

Carroll Baldwin Memorial Hall
Centennial Celebration
Rededication Address
Sara Vermillion, CBMI President
November 12, 2022

Welcome to the Centennial Celebration and Rededication of Carroll Baldwin Memorial Hall—as the plaque says—for the welfare and happiness of the whole community. Carroll Baldwin was the President of the Savage Manufacturing Company—our Savage Mill—from 1905 until his death in 1918. He was known as a generous and fair man, devoted to family and friends, and a leader who ensured the highest quality of goods and services for the mill and the community.

After he died, his sister Sallie led the effort to construct a building that would serve as a memorial to Carroll and as a community hall for the people of this town that he loved so well. The cornerstone was laid in 1921 and it was dedicated on Thanksgiving Day, 1922. Carroll's uncle—the Reverend Charles Baldwin—delivered a tribute, the plaque was unveiled, and 500 people enjoyed a turkey dinner provided by the Mill. Several of our friends from the Mill are here today. We thought about asking you all to host a Thanksgiving dinner for 500 people, but you lucked out that our neighbors over at the Methodist Church were already serving a big meal today for their Fall Festival.

In thinking about my remarks, I looked at the Reverend Baldwin's speech for some inspiration. An obvious and very appropriate theme for a Thanksgiving speech was to talk about blessings for which to be grateful. Most of the items he listed, though, were national events. In particular, he devoted a good amount of time talking about how prohibition is alive and well, and the American people will most certainly never allow that to end. I decided—with 100 years of Baldwin Hall history to draw from—I'll keep my remarks and thanks a little more local.

This Hall has gone through many phases over the last century. It thrived in those early years as the center of a bustling mill town. This main room was used for movies, productions, dances, and gatherings. It housed the first library in Savage, and there was a bowling alley, billiard table, and kitchen on the lower level. The Hall even served temporarily as the elementary school in the late 1930s when they realized the school they built at the south end of the Common was essentially on top of a sinkhole.

When the Mill ceased operations in the 40s, Harry Heim bought it to make Christmas ornaments. The Hall was used as a store to sell ornaments and toys. That phase lasted a few years, and after that the Hall went into a period of decline. That's where MY list of "thanks" begins, for the many people who have kept this Hall going over the years. Since 1922, the Carroll Baldwin Memorial Institute—CBMI—has been a not for profit, volunteer organization. I can't even begin to list all of the Board members and volunteers across a century, but there are a number of people—some here today—who

stepped up at key points to preserve this building, and we are immensely grateful to all of them.

In the mid 70s, a group of women in the “Savage Homemakers Club” met here regularly to sew and share recipes. They recognized the Hall needed help, took matters into their own hands, and became the first all-woman Board of Directors for CBMI. One of these women—Minnie Rooney—was particularly instrumental in leading the efforts to maintain the Hall. The urge to preserve this building must run strong in that family; Ron Rooney, her nephew, has been with CBMI for decades, and some other Rooneys helped haul river stones by horse and wagon to build the Hall in 1922.

Not long after that, Dennis Thornton became the caretaker of this building. Now, the way I heard the story was that his wife, Lovie, suggested that he could fix a few things around the Hall, and he just kept finding more and more things to fix . . . for about 40 years. No matter how it began, Dennis, we are so fortunate that you took the Hall under your wing. And incidentally for all of you, if you need a particular tool or advice on how to fix something, Dennis is the one to ask.

In the early 90s, the slate roof was leaking badly, and Cathy Whitehead and Corrinne Arnold joined forces to tackle that critical project. They obtained a grant, and through a variety of fund-raising efforts, raised quite a large sum of money for matching funds, and most surely saved the Hall from water damage.

In the 2000s, Lovie and Dennis Thornton were joined by Dale and Liz Fixsen, Greg and Mary Anne Gardes, Lourdes Sullivan, Jordan Borak, and Brian Clifford. They also worked hard to get a grant from the state and raise matching funds, but it was getting hard to keep up with everything that needed to be done: cracking plaster, faded plexiglass window panes, and the lower level smelled rather mildewy most of the time. Dale and Dennis led an effort for volunteers to take down each of the windows to repair and replace the glass. That’s when my husband Don and I got recruited to help.

Then Don and Brian had an idea. What if we really fix the place up, plaster and paint, renovate the lower level with better offices and bathrooms, and install this new-fangled technology called air conditioning. The Hall would be more useful to the community, and more self-sustaining, but we were going to need a lot more money. The Board went to our State and County leaders, Guy Guzzone, Jen Terrasa, and Shane Pendergrass. Guy, you may have thought we were a little crazy, but thankfully you all believed in us, and helped get the funding we needed for our grand plan.

But then we had another problem, because the plan worked and use skyrocketed! The phone became a like a game of hot potato. Nobody wanted to be in charge of answering all of those calls asking about using the Hall. Norma Broadwater, Cecily Christian, Suzanne St Onge, Tanyita Ruley, and Doug Woods—our wonderful Manager and event monitors—we are thankful for you every day not just for answering the phone, but for working so tirelessly to make this such a welcoming space for all.

And the work goes on. We've rebuilt and waterproofed the East and West entrances. It is such a relief not to have to run down here with towels and buckets after a hard rain. You're standing on new floors that don't have that odd hump running down the middle. We are very thankful for the skill, advice, and patience of our architect—Kate McCullough of Symmetry First—and contractors, most recently our own hometown ROI led by Dom DiPietro. They are the experts that repaired the badly weathered exterior woodwork around the windows and eaves, and restored the copper roof on the porticos.

Personally, I am very thankful for our current Board. We've had some important decisions to make, and we often roll up our sleeves and do the work ourselves. A prime example is Jeff Smith always buzzing about the Hall to keep the sound system running. It's a lot of work, but done with camaraderie, dedication, ingenuity, and thoughtfulness in discussing and considering what's best for the Hall.

Finally, there's something that's very important to us as stewards of Carroll Baldwin Hall as we recommit to ensuring that the Hall is available "for the welfare and happiness of the WHOLE community." What began as a largely white community when this Hall was built, is today a much more colorful diversity of races, ethnicities, genders, faiths, and sexual orientation. It's gratifying to see how our community has grown, and CBMI is firmly committed to continuing to broaden the use of the Hall as a welcoming and inclusive space. We'd love to see some more folks from the community on the Board. You don't have to be a carpenter or electrician, just committed to helping preserve this historic gem.

So, Carroll Baldwin never got to see this Hall his uncle declared a "building of rare grace, beauty, and usefulness", but I like to think that if he saw it today, he'd approve of how it has weathered the years, and how it has changed and grown to continue to serve the community. Thank you.