

ROBERT BURKE WALKER, JR.

Georgia's Carnegie Libraries: A Study of Their History, Their Existing Conditions, and Conservation.

(Under the direction of CATHERINE HOWETT)

Georgia's twenty five existing Carnegie libraries were considered from a historic preservation perspective, identifying and evaluating each building's historic significance. The name of the architects, the libraries individual histories, and current physical conditions were included in the study. Methods for conserving the libraries' historic materials, features, and elements are discussed in light of their level of integrity. Nine libraries had few, if any, interior changes; one was restored; four interior underwent rehabilitation projects; and eleven had renovated interiors. Six Carnegie libraries are individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places and eleven are within National Register districts. At the time of the study, three Carnegie libraries were determined to be endangered and consequently received threatened status.

INDEX WORDS: Carnegie Libraries, Historic Preservation, Library architecture--  
Georgia--Conservation and Restoration, Public Libraries, Andrew  
Carnegie

GEORGIA'S CARNEGIE LIBRARIES: A STUDY OF THEIR HISTORY, THEIR  
EXISTING CONDITIONS, AND CONSERVATION.

by

ROBERT BURKE WALKER, JR.

B.A., Kenyon College, 1983.

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty  
of the University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

1994

CONTENTS

GEORGIA'S CARNEGIE LIBRARIES:  
THEIR HISTORY, THEIR EXISTING CONDITIONS, AND CONSERVATION

INTRODUCTION

by

CHAPTER

I. ANDREW CARNEGIE AND THE CARNEGIE LIBRARY PROGRAM

ROBERT BURKE WALKER, JR.

II. THE HISTORY OF PUBLIC LIBRARY BUILDINGS AND CARNEGIE  
LIBRARY ARCHITECTURE

III. GEORGIA'S EXISTING CARNEGIE LIBRARIES

IV. CONSERVING GEORGIA'S CARNEGIE LIBRARIES

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDICES

Approved:

Richard W. Hewett  
Major Professor

Richard Westmarcott  
Chairman Reading Committee

June 1, 1994  
Date

Approved:

Gordhan L. Patel  
Dean of the Graduate School

June 2, 1994  
Date

## CONTENTS

### INTRODUCTION

Across America, Carnegie libraries serve as evidence of one of the greatest philanthropic acts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Andrew Carnegie donated in excess of twenty-eight million dollars between 1881-1916 to libraries throughout the country and was responsible for providing over sixteen hundred library buildings.

INTRODUCTION.....	1
-------------------	---

### CHAPTER

I. ANDREW CARNEGIE AND THE CARNEGIE LIBRARY PROGRAM.....	3
II. THE HISTORY OF PUBLIC LIBRARY BUILDINGS AND CARNEGIE LIBRARY ARCHITECTURE.....	12
III. GEORGIA'S EXISTING CARNEGIE LIBRARIES.....	27
IV. CONSERVING GEORGIA'S CARNEGIE LIBRARIES .....	80
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	98
APPENDICES.....	101



## INTRODUCTION

Across America, Carnegie libraries serve as evidence of one of the greatest philanthropic acts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Andrew Carnegie donated in excess of twenty-eight million dollars between 1881-1918 to towns throughout the United States and was responsible for providing over sixteen hundred library buildings nationally. Most of the libraries are still found in towns across the United States, although many have been renovated, involving the replacement and removal of their historic features. It is likely that no other philanthropic program has touched and shaped the lives of as many Americans as the Carnegie library initiative. These distinctive, recognizable and beloved buildings play an important role in this country's cultural heritage.

Despite the large number of libraries and their value to many individuals and communities, the history of the Carnegie program and the architectural significance of the buildings are not well known. Collected information regarding the condition and current use of each state's libraries is likewise largely unavailable; typically, pertinent--although usually limited--information exists only in State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPO). Specific information such as the names of a library's architects or the local citizens who helped obtain funding for a Carnegie library remains mostly undocumented. While some books and other publications documenting Carnegie libraries have been produced, most of these were written by librarians who focus on the buildings' significance in terms of library development. No study to date considers the Carnegie libraries from a historic preservation perspective, suggesting methods and techniques for their preservation.

The surviving Carnegie Libraries exist as physical monuments to the ideals of Andrew Carnegie's philanthropy, which held that libraries are the means to elevate, through education and learning, an entire culture. The libraries' architecture, through their inclusive classical features and elements, reflects the bold intentions behind Carnegie's philosophy. Indeed the buildings provide physical evidence to America's cultural development during the nineteenth and twentieth century.

The preservation of Carnegie libraries depends on an understanding of each building's significance. Good historic preservation practice--such as sensitive rehabilitation and restoration--must also be understood and embraced by those who make decisions involving changes to Carnegie library buildings. Permanent changes that destroy the character of Carnegie libraries have occurred primarily because of a lack of familiarity with historic preservation methods and techniques on the part of decision-makers. A primary purpose of this thesis is to provide alternatives to treatments and actions that threaten Carnegie libraries. It focuses on Georgia's remaining twenty-five Carnegie libraries and categorizes the individual style and features of each one, providing information regarding the libraries' architecture and history. In the end, this study hopes to suggest historic preservation guidelines to be used in conserving and restoring the remaining Carnegie libraries in Georgia, and possibly others across the United States. It also attempts to dispel common misconceptions concerning Carnegie libraries and to heighten community awareness of the buildings, in the interest of encouraging local communities to weigh alternatives conscientiously when making decisions that permanently alter or destroy a Carnegie library or some part of its historic fabric.

## I. ANDREW CARNEGIE AND THE CARNEGIE LIBRARY PROGRAM

Because the Carnegie library program was conceived and implemented by one individual, biographical information regarding Andrew Carnegie is relevant to our understanding of the program. The personality of Andrew Carnegie is evident in the policies of the endowment he established--indeed, the library program's methods and procedures reflect many of Carnegie's idiosyncrasies.

Andrew Carnegie's early life reads like a Horatio Alger story. Carnegie's family came to the United States in 1848 from Scotland, hoping to improve their economic prospects after the failure of Andrew's father's business. They settled in Pittsburgh, where Andrew began working in a factory office as a clerk, copying billets and messages. He won the job mainly for his skilled penmanship, but also for his congenial and energetic personality. During this time, Andrew was exposed to his first library--the four-hundred-volume library of Colonel Anderson of Pittsburgh. Once a week, this private library was opened to Andrew and other children for reading. This gesture by Colonel Anderson had a dramatic impact on Andrew's early development and was partly responsible for his affinity for libraries throughout his life. Carnegie observed in his autobiography that "my own personal experience may have led me to value a free library beyond all other forms of benevolence."<sup>1</sup> He also considered public libraries to be a kind of sound, social investment: "It was from my own early experience that I decided there was no use to which money could be applied so productive of good to boys and girls who have good within them and ability and ambition to develop it, as the founding of a

---

<sup>1</sup>Andrew Carnegie, The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1962), 36.

public library. . . "2 Carnegie's personal philosophy fueled the library building program for over thirty years.

Carnegie's first financial success came after he invested in the Woodruff Sleeping-Car Company, which was later purchased by the Pullman Car Company. The capital for this early investment came from both earnings and borrowed money. Success in this venture led to other profitable investments--a pattern that continued during most of Carnegie's adult life. He eventually invested heavily in the American steel and iron industry, amassing his well-known fortune: "By the nineties Carnegie was the most advanced and the most powerful unit in the American steel and iron industry."<sup>3</sup> In 1901 Carnegie sold his interest in this industry for three-hundred million dollars to a consortium forming US Steel. Carnegie dedicated the next seventeen years of his life to distributing most of this sum to philanthropic causes, especially the construction of public libraries.

Carnegie's reasons for giving his fortune away were based on his belief that the wealthy have an obligation to share with the less fortunate. He also recognized that bestowing charity reflected positively on his own reputation. A remarkable aspect of Carnegie's philosophy was that he believed fortunes should end with their creator. He supported taxing estates at death to encourage the wealthy to give during their lives: "By taxing estates heavily at death the State marks its condemnation of the selfish millionaire's unworthy life."<sup>4</sup> His austere Scottish character also disapproved of leaving wealth to heirs, whom he felt typically wasted it selfishly. So, Carnegie's reasons for giving were not necessarily simply charitable, but pragmatic in terms of distributing large sums of monies. That is, he intended to distribute his entire fortune and set about the task with much the same vigor as he had shown in establishing it.

---

<sup>2</sup>Andrew Carnegie, Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), 45.

<sup>3</sup>Carnegie, Gospel, xiii.

<sup>4</sup>Carnegie, Gospel, 22.

The first library building Carnegie contributed was to his birthplace, Dunfermline, Scotland, in 1881. In the United States, the first Carnegie library was given to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1886. These early library donations were characterized by informal and unsystematized procedures, a situation that lasted until the mid-1890s. At that time, Carnegie and his private secretary James Bertram recognized the need to formalize the giving program and exert greater control over the types of libraries constructed: "Library giving . . . quickly became a business, as efficient and standardized in procedure as the filling of orders for steel billets at Homestead or Duquesne."<sup>5</sup> Carnegie and Bertram believed the libraries should be utilitarian buildings, ones which excluded capacious interiors, ornate decorative features, or such amenities as large offices or washrooms. The standards and requirements they developed constituted the formal Carnegie Library Program and were intended to eliminate impractical and inefficient buildings like the many constructed during the program's early years.

The direct involvement of Carnegie and Bertram is evidenced by Bertram's "Notes on Library Buildings[sic]," published in 1910, which included six prototypical library floor plans--identified as plans A, B, C, D, E, and F. These six plans were intended to be suggested designs, to be interpreted by a locally-commissioned architect. There were no specific requirements outlined by Carnegie or Bertram; instead, suggestions were made for preferred interior features, such as a central delivery desk and separate adult and children's reading rooms. The models suggested, without requiring, certain arrangements of interior space. Most communities and architects realized that adherence to Bertram's suggested plans helped to ensure a proposed design's approval, and approval was required before Carnegie granted funding for a library building. It was not uncommon for Bertram to return rejected plans with instructions to review "Notes on

Barnesville's eventual grant amounted to ten-thousand dollars in 1909. So, the amount granted was based on population and did not represent an arbitrary figure.

---

<sup>5</sup>Joseph Frazier Wall, *Andrew Carnegie* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 818.

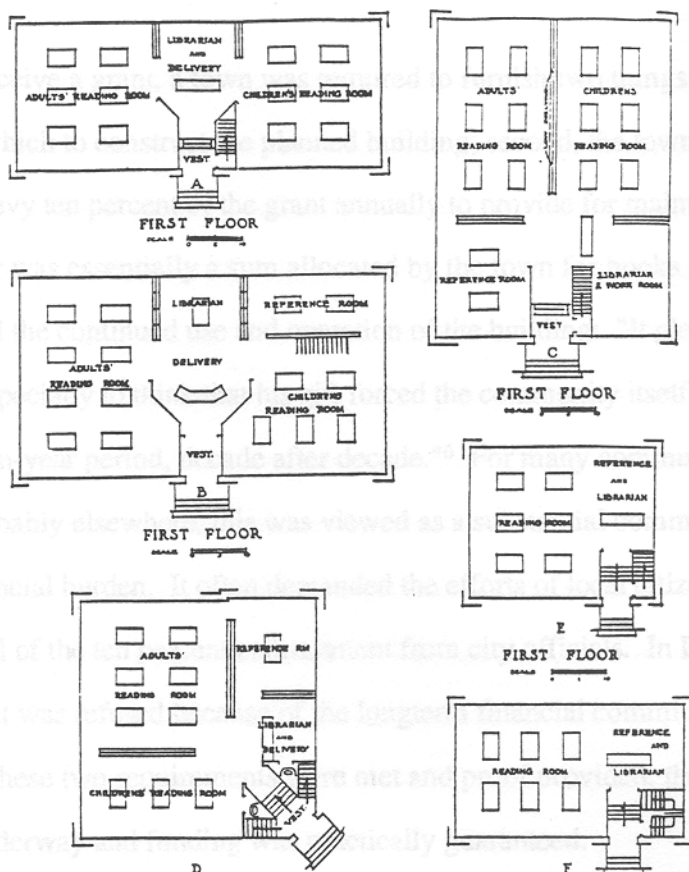


Fig. 1. First floor plans from "Notes on Library Buildings[sic]."

Library Buildings[sic]." (Bertram was also quick to point out that this review should have been done before the plans were drawn.)

The procedure required for requesting a Carnegie library was straightforward. A resident, librarian, community organization or virtually any citizen could send a written request to Andrew Carnegie (in care of Bertram) stating the desire to erect a library building. Requests were received and replied to by Bertram, although occasionally they were also reviewed by Carnegie himself. The amount requested had to be based on available census information, following a formula, typically, of two dollars per capita. For example, a letter from the city of Barnesville, Georgia, dated April 19, 1909, reports to Bertram that the "present population of Barnesville is between 4500 and 5000." Barnesville's eventual grant amounted to ten-thousand dollars in 1909. So, the amount granted was based on population and did not represent an arbitrary figure.



In order to receive a grant, a town was required to furnish two things: first, a suitable site or lot upon which to construct the planned building; second, the town government was required to levy ten percent of the grant annually to provide for maintenance and books. The latter was essentially a sum allocated by the town for books and upkeep, which guaranteed the continued use and operation of the building: "It pleased him[Carnegie] especially to think that his gift forced the community itself to match that gift over every ten-year period, decade after decade."<sup>6</sup> For many communities in Georgia, and probably elsewhere, this was viewed as a substantial commitment and sometimes a financial burden. It often demanded the efforts of local citizens to advocate and gain approval of the ten percent commitment from city officials. In Bainbridge, Georgia, the grant was refused because of the longterm financial commitment.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, if these two requirements were met and proof provided, the grant process was officially underway and funding was practically guaranteed.

Carnegie provided grants for both public and academic libraries. Public libraries were given to individual towns to be used by their residents. Some public libraries were granted as "Colored" libraries, intended for African American communities in larger towns. Academic libraries were given as "institutional" grants to universities and colleges across the United States to be used by their students and faculty. Most of the Carnegie libraries in the United States were given as public libraries.

Each town was responsible for engaging an architect to design a library, according to the amount granted and usually reflecting one of the six recommended plans. Copies of the completed design were forwarded by the town representative to Bertram for approval. In some cases, as in Savannah, Georgia, the plans were returned with instructions for revisions because specific features--in this case lateral wings--were deemed unnecessary. It was then the responsibility of the representative to contact the architect, communicate

---

<sup>6</sup>Wall, 829.

<sup>7</sup>Robert Sideny Martin, Carnegie Denied (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 159-161.

Bertram's objections, and resubmit the revised plans. In some instances, the commissioned architect attempted to clarify or explain his design directly to Bertram. This action was considered an interference by Bertram, who refused to confer with local architects. In the case of Cuthbert, Georgia, Bertram notified the acting representative of the architect's contact and expressed his displeasure.<sup>8</sup> Bertram consistently rebuked requests and communications from architects, relying more on professional librarians for a library's design. The professional librarian's advisory role during the grant process always superseded that of the commissioned architect.

When the plans were approved--with or without revisions--Bertram notified the representative and authorized payment from the Carnegie Corporation treasurer, R. A. Franks. In general, construction soon followed. Upon completion of the library, the Carnegie Corporation requested photographs of the library, as described in a letter from Bertram to the Atlanta Library Board President:

When the building has been erected, please send us unmounted photographs showing the front and side elevations on a reduced scale, preferably on sheets not more than 12x16 inches. If reduced to a size about 8x10 inches, these should not cost more than a dollar a sheet.<sup>9</sup>

This communication generally marked the completion of the process. The only other occasional exchange was in the form of an invitation to Carnegie from the town to attend the library's dedication--an invitation Carnegie rarely accepted. Sometimes the formal request for a library and the program's procedures caused difficulty for Georgia communities. There was, in some cases, confusion among local officials in obtaining census reports, levying the ten percent tax, or obtaining a "suitable lot." Communities like Dawson, Georgia, had no real understanding of the requirements. Bertram's correspondence includes many explanations and instructions that reveal his frustrations.<sup>10</sup> Bertram had to state and restate procedures to many local officials across the country,

---

<sup>8</sup>Andrew Carnegie, Carnegie Correspondence (New York: Carnegie Corporation, n.d.) 7, microfilm.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.



which may have resulted from the library program's procedures being unclear or misunderstood. The grant process could last from months to years and required diligence on the part of Bertram as well as the local representative.

After a library's construction, Carnegie wanted no future involvement with the buildings. Often, subsequent requests were submitted for additions or funds for new books, as was the case in Albany, Georgia. These requests were routinely denied. Carnegie expected the buildings he donated to be self-sufficient, not unlike a private business. Bertram's reply to various towns regarding such requests usually expressed some degree of irritation. The implication was that library buildings were one-time gifts, not the future responsibility of the Carnegie Corporation.

In Georgia, the Carnegie libraries all participated in this formal request procedure. Their size was typically dependent on their budget, which was, as described, based on census figures. More than anything, construction costs dictated the size and building type as described in this recommendation:

With a building fund of less than \$20,000, it is unwise to attempt a two-story building. The \$5,000 building should have one good-sized room over a high basement. A \$10,000 building will be similar, with a finished basement containing audience and class rooms.<sup>11</sup>

The architects were selected by the library commission or other city officials. While the building's form was suggested in the six floor plans, their overall design was left to the commissioned architect. The architects for Georgia's Carnegie libraries were, for the most part, associated with Georgia firms. At least three libraries were designed by architects based outside Georgia. Carnegie and Bertram were not concerned with specific architectural elements. That is, they did not completely control the architect's design for library buildings. Consequently, Georgia's Carnegie libraries, like those elsewhere, are unique, containing distinctive exterior detailing. They may also include local stylistic

<sup>11</sup>Joseph L. Wheeler, The Small Library Building (Chicago: American Library Association, 1963),

preferences common to a geographic area or region in Georgia. Georgia's Carnegie libraries thus reflect certain cultural aspects of their area, evidenced in their architectural characters such as the Cuthbert Carnegie Library's strong Colonial Revival references.

The Carnegie library building program remained active until 1917:

In 1917, with the advent of American's entry into the First World War, grants for buildings were discontinued, chiefly because of a shortage of materials and manpower. After the war earlier commitments were honored, but due to a change in policy no new grants were made of public library buildings.<sup>12</sup>

In Georgia, the Fort Valley Carnegie library was constructed in 1921, after American's involvement in the First World War. During and after the War, the Carnegie Corporation maintained control of the library building program. In 1915 the trustees, based on a study conducted that year of Carnegie libraries by Alvin S. Johnson, decided to discontinue the library building program. The decision was based on Johnson's findings that the existing Carnegie libraries "were not providing good service because they lacked trained librarians, he recommended that the Corporation, before giving more money for buildings, do something about the preparation of librarians and the establishment of central services for book selection, cataloging, and other operations."<sup>13</sup> So, other than buildings promised before the War, as in Fort Valley, Georgia, the construction of Carnegie libraries came to an end in 1918. The Carnegie Corporation no longer provided grants for the construction of library buildings, directing the grant program instead to library education and training. Most importantly, following 1918, Carnegie libraries achieved greater significance because their quantity was forever fixed. In theory, this date marked the beginning of their conservation and treatment as a limited resource. The death of Andrew Carnegie in 1919 also meant the loss of the program's creator and ardent

---

<sup>12</sup>Florence Anderson, Carnegie Corporation Library Program 1911-1961 (New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1963), 5.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

supporter. The Carnegie Corporation guided the library program until its conclusion in 1961, focusing entirely on library development, training, and education.

During the thirty years of library construction, Carnegie and the library building program succeeded in establishing 1,681 free public libraries in the United States while donating over twenty-eight million dollars toward their construction. The scope of the program was equally impressive, since "every state in the Union except Rhode Island had at least one Carnegie Library."<sup>14</sup> It is very likely that almost every American was somehow touched by a Carnegie library. The libraries' effect is difficult to estimate, but "who can say how many youths or lonely old people living in towns like Idaho Springs, Colorado, or Fora, Indiana, or Sanborn, Iowa, in those pre-radio-television days, found their only intellectual excitement or companionship in the Carnegie Free Public Library."<sup>15</sup> The Carnegie libraries, sprinkled across America, serve as evidence of our social and cultural history. They also represent an idealistic vision for America's future, as expressed in a 1902 issue of Library Journal: "They involve the introduction of a new feature into civic life and holding great possibilities for the future."<sup>16</sup> It is crucial for individuals and communities deciding the future of Carnegie libraries to remember that the destruction of Carnegie library buildings literally chips away at that hope and legacy.

---

<sup>14</sup>Wall, 829.

<sup>15</sup>Wall, 818.

<sup>16</sup>Library Journal, Vo.27, No 1.