ensuring access to all government publications received from the Government Printing Office, in perpetuity.

By the end of the 20th century, KU government information librarians were answering over 6,000 reference questions related to government information annually and government document webpages recorded 80,000 visits in 1999. The Internet keeps evolving, and so does KU's collection. KU's tangible government documents now exceed 2 million items, in addition to a burgeoning collection of federal portals and links to digital publications and databases.

Neal R. Axton
Government Information Librarian
University of Kansas Libraries