

DRAFT

TV PRESENTATION

History of Oakland Public Library

Presented by
Library Growth Foundation of Oakland
And
OK TV Productions

Announcer(AN):

Hello. Today we are going to discuss some of the history of the Oakland Public Library. To help us, we have three guests: John Murphy, former Library Board member and a current trustee of the Library Growth Foundation of Oakland; Connie Monks, a lifelong resident of Oakland who witnessed many of the events in the life of Oakland and the Oakland Public Library; and Judy Gray, President of the Oakland Historical Society and another longtime Oakland resident.

AN:

John, can you tell us why the Library Growth Foundation is interested the history of the library?

John:

The Foundation believes that an important part of its fund-raising campaign is to give Oakland residents a better awareness of the wonderful history of Oakland and its library. The library's important role in the life of Oakland is due to the dedication and support of many Oakland residents, past and present. **In light of the events in the past few months, it is more important than ever to understand and appreciate the institutions and people that have built and maintained our culture and values.**

Also, the expanded library building will have a Local History Room, dedicated to preserving and presenting the history of Oakland and the area around Oakland. This room will be located in the area in front of the wonderful mural in the library. Some of the money raised by the Library Growth Foundation would be used to furnish this room.

(show shot of the mural) {LibraryMural.jpg}

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When the library first moved into its current location, the Ponds Memorial Building, it had a local history collection in the lobby. The Library Board wants to restore that function so Oakland residents can fully appreciate Oakland's rich history. This work would be done jointly with the Oakland Historical Society.

AN:

Connie, how long have you lived in Oakland and can you describe some of the early events in the life of the Oakland library?

Connie:

I have lived in Oakland since 1929. The first recorded loaning-out of books in Oakland took place **in 1900**. Mrs. Louise Sheffield started loaning books from her personal collection to neighborhood children. Mrs. Sheffield was a former school teacher; her husband, Charles Sheffield was later a President of the Oakland School Board. The Sheffield Homestead was on Ramapo Valley Road (then called Oakland Avenue) near the railroad tracks and at the intersection with West Oakland Road. Some of the buildings in that location are gone, but the home of Charles & Louise Sheffield still stands at 413 Ramapo Valley Road.

(show picture of Sheffield Homestead) {SheffieldHomestead0001.jpg}

(show picture of 413 Ramapo Valley Road) {413RVRFrontView.jpg}

In 1910, Mayor Edward Page appointed 15 interested residents to committees to organize and operate a library. Mrs. Sheffield was one of those members.

In 1920, two sisters, Louise and Hattie Van Wagoner, became the first library hostesses and set aside one of the rooms in their house on Powder Mill Lane as the library. The book collection grew through gifts from friends and neighbors.

In 1923, the collection moved to the Annie Meyer's home on Ramapo Valley Road across from the Sheffield Homestead. The Annie Meyer's home is now 410 Ramapo Valley Road.

(show picture of Sheffield Homestead and Annie Meyer's Home)

{SheffieldHomestead0001.jpg}

(show picture of 410 Ramapo Valley Road)

{410RVRPostOffice.jpg}

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In 1926, Mrs. Henry Hopper became the library hostess and the collection moved to her home on Ramapo Valley Road across from the Oakland Grammar School (now the Board of Education building).

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AN:

Judy, can you continue the history?

Judy:

In 1929, the library's collection had grown to 1,000 volumes and needed more space. The collection was moved to the first floor of the Page Office Building on Page's Hill (now known as Franklin Avenue). This building, now known as the "Stream Building" is next to the Van Allen House. The Oakland Historical Society currently has a project to restore this building.

(show current pics of the Stream Building)
{PageOfficeFront.jpg and PageOfficeSide.jpg}

The Page Office Building was one of the original buildings on an estate once owned by Edward Page. During the 1920's, the estate was occupied by a Catholic Seminary which granted permission for the library to use the building.

Ill health forced Mrs. Hopper to give up the post of librarian shortly after the move to the Page Office Building. Mrs. Henry P. Demarest became the librarian in October 1929, and **in June 1932**, the library was moved to her home at 277 Ramapo Valley Road (currently the home of Bill Potash). The Library Board paid \$15 a month to use space in the house.

(show 1964 pic of 277 Ramapo Valley Road)
{Demarest_PotashHouse19640001.jpg}

In 1929, the borough first provided \$100 to support the library; in 1930 this was increased to \$200. Also in 1929 the librarian was first paid--\$10 a month. The library also received funds from contributions, social events and book rental fees.

In 1930, Mayor Peter Demarest appointed the first Library Board trustees: Mrs. Henry Demarest, Mr. Charles Sheffield, Mrs. Charles Sheffield, Mrs. Horton, Rev. George Geres and Mrs. Scott (Superintendent of Schools).

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AN:

Connie, did the library collection continue to reside in private homes?

Connie:

NO. **In 1933**, Mrs. Demarest resigned as librarian and a new home had to be found. The Library Board obtained permission from the School Board to use an unoccupied classroom in the Oakland Grammar School (current Board of Education building). This classroom was a one-room kindergarten wing located on the north side of the school, and the library moved there early in 1934.

(show current pic of Board of Ed building)
{BdofEd_Grammar.jpg}

During the school year, the library was open to the public twice a week, Tuesday evenings and Friday afternoons. High school girls and volunteers provided assistance for the librarian. **In December 1935**, the library had 154 cardholders, of which 82 were regular borrowers. Approximately 1700 books circulated that year.

In 1939 the School Board notified the Mayor and Council that the North Wing room was again needed for classes.

AN:

John, where did the library go then?

John:

The original Yawpo Avenue Firehouse was built **in 1910**, approximately in the current location of the parking lot across from the current Yawpo Firehouse. Several years later a second floor was added. The Volunteer Fire Department was given exclusive use of the building by the Council, with the exception that part of the second floor was to be reserved for future use by the library.

In late 1939, the librarian, assisted by Library Board members, moved everything to a 600 sq. ft. front room on the second floor of the firehouse.

(show pics of side and front of firehouse. Note Library sign in front.)
{YawpoFDSide0002.jpg and YawpoFDFront0001.jpg}

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During the 1940's the library's book collection was less than 4,000 volumes (3,000 fiction and 750 non-fiction). Also during the 1940's Oakland's population doubled from 932 to 1,817, but its circulation figures were not growing at the same rate.

In 1951, the Library Board asked Mrs. Florence Ridley, a professionally trained librarian, to become the temporary library director. Mrs. Ridley had recently retired from the Brooklyn Public Library. During Mrs. Ridley's "temporary" tenure as library director from 1951 to 1963, many significant changes occurred in the library.

- An inventory of the library collection was completed.
- All non-fiction books were arranged according to the Dewey Decimal System.
- More non-fiction and reference books were added.
- Inventory and circulation increased.
- Hours of operation increased.
- More staff were added.
- A Children's Story Hour was instituted.
- Programs were initiated to encourage library use by schoolchildren.
- Boro appropriations to support the library increased.
- **In Jan. 1956**, the Boro Council issued a Certificate of Organization for the Oakland Free Public Library, after a public referendum supported that action.
- **In 1961**, after several requests by Mrs. Ridley and the Library Board, the Mayor and Council approved the renovation of the Ponds Memorial Building to be the new home for the library.
- **On April 14th, 1962** the library in its new location was formally opened and dedicated.

(show pics of library exterior, library interior and Mrs. Ridley)
{ScannedOakLib.jpg and ScannedLibInterior.jpg and LibDirector19640002.jpg}

AN:

Connie and Judy, can you give us more information on the history of the Ponds Memorial Building?

Connie/Judy:

On July 17, 1937, the Ponds Memorial Building was dedicated. It was built as a replica of the 1829 Church of the Ponds that used to stand at the intersection of Ramapo Valley Road and Long Hill Road, where Portobello restaurant is currently located. The Ponds Memorial Building was constructed to serve as a community and government center. At

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one time it housed the Boro offices, Police Department, Council Meeting Room, Civil Defense office and community activities, including a bowling alley in the basement.

The building's structure is unique. It is made of native stone with thick outside walls and some red sandstone corner blocks from the 1740 Church of the Ponds. The weathervane was originally used on the 1829 church.

(show pics of 1829 Church and Ponds Memorial Bldg.)
{Scanned1829PondsChurch.jpg and ScannedOakLib.jpg}

AN:

John. Were there any subsequent changes made to the library building?

John:

In June 1970, after several studies and much discussion of various ways to provide more space for the library, the Boro Council approved funds for renovating the library basement so it could house the Children's Dept. and a meeting room. In 1971 the renovation was completed and the Children's Dept. was moved.

In 1976, a mezzanine floor was added to provide more space for the library.

(show pics of mezzanine)
{LibInteriorMezz.jpg and LibInteriorMezz2.jpg}

In October 1998, an elevator was added as a preliminary stage before the current library expansion.

(show pic of elevator wing) {LibElevAdd.jpg}

AN:

I want to thank you all for giving us a very interesting description of the history of our library. John, are there plans for increasing our access to more of Oakland's history?

John:

I first want to say how indebted we are for the historical information collected by Ryerson Vervaeke in her book Valley of Homes, Shirley Kern & Eleanor Little in their book The Years Between, Alexander Potash in his book Over the Years, 1902 -- 1988, and The Oakland Public Library--Yesterday and Today compiled by Ruth & Irving Bush

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and Sarah Swanson. Mrs. Ruth Sheffield Bush is the daughter of Mrs. Louise Sheffield, who started a library in 1900 in her home. We are also grateful for the assistance of the Oakland Historical Society for providing the old photos used in this program.

The Library plans to use this information and other books and resources to form the nucleus of the collection in the new Local History section in the expanded library. This will be a joint project with the Oakland Historical Society.

We urge all viewers of this program who have more information or material on the history of Oakland and the Oakland Public Library to contact the Oakland Public Library or the Oakland Historical Society or the Library Growth Foundation. We are looking especially for interior pictures showing the library in its various locations and any pictures showing the construction of the Ponds Memorial Building, the renovations for the library and the construction of the library mezzanine. We are also looking for names and pictures of all past Library Directors and Library Board Members.

CONTACTS

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