

A LIBRARY SHOULD NEVER DIE!

Consider the following quote from a 2010 interview given by Neil Gaiman, Honorary Chair of National Library Week:

“GOOGLE CAN BRING YOU BACK 100,000 ANSWERS. A LIBRARIAN CAN BRING YOU BACK THE RIGHT ONE.”

The forthcoming April 4th tax initiative for Maryville Public Library is arousing enthusiasm in some people, skepticism in others. Having talked with many people about this issue, it seems obvious that the skepticism is based on several misconceptions: Many people believe that the Maryville Public Library is funded by Maryville City. In fact, The Maryville Public Library receives no money at all from the City of Maryville. Nor does it receive money from the county. It does receive a small stipend from the state of about \$1,100 dollars a year. Also, it is not privately owned (as some people believe) thereby operating out of a private budget.

So what are the facts? The library was originally set up through a vote by Maryville citizens. It has always been run by a 9-member Board of Trustees made up of local citizens. This library began in 1904 with a one-time grant from Andrew Carnegie to set up the original building (at 2nd & Buchanan), and also with a local tax levy for books, furnishings, and basic maintenance. This initial tax rate was minimal, and in 1962 there was a modest increase. But there has never been any further rate increase. Occasional donations from individuals and organizations have filtered in. For example, private donations paid for the library's expansion in 2000-2001, but donations now make up only 8% of the library's income.

Without the proposed revenue increase, our library is in serious trouble. The last tax rate adjustment happened way back in 1962. In short: There has been no increase in tax rate funding for The Maryville Public Library in over half a century! As a result, unexpected expenses, like the roof leak of last summer which cost over \$60,000 to fix, had to be paid for out of the library's reserves, seriously depleting that already meager fund. Aside from unexpected expenses, there isn't even enough money to pay for basics. Updates to normal library services cannot be funded; this includes digital

newspaper archives and search tools, staff training, plus many basic books and magazines.

I grew up in Nodaway County. My dad was Leo Baumli, with the big horse and mule operation. My uncle was Charles William Baumli, Nodaway County Treasurer for many years. I went to grade school and high school in Nodaway County, and went to college my first five semesters there at Northwest Missouri State.

The Maryville Public Library has always been important for me. Before I was in my teens, my mother's Saturday shopping trips to Maryville included bringing books home from the library. The copy of Black Beauty I read came from there. So did Little Women, Little Men, the Chip Harrison series, the Cherry Ames series.

The importance of libraries was something Andrew Carnegie understood way back in the early 20th century when he helped found over 3000 public libraries, including our own. Shouldn't we make sure our Maryville library continues to exist? Surely we must not let it wither away, just because its tax base has been neglected for more than 50 years.

by Francis Baumli

(Written: February 2017.)

(Posted: May 1, 2017.)

This little article did publish in the Nodaway News Leader, a small weekly newspaper put out in Nodaway County—the big county in Northwest Missouri where I grew up. The editors, however, exercised their imperious pen. The changes were minimal, but because of my compulsive protectiveness toward my pristine prose, I here present the article as I originally wrote and formatted it.

One note is in order. I received several phone calls from people in that area after this piece published, and it was interesting to discover how one bit of phraseology in my piece stuck in people’s minds. Namely, the observation that it had been “over half a century” since there had been a tax levy increase. “You mean it’s really been over half a century?!” “I never thought about that. Half a century is a long time!” “Half a century without more funding? The price of groceries sure has gone up since then!” This is a lesson in the value of rhetoric, which I learned well from hearing Ronald Reagan’s political speeches long ago. I didn’t like his policies as President, but he sure knew how to use rhetoric for getting his message across.

I place this article in the philosophy category of “Baumli’s Mirror” because, however much it may be a piece of journalism, it nevertheless fits into the branch of axiology called “social and political philosophy,” and I daresay it does contain certain ideas which persist beyond the temporal parameters of usual journalism.

For those who are curious: the proposed tax levy, which this article supported, did pass at the April 4, 2017 election with an impressive 72 percent of the vote.