

## Andrew Carnegie's Legacy and the Quogue Library Society

One purpose of this Gala is to thank all of you for your continuing support as Quogue Library Society members, who benefit the Library and its patrons in ways large and small. You all may not think of yourselves in the same league as **Andrew Carnegie** but a little research reveals some similarities.

As we know, Carnegie was once the richest man in the world. He was a controversial and complicated man, but let's focus on his role in the development of public libraries. Coming as a dirt poor child immigrant from Scotland to the US, by the 1880's he'd built an empire in steel – and then gave it all away: *\$60 million of it to fund through grants a system of 1,689 public libraries across the US*. Why? Carnegie's first job was as a bobbin boy in a textile mill. He was determined to improve his lot but he couldn't pay the \$2 library subscription fee. He wrote a letter to the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* and the library was opened to working men and apprentices. Later he borrowed books from the personal Library of a Colonel James Anderson, who opened his collection to his "working boys" every Saturday.

Thus - **public** and **free** - became the visionary keystones of Carnegie's library mission. But equally important these libraries were built according to the "Carnegie Formula", which required a community's commitment to obtain a Carnegie grant. Each community had to demonstrate the need for a public library; provide the building site; maintain the library from public funds (not just private donations) and pay staff to run the library and to provide free service to all.

The impact of Carnegie's library philanthropy was maximized by his timing. Coming at a peak of town development and library expansion in the US, public libraries became instruments of change – not luxuries, but rather necessities, important institutions – as vital to the community as public schools, police and fire departments. Carnegie libraries still form the nucleus of the New York Public Library system. Washington, DC's Carnegie library opened in 1903 to women, children, all races. During the depression it was called the "intellectual breadline" – with no money you went there to feed your brain. By the time of the last Carnegie grant in 1919 there were 3,500 libraries in the US –half Carnegies – temples of learning, ambition, and aspiration for all.

The Quogue Library was founded in 1897 during this tremendous expansion – started in a general store, built on donated land and supported ever since by this community – faithfully and generously. So each of you who support the Library, through the Quogue Library Society as well as your taxes, keeping it in peak form as a 5-Start library to serve all, consider yourself a legatee of Andrew Carnegie

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Quogue Library Board of Trustees  
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