

We are gathered here today, August 10, 2010, to celebrate the cornerstone centennial of this magnificent Carnegie Library. It was 100 years ago today at this very hour, that our founders cut the ribbon over the block carved "1910." Fourteen months later the building was completed and opened to the public.

The Oak Lane Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia was the twelfth public library erected in Philadelphia with proceeds from the "Carnegie Fund." Beginning in 1903, Andrew Carnegie, a multi-millionaire who made his fortune in the Pennsylvania steel industry announced a donation of \$1.5 million for the erection of thirty branch libraries, provided that the sites be donated and that the City of Philadelphia assume their maintenance cost of not less than \$150,000 a year.

Oak Lane was a rather new neighborhood at that time and was unique for having many families living on large lots with big detached homes. The community had built many churches but had no library. The women in the Ladies Review Club started the process by offering to rent a room in their club house on Lakeside Drive for a library. They then raised \$400 from the residents in Oak Lane to establish a small circulating branch library. This money was given to Dr. John Thompson, secretary to the Carnegie Fund, who, in turn, provided the residents of Oak Lane with a well-chosen stock of literature. The citizens then proceeded on a fund-raising campaign to purchase a lot of land for a library building. The groups involved in fundraising included the Ladies Review Club of Oak Lane, the Library Association, an organization created to accept the donations, The Young Ladies Auxiliary of the Association, and the Gift Club. I will let my wife Marita tell you who were the big donors. She has just finished writing, with two others, a book on Oak Lane, Logan and Olney, to be published early next year, and has done lots of research on the history of Oak Lane. The groups wanted the land at 12th street and Oak Lane Avenue. The land was owned by Charles Davis, a close relative of Lucretia Mott, the abolitionist who had a home near Old York Road and Cheltenham Avenue. At first, Mr. Davis wanted \$7000 for this land, but he reduced his price to \$5000, thus, in effect donating \$2000.

The land was bought and the City agreed to accept the land. An appropriate bill was passed by City Council and the deed recorded with the City's obligation to maintain the building to be erected with Carnegie Fund monies.

The past century has seen at least six generations of Philadelphians pass through these doors and enjoy access to the library and its facilities. Judges, musicians, businessmen, manufacturers, teachers, writers, students, and parents have all enjoyed use of the Oak Lane Library.

For the past 28 years or so we have witnessed the growth of home computers and the internet. These technical innovations have not led to a reduced used of libraries, but rather have proven the necessity for professional librarians, well stocked and staffed neighborhood branch libraries than can serve the communities in which they are located.

Near here is Godfrey Avenue, named for Thomas Godfrey. As a young man, he was very bright and had an aptitude for mathematics. He visited James Logan at his house in Stenton. Mr. Logan had a personal library of over 3,000 books, including a new one written by Isaac Newton called the Principia. The treatise was in Latin. Mr. Godfrey looked at the book and found the equations interesting, but he did not understand Latin. So he began home schooling himself and learned Latin. Then he went back to Mr. Logan and asked to borrow the book and he read Principia. Later he developed a device for calculating longitude which was used to accurately locate Cape Henlopen. This was a private library not more than three miles from here and it was, of course, in a different time.

If one child picks up a book and decides he wants to learn, then we will all be better off for it someday.

And it is for this reason that for eighty years there have been Friends of the Library groups associated with the Oak Lane Library. Have a great day every one and thanks for coming out to celebrate this occasion.

Regards,

T. Michael Poxon

President of the Friends of the Oak Lane Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia