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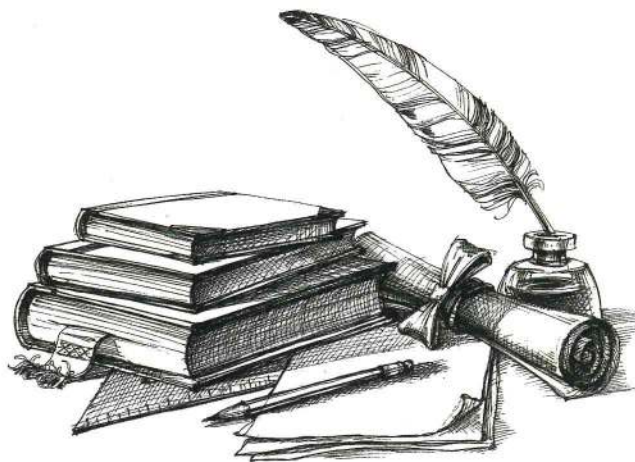
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# DREAM COME TRUE



## IN EDGARTOWN, ANDREW CARNEGIE'S DREAM LIVES ON

In 1848, a 13-year-old boy and his family emigrated from Dunfermline, Scotland's historic medieval capital, to the United States, in the town of Allegheny, Pennsylvania, essentially penniless, having sold all of their possessions to fund their voyage to America. This boy would one day preside over the largest steel corporation in the world and would command the title of the world's richest man.

Prior to achieving this pinnacle of success, however, the boy would read—hundreds of books. Lacking formal education, he was self-taught in a wide variety of subjects. He would read in his free time, taking advantage of the opportunity that one local citizen provided; Colonel James Anderson had opened his own private library to working boys as a way of giving back to the community of Allegheny. This privilege was extremely rare in working class America, as very few free libraries existed in the 19th century, and it is a key factor in the origin story of Andrew Carnegie, who became known both as the “King of Steel” and as the “Patron Saint of Libraries.” Carnegie's rise from impoverished immigrant to entrepreneur and titan of industry also cemented his position as a quintessential embodiment of the American Dream.

Because of the education that he acquired by reading, Andrew Carnegie would later write in his autobiography, “Resolved, that if wealth ever came to me, that it should be used to establish free libraries.” Not only had he achieved

the American Dream to a nearly mythical degree, he believed that everyone should enjoy the shot at success that reading, and accumulating knowledge, could provide. He also believed that it was his responsibility to share his riches with the world, and became known as the “father of modern philanthropy.” In 1889, he published “The Gospel of Wealth,” an essay that would find readership worldwide, in which he famously stated, “The man who dies thus rich dies disgraced.” To carry out his mission, he established a number of trusts and institutes dedicated to such issues as advancement in science, teaching, and world peace. He gave away more than \$350 million to charitable foundations, and when he died, his remaining \$30 million passed to the Carnegie Corporation, which he established in 1911, “to promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding.” Adjusted to today's standard, Carnegie's total wealth stood at \$306 billion, more than the combined worth of Bill Gates, Sam Walton and Warren Buffet. And he gave it all away, though he insisted on doing so along a strict philosophical line. He wrote that “In bestowing charity the main consideration should be to help those who help themselves.”

Carnegie's dedication to building free public libraries served as both a tangible and symbolic expression of this guiding principle, and he spent over \$55 million to build 2,509 libraries, including 1,679 of them in the

BY CHRIS WHITE · PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREG PREMURU

United States. He strongly believed that anyone with access to books in this country could live the American Dream, and his free libraries soon became the most visible, nearly ubiquitous standard bearers of his philanthropic pursuits. The smallest of these monuments to philanthropy is a brick building on North Water Street, in Edgartown. Built in 1904, the Carnegie Library served the Martha's Vineyard community for over 100 years, until the new public library opened in 2016. Vineyard Trust, an organization dedicated to preserving, maintaining and creating cultural opportunities in historic landmarks all across the island, has since renovated and reimagined the building. It now serves as a community center, as a museum that showcases the philanthropic work of Vineyard Trust, and as the organization's flagship and headquarters under its new name—The Carnegie.



In some respects, The Carnegie and Vineyard Trust experienced a twin rebirth between the years of 2016 and 2017. Funi Burdick, executive director and CEO, became involved in the planning phase beginning in October of 2016, then officially stepped into her position in January 2017. “I arrived just as we were reimagining The Carnegie,” she says. “It was very exciting to be at the heart of this project.” In her first year, the organization also abbreviated its name. Founded in 1975, the Martha's Vineyard Preservation Trust owned and maintained 20 historic properties in the island community, but its name seemed to limit possibilities. Burdick explains: “Preservation is



“Living Landmarks” chronicles Martha's Vineyard's storied past—from the first European families to the days of whaling and the rise of resort communities—told through the lens of the Vineyard Trust's properties, including The Carnegie.



one major work of the organization, but we also do much more than simply preserve the landmarks that we own. We reimagine them in efforts to cultivate community, to create living history.” Thus, the rebranding of Vineyard Trust and The Carnegie occurred nearly simultaneously.

One of the functions of The Carnegie is to provide a space to unify Vineyard Trust properties. Burdick’s previous occupation was executive director and CEO of the Canterbury Shaker Village, a National Historic Landmark located just north of Concord, NH. This was a different type of landmark because its community is essentially contained. The properties of Vineyard Trust, however, are diverse in both design and geographic setting. They range from the Flying Horses Carousel in Oak Bluffs to the Edwina B. catboat to Alley’s General Store in West Tisbury to the Old Whaling Church in Edgartown. “One challenge in overseeing Vineyard Trust properties is that each has been acquired for different reasons and purposes. Each landmark is one with individual importance,” Burdick says. As she and the board of trustees worked to reenvision The Carnegie, the plan culminated in the idea to create the “Living Landmarks” exhibit, which serves, Burdick says,

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“as an opportunity to cohesively tell the story of the Trust’s mission and to mirror it by telling some of the history of the island.”

The renovation of The Carnegie began in earnest in January of 2017, and the process included a number of different focal points, including the building’s exterior, interior and landscape, all of which would need to serve the cultural goals of Vineyard Trust. In the process, the work would echo Andrew Carnegie’s call for giving back to the community. Burdick says: “We needed to retrofit it so that it could become exhibit space, and we needed to collect artifacts. This was the reverse of how I usually work because, in this case, we had the building, but we lacked the smaller pieces. I needed to meet people on



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the island, to collect pieces that would best tell the story. The board was extremely valuable in the process, as many members are themselves collectors with real interest in subjects such as whaling and scrimshaw." Gerret Conover, president of Conover Restorations and Vineyard Trust board member, agreed to come on as builder, and architect Patrick Ahearn, FAIA, also chairman of Vineyard Trust, provided the renovation design on a pro bono basis, as he has with a number of other Trust properties. "I believe in giving back to the community that I work in," says Ahearn.

Ahearn and the renovation team faced a number of challenges in the rebuilding process. The old library was dark, and it suffered from an addition that had been tacked on in the 1960s. "This was poorly done," says Ahearn, "and the basement, which held the children's library, was moldy and pretty grim." To make better use of the footprint, Ahearn reimagined that the building had been larger to begin with, "as if Carnegie had begun with a bigger program." New arched openings and opened-up windows made the space much lighter. "We preserved the essence of what was there—the library—but then the building unfolds to a participatory map of the island that highlights Vineyard Trust properties," Ahearn says. "It's no longer stagnant."



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One of the most dramatic changes to The Carnegie is the rectangular cutout in the floor, which lines up with a skylight. Bordered by a glass railing, this links a gallery below with the one on the main floor. Suspended above this opening is the wooden upside-down skeleton of a rescue boat that had been discovered in a Vineyard marsh. Ahearn says, "It's almost like in the Museum of Natural History in New York—that's our dinosaur."

This year, The Carnegie will offer a number of events and programs, including poetry readings, author events, concerts, and two series called "Meet the Maker" and "Be the Maker." Ahearn notes: "The Carnegie is in the village core, opposite the ferry line going to Chappaquiddick, and it's an important ingredient in walking the village. It celebrates the work of Vineyard Trust but also tells the story of the island in a new and different way." At the same time, this historic landmark of Edgartown continues to indirectly tell one of its initial stories. It may no longer lend books, but the building maintains its original spirit with its reading rooms, and it most certainly carries forward the vision of its namesake, Andrew Carnegie, well into the 21st century.

*Chris White is an English teacher at Tabor Academy in Marion.*



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