



Historical Society of the Nyacks

Newsletter

Volume 6

Issue 1

Winter 2011

Nyack's Carnegie Library

by Brian Clay Jennings, Local History Librarian, Nyack Library



Laying Cornerstone for the Nyack Library, May 21, 1903. Nyack Library, Local History Collection, no. 0056.

Andrew Carnegie endowed the construction of 1,689 public libraries in 1,419 communities across America—half of all the public libraries in the nation,¹ including ours here in Nyack. Why did Carnegie donate money to libraries and how did a community obtain this money? How did Nyack acquire a Carnegie Library?

Andrew Carnegie wrote in his autobiography: “The treasures of the world which books contain were opened to me at the right moment. The fundamental advantage of a library is that it gives nothing for nothing. Youths must acquire knowledge for themselves. There is no escape from this.”² Carnegie was deeply

¹ Jones, Theodore, *Carnegie Libraries Across America: A Public Legacy* (New York: Wiley, 1997), p. 2.

² Carnegie, Andrew, *The Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), pp. 45-46.

Message from the President

by Win Perry, Society President

Much is happening in the realm of local history in Nyack as we move into 2011.

At least three good letters have appeared in *The Journal News* recently in support of saving the John Green House at 23 Main Street, as the Village government considers ordering its demolition as a safety hazard. Built circa 1820 by one of the first businessmen in Nyack, it is a rare old example of Dutch Colonial-style design using locally quarried red sandstone, unusual because of its 2½-story height. John Green had a commercial dock and a store on his property. He was a founder of the Nyack Steamboat Association that built Nyack's first steamboat and of the Methodist (Old Stone) Church. We're all watching this cliffhanger and hoping that a hero will step forward before the wrecking ball strikes. It could be a beautiful home, office, and/or shop.

The Historical Society of the Nyacks is about to announce the achievement of a sixteen-year goal—a home of our own. As we go to press, the Board of Trustees is choosing among several available rental spaces that will give us a place to work and show the public some of our collection of old Nyack lore. The location and the date of our housewarming will be announced soon.

Equally exciting is the Nyack Library's move of its excellent Local continued on page 3

Stay connected to local history. Visit our website.

www.nyackhistory.org

Join Email List



impacted by his exposure to public libraries as a young man and this passion translated into a tremendous philanthropic effort funding the building of libraries in the United States with over \$41 million.³ When Carnegie was a young man he used the library of Colonel James Anderson, the founder of free libraries in Western Pennsylvania. It was from this early experience with libraries that he “decided there was no use to which money could be applied so productive of good to boys and girls who have good within them and the ability and ambition to develop it, as the founding of a public library in a community which is willing to support it as a municipal institution.”⁴ Carnegie wrote: “books that would have been impossible for me to obtain elsewhere were placed within my reach” by Anderson’s “wise generosity.” He also indicated a moral benefit to the library writing that “nothing contributed so much to keep my companions and myself clear of low fellowship and bad habits.”⁵

Carnegie funded his first library in 1881 in his home town of Dunfermline, Scotland.⁶ His father had been a founding member of the first circulating library in the town and Carnegie wrote that he followed his father in library-founding “unknowingly,” yet it was a point of “intense satisfaction” and “he had yet to hear of a lineage that he would exchange for a library-founding weaver.”⁷ Carnegie’s library donations that followed would be granted to Allegheny, Pennsylvania, the city where the Carnegie family first settled in America, and Braddock, Pennsylvania, the site of Carnegie’s first steel mill. These were huge buildings that included adjoining facilities with art galleries, swimming pools, gymnasiums, and, in Allegheny, a 1,200-seat music hall.⁸

In 1901, Carnegie sold his Carnegie Steel Company to J.P. Morgan for \$400 million. Upon reaching the agreement, Morgan said to Carnegie: “I want to congratulate you on being the richest man in the world.”⁹ Also that year, with his retirement, Carnegie’s funding of libraries around the country increased—132 library grants were given that year,¹⁰ including the grant to Nyack. The buildings were not as elaborate as the ones in his Pennsylvania factory towns, but the funding became much more widespread across the nation. A basic set of criteria and questions were emerging to determine Carnegie’s funding of a public library. The earliest basic questionnaire went as shown on the right.¹¹

Carnegie believed that the amount of money allocated for each library should be calculated on the basis of two dollars per person. His personal secretary, James Bertram, relied on census data to verify population totals.¹²

As Carnegie was increasing his philanthropy to libraries in his retirement, Nyack was coming to the realization that it needed a new library facility. In March 1901, it was decided at a meeting of the Nyack Library Board, a committee from the Board of Trade, and the presidents of the three Nyack villages to petition Andrew Carnegie for money to build a library building in Nyack.¹³ Although the petition was submitted in April, there was no word until December. James Bertram, who handled almost all of the correspondence related to the funding of library buildings, responded to Library Board President Howard Van Buren in December 1902, saying that Carnegie would contribute \$15,000 for a library building in Nyack “if the community of Nyack will furnish a suitable site and pledge itself by resolution of councils to support a library at a cost of not less than \$1,500 a year.”¹⁴

<p>FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Town 2. Population 3. Has it a library at present? 4. How housed? 5. Amount taxes Paid by Community, Yearly for Support 6. Amount Guaranteed from Taxes Yearly if Building Obtained 7. Is Requisite Site Available? 8. Amount Now Collected toward Building <p>To facilitate Mr. Carnegie's consideration of your appeal, will you oblige by filling in the above, and return with statement of any particulars likely to assist in making decision.</p> <p>Respectfully, JAS. Bertram, Secretary</p>

Andrew Carnegie's questionnaire

3 Jones, p. 3. That equals over 800 million in 2009 dollars!

4 Carnegie, p. 45.

5 Ibid., p. 46

6 Jones, p. 7.

7 Carnegie, p. 46.

8 Jones, pp. 8-9. Allegheny is now the North Side of the City of Pittsburgh.

9 Nasaw, David, *Andrew Carnegie* (New York: Penguin, 2006), p. 586.

10 Bobinski, George S., *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969), pp. 203-04.

11 Bobinski, George S., *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969), pp. 203-04.

12 Nasaw, p. 606.

13 "To Petition Carnegie: Request From Nyack for a Library Building," *Nyack Evening Journal*, Mar. 23, 1901.

14 "Carnegie Offers to Build a Library Here," *City and Country*, Dec. 1902.

That pledge fit perfectly with the logic that communities should be funded at approximately two dollars per resident, as the population of the three Nyack villages was approximately 7,500 at the time.¹⁵

It was always Carnegie's intention that the communities he offered library buildings to fund the libraries themselves and he required communities to promise support of 10% of his total gift per year.¹⁶ At the time of the gift to the Nyacks there was \$1,200 in funding for the library annually from the villages. To receive the grant from Carnegie the villages had to increase their funding slightly, yet all three village boards approved the increase.

One of the major obstacles to communities when applying for Carnegie money for a library was the acquisition, or agreement upon the location of the library. The Nyack Library was already in possession of a "parcel of land 52 feet wide by 115 feet deep on the West side of Broadway, adjoining the Nyack Journal Building." This piece of land was thought to be insufficient, so the lot where the library stands today was purchased for \$4,000.¹⁷ As preparations began for the construction of the new building, the Nyack Evening Star interviewed a "Nyack antiquarian" on the history of the library site. He recalled¹⁸:

Here were the barns, granaries, and outbuildings of the DePew farm for over a hundred years, for it was about that length of time since Petrus DePew came and bought the strip of land lying between what is now Cedar Hill avenue and a line passing from the river up north of the Presbyterian Church. At that time there was a grist mill at the foot of Hudson Avenue, and what is now Hudson Avenue between the factory and Broadway was a narrow road leading up and passing the school house, going west. The brook which runs on the north side of Hudson avenue was then a large and rapid stream, dashing down in a waterfall through a deep hollow...Every time the street was made wider the barns came nearer the street and it will be remembered that only a few years ago one of these buildings was cut off to make room for the sidewalk.

Andrew Carnegie declined to attend the laying of the cornerstone or grand opening of the library in Nyack. Yet he is still remembered today. If you look up as you enter the original Carnegie building, his portrait hangs as a reminder of his gift.¹⁹ In 1903, at a library dedication in Washington, DC, Carnegie said: "Free libraries maintained by the people are cradles of democracy, and their spread can never fail to extend and strengthen the democratic idea, the equality of the citizen, and the royalty of man. They are emphatically fruits of the true American ideal."²⁰

¹⁵ Nyack population in 1900 was 4,275. Nyack in the 20th Century: A Centennial Journal (Historical Society of the Nyacks, 2000), p. 10. In 1927, the population of Nyack was 4,917, South Nyack 2,102, Upper Nyack 725. Rockland County Redbook, 1927.

¹⁶ Nasaw, pp. 605-06.

¹⁷ Penfold, Saxby, "Historic Nyack," article in The Nyack Library local history vertical files.

¹⁸ "Progress on Library," Nyack Evening Star, Dec. 1, 1902.

¹⁹ When library trustees requested busts, portraits, or life-sized photographs to display at their openings, Bertram forwarded the name of commercial outlets that might supply them, but refused to pay for them. I have heard it suggested that Carnegie required the library to hang his portrait, but there is no truth to this.

²⁰ Jones, p. 4.

President, continued

History Department into newly remodeled space in its original building made available by the recent construction of the large new addition. The Historical Society of the Nyacks is the proud sponsor of this new location by virtue of having made a major contribution toward the cost of its renovation. There are two interconnected rooms, an office with computer-equipped workstations and some specialized files, and a conference room lined with shelving to accommodate the rest of the Local History Collection. The Local History Department is staffed by volunteers, most of them members of the Society, working under Brian Jennings, Librarian Supervisor on the staff. New hours of operation are being worked out, but will probably include some weekdays, an evening, and some Saturday time. The Local History Collection of the Nyack Library is so good and so well equipped and staffed that the Historical Society has decided not to compete with it in the collection of books, photographs and clippings, but to pass on to it any such items that would add to its usefulness. Of course, we continue to collect artifacts and other items not needed by the Library. I hope you will enjoy the article in this issue about the origin of Nyack's Carnegie Library.

In the newly renovated
Carnegie Library Building
***The History of the
Nyack Library***
an exhibit by the
Historical Society of the
Nyacks and the Library
through May 31, 2011

The Thought of Alvin Johnson

by Tom Morrison, HSN member

What ideas were advocated by Alvin Johnson, the great educator who lived in Upper Nyack until his death in 1971? It was in search of an answer to that question that I looked into his book, *The Clock of History*, a collection of editorials written from 1931 to 1945 for the Bulletin of The New School, the innovative institution that he co-founded and for many years (from 1922 until his retirement in 1945) directed. I also read “Ideas are High Explosives,” a pamphlet of editorials he wrote for the Bulletin from 1945 to 1961.

Most of Johnson’s selected observations, written during and soon after the years of the Great Depression and World War II, have given us a prism that filters light onto our own financially, politically, and militarily stressed times. One shared theme is the changing guise of apocalypse—what it is that we are afraid of. Today, we are most often warned of terrorists and climate change. The main threat described in Johnson’s essays in the aftermath of the war was nuclear obliteration. “For the first time in history all the world knows that no country can . . . insure its citizens against human death by vaporization.” He went on to point to a solution: “The only security for man lies in world organization We cannot be secure in peace if men of a certain complexion, of certain racial antecedents, of certain religious beliefs, flatter themselves with the illusion of a superiority that justifies them in oppressing other men.”

A fear that Johnson did not encourage was “the red menace.” The best prevention against any untoward Russian influence, he felt, was “to put our own house in order, recognizing that if we permit abuses to accumulate, an explosive ideology will appear.” He hoped that “in the coming decades Russia and America will find it possible to cooperate consistently for the peace without which ideology has no meaning.” In later editorials he tempered his call for détente, but kept questioning the merits of spy-chasing.

What part of the American house was out of order? Racism is one that Johnson called out for special attention. That specter oiled the wheels of the Nazi regime, which our country took on, but which we were by no means free of ourselves: “The greatest menace to world peace does not spring from the beaten Nazis licking poison from their wounds. It springs from the congealed prejudices of the benighted sections of the United States, the Devil’s fifth column, the fat-witted gentlemen who seek applause by repeating the idiotic formula, the New Deal is a Jew deal” Johnson was a consistent battler against anti-Semitism, and one of his greatest achievements was the formation of the University in Exile, a refuge for Jewish and other scholars escaping the Nazi menace.

It is tempting to imagine what Johnson might say today about aspersions cast against Muslims and undocumented immigrants. He would likely fit such considerations into a broader historical context, with a tinge of optimism, such as when he wrote: “It is predicted that we shall soon be erecting barriers not only against alien immigrants but against alien culture as well [But] American people have made immense strides since 1918 We like our own type but recognize that God in His goodness has found uses for other types, too.” Connected to the issue of immigration is job availability, which Johnson connected to the budget deficit. To tackle both of these simultaneously, he wrote, a peacetime economy needs to be developed with full employment.

The United States emerged from World War II as the newly anointed leader of the world. “How will America use this vast power, in the coming era of peace?” Johnson posed. “Blindly, ignorantly, under the domination of brute economic interests . . . ? Or will America use her power with clear vision of the remote as well as of the near future?” He would not hold court with voices that called for an imperial America.

Was there a way to guard against misuse of the newly gained power? Being the educator he was, Johnson had a definite opinion: “The fair-mindedness and intelligence of our people, not our written Constitution, however sacred, nor our formal institutions, however adamant in seeming, are the guaranty of our liberty and happiness.” The tenor of the education he recommended is not left in doubt. Johnson unabashedly and repeatedly advanced the terms “liberal” and “progressive,” and his words have a particular ring in the context of the recent November 2010 elections: “American political history is characterized by alternations of progressiveness and reaction. But the reaction has never succeeded in undoing the work of the progressive movement it has overthrown. At most, it means a pause in the forward movement.”

Johnson defined progressive and liberal in the context of a striving for egalitarian democracy. He wrote that the particular characteristic of U. S. adult education, such as at The New School, was classlessness. “We shall need to strengthen our liberal educational system, if we are to cope satisfactorily with the totalitarian ideas that outlive the totalitarian armies.”

continued on next page, bottom right

The University in Exile and Alvin S. Johnson

by Gini Stollendorf, Editor

Dr. Alvin S. Johnson (1874-1971), longtime resident of Upper Nyack, scholar, teacher, humanitarian, and citizen of the world was instrumental in saving hundreds of scholars whose lives were in danger in Europe in the 1930s (see HSN Newsletter, Fall 2010).

In the early 1930s, Johnson became concerned over the spread of Nazism and Facism and their impact on Jewish and liberal scholars in Europe, who were losing their teaching positions at universities due to racial, religious, or political persecution. He organized the University in Exile, a division of The New School for Social Research in New York City (which he co-founded in 1919), and arranged to bring the European scholars to North America.

For the University in Exile to succeed, Johnson needed funding. He garnered support through negotiation with private individuals, such as Hiram Halle of Pound Ridge, New York, and organizations such as the Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations.

In his autobiography *Pioneer's Progress* (Macmillan 1952), Johnson relates:

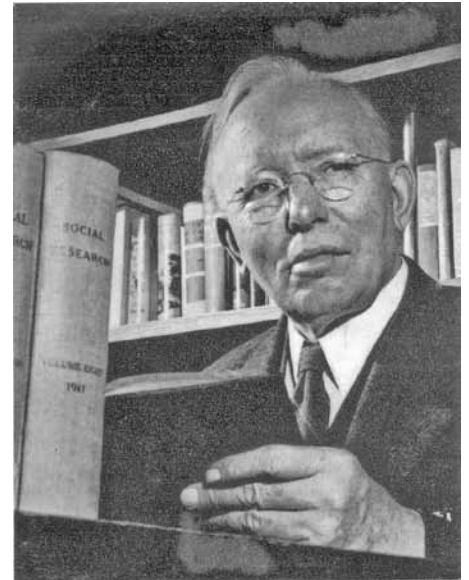
As I rode in the bus to Rockefeller Center, on a bright and hopeful morning, I revised my ideas. I could get fifteen scholars as easily as five. I revised my ideas again as the elevator shot me up to the [Rockefeller] Foundation offices. I'd ask for twenty-five.

President Raymond Fosdick was so cordial I found it easy to put my case. French liberal and Jewish professors, refugee scholars from Germany, were in deadly peril. Many of them had been engaged in research projects financed by the Foundation. Their fate was of profound interest to the Foundation. But the Foundation could do nothing for them, except perhaps supply them with money, which the Germans would grab. The New School, however, could issue invitations that would give those scholars non-quota visas to America for themselves and their families. . . .

Fosdick heard me through patiently. "How many could you take care of?" he asked. To my own surprise I answered, "It would not be worth while to go ahead with this project unless we are prepared to take care of a hundred." I shall have to consult my trustees," said Fosdick. I can do it by telephone and give you an answer in three days." But the next day he called me up. The trustees had approved and I could go ahead immediately.

So began a relationship between Johnson and the Rockefeller Foundation that would rescue over 200 scholars. The educational community opened its doors to his idea. The scholars were given positions at the universities of Notre Dame, Missouri, McGill (Montreal), Yale, Pennsylvania, as well as The New School for Social Research (now The New School), and other institutions where they would lend their expertise in the fields of medical research, the humanities, economics, international relations, genetics, engineering, and astronomy.

Great ideas last forever. It is possible that Johnson's concern over the danger to scholars in the 1930s survives today in the *City of Asylum/Pittsburgh*,



www.cityofasylumpittsburgh.org, a program started six years ago that provides sanctuary to exiled writers whose work has put them under threat of persecution in their homelands. The program provides housing, a stipend, medical assistance, and help with adjusting to what could be permanent exile. (*City of Asylum/Pittsburgh*, a report by Jeffrey Brown, appeared on the PBS News Hour.)

In 2009, on the 75th anniversary of the founding of the University in Exile, the Alvin Johnson University in Exile Memorial Fellowship was established. The program, which is funded by the Fellowship and the German-American Fulbright Commission, provides full tuition and a stipend for exceptional German graduate students wishing to attend The New School for Social Research.

Thought, continued

The title, *The Clock of History*, informs the reader that Johnson viewed history as something that moves along inexorably. Some may want or try to stop it, or to move it back. But, he warned, that is stagnation, which is the opposite of what he devoted his life to.

SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

LIFE AT THE CLARKSTOWN COUNTRY CLUB, A PLACE WHERE THE PHILOSOPHER MAY DANCE AND THE FOOL BE PROVIDED WITH A THINKING CAP—\$17

Reprint 2010, Historical Society of the Nyacks. Originally published in 1935 by the Clarkstown Country Club.



GUIDEBOOK TO THE GREAT NYACK HOUSE TOUR—\$3

2010. A companion to *Life* and an attractive souvenir of the Tour. Replete with paintings of the houses by Beverley Bozarth Colgan.

OLD NYACK – AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORICAL SKETCH OF NYACK-ON-THE-HUDSON—\$11

Facsimile ed., 1983, Village of Nyack. Originally published in 1928 by Nyack National Bank.

NYACK IN BLACK & WHITE - RACE RELATIONS OVER THREE CENTURIES—\$10

by Carl Nordstrom, 360 pages, December 2005, Historical Society of the Nyacks and the Nyack Library.

THE NYACKS—\$22

128 pages, October 2005, Historical Society of the Nyacks and Nyack Library. From the series *Images of America*, Arcadia Publishing.

NYACK IN THE 20TH CENTURY: A CENTENNIAL JOURNAL—\$27

155 pages, 2000, Historical Society of the Nyacks.

These publications may be purchased at the Nyack Library. If ordering by mail, add \$3 per book for shipping and handling (\$2 for Guidebook) and mail your check to Historical Society of the Nyacks, P.O. Box 850, Nyack, NY 10960.

PRICES INCLUDE SALES TAX

Publicize Your Local History Events

We encourage organizations to post local history events directly to the Local History Calendar on our Website for all to see.

Contact Jim Hershberger, 845.268.9087
jimhershberger@nyackhistory.org

Time to renew your membership? This could be your last newsletter.



Check your mailing label. If the expiration date has gone by, it's time to renew your membership.

Don't miss a single newsletter!

\$1/mo = \$12/yr individual

\$2/mo = \$24/yr family



Check payable and mail to
Historical Society of the Nyacks

P.O. Box 850

Nyack, NY 10960

Another way to Join or Donate

www.nyackhistory.org, Membership Tab.



Support Local History Join the Society

- Renewal New Gift membership
- \$24 for family/joint \$12 for individual
- \$50 for business/professional \$___
- corporate gift \$___ donation Sustaining (\$50) Enduring (\$100) President's Club (\$500) Fellow (\$1,000) Senior Fellow (\$2,500) \$___ donation
- \$___ corporate gift
- I am interested in mentioning the Society in my will.

Members receive the satisfaction of supporting local history and receive our newsletter while enjoying discounts on special events.

Thank you

Judy Martin 845.358.7797
membership@nyackhistory.org



Jay Hood (1944-2010)

by Leontine Temsky and Florence Katzenstein, HSN Trustees

We were saddened to learn of the sudden and untimely death of Jay Hood Sr., age 66, on October 4th, 2010. An attorney in practice in Haverstraw, with wife Kathleen and son Jay Jr., Jay was an important and most helpful member of the Historical Society of the Nyacks since the early days. He was always available to assist us as we applied for our provisional charter, helping to formulate our bylaws, arranging for our non-profit status, and investigating insurance options for our house tours and exhibits. More recently, he was involved in exploring possible sites for a permanent home for our organization.

Each spring and fall, Jay was available with gloves, clippers, rake, and shovel to help clean up the Old Palmer Burial Ground on Old Mountain Road in Upper Nyack. Many members of the Historical Society remember with pleasure the bus tour of Haverstraw that he arranged as he proudly showed us the new parks with playgrounds and trees, renovated storefronts, cafes, bed and breakfast, which reflected his many years of involvement in Haverstraw and surrounding communities. For

more than fifteen years, Jay was an invaluable member of our Society. We will miss him.



Newsletter of the Historical Society of the Nyacks

P.O. Box 850

Nyack, N.Y. 10960

845.418.4430

www.nyackhistory.org

newsletter@nyackhistory.org

~

Gini Stolldorf, Editor

James Hershberger, Designer

John Elliot, Logo Artist

Patricia H. Jarden, Copy Editor

Myra Starr, Copy Editor

~

Photographs and content courtesy of the Hood Family, Michael Overn, Tom Rosenbaum, and The Rockefeller Archive Center, all rights reserved.

**For past issues of the
Newsletter, visit our
Website.**

www.nyackhistory.org

Historical Society of the Nyacks

A not for profit organization
www.nyackhistory.org

P. O. Box 850, Nyack, NY 10960

Officers and Committee Chairs

President: Win Perry • **Vice Presi-**

dent: Leontine Temsky **Secretary:**

Myra Starr • **Treasurer:** Tom Hackett

• **Corresponding Secretary:** Virginia

Smith • **Collections:** Evelyn Fitzger-

ald • **Events/Fund-raising:** Florence

Katzenstein • **Fund-raising/Grants/**

Volunteers: Linda Greene • **Exhibi-**

tions: Pat Condello, Karen Kennell •

Finance: Tom Hackett • **Headquar-**

ters and Museum: Tom Hackett • **His-**

torian: Ruth Fee • **Historical Markers:**

Leontine Temsky • **Historic Preser-**

vation: Jean Pardo • **Membership:**

Judy Martin • **Graphic Design:** Jim

Hershberger • **Publicity:** Tom Mor-

rison • **Newsletter:** Gini Stolldorf •

Oral Histories: Linda Greene • **Pro-**

grams/Publications: Bob Goldberg

• **Upper Nyack Cemetery:** Florence

Katzenstein • **Yard Sale:** Win Perry



Hudson Avenue Looking East to Broadway prior to the Nyack Library, ca. 1880. Nyack Library, Local History Collection, no. 0874A.



Historical Society of the Nyacks
www.nyackhistory.org
P. O. Box 850
Nyack, NY 10960

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit #6006
Monsey, NY
10952

Return Service Requested

**Time to renew? Check your
mailing label and see page 6.**

In the newly renovated
Carnegie Library Building
***The History of the
Nyack Library***
an exhibit by the
Historical Society of the
Nyacks and the Library
through May 31, 2011

