



City and Borough of Sitka

KETTLESON MEMORIAL LIBRARY

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MEMORANDUM

Date: April 16, 2015

To: Mark Gorman, Administrator
Mayor McConnell and Members of the Assembly

From: Curt Ledford, Board of Library Commissioners Chair

Subject: Proposal to Examine Changing the Name of Kettleison Memorial Library

REQUEST

A Sitka citizen brought a proposal to the Board of Library Commissioners, asking them to consider changing the name of the library. After discussing the proposal internally, the Commission seeks the Assembly's advice and consent, prior to more fully investigating whether this change should be made.

BACKGROUND

At the March 4, 2015 meeting of the Board of Library Commissioners for the City & Borough of Sitka, city resident Bill Foster both addressed the Board in person, and offered a written request with a proposal to consider changing the name of Kettleison Memorial Library to Sitka Public Library. The written proposal is attached. Arguments offered for the change included the following:

- Naming an entity for what it is and where it is located both reduces confusion, and reflects local native tradition.
- The library's namesake was but one of many people who have contributed to the development and success of the library, throughout its history, and there are other means of recognizing their many contributions.
- The current library expansion project offers a timely opportunity to make a name change.

Commission members discussed the proposal, with opinions, pro and con, varying among the membership. No decision or vote was made, and the issue was tabled until the next meeting on April 1, 2015.

At the April Commission meeting, the proposal was discussed once more. There was a quorum, but not all members were in attendance. Mr. Foster attended this meeting to offer his thoughts and answer questions. Sitka resident, Nancy Yaw Davis was unable to attend the meeting, but left a written statement offering her views in opposition to a name change. Her written statement is attached. Commission member Jan Love delivered the results of an informal written poll taken by attendees of the Annual Meeting of the Friends of Kettleon Memorial Library organization, which was held on March 21, 2015. That poll asked each person both whether they wanted to change the name, and how strong their preference was. There were only approximately 15 responses to the poll, with some strongly in favor, some strongly opposing, and some with no preference. Library Director, Robb Farmer reported that the name change proposal had also been discussed with library staff. Once again, opinion on the issue ranged from strongly in favor to strongly opposed, with some in between. The potential name change was then discussed further among the Commission members present, and a straw poll was taken to gauge the feelings of the group. The majority present was in favor of the change, with one member opposed. The Commission decided to bring the issue to the April 28th Assembly meeting, in order both to receive the Assembly's advice and consent on whether this issue should be further examined, and to bring the matter fully before the citizens of the City & Borough of Sitka, in order to get their feedback.

OUR NEW LIBRARY

This is an exciting time for our Sitka library. We are on the verge of essentially a new library...a library for Sitka for years to come, long after many of us are gone. Our library has a long and colorful past, from humble beginnings in 1923 to our present vibrant organization.

Over the past 90 years, through fire, move after move and financial challenges many Sitkans have worked hard to keep it going. Theodore Kettleson was one of those. We certainly appreciate his contribution which came at a critical time. But there were many others...Brightman, Rowe, Tillotson, Allen, Conway, Polley, deGroff and on and on. I'm sure you could add names to the list.

I feel we should seriously consider honoring many of the people who worked so hard to bring our library to this point. We can't put all of their names on the front of the library but we can honor them in other ways.

I propose we name the new library what it started as and what it really is today ...the Sitka Public Library. What about Mr. Kettleson? We can honor him and many others within the new library, with historical exhibits or naming of rooms or areas.

Mr. Kettleson's name will live on even if we name the new library the Sitka Public Library. His name is stamped, sometimes multiple times, on the 60,000 items presently on our shelves. I recently checked out a book that had the Kettleson name stamped on it seven times!

And finally a word about names. I recently started to delve into the book edited by Thomas F. Thornton "Our Grandparents' Names on the Land." It is a collection of 3,000 Tlingit, Haida and other Native names. Our original people gave place names that were descriptive, rarely naming places after people. This is why the name "Sitka Public Library" would be right, since Sitka, a name derived from Tlingit (Sheet'ka') telling where we live and where our library is located.

Bill Foster

April 1, 2015

To: The Library Commission

From: Nancy Y. Davis

Re: Name Discussion

I respectfully request an opportunity at your next meeting to make a presentation about Mr. Kettleson, the rotund business man, who came to Sitka in 1921 as the first superintendent of the Pioneers' Home. He built the Kettleson Building in 1941 (now Harry Race Building, owned by Dirk and Trish White. In the 1930's he owned the lot just south of Dog Creek (Little Puppie Creek) that extended from Lincoln Street to Etollin Street. He sold half that lot to Jack Conway, who was mayor of Sitka in 1941 and owner of Conway Dock. Jack sold half that lot to Jack and Sasha Calvin, of great and continuing fame here in Sitka and elsewhere. They had a creative affiliation with Ricketts, the father of Sitka's Nancy Ricketts.

Mr. and Mrs. Kettleson lived in a one story house with a spacious sun room in front and a white picket fence on the Lincoln Street lot where the Catholic Church is located. Later, they lived in the second story northwest corner apartment of the then Kettleson Building. You could see Bessie Kettleson's perfectly curled white hair in the window where she sat, rocked and watched Sitkans go by to the postoffice (and jail) where much of Sitka's social life and gossip was shared. There was some question whether Bessie's curls were hers, or a wig.

In the name, Kettleson, a band of Sitka history is reflected: pioneers, pharmacy, politics, authors and artists. Quite a legacy reflected in the name.

Might you consider dropping the word "Memorial" in the distinguished name of our new library. Just Kettleson Library sounds classy. Sitka Public Library sounds, well, a bit ordinary.

Is there a creative way to celebrate the remarkable contributions of Sitka's Librarians, volunteers, supporters through pictures, stories, history and books? Louise Brightman, Wanada Holic, Nancy Gustafson, Cheryl Pearson, and the sparkling Sarah Bell, generous Gus Adams, and - well that is a start.

Best wishes to you all in your leadership on the Library Commission at an important time in Sitka's history.