

## “Open to All:” Andrew Carnegie’s Library Building Program and the Development of the Modern Library Building Type

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Libraries are repositories of written material culture. Within these institutions dialogues are created and ideas take shape. The notion that access to libraries has always been free to whomever is hardly questioned nowadays; this, however, has not always been the case. In the past libraries were considered private places exclusively for those of cultivated upbringings. Fortunately with the passing of time and the rise of philanthropy, the concept of a library free for all to use and free of charge started to take shape during the late nineteenth century (Van Slyck 359). As mentioned above philanthropy was vital to the growth of cultural institutions. In “The Best Fields for Philanthropy” well known businessman Andrew Carnegie posed the question, “What is the best gift which can be given to a community?” His answer: “a free library” (Carnegie 688). Carnegie’s influence on the library world affected not only the administrative aspects, but the architectural

aspects as well. The main aim of this paper is to provide an analysis of the Carnegie library building model that evolved out of the library building process the Carnegie Corporation oversaw.

Through his generous donations Andrew Carnegie helped establish close to two-thousand libraries in the United States alone. In total he gave “1,419 grants, at a cost of \$41 million, several billion dollars today” (Nasaw 607). A self-made successful business man, Carnegie embodied the ideal of elevating oneself to a position of influence, provided one maintained a determined work ethic. After immigrating to the United States from Scotland with his family, the young Carnegie worked in various occupations until he eventually garnered a great deal of wealth in the railroad and steel industry (Van Slyck 364).

Financially comfortable at a young age Mr. Carnegie felt the need to contribute to society. One of the ways he did so was by helping establish libraries throughout the world.

Influenced by other philanthropists, most notably George Peabody and Enoch Pratt, Andrew Carnegie “began his philanthropic career by extending gifts only to towns with which he had some sort of personal connection” (Van Slyck 365). Soon, however, numerous towns were requesting funds from Carnegie for the development of public libraries. Carnegie quickly realized the necessity to streamline the process of how funds would be distributed to those who were approved a library grant: “Carnegie instituted clearly defined procedures that gave his dealings with individual towns the formality of a

contractual agreement” (Van Slyck 369). In a way, Mr. Carnegie managed his philanthropic endeavors similar to how he managed his corporation.

Busy with other business and philanthropic tasks Mr. Carnegie appointed James Bertram, his main secretary, to handle the affairs of the program (Nasaw 606). Under the direction of Mr. Bertram the library program required those interested in obtaining a grant to fill out a detailed application, or a “Schedule of Questions” as Mr. Bertram preferred to call it (Bobinski 38). The main questions asked of those applying for a grant had to do with whether a library was already established in the community, the current town population, if a location was available for a library, and whether or not the town was willing to be taxed in order to support a new library (Bobinski 38-40). Once the questionnaire was completed Bertram analyzed all of the answers to determine if the community was eligible, and if so how much money the Carnegie Corporation would donate. If approved, the town had to agree to an annual maintenance fee, “the pledge had to be for 10 percent of the gift amount” (Bobinski 43). Mr. Carnegie was personally adamant about this requirement because he believed the community was responsible for the library’s growth. In fact, in his essay on philanthropy he comments on his willingness to provide the money needed to establish libraries given that the community is “willing to maintain and develop it” (690). Carnegie’s standards concerning social responsibility and hard work were not only evident in his personal achievements, but in his philanthropic work as well.

Andrew Carnegie's secretary, Mr. Bertram was equally determined to abide by such high standards. As the years progressed Bertram eventually became well-versed in the library program process and began to notice its shortcomings, specifically the way in which the grant money was spent on unnecessary building practices. The result of such activities led to the publishing of the pamphlet "Notes on Library Buildings," authored by Bertram himself. The pamphlet suggested six architectural plans that promoted "'good taste in building'" (Van Slyck 377). Consequently, Bertram's suggestions on the design of the libraries resulted in the creation of the "ideal Carnegie library" building type (Van Slyck 377). Most of the Carnegie libraries built in the United States, especially after 1911, the year Bertram's "Notes" was published, were constructed in a rectilinear format with the main entrance centrally located in the front of the building.

Mr. Bertram was cognizant of the conflicts that arose over library planning between the library community and the architects. The constant debate between both sides dealt with issues pertaining to the use and layout of space within the library. Most architects favored attractive interiors and the "Richardsonian type...alcoved bookhall" (Van Slyck 363). Librarians, however, felt that the use of alcoves in libraries hindered their visual access to all parts of the library. Agreeing with those in the library community, Mr. Bertram promoted library designs that "allow[ed] a single librarian to oversee the entire library" (Van Slyck 378). As a result, the circulation desk was placed in the center of the space, near the entrance, and open stacks instead of enclosed spaces became the preferred

Carnegie library layout. As important as the “Notes” were to the development of the Carnegie libraries the plans did not fully dictate the architectural style of every building. Every Carnegie library is original in its own way, the building plans may resemble one another but overall the libraries are varied and diverse in style.

Carnegie libraries built outside of the United States are examples of these diversions from Bertram’s building plans. For instance, many European libraries established with the funds of the Carnegie Corporation were not built in the simple, rectilinear designs. Farther away from the supervision of Mr. Carnegie’s attentive secretary the architects of these libraries most likely had greater freedom when it came to the design of the building. One example of this deviation from the regular building design is seen in the first library established by Carnegie. The Dunfermline library in the millionaire’s hometown of Dunfermline, Scotland officially opened in 1883 (see Figure 1). The library creation signified Andrew Carnegie’s success, embodied his value of philanthropy, and paid homage to the town in which he was born.

One of the fundamental Vitruvian aspects of architecture is *Utilitas*, or in other words, “the need a building is meant to serve” (O’Gorman 17). Andrew Carnegie saw a need for a library in his hometown and chose to address the issue. It is interesting to note, however, that he was not the first to try and solve this problem. His father, William Carnegie, actually initiated “the first circulating library” in Dunfermline (Bobinski 12).

William Carnegie, along with his fellow workers in the weaving industry raised enough funds to purchase books for the collection; it was officially called “the Dunfermline Tradesmen’s Library” (Thomas 53). Most likely influenced by his father’s actions, Carnegie returned to Scotland in July of 1881 for the dedication of the site on which the library was going to be housed, and which would remain a permanent symbol of Carnegie’s legacy.

The architecture of the Dunfermline Library accurately expresses the essence of Andrew Carnegie in its physical form. Despite the lack of plans available on the library’s structure, or, in the words of Vitruvius, its *Firmitas*, it is easy to see that the library is not overly large but humble in size and shape (see Figure 2)(O’Gorman 31). The architectural style of the library is also somewhat modest; it conveys a sense of refinement and function. The library’s style is identified as “Domestic Tudor” (Thomas 54); however, it is not a pure example of this style. Rather, the design of the library blends different elements of architectural styles together. For example, the style of the windows resembles simple neoclassical casement windows. Along with the simplicity in the windows, the plain dressing of the stone is reminiscent of that of French architect Claude Ledoux’s approach to handling his materials (see Figure 3).

The two-story, rectilinear building is situated on a street corner and subtly blends in with its surroundings. Nothing about the structure reveals its significance except for “Carnegie Public Library” inscribed above the entrance way in a Celtic font (see Figure 4). The doorway is an excellent example of the Gothic style utilized in the building’s

architecture. The verticality of the pointed archway directs one's gaze upwards to the two turrets. In between and next to the small towers are two pediment-like structures. A narrow, vertical hipped roof replaces the ornate structures at the adjacent end of the building. The library's design perfectly exemplifies the architect's decision to meld refined taste, and the simplicity of form, into a building that stands as an exemplar of the achievements of the library's benefactor.

Essentially, the Dunfermline library conveys Carnegie's success and humility through its architecture. It is interesting to point out the style of the library, which as mentioned earlier is a form of Domestic Tudor. The definition of Tudor architecture is: "the final development of English Perpendicular Gothic architecture" (Harris 553). I want to emphasize the term "Gothic" in the above definition, because it makes an interesting connection between the function of the library and the associations linked with the Gothic style. According to Erwin Panofsky "there exists between Gothic architecture and Scholasticism a palpable and hard accidental concurrence" (Panofsky 2). In other words, Gothic architecture personifies qualities associated with the development of the mind. And to Andrew Carnegie progress in the form of intellectual advancement was something he did not take lightly. David Nasaw emphasizes that "Andy [Carnegie] took his own self-education seriously" and knew that in order to be successful "he had to read more" (Nasaw 45, 42). The Dunfermline library is unique because it is the closest to Carnegie and it represents his journey to success.

As the library program grew and the number of libraries built increased, Mr. Carnegie lessened his participation in the program. It is known that Mr. Carnegie tended to shy away from opening events or library celebrations, in fact he “usually refused to appear at dedications” (Hoagland 79). Such was not the case, however, when the time came for the opening dedication ceremony for the Carnegie Library in Washington, D.C. Determined to have the benefactor of the new library present at the ceremony, the library committee cancelled and rescheduled the event after Mr. Carnegie denied the first invitation due to scheduling conflicts (Hoagland 79). In the end Mr. Carnegie reluctantly attended the D.C. ceremony which took place in 1903. The Washington, D.C. library was already an established organization before Carnegie offered to fund the construction of the new library building. Originally known as the Washington City Free Library, the institution was established mainly due to the efforts of newspaper editor Theodore Noyes (Hoagland 76). The small library was renting a space at the time Carnegie donated “\$250,000 for the construction of a new library building” (Hoagland 77). Due to the significant location of the library, it was designed to resemble “a monument, respecting its position in the nation’s capital” (Hoagland 78).

Cognizant that the architecture of the library would add to the character of the Capitol, its location was also a decision not taken lightly. Both the library committee and Congress took into consideration L’Enfant’s original plan for the District. Because of



L'Enfant's desire to create specific vistas around the Capitol buildings, the Congressional committee who helped determine the location, felt that having a library situated in Mount Vernon Square "would add dignity and beauty to a portion of the city where ornamentation is somewhat lacking" (Hoagland 81). After much debate it was agreed upon that Mount Vernon Square, situated between the White House and the Capitol, was the ideal location for the new library.

The next phase for the construction of the library was the design process. Luckily for the library committee Bertram's "Notes" had not been published, as a result they had greater freedom to experiment with building designs. For this reason the committee proposed a design competition, similar to the competition that determined the design of the United States Capitol. Participants were required to follow strict guidelines concerning the interior of the library, but not for the exterior. The only design suggestion for the exterior was that "the building be faced with marble" (Hoagland 88). One of the important requirements for the library's interior included how natural light should infiltrate the building. The most important guideline specified the exact dimensions each interior space needed to be. Therefore, the square footage of the rooms in the library determined the overall size of the building. After reviewing a considerable number of entries, the design by two architects from New York, William S. Ackerman and Albert Randolph Ross, won the competition (Hoagland 88). The Beaux-Arts design by Ackerman and Ross met the

requirements all the while conveying a sense of Classical elegance suited for the library's place within the Capitol (see Figure 5).

As mentioned above the library is a Beaux-Arts style building, which means it has a "historical and eclectic design on a monumental scale" (Harris 59). Quite a few Carnegie libraries were constructed in this fashion because of the style's elegant, ornate qualities and appeal. The original design by Ackerman and Ross was indeed ornate, and as the building process progressed the architects "were forced to modify their Washington design" due to cost (Hoagland 88). Areas that saw the most change took place inside the library. Initially the design called for lavish decorations but with a budget guiding the construction, "virtually all rich materials and ornament were scrapped" (Hoagland 88). The design of the library's exterior, on the other hand, was not as severely altered. The library's exterior is divided into a three part plan: two rectangular sections hug the main square body of the building. The rectilinear qualities of the building are emphasized by the "exaggerated horizontal course lines" (Jones 64). The smoothly finished stone building is quite reserved for its grand size. Instead of plastering the facades with ornate decorations attention was given to certain areas of the library, specifically the entrance. The six massive, engaged columns that grace the entrance way facade are a rendition of the Ionic order. Also incorporated in to the entrance way are two large Palladian windows, beneath these are implied stone windows topped with small pediments. A large, broken pediment,

ornamented with cherubs, rests atop the wood and glass doorway. The words “Science,” “Poetry,” and “History” solidify the *Utilitas* of the library, which was to provide the Capitol community with an institution that dedicated itself to the advancement of knowledge for others (see Figure 6). In addition, the library was also a symbol on a much grander scale. Positioned in the nation’s Capitol, the library served as a physical metaphor for the wealth of knowledge available to those who sought it.

Not all libraries established by the Carnegie Corporation were as predominant or large as the Dunfermline and Washington, D.C. branches. In fact, according to the list of libraries built under the program, the amount of “small libraries greatly outnumbered the larger ones” (Bobinski 15). Aiming to resemble the large Carnegie libraries already built, the libraries that weren’t as large sometimes borrowed those designs yet used them on a smaller scale. Others stuck closely to Bertram’s suggestions in his “Notes” because they were drafted with small libraries in mind. Other building styles were influenced by the region in which they were located. One example of this regional distinction is seen in the Riverside, California branch. The architects of this location wanted the new library to resemble other buildings in the area. Therefore, they constructed the building in a “Mission and Spanish” revival style (Jones 74). However, the majority of the smaller libraries were built in a Neoclassical Revival or Carnegie Classical style (Jones 67). The Toronto Yorkville library and the Old Town, Maine library are clear models of these two architectural building types.

The Toronto Yorkville library was just one of the 125 libraries established in Canada through the Carnegie Corporation (Nasaw 607). Yorkville, the first of the four branches established in the Toronto public library system, was built in 1907. The Carnegie Corporation donated \$350,000 for the construction of the four libraries (“Toronto’s Carnegie Libraries”). The library’s plan closely follows Bertram’s suggested layouts; specifically plans A and B (see Figure 7). From the exterior one can observe that the interior was most likely designed in conjunction with Plan B, due to the similarities in the width of the building and the plan. It is evident that Bertram’s preference for an open floor plan was used Yorkville architect. The absence of walls allowed the librarian to overlook the entire space from the centralized reference desk (see Figure 8). Minimal decorations were utilized, instead the design of the interior space focused on practicality more so than beauty.

The same can be said about the library’s exterior which was designed in a Carnegie Classical style (see Figure 9). This architectural style is easily identified due to its use of a “half-exposed foundation..., brick walls with corners accented by quoins, a pediment” and “large windows on either side of the entrance” (Jones 69-70). The Yorkville branch incorporates all of these elements in to its entrance façade. A small staircase leads up to the entrance, indicating the building is one story with a basement floor. Quoins line the sides of the building and extend around the raised foundation. Four Tuscan columns frame the entrance way and support the small pediment. Stemming out from the columns is a

suggested entablature. It encompasses the perimeter of the building and adds to the refined, Classical feelings conveyed through the architecture. Five simple but decorative keystones sit atop the doorway and front windows. An important physical trait emphasized in most Carnegie libraries is the incorporation of large or numerous windows to allow light in to the building. Although not very large, four casement windows are located on the front façade and three additional windows are on each side of the building, allowing for natural light to infiltrate the reading rooms and open stacks. Adding to the simplicity, the undressed brick and stone complement the minimalist and practical character of the library.

The Carnegie Classical style evolved from a previous library model, the Carnegie Neoclassical library style. Pleased with the aesthetic look of neoclassical architecture and the intellectual emotions associated with the architectural style, at least 247 communities in the United States chose to construct their libraries in this fashion (Jones 61). The committees who oversaw the construction of these libraries chose this style because “it was beautiful and seemed to them philosophically appropriate for a public library building” (Jones 67). Indeed, sentiments associated with Greek and Roman beauty, practicality, and intellectual advancement come to mind when admiring buildings that follow this style. When it came to building the libraries in this fashion the architects were often forced to sacrifice ornament because of financial restrictions, especially small town libraries that were usually given less money.

The architects who designed the library in Washington, D.C, encountered this same issue. Interestingly enough, Albert Ross, one of the D.C. library architects, also designed smaller Carnegie libraries (“New England Carnegies”). One example of his smaller designs and of Carnegie libraries constructed in the Neoclassical style, is the public library in Old Town, Maine built in 1904 (see Figure 10). The library’s dominant rectangular shape is evidence that Ross chose to abide by Bertram’s single-story A and B library formats. Similar to the Yorkville design, the raised foundation indicates that the Old Town branch contains a basement floor. A simple string course cuts across the lower half of the building. The staircase that leads up to the entrance way is compact, and the steps are compact and condensed. The arched window above the doorway is identical to the arched windows that surround the building. Two massive columns are situated on either side of the entrance way, easily recognized as symbols of Classical architecture. The Old Town library is an excellent example of achieving refined beauty, but on a smaller scale and budget.

Compared to other larger branches the small libraries were able to accomplish similar goals in terms of design and for less money. In addition, the small town libraries helped set the precedent for principles expected in modern libraries. Andrew Carnegie’s presence as a benefactor was more evident in the larger libraries, for various reasons. Most notably, if the library was larger there was likely a connection between the corporation and the community. Or in the case of the Washington, D.C. branch, the location

itself was enough to persuade Mr. Carnegie to assist in the building of a library which would bear his name in the Nation's Capitol. In contrast, the smaller libraries were less associated with Carnegie and therefore, less inclined to make his presence as their patron known. In earlier Carnegie libraries his name was usually inscribed above the door, or a portrait or bust was positioned inside. For example, clearly emblazoned on the D.C library are the words, "THIS BUILDING A GIFT OF ANDREW CARNEGIE." Libraries established later, however, shied away from such inscriptions and opted for simple titles instead (Jones 87). Above the Yorkville library's entrance way are the words, "PUBLIC LIBRARY" and the phrase "Open to All" is carved above the Old Town library doorway. Slight changes such as these indicated a shift in social stratifications. Van Slyck observes that the plans suggested by Bertram "reveal a different set of priorities" (380). In short, Bertram's intentions behind the publication of his "Notes" were meant to deconstruct social hierarchies within libraries. With standardized plans the "donor's presence was less palpable," instead the focus was placed on the librarian and the users (Van Slyck 380). Consequently, with the development of more Carnegie libraries, the way the public institution was experienced changed over time, the result is what Van Slyck calls "the reformed library" (380). That is emphasis was placed on the patrons and library community rather than the benefactor.

Another aspect that altered the way libraries were perceived by the public rested in the physical design itself. In order to attract patrons and have them use the library

Bertram recognized the need to make the libraries physical appearance approachable. Thus, the building layouts in his “Notes” “all used open plans like those already in place in department stores, factories, and skyscrapers” (Van Slyck 380). The uniform exterior of the libraries indicated that the building was a public space and made entering the library less daunting. Incidentally, thirty years later the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, Maryland would use a similar approach to the design of their building. The impact that Mr. Carnegie’s library program had on the library community was substantial; specifically the way in which patrons viewed and used the public space.

Unfortunately, the Carnegie library program eventually came to a close in 1917 (Van Slyck 383). The program’s suspension was mainly due to the start of World War I. With the lack of resources and materials to continue construction of the libraries, the corporation resolved to halt all funding. After the war ended, however, the program did not resume and the development of Carnegie libraries permanently ceased.

Many Carnegie libraries are still used as public libraries today. According to most recent findings “of the 1,689 Carnegie buildings constructed, more than 772 still function as public libraries” (Jones 105). With the growth of the communities in which they are located, many libraries have undergone renovations and have extended the library space. Also, certain communities that started off with a small library grew over time and consequently needed more space. In many of these cases the old building was left in its original state and location, and new libraries were built. These buildings are now used for



various purposes, most notably city, public, or educational offices (Bobinski 177).

However, not all Carnegie libraries remain, at least “276 have been razed or destroyed by fire or other natural disasters” (Jones 105). Fortunately all of the library buildings discussed in depth have lasted, and of the four analyzed three are still used as libraries.

The library in Washington, D.C. no longer uses the Beaux-Arts building as its home.

Instead, the Historical Society of Washington, D.C moved in to the building in 1999 after the library transferred its collection to its new location (“Carnegie Library”). Ultimately, it is important to emphasize that the libraries continue endure as public spaces and institutions.

Andrew Carnegie relates the story of how he came to admire libraries in his treatise “The Best Fields for Philanthropy.” Carnegie shares with his readers his personal experience of visiting the private library of Colonel Anderson, a prominent man who lived in Carnegie’s hometown of Allegheny, Pennsylvania, when he was a young boy (689). The story goes that every Saturday Colonel Anderson would allow the young school children to borrow books from his library and exchange them for new ones the following weekend. Reflecting upon this opportunity Mr. Carnegie stated that if he ever earned great wealth he would “establish free libraries, that other poor boys might receive opportunities similar to those for which we were indebted to that noble man” (689). True to his promise Mr. Carnegie not only established free libraries but helped reform the public library system,

along with the help of James Bertram, through the program's guiding principles and architectural practices.

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*Yorkville Branch Library, C. 1907*. 1907. Photograph. Toronto. *Toronto Public Library*. Web. 08 Mar. 2012.

*Yorkville Branch Library: Ground Floor, C. 1911. 1911. Photograph. Toronto. Toronto Public Library. Web. 08 Mar. 2012.*

Figure 1 – Dunfermline Library



Figure 2

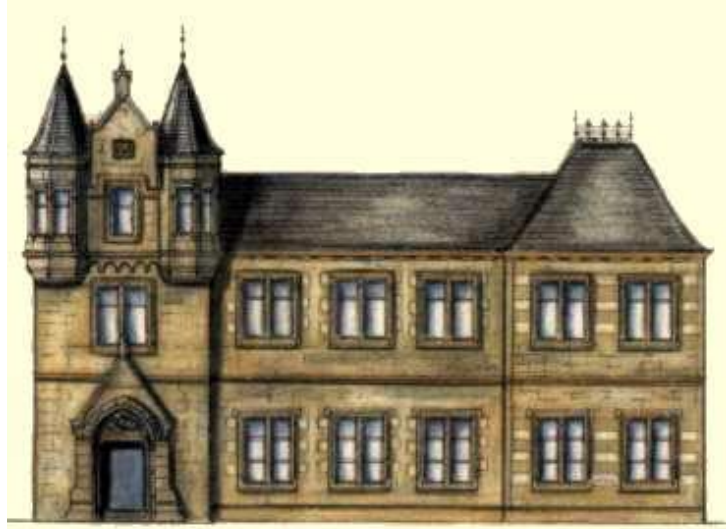


Figure 3 – Claude Ledoux's Barriere de la Vilette; the undressed stone is similar to that of Dunfermline's.



Figure 4



Figure 5 – Carnegie Library in Washington, D.C.



Figure 6



Figure 7 – Bertram’s Architectural Plans

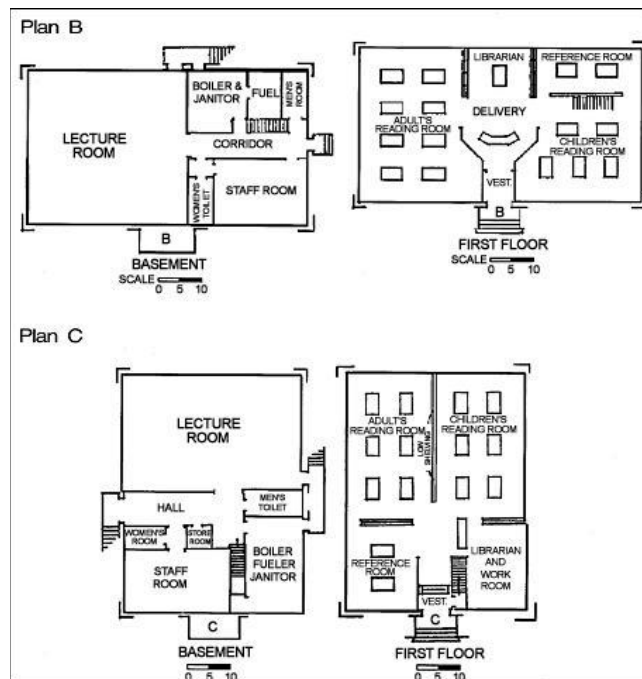




Figure 8 – Interior of Yorkville Library



**Yorkville Branch Library: ground floor, c. 1911**

Photograph  
From Ontario. Department of Education. *Report of the Minister. 1911*

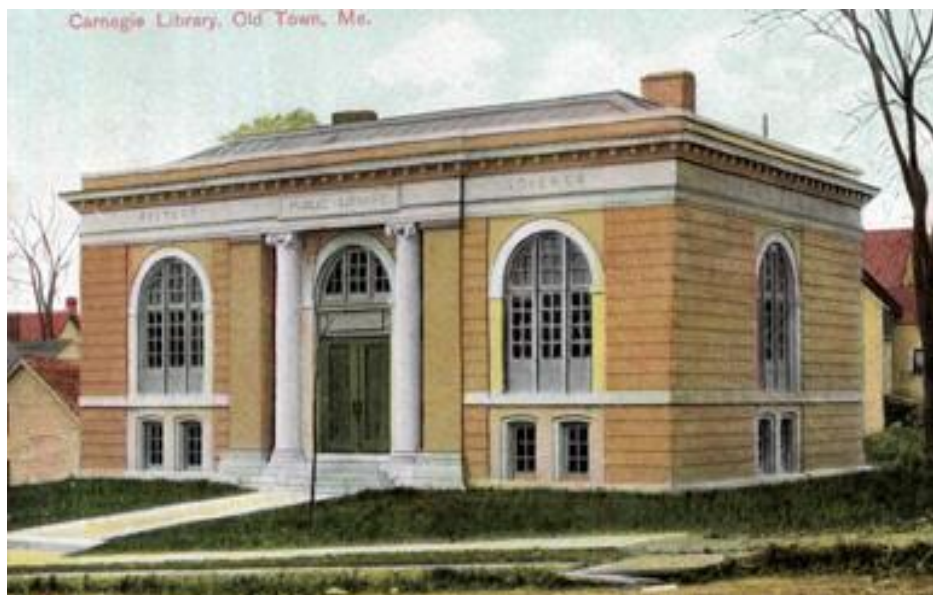
Figure 9 – Exterior of Yorkville Library



**Branch Library, Yorkville Avenue, c. 1906**

Design drawing: Robert McCallum, City Architect  
From Toronto Public Library, *Annual Report, 1906*

Figure 10 – Old Town, Maine Library



### **Julia Rogers Research Prize: Research Strategy Essay**

Initially the focus of this paper was somewhat broad. At the time I was taking the history course, “The Great Libraries of Baltimore” and Professor Husch’s “European and American Architecture” class. In both classes I was intrigued by the development of libraries in the United States. In my history course, I noticed that two of the libraries the class visited on field trips, the Peabody Library and the Enoch Pratt Free Library, were both funded by philanthropists and are successful till this day. In my Art History, we touched on the physical development of libraries. Thus, the historical information on libraries, combined with the architectural history led to my research topic: the role of philanthropy in the development of public libraries. After consulting with Professor Husch I narrowed my research topic down to a specific philanthropist and building type. Thus, the focus of my paper centered on Andrew Carnegie and the history of the Carnegie libraries.

During my research, I interlibrary loaned multiple books and articles from surrounding institutions. However, the Goucher library supplied me with most of my sources. First, I reviewed works that covered the basic topics, essentially the foundation of my paper: library development, library architectural practices, and philanthropy. From there I focused on Andrew Carnegie, his personal history, and career. After I collected the information on Mr. Carnegie I explored the development of the libraries built under his

name. Information on this topic was more difficult to find due to the specificity of the topic. I consulted multiple databases such as, JSTOR, Academic Search Premier, and Project MUSE, and found the sources I needed to compose my paper.

The process of putting together a thorough and well-researched paper is tedious. It takes time and the willingness to search for the sources you need, however, the end result is gratifying. For me, I enjoyed taking material from two classes and developing a research topic. Connecting material from multiple classes and disciplines is a rewarding experience, because it allows you to see the fibers that link different subjects together.