

ROCKFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY  
215 N. Wyman Street  
Rockford  
Winnebago County  
Illinois

IL HABS No. WO-2017-2

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ILLINOIS HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
Illinois State Historic Preservation Office  
Old State Capitol Building, 2nd Floor  
One Old State Capitol Plaza  
Springfield, IL 62701

ILLINOIS HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ROCKFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY

IL HABS No. WO-2017-2

- Location: The former Rockford Public Library was located at 215 N. Wyman St. in Rockford, Winnebago County, Illinois. The property is situated on Parcel Number 11-23-314-004, on Lots 6 through 9 in Section 9 of the original plat of West Rockford. The property is bounded by N. Wyman Street to the northwest; Mulberry Street to the southwest; River Drive to the southeast; and a parcel boundary to the northeast.
- USGS Quadrangle: Rockford North
- Present Owner: City of Rockford
- Present Use: Demolished
- Significance: The Illinois State Historic Preservation Officer determined that the Rockford Public Library was eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with the residents and development of Rockford since the time it was constructed and under Criterion C for architecture.
- Historian: Maria Katharina Meiser, M.A., Senior Architectural Historian/Preservation Planner, AECOM, 303 E. Wacker Dr., Suite 1400, Chicago, Illinois. March 29, 2019 (revised December 29, 2020).
- Project Information: This documentation was undertaken pursuant to a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Commonwealth Edison Company, and the Illinois State Historic Preservation Office executed on April 2, 2018. The terms of the MOA were agreed upon and executed to ensure compliance with the Illinois State Agency Historic Resources Preservation Act (20 ILCS 3420). The property was recorded between December 2017 and March 2018, prior to demolition of the building in fall 2018.

## PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

### A. Physical History

#### 1. Dates of construction:

- a. Carnegie Library: 1902-03
- b. Modernization Project: 1961; 1962-64; 1964-65; 1966-69
- c. Reconfiguration Project: 1986-87

#### 2. Architects:

- a. Carnegie Library: Local architects Bradley & Carpenter won the design contract for the original Neoclassical-style library building in 1902.

Charles Wyman Bradley (1863-1951) was the son of George Bradley, who established an architecture practice in Rockford in 1854 and is considered Rockford's first architect. Charles had a long and prolific career in architecture, which began when he was 14 years old and worked as his father's assistant. He briefly went to California to study the popular Spanish Colonial Revival style. Over the course of his career, he designed public buildings, churches, memorials, industrial plants, recreational facilities, and residential buildings, including his own home in the Spanish Colonial Revival style in the Bradley Heights subdivision of Rockford. He supervised the design and construction of Camp Grant during World War I. In 1922, his son, Harold, joined the firm, and Charles, who served as the Dean of Rockford Architects, retired from Bradley and Bradley in 1946.

Frank A. Carpenter (1872-1956), born in Guilford Township, Winnebago County, studied architecture at the University of Illinois and joined the Bradley firm in 1899, forming Bradley & Carpenter until 1904. Carpenter also had a long career in Rockford, operating his own architecture firm for 40 years and designing civic and commercial buildings, hospitals, churches, and residences. Well known in the region, he served as an associate architect advisor for the Home Owners' Loan Corporation and in the administration of the Illinois Society of Architects. He was invested in the American Institute of Architects (AIA) College of Fellows in 1932.

- b. Modernization Project: Local architect Charles E. Boettcher (Boettcher & Simmon from 1964) was hired to design the renovation of the library in 1957. His plans included the removal and replacement of the Carnegie Library dome, the addition of the South Wing, and the renovation of the Carnegie Library.

Charles Everett Boettcher (1913-93), born in Waupun, Wisconsin, briefly studied architecture at the University of Illinois during the Great Depression before enlisting in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers during World War II. He later completed his degree at the University of Illinois in 1947 and started his own firm in Rockford in 1949. By 1957, Boettcher acted as the library board architect and began planning for the expansion of the Rockford Public Library. By 1964, he and Hans Simmon

established Boettcher & Simmon. Boettcher specialized in Contemporary architecture, designing several civic structures in Rockford and serving as the first architect on the City-County Planning Commission. He retired in 1979 and was invested in the AIA College of Fellows in 1984.

Hans H. Simmon (1926-2008), originally from Hoexter, Germany, immigrated to Rockford in 1952. He worked as a draftsman at the Hubbard and Hyland architectural firm in Rockford, and then as a partner in Boettcher & Simmon from 1964 to 1978. After Boettcher retired, Simmon established Hans Simmon and Associates. He designed several public buildings, schools, and churches.

- c. Reconfiguration Project: Richard L. Johnson Associates, Inc. of Rockford served as the architects for the primarily interior reconfiguration of the library in 1984-87.

Richard L. (Dick) Johnson founded his namesake firm in Rockford in 1981. The firm provides services in architecture, interior design, life safety, master planning, and feasibility studies, specializing in educational and commercial planning in design. Dick Johnson, Scott Johnson, and Terry Carbaugh are the principals (as of 2019).

3. Builders/Contractors/Suppliers:

- a. Carnegie Library General Contractor: W.H. Cook (Rockford)

William H. Cook was a Rockford contractor who had a good reputation: “Mr. Cook has shown his ability to handle large building affairs. He is a conscientious contractor, a competent builder in every respect and deserves the confidence bestowed in him with Memorial hall and the new Carnegie library.”<sup>1</sup>

- b. Modernization Project General Contractors: J.P. Cullen & Son Corporation (South Wing addition – Phase I); Gust G. Larson & Sons, Inc. (South Wing addition – Phase II); Pearce Butler Co. (Carnegie Library renovation)

- c. Reconfiguration Project General Contractor: John Fridh & Sons, Inc.

4. Original and subsequent owners, occupants, uses: The City of Rockford acquired the property (the former site of the Rockford Gas Light and Coke Company) in 1902 from the American Gas Company for the specific purpose of building a library. The building served as the Rockford Public Library from its opening in 1903 until its closing in 2017.

5. Original plans and construction:<sup>2</sup> The Rockford Public Library was constructed in 1902-03. Located along N. Wyman Street along the Rock River, the original Neoclassical-style

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<sup>1</sup> “Is an Honor to Its Builders,” *Rockford Morning Star*, May 31, 1903.

<sup>2</sup> Original or as-built plans for the Carnegie Library are not available; this description is based on one rendered drawing by Bradley & Carpenter; historic photographs, postcards, and other images found in archival sources; and on a description of the interior provided in a newspaper article when the library opened to the public in 1903; “New Library Completed,” *Rockford Republic*, September 15, 1903.

building had a full-height porch on its principal façade facing the river (southeast) and a copper-plated dome at the center of its roof. The building had an asymmetrical, rectangular plan, and was two stories high with a basement. The base of the building from the ground to the first-story windowsills consisted of banded courses of Bedford (Indiana) limestone and a projecting, molded water table course. The exterior walls were “Roman French grey pressed brick.” Other molded beltcourses of limestone delineated the sills and the headers of the second-story windows. The majority of windows were single- or double-hung wood sash, and second-story windows had patterned muntins in the upper sash. The cornice had rows of dentils and modillions below a stone-capped brick parapet and ornate roofline balustrade. The gabled roof had a very low pitch and was concealed from the ground by the parapet. In the center of the roof, a raised square platform with ornamental acroterion at its corners supported the dome. A chimney and a flagpole were also located on the roof.

The east elevation along River Drive contained the projecting, full-height porch at the center, flanked by four bays of windows in each story and the basement. Stone stairs led up to the entrance porch that had two independent and two engaged limestone Corinthian columns with molded bases, fluted shafts, and carved capitals. The entablature above the columns included a frieze with the name of the library across it and a cornice with dentils and modillions. The pediment of the porch contained a carved panel of a laurel wreath with “1902” at the center and had acroterion at its apex and on each side of its clay tile roof. The covered portion of the porch was three bays wide with the main entrance of double wood doors in the center and sash windows with molded surrounds on either side in the first floor, a row of sash windows with molded surrounds in the half-story above, and patterned circular clerestory windows in the second story.

The west elevation was similar to the east elevation, with the exception of the porch. The N. Wyman Street entrance had an open porch with pilasters and pediment slightly projecting from the exterior wall. The first story contained the entrance of double wood doors with patterned transoms in the center and sash windows, and the second story contained sash windows aligned over the limestone beltcourse at the windowsills.

The south elevation contained five bays, with sash windows in each bay of the upper two stories. In the basement story, the central bay contained a basement door flanked by sash windows in the other four bays. The north elevation contained eight bays of narrow windows in the first and second stories aligned above four bays of windows at the basement. The first-story bays contained stacked windows (sixteen total windows in the first story).

The interior layout included a two-story rotunda at the center under the dome, allowing natural light from the dome skylight into the first floor. The inner dome ceiling was painted with scroll work in red and blue and literary names, including Hawthorne, Longfellow, Emerson, Bancroft, Homer, Dante, Milton, Shakespeare, Goethe, Voltaire, Tegsner, Darwin, Burns, and Dickens. The second floor had a 4' brass railing around the rotunda opening.

The north side of the building contained the book stacks on the first and second floors, which consisted of two-story steel shelves extending to the ceiling, with glass floors on the second floor and a stairway and book lift to access both floors. The south side of the first floor contained the reading room, and the west side of the first floor contained the reference room. The first-floor main hall was surrounded with Ionic columns and classical trim. The east side contained the entrance into the rotunda area. The second floor included a lecture room, supply room, open shelving, and a conference room for the library board. The basement contained the boiler and mechanical room and a room for the children's library. The interior was predominantly painted in yellow, with "delicate tints" of red and blue.

6. Alterations and additions: The Rockford Public Library was substantially altered and expanded after its original construction in 1902-03.

In 1924-25, the Carnegie Library was remodeled. The second-floor open rotunda was enclosed to provide more floor space; a third floor of book stacks was installed; ten additional windows were cut into the north elevation for increased light for book stacks; the basement was finished for a repair room; and various other furnishings were reconfigured throughout the building (Tolmie Brothers, contractors).<sup>3</sup>

In 1961, a phased eight-year modernization project began, which included the removal of the dome; construction of a massive addition on the southwest side of the Carnegie Library (original or main building); and renovation of the Carnegie Library.

In 1961, the dome was removed and replaced with a gable roof.

In 1962-64, the shell of the three-story South Wing addition (Phase 1) was constructed on the southwest wall of the original building.

In 1964-65, the core of the South Wing addition (Phase 2), including interior finishes, was completed. The South Wing opened on August 30, 1965.

In 1966-69, the main building was completely gutted, with floors, interior walls, stairs, windows, and doors removed. A third story with concrete block walls was added to the top of the original building, and window openings were infilled with concrete block. A new roof, new floors, interior walls, stairs, elevators, doors, mechanical, plumbing, and electrical equipment, and other furnishings were installed in the shell of the original building. The exterior of the building was sheathed in limestone and granite panels in a Modern style to complement the South Wing. A new mechanized book return was installed in the basement with a tunnel to a new book return drop depository on N. Wyman Street. The remodeled library reopened on February 10, 1969.

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<sup>3</sup> "Library Gets Permit to Remodel Building," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, May 27, 1924; "Add Art Room to Library's Plant," *Rockford Morning Star*, September 27, 1905.

In 1986-87, the interior of the library was reconfigured. The main entrance on N. Wyman Street was moved from the original building to the South Wing. A portion of the rooftop area over the garage on the east side was enclosed to provide a patron lounge and rear access from the east side entrance to the circulation desk in the South Wing. This exterior enclosure altered the east elevation by continuing the entrance vestibule's two-story black granite veneer-clad roof line, piers, and fixed windows for an additional three bays to the south. A new interior staircase was added between the second and third floors in the South Wing, a new wheelchair lift was installed in the east entrance vestibule, and a new interior wheelchair ramp was installed at the new main entrance. Library departments were shifted to expand the children's area and move the circulation desk. The reconfigured Rockford Public Library reopened on October 11, 1987.

In 1998, new exterior signage was installed on the exterior of the southwest façade on N. Wyman Street.

In 2000, nine decorative mosaic murals were applied to the northwest façade on N. Wyman Street. The murals were removed in 2018, prior to demolition.

In 2018, the building was demolished.

## B. Historical Context

### Rockford

After the United States dispatched the Sauk and Fox tribes from their settlements in the Rock River valley in the Black Hawk War of 1832, the first settlers of European descent arrived at the site of Rockford in 1834-35. Germanicus Kent and Thatcher Blake canoed along the Rock River from Galena and staked claims on the west bank of the river, followed by Daniel Shaw Haight, who settled with his family on the east bank of the river. The development of these settlements on opposite sides of the river laid the groundwork for a long-standing east side versus west side rivalry. Originally known as "Midway," the east and west settlements were known as "Haightville" and "Kentville," respectively.<sup>4</sup> Midway's location, halfway between Chicago and Galena, was chosen at the head of a limestone river ford, which formed rapids and literally figured into the settlement's new name. The village of Rockford was incorporated in 1839 and, after much debate, was also named the county seat of Winnebago County. The earliest settlers came to the trading post from New York State and New England, followed by Irish and Swedish immigrants in the 1850s.

From the beginning, Rockford was a mill town. In 1843, the State legislature passed an act to improve navigation at the rapids and to incorporate the Rockford Hydraulic and Manufacturing Company that would construct a dam and create a water power district.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jon W. Lundin, *Rockford: An Illustrated History* (Windsor Publications, Inc., 1989).

<sup>5</sup> *Rockford City Directory and County Gazeteer*, 1869.

The Rockford Water Power Company was established in 1851 and subsequently built a dam to provide power for the development of numerous mills, foundries, and other industrial plants. In 1852, the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad reached the east side of Rockford, allowing for rapid transportation of both people and goods. As energy and transportation opportunities developed, the village transformed into a growing industrial center where agricultural machinery, notably John H. Manny Combined Reapers and Mowers, and all sorts of other agricultural and household products were manufactured on a large scale. The City of Rockford was chartered in 1852 and continued to grow quickly, reaching 8,000 residents by 1857.<sup>6</sup>

In 1855, the first gas manufacturing plant to supply the city with residential and street lighting was chartered and constructed on Wyman Street (site of the Rockford Public Library). The gas works opened in 1856 with an illuminated Christmas festival and celebration. In 1857, Thomas Butterworth acquired the gas works and established the Rockford Gas Light and Coke Company, which was formally incorporated by the Illinois General Assembly in 1861. Gas pipes were laid through the principal streets of the city, and manufactured gas serviced the rapidly growing city through the mid-twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Rockford's continued growth was based on industrial manufacturing. While the agricultural machinery industry continued to thrive, a substantial furniture industry also grew in the 1880s. Led by its substantial Swedish population, Rockford developed into the second largest furniture manufacturing center in the United States (after Grand Rapids, Michigan) by the early twentieth century. At the same time, Rockford was considered an important regional cultural center. The city boasted educational institutions, an opera house, a nationally recognized baseball club, and the second public library in Illinois by the 1870s. Four railroads serviced the city, and downtown Rockford became the hub of regional activity. By the 1880s, the State Street Bridge connected the east and west sides of the river. Development of passenger train stations, premier hotels, entertainments, civic institutions, and more affluent neighborhoods primarily occurred on the west side, while working-class neighborhoods were concentrated on the east side. The inequities of the east and west sides would create fierce oppositions in the city council and the community, with the river becoming known as "The Black Line" separating the factions.<sup>8</sup>

At the turn of the century, Rockford was a prosperous working-class town, with a demographic mix of Swedish, Italian, Polish, Lithuanian, German, and Irish immigrants arriving in various waves to settle in the city. Between 1900 and 1920, the population of Rockford more than doubled. The U.S. Army established Camp Grant in 1917, which served as an army training camp during World War I and later became an Illinois National Guard facility. Large groups of African Americans and whites from the South migrated to Rockford seeking factory work in the post-World War I era. In the 1920s, the

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<sup>6</sup> William Hukin, Esq., "Rockford, Illinois," *Rockford City Directory*, 1857.

<sup>7</sup> William Hukin, Esq., "Rockford, Illinois," *Rockford City Directory*, 1857.

<sup>8</sup> "Library Site Chosen on May 1 of 1901," *Rockford Morning Star*, May 16, 1926.



furniture industry, with over fifty furniture factories and associated industries, was at its peak, but began a decline that would conclude during the Great Depression. Despite this decline, manufacturing successfully shifted to other building materials, mechanical implements, and a wide range of household and industrial products. Although railroad transportation also declined with the advent of the automobile, downtown Rockford remained the center of the city's prosperity when U.S. Highway 20 was established along State Street in the mid-1920s.<sup>9</sup>

In the World War II era, manufacturing recharged and Camp Grant reactivated as an important military training center and prisoner-of-war camp. Rockford manufacturing continued to drive Rockford's economy in the postwar era. In 1949, *Life* magazine profiled Rockford as "Jonesville," the typical American city, "featuring hard-working people of various social and economic classes who lived in strong families and attended church, belonged to social, fraternal and ethnic clubs, and shopped at neighborhood stores."<sup>10</sup> Underlying the working- and middle-class nature of the community, racial and ethnic tensions segregated the city. Following national trends, automobile culture led to suburban development, with middle-class white families moving away from downtown Rockford. The completion of Interstate 90 on the east side of the city in the late 1950s influenced development away from the urban core, eventually devaluing the historically prosperous downtown Rockford and leaving blight in its wake.<sup>11</sup>

Urban renewal efforts to remodel downtown Rockford into a modern metropolis began in the 1960s. Large projects were planned to update municipal facilities in an effort to attract commerce back downtown. As its manufacturing industries declined in the late twentieth century, Rockford suffered severe unemployment and saw shifting economic and social conditions. Between 1970 and 1980, the population significantly declined for the first time in Rockford's history.<sup>12</sup> Economic recovery into the twenty-first century relied on Rockford's emergence as a regional health care and educational center to supplement its intact manufacturing industries. Although the population has maintained a steady decline since 2010, Rockford's downtown revival is evident with the establishment of new businesses and popular public events and entertainments, particularly along State Street on both sides of the river (2018).

### **Carnegie Libraries**

In the early nineteenth century, American lending libraries were generally limited to social libraries, which were private collections that required membership or subscription for access. Between 1815 and 1850, many social libraries became specialized in mechanics, mercantile, juvenile, ladies, theological, or historical topics, and were restricted to certain users based on special interests. By the mid-nineteenth century, libraries began to be regarded as beneficial to society for both educational and social purposes and the establishment of free public libraries came to the forefront of civic

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<sup>9</sup> Jon W. Lundin, *Rockford: An Illustrated History* (Windsor Publications, Inc., 1989).

<sup>10</sup> Jon W. Lundin, *Rockford: An Illustrated History* (Windsor Publications, Inc., 1989).

<sup>11</sup> Jon W. Lundin, *Rockford: An Illustrated History* (Windsor Publications, Inc., 1989), 8-9.

<sup>12</sup> Census information accessed at <http://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/rockford-population/>.

development. At that time, municipalities typically needed State authorization to increase local taxes for municipal projects. Massachusetts was the first state to allow local governments to levy taxes in support of public libraries in 1848, when it authorized Boston to establish the first public library in the United States. This began the trend for the formation of public libraries, particularly in urban areas where taxes could be levied and the social value of libraries was recognized.<sup>13</sup>

Raising funds for new library institutions through taxation was often difficult, and philanthropists played a vital role in financing public libraries in the late nineteenth century. An elite group of multi-millionaires, including George Peabody, Walter Newberry, Charles Bower Winn, and Andrew Carnegie, used their extreme fortunes made in banking and industry for the establishment of large, urban libraries. These philanthropists donated large sums of money, usually a one-time gift for construction with an endowment to support the library. In smaller towns, wealthy local citizens also left their philanthropic mark by donating large sums for library construction or new books. In many cases, public libraries established through philanthropic funding received growing support in their communities that influenced new local taxes for their continued maintenance and operation.

Born in Scotland in 1835, Andrew Carnegie immigrated to Pittsburgh as a boy with his family and began working in a cotton factory as a bobbin boy. Through diligence, hard work, and self-improvement, Carnegie developed his career and investments in the telegraph and railroad industries, and by his 30s, he had amassed a fortune. Beginning in the 1870s, Carnegie established a steel empire, which was consolidated as the Carnegie Steel Company in 1892. In 1901, J.P. Morgan purchased Carnegie Steel for \$480 million, making Carnegie one of the richest men in American history.<sup>14</sup>

In 1889, Carnegie wrote two essays that reflected his philanthropic motivations. In "Wealth," Carnegie defended capitalism and the concentration of wealth, but espoused the moral principle that the wealthy are obliged to help the poor and should administer their wealth to benefit society during their lifetime. He also stated that "the man who dies leaving behind many millions of available wealth, which was his to administer during life, will pass away 'unwept, unhonored, and unsung,'" indicating his personal motivation for altruism.<sup>15</sup> In his follow-up essay "The Best Fields for Philanthropy," Carnegie wrote that "surplus wealth should be considered as a sacred trust, to be administered during the lives of its owners, by them as trustees, for the best good of the community in which and from which it had been acquired."<sup>16</sup> He identified seven types

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<sup>13</sup> Karen E. Schnell, "Illinois Carnegie Libraries." National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, Springfield, Illinois, November 10, 1993.

<sup>14</sup> Carnegie Corporation of New York, "Andrew Carnegie's Story," <https://www.carnegie.org/interactives/foundersstory/#/>.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Carnegie, "Wealth," 1889; Rockford's sentiments upon receipt of Carnegie's philanthropy would have gratified his motivations: "The name Andrew Carnegie will be held in loving remembrance in Rockford long after present generations have passed away," in "Carnegie Gives \$60,000 for Library Building," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, March 8, 1901, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Carnegie, "The Best Fields for Philanthropy," 1889.

of facilities that provide societal benefit as examples for philanthropic consideration: universities, libraries, medical centers, public parks, meeting and concert halls, public baths, and churches. Carnegie found that a free library was the best gift which can be given to a community, “provided the community will accept it and maintain it as a public institution.”<sup>17</sup> Although Carnegie’s formal education had ended when he moved to America, in his youth he and other children had access to a private library in Pittsburgh through the generosity of its owner, for which Carnegie was very grateful: “I resolved, if ever wealth came to me, that it should be used to establish free libraries, that other poor boys might receive opportunities similar to those for which we were indebted to that noble man.”<sup>18</sup> With these motivations, Carnegie began an unprecedented program of funding public libraries across America at the age of 66.

Carnegie’s library program had two distinct periods, the first from 1886 to 1896, and the second from 1898 to 1919. In the first period, Carnegie donated \$1,860,869 for the construction and endowment of fourteen libraries in six communities where he had some personal affiliation: Allegheny, Johnstown, Braddock, Homestead, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Fairfield, Iowa. The buildings were large, multi-purpose structures or complexes that contained libraries and other amenities, such as art exhibition space, lecture and recital halls, and even a gymnasium and swimming pool. In the second period, Carnegie changed his practice and provided smaller buildings in smaller towns with limited access to cultural institutions. During this period, Carnegie gave \$39,172,981 in grants to 1,406 communities for the construction of smaller library buildings. Although Carnegie libraries were built across forty-six states, the majority of grants were awarded to towns in the Midwest for under \$20,000. Between 1886 and 1919, Carnegie donated over \$56 million for libraries.<sup>19</sup>

To receive funding, prospective communities had to have a population over 1,000, provide the library site, and levy a local library tax as a pledge to maintain the library in the future. Carnegie required communities to secure library funding of at least 10 percent of the amount he donated for continuing library operations as a way to ensure the community’s investment in the library’s maintenance after its construction. The application process was administered by his secretary, James Bertram, in New York. Bertram acted as Carnegie’s official representative, sent a schedule of questions to the towns seeking assistance, compiled and verified the information provided, and presented the application to Carnegie for approval. Applicants frequently provided “glowing accounts of a town, its potential for development, the community's high moral character and the lack of saloons” among their worthy virtues.<sup>20</sup> The process was often delayed by a town’s difficulty passing taxes, arguments over the library building site, or confusion over how to proceed. Once approved, Carnegie Corporation funds were made available to the towns for the library construction.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Andrew Carnegie, “The Best Fields for Philanthropy,” 1889.

<sup>18</sup> Schnell, “Illinois Carnegie Libraries,” 1993.

<sup>19</sup> Schnell, “Illinois Carnegie Libraries,” 1993.

<sup>20</sup> Schnell, “Illinois Carnegie Libraries,” 1993.

<sup>21</sup> Schnell, “Illinois Carnegie Libraries,” 1993.

Initially, Carnegie placed virtually no constraints on the design and construction of the library and donated funds, except that the building should be used for library purposes only, and that unnecessary and costly ornamentation should be avoided. However, widespread mismanagement of funds led to frequent requests to Carnegie for additional money to complete or furnish libraries, which eventually led to Bertram's closer scrutiny of construction expenditures. After 1908, towns were required to submit library designs before grant approval. Bertram became increasingly involved in the actual planning for the new libraries and, in 1911, compiled "Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings[sic]," which included six floorplan designs as examples for efficient, inexpensive, functional structures according to leading library experts.<sup>22</sup> Bertram provided it as a guide to towns applying for funding. Beginning in 1914, town mayors also had to sign a pledge that library construction and furnishing expenses would not exceed the amount of the Carnegie benefaction.

Carnegie library donations peaked from 1901 to 1903, and then declined sharply. By 1915, reports of broken pledges and vacant buildings led the Carnegie Corporation to commission a study to determine whether "the policy of establishing free public libraries with the requirement of a definite annual maintenance fund was fulfilling the purpose well enough to justify the outlay involved."<sup>23</sup> Alvin Johnson, an economics professor, conducted the study on the social contributions of the Carnegie libraries, their physical aspects, and their financial condition. Johnson concluded that active and efficient libraries were beneficial to the community by providing culture, entertainment, and education, but depended on the competency and engagement of the librarians and library staff. A deficiency in librarian educational training led many libraries to passively languish and ultimately contributed to the end of the library building program. Carnegie terminated the program in November 1917 during World War I, citing war demands on resources, but began supporting library education after 1919. Previously approved libraries were constructed until 1923.

### **Rockford Public Library**

In many burgeoning communities across Illinois in the nineteenth century, economic growth and stability led to an interest in developing cultural institutions, including libraries. The first libraries in Illinois were small collections established in Albion or Edwardsville in 1818.<sup>24</sup> Social libraries such as these were generally associated with a literary society or required membership or subscription, consisted primarily of donated books, and had modest reading rooms. In Rockford, the first circulating library was established in 1852 by the former members of the Sinnissippi Division No. 134 of the Sons of Temperance, who briefly organized their limited collection as the Rockford Library Association but failed to establish a successful institution. In October 1858, a new subscription library successfully raised \$6,000 and rented rooms in a bank building in downtown Rockford for its collection. F.H. Bradley served as the librarian, and by

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<sup>22</sup> Schnell, "Illinois Carnegie Libraries," 1993.

<sup>23</sup> Schnell, "Illinois Carnegie Libraries," 1993.

<sup>24</sup> Schnell, "Illinois Carnegie Libraries," 1993.

1860, the collection included 1,134 volumes. However, the library declined in popularity during the Civil War and eventually closed in 1865.<sup>25</sup>

On March 7, 1872, Governor John M. Palmer signed the Public Library Act that authorized Illinois cities, incorporated towns, and townships to establish and maintain free public libraries and reading rooms. The act allowed towns to appoint a library board of nine directors, independent of the city council, that could create the rules for the library, allocate the funds collected from a specific library tax levy, construct a library building, and appoint a librarian. Elgin was the first of nine Illinois cities to establish a public library under the law in 1872, and Rockford claimed to be the second.<sup>26</sup>

Shortly after the act was signed, Rockford passed a local ordinance on June 17, 1872, establishing a public library and reading room and appointing the first library board of directors. One board member, Major Elias Cosper, was a dedicated supporter whose 20 years of service on the board earned him the moniker “Father of the Library.”<sup>27</sup> Initially, the library rented three rooms on the second floor of the D. Wallach & Co. three-story brick commercial block at State and Main streets for \$350 a year.<sup>28</sup> The board held a public meeting on July 2, 1872, appointed Mary B. Rankin as a temporary librarian, and raised \$2,000 in subscriptions. The reading room opened on August 1, 1872, and a permanent librarian, William Leonard Rowland, was appointed on September 17, 1872. Circulation began on February 1, 1873, with 2,326 books in the library catalog.<sup>29</sup> In June 1876, the library was moved to rooms over the post office on the second floor of the Church, Robertson and Emerson building on W. State Street.<sup>30</sup> The collection grew to over 7,000 volumes in 1877, and the library took over the entire second floor of the building in 1896.<sup>31</sup>

As the library continued to grow at the turn of the twentieth century, the “need of a commodious, fire-proof building for the library had been recognized for many years, but the city was unable to build it since it was up to the statutory limit of its bonded indebtedness.”<sup>32</sup> Rockford wanted a new library building, because “a library in a city the size of Rockford should be housed infinitely better than it is at present.”<sup>33</sup> This critical

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<sup>25</sup> “Public Library Here Was First Built Downstate,” *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, August 31, 1929; David M. Oberg, “The Past, Present and Future of Rockford Public Library.” Rockford Historical Society, *Nuggets of History*, Vol. 44, No. 4, December 2006.

<sup>26</sup> The historical record often refers to Rockford as having the second public library in Illinois after Chicago, but according to the State Library, Elgin preceded Rockford. Refer to the Illinois State Library Heritage Project, “Chapter 7 – The State Library & Growth of Illinois Public Libraries,” [https://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/library/heritage\\_project/home/chapters/the-state-library-growth-of-illinois-public-libraries/](https://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/library/heritage_project/home/chapters/the-state-library-growth-of-illinois-public-libraries/).

<sup>27</sup> “The Rockford Free Public Library,” in “Rockford, Yesterday-Today & Forever,” *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, Historical, Biographical, Industrial Edition, December, 1904, 29.

<sup>28</sup> “The Rockford Free Public Library,” in “Rockford, Yesterday-Today & Forever,” *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, Historical, Biographical, Industrial Edition, December, 1904, 29.

<sup>29</sup> “Fiftieth Year Library Work Stirs Memories,” *Rockford Morning Star*, May 20, 1923, 6.

<sup>30</sup> “Public Library Here Was First Built Downstate,” *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, August 31, 1929.

<sup>31</sup> D. Shaw Haight, *The History of Winnebago County, Ill., Its Past and Present* (Chicago: H.F. Kett & Co., 1877).

<sup>32</sup> “Public Library Here Was First Built Downstate,” *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, August 31, 1929.

<sup>33</sup> “Letter from Carnegie,” *Rockford Daily Republic*, February 18, 1901, 4.

need coincided with the peak of the Carnegie Corporation's well-known library grant program, and the Rockford library board of directors mobilized to apply for Carnegie funding. By 1900, Professor O.F. Barbour, the president of the board, began contacting the Carnegie Corporation in the hopes of receiving funding for a new library building. It took several attempts to receive a response. On February 18, 1901, Barbour finally received a letter from Bertram inquiring about the condition of the current library and Rockford's real need for a new building. This letter was taken as an indication that "the multi-millionaire has serious intentions of bestowing on Rockford one of his lavish gifts for the good of the reading public."<sup>34</sup> To further Rockford's petition, Mayor E.W. Brown and library board member A.D. Early traveled to New York expressly to make an appeal to Carnegie in person in late February 1901. Although Carnegie was not available, they met with Bertram, whose assurances left them encouraged.<sup>35</sup>

On March 8, 1901, Barbour received a letter from Bertram that simply stated: "If the city of Rockford will furnish a suitable site and agree to maintain the library at a cost of not less than \$8,000 a year, Mr. Carnegie will be glad to give \$60,000 for a free library building."<sup>36</sup> The board and the city were elated by the news: "The gift of the \$60,000 library building to Rockford by Mr. Carnegie is one of the happiest events in the history of the city."<sup>37</sup> Ironically, that sentiment quickly changed as all attention turned to the question of the new library site, and tensions between Rockford's east side and west side mounted into a battle that would last more than a year.

### *The Library War*

Speculation on the potential library site had begun even before Bertram confirmed Carnegie's gift to Rockford. The principal issue was whether the library should be located on the east or west side of the city. Although dozens of sites were identified as possibilities, two sites became the prime candidates for the location of the new library: the "Rood lots," an industrial site on the east side, and the "gas plant" or "gas works" site, the former location of the Rockford Gas Light and Coke Company on the west side. On March 7, 1901, the day before Bertram's letter arrived, the *Morning Star* reported:

"There seems to be only two possible locations for the building, one on the lots at the east end of the girder bridge and the other on the gas works lots. The former is impossible on account of the high price placed on the property. Condemnation cannot be resorted to for library purposes and the price asked must be paid. The other location is almost as central, as it can be reached from the west end of the bridge by means of a footway along the river... Many residents of the East side have expressed

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<sup>34</sup> "Tried to Give Us a Library Room," *Rockford Morning Star*, February 19, 1901, 6.

<sup>35</sup> "Carnegie Has His Eye This Way," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, March 4, 1901, 3.

<sup>36</sup> "Carnegie Gives \$60,000 for Library Building," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, March 8, 1901, 1; "Andrew Carnegie Gives a Building," *Rockford Morning Star*, March 9, 1901, 5.

<sup>37</sup> "Rockford Carnegie Library," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, March 9, 1901, 4.

themselves as well pleased with the gas works site as the place for the library and no opposition to such a location would probably develop.”<sup>38</sup>

However, on the same day, the *Rockford Republic* reported on an east side resident’s complaint:

“I don’t just see why the west side should get the library building when everybody knows the east side has about 3,000 more people and that the center of population is on this side of the river... The idea of having the library on the gas works site is out of the question. It would be in one of the dirtiest parts of the city, the best way you can make it. There is a row of West State Street blocks with their back yards facing the proposed site filled with ash heaps and refuse... There are two sides to the matter and the east siders want to have their say in the location of the building.”<sup>39</sup>

The main arguments for locating the library on the east side were a demand for parity with the more affluent west side, which claimed all but one of Rockford’s public buildings—the high school, and the practicality of locating the new library in proximity to the center of population and the high school for the benefit of both the workingmen and the students. The east side promoted several locations for the library, with the Rood lots site being the closest to the State Street bridge, which formed the main connection over the river between the east and west sides. However, the Rood lots site was in the midst of an industrial zone with noise issues of nearby buzz saws, street cars, railroads, and the steam engines in the coal yard. Moreover, swarms of Cisco flies on the banks of the river every summer near the site posed a potential nuisance.<sup>40</sup> The Rood lots site was also significantly smaller and more expensive than the gas plant site with a price of \$25,000.<sup>41</sup>

Arguments for the west side were less impassioned and centered on the precedents of the library’s existing location and a larger west side library membership. The gas plant site was located on the west bank of the river just north of the existing public library. In addition, west side boosters had already garnered financial support for a project to beautify the west bank with a new riverside park.<sup>42</sup> The American Gas Company, the parent company of the Rockford Gas Light and Coke Company, had offered the site for a park to Rockford for \$11,000 and pledged to donate \$1,000 toward the cost.<sup>43</sup> As the library location debate continued, the company pledged to donate another \$1,000 toward the cost, if the library were to be built on the gas plant site. Thus, the city only needed \$9,000 to acquire the site for the library. The west side boosters had already raised nearly \$8,000 to buy the site for a park and were certain that the pledged financial backing could

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<sup>38</sup> “Ideal Site for Public Library,” *Rockford Morning Star*, March 7, 1901, 5.

<sup>39</sup> “East Sider’s Library Talk,” *Rockford Daily Republic*, March 7, 1901, 8.

<sup>40</sup> “Of Sites No End in Sight,” *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, March 16, 1901, 1.

<sup>41</sup> “Now It Is Up to Library Board,” *Rockford Daily Republic*, March 18, 1901, 3.

<sup>42</sup> “Gas Company Sets Price,” *Rockford Daily Republic*, March 27, 1901, 1; “Many Points for Gas Plant Site,” *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, April 15, 1901, 7.

<sup>43</sup> “Gas Company Sets Price,” *Rockford Daily Republic*, March 27, 1901, 1; “Gets \$1,000 in a Lump,” *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, April 29, 1901, 2.

be used for the library site, instead.<sup>44</sup> The disadvantages of the gas plant site included its distance from the center of population on the east side and its industrial surroundings.

The library board was solely responsible for choosing the new site and quickly became the target of the community's attention and ire. With six members from the west side representing the fourth ward and three members from the east side representing the six other wards, the disproportionately represented library board became a hotbed of divisive east-west politics. The east side-leaning *Rockford Republic* reported a feeling that west side interests "dominate the board to an extent prejudicial to the prospects of an east side location of the building,"<sup>45</sup> and that "an unjust ward apportionment and the organization of the library board do not give to the east side of the river the representation in council and board that it is entitled to on the basis of population."<sup>46</sup> The site selection process raised unprecedented public interest in library board proceedings. On March 29, 1901, the first public joint meeting of the city council and the library board to discuss the acquisition of a library site overflowed with interested residents, predominantly east side supporters. An east side alderman outlined the reasons that the library should be located on the east side as: "first because a majority of the people want it there; second because nearly every public building is now located on the West side, and third because the West side represents the wealthy and influential people, who can afford libraries of their own, while Mr. Carnegie's gift was essentially for the working people."<sup>47</sup>

The politicization of the site selection only worsened when the library board finally voted. After failing to vote on a site for months and despite the fervent appeals for the east side, on May 1, 1901, the library board decided in a five-to-four vote to locate the library on the west side, although they did not choose a specific site. The meeting was a "delightfully stormy one," when an east side board member threatened legal action against the vote of another, who happened to be a representative of the American Gas Company, and stated that the east side members had "given up all hope of a fair deal."<sup>48</sup> The sentiment of the east siders was to "fight it to the last"; they "would fight the laying of every plank or stone or brick in the building, the driving of every nail" and "would elect aldermen to fight the annual appropriations for the maintenance of the library and the indications are that if the fourth warders ignore the requests of the mass of the people there will be war."<sup>49</sup> At the next library board meeting, A.D. Early "referred feelingly to the strain under which he had been for weeks and deplored the antagonistic sentiment between the two sides of the river and urged consideration of the Rood site as a move in behalf of harmony."<sup>50</sup> However, the board moved forward by choosing a different west side site across N. Wyman Street from the gas plant (the later site of Memorial Hall).

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<sup>44</sup> "New Library on the West Side," *Rockford Morning Star*, May 2, 1901, 5.

<sup>45</sup> "Want Site Question Settled," *Rockford Daily Republic*, March 23, 1901, 1.

<sup>46</sup> "Where Should It Be?" *Rockford Daily Republic*, March 29, 1901, 4.

<sup>47</sup> "Inning for East Side," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, March 30, 1901, 1.

<sup>48</sup> "4<sup>th</sup> Ward Board for a 4<sup>th</sup> Ward Site," *Rockford Daily Republic*, May 2, 1901, 1 and 4.

<sup>49</sup> "4<sup>th</sup> Ward Board for a 4<sup>th</sup> Ward Site," *Rockford Daily Republic*, May 2, 1901, 4.

<sup>50</sup> "Attempt to Choose Site," *Rockford Daily Republic*, May 3, 1901, 1.



In response, organizers staged a working-man's protest of the vote in East Side Park on May 4. The protest began with a march led by a band from Seventh Street to the park. Slogans including "We Want the Library," "Carnegie's Gift was for Us," "Do You Think We Can't Read?," in response to the "sneering references made by opponents of east side sites relative to the education and general intelligence of the masses in the great manufacturing districts of the east side."<sup>51</sup> There were also personal attacks against west side library board members. An "immense turn out" of an estimated 1,000 people attended the rally.<sup>52</sup> Several speakers harangued the library board and roused the crowd with aggressive commentary on class politics. The protest ended peacefully but indicated the escalation of community tensions. As one east sider stated: "There is no doubt about the bitterness of the feeling that exists in this quarter of the city... I have never seen the people so aroused."<sup>53</sup>

A timely change in the State library legislation added to the political upheaval, with a new act making the library board's ability to purchase a library site subject to approval of the city council.<sup>54</sup> After local elections in spring 1901, Mayor-elect Amasa Hutchins declared that he opposed the plan to appropriate additional funds for the purchase of a library site, and would "veto any bills that would increase the city's indebtedness."<sup>55</sup> Therefore, the site had to be donated or located on existing City property. Hutchins' decision crucially shifted the library site battle. The west side boosters moved to reallocate pledged donations for the gas plant site park for the new library location, and the east siders scrambled to raise \$21,000 for the Rood lots or other possible sites on the east side. On June 14, the library board rescinded its previous selection of the N. Main Street site, and the debate continued.

Prior to the advent of natural gas service, manufactured gas or "town gas" was produced locally to provide fuel for lighting, cooking, and heating. Gas manufacturing became obsolete as new pipeline systems allowed for the widespread use of natural gas. The Rockford Gas Light and Coke Company had moved its main operations from town to a more remote location, making the old gas plant site available in 1901.

Described as "the most bitter and lasting controversy between the residents of the two sides of the river in the city's history,"<sup>56</sup> the hostile struggle to choose a library site continued through several more dramatic turns. In June, the library board submitted a report to the city council selecting the gas plant site for a cost of \$2,000. On July 15, 1901, the city council approved the gas plant site for the library in a tied vote that was broken by Mayor Hutchins. However, the library board had changed in July and now favored the east side. After exploring many other possible sites, including a site in the

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<sup>51</sup> "Labor Will Voice a Protest," *Rockford Daily Republic*, May 4, 1901; "Denounce Library Board," *Rockford Morning Star*, May 5, 1901, 3.

<sup>52</sup> "Labor Voices Most Vigorous Protest," *Rockford Daily Republic*, May 6, 1901, 1 and 3; "Denounce Library Board," *Rockford Morning Star*, May 5, 1901, 3.

<sup>53</sup> "Won't Accept the Decision," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, May 3, 1901, 7.

<sup>54</sup> "The Council Will Be in It," *Rockford Daily Republic*, May 4, 1901, 1.

<sup>55</sup> "How to Get Library Site," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, May 10, 1901, 7.

<sup>56</sup> "Compromise on Rood Lot," *Rockford Daily Republic*, June 21, 1901, 1.

middle of the river,<sup>57</sup> the new library board rescinded the former board's report and selected the Rood lots site on September 30.<sup>58</sup> Although by law it was up to the library board to choose the site and the city council to approve it, in frustration at its October 7 meeting, the city council ordered a special election for the public to choose between the sites.<sup>59</sup> Due to uncooperative actions of several aldermen, the city council cancelled the election, revoked its July 15 approval of the gas plant site, and instead approved the Rood lots site for \$23,500 on October 21.<sup>60</sup> The necessary appropriations for the Rood lots site would be spread out over ten years.<sup>61</sup>

The general relief of the city council's approval of the library board's site selection was short-lived, when Bertram informed the library board that Carnegie would not accept a mortgaged property as the library site.<sup>62</sup> The debate raged on as the east siders continued to look for an affordable site and the gas plant site boosters closed in on raising the remaining funds to purchase the site. At the December 12, 1901, meeting of the city council, where "disorder was rampant," the aldermen voted on geographical lines to refuse a lump sum appropriation for the Rood lots site and urged the library board to take the gas plant site.<sup>63</sup> The drama of the library board's decision to choose a new site was further marked by the untimely death of board member Robert Coyner on his way to a library meeting December 21, which left the board briefly divided four-to-four along east and west lines.<sup>64</sup> In a "hope to end the war," the city council attempted to negotiate with the library board, promising to locate a new City Hall building on the east side, if they would choose the gas plant site for the library.<sup>65</sup> The library board rejected the compromise and remained resolved to select an east side site.

On January 14, 1902, the library board selected an east side location, and sent a special committee to present the proposed site to Carnegie and Bertram in February, only to learn that Mayor Hutchins had already presented Carnegie with a resolution to acquire the gas plant site.<sup>66</sup> Bertram refused to give an indication of preference for either site, but he sent a missive to Hutchins dated February 19 stating: "Mr. Carnegie stipulates that a suitable site be furnished. To be suitable, a site should be large enough to give light around the building and be satisfactory to the community. Regarding the latter essential we have received the enclosed paper." The enclosed paper was the report the library board's special committee had given Bertram on their visit. Bertram also requested minor changes to the wording of the resolution, but did not indicate acceptance of the gas plant

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<sup>57</sup> "Library Board Cracks a Joke," *Rockford Morning Star*, August 6, 1901, 5.

<sup>58</sup> "Site is Up to Council," *Rockford Morning Star*, October 1, 1901, 5.

<sup>59</sup> "Library Site by Election," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, October 8, 1901, 3.

<sup>60</sup> "East Side Wins Out and Library Building Goes to Rood Site," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, October 22, 1901, 1.

<sup>61</sup> "Site Again in the Air," *Rockford Morning Star*, December 1, 1901, 8.

<sup>62</sup> "Site Again in the Air," *Rockford Morning Star*, December 1, 1901, 8.

<sup>63</sup> "Council Says Take Gas Site," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, December 10, 1901, 8; "Council is for Gas Lots," *Rockford Morning Star*, December 10, 1901, 6.

<sup>64</sup> "The Board Now Tied on Site," *Rockford Daily Republic*, December 21, 1901, 7; "Sudden Summons of Mr. Coyner," *Rockford Daily Republic*, December 21, 1901, 1.

<sup>65</sup> "Conference on Library Site," *Rockford Morning Star*, January 10, 1902, 5.

<sup>66</sup> "Tell of Visit to Carnegie," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, February 21, 1902, 2.

site.<sup>67</sup> However, on March 13, Bertram wrote to Hutchins with Carnegie's approval of the gas plant site.<sup>68</sup> The city council acted to accept Carnegie's gift for the gas plant site, thus superseding the library board's authority. This decision was unsurprisingly met with east side anger and dissention, a call for referendum, and a legal injunction that was not fully resolved until July 1902.<sup>69</sup> Despite the east side's efforts, planning for the building began.

*The Carnegie Library (1901-03)*

Although they could not decide on a site for more than a year, the library board started entertaining design ideas early on. By March 19, 1901, less than two weeks after Bertram's first letter arrived, the library board asked local architects Bradley & Carpenter to provide a sketch showing the approximate dimensions of a \$60,000 building to assist them in choosing a site.<sup>70</sup> On April 13, 1901, Bradley & Carpenter and another local architect presented preliminary plans for the new library building.<sup>71</sup> An entire year passed before the city council definitively selected the gas plant site and solicited bids for building plans. On April 22, 1902, the city council received the deed to the gas plant site and, along with four participating library board members, chose Bradley & Carpenter's Neoclassical design for the library over two other sets of drawings submitted by local architects.<sup>72</sup>

The grounds of the library were to be designed in conjunction with the grounds for the Memorial Hall, which Bradley & Carpenter also designed and was already under construction across the street from the gas plant site. Working with the architects, Robert H. Tinker designed the landscape for the library, Memorial Hall, and the river bank to the State Street girder bridge. The community's long-wished-for riverside park with trees and winding paths was incorporated into Tinker's plan.<sup>73</sup>

On June 16, 1902, the city council selected the bid of general contractor W.H. Cook to construct the library building for \$49,746 by February 1, 1903.<sup>74</sup> A small groundbreaking ceremony occurred the following day, and the young grandson of the former owner of the Rockford Gas Light and Coke Company had the honor of breaking ground.<sup>75</sup> Laying the foundation progressed rapidly. Despite a few issues, like worker strikes and a delay in receiving promised funds from Carnegie, construction went smoothly. By October, the second story of the building was halfway up, and the pilasters for the west side of the

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<sup>67</sup> "Must Make Some Changes," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, February 22, 1902, 2; "Mayor Hears from Carnegie," *Rockford Morning Star*, February 22, 1902, 8.

<sup>68</sup> "Library Site is Settled," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, March 25, 1902, 3; "Library Fight Ended at Last," *Rockford Morning Star*, March 25, 1902, 8.

<sup>69</sup> "Settled at Last," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, July 29, 1902, 4.

<sup>70</sup> "How Board Will Consider Sites," *Rockford Morning Star*, March 20, 1901, 6.

<sup>71</sup> "Local Architects Meet Members of Library Board," *Rockford Morning Star*, April 14, 1901, 6.

<sup>72</sup> "Classic Plan is Accepted," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, April 23, 1902, 8; "Choose Design for Library," *Rockford Morning Star*, April 23, 1902, 6; "West Side Library," *Rockford Daily Republic*, April 23, 1902, 4.

<sup>73</sup> "Library Grounds Become Park," *Rockford Morning Star*, May 11, 1904, 8.

<sup>74</sup> "Contract for Library Signed," *Rockford Morning Star*, June 17, 1902, 5.

<sup>75</sup> "Third of His Line," *Rockford Morning Star*, June 17, 1902, 5.

building were ready to be installed.<sup>76</sup> By February 1903, work on the dome was underway with copper sheathing and placement of the dome cap.<sup>77</sup> In April, it was reported that plastering and window trim were complete, and that flooring would be next.<sup>78</sup> At the same time, the construction budget was running out.<sup>79</sup> The city council requested funding from Carnegie and was granted an additional \$10,000 for interior decorations and other building finishes.

The announcement that President Theodore Roosevelt would visit Rockford on June 2, 1902, created a sense of urgency to hurry the library construction and, more importantly, to beautify the library grounds. Roosevelt would deliver an address at the dedication of the new Memorial Hall with the unsightly library site across the street. Popular opinion expressed that the library board “should begin the work of improving the library grounds. Not to do this would be unpatriotic.”<sup>80</sup> The fear that “Teddy will not carry away a good opinion of Rockford” had a serendipitous effect on the continued antagonism between the city council and the library board resulting from the library controversy. The city council resolved to appropriate \$1,000 “to present a finished and complete appearance” by the time of Roosevelt’s arrival, and asked the library board for cooperation in the matter. Finally on May 9, the library board officially acknowledged its acceptance of the building as the new public library and unanimously voted to improve the grounds and install sidewalks. Rapid work involved grading the site with borrowed fill from other construction sites hauled from the east side.<sup>81</sup> Not all improvements were completed in time for the visit, but nevertheless, Roosevelt greeted schoolchildren assembled in front of the library.<sup>82</sup>

By July 1903, the interior of the library was ready for painting and decoration. The library board ordered \$3,000 in furnishings from the Library Bureau of Chicago, including oak tables, chairs, and cabinets, and a bronze plaque to honor Andrew Carnegie.<sup>83</sup> By mid-September, the library was basically complete and the books were transferred from the former library building.<sup>84</sup> The circulating department of the library opened for a few hours to the public on October 19; however, the furniture order did not arrive until the end of October, and the grand opening was postponed.<sup>85</sup> No formal dedication ceremony took place, but the new library held open houses for the public on November 21 and 25, even though the reading room chairs had not yet arrived.<sup>86</sup> The

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<sup>76</sup> “Keyt Goes to Work on Library,” *Rockford Morning Star*, October 23, 1902, 5; “Work Progressing,” *Rockford Morning Star*, October 28, 1902, 2.

<sup>77</sup> “Put Cap on Dome,” *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, February 4, 1903.

<sup>78</sup> “Contracts on Library Fund,” *Rockford Morning Star*, April 11, 1903.

<sup>79</sup> “Contracts on Library Fund,” *Rockford Morning Star*, April 11, 1903.

<sup>80</sup> “Library Board Should Get Busy,” *Rockford Morning Star*, April 12, 1903.

<sup>81</sup> “Library Lot to Be Fixed Up,” *Rockford Morning Star*, May 29, 1903.

<sup>82</sup> “President Goes in Hurry,” *Rockford Republic*, June 3, 1903.

<sup>83</sup> “Library Furnishings,” *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, August 1, 1903.

<sup>84</sup> “Library Now Nearly Ready,” *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, August 26, 1903; “New Library Completed,” *Rockford Republic*, September 15, 1903.

<sup>85</sup> “First Book Goes to Prof. Barbour,” *Rockford Morning Star*, September 20, 1903; “Furniture is Here,” *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, October 31, 1903.

<sup>86</sup> “To Open Saturday,” *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, November 20, 1903.

total cost of the library, including the building, furnishings, grounds, and contents, was approximately \$90,000, of which \$70,000 came from Carnegie.<sup>87</sup>

Shortly after the library opened, an anonymous benefactor donated a large natural history collection to the library for a museum. An intermediary, Giles F. Hunter, presented the donation, which the library board accepted. The collection was the life work of Dr. J.W. Velie, a naturalist and taxidermist of the Chicago Academy of Sciences, amassed over three decades. Dr. Velie personally oversaw the arrangement of the collection when it began arriving in crates in December 1903. The collection included an impressive variety of birds, mammals, shells, and a 14'-4" crocodile.<sup>88</sup> On March 9, 1904, the museum opened to the public in the southwest and west sections of the second floor of the library, where it would stay for 36 years.<sup>89</sup> In May, the benefactors were revealed to be the Beattie family, whose bequest was in honor of their deceased parents, John and Mary A. Beattie of Rockford. A bronze memorial plaque with their names was installed above the entrance of the museum.<sup>90</sup>

#### *Rockford Public Library in the Early Twentieth Century*

The library opened with 37,000 volumes and membership increased rapidly. In the first decades of the 1900s, the library system expanded with new branches and stations across the city to keep up with increasing patronage and circulation. In the aftermath of the library fight, an east side library branch was planned before the main library was finished, and the Seventh Street branch opened with a modest 1,700 volumes in June 1904. By 1907, the "progressive-up-to-date institution" had 46,000 volumes at the main library and 3,500 volumes at the east side branch. Ten years later, the Seventh Street branch moved to a new building at Sixth Street and Fourth Avenue on the east side, and its name was changed to the Rowland branch. Deposit stations were established at 1616 West State St. in the west end and at the Women's Christian Temperance building in the north end. Through a cooperative program with the public schools, other stations opened in the Highland and Montague schools; by 1920, auxiliary stations existed in 50 area schools. The number of library users continued to increase, with a spike in 1918 during World War I from 1,000 Camp Grant soldiers.<sup>91</sup>

By the Rockford Public Library's fiftieth anniversary in 1922, circulation was 308,000 with 18,000 card holders, representing 25 percent of the population. In May 1923, the new Montague Branch building on the south side was completed and dedicated as part of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the library. The library system continued to

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<sup>87</sup> Rockford Public Library, "Thirty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the Rockford Public Library," 1904.

<sup>88</sup> "Alligator in the Library," *Rockford Morning Star*, December 27, 1903; "Great Collection," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, January 9, 1904; "Rockford has the Biggest Crocodile," *Rockford Republic*, January 11, 1904.

<sup>89</sup> "Velie Museum Open to Public," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, March 9, 1904; "New Museum is Handsome One," *Rockford Morning Star*, March 9, 1904.

<sup>90</sup> "Donors Now Made Public," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, May 14, 1904.

<sup>91</sup> Oberg, "The Past, Present and Future of Rockford Public Library," 2006.

grow with the opening of the new Southeast Branch at 11th Street and 15th Avenue in October 1929.

By 1924, the main library was overcrowded with materials due to its growing circulation. In 1924-25, the main library building was remodeled to improve capacity and efficiencies. The second-floor open rotunda was closed to create more floor space. Ten new windows were cut into the north wall to provide additional light to the book stacks, where a third floor of metal shelves was added to increase capacity by 50 percent to hold 60,000 volumes. The interior was repainted, and suspended bronze light fixtures installed on the ceilings. The delivery desk was redesigned and placed under the rotunda. Several sections were rearranged, and the basement was finished for a new repair room and periodicals room. A new fine arts department was also developed at the time.<sup>92</sup>

Following national trends, library patronage grew during the Great Depression due to increased unemployment and new residents coming to Rockford seeking work. Although library circulation increased to nearly 650,000 in 1932, the library board had to cut the operating budget by 25 percent that year and staff wages by 25 percent in the following year.<sup>93</sup> On July 3, 1935, Governor Henry Horner signed Illinois House Bill No. 405 to provide \$600,000 for Illinois public libraries to buy books and periodicals, of which Rockford Public Library received \$8,000. During the hard times, the library board had wanted to move the West End branch to distance it from a tavern in the same building, but decided not to build a separate building and continued leasing 1616 W. State St.<sup>94</sup>

Further changes to the main library building commenced in late 1930s. In August-September 1938, a six-week construction project to expand the children's room in the basement included removal of the west wall of the room. In 1939, the natural history museum transferred from the library board to the park board, and the collection was moved to the Art Association's museum on N. Main Street, combining the Beattie collection and the Mandeville Park collection of curios and antiques.<sup>95</sup> The newly opened space on the second floor of the main library was remodeled for an expansion of the art, business, and technology rooms, and a new local history and genealogy room.<sup>96</sup>

During World War II, the main library building became a hub of war-related community activity. It was the center for the Victory book drive for the armed forces, which collected around 3,600 books in 1942. The library stocked up on media related to current events, rationing, and other useful information related to the war effort. In 1944, the main library displayed art work from the soldiers stationed at Camp Grant. Immediately following the war, patronage of the main library's reading room spiked due to the return of servicemen

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<sup>92</sup> "Henry Whipple Resigns from Library Board," *Rockford Morning Star*, April 18, 1924; "Double Book Shelf Space for Library," *Rockford Republic*, April 17, 1924; "Add Art Room to Library's Plant," *Rockford Morning Star*, September 27, 1905.

<sup>93</sup> "Cut Library Wages by \$10,808," *Rockford Morning Star*, January 17, 1933, 1.

<sup>94</sup> "Library Site Change Asked," *Rockford Morning Star*, October 13, 1936, 1; "Library Board Not to Build," *Rockford Morning Star*, December 1, 1936, 2.

<sup>95</sup> "Frankly Speaking," *Rockford Register-Republic*, December 2, 1939; "Crocodile in Library Alone," *Rockford Register-Republic*, January 26, 1940.

<sup>96</sup> "Library Opens Local History Section Soon," *Rockford Morning Star*, May 5, 1940.

and the needs of high school students. In 1946, a room specifically for teenagers was created, with locally donated furniture.

Jane P. Hubbell was responsible for many of the improvements to the library and the system. Hubbell joined the staff of the library on May 1, 1892, and became the head librarian in January 1901, after the death of W.L. Rowland. During her tenure, the library “entered a period of expansion and development which has kept it abreast of the growth of the city ever since.”<sup>97</sup> Her “executive leadership and wisdom” shaped the development and growth of library programs for 50 years.<sup>98</sup> She also served the Illinois and American library associations, “keeping up with the times” in library programming and technology. At the celebration for her retirement effective on May 1, 1942, she was still looking ahead, suggesting that the present library building had already been outgrown, and that Rockford would need a library building “worthy of the city.”<sup>99</sup> She was succeeded by Mary C. Bigelow, and then by Faith Armstrong in 1944, who served as the head librarian until 1961.

In honor of the Rockford Public Library’s 75th anniversary in 1947, Jane Hubbell remarked on the growth and success of the library as the result of dedicated staff and board members:

“It must be credited in large measure to the spirit of service which has characterized the personnel of its staff and governing board. There has been a record of long service by many capable women on the staff, who have given wholehearted co-operation to the library advancement. Their loyalty and devotion during the hard years of the depression was evidenced in the fact that the greatest service in every department was maintained under the greatest financial hardships. Many public spirited men and women have given freely of their time and energy to serve on the library board. Often they have worked with meager funds to accomplish desired library objectives, but always they have been leaders of ability and vision to maintain the high standard set by the founders of the library.”<sup>100</sup>

The celebration included a variety of displays and exhibits, the dedication of the teenagers’ book room, and the dedication of record collection for circulation and a listening room in living memorial to fallen servicemen.

During the postwar era in the late 1940s through the 1950s, constant changes in technology and popular media were reflected in the library’s collections and services. In 1949, the library partnered to microfilm approximately 800,000 pages of local newspapers and installed a Recordak microfilm viewer the following year. In 1950, the record collection increased and, in 1954, the library began circulating 16 mm film reels.

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<sup>97</sup> “Jane Hubbell Librarian for 50 Years, Quits,” *Rockford Morning Star*, March 27, 1942.

<sup>98</sup> Isadora Haight, “Laud Service to Books by Miss Hubbell,” *Rockford Morning Star*, May 2, 1942.

<sup>99</sup> Isadora Haight, “Laud Service to Books by Miss Hubbell,” *Rockford Morning Star*, May 2, 1942.

<sup>100</sup> Notes provided by Jean Lythgoe.

In 1955, the library was described as “an indispensable source of recreation as well as of instruction for residents of the city.”<sup>101</sup> The library system also reached those with less access to the main library. After the overwhelming success of a bookmobile program using a borrowed vehicle from the State Library, the library bought its own bookmobile that could hold 2,000 books in 1953, and another that could hold almost 4,000 books in 1959.

*Modernization Project (1957-1969)*

By the late 1950s, the library circulation was record-breaking, and the demand for library services highlighted the fact that the Carnegie building was glaringly antiquated in terms of size and amenities. The library board considered remodeling the main library and constructing an addition to meet desperate space needs with a collection of more than 100,000 volumes.<sup>102</sup> As librarian Faith Armstrong put it: “Rockford built a library for the 1910s and ‘20s... We need a library now for the ‘60s and ‘70s.”<sup>103</sup> The library board noted that while several other Illinois cities were renovating their Carnegie libraries, “the trend is away from library buildings which look like Mausoleums and toward the idea of making them friendly and inviting;” and although the library “does not have the gingerbread and columns some libraries have... it has much space devoted to hallways, the rotunda of the second floor, and corridors which can be converted into better use.”<sup>104</sup> Other items for consideration included an elevator for accessibility and air conditioning.

On October 28, 1957, the library board approved a \$35,000 budget to begin a long-range, multi-phase modernization project for the main library. The project was anticipated to take five years to complete, financed through annual appropriations and tax revenues, allowing the board to “bring the library up to the standards it should enjoy in a city the size of Rockford, while at the same time not forcing us to float a bond issue for the financing.”<sup>105</sup> The “pay-as-you-go” financing plan required contractors to take out bank loans against the money owed by the library, which the library would pay back with interest, using the library’s future income.<sup>106</sup>

The library board requested plans to improve efficiency from Charles E. Boettcher, a local architect. At the time, Boettcher was working on several civic projects in Rockford, including schools, city hall, and the airport terminal, and served as the president of the Northern Illinois Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. He was also a proponent of urban renewal.<sup>107</sup> On his vacation to California in late 1957, Boettcher visited several modern libraries for ideas for the renovation, including Lido Beach, Laguna Beach, San Diego, and Orange State and Long Beach colleges.<sup>108</sup> On March 31,

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<sup>101</sup> “Public Library Here Established in 1872,” *Register Republic*, February 15, 1955.

<sup>102</sup> “Main City Library Bulging at Seams,” *Rockford Register-Republic*, November 25, 1957.

<sup>103</sup> “Outline \$900,000 Library Expansion, Modernization,” *Rockford Morning Star*, December 6, 1960.

<sup>104</sup> “Library Board Budgets \$35,000 to Start Big Remodeling Project,” *Rockford Morning Star*, October 29, 1957.

<sup>105</sup> “Library Board Budgets \$35,000 to Start Big Remodeling Project,” *Rockford Morning Star*, October 29, 1957.

<sup>106</sup> “Library to Mortgage Property,” *Rockford Register-Republic*, January 16, 1968.

<sup>107</sup> Rod Wenz, “Rockford Ailing, They Say; Architects Spotlight Decay,” *Rockford Register-Republic*, November 30, 1961.

<sup>108</sup> “Architect Tours West,” *Rockford Morning Star*, November 22, 1957.



1958, the library board hired Boettcher to work with library consultant James E. Bryan of Newark, New Jersey, who would determine the library's needs for seating capacity and book space.<sup>109</sup> In July, modernization planning was still in "formative stages," but the board decided to immediately install ramps at the entrances for wheelchair accessibility.<sup>110</sup> By August 1958, Boettcher reported that the size and setback of a proposed addition located on the south side of the main building were determined.<sup>111</sup> A year later in August 1959, the library board officially authorized Boettcher to draw plans, specifications, and publicity sketches for the proposed project.<sup>112</sup>

On December 5, 1959, Boettcher presented drawings to the library board. The plans illustrated a two-and-a-half-story modern addition on the south side, a bookmobile garage on the east side, and removal of the dome structure, which had been problematic for some time due to leaking, corrosion, and wood rot. The addition was designed with an inset balcony on the second floor of the east side. Adjacent to the bookmobile garage, the design included a drive-up book return drop. A large slab creating a visual separation between the incongruent architectural styles of the old building and the new addition was also part of the design. An early modification of the initial design included removing the balcony area, and adding an additional story above the garage instead.<sup>113</sup> The entire project was estimated at \$900,000. After two years of planning, a three-year construction schedule for the addition began in 1962, followed by a two-year schedule for remodeling the main library building.

The first order of business was removal of the two-story dome structure and replacement with a gabled roof. In a two-step process to avoid exposing the interior of the second floor to the elements, the lower interior ceiling, including the inner dome visible from the rotunda, was removed first and a new roof built to seal the rotunda. Then, the exterior, copper-clad dome was removed.<sup>114</sup> Contractor Frank S. Pearce Co. removed the dome and built the new roof in late July 1961. The community lamented the loss of the landmark dome but embraced the practicality of its removal and the prospect of an improved library.

In September 1961, Julius R. (Jack) Chitwood became the new library director. He and the library board felt that even more library space would be needed, so the plans for the addition changed to include a third story.<sup>115</sup> Chitwood also had recommendations for rearranging the interior. Boettcher submitted revised plans on October 30, 1961, which included a third floor to the addition, rearranged the interior, and removed the drive-up book return drop.<sup>116</sup> The cost of the revisions was estimated at an additional \$125,000.

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<sup>109</sup> "Architect Aids Library in Survey," *Rockford Register-Republic*, April 1, 1958.

<sup>110</sup> "Mae Andrews' Successor Named by Library Board," *Rockford Morning Star*, July 1, 1958.

<sup>111</sup> "Favor 3100 Rockton Ave. for Library," *Rockford Register-Republic*, August 19, 1958.

<sup>112</sup> "Draw Plans for Library Remodeling," *Rockford Morning Star*, September 1, 1959.

<sup>113</sup> "Library Board Approves Dropping Balcony Area," *Rockford Morning Star*, March 28, 1961.

<sup>114</sup> "Doom of Library Dome is Sealed," *Rockford Register-Republic*, May 30, 1961; "Inside View Tells Why Library Dome Being Torn Down," *Rockford Morning Star*, July 2, 1961.

<sup>115</sup> "Order Plan for Third Floor in Library Unit," *Rockford Morning Star*, September 26, 1961.

<sup>116</sup> "New Library Revamp Plan is Approved," *Rockford Morning Star*, October 31, 1961.

Based on further criticism of the preliminary plan due to the sharpness of the architectural contrast between the Neoclassical and Modern styles, the library board asked Boettcher to propose a new design to refinish the Carnegie building to match the new addition.<sup>117</sup> In January 1962, Boettcher revised the plan by encasing the existing building with Indiana limestone modulated in the same patterns as the new addition.<sup>118</sup> The revised cost estimate for the entire modernization project was \$1,140,000.<sup>119</sup>

Boettcher's modern vision for the library reflected his dedication to urban renewal. In presentations and publications presented by the Northern Illinois Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, Boettcher and other local architects made the case to revamp downtown Rockford, promoting the prevalent rationale for civic redevelopment. Boettcher felt that downtown Rockford was "ailing," and that the community had a responsibility "to see that these portions are nursed back to health for our own good as well as the good of the entire community." He argued that the major symptom of downtown decay was commercial decline and loss of the tax base. Boettcher moved "through the stark present," describing "neglect, apathy, procrastination, deterioration, confusion, and decay," and then proposed "what could be a grand and picturesque future." The epitome of that vision included exclusively modernistic architecture, with large open spaces, parklike areas, and an "immaculate" riverfront. A civic redevelopment survey of downtown Rockford identified areas for urban renewal, and Boettcher led the charge for a comprehensive change to the entire downtown district, with additional ideas for the Seventh Street and Broadway commercial districts.<sup>120</sup> The library modernization project would be one of the first major actions of the urban renewal campaign to overhaul downtown Rockford.<sup>121</sup>

In May 1962, the library board accepted Boettcher's drawings for the first phase of construction, including the foundation, framing, walls, roof, and windows, and some mechanical, electrical, and plumbing conduits forming the shell of the addition.<sup>122</sup> In July, the library board awarded the general contract for the first phase to J.P. Cullen & Son Corp. of Janesville, Wisconsin. Other contractors included Mississippi Valley Structural Steel Co., Rockford Industries, Inc., Nelson Piping Co., and Broadway Electric Co. Groundbreaking ceremonies attended by Mayor Benjamin Schleicher, the library board, and several other local dignitaries were held on July 23.<sup>123</sup> Excavation for the foundation footings began the next day. Construction continued steadily and remained on schedule through the end of 1963.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> "'Look-Alike' Plans Asked for Library, New Addition," *Rockford Morning Star*, November 28, 1961.

<sup>118</sup> "Brand-New Look for Rockford's Library Unveiled," *Rockford Morning Star*, January 14, 1962.

<sup>119</sup> "Break Ground for 3-Story Addition to Public Library," *Rockford Morning Star*, July 24, 1962.

<sup>120</sup> Rod Wenz, "Rockford Ailing, They Say; Architects Spotlight Decay," *Rockford Register-Republic*, November 30, 1961.

<sup>121</sup> Hal Nelson, "Library Plan Points Way," *Rockford Morning Star*, July 29, 1962.

<sup>122</sup> "Give Green Light to First Phase of Library Addition," *Rockford Morning Star*, May 29, 1962.

<sup>123</sup> "Break Ground for 3-Story Addition to Public Library," *Rockford Morning Star*, July 24, 1962.

<sup>124</sup> "Library Addition Work is Progressing Steadily," *Rockford Morning Star*, June 16, 1963.

The second phase of construction addressed the floors, interior walls, and finishing of the addition. As the first phase of construction was nearing completion in February 1964, the library board awarded the general contract to complete the second phase to Gust G. Larson & Sons, Inc., and other contracts to Nelson Piping and Supply Co., Cecil B. Wood, Inc., and Rockford Industries, Inc.<sup>125</sup> Interior work was nearly complete when the library board took its first walk-through of the addition on March 1, 1965.<sup>126</sup> Notable interior work included wood paneling in the auditorium addition, which earned Gust G. Larson and Sons, Inc. a building construction award of merit at the Rockford Seminar for Architects, Contractors and Owners.<sup>127</sup> Other areas were decorated in bright colors with contemporary furniture. Interior furnishings, including six miles of shelves, were installed in August 1965.<sup>128</sup> The library recruited 62 teenage boys to move more than 100,000 books from the old library into the addition, which they accomplished over a weekend.<sup>129</sup> The new addition opened on August 30, 1965, with an informal reception and tour.<sup>130</sup> The library hosted an open house for the public on October 31, and more than 1,300 people enthusiastically took guided tours of the new facilities.<sup>131</sup>

At the time of the addition's opening, the Rockford Public Library was having a banner year. Circulation in 1964 topped 1 million for the first time in the library's history. The library system extended to five branches at Highland, Montague, South East, Rockton Center, and West End, as well as the bookmobile, school, and hospital services. In December 1965, it joined the nascent Northern Illinois Library System (NILS), a regional library cooperative between multiple counties.<sup>132</sup> Chitwood was named the head librarian of NILS, and the Rockford Public Library was named the NILS headquarters.<sup>133</sup> Although the library was experiencing tremendous growth and expansion, it was struggling financially. The library board had no immediate plans to complete the remodeling project of the old library building, because the library still owed \$160,000 on the addition.<sup>134</sup> Fortunately, federal funds allocated through the Illinois State Library were available, and the library board received \$276,238 for the next phase of the modernization project.

The library's expanding services required more space than allotted in the original remodeling plan. In March 1966, the library board voted to add a third story to the top of the main building as part of the third phase of the modernization project, and Boettcher verified that the structure's walls and foundations could support another story. The additional floor increased the fast-rising cost estimates of the remodeling project by

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<sup>125</sup> "Pacts to Complete Library Wing OK'd," *Rockford Morning Star*, February 4, 1964.

<sup>126</sup> "Library Board Tours Addition," *Rockford Morning Star*, March 2, 1965.

<sup>127</sup> "Builder, Architects of 10 Structures Presented Awards at Local Seminar," *Rockford Morning Star*, March 27, 1965.

<sup>128</sup> "Public Library Here Installing 6 miles of Shelves in Addition," *Rockford Register-Republic*, August 2, 1965.

<sup>129</sup> "Muscles, Patience Needed in Rockford Library Move," *Rockford Morning Star*, August 27, 1965.

<sup>130</sup> "Ceremonies Open Library Addition," *Rockford Register-Republic*, August 30, 1965.

<sup>131</sup> "Looking Over Library," *Rockford Register-Republic*, November 1, 1965.

<sup>132</sup> "City Officially Joins Region Library Plan," *Rockford Morning Star* December 7, 1965.

<sup>133</sup> "\$314,802 Budget Approved for N. Illinois Library Net," *Rockford Register-Republic*, January 19, 1966.

<sup>134</sup> "Seek U.S. Aid for Library Remodeling," *Rockford Morning Star*, Mar 29, 1966.

another \$160,000.<sup>135</sup> Boettcher & Simmon, Architects, submitted revised preliminary plans with a new local history and genealogy room, administrative offices, and an expansion of social sciences section on the third floor. The plans also called for a new technical processing department in the basement and a boiler room with two boilers to replace the city steam heat source.<sup>136</sup> On September 12, 1966, the library board approved the final plans submitted by Boettcher & Simmon, Architects, and authorized completion of the specifications for bids.<sup>137</sup> On December 5, 1966, the library board awarded contracts for the remodeling to Pearce Butler Co., general contractor; Nelson Piping Co., Broadway Electric Co., and Rockford Industries, Inc.<sup>138</sup>

The third phase of the modernization project, which consisted of gut renovation of the original building, began immediately; library materials were moved to the addition and entrances to the old building were closed off on December 10, 1966. Construction began with excavation of the northeast basement wall, which was opened to allow heavy equipment to move inside. Concrete was poured to create base footings for structural steel supports.<sup>139</sup> The interior was systematically gutted with the removal of second-floor ceilings, flooring, joists, doors, and windows. By January 1967, most of the windows were infilled with concrete blocks. In February, the north end was completely gutted and the exterior trim removed.<sup>140</sup> The basement mechanical and boiler room and heating equipment remained in place for continued use, and concrete was poured to cap the area for its protection. The elevator shaft was also saved in place and extended to the new third floor. By March, the roof was gone.<sup>141</sup>

Few architectural elements were salvaged from demolition. The multi-story steel book stacks were purchased and removed by the Aurora Public Library.<sup>142</sup> The limestone columns from the east side entrance were saved and moved to a local quarry for storage, until one was reused as a statue pedestal for a veterans' memorial and then moved to Memorial Hall.<sup>143</sup> An approximately 4' x 6' limestone slab inscribed with 1902 from the gable of the N. Wyman Street entrance was salvaged for reuse in the new building, along with the bronze plaque honoring Andrew Carnegie.<sup>144</sup>

Meanwhile, the library's "pay-as-you-go" financing plan for the modernization project unraveled when general contractor Pearce Butler Co.'s invoices required loans that exceeded the library's credit. To cover an estimated \$700,000 debt, the library board voted to mortgage the library property. However, the Rockford Public Library did not

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<sup>135</sup> "Vote to Add 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor on Library," *Rockford Morning Star*, April 5, 1966.

<sup>136</sup> "Library Remodeling Plans Given OK," *Rockford Morning Star*, August 2, 1966.

<sup>137</sup> "Plans OK'd for Library Remodeling," *Rockford Morning Star*, September 13, 1966.

<sup>138</sup> "Award Pacts for Library Remodeling," *Rockford Morning Star*, December 6, 1966.

<sup>139</sup> "Library Wing Remodeling Under Way," *Rockford Morning Star*, December 14, 1966.

<sup>140</sup> "Library Remodeling Is on Schedule," *Rockford Morning Star*, February 7, 1967; "Work on Library Stays on Schedule," *Rockford Daily-Register*, February 7, 1967.

<sup>141</sup> "Workmen Pushing Ahead with Library Demolition," *Rockford Morning Star*, March 5, 1967.

<sup>142</sup> "Demolition of Interior Continues at Main Library," *Rockford Morning Star*, January 8, 1967.

<sup>143</sup> Doug Adams, "At Dedication of Statue Park, Soldier Unknown But Not Unsung," *Rockford Register Star*, May 25, 1985, 2.

<sup>144</sup> "Library's Pillars to Reappear Here," *Rockford Register-Republic*, February 15, 1967.

own the library property since it had been donated to the City in 1902. On January 22, 1968, the library board requested the city council to transfer the deed for the library property as collateral for the mortgage.<sup>145</sup> The City, forbidden by state law to mortgage its property, had to transfer the land title via public sale and accept the highest bidder at auction. In a risky move, the City offered the property for sale, and, fortunately, the library was the only bidder. On April 1, 1968, the library board bought the property from the city council for \$10.00, but had been prepared with a second bid of \$1,005 just in case another bidder came forward.<sup>146</sup> The city council also expected the library to return the land title to the City after the mortgage was paid in full. In actuality, the library needed \$960,841 to cover its expenses, which also included covering missed payroll in March and April.<sup>147</sup> Because of the library's dire financial situation, Jack Chitwood tendered his resignation on May 6; however, the library board refused it and vowed to take responsibility for regulating expenditures.<sup>148</sup> Mortgage approval was delayed by the Internal Revenue Service, which was investigating the exemption status of interest on the mortgage. The ten-year loan at 6 percent interest was not finalized until October.<sup>149</sup>

The final phase of the modernization project was practically complete when the remodeled main library building reopened on February 10, 1969. The circulation desk, technical processing area, and staff offices were moved back to the main building, while other finishing touches were still being completed. On April 18, the library hosted a special evening preview event showcasing the "library of the future" for state and local elected officials, the library board, staff, and friends of the library.<sup>150</sup> On April 20, the public open house welcomed visitors to guided tours of the library, including areas not typically open to the public. Areas of interest included the new children's theater, audio-video rooms, the technical processing area, and the local history and genealogy room. Other progressive amenities included wheelchair-accessible features, snow-melting equipment at the entrance and entrance ramp, new drinking fountains, and elevators with communications systems. The new tunnel in the basement with a conveyor system connecting to the book return drop on N. Wyman Street was a highlight of the tour.<sup>151</sup>

With the new facilities, the main library stayed abreast of both library and popular technology into the late twentieth century. In 1975, new computerized checkout began using barcodes. In 1981, a new telephone device for the deaf (TDD) teletype (TTY) machine was installed. The library offered an Apple IIe computer for public use for the first time in 1983 and added a computer room three years later. Electronic typewriters and fax machines were also introduced in the 1980s. As an important community center,

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<sup>145</sup> "Library Asks Council for Property Deed," *Rockford Register-Republic*, January 23, 1968.

<sup>146</sup> "Board Buys City Library with \$10," *Rockford Morning Star*, April 2, 1968.

<sup>147</sup> "\$960,841 Mortgage Needed to Meet Library Expenses," *Rockford Morning Star*, March 2, 1968; "Library Workers May Miss Pay Again," *Rockford Register-Republic*, April 9, 1968.

<sup>148</sup> "Board Votes Full Support of Chitwood," *Rockford Register-Republic*, May 7, 1968; "Urges Strict Tab by Board on Library Expenditures," *Rockford Morning Star*, June 4, 1968.

<sup>149</sup> "\$960,000 Transferred to Library," *Rockford Morning Star*, October 23, 1968, 3.

<sup>150</sup> "New Library Plans Open House," *Rockford Register-Republic*, April 7, 1969, 3.

<sup>151</sup> "Library's Book Drop Moves Again," *Rockford Morning Star*, November 19, 1967.

the library evolved with changing technology and public interests, and the interior library spaces also shifted.

Financial problems continued to plague the library in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1976, the city council cut the library's budget, resulting in a drastic curtailment of library services and Jack Chitwood's resignation. In 1979, all six branch locations closed. Library services slowly recovered after the financial disaster and, in 1981, new director Joel Rosenfeld conducted studies and planned for a reorganization of the library to meet changing needs. However, financial troubles returned after the library's local tax income of 24.5 cents per \$100 assessed valuation was reduced to 15 cents after 1982. In 1984, with fears that library hours and staff would need to be cut due to budget, the library board asked voters to double the library property tax rate ceiling from 15 cents to 30 cents per \$100 assessed valuation in a referendum.<sup>152</sup> The referendum passed, and the tax levied remained at 23 cents, below the maximum of 30 cents, to appease the public. The library board moved forward with its plans to revamp the library, approving a statement of purpose for the changes in July 1984.

#### *Reconfiguration Project (1984-87)*

In the mid-1980s, planned changes focused on consolidating departments, improving accessibility, increasing services, and introducing more computers. On January 24, 1985, Rockford architect Richard L. Johnson presented drawings and costs for the building reconfiguration to the library board. The estimated \$1.6 million cost for the project was stunning, considering the library's recent financial troubles.<sup>153</sup> In February, the library board approved plans for half the cost to create two new entrances, improve accessibility, enlarge the children's section, relocate the circulation desks, re-carpet the first floor, construct an open stairway between the second and third floors in the South Wing, and install double-glazed windows.<sup>154</sup> The \$878,530 reduced plan was met by public outcry, with more than 100 people at the public hearing on the design in March, prompting the city council to delay its approval.<sup>155</sup> By May, another reduction to the reconfiguration project further decreased the costs to \$793,255.<sup>156</sup> By July, it was scaled down to \$549,810.<sup>157</sup> In August, the city council finally approved the project and authorized the library board to apply for a Build Illinois state grant, which was awarded. However, the controversy continued as a group of citizens led by former librarian Ruth Lunde filed for an injunction against the library to stop the project in October.<sup>158</sup> The lawsuit was dismissed in December 1985 but was later appealed to the U.S. District Court of

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<sup>152</sup> "Library Tax-Hike Backers Have Concerns," *Rockford Register Star*, March 2, 1984, 3; "Library Plans Reveal Big Role for Computers," *Rockford Register Star*, April 9, 1984, 9.

<sup>153</sup> "Library Revamp Cost is About \$1.6 Million," *Rockford Register Star*, January 25, 1985, 3.

<sup>154</sup> "Library Changes OK'd," *Rockford Register Star*, February 5, 1985, 3.

<sup>155</sup> Florestine Purnell and Eileen Peterson, "Loud Public Cry Leads Library Board to Reconsider Plans," *Rockford Register Star*, March 26, 1985, 1.

<sup>156</sup> Doug Adams, "City to Get Scaled-Down Library Remodeling Plan," *Rockford Register Star*, May 31, 1985, 5.

<sup>157</sup> Eileen Peterson, "Library Board Approves Scaled Down Remodeling," *Rockford Register Star*, July 30, 1985, 1.

<sup>158</sup> Norma Hurdle, "Quiet but Determined Woman Fights for Her Goal," *Rockford Register Star*, October 4, 1985, 43.

Appeals.<sup>159</sup> Ultimately, action on the reconfiguration project was delayed due to a holdup in grant funding, not the lawsuit.

In December 1986, Johnson submitted another revised plan for the project, and the library board awarded the general contract for the project to John Fridh & Sons, Inc.<sup>160</sup> Construction began in late December. Major alterations related to the project included creating a new main entrance on N. Wyman Street with an interior wheelchair ramp, elevating and leveling the sunken ground floor in the browsing area, installing a new wheelchair lift in the east entrance vestibule, expanding youth services on the first floor of the main building, consolidating the adult collection and reference desks, relocating the circulation desk near the new main entrance, constructing the open stairway between the second and third floors in the South Wing, and adding a patron lounge. The reconfigured library held a grand reopening open house from October 11 to 17, 1987. The event, themed “Everything old...is new again,” had tours, music, lectures, and giveaways.<sup>161</sup> The reconfiguration project created “a virtually new experience.”<sup>162</sup>

The library reconfiguration was noted to be “as spacious and inviting as the library esplanade at the rear of the building.”<sup>163</sup> The City had envisioned riverfront improvements along the west bank, including the area behind the library, for several years. Back in June 1984, the City began a campaign to renovate Memorial Hall (or War Memorial Building) and to improve and beautify the riverfront between the Mulberry Street and Jefferson Street bridges with a trail designated as Veterans’ Walk.<sup>164</sup> Although that project was sidelined due to a lack of funding, the City and the Park District initiated a project using Build Illinois funds to extend the Luther High Rise Esplanade riverfront walkway from 111 W. State St. to the Jefferson Street Bridge in September 1986. The \$600,000 project turned part of the library’s parking lot along River Drive into a park, taking thirty-six of sixty parking spaces and causing a parking shortage.<sup>165</sup> A groundbreaking ceremony was held on October 7, 1986. The project required permitting from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to drive large pilings into the river.<sup>166</sup> The area was built up with recreation walkways, benches, trees, and lights by January 1987. The dedication ceremony for the library esplanade took place on July 15, 1987, while the library reconfiguration project was finishing.

Library services continued to expand at the end of the twentieth century. In 1987, circulation once again reached 1 million for the first time since 1975. The library

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<sup>159</sup> Eileen Peterson, “Judge Dismisses Lawsuit to Block Library Remodeling,” *Rockford Register Star*, December 19, 1985, 3.

<sup>160</sup> Lorna Collier, “Library to Get Revised Remodeling Plan,” *Rockford Register Star*, 3.

<sup>161</sup> Notes provided by Jean Lythgoe; Lorna Collier, “Remodeled Library Opening Set Oct. 11,” *Rockford Register Star*, 3.

<sup>162</sup> “Rockford Public Library,” *Rockford Register Star*, May 10, 1988, 35.

<sup>163</sup> “Rockford Public Library,” *Rockford Register Star*, May 10, 1988, 35.

<sup>164</sup> “Mayor: Make Hall a Convention Center,” *Rockford Register Star*, June 6, 1984, 5.

<sup>165</sup> Lorna Collier, “Library Board Tells Mayor Parking Relief Is Overdue,” *Rockford Register Star*, January 29, 1987, 7; Norma Hurdle, “Ground Broken for Walkway Near Rockford Public Library,” *Rockford Register Star*, October 8, 1986, 4.

<sup>166</sup> Lorna Collier, “Work on Walk Disrupts Library Parking,” *Rockford Register Star*, November 13, 1986, 3.

reinstated Sunday hours after a ten-year hiatus in 1989. In 1994, the library developed the online “Sinnissippi Valley Freenet Project,” (SinnFree) giving users access to the burgeoning Internet.<sup>167</sup> Behind these achievements, the library continued to struggle financially. In the early 1990s, the library board sought another tax referendum to support its ballooning deficit.<sup>168</sup> Despite this, the library turned to other sources of income as its attention focused on improving and expanding the library branches and reaching the greater Rockford community in the late 1990s. While development in Rockford began moving east, library director Joel Rosenfeld advocated for keeping the library’s anchor downtown.<sup>169</sup> However, after a failed attempt to get public funding for a new east side library branch in 1998, Rosenfeld announced his retirement in 2000.<sup>170</sup>

*Rockford Public Library in the Early Twenty-First Century*

To celebrate the millennium, a program entitled “The Spirit of Rockford” made its mark on the exterior of the library. The project celebrated the diversity and strengths of the community through artwork produced by high school students. The result was nine tile mosaics forming approximately 51" x 6' murals installed on the limestone panels of the library exterior near the old main entrance on N. Wyman Street.<sup>171</sup> The mosaic murals were revealed at the Spirit of Rockford Tapestry Festival held at the library on May 20, 2000.

In June 2000, Philip Cherry III became the new library director for a brief, rocky tenure that ended with a negotiated resignation in October 2001. Upheavals in staffing and speculation over the controversy lasted into 2002. Karen Van Drie was named the new director in June 2002; however, she had her own share of controversy when she was caught inappropriately using the library’s credit card for personal items, failed to meet management goals, and finally resigned in May 2005.<sup>172</sup> While library leadership was tenuous, the library delayed seeking a referendum for a \$32 million expansion. The new expansion project primarily addressed the needs of the branch libraries, but also a possible expansion of the main library.<sup>173</sup> In January 2006, Frank Novak became the executive director, bringing “a progressive vision and ambition to lead the library into the twenty-first century.”<sup>174</sup> Novak led the effort to acquire a former Barnes & Noble

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<sup>167</sup> Tracy Dell’Angela, “Library Project Puts Area Resources On-Line,” *Rockford Register Star*, August 12, 1994, 5.

<sup>168</sup> Tracy Dell’Angela, “Library May Hike Taxes, Too,” *Rockford Register Star*, January 11, 1991, 1.

<sup>169</sup> “Checking Out,” *Rockford Register Star*, June 28, 1999, 5A.

<sup>170</sup> Mark Bonne, “2 Library Directors to Retire,” *Rockford Register Star*, June 25, 1999, 11A.

<sup>171</sup> Geri Nikolai, “Young Artists Put Imprint on City with Mural,” *Rockford Register Star*, April 21, 2000, 6B.

<sup>172</sup> Isaac Guerrero, “Library Looks to Restore Stability with New Director,” *Rockford Register Star*, November 12, 2005, 7A.

<sup>173</sup> Isaac Guerrero, “Library Looks to Restore Stability with New Director,” *Rockford Register Star*, November 12, 2005, 7A.

<sup>174</sup> WIFR Newsroom, “Executive Director at the Rockford Public Library to Take on a New Role,” March 21, 2014, <https://www.wifr.com/home/headlines/Executive-Director-at-the-Rockford-Public-Library-to-Take-on-a-New-Role-251567501.html>.



bookstore to convert it into the new East Branch in 2008.<sup>175</sup> Novak also oversaw the library's acquisition of the Sullivan Center before his resignation in 2014.

In 2012, Richard Nordlof donated the Sullivan Center, a theater at 118 N. Main St., to the Rockford Public Library. The library board accepted the facility to promote the arts and education through new programming.<sup>176</sup> The facility, which included the J.R. Sullivan Theater and other classrooms, was renamed the Nordlof Center.

In 2017, the city council approved the library board's decision to replace the main library at its existing site to allow for remediation of the property pursuant to the Illinois Site Remediation Program. The main library closed on November 25, 2017. Library materials were moved to an interim site at 214 N. Church St., which opened as the Hart Interim Library on December 2, 2017. The main library was demolished in fall 2018 and a new library building will be constructed in its place. Remediation of the site is anticipated in 2021.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement

(The following describes the building's conditions as recorded in March 2018, prior to demolition.)

1. Architectural character: The Rockford Public Library was a three-story building with a basement that had a monolithic, Modern design with two major wings consisting of the original building and the South Wing. The exterior was clad in limestone with black granite features and a regular pattern of stone panels and window penetrations. The building lacked ornamentation.
2. Condition of fabric: Building materials appeared in good condition, with some staining on the limestone exterior walls.

### B. Description of exterior

1. Overall dimensions: Approximately 161' x 100'
2. Foundations: The original 1903 building had spread footings. The South Wing had steel, concrete-filled piles. The foundation was poured concrete. Exposed foundation walls were clad in black granite veneer.

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<sup>175</sup> Betsy Lopez Fritscher, "Library's Fund Drive Gets Going Saturday," *Rockford Register Star*, September 16, 2008, 1B.

<sup>176</sup> Chris Green, "Rockford Library Board Accepts Sullivan Center As a Donation," *Rockford Register Star*, September 25, 2012, <https://www.rrstar.com/x1217100972/Rockford-library-board-accepts-Sullivan-Center-as-a-donation>.

3. Walls: The original 1903 building had brick and limestone masonry bearing walls with 4" Indiana limestone veneer applied during renovation. The third-story addition had 8" concrete block walls with 4" Indiana limestone veneer. The South Wing addition had 8" concrete block walls with 4" Indiana limestone veneer. The Indiana limestone veneer was flush with regularly spaced 4' x 12' panels that projected 1.5" in relief in each story. The exterior walls also featured black granite panels around the lower level of the building, in two three-story sections at the north and west corners of the original 1903 building, and in trim surrounding the entrances. The first story of the South Wing on the northwest side contained a glass storefront configuration with plate glass panels in a mill finish aluminum frame.
4. Structural system: The South Wing had a structural steel framing system on pile foundations. Floors were a composite metal pan and reinforced concrete system. During the remodel of the 1903 building, the original masonry bearing walls were supplemented with new structural steel interior columns and beam framing. A composite reinforced concrete floor system replaced the original wood framed floor system.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, porticoes, bulkheads: The west (main) entrance on N. Wyman Street was within the South Wing and featured a full-width porch under the cantilevered second floor supported by four square piers with black granite veneer. The first story was composed of a continuous series of storefront glass panels in a mill finish aluminum framing with a central entrance. The entrance led to an interior vestibule with mill finish aluminum framing, storefront windows, and an additional set of doors.

The former north entrance on N. Wyman Street into the original portion of the library consisted of a one-story vestibule that projected from the wall. This entrance was the main entrance on N. Wyman Street prior to 1986. The vestibule consisted of anodized bronze finish aluminum vertical framing with eight glass panels facing N. Wyman Street, four glass panels and a single door on the north side, and five glass panels on the west side, topped with a flat roof and a box cornice clad in black granite veneer.

The east entrance on River Drive was located on the ground floor of a two-story portion of the building that had three bays of anodized bronze finish aluminum vertical framing with three rows of glass panels, set between piers clad in black granite veneer. The entrance consisted of four anodized bronze finish aluminum and glass doors in the first row (ground level) of the central bay. An attached garage with a flat roof deck was situated to the south of the east entrance. One entrance to the garage had a shed metal awning.

The south entrance on Mulberry Street to the auditorium was inset under the first floor and surrounded with black granite veneer panels along the ground floor.

6. Chimneys: The chimney was at the northwest corner and encased in granite stone veneer. It extended 30" above the roof.

## 7. Openings

- a. Doorways and doors: The southwest (main) entrance on N. Wyman Street contained two sets of mill finish aluminum and glass doors separated by a large storefront glass panel, with signage reading “215 North Wyman Street” and fixed transom panels above. The northwest (original building) entrance on N. Wyman Street was an anodized bronze finish aluminum and glass door. The east entrance on River Drive contained four anodized bronze finish aluminum and glass doors. The garage contained a metal, roll-up, double garage door. Adjacent to the roll-up door was a single metal door with a glass panel. A pair of insulated flush panel metal doors and hollow metal frames was located on a perpendicular wall (northeast corner of the South Wing) to the garage. In the second story of the same elevation, a single mill finish aluminum-framed glass door with a transom and a sidelight provided access to the exterior roof deck above the garage. The south entrance on Mulberry Street contained a mill finish aluminum and glass door with sidelights. The north elevation contained a utility door with stairs down to the mechanical and boiler room on the lower floor. All exterior doors had panic bar hardware.
- b. Windows: Storefront windows at the entrances had mill finish aluminum frames with single glass panels. On the exterior walls of the South Wing, windows were regularly spaced in the second and third stories on the west side, and in the first, second, and third stories of the north and east sides. The south elevation of the South Wing had no fenestration above the ground floor. The original wing only contained windows in the first, second, and third stories of the east side. All the upper-story windows consisted of mill finish aluminum frames with insulated glass panes.

## 8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof was flat and covered with an insulated ethylene propylene diene terpolymer (EPDM) membrane system. The roof slightly sloped to interior drains. The roof also contained a metal-sided penthouse with mechanical equipment, cooling tower, and antennae.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The roof had no cornice or eaves; the slightly inset parapet wall was 12" high, clad in Indiana limestone veneer, and covered with metal coping.

## C. Description of interior

1. Floor plans: Architectural drawings for the South Wing addition (1962), the remodel of the original building (1966), and the reconfiguration of the library (1986) are available. The following is a general description of the floor plans for each floor based on architectural drawings and existing physical evidence at the time the building was recorded.

The lower floor had a north-south axis hallway that ran through the center of the original building and continued through the South Wing. To the west side of the hallway, the mechanical and boiler room was located at the north side of the original building, and another open room was located to the south. On the northeast side of the hallway, the lower floor of the original library contained two large technical process rooms, one of which was outside of the original walls and topped with the exterior reading deck. The southeast side of the original library contained a maintenance room attached to the garage. On the east side of the lower floor, the South Wing addition contained an approximately 1,500-square-foot auditorium with a stage, lobby, meeting rooms, restrooms, and storage closets. The west side contained a large open storage room with book stacks and other storage racks.

The first floor contained open spaces supported by columns and beams along the same north-south axis between the original building and the South Wing. In the original building, the first floor contained a children's theater at the northwest corner, an enclosed office, and a workroom, but was otherwise open with load-bearing columns and beams along the north-south central axis. The upper level of the east entrance vestibule connected to a patron lounge (1986 addition). The first floor of the South Wing contained the main entrance and lobby on the west side, and the circulation desk, workroom, offices, and open stacks area on the east side.

The second and third floors of the original building had similar layouts, with the northern half closed off from the north-south axis and subdivided into smaller rooms and offices, and the southern half divided along the central axis (open stacks on the second floor, open stacks and the local history room on the third floor). The second and third floors of the South Wing were alike with predominantly open floor plans, with a wide east-west axis flanked by book stacks, an open stairwell on the west side of the north-south axis, and a few small meeting and storage rooms.

2. Stairways: The remodeled original building contained stairs from the lower floor to the first floor in the east entrance vestibule. The stairs had black granite veneer treads, decorative aluminum and wood veneer panel balusters, and an aluminum handrail. The original building also included an enclosed staircase from the second floor to the third floor at the center of the east side with vinyl treads and metal handrails.

The South Wing addition contained two enclosed stairwells that extended from the lower floor to the third floor. The stairwells contained switchback stairs with straight runs of metal stringers, treads, risers, handrails, newel posts, and balusters. The treads and risers were covered with vinyl material. The stairwell walls were covered with 8" tiles. Another enclosed single-run staircase connected the third floor to the penthouse on the roof. The lower floor contained sets of shallow terrazzo steps with aluminum handrails leading to the auditorium. The first floor had a series of four steps leading from the main entrance to the lobby with aluminum handrails. The South Wing addition also contained an open-well staircase between the second and third floors that was added in 1986. The staircase

had a semicircular switchback landing, and the stairs had open treads covered in vinyl, sidewalls, and aluminum tube handrails.

3. Flooring: In the main areas of the library, concrete floors were covered in 12" x 12" vinyl tile with a layer of carpet tiles over it. In the east vestibule, the floor was covered with black granite veneer. The west (main) entrance had continuous tile flooring from the exterior to the interior vestibule. The lower floor surrounding the auditorium was terrazzo. The third-floor local history room had 6" x 6" wood parquet floors. In the patron lounge, stairwells, and other maintenance areas, vinyl tile flooring covered the concrete subfloors. Restroom floors were tiled.
4. Wall and ceiling finishes: The majority of the interior walls were covered in painted drywall. Additional wall finishes included vinyl, plaster, black granite veneer, and wood paneling. Entrance vestibules, first-floor elevator surrounds, and other first-floor interior walls were clad in black granite veneer. The lower-floor auditorium, first-floor browsing area, and second- and third-floor meeting rooms in the South Wing addition had vertical wood veneer paneling. The third-floor local history room and director's office were covered in molded wood paneling. Enclosed stairwell walls and the lower-floor hallway were clad in 8" x 8" tile from floor to ceiling. Restroom walls were typically clad with 4" x 4" tiles. Ceilings were typically 14' high and covered with 12" x 12" acoustical ceiling tiles. Ceiling heights varied in certain areas, and ceiling finish materials varied at certain perimeters that were finished with drywall soffits or other acoustical ceiling tile systems.
5. Openings
  - a. Doorways and doors: Interior doorways generally had hollow metal frames. The majority of interior doors were flush wood veneer single panels, often with glazing and metal lever handles. Many interior doors were fire-rated. Other common interior doors included mill finish aluminum and glass doors in storefront configurations with transoms and side lights. On the third floor, the local history room and director's office had single and paired eight-panel molded wood doors with large, elaborate burnished brass handles. The wood appeared to have an oak grain with a walnut finish.
  - b. Windows: The interior window openings had deep drywall surrounds and granite sills. Most windows on the second and third floors had an aluminum strip applied across the lower half of the interior window frames, presumably to meet a safety standard. Transparent shade film was attached to the top of the window frames in the second-floor employee lounge.
6. Decorative features and trim: Several interior spaces, including the east entrance vestibule, auditorium, meeting rooms, children's theater, local history room, director's office, and conference room exhibited decorative features and trim.

The east entrance vestibule was distinctive for its comprehensive black granite veneer interior finishes; stairs with decorative aluminum and wood veneer handrail and balustrade; and suspended, stylized pendant lighting. In addition, a carved limestone panel from the original building was salvaged and mounted on the wall above the staircase switchback landing. The panel read "1902," which was set within a laurel wreath with acanthus leaves and ribbon swaths tied below it.

The auditorium on the lower floor had curvilinear corners flanking the stage and vertical wood veneer paneling around its interior walls. The lobby of the auditorium had terrazzo floor finishes and wall-mounted cylindrical brass sconces.

Vertical wood veneer paneling was applied to other interior walls in the South Wing, including the first-floor browsing area and the second- and third-floor meeting room areas (each located along the north wall of the addition).

The children's theater and adjacent projection room on the first floor had black and white checkerboard vinyl floor tiles and were painted with bright colors. The children's theater had a long bench installed along the west wall.

The local history room on the third floor was distinctive due to its decorative molded wood paneling and built-in cabinets. The room was approximately 1,500 square feet with 6" x 6" oak parquet flooring. It had solid, eight-panel wood double doors with wood trim and brass hardware. Windows had wood trim and granite sills. The wood paneling and trim appeared to be solid oak. A continuous row of panels ringed the top of the walls above built-in shelves and cabinets, including a series of three alcoves with perpendicular walls containing shelves and cabinets along the west wall of the room (opposite the windows). Each alcove had three sides of wood cabinets – five cabinets on the back wall and three cabinets on the side walls – with each section consisting of an upper cabinet with brass wire-mesh panel doors and a lower cabinet with solid wood panel doors. Each upper cabinet contained five evenly spaced internal shelves. All cabinet doors had scrolled brass handles and brass hinges. Similar cabinets were located along the south wall of the room. Panels at the wall ends of the alcoves, panels between the windows, and other panels on the north and south walls had applied molded trim. The room had a coffered drywall ceiling divided into four sections with recessed can lighting.

The director's office on the third floor was decorated in similar fashion. It had floor-to-ceiling wood paneling with wide crown molding at the ceiling. The room had several doors, including the single entrance door near the center of the west wall with a series of closet doors on either side, a restroom door in the south wall, and a pair of large sliding pocket doors in the north wall. The main doors were solid eight-panel doors, and bi-fold closet doors had four panels on each door.

The conference room on the third floor contained a decorative, modern lighting fixture at the center of its ceiling. The ceiling was surrounded by a dropped plaster or drywall soffit. The lighting fixture was 8' x 8' square consisting of a bronze-colored grid with a

random arrangement of 3", 6", and 12" squares with circles and some concentric circles set inside the squares. Circular recessed lights were installed randomly within a few of the 6" squares. Solid, translucent plastic cylinders of varying lengths hung down from several of the 3" squares toward the center of the fixture.

7. Hardware: Hardware throughout the building was modern and non-distinctive, with the exception of burnished brass hardware in the third-floor local history room and director's office. Door handles consisted of long bars with decorative attachments, and cabinet door handles were scrolled. Cabinet hinges were exposed on the exterior of the cabinet doors.
8. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: The building had central air and steam boiler baseboard heating. Ventilation was supplemented with suspended ceiling fans.
  - b. Lighting: The building had a variety of lighting systems, including 1' x 4' linear recessed fluorescent fixtures (most common throughout), 8' x 8' suspended fluorescent fixtures, recessed can lights, track lights, pendant lights, wall-mounted sconces, and decorative light fixtures.
  - c. Plumbing: The plumbing system was modern, with water provided by the city system. Restrooms were located on each floor, and other sinks were located in staff and technical rooms. Water fountains were also connected to plumbing lines.
  - d. Elevators: Two elevator banks were located along the north-south axis of the building, including one individual elevator near the center of the original building and two paired elevators on the north side of the South Wing addition. The elevator shafts were clad in black granite veneer. The elevators had painted steel sliding doors and digitized floor indicator signs above. An additional freestanding elevator lift was located in the east entrance vestibule and serviced the lower floor and the first floor.
  - e. Book return drop conveyor: A mechanized book return drop (1969) was located on N. Wyman Street. From the book return drop, books would fall onto a conveyor belt that operated below the sidewalk. The conveyor belt transported the returned books back into the library. The conveyor belt and related machinery remained within a tunnel that connected the book drop to the mechanical and boiler room on the lower floor.
9. Original furnishings: The existing reference desk, circulation desk, other staff desks, cabinets, and equipment were associated with the reconfiguration and redecoration of the library in 1987. Cabinetry in the local history room dated to the 1966-69 remodel of the main building.

D. Site

1. Historic landscape design:

- a. Carnegie Library: Robert H. Tinker designed the landscape to create a parklike atmosphere on the riverfront. The east and south sides of the property around the building were terraced and then filled to create smooth slopes. Sidewalks were installed along N. Wyman Street and leading to the library entrances. Trees, shrubs, and winding recreational paths beautified the landscape.
- b. Modernization Project: A concrete plaza with a symmetrical grid design; a granite-faced, round kiosk; landscape beds; and streetlamps surrounded the north entrance. Twelve aluminum, single-globe light posts and four aluminum, four-globe light posts were installed in the plaza. Two landscape islands were located on either side of the north entrance. The east entrance on River Drive had a smaller concrete sidewalk grid that had a burnished granite walkway. A strip containing shrubbery extended along the south wall of the South Wing along Mulberry Street. This project also introduced a parking lot with sixty spaces that was modified by the esplanade project in the 1980s.
- c. Reconfiguration Project/Esplanade Project: The City of Rockford Park District's esplanade project created a riverfront park with recreational pathways and new trees, benches, and other park features. The project removed thirty-six of sixty parking spaces in the library's parking lot off River Drive.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

#### A. Architectural drawings

Bradley & Carpenter, Rockford, Illinois

Rendering of Rockford Public Library, 1901

Chas. E. Boettcher, A.I.A., Architect, Rockford, Illinois

Alterations for Elevator Addition to Rockford Public Library, June 8, 1959

Addition to & Remodeling of Rockford Public Library, June 4, 1962

Boettcher and Simmon, Architects, Rockford, Illinois

Addition to & Remodeling of Rockford Public Library, Furniture Layout, March 29, 1965

Phase 3 – Remodeling Original Building, October 10, 1966

Plot Plan Revised, 1967



Children's Shelving Layout, August 13, 1968

Revised Charging Desk, May 24, 1972

New Ramps for the Handicapped, May 19, 1975

Hans Simmon and Associates, Rockford, Illinois

Reading Deck Roof Rehabilitation, July 23, 1980

Richard L. Johnson Associates, Inc., Rockford, Illinois

Interior Reorganization Plan, December 27, 1984; revised January 25, 1985; June 10, 1985; April 21, 1986

B. Early views

Historical images include architectural renderings, postcard images, and photographs of the Carnegie library building (1902-47); architectural rendering of the modernization project (ca. 1962); and photographs of the remodel of the Carnegie library building as part of the modernization project (1967-69).

C. Interviews

During research conducted at the Rockford Public Library's Local History and Genealogy Department in March 2018, Ms. Jean Lythgoe, who has worked at the main library since 1965, supplied first-hand accounts of the development of the library and assisted in finding archival documentation related to the establishment and development of the library. Her notes are incorporated into this report.

D. Selected sources

1. Primary sources:

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- “Checking Out.” *Rockford Register Star*, June 28, 1999.
- “Choose Design for Library.” *Rockford Morning Star*, April 23, 1902.
- “City Officially Joins Region Library Plan.” *Rockford Morning Star* December 7, 1965.
- “Classic Plan is Accepted.” *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, April 23, 1902.
- “Compromise on Rood Lot.” *Rockford Daily Republic*, June 21, 1901.

- “Conference on Library Site.” *Rockford Morning Star*, January 10, 1902.
- “Contract for Library Signed.” *Rockford Morning Star*, June 17, 1902.
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The historical development of the Rockford Public Library is well-documented in newspaper articles, library annual reports, and other archival documents available in the library's Local History and Genealogy Department. The most pertinent missing documentation that would supplement the information herein is the Bradley & Carpenter's original or as-built drawings of the original library building. A potential source of additional information is the Carnegie Corporation of New York historic records at Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New York City.

Other City of Rockford department archives, including the city council and the Park District, may yield further information related to the property.

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Maria Katharina Meiser, Photographer, March 21, 2018

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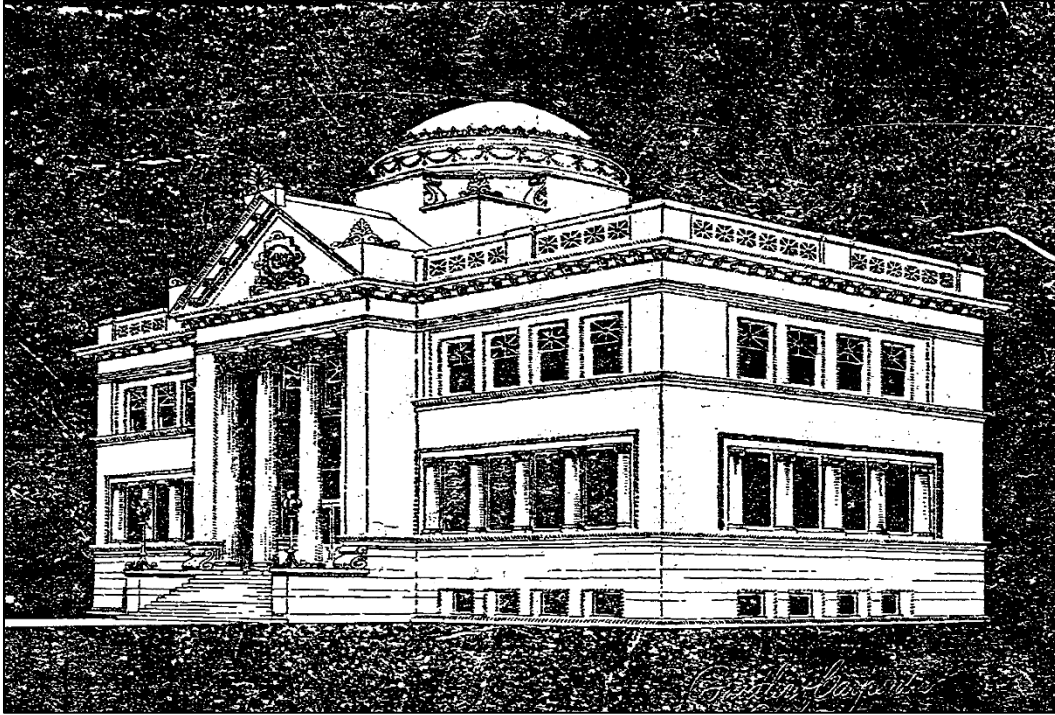


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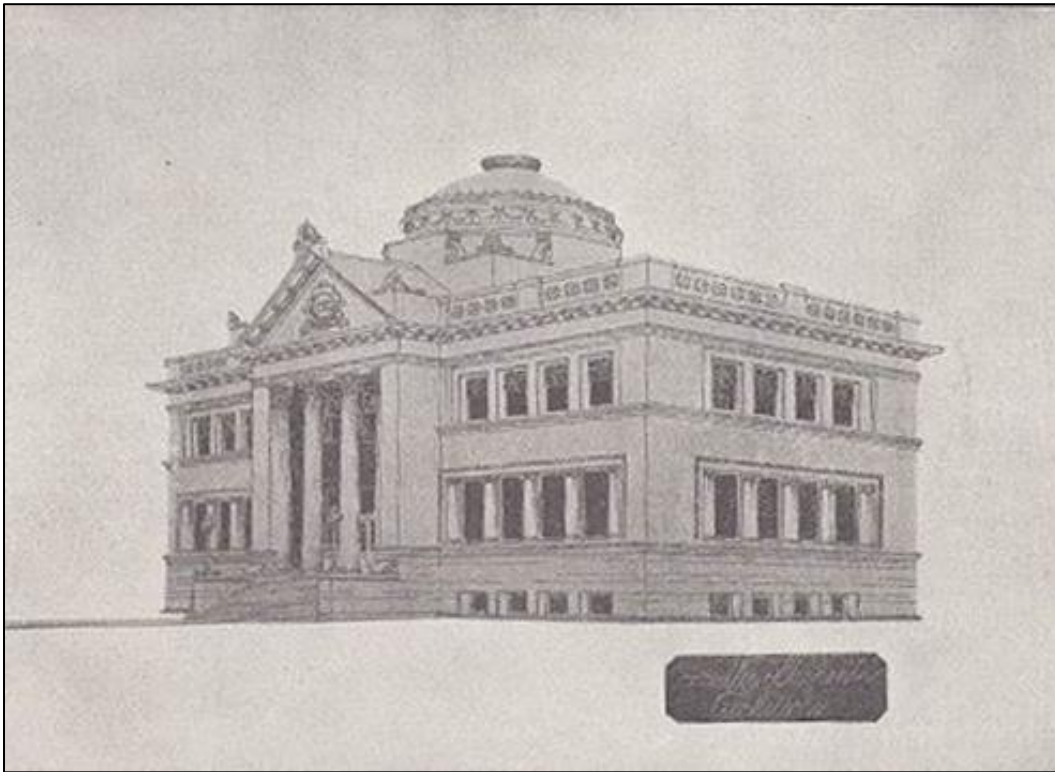


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HISTORIC IMAGES



Newspaper print of Bradley & Carpenter's architectural rendering, 1902. Caption: "Through the Generosity of Andrew Carnegie Rockford Will Soon Have a New Library Building – Plans and Specifications for the Same Have Been Accepted and Construction Will Begin Soon." Source: *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, June 4, 1902.



Print of Bradley & Carpenter's architectural rendering, 1902. Source: Rockford Public Library, Local History & Genealogy Department.

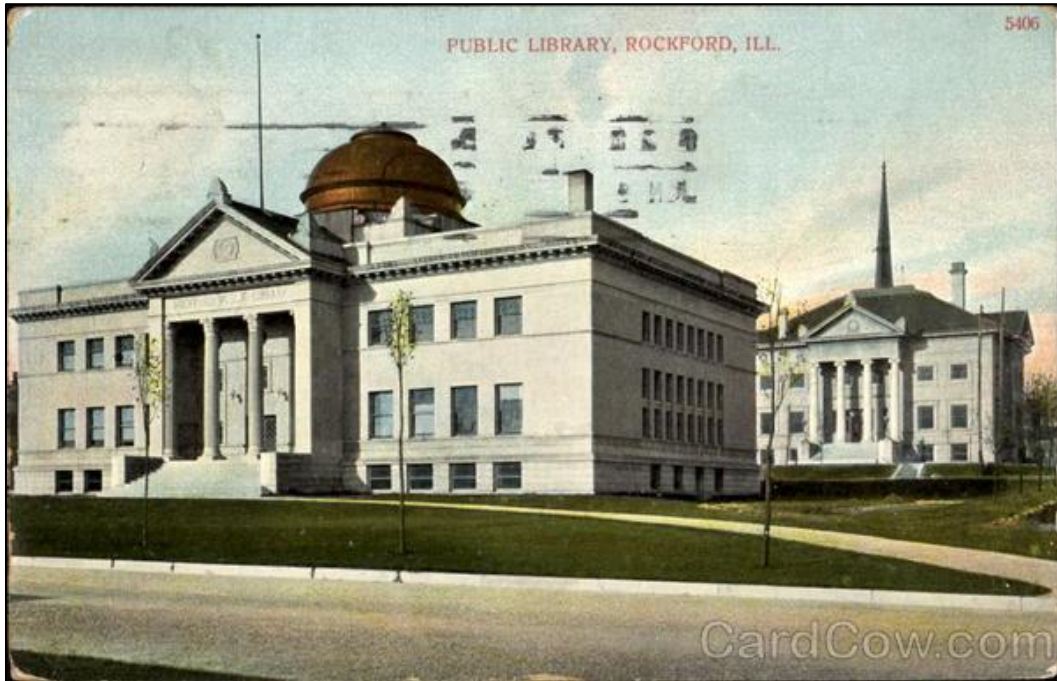




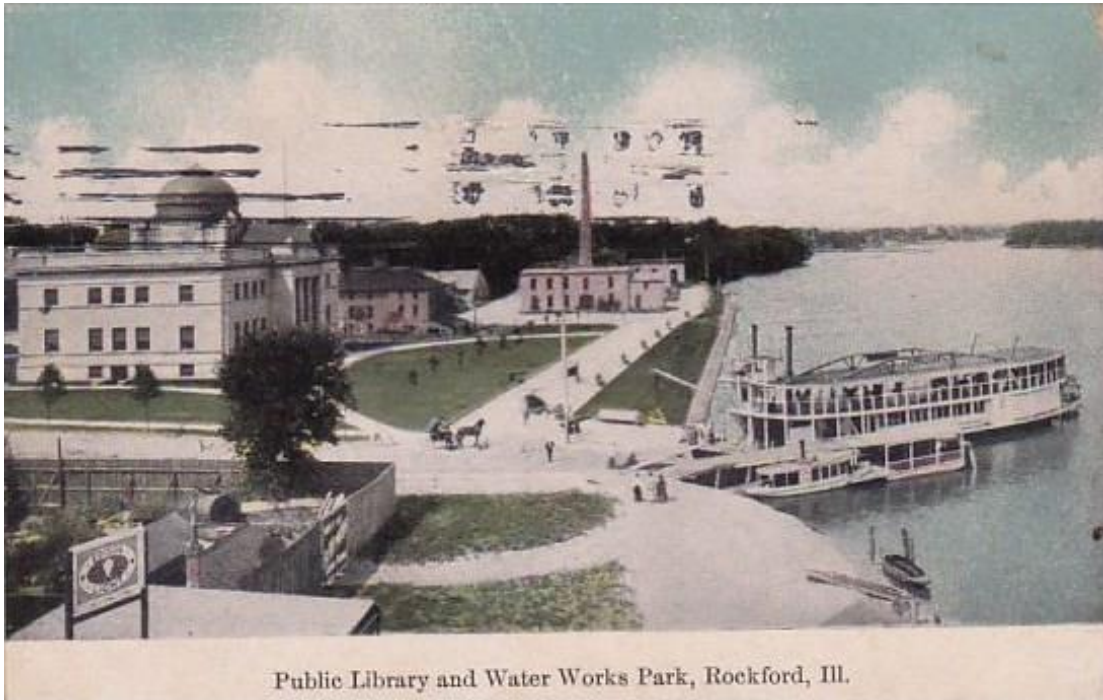
Photograph, ca. 1903, showing N. Wyman Street entrance. Source: Rockford Public Library, Local History & Genealogy Department.



Pamphlet print, 1904. Source: "Thirty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the Rockford Public Library," 1904, Rockford Public Library, Local History & Genealogy Department.

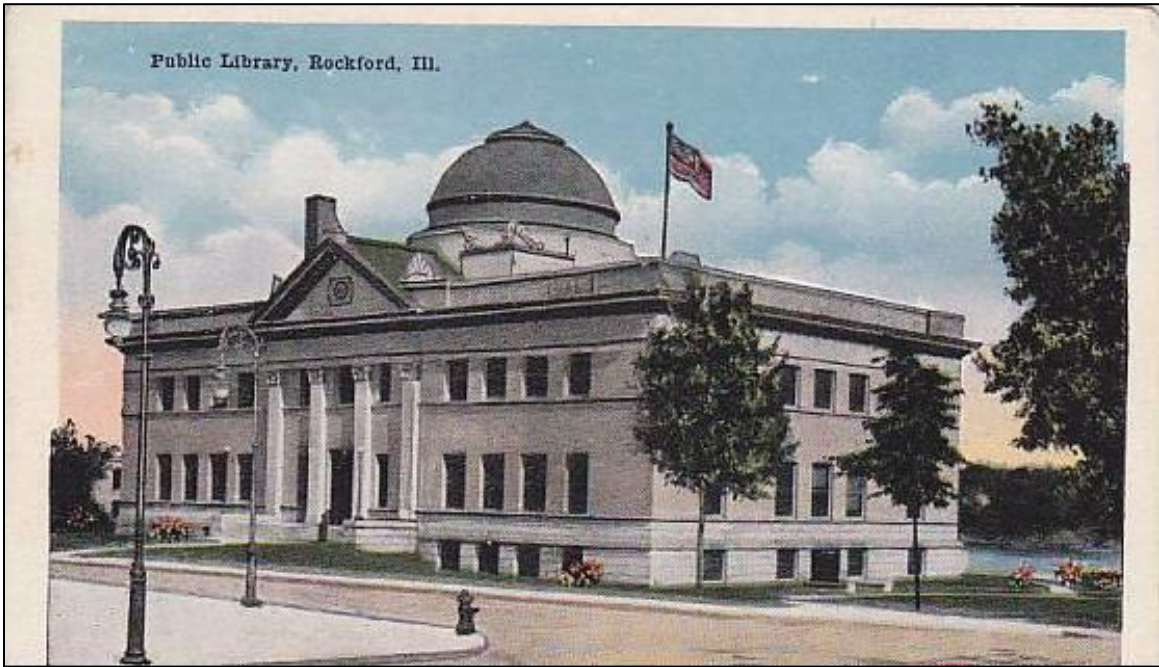


Postcard, ca. 1903, showing Memorial Hall in the background. Caption: "Public Library, Rockford, Ill." Source: CardCow.com (accessed March 2019 at <https://www.cardcow.com/127435/public-library-rockford-illinois/>)

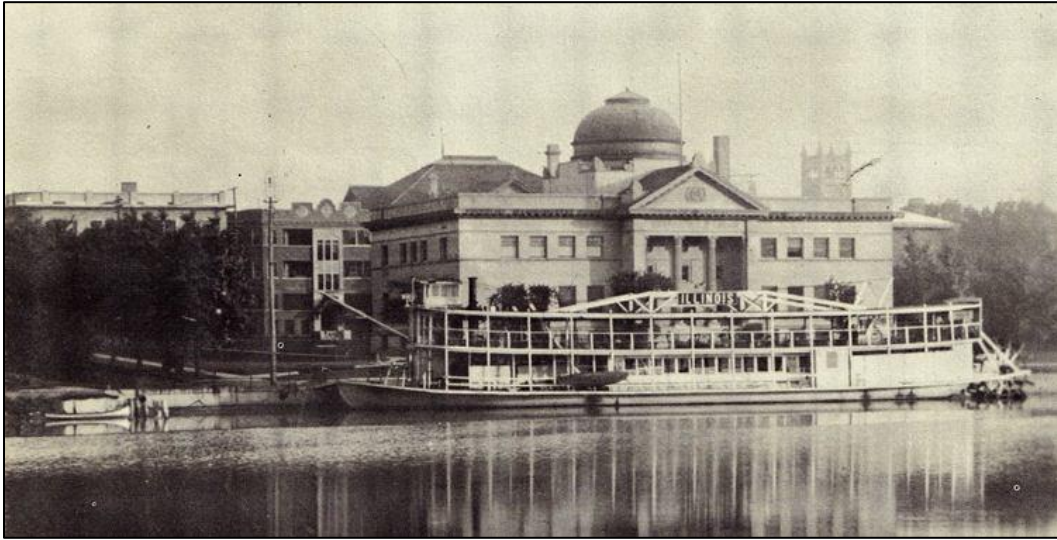


Public Library and Water Works Park, Rockford, Ill.

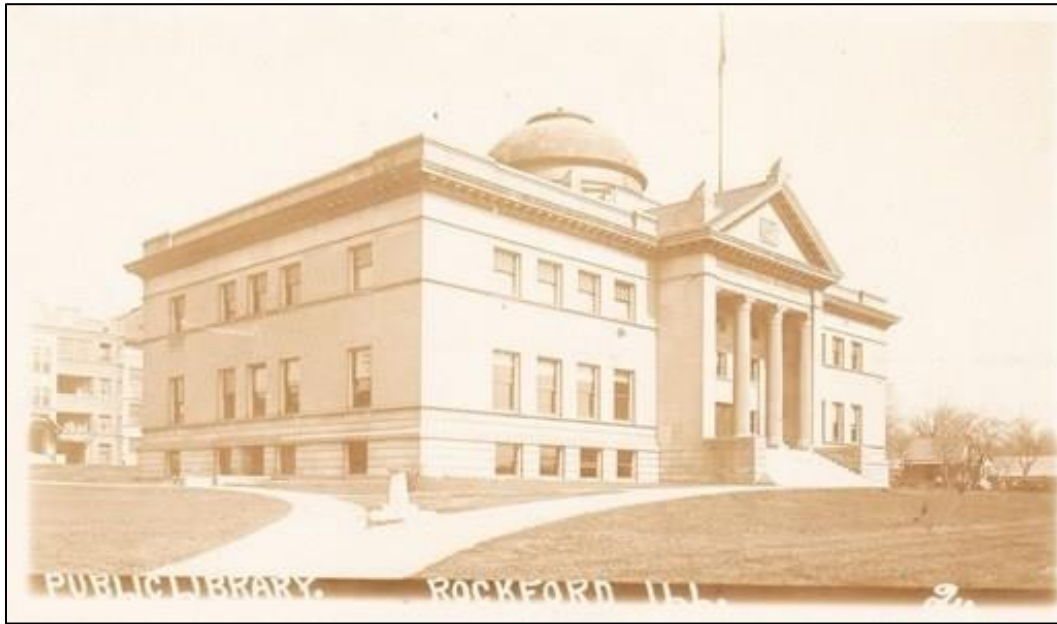
Postcard, ca. 1903, showing Water Works Park and the Mulberry Street boat landing. Caption: "Public Library and Water Works Park, Rockford, Ill." Source: Rockford Public Library, Local History & Genealogy Department. <https://www.hippostcard.com/listing/illinois-rockford-public-library-and-water-works-park/288594>



Postcard, ca. 1910. Caption: "Public Library, Rockford, Ill." Source: Rockford Public Library, Local History & Genealogy Department.



Photograph, ca. 1908, showing steamboat *Illinois* docked at the Mulberry Street boat landing.  
Source: Rockford Public Library, Local History & Genealogy Department.



Postcard, ca. 1912 (postmark dated 1912). Caption: "Public Library, Rockford, Ill." Source: Rockford Public Library, Local History & Genealogy Department.



Pamphlet print, ca. 1924. Source: Rockford Public Library. "Fifty-Second Annual Report of the Rockford Public Library." 1924. On file at the Rockford Public Library, Local History & Genealogy Department.

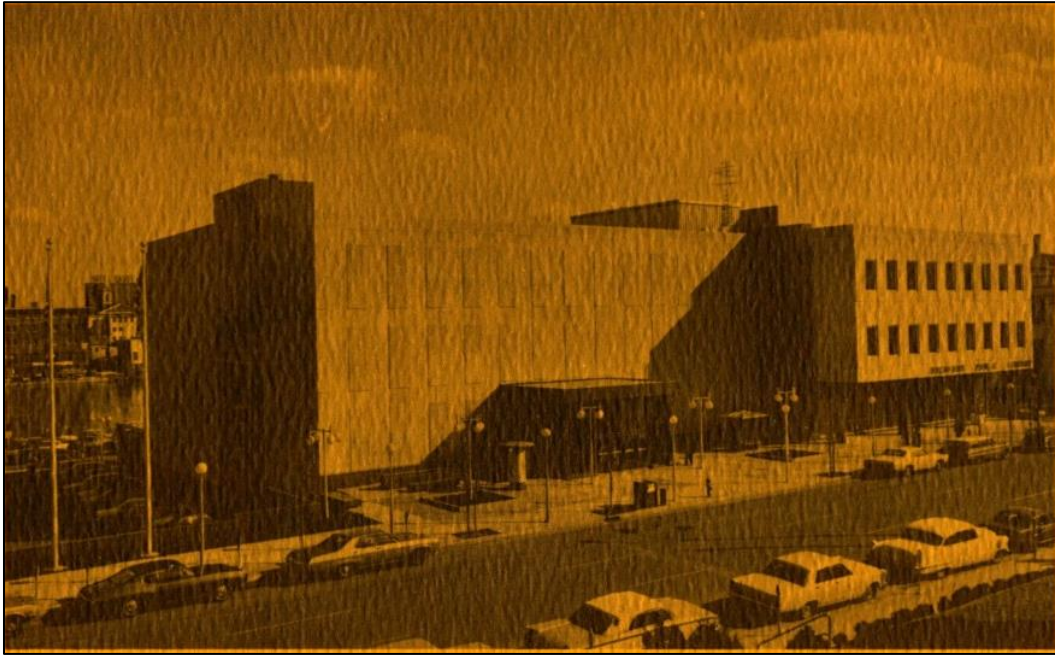




Pamphlet print, 1947. Caption: "Main Library." Source: Rockford Public Library. "75 Years of Service, Rockford Public Library, 1872-1947." 1947. On file at the Rockford Public Library, Local History & Genealogy Department.



Pamphlet print of Charles E. Boettcher's architectural rendering for the modernization project, ca. 1962. Caption: "Out of the Past, Into the Future." Source: "The South Wing; An Introduction to the Organization of the Rockford Public Library, Rockford, Illinois," 1965. On file at the Rockford Public Library, Local History & Genealogy Department.



Pamphlet print, ca. 1969, showing the Rockford Public Library after completion of the modernization project. Source: "An Introduction to the Rockford Public Library." 1969. On file at the Rockford Public Library, Local History & Genealogy Department.



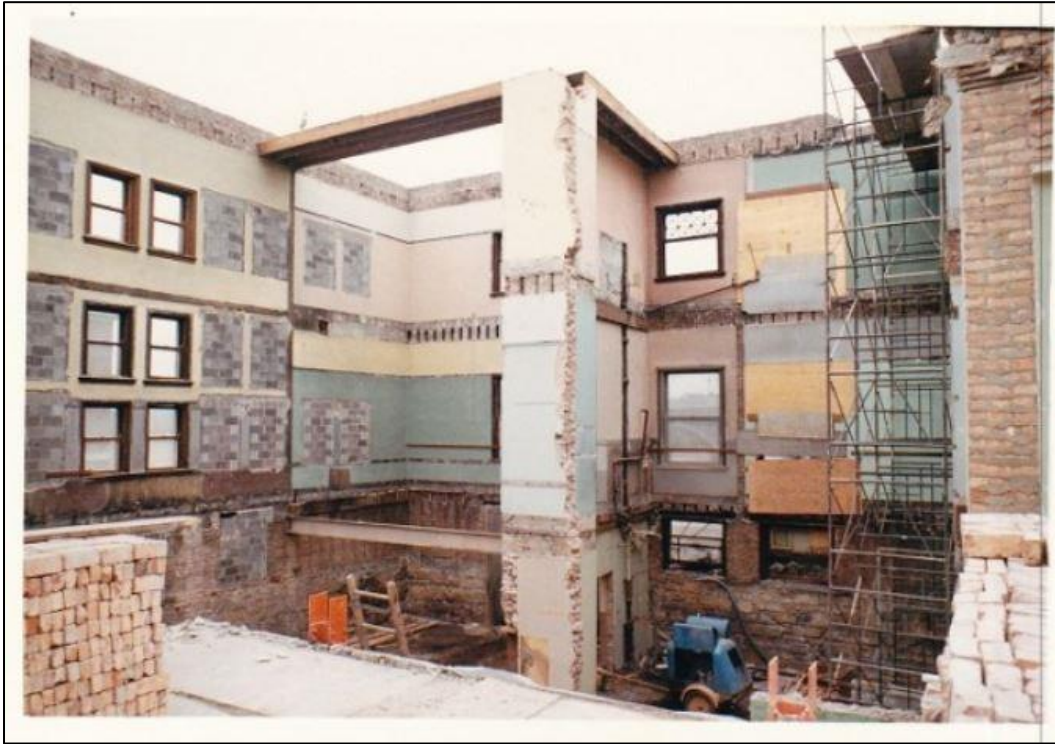
Photograph, 1967, showing remodel of the Carnegie library building. Source: Rockford Public Library, Local History & Genealogy Department.



Photograph, 1967, showing remodel of the Carnegie library building. Source: Rockford Public Library, Local History & Genealogy Department.



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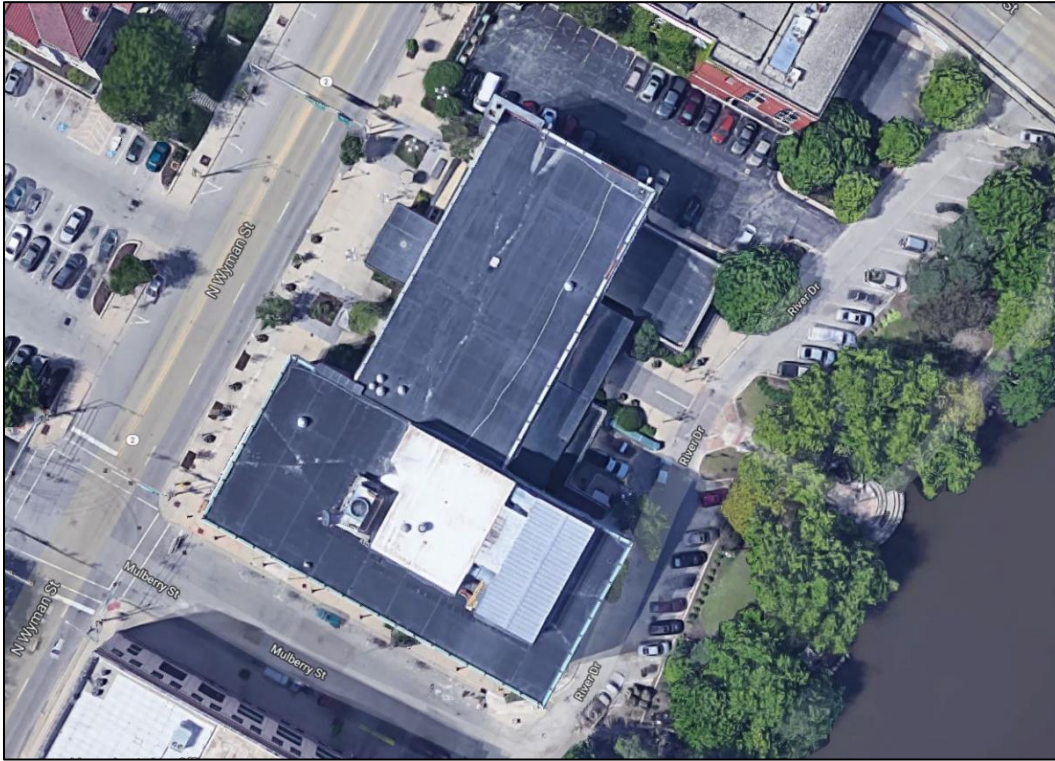


Photograph, 1967, showing interior remodel of the Carnegie library building. Source: Rockford Public Library, Local History & Genealogy Department.



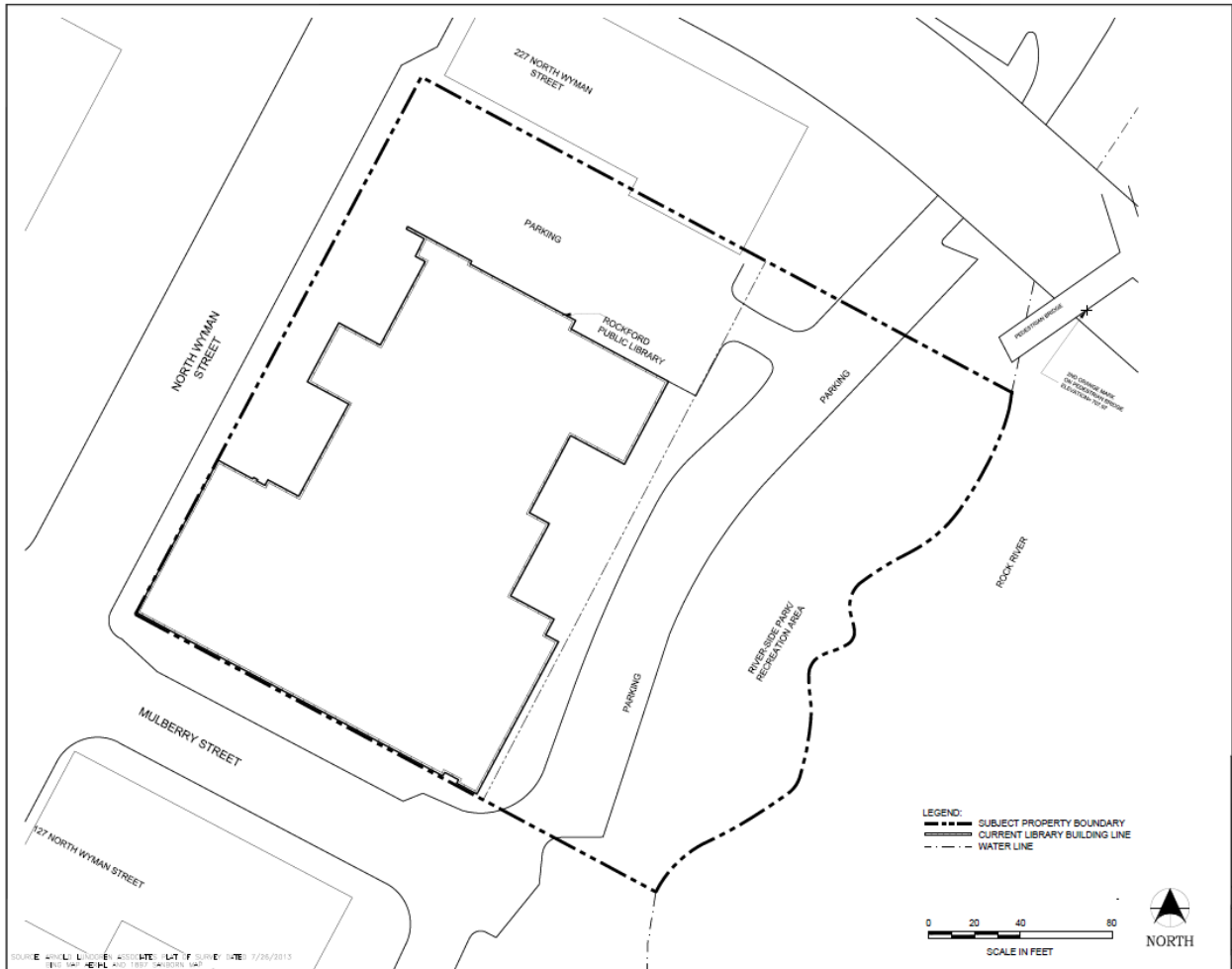
Photograph, 1967, showing interior remodel of the Carnegie library building, elevator shaft.  
Source: Rockford Public Library, Local History & Genealogy Department.



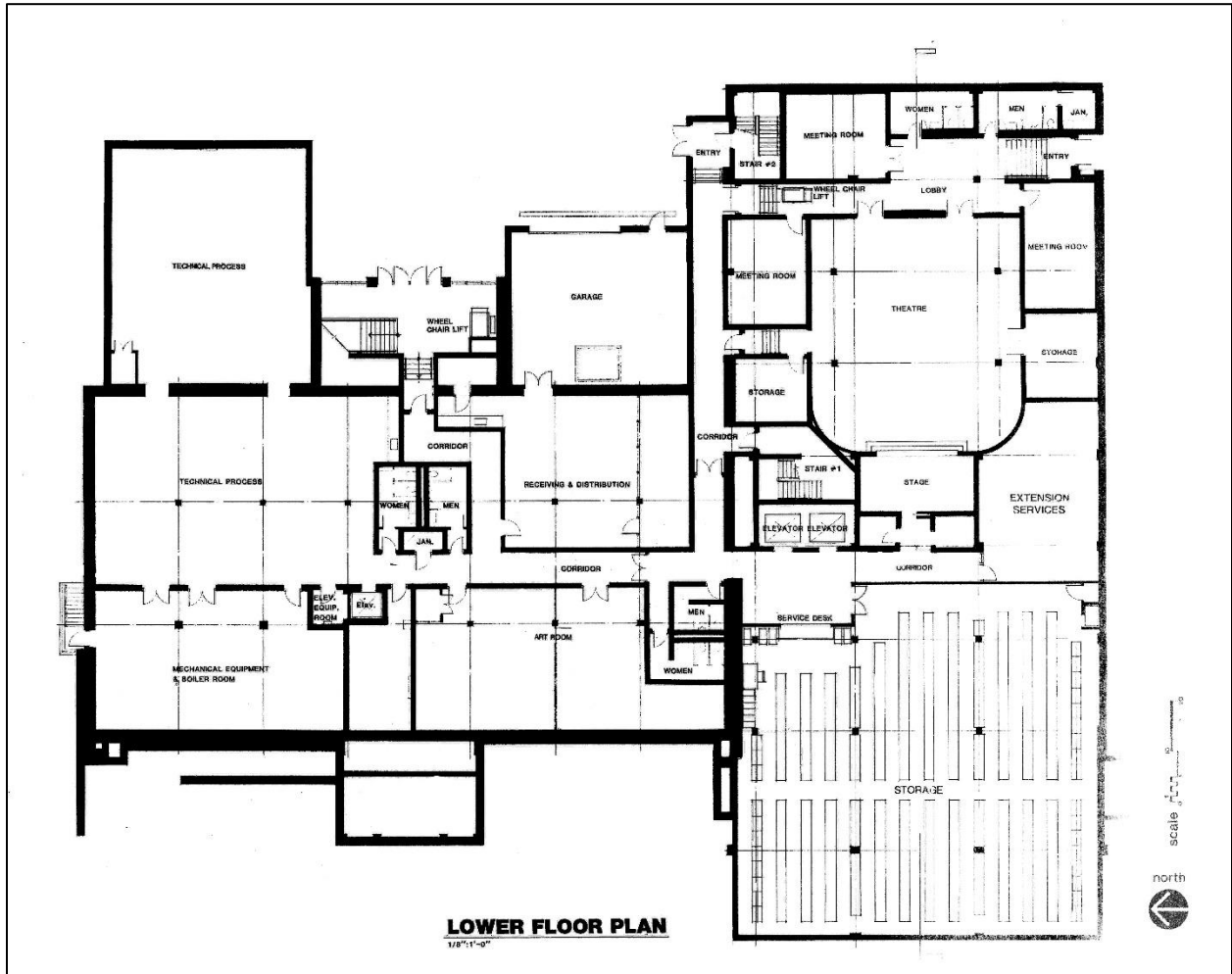


Aerial view of the Rockford Public Library. Source: Google, 2018.

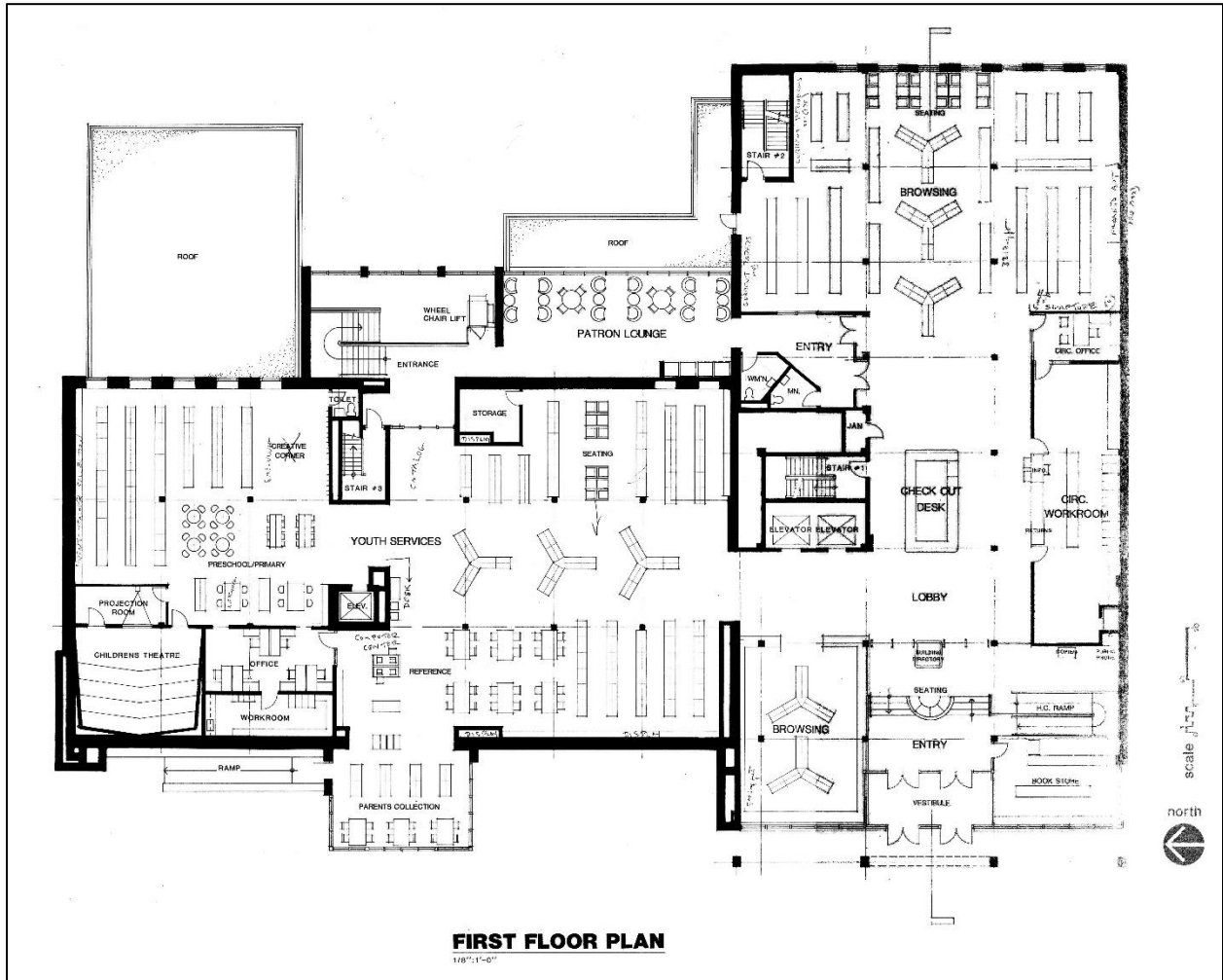
SKETCH PLANS



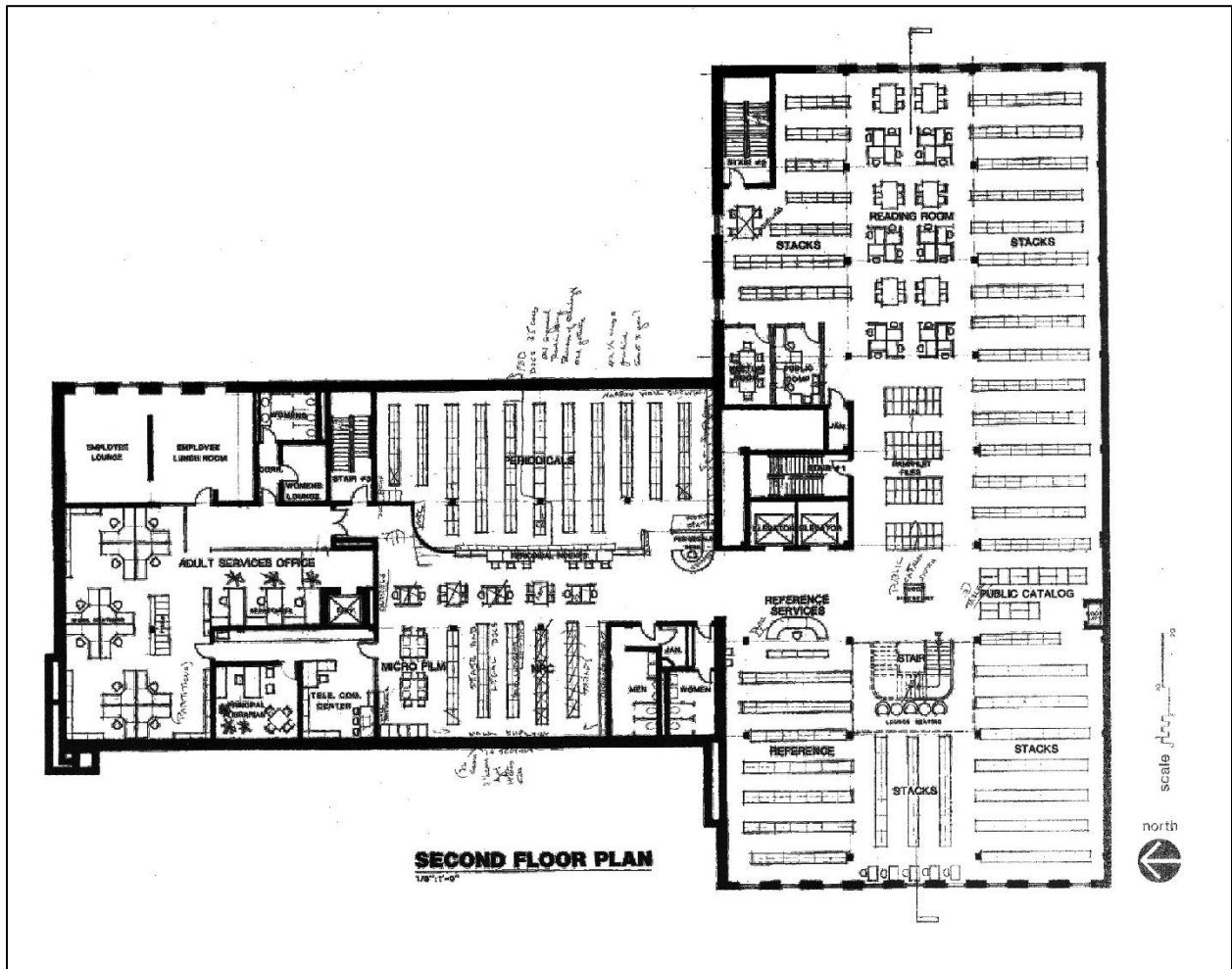
Rockford Public Library, 215 N. Wyman St., Rockford, Illinois.  
Source: AECOM, 2018.



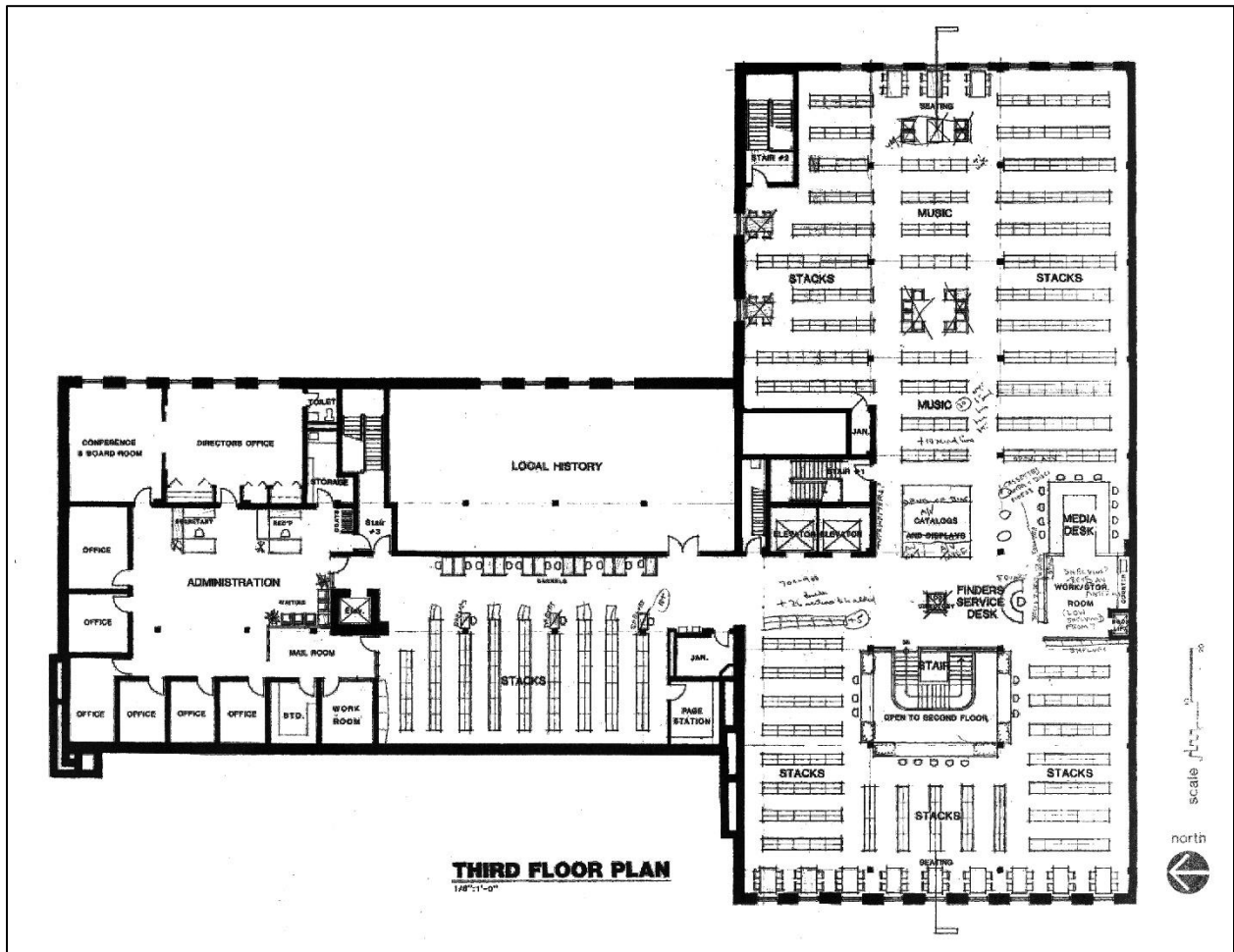
Rockford Public Library, Lower Floor. Source: Richard L. Johnson Architects, 1986.



Rockford Public Library, First Floor. Source: Richard L. Johnson Architects, 1986.



Rockford Public Library, Second Floor. Source: Richard L. Johnson Architects, 1986.



Rockford Public Library, Third Floor. Source: Richard L. Johnson Architects, 1986.