



Library Receives Major Gift from Davis Library, Inc.

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

September 17, 2020

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Davis Library, Inc. Donates \$200,000 to CCPL's Exploration Commons at 50 East

Westminster, MD – Carroll County Public Library (CCPL) is honored to announce a major gift of \$200,000 from the Davis Library, Inc. The gift will go directly to support the library's new project, Exploration Commons at 50 East, a 14,000 sf interactive community space coming to the lower level of the Westminster Branch Library in 2021. The space will fill many existing community needs with the addition of a makerspace, professional teaching kitchen, and multiple collaborative meeting spaces in downtown Westminster. A rededication of the building the library branch and Exploration Commons are housed in at 50 East Main Street, Westminster will take place on Friday, September 18, 3:00 pm.

This year marks the 71st Anniversary of the gift from Walter H. and Elizabeth R. Davis that established free public library service in Carroll County. Exploration Commons at 50 East represents the evolution of that vision for modern library service to our community, including the essential roles that the public library could play in enhancing the quality of life of the individual through access to educational tools and self-directed learning. Davis Library, Inc. has a history of longstanding support of CCPL programs and activities. This recognition of Walter H. and Elizabeth R. Davis on the 71st Anniversary of their transformative gift to the community will honor both the legacy of Mr. and Mrs. Davis and the Davis Library, Inc. *(Please see next page for highlights from the lives of Mr. and Mrs. Davis.)*

In response to the gift, Sharon Hafner Yingling, Fundraising Chair for Exploration Commons at 50 East said, "This major gift continues the legacy of Walter H. Davis. He believed in and supported equal access to learning resources for all. I can think of no better way to continue that support than by helping our library bring new technology and skills to our community. We are delighted and grateful to the Board of the Davis Library, Inc. who recognize the importance of the library's newest project, Exploration Commons at 50 East."

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Attached Images

Rendering of Exploration Commons with naming recognition
Photo of Walter H. Davis and Elizabeth R. Davis

About Walter H. Davis

Mr. Davis was born in Middletown, Md, in 1873. At the age of 12, he was forced to quit school and get a job. He worked for a few years in dry goods retail in Frederick.

Mr. Davis obtained an apprenticeship with Ramsburg Carriage Works. In 1889, at age 16, he moved to Westminster and worked as a journeyman trimmer for Herr Brothers carriage makers. In 1898, at age 25, he purchased a grocery business on West Main Street. In 1910, at age 37, he opened one of the first car dealerships in the nation. Initially, he sold Stevens-Duryea and E-M-F automobiles. In 1920, he started selling Buick automobiles.

Mr. Davis was very active in the Westminster community. He served on the Common Council for several years and briefly served as Mayor in 1938. He was a member of the Westminster Rotary, and served on the Board of Trustees of then Western Maryland College, now McDaniel College, for nearly a decade.

During this period, he:

- Gave property on Sullivan Road to the College to construct housing for veterans returning from WW II and their families, so that veterans could pursue education under the GI Bill.
- Gave a gift of \$256,000 to the College in 1950, which was the largest gift WMC had ever received.
- Was honored by the Westminster Chamber of Commerce as Citizen of the Year in 1945.

On January 7, 1949, Mr. Davis and his wife, Elizabeth, announced that they would give a public library building to Westminster and provide an endowment for its support. At the time, he was on the Board of the Westminster Methodist Church. The two Methodist churches in town had merged, leaving an empty building on Main Street. Mr. Davis bought the vacant church to expressly house a free public library.

There was a subscription library in town operated by the Westminster Library Association. That library had been established in 1863, but was a members-only library which charged an annual fee. It had moved several times over the past 80 years, and in 1949, was housed in a small room in the Times Building.

The Westminster Library Association was delighted with the gift from Mr. and Mrs. Davis to expand library service, and on January 27, 1949, a special meeting was called by Association President George Mather for the purpose of liquidating all assets, discharging all officers of the Association and releasing all assets to the new Davis Library, Inc. At that time, the subscription fee was dropped and library service was free to everyone.

Mr. Davis named a self-perpetuating Davis Library, Inc. Board to supervise the extensive renovation of the former Methodist Protestant Church at 129 E. Main Street. He provided a cash donation of \$40,000 for the renovations. To provide operating funds for the new free library, he gave the Davis Library, Inc. the building he owned at the corner of John and Main Streets. The occupants of the building were men's clothing manufacturer, L. Grief and Bros., Bixler and Guild Drugstore, State Theatre, and four apartments. The net income was approximately \$12,000 per year.

Recognizing his gift of a public library to the citizens of Carroll County, the Maryland Library Association presented Mr. Davis with a lifetime membership in 1949.

Mr. and Mrs. Davis were totally engaged in the plans for the new library. They were looking forward to the dedication scheduled for May 25, 1951. Sadly, Mr. Davis died three weeks before the dedication.

The Davis Library opened as scheduled on May 25, 1951, which would have been Mr. Davis' 78th birthday. It was open 35 hours per week, staffed by two employees, housed 9,000 books and had a circulation of 19,500 in its first year.

In envisioning the Davis free public library, Mr. Davis had high hopes that it would provide books, magazines, newspapers, maps, pictures, films, music scores and recordings; and that it, should give guidance in their use.

The public library should offer children, young people, men and women opportunity and encouragement to:

- Educate themselves continuously,
- Keep abreast of progress in all fields of knowledge,
- Maintain freedom of expression and a constructively critical attitude toward all public issues,
- Be better social and political citizens of their country and the world,
- Be more efficient in their day-to-day activities,
- Develop creative capacities and powers of appreciation in arts and letters,
- Aid generally in the advancement of knowledge, and
- Use their leisure time to promote personal happiness and social well-being.

Carroll County Public Library is proud that this vision continues today as part of his legacy.