



The Architecture of Literacy

Carnegie Libraries in the U.S.

Mary B. Dierickx

National Trust for Historic Preservation

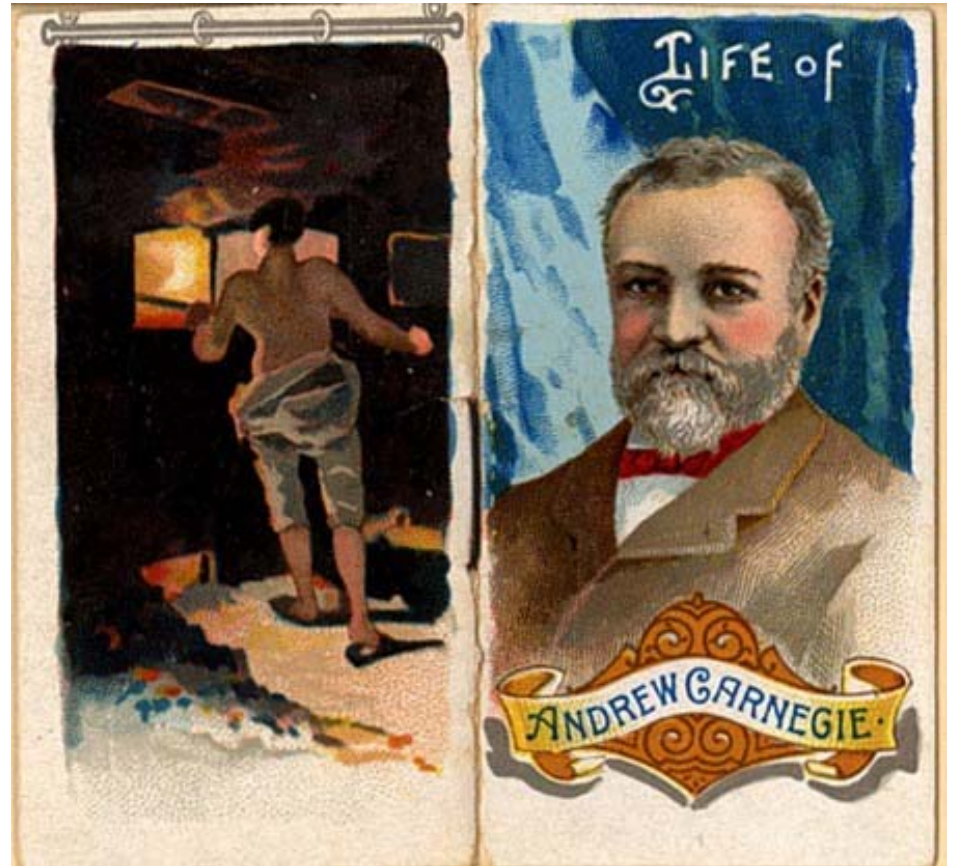
November 3, 2006

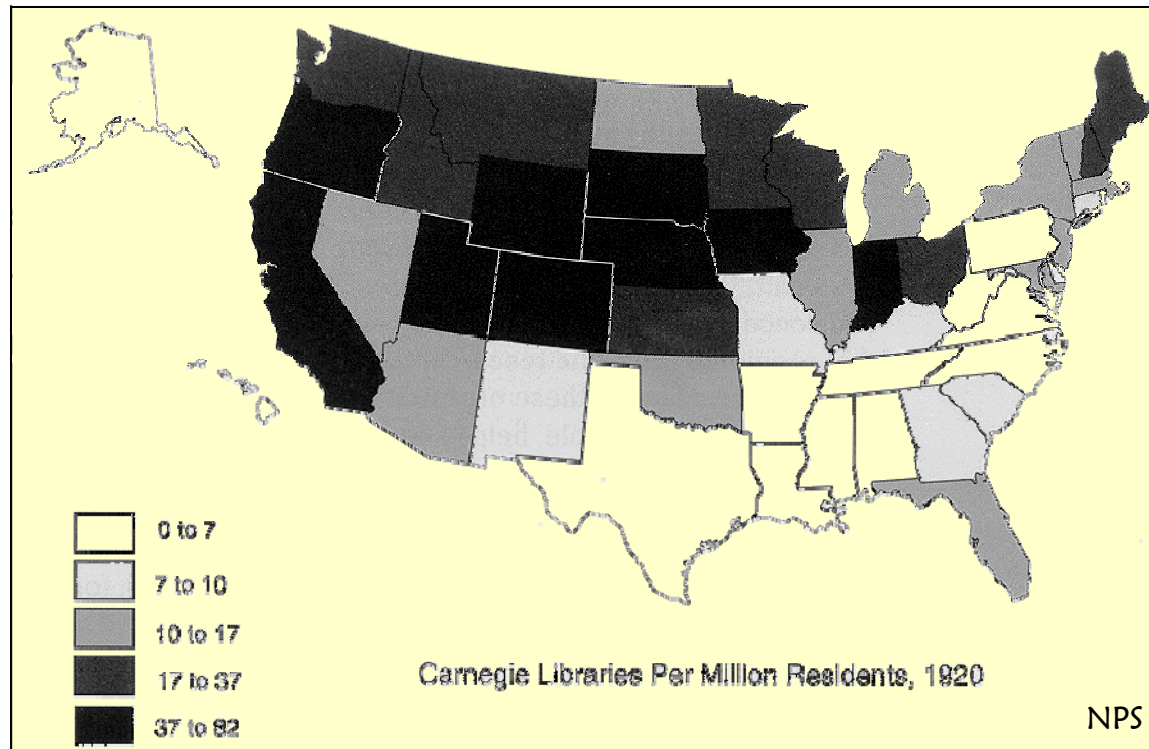
- Carnegie libraries are a unique collection of buildings, united in time, space, and intent



Goshen Indiana (1903) library
Indiana's 1st Carnegie library

- Andrew Carnegie gave over \$40 million for libraries in the US and nearly \$50 million worldwide
- He funded libraries from about 1883 to 1919, the bulk of donations from 1901-1917





- Over 1600 Carnegie libraries were built in the US in 46 states
- The most Carnegie libraries were built in Indiana, at 164
- California is 2nd, with 142

Table 1: Distribution of Carnegie Libraries, 1920

State	Population	Libraries	Libraries Per Million	State	Population	Libraries	Libraries Per Million
AL	2,348,174	14	6.0	MT	548,889	17	31.0
AZ	334,162	4	12.0	NE	1,296,372	69	53.2
AR	1,752,204	4	2.3	NV	77,407	1	12.9
CA	3,426,861	142	41.4	NH	443,083	9	20.3
CO	939,629	35	37.2	NJ	3,155,900	35	11.1
CT	1,380,631	11	8.0	NM	360,350	3	8.3
DE	223,003	0	0	NY	10,385,230	106	10.2
DC	437,571	4	9.1	NC	2,559,123	10	3.9
FL	968,470	10	10.3	ND	646,872	8	12.3
GA	2,895,832	24	8.3	OH	5,759,394	105	18.2
ID	431,866	10	23.2	OK	2,028,283	24	11.8
IL	6,485,280	106	16.3	OR	783,389	31	39.6
IN	2,930,390	164	56.0	PA	8,720,017	58	6.6
IA	2,404,021	101	42.0	RI	604,397	0	0
KS	1,769,257	59	33.3	SC	1,683,724	14	8.3
KY	2,416,630	23	9.5	SD	636,547	25	39.3
LA	1,798,509	9	5.0	TN	2,337,885	13	5.5
ME	768,014	17	22.1	TX	4,663,228	32	6.9
MD	1,449,661	14	9.6	UT	449,396	23	51.2
MA	3,852,356	43	11.2	VT	352,428	4	11.3
MI	3,668,412	61	16.6	VA	2,309,187	3	1.3
MN	2,387,125	65	27.2	WA	1,356,621	43	31.7
MS	1,790,618	11	6.1	WV	1,463,701	3	2.0
MO	3,404,055	33	9.7	WI	2,632,067	63	23.9
MT	548,889	17	31.0	WY	194,402	16	82.3

- New York State received the most money, at 6.5 million
- Pennsylvania was next at \$4.6 million

- Over 2500 Carnegie libraries were built worldwide, in Canada, England, Scotland, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and other countries



Fraserburgh, Scotland (1905)



Owen Sound, Ontario,
Canada (1914)

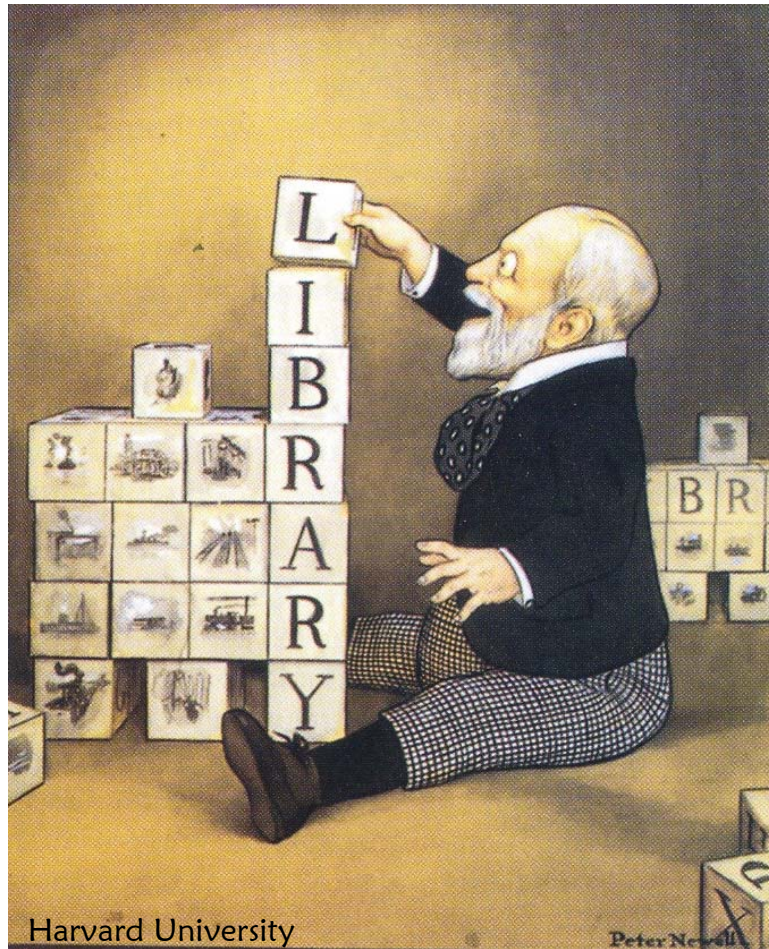
- Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) believed that the rich should live simply, provide moderately for their families and then give away the rest of their money while still living, acting as trustees for their wealth.



- Carnegie believed in helping those who helped themselves by providing the means to improve themselves – libraries were high on his list



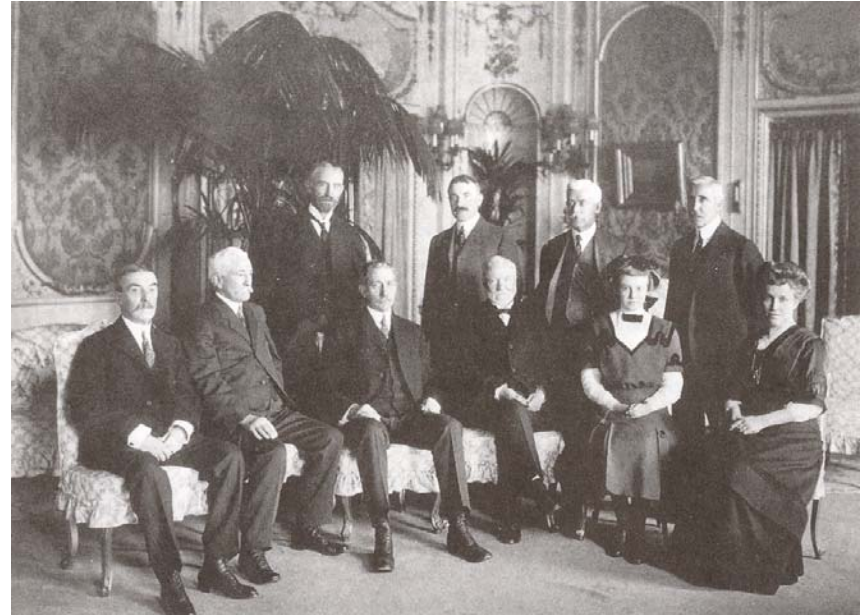
Harper's Weekly, 3/30/1901 (NPS)



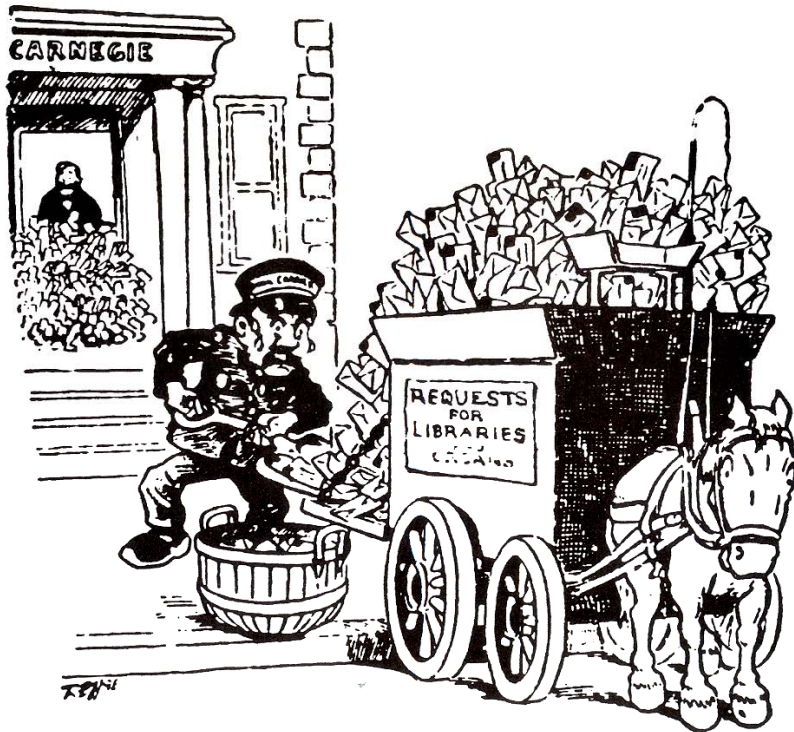
Carnegie's 7 areas of philanthropy in 1889:

- Universities
- free libraries
- hospitals
- parks
- meeting and concert halls
- public baths
- churches.

- Andrew Carnegie gave away 90% of his fortune, about \$350 million, in early 20th century dollars
- He established the Carnegie Corporation in 1911, one of the earliest philanthropic corporations



1st meeting of the Carnegie Corporation in 1911

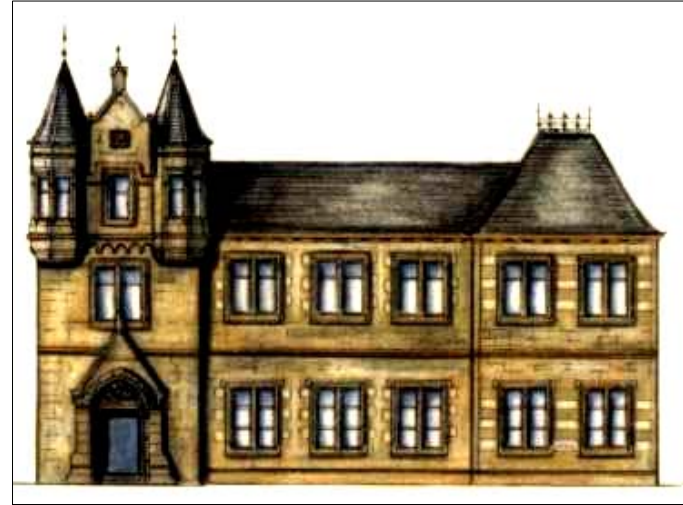


**SPEAKING OF LIBRARIES, HOW WOULD LIKE TO BE
THE MAIL MAN?**

Courtesy St. Paul Pioneer Press-Dispatch; undated.

"I hesitate to interrupt the flow of your happiness in your bonnie castle of Skibo, but circumstances are compulsory." From an 1899 letter from Uniontown, Pennsylvania.

- Carnegie divided his library giving into the retail (1883-1896) and wholesale periods (1896-1917)
- After 1917 the corporation gave to library education rather than buildings, although library funds were dispersed into the 1920s



- Carnegie's early giving focused on his home areas in Pennsylvania and Dunfermline, Scotland. The library at Dunfermline (1883), at right, was his first library donation
- The Carnegie Free Library and Music Hall of Allegheny City, now in Pittsburgh (1886), at left, was his first library in the US

- The Fairfield, Iowa library (1892), right, Carnegie's first library donation outside his home area. It is now a school.
- Carnegie gave about \$2 million for 14 buildings during this retail period

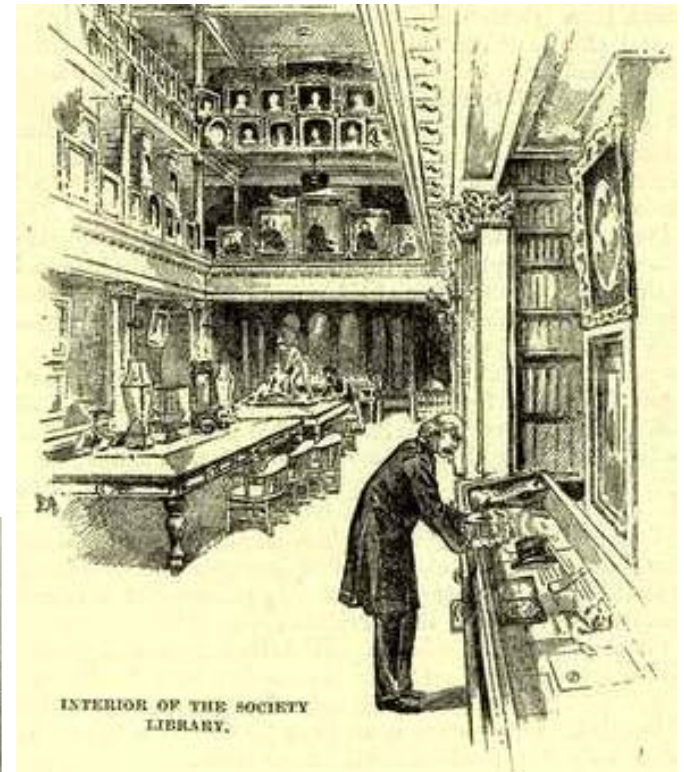


Homestead, PA (1896) library today

- Most libraries in the 19th century were subscription, private, attached to schools, or special collections

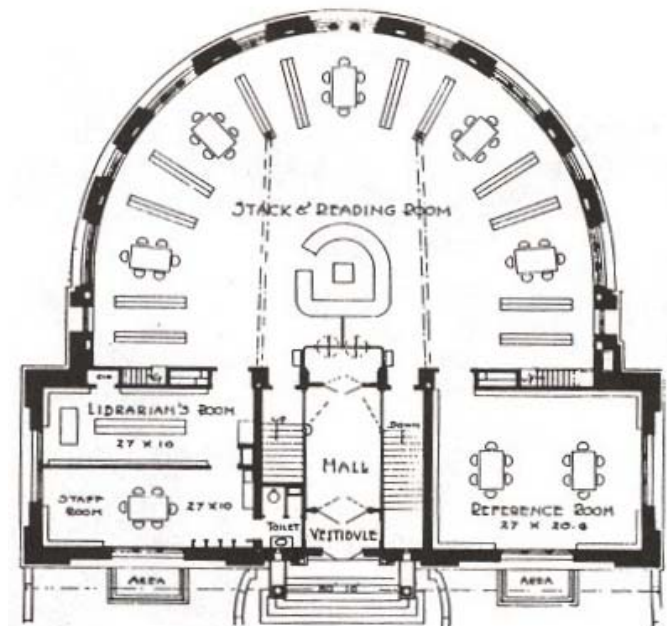


Player's Club Library, NYC in 1895



Society Library, NYC, in 1894

- Library shelves in the earlier 19th century were usually closed and patrons had no direct access to books
- Library reforms, encouraged by Carnegie, called for better layouts, more public access, and professional staff



Pacific Branch, New York City (1903)
library, professional librarians and plan
with early use of radial stacks

- Public libraries in the later 19th century were often housed in storefronts and on floors of buildings. Carnegie's gift encouraged separate buildings for libraries



Williamsburgh, Brooklyn: Storefront branch in 1899 and Carnegie library replacement in 1910

- Public libraries began to be built in the later 19th century, Carnegie's gift accelerated this pace



Sparta, Wisconsin (1902) library today



DeKalb Branch, New York City (1905) library today

- Towns across the nation applied to Andrew Carnegie for a library



Cleburne, Texas (1904) museum & theater today



Girard, Kansas (1906) library today

- James Bertram (1872-1934), Andrew Carnegie's Secretary, and after 1911 Secretary of the Carnegie Corporation, managed the applications and influenced library designs



Bertram scrutinized the answers to the library questionnaire. He wrote to Independence, Kansas:

“Your statement of the extraordinary development of Independence is not borne out by the fact that only one thousand dollars a year can be guaranteed to support the library”



Independence, Kansas (1907) library
today \$22,500 grant

Free Public Library

1. Town
2. Population
3. Has it a Library at present?
4. Number of Books (excluding Government Reports)?
5. Circulation for past year?
6. How is Library Housed?
7. Number and measurements of Rooms, and their uses?
8. Finances according to last Yearly report

Receipts		Expenditures	
City Appropriation	\$....	Rent	\$....
Bequests	....	Salaries	....
Miscell. Receipts	....	Books	....
.....	....	Miscell.	....
Total Revenue			
for year	....	Total	
		Expenditures	....

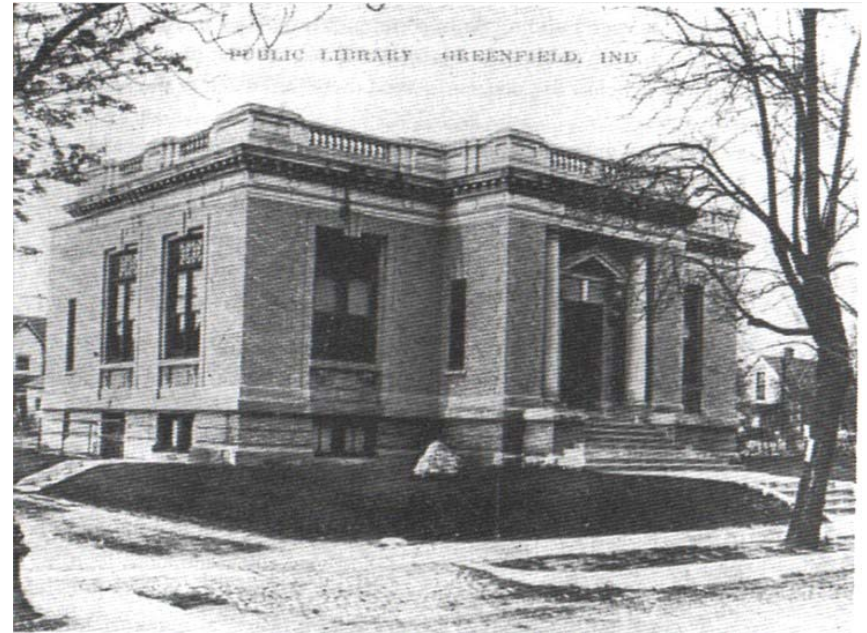
9. Rate at which Councils will pledge support of Library yearly (levying tax for purpose) if building obtained
10. Is requisite Site Available?
11. Amount now Collected toward Building?

To facilitate Mr. Carnegie's consideration of your appeal, will you oblige by filling in the above, and return with statement of any particulars likely to assist in making decision?

It is necessary to give explicit answer to each question, as in the absence of such, there is no basis for action, and the matter will be delayed pending further communication.

- Carnegie would deal only with municipalities, not library boards or private groups
- Greenfield, Indiana originally asked for \$30,000; James Bertram wrote:

“A request for \$30,000 to erect a library building for 5000 people is so preposterous that Mr. Carnegie cannot give it any consideration.”



Greenfield, Indiana (1909)
commercial today \$10,000 grant

- Andrew Carnegie invented cost accounting and greatly leveraged the amount he gave
- He required that municipalities provide a site, books, staffing, and maintenance in perpetuity of the libraries
- It was not always popular with municipalities when the real cost was computed



- The average grant was \$15-30,000 but there was great variation. The earlier libraries were more expensive on average than the later ones



Bellefontaine, OH (1905) library
today \$14,000 grant



Alameda, CA (1903) library today
\$35,000 grant

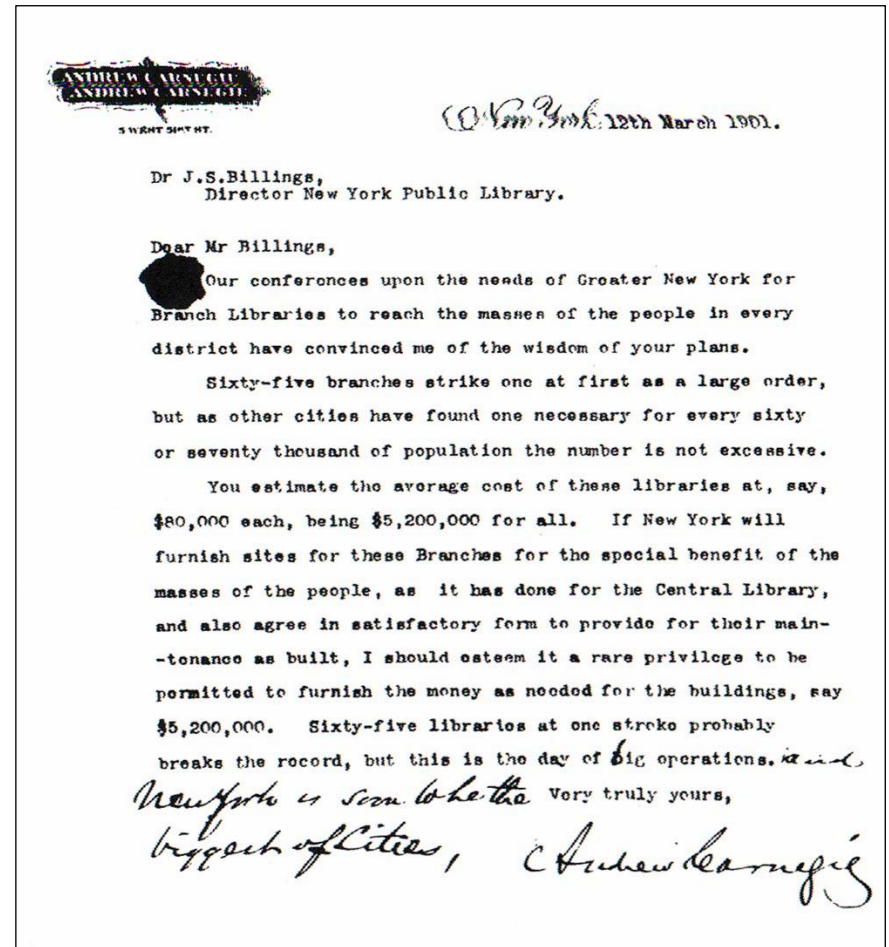


Medford, Wisconsin (1913) library
today \$6,000 grant

- Carnegie also gave large grants to cities, starting with \$5.2 million to New York City for a branch library system in 1901, 67 libraries were built



Stone Avenue Branch (1914), New York City library today



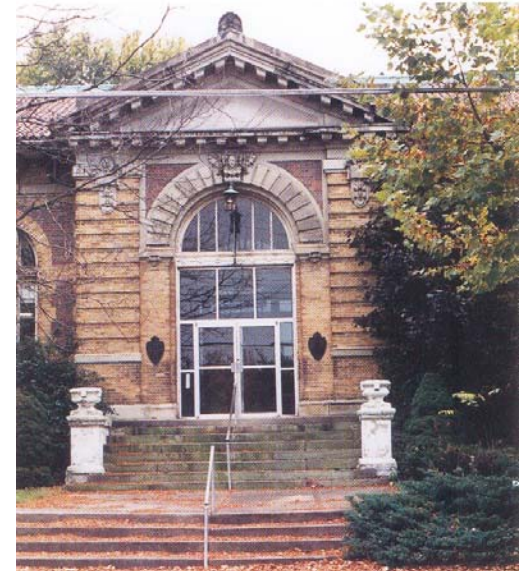
- Philadelphia received \$1.5 million in 1903 for a main library and branches
- Other cities received grants to establish branches, including San Francisco, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Baltimore, St. Louis, Detroit, Louisville, New Orleans, Denver, Portland, Oregon, Seattle



Lehigh Branch, Philadelphia (1906)
library today



Richmond Branch, San Francisco
(1914) library today



East End Branch, Cincinnati (1907)
community center today

- Along with Philadelphia, St. Louis, Detroit, Washington, DC, and San Francisco, 34 cities in all received funds for main libraries
- Main libraries were were grander in style and plan than the small local and branch libraries



Washington, DC (1902) museum



Detroit Main Library, (1913-21)
library



San Francisco Main Library (1917)
museum

- By 1919 there were about 3,500 public libraries in the US, half of them Carnegies



Fletcher Free Library, Burlington, Vermont (1904) library today



Ballinger, Texas (1911) library today

- Over 1400 communities in the US received Carnegie grants



Waterville, Maine (1905) library today

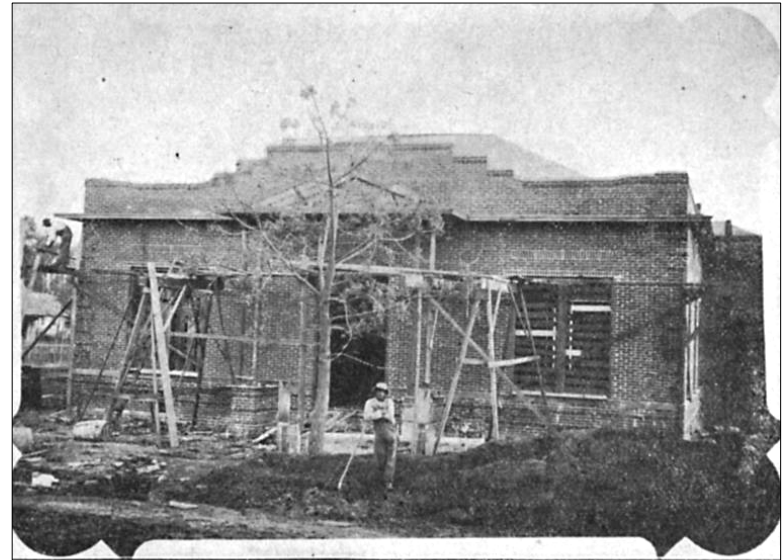


Cedar Rapids, Iowa (1904)
museum gift shop today



Niles, Michigan (1902) chamber of commerce today

- Carnegie did not insist on racial integration, saying he did not interfere in local matters
- Carnegie funded libraries for African-Americans, mainly in the south in Louisville, Atlanta, Houston, New Orleans and other cities, and also outside the south in such towns as Evansville, Indiana

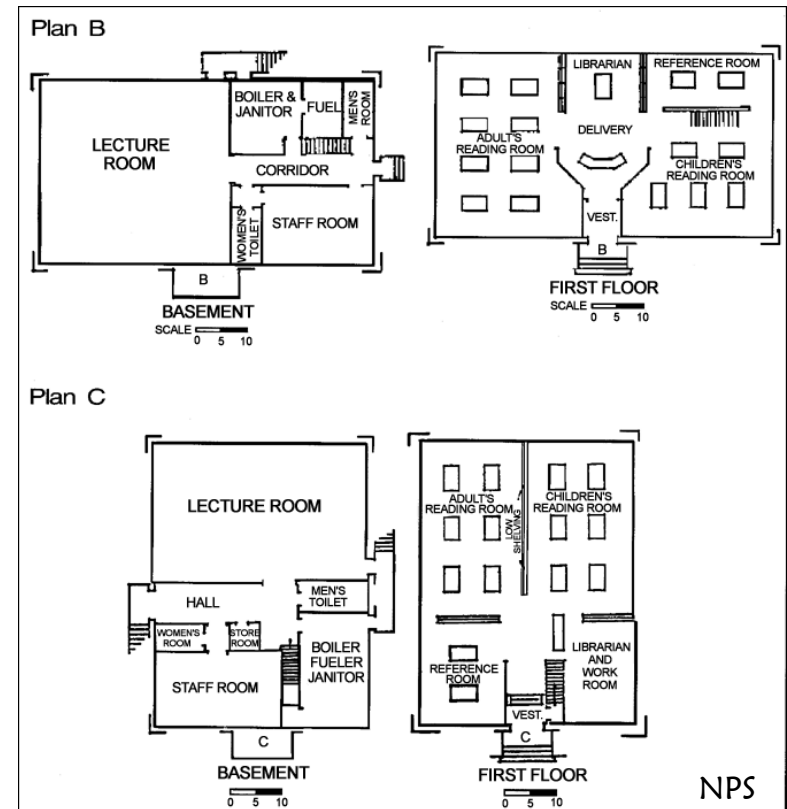


Carnegie Library in course of construction at Mound Bayou, Miss.

Mound Bayou, Mississippi (under construction, 1910, burned)

Booker T Washington requested library funds for Mound Bayou, a small African American community. The community could not support a library. The building was used as a Masonic Hall, then burned down in the 1930s

- Communities frequently went over budget and built libraries Carnegie and Bertram considered too elaborate
- IN 1904 Bertram began reviewing library plans as part of the application process
- In 1911 he published “Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings” with sample floor plans and notes about modesty in design, reflecting Andrew Carnegie’s preferences



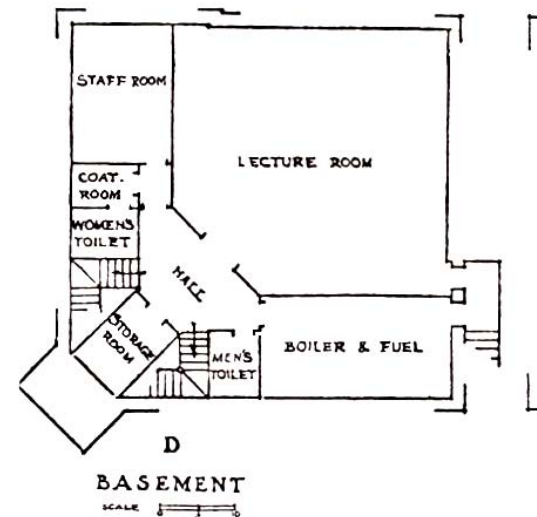
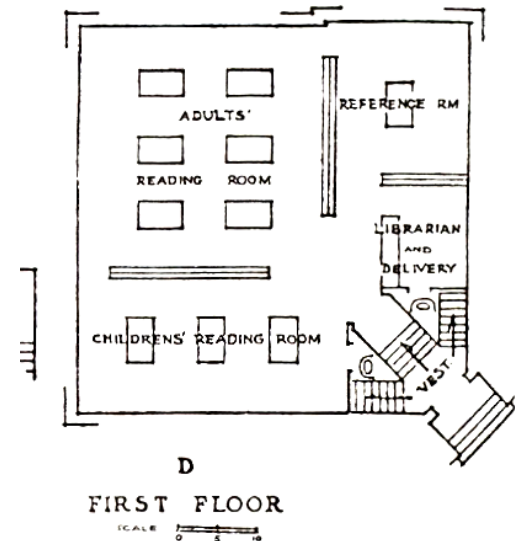
Sample library plans from “Notes”

- Carnegie libraries have a variety of plan types
- Characteristic features:
 - large, open spaces rather than small nooks
 - accessible, perimeter book shelves
 - reference desk located so that librarian can see several spaces



Webster Branch, New York City
(1906) library today

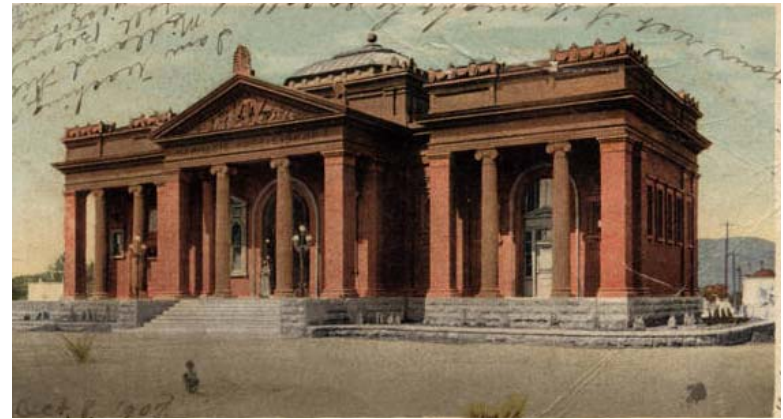
- Communities wanted a combination of uses: library, theaters, cultural centers, club spaces, gymnasiums, museums
- Carnegie held the line at libraries, although lecture rooms or community spaces were accommodated, mainly in the basement



Sample Plan D in “Notes” showing lecture room in basement

- The Carnegies vary widely but many share type and materials:

- Masonry construction
- Plaster walls and ceilings, wood furnishings
- 1-2 stories high
- High base
- Steps leading to entrance
- Windows at 1st floor set high on facade



Tucson, Arizona (1901) museum today



Coleraine, Minnesota (1912) library today

- Carnegies came in a wide variety of styles
- The emblematic Carnegie is Classical in style with steps leading to a center entrance



Sonoma, California (1913) visitors' center today



Napoleon, Ohio (1913) book storage today

- The majority of the libraries were classical in style: Beaux Arts, Classical Revival, Renaissance Revival



Xenia, Ohio (1906) library today



Kokomo, Indiana (1905) demolished



Salem, Indiana (1904) library today



Paris, Illinois (1904) library today



Paxton, Illinois (1904) library today



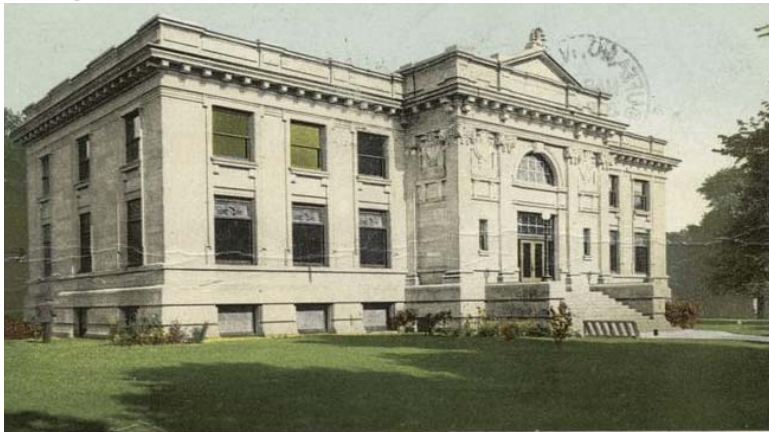
Jacksonville, Florida (1902) offices today



Houston, Texas (1904) demolished



Lexington, Kentucky (1906) library
programs today



Port Huron, Michigan (1904) museum
today

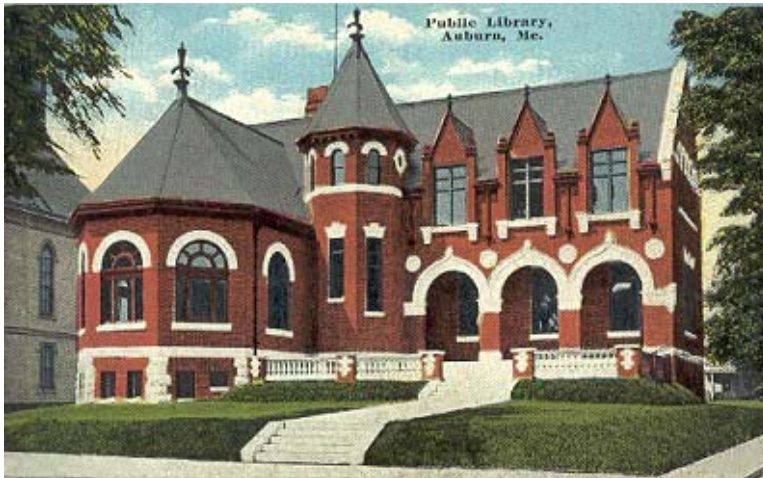


Cedarville, Ohio (1908) college
classrooms and offices today

- The other eclectic styles of the early 20th century were represented, including Romanesque Revival, Tudor Revival, Prairie, Mediterranean and other variations



Riverside California (1903) demolished



Auburn, Maine (1904) library today



Parsons, Kansas (1911) arts center
today



Richfield, Utah (1911 grant)
government offices today

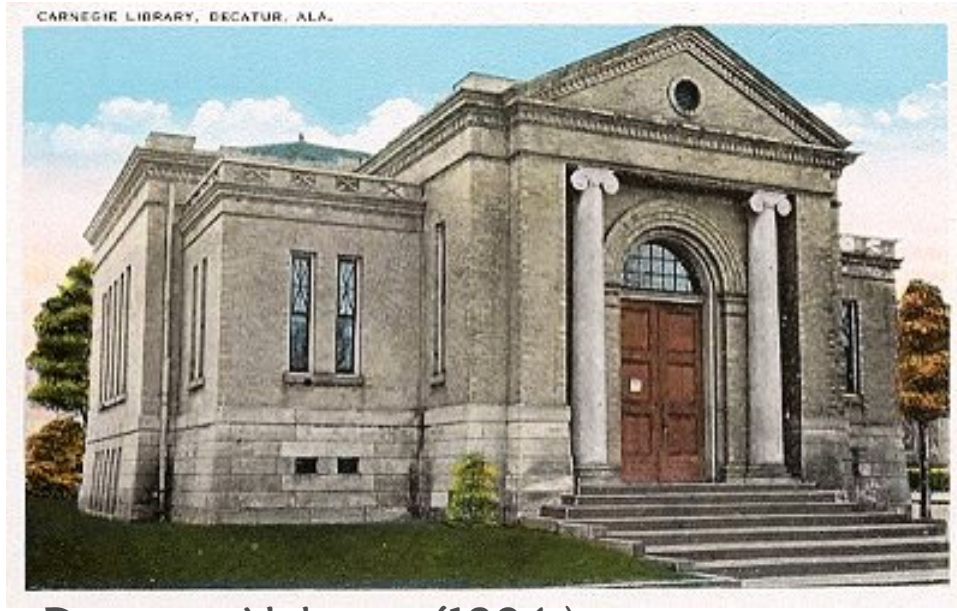


Hoquiam Timberland (1911)
Hoquiam, Washington library
today

- Architecture firms developed specialization in Carnegie libraries
- Edward L. Tilton of New York City helped James Bertram develop his “Notes” on libraries and designed libraries across the country
- Other Carnegie library architects:
 - Patton & Miller, Chicago
 - Wilson B Parker, Indianapolis
 - Clifford Shopbell, Evansville
 - W H Weeks, California



Washington Irving Branch, New York City
(1923, Edward L Tilton) library today



Decatur, Alabama (1904) arts center today

- Today over 1100 Carnegie libraries have survived
- Over 700 are still libraries
- Other are used as museums, community centers, offices, and arts centers
- Hundreds are listed in the National Register

- The Carnegie libraries of the US are a significant and irreplaceable collection as essential to producing a literate and educated populace today as they were over 100 years ago



Thanks



Many people have written about, photographed, and publicized Carnegie libraries in the US. Images and information in this lecture primarily come from:

Mary Ellen Armentrout, *Carnegie Libraries of Ohio*

George Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*

Mary B Dierickx, *The Architecture of Literacy*

Theodore Jones, *Carnegie Libraries Across America*

Alan McPherson, *Temples of Knowledge*

Abigail Van Slyck, *Free to All*

Joseph Wall, *Andrew Carnegie*

Web sites: Library of Congress, National Park Service
– *Teaching with Historic Places*, NY Public Library,
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Mary B Dierickx

Principal

Mary B Dierickx

Architectural Preservation Consulting

125 Cedar Street, Suite 11S

New York, NY 10006

212-227-1271

MDierickx@MBDierickx.com