NORTHLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY--AN OVERVIEW--1968-1985

"THE MOST IMPORTANT LIBRARY IN THE STATE, AT THE MOMENT, IS ONE THAT HAS NO BUILDING AND NO BOOKS," quoted the Pittsburgh Post Gazette in an article published August 4, 1967. This most important library was Northland Public Library, the first library in the state of Pennsylvania to be sponsored by not one community but four. This statement reflects the being and essence of Northland--something new, something growing, and somethin never standing still. Other areas of the North Hills were more established during the 1950's than the area that grew so rapidly along the McKnight Road. The octopus of a new connecting four-lane highway did not allow for much planning as businesses and home homes mushroomed along the way. But where begins a sense of community, there becomes a sense of centralization--a place where the community can gather informally to grow.

As early as the 1950's there were complaints among local residents concerning the lack of library service in the North Hills. These complaints led to a Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's bookmobile stop at the Northway Mall. As the years passed, and the use of the bookmobile grew, the complaints again began to be heard. **THE NORTH HILLS COMMUNITY NEEDED A LIBRARY.**

In 1963, Keith Doms, then the director of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh prepared a study which outlined the plan for what was eventually to be Northland Public Library. His very original concept of a multi-municipal library was based on the cooperation of seven communities; Ross, McCandless, Franklin Park, Bradford Woods, Pine, Marshall, and West View. As Keith Doms put it: "Together, these seven municipalities can pool their resources to create a quality library--with the exception of Ross Township, the other communities are too small to support a public library at this time. However, it is not likely that it would exceed minimum standards on a 'go it alone' basis since per unit service costs are proportionately higher for smaller service areas than for larger ones."

Doms's document entitle The Northland Public Library, a Cooperative Library, became the cornerstone for eventual development of the current library.

On July 3, 1963, representatives from most North Hills communities attended a meeting at the Northway Mall to study the possibilities of establishing a library in this area. Mr. Doms had been speaking to municipal officials urging them to send representatives to that meeting. Mrs.

Strang of McCandless, leader of the library movement, accompanied him on these visits.

Outcome of that meeting brought an estimate of $59,000 to maintain a central library or one dollar for each of the 59,000 people it expected to serve.

By April of 1964, Ross commissioners had decided to put the issue of the library on the township's ballot and to let the people decide whether or not they wanted to pay the cost. Decision day for the library was November 8, 1966, when the Ross voters, largest of the population centers, voted whether or not they would pay for support of a cooperative community library.

From 1963 to 1967, many hours of work were invested by a variety of interested citizens. Again the birth of the library had to be a community effort. Thirteen men and women were named to represent seven municipalities considering the library. Civic organizations, including the North Hills Ministerial Association, North Hills and North Allegheny School Districts and the McCandless Lions Club, worked hard in support of the library.

A defeat in Ross Township would spell the end of the joint community venture. Keith G. Swensen headed a committee of volunteers to push the **"YES"** vote in Ross. When the November 8 votes were counted, Ross voters had approved the library by a 55% margin, (6,573 in favor to 5,361 against.) By February, 1967, it became apparent that West View would not sign the library agreement and Pine Township supervisors said a postcard poll of residents showed the majority opposed the library venture. Marshall Township was also not interested.

The Northland Public Library Board of Directors representing the four remaining communities met for the first time and on April 10, 1967, they signed a contract which officially initiated the Northland Public Library. Serving on the first board were: Dr. Robert Lord, Ross Township, President; Mr. John Nutter, McCandless, Treasurer; Mrs. Jane Kehoe, Franklin Park, Vice President; and Mr. Eric Lavery, Bradford Woods, Secretary. All were appointed by their respective municipalities to select a site for the new library and to hire staff. Of the possible sites under consideration, the Three Degree Road location was selected.

A federal grant of $135,000 and a check of $1,278 from Northland Library Friends helped open the library on October 6, 1968 with Dale W. Craig as its first director, seven staff members, and 16,000 volumes in a building of 10,000 square feet. The community response was overwhelming--shelves were wiped

clean. It was not unusual for a patron entering the library to be asked to wait for a little while--books would probably be returned so that others could check them out. From this immediate demand the library began to formulate a policy of future library use.

WHAT IS NORTHLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY'S BASIC GOAL? It is to be an information center which gives primary service to those with no alternate library service, mainly adults and preschoolers, with secondary emphasis on school and college students. With this statement the library began to grow and to meet creatively the community demands.

In the first three months of operation the staff registered more than 11,000 library users and circulated more than 44,000 items. The next few years were ones of growth and development. In 1969 another federal grant allowed the library to hire two more professional employees for one year. The municipalities appointed board members to more fairly represent the communities by population. In 1971, a new director came to Northland, Laura Shelley. Along with the new director came new dynamics to respond to community demand. A 1972 Pittsburgh Press interview called her the "car saleman of the library world." The library continued to add more books to its collection but not fast enough to keep pace with community request. The library began to offer programs such as story hours in the morning and family film programs at night. No one could have predicted the phenomenal success..... In five year, Northland's statistics showed 50,716 volumes owned, 35,469 people with library cards, and 307,704 items circulated.

THE COMMUNITY DEMANDED AND THE LIBRARY RESPONDED. More programs were added to show that the library was involved with the community and was aware of its needs--reading clubs, writing workshops, community carnivals, pet shows, travelogue programming, election night television results, school visits, the addition of non-print media.

Northland Library never needed to sell itself. The North Hills community was thirsting for whatever new adventures the library could offer. It soon became apparent that the rented quarters could never satisfy the public demand for both services and collection development. Long waiting lists for titles, cramped quarters, and serious library users having to compete for space with preschool programming became a nightmare for both the staff and the library board. Within ten years, Northland's collection and patron use had increased to the point where the rented quarters and the fifty-car parking lot were totally inadequate. More than 75,000 volumes were being housed in a building with shelving space for 45,000. This only possible because circulation had reached

more than 360,000 items a year and at least half of the collection was always checked out at any given time. Circulation had **DOUBLED** in the first ten years of operation!

The board of Northland Public Library recognized the growth of the library and the need for permanent quarters. As early as 1975, they began looking at alternatives for the library's future., as the lease at Three Degree Road was to expire in 1978. Two strong community leaders, Frank and Betty Hess were asked to chair a building committee which, with the help of Jack Ross and John Schonder of Ross and Schonder Architects, studied numerous possible sites and potential building options. After much discussion and study, the Northland Public Library Board decided that a 30,000 square foot building built on a 4.8 acre site donated by the North Allegheny School District was the wisest long range choice.

Three of the municipal councils, McCandless, Bradford Woods and Franklin Park, approved the site and agreed to plan for funding a new facility. Ross officials objected when a location other than Ross Township was suggested, because they felt their residents would be too far from the new library. A "Save the Library" committee aimed at Ross residents was spearheaded by Hobart Richey and David Westhead. Volunteers madce a door-to-door canvas urging people to cast a **"YES"** vote on a November referendum. **AGAIN THE COMMUNITY RESPONDED.** This time the Ross voters approved the new lbirary by a 64% margin (7,901 in favor to 4,469 against) almost a 10% increase over the original referendum to establish a library in the North Hills.

Groundbreaking ceremonies were held on August 3, 1977. Between August, 1977 and the grand opening in October, 1978, the staff worked at a frenzied pace. Moving into a new facility was more than a physical move. Increased circulation had placed demands for more speed and efficiency than the manual card-sorting circulation system could handle. The outcome of serious study, consultant work, and staff evaluation was a decision to computerize the circulation system. The decision to automate was made more difficult also, because fewer than 200 libraries in the nation were computerized in any fashion. Finding a computer system which could meet the North Hills users' needs became a critical decision. Universal Library Systems out of Vancouver, Canada, seemed to have the best library product available. In order to convert the collection, every item had to be "bar-coded" and every library user had to be re-registered for the new automated system. Staff had to be trained to use terminals and input information into the comp uter.

An organization NEW PLACE (an acronym for Northland's Expanding World--Public Library Acquisitions, Collection and Equipment) was formed by the Friends of Northland Library. The main idea: local residents helping the new Northland and each other. Local civic clubs, garden clubs, parent-teacher organizations and hobbyists donated money for new equipment and collection development.

The director and staff worked and reworked plans for the most efficient way to move a collection of 70,000 items to its new location. Again the community of library users was called upon for help. They were asked to check-out as many items as possible from the old building and to return them to the new building at the time of opening. Scores of community volunteers donated hundreds of hours of time and muscle to "move the library." Bright red T-shirts were seen throughout the community with the words--**"NORTHLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY--A MOVING EXPERIENCE."** It was. Staff and volunteers worked for two weeks from 8:00 in the morning until midnight each day to ready the new building for its grand opening, displaying a phenomenal comittment from the community for its public library.

On October 6, 1978, exactly ten years from the original opening, the **NEW** Northland was unveiled to its awaiting public. Grand opening ceremonies included a ribbon cutting ceremony, tours, songs, story times, puppet shows, dance demonstrations and craft exhibitions.

The two-story structure, three times larger than the builiding on Three Degree Road, covers 30,000 square feet. It's cost was $1.8 million for construction and equipment. It was financed by a one mill tax hike in the four supporting municipalities for the first seven years. The funding plan was to hold a private sale of bonds with a local bank and to repay the bank at the rate of one mill from each municipality over a seven-year period/1978-1984. Because the municipalitis paid their millage on a 1977 through 1983 schedule and because of the interest earned on the account, it was possible to clear the loan with only six years of payments by the four municipalities instead of seven. The effective interest rate for the bond sale was 1.75%.

The new building has a ground entrance on both levels. The first floor houses public meeting rooms, administrative office, and the Popular Reading Library which includes current books, paperbacks, magazines, records, and audio-visual equipment. The Young Adult Department and the Children's Department which features an arts and crafts area and