

"The Early Days of the Davis Library"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

I recently came across a copy of the second annual report of the Davis Library published in June 1953. The report included a concise history of the unique circumstances surrounding the founding of the Davis Library. As the Davis Library Board reflected in 1954, it was a "good time to for the people of the community to review the circumstances which contributed so much to the public library resources of Westminster and Carroll County."

On May 25, 1951, the Davis Library was formally dedicated in the presence of the Mayor, the Common Council, the Board of County Commissioners, and a large group of interested friends and guests. Dr. Lowell Ensor, president of Western Maryland College gave the dedicatory address and his words expressed the feelings of all on that occasion when he said, "A library is the meeting place of the great minds of the ages. We are not here this afternoon by ourselves, merely in the presence of each other; we are in the presence of men and women of all generations who have passed on to posterity, through the medium of the printed page, something of their life and thought. Whether it be poetry or fiction, history or biography, philosophy or science, the products of great minds are waiting on these shelves to be released. It is in the library that the past speaks to the present, and the present reviews the past, and the wisdom of the ages like a refiner's fire assays the gold of eternal truth."

This second anniversary is a good time for the people of the community to review the circumstances which contributed so much to the public library resources of Westminster and Carroll County.

A few years before his death, Mr. W. H. Davis in consultation with interested friends selected eight representative citizens of Westminster to serve with him on the Board of Trustees of the Davis Library. They were K. Ray Hollinger, Samuel M. Jenness, Norman H. Boyle, Ralph G. Hoffman, Carroll L. Crawford, John A. Bankert, Gerald E. Richter, and George K. Mather, all of whom make up the present Library Board.

Mr. and Mrs. Davis deeded to this Board in perpetuity, with no restrictions, the valuable property known as the Davis Building located at the corner of West Main and John Street in Westminster. This building is occupied by the Bixler and Guild Drug Co., the State Theatre, Carroll Manufacturing Company, and certain apartments. The purpose of this gift was to provide an endowment, the revenue from which was to be used toward the support of library service from the Davis Library. However revenue from the endowment has turned out to be less than was first expected, which made it necessary to cut recently hours and services of the Davis Library until a workable solution can be discovered.

At the same time the Davises gave the John St. Building to the Davis Library Board, Mr. Davis acquired the former Methodist Protestant Church Building and presented it to the Library Board as a gift to be used as a home for the library. The Library Board supervised the extensive alterations and additions which were necessary to convert the church into a modern library building. While no written obligations existed, Mr. Davis told many of his friends that it was his purpose to assume the cost of alterations in order to present to the community a going enterprise free of debt. He contributed \$40,000 in cash toward the reconstruction. Mr. Davis died before the work was completed and the total cost of the remodeling proved to be \$60,000. This made it necessary for the Board of Trustees to negotiate a loan to meet this outlay and the loan is still outstanding. The Board hopes that some civic minded citizens will

recognize the educational values inherent in the building and its services and will supplement the generous gift of the Davises with sufficient funds to clear up the indebtedness.

The Board of Trustees view the library's future with optimism. Its use the past two years indicates that the community wants a library which will be a general center of reliable information and where children, young people, men and women will have an opportunity to educate themselves continuously. The Board felt that it could justify a request for tax support and asked the city of Westminster to appropriate funds for the support of public library service from the Davis Library. The legislature of Maryland gave the Common Council permission to levy 2¢ on each \$100 of valuation in its last session. A 2¢ levy will yield approximately \$2600 per year which is almost the same amount of money which the library pays each year in city and county taxes on its endowment property. It cannot be levied until 1954.

The report went on to discuss the merits and possibility of a county library system. The Davis Library Board supported the idea and the county system became a reality in 1958. The former Davis Library building was sold but the Library Board continues to support local charitable organizations including the Historical Society.

Photo caption: The Davis Library was photographed by John Byers shortly after it opened in 1952. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.