

# Bi-Sesqui-Centennial Commemorative Tree Planting

## Remarks by Rhea Walker, Board of Trustees President

To understand the history of the Dansville Public Library and the Shepard Memorial building, you should understand the history of the Shepard family. Ancestor Ralph Shepard hailed from London and settled in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1635. It was Ralph's grandson Samuel who helped found the town of Plainfield, Connecticut, and it was Samuel's grandson Joshua who moved from Plainfield to New York and who purchased land here from Colonel Nathaniel Rochester. It is on that land that he built for his bride Elizabeth Hurlbut, daughter of the founder of Arkport, the homestead that today is home of the Dansville Public Library. While Joshua enjoyed the home for only five years before his death, Elizabeth and their children, and eventually their son Charles and his family, enjoyed the home for close to one hundred years.

Joshua and Elizabeth's son Charles married Katherine "Kitty" Rochester Colman, granddaughter of Nathaniel Rochester. Their vibrant lives, filled with literature and love, were chronicled by their daughter Mary in the text *Golden Lives*. Her words paint a clear picture of the love of family, history, literature, and knowledge that filled this house as a home. It was with that spirit in mind that the three surviving children of Charles and Kitty, Charles Edward, Thomas Rochester, and Mary, took in mind the idea of donating their family's homestead as a permanent residence for the growing public library of their hometown. This idea became action in 1920, and through the financial contributions of Dr. Francis Marion Perine and Miss Mary Ella Griggs, by 1924, the homestead was transformed into the new and permanent residence of the Dansville Public Library, the Shepard Memorial.

Along with the Shepards, our entire Library history has only been possible through the support of men and women whose names still mark our town, whose descendents still reside here: Faulkners, Perines, Kreins, Rochesters, Raubers, Endresses, Conklins, and more. Among those who first formed the Dansville Library Association in 1872 were Dr. Katy J. Jackson, whose husband and family founded the Home on the Hillside; Miss Mary E. Noyes, whose family later provided so much for the establishment of a hospital in Dansville; and Miss D.B. Bunnell of the publishing family that brought a great deal of business to Dansville. The move to the Shepard homestead in 1924 was an apt transition as the library's purpose evolved from reading room to a home for knowledge, a place where knowledge grows. The acorn of their idea has roots that spread wide and deep, and the tree of knowledge that it produced has provided a pillar of

strength that has weathered many eras in our town. Our Library is irrevocably intertwined with the history of Dansville, the Rochester region, and our nation.

I have been a Trustee of the Library for nine years now, and President of that Board for four. Trustees are charged with stewardship in all its forms. While the first Trustees were burdened with the responsibility of making the institution financially solvent, today's Trustees focus on carrying the library into the 21st century. Former Trustee and historian Bill Conklin noted in the 1969 library history that he wrote, *Acorn to Oak*, that "Today as a member of the Livingston County Library System and the multi-county Pioneer Library System, the Dansville Public Library has achieved a position of usefulness beyond anything the founders could have pictured in their rosiest dreams." Today's Trustees have lived to see many of the evolutions of our library, to see branches grow from the tree that grew from an acorn. What began as an idea in a drawing room, then as a single room in Maxwell block, became a home for the community, and is now a 10,000 square foot establishment at the heart of Dansville. As we look forward, we are grateful for all of the men and women who have labored to ensure the Library's survival, and are especially grateful to the Shepard family, without whom our library would not have a home.