

Patrick Henry Library: “The Last Big Battle”

MR: The last big battle was Patrick Henry Library. When that was initially built, we finally got a true public library building. *That* was a watershed. It was lovely. No other county library—it wasn’t just a square building. It had an inner courtyard, it had an outer courtyard where the high wall goes around. There was kind of a garden there, and trees. It was just a little architecture—there was nothing like it as a library in Fairfax County. In fact, the County librarian, I think it was Mrs. McCullough, she loved what the Vienna Friends were trying to do. She was a lovely lady. She called our chairman and said, ‘Could you come over to Fairfax City? Meet me at the library at such-and-such a night. I want to show you something.’ She showed us the architect’s rendering. We practically burst into tears. Just ‘ohh, this is beautiful.’ We then had that Town Manager I referred to. He didn’t do it himself, or take credit for it. He was at the library. ‘That wall is too low.’ So the wall got ramped up. But he couldn’t change it. But then, in the ‘90s, the county decided to expand the library. Fine, It needed more space. A big meeting convened about what they were going to do when they remodeled this. It was just gosh awful. It was awful. And some of us that had been on the initial struggle, including a former Mayor, Jim Martinelli, good guy, to get this library, we couldn’t believe what we were seeing. So we started getting organized. We went to for our district, our county district, each supervisor named somebody on the Fairfax County Library Board—the overseers. We said, ‘this just isn’t right’. All this culminated with two or three of us badgering her and a big town meeting over at Patrick Henry. Or was it Town Hall. I don’t remember which. We said, ‘Okay, enlarge this library. But you can’t do to it what you’re planning to do to it.’ We had very—we had Kenton Kilmer, son of ‘I shall never see a poem as lovely as a tree.’ He and his wife had started Green Hedges School. We had some very well-spoken people who all stood up to say ‘don’t desecrate Patrick Henry Library’. And we all signed up to speak. These were really eloquent people. I’m the last one on the list. Yeah, I’m sitting there and thinking ‘what is there for me to say? Everyone has extolled...’ But knowing how the black and white communities had come together, I stood up and I made an entirely different argument—how this was more than a library. How this was part of the soul of the community and everything and what it had represented above and beyond books. And afterwards, one of the—was she a county supervisor? She ended up in Richmond on the legislature. She knew me and I politely greeted her. She said, ‘Maud, what were you trying to do, make us all cry?’ I think it’s the only time I’ve deliberately gotten a little emotional in front of a group. But what I said was true. It was more than just getting a library and access. It just showed was a town and a community could do working together.