

Letter by Dolle Nichols to the city leaders and citizens of Naperville:

For years each child in Naperville visited the Nichols Library in 2nd and 4th grade. They were told a story. It was hoped the story would inspire a love for books and encourage their desire to learn. But most important, the story was to help them realize anything is possible IF you try hard enough. I'd like to share the story.

It's a tale of a little boy, not much older than 8 years old, unable to speak English and orphaned when his mother died and his step father deserted him. He had no home, no one to take care of him, no one to feed, clothe or shelter him. He was desperately alone. This little boy had learned to labor in the fields at his mother's side, but he was left with nobody to guide him.

This seems so impossible to me, but he was able to eke out a living, even though many of his employers were cruel and mistreated him. Some of the wives of his fellow laborers looked out for him and gave him good advice ... Get an education and be a good Christian. He was only able to attend school when he wasn't working in the fields or tending cattle. His life was hard, but this amazing youngster worked his way to Naperville and was teaching at 19. This enabled him to attend North Western, now North Central College.

An excellent student, he was hired by the college to head the business department. Finding the textbooks inadequate, he wrote his own book called, The Business Guide. It was impractical to hire a publisher so he took on that job himself and thus, the Nichols Publishing Company was founded, becoming a world-wide business. He wrote and published his own books, but published many books for others too.

James married Elizabeth Barnard and built a home on Chicago Avenue for his growing family. He and Elizabeth had three children: Grace, Laura, and James II. They hired 2 or 3 young men every year to help with chores and sell books in the summertime. In exchange, these young men earned a warm home, good food, and received a college education. This was a gift of life!

James died when he was only 44. His children were only 8, 6, and 5, so they never really knew what a great man their father was until they were older. Because of this admirable man, our town grew, businesses grew, the college grew, our community grew. He was responsible for bringing one of his best

student to Naperville to oversee Kroehler Furniture. This company gave hundreds of people employment for many years and put Naperville on the map. He taught Naperville how to do business. Upon his death, he bequeathed \$10,000 to the college for a gymnasium. To the city of Naperville, he left funding to build a library so everyone could have books. He wanted every child to be given the same opportunities he had. Learning to read was important to have a successful in life.

We outgrew that original library. When the new library opened, all the Nichols grandchildren came to celebrate our great-grandfather, and we were very proud of his legacy. But the newer building does not make the original passé. It continues to stand beautifully in its design and is one of the few original buildings left in town. It welcomes people to our city and tells newcomers who we are.

I plead with you to maintain and respect our past so we may truly appreciate our future. That building has purpose. It's the gateway to Central Park. It's the backdrop to our concerts. It's a grassy spot where we still spread our blankets to watch parades and listen to music. It's part of our past and important to our future. For those of us who grew up here, we see it as the heart of town and should remain so. YOU as city leaders, have an opportunity to leave your own proud legacy to our town...one in keeping with the spirit of this man.

I want to mention that our family never really knew his real name. When he first heard the motto, "Don't give up the ship!" he took it as his own. He also took the famous naval officer's name who had said those words as his own: "James Lawrence." I am asking Naperville to not give up his ship! Please Save The Old Nichols Library for future generations and give this story, heard by so many children, a happy ending. Please keep that little boy's dream alive. That beautiful building still has a use and represents something important. Don't let it be destroyed. It would be an irreversible mistake. Thank you for giving me an opportunity to express this very emotional message on behalf of my family.