

THE NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY
5 WASHINGTON STREET, NEWARK, NEW JERSEY 07102



P R E S S R E L E A S E

Thursday, June 29, 2006
Please Contact: Heidi Cramer 973-733-7837

Newark Salutes 150th Birthday of John Cotton Dana

The Father of the Modern Library Left His Imprint on Three Great Newark Institutions: The Newark Library, The Newark Museum and Rutgers-Newark

Just as certain buildings define skylines, as music marks an age, as ideas mark an era, John Cotton Dana, visionary, revolutionary and director of the Newark Public Library from the turn of the 19th century until his death in 1929, defined the city and changed it forever.

He opened the Library to the common man, transforming it from the bastion of intellectuals to a democratic forum. He founded the Newark Museum and sat on the board of the Dana College of Arts and Sciences, now the Newark College of Arts and Science at Rutgers University.

“John Cotton Dana was instrumental in molding the social and civic life of Newark,” said Wilma J. Grey, the director of The Newark Public Library. “His influence is still felt throughout the city. Some of his ideas, many of them radical at the time, are just now gaining favor in intellectual spheres.”

The library will hold a gala evening Thursday, July 13, at 6 p.m. to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Dana’s birth at the main branch of the Newark Public Library, 5 Washington Street, Newark.

Sponsored by the Newark Public Library and the Newark History Society, the program will feature a panel discussion on ***Civic Life in Newark: The Legacy of John Cotton Dana***. Speakers will include the leaders of the three institutions which embody his legacy: Wilma J. Grey, director of The Newark Public Library; Mary Sue Sweeney Price, Director of The Newark Museum; and Dr. Steven J. Diner, Provost of Rutgers-Newark. Ezra Shales, assistant professor at Alfred University and an expert on decorative arts and their impact on the public, also will be part of the panel.

A reception and tour of the Library's gallery will follow the program, which opens a two-month exhibit entitled: *A Tribute to John Cotton Dana, Commemorating the Sesquicentennial of His Birth*.

Dana is now recognized as the "Father of the Modern Library," for his innovations. He opened the stacks to patrons so they could browse and handle the books, established a children's section with its own reading room, built a business library, purchased materials in other languages and decided to advertise the library and its contents to make it known to the citizens of Newark.

One of the photographs in the exhibit shows a long white fence enclosing a parking lot on which is written: "Who Knows? Your Library Knows. Ask it. JCDana, Librarian." Parking cost 25-cents a day back then. A library card, as Dana made known to all when he sent his librarians door-to-door to tell residents, was free.

But during his life Dana was a controversial figure, some even saw him as a gadfly. He was passionate and outspoken, arguing his every idea and position in the press. Dana was unafraid to state his opinions. When he argued in favor of establishing what was to become the Newark Museum, an institution that celebrated the strengths of Newark, its industrial base, its manufactured goods, its diversity, he called traditional museums "picture galleries,"... "useless, wearisome dead-alive gazing collections of which the whole community would soon tire."

Also in the exhibit is a quote from Richard C. Jenkinson, one of the Library trustees responsible for hiring Dana in 1902. He wrote after Dana's death that: "He did not please us all with his radical suggestions, nor did he please everyone." But Jenkinson also noted that when Dana's plans had been implemented and had come to fruition, Dana had "helped build up not just the library but the reputation of Newark as a literary or book city. Then he was appreciated by all."

Under Dana, the Library's collection increased from 79,000 books to 392,000. Patrons increased from 19,000 to 75,000 visitors a year. Circulation jumped from 314,000 books loaned in 1902 to nearly 2 million loaned in 1928.

Dana was a transitional figure; a member of that first generation of men who were hired and paid to organize library collections, said Dr. Debra Hansen, professor of library history at San Jose State University School of Library Information Science.

"Until the later 1800s, librarians were literary figures; scholars who were fairly well off. Libraries were post-graduate reading rooms used for serious reading," Hansen said. "The new generation had a new vision for the American library; they rejected the idea of the library as a storehouse and the librarian its keeper."

“Their vision was more democratic. They saw the library as a community center, responding to the needs and desires of the population, embracing the idea of service to the community,” Hansen said.

Dr. Diner, Rutgers-Newark’s provost and a historian who specializes in the Progressive Era of American history, believes Dana was consistent with his times. “At a time when cities were inundated with new immigrants, many who did not speak English, the first response of the Progressivism Movement was to educate them.”

Dana was above all an educator; all his endeavors revolved around creating educational opportunities for the common man. All his institutions, the Library, the museum and the university, were educational tools.

“The University of Newark was what we now call a streetcar university, it enabled those of modest means and backgrounds to gain an education,” said Diner, explaining Dana served on the board of the Newark Law School, which merged with the business school to become the University of Newark.

“Law school was very much a professional school at that time,” Diner noted. Dana College was created as a collegiate (undergraduate) division of the old New Jersey Law School and later became the Newark College of Arts and Sciences, now part of Rutgers.

The Newark Museum has long embodied Dana’s conviction that museums should reflect the community that creates them. Newark, formerly a manufacturing Mecca and now a transportation and educational hub, has a museum that is more than a picture gallery. As he envisioned, The Newark Museum today showcases the talents of the city, its strengths and accomplishments.

Dana equated reading with learning and he was, above all an avid reader.

He established 12 rules for reading: 1) Read. 2) Read. 3) Read some more. 4) Read anytime. 5) Read about everything. 6) Read enjoyable things. 7) Read things you yourself enjoy. 8) Read and talk about it. 9) Read very carefully, some things. 10) Read on the run, most things. 11) Don’t think about reading but... 12) Just read.