

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE BROWN COUNTY LIBRARY BOARD
PUBLIC FORUM**

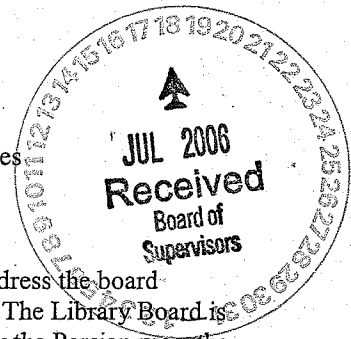
A meeting was held on **June 22, 2006 at 7:00 p.m.** in the Auditorium at the **Brown County Central Library, 515 Pine Street, Green Bay, WI**

PRESENT: ROB MILLER, PAUL KEGEL, MARY SCRAY, TERRY WATERMOLEN, MIKE AUBINGER, PAUL SCHIERL

EXCUSED: DENISE BELLMORE, KATHY PLETCHER

ABSENT: NONE

ALSO PRESENT: MARY RYAN, LORI DENAULT, BOB ROCQUE (Staff); Other Interested Parties



President Terry Watermolen called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and introduced the board members.

Terry explained that the reason for the forum is to allow interested members of the public a chance to address the board regarding how the historical artifacts owned by the library can best be used in the interest of the library. The Library Board is still in the process of gathering as much information as possible about these artifacts, which are primarily the Persian rugs, the Abraham Lincoln autographed photo, and paintings by Howard Pyle. Part of the information gathering includes appraisals of the artifacts by Christie's auction house which estimated their worth between \$1.1 and \$1.7 million. One of the options for the artifacts is the sale of the same. If that decision is made the money would be placed in an endowment, the interest of which would be used for future enhancements to the libraries for years to come. Terry asked members of the public to help with solutions and recommendations, asking that if they feel the artifacts should not be sold they also offer a solution for how they can best benefit the library.

John Berens, 424 Turner St., Wrightstown, said he and his wife, retired college professors, are professional historians that make extensive use of the Brown County Library and the donors wanted the people of Brown County to be able to view what they gave to the library. The majority of county residents will never be able to travel to New York or Washington and to sell the items will send a negative message to future donors. Mr. Berens and his wife support working with public and private groups, especially the Neville Museum, to arrange for displays of the items.

Nanette Hoppe, 1799 Aspen Lane, Green Bay, of the Green Bay-De Pere Antiquarian Society is opposed to the sale of the artifacts and provided the Library Board with comments made by people viewing the oriental rugs at a recent Antiquarian Show. She also referred to a resolution stating that the GB-DePere Antiquarian Society pledges \$25,000 over the next 5 years, in increments of \$5,000 per year, to fund storage and/or display costs contingent on all items remaining in this community and held by a public institution.

Pat LaViolette, 337 Ridgeview Terrace, Green Bay, former director of BCL and current County Board Supervisor, presented a note from her constituent Peg Nelson stating that the members of the Antiquarian Society would like to keep the artifacts in the community. Pat stated that she is concerned about the future of the library. In the last three years the administrative staff has been decimated and there are no longer any library administrators at the library. Budget cuts have been so deep that it is difficult to cover vacations or sick time because 14 staff members have been lost. The book portion of the budget has been cut 29% or \$170,000. The strategic plan just completed for the library shows that we are right near the bottom statewide in library support. There are many funding needs in Brown County including a Mental Health Center and the library is going to have to find other funding besides tax dollars, and as one of the options the Library Board is looking at the sale of the assets to produce funding on an annual basis from endowment interest. The first responsibility of the Library Board is to run good public libraries and they need money to do it. If selling the assets is not an option, then other solutions need to be offered.

William Sprole, 1492 Sherwood, Green Bay, stated that once the artifacts are gone, and the funds are gone, where do you go from there. He is hopeful that some other worthwhile solution will be offered.

Christine Dunbar, 1044 Holzer St., Green Bay, president of the Brown County Historical Society and past chair of the City Preservation Committee, stated that she has been a lifelong user of the library and doesn't want to see services cut. The Brown County Historical Society, Heritage Hill, Antiquarians, De Pere Historical Society, and others should all get together as a group, look at all the artifacts and see what the alternatives to sale are.

Donald Zuidmulder, 903 S Quincy, Green Bay, stated that the community has failed the library or we wouldn't be in this situation. His great-grandfather who served in the Civil War would not comprehend that this community would consider parting with the historical artifacts we have. To consider allowing these assets to leave our community is a comment that we

are not the people we think we are. These things link us to our forefathers and the people that made this community great. That the Library Board had gotten to this point is because the community has failed the library in the funding that it deserves. Mr. Zuidmulder recommended that a private foundation raise the money the library needs to have and the foundation could own the property, hold the assets in trust for this community, and display them in a public building - if the board feels that the community will not give the library the money it needs. To have a photo of Abraham Lincoln, that was given as a gift, leave this community would blaze the names of this board for history in terms that you have abandoned the heritage that this community so richly deserves.

Stephen Perkins, 908 Talbot Ave, De Pere, Curator of Art at UWGB, stated that American Association of Museums has very strict guidelines for de-accessioning art. If the artifacts are sold Mr. Perkins suggests that the money be used to acquire more art for the public to enjoy. If the work is to be kept, the natural place to keep it is the Neville Museum because the library is not the appropriate place.

Mike Fleck, 1402 Charles St, De Pere, Brown County Supervisor, De Pere City Counsel, Brown County and De Pere Historic Preservation Committees, agrees that these artifacts were given in good faith to the community and should stay here. There are other options to come up with the money and there should be some kind of traveling display that would allow the school children to see the items.

Bob Bush, 3062 Bay View Dr., Green Bay, Brown County resident for 67 years and past president of the Library Board, stated that many people use the libraries that contain, books, periodicals, CDs, DVDs, computers providing access to the Internet, and most important of all well-informed librarians. The holdings are established by the needs of the people. Since funds are limited the items not utilized will not continue to be purchased. Since space is limited, and needs change, library books are sold by the Friends of the BC Library along with donated books, so selling assets is nothing new to the library. The assets we are discussing tonight are not used by the people. It is not because people don't know they are here because 10 years ago the issue came up, and again a year ago, there was a lot of publicity regarding the assets. The library does not have the proper humidity control or security. Bob asked the Library Board to sell the assets, for the best price possible, and use that money for the healthy start of an endowment fund which will be a gift that will keep on giving. To keep those assets here for sentimental reasons is unthinkable and poor stewardship.

Tom Coaty, Assistant District Attorney, stated that the Lincoln photograph deserves to stay here. 9 of the 30 largest corporations in the state are in Brown County and between all of us we can raise the money. If we can hold on to an NFL franchise we can hold on to Mr. Lincoln.

Jim Sickel, 122 W. Mission Rd., Green Bay, stated that we have a rare thing in the photo of Abraham Lincoln reading to his son, giving instructions like a librarian does. If this photo were prominently displayed in the library it would instruct the community in family values and educate us as much as books and encyclopedias. He would hope that a private/public partnership could preserve these artifacts the same as one did when the old Carnegie library was built in Green Bay. The County Board just has to simply get some backbone and fund this very vital asset as County Boards have done in the past. We can't keep cutting costs to fund this library system that the community has come to rely on. We built the Kress and Weyers-Hilliard libraries with private and public funding and you just don't give gifts away. He doesn't want the artifacts at the museum he wants them at the library.

Susan Hockers, 1167 Jordan Rd, De Pere, expressed the opinion that the library should not sell the historical paintings, letters that have been entrusted to its care. Given the library's history of exemplary public service as recognized by being awarded the Wisconsin and Nation Public Library of the Year Ms. Hockers doesn't understand how it could consider such a short sighted idea of selling these assets. These items were given as gifts to be preserved and enjoyed by the people of Wisconsin. What a disservice would be done to these benefactors. No amount of money realized from selling these assets will solve the library's financial problems long term. She stated that the library's mission is to provide access to information in support of cultural enrichment by maintaining information unique to its residents, and she fails to see how selling assets given specifically to residents of this community supports that mission. She added that if the library doesn't have the means to display the assets properly an agreement should be made with the local museum to loan them to the museum who could display them on the library's behalf. That would provide an opportunity to increase awareness and solicit donations.

Cliff Wall, 2576 Riverside Dr., Green Bay, asked everyone present that does not support selling the assets to stand up and most of the attendees stood. He stated that he is the county and the assets were gifts to him, as well as his great-grandparents, and they wanted to preserve them so that he could see them and his children and grandchildren could see them.

Bill Eiler, 720 4th St., De Pere, Treasurer of the Green Bay-De Pere Antiquarian Society, asked how much of the total appraisal money would actually be received after commissions, transportation, and other fees are taken out. Selling our heritage for a

few hundred thousand dollars is not worth it. He would be happy to pay more taxes to support the library and many others present applauded in support.

Harry Maier, 886 Hubbard St., Green Bay, President of the Friends of BCL, mentioned that the mission of the Friends is to support the library in all of its efforts by financial contributions and the purchase of equipment and sponsoring programs. Initially the Friends board would support the effort of the Antiquarian to preserve the assets, however if that effort is not successful their next thought would be to support raising an endowment which would require at least a minimum of \$3 million to be somewhat successful. If those two efforts fail we would have to proceed then with the sale of the assets.

Bridget Zakowski, 1254 Emilie St., Green Bay, a homemaker with 4 children spends a lot of time in the library. She grew up in a town with a Carnegie library, adding that he was a great visionary. She would hope that the Library Board is also a visionary in the community and it would be very short-sighted to sell the assets. Ms. Zakowski stated that we need to do a better job getting more money for the library and asked the library to provide citizens with ongoing information on budgets and how they relate to previous years. Also suggested was an information kiosk listing the names of County Board members that support the library. Ms. Zakowski suggested bringing back the Abe Lincoln impersonator to march in the parade and promote the photo, and also try a Give-the-Library-A-Buck campaign. She closed by saying she would support her taxes being raised to support the library.

Laurie Weyenberg, 1043 Reed St., Green Bay, stated that she has seen the artifacts and was a part of getting the rugs to the Antiquarian show and numerous people asked why they weren't out for our children to see. She added that there are so many intelligent, wealthy entrepreneurs in this community she can think of so many ways to make so much more than \$3 million and it would not entail selling these gifts. She asked if everyone could go upstairs now to see the artifacts and Terry Watermolen responded that we do not have the proper security, or the staff, to protect the pieces or have them on display for the public. Ms. Weyenberg added that she knows that this community can raise the money to place the artifacts in trust.

Written comments were received from Chuck Hastert, 4494 Seminole Trail, Green Bay, who suggested a public referendum like other governmental units, adding that it would pass. He also requested the documents be kept but showed/displayed. Reanna Reimer, 2124 Kensington Lane, Green Bay, stated that something needs to be done to update the library including adding wireless access, a way to view VHS tapes, and if not sell the paintings raise funds by way of a fundraiser or donations.

Terry Watermolen closed by thanking the Library Board members for all of the time, effort and expertise they offer throughout the year, adding that it is the board's fiduciary responsibility to act in the best interest of the library. After all information is gathered regarding the artifacts it will be an extremely difficult decision. However, something will be done because the items will not be put back in storage at the library. He stated that it would be nice to maintain the items in the community and the Library Board is certainly open to solutions that include that.

OTHER BUSINESS

Motion by Schierl, seconded by Miller, to adjourn the meeting. **Motion carried.**

Respectfully submitted,
Rob Miller, Secretary
Mary Ryan, Recording Secretary