

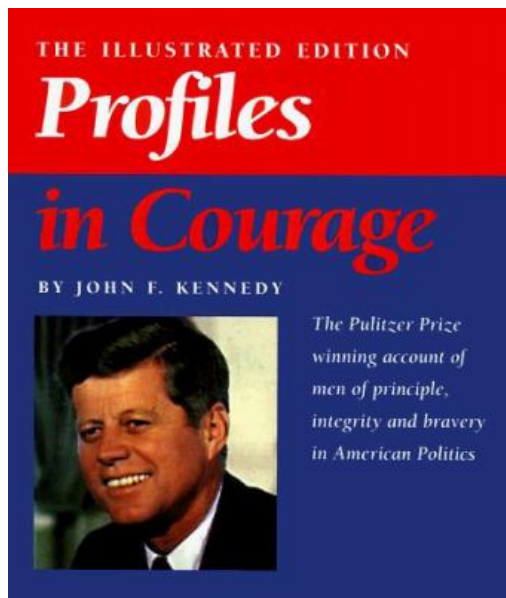
SADDLE BROOK FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

SADDLE BROOK HISTORICAL SOCIETY – MARCH 2015

JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY MEMORIAL LIBRARY???

It was November 22, 1963. I was a junior at Fairleigh Dickenson University walking next to the Commons building when the little transistor radio I was carrying reported that our President had been assassinated in Dallas. It was a tragic, unbelievable event across our nation and around the world. Whether Republican or Democrat, we realized in the weeks ahead that the promising, hopeful days which were later called Camelot had been taken from us.

In Saddle Brook Mayor Walencyk quickly ordered a thirty-day mourning period during which



all township flags would be flown at half-mast. He also ordered that a letter of condolence be sent to the White House. Members at the next Township Committee meeting stood in silent prayer.

Committee member Jeremiah O'Connor who would later become a state congressman introduced a resolution to have our new library renamed the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Memorial Library. He stated that the late president was one of the great men in the history of the United States. Renaming the library for him was the least that we could do to show our appreciation for his contribution to the country and to the world. O'Connor also noted that "this would be a

tribute to a man of letters who furthered the course of knowledge and education in all his speeches and actions. During his lifetime he was also a recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for his book *Profiles in Courage*..."

Mayor Walencyk stated that a committee to authorize the name change be organized. The committee had township attorney Harry Smith draft a resolution asking the Library Board to make the change. At a Christmas party for children held on December 22, the Jamros-Baker-Schneider Post 415 followed with a unanimous vote to make the change. Commander Norman Sistaró stated that "The late President Kennedy furthered the cause of knowledge, and we feel that this action would be a fitting tribute to him."

The Library Board's position as expressed by President Alvin Yhlen stated that the name change would be difficult "because the library has already been dedicated to all the deceased people of the township." The library had been dedicated September 22, 1962, in memory of deceased residents and veterans. Yhlen added "that had the suggestion been made during the planning stage, he would certainly be in accord."

All of this generated a great deal of public discussion and thought. As a result the initiative was terminated. Mayor Walenczyk, also a member of the Library Board, conceded that "in our hearts we'd like to do it but we should not go around naming everything Kennedy." He had no objection to setting up some type of memorial within the library and suggested that a bronze plaque be placed over the entrance with the inscription, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." For some reason this never happened.

It's hard to believe that fifty-one years have passed since that day in Dallas, a day when we lost much of our youth and optimism.

Township Historian: Jack Wasdyke

