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Statement from the Caldwell Public Library, March 1, 2022:

Addressing the Loss of the Caldwell Public Library Building: Continuing the Legacy

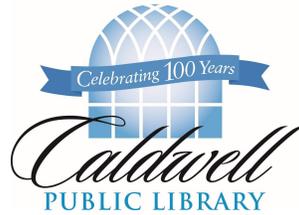
"A library outranks any other one thing a community can do to benefit its people. It is a never failing spring in the desert." Andrew Carnegie

1805 - Present

Caldwell has deep roots in the desire to have a library in this community. It goes back to 1805 with residents donating funds to ensure that the community had access to books. However, the momentum to establish a real public library started in 1894, with Caldwell High School teachers highlighting the need for their students to have access to more books than the school could provide. By 1907 the Borough of Caldwell voted to establish a Free Public Library under the State Library Act. In 1908, they received \$7500 from Andrew Carnegie's Foundation to construct a library. All the town needed to do was provide an appropriate lot on which to build, and 10% of the Carnegie grant--\$750—to annually sustain the library. After many delays in finding that appropriate lot, things finally fell into place and on October 12, 1917, the Caldwell Free Public Library was dedicated and opened its doors.

Our Library has been a fixture in Caldwell since that day in 1917, providing free access to a variety of materials and trusted information from knowledgeable and dedicated staff. Over the years, renovations were made, in an attempt to expand not only the building, but also the services that could be provided. There were partnerships with organizations, schools and individuals in the Community to provide programs, materials, technology, and needed information and education to our local residents; and, we cannot underestimate the library's efforts to simply be a welcoming place for anyone who comes in the door.

During these past 105 years, there have also been restrictions and limitations, for the most part, due to the existing structure. Library staff are extraordinarily resourceful, but the building designed in the early 1900's didn't account for life in 2022 and was starting to limit what the library could offer to the community. In addition: the updates and repairs that needed to be made in order to provide a safe building for the public were starting to grow. The Library's ability to keep moving forward and to serve the Community in the existing building has finally reached a point of unsustainability—both for the Library itself, and for the Borough, through its financial support. The Library's vulnerability to intense weather events, which have in recent



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years, caused such disruption and damage to the building can no longer be ignored; nor, can we renovate our way out of it.

Opportunity and Growth

It is, therefore, the time to imagine and to plan for a new Library for Caldwell. What created the bedrock of the Caldwell Library, with that original \$7,500 grant from the Carnegie Library Foundation in 1908, will now allow for the realization of a new dream. It will allow us, as a Community, to once again, create a beautiful new building to better serve the residents of our area for many years to come; and, to do so with better functionality and to be more suited to the way that we live now.

The current Staff and Board of Trustees of the Caldwell Public Library do not take this event lightly. We care passionately about the Library and its ability to serve and to be a part of this Community. It is because of that, that there is recognition that a library is more than a building--a library is the sum of not just its staff and contents; but, the entirety of all that makes up a community: a place to gather, a place to learn, a place to collaborate. In planning the new building, every effort is being made to honor the origins of the Caldwell Public Library, along with Caldwell's history.

We never would have wished for what happened on September 1st with Tropical Storm Ida and it was a devastating loss to all of us; but as we work with the Borough administration and architects, we look forward to the opportunities that this new building will provide. There is a feeling of real excitement at how much more we can do and how much better we can serve our Community.

(Specific history references from "The History of the Caldwell Public Library" by Joan Garrison. For a fascinating and brief history, visit: <https://www.caldwellpl.org/library-history>)