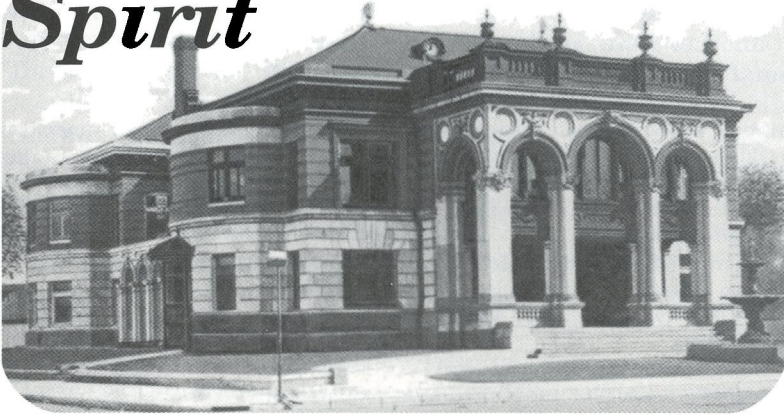


# *Celebrating the Library Spirit*



## *A Look Back at the Carnegie Libraries in Oklahoma*

*By Tanya D. Finchum and G. Allen Finchum\**

During the last century, thousands of Oklahomans walked through the heavy wooden doors of their local Carnegie library buildings to learn, to read, and to be entertained. The first library in Oklahoma was built with money donated by Andrew Carnegie, and it is only fitting that at the close of the twentieth century, Oklahomans take a look back and celebrate the 100th year of the presence of Carnegie libraries in Oklahoma.<sup>1</sup> The first Carnegie library cornerstone was laid in Oklahoma City on August 29, 1900,

even before Oklahoma became a state. Guthrie followed close behind by laying the cornerstone of its own Carnegie building in 1902.<sup>2</sup>

### **Andrew Carnegie and Library Grants**

At the time of his retirement in 1901 Andrew Carnegie had an estimated net worth of \$24.7 million. He owned the Carnegie Steel Company, the largest steel manufacturing company in the world at that time.<sup>3</sup> Carnegie decided to share his wealth during a time when there was a long agenda on civic improvement, and his gifts to public libraries began in 1886. He gave money to libraries so all people, especially immigrants, would have the opportunity of self-education and advancement. According to historian Theodore Jones, "Carnegie paid for the construction of 1,689 public library buildings throughout the country in large cities and tiny crossroads alike."<sup>4</sup> Andrew Carnegie supplied the buildings for the libraries and expected the people to provide the books and the library spirit. Contrary to belief, he did not require towns to attach his name to the buildings; some did so to honor his generosity.

To determine the amount of the proposed library/building grant, Carnegie required each community to complete and return a questionnaire. He asked for population and income data for the community and tended to award the grant at a rate of two to three dollars per person. In addition, Carnegie also wanted to know if the town already had a library, if a building site was available, and how much the community was legally able to tax itself for the annual support of the library. He required that the town provide the site and promise to support library services and maintenance with tax funds equal to 10 percent of the grant amount annually. By doing so, he ensured that the town would have a vested interest in the library.<sup>5</sup>

By 1916 Carnegie had given gifts in Canada and the United States to a total of \$1,241,888 for library buildings.<sup>6</sup> Oklahoma received twenty-four Carnegie building grants and ranked twenty-third out of forty-six in the total amount Carnegie contributed for public libraries. When considering state and regional rank by appropriation per 100 population, Oklahoma was thirty-first with \$19.40 per 100 persons. In ranking the number of communities receiving grants, Oklahoma was twenty-first.<sup>7</sup> At one point, a few Oklahoma libraries failed to live up to annual support obligations and further grants were denied. In an analysis of United States public libraries for the period 1896–1923 completed by George Bob-

inski in the 1960s, Oklahoma had no communities possessing public libraries of 1,000 volumes or more in 1896; twenty-four communities had obtained one or more Carnegie buildings by 1923; twelve communities already had a public library before receiving a Carnegie grant; twelve communities did not have a public library at the time of receiving a Carnegie grant; and forty-four communities with a population of 1,000 or more in 1923 possessed public libraries unaided by Carnegie funds.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Geography of Oklahoma Carnegie Libraries**

In Oklahoma, neighboring Oklahoma City and Guthrie received the first two Carnegie grants. Other paired constructions were in Ponca City and Bartlesville in 1908, Cordell and Hobart in 1911, and Frederick and Lawton in 1914 and 1916. "With only two exceptions, all Oklahoma grants occurred in ever expanding circles of time and geography from the first two grants."<sup>9</sup> According to the Oklahoma Library Commission's report of 1928, "[Seventy-five percent] of Oklahoma's rural population was . . . without access to public libraries. Thirty-five out of the state's seventy-seven counties had no public library service."<sup>10</sup> Farm-to-market roads were barely passable in the early days. Often farmers had difficulty even hauling grain and cotton to elevators. Rural citizens found it almost impossible to make it to the library, and often the traveling library could not make it to them.

### **Libraries in Oklahoma: An Urban Phenomenon?**

The American public library in the late nineteenth century was an example of a democratic institution that had as its major purpose the assimilation and integration of the diverse cultural groups that were the result of migration. The era also was marked by increasing industrialization accompanied by efforts for social reform.

The promoters of public libraries viewed the public library as an educational as well as a cultural agency. Carnegie believed that as well, because he had educated himself largely through books. The spread of free public education, the urge for self-improvement, and the natural right to knowledge were all factors in the public library movement. Other factors included the increase in specialization in occupations, industrialization, urbanization, and increasing prosperity.<sup>11</sup> One of the requirements of receiving a grant was that the town had to provide tax support for the maintenance of the library. Urban areas were more likely to have the structure and income potential in place to accomplish that.

In 1876 when the American Library Association (ALA) was organized there were 188 public libraries in the United States; by 1894 there were 400.<sup>12</sup> Of those only 46 were west of the Mississippi River with 18 of them in California. Reasons offered for not having more public libraries included lack of a stable source of funding, inability to arrange permanent housing, and local governments without the tax funds for support. A public library functioned both as a community center and a place to store a community's history and culture. A public library in its own building was visual proof of a town's commitment to education and to the community's history and future. A public library gave a town the appearance of stability usually seen only in big cities.<sup>13</sup>

Oklahoma had many diverse groups due in part to the land runs and to the relocation of the American Indians. The gas and oil discovery booms along with railway service also brought people from different cultures into Oklahoma and those people then helped to bring cultural institutions, including libraries, to the territory and state. However, during Oklahoma's early statehood period only a small percentage of the population lived in the few relatively small urban places. To be considered a city there had to be more than 2,500 people living within its limits. In the early 1900s many Oklahoma and Indian Territory communities were characterized as rural and functioned for the most part as autonomous rural support communities. The 1910 United States census, the first taken after statehood, listed sixteen cities in Oklahoma;<sup>14</sup> of those, eight had or would have Carnegie libraries (Elk City, Frederick, Guthrie, Lawton, McAlester, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Woodward).<sup>15</sup>

After the first Carnegie libraries were built in Oklahoma City and Guthrie, Carnegie libraries spread throughout the state in distances farther and farther from the initial sites (Figure 1, p. 459). However, the sites were almost exclusively in urbanized places, often leaving the rural populace to navigate Oklahoma's early roads to reach the library. That made a visit to those facilities an even greater luxury than for citizens in the towns and cities. While some of the towns and cities fortunate to obtain a Carnegie grant were small, farm-oriented communities, that did not alter the fact that traveling to town in the early years of statehood for many farm residents was an infrequent activity, normally centered around work and farming needs, not visits to the library or other public service activities commonly used by urban residents.

The rural past is difficult to understand fully due in part to the decentralization and regional distinctions of rural experiences com-

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

pared to urban experiences. Another reason is that the sources of rural history are scattered and largely unwritten. There is very little information on the early days of the Carnegie libraries, because there was no organizing body for compiling such information until the formation of the Oklahoma Library Association in 1919. At various times, the commission suggested that library trustees compile a history of their library but there was no formal requirement to do so.<sup>16</sup>

Territorial and early statehood days for Oklahoma, or roughly 1890 to 1920, occurred during the City Beautiful period in urban planning. The central tenet of the movement was the notion that the city itself could engender civic loyalty, thus encouraging a harmonious moral order. Carnegie paralleled that train of thought by requiring communities to provide annual maintenance funds as well as a building site. The City Beautiful theme emphasized order and aesthetic potential of land-planning design to include public buildings, boulevards, and parks. The land-planning design of the early communities of Oklahoma was consistently gridiron in nature with some provisions made for a government square. Many public libraries have addresses, such as Main Street, Broadway, and First Street, that denote their perceived importance at the time. In Oklahoma, for example, the Cordell Carnegie building is one block north of the town square, while the Perry Carnegie Library is actually part of the town square. The orderly nature of the gridiron plat and the provision of sites for public buildings such as the Carnegie libraries is evidence of the impact of the City Beautiful movement in Oklahoma.<sup>17</sup>

Nationwide, libraries offered a place of education and recreation for everyone, even those without a penny in their pockets. That also was true in Oklahoma. During World War I, for example, Oklahoma libraries or the rooms in city hall that were used for libraries often housed Red Cross stations and then converted back to libraries after the war. During the Great Depression, enforced leisure brought many patrons to the libraries in search of moral support, knowledge to do their work better, information for a new career, or current and accurate information about economic conditions. In the same period, many Oklahoma libraries reported heavy use of dictionaries by persons hoping to win crossword puzzle contests. On Christmas Eve in 1933, when the Enid library stayed open late, it circulated 500 books on that day. Parents with little money for gifts offered a trip to the library to their children. In general, throughout the state,

## CARNEGIE LIBRARIES

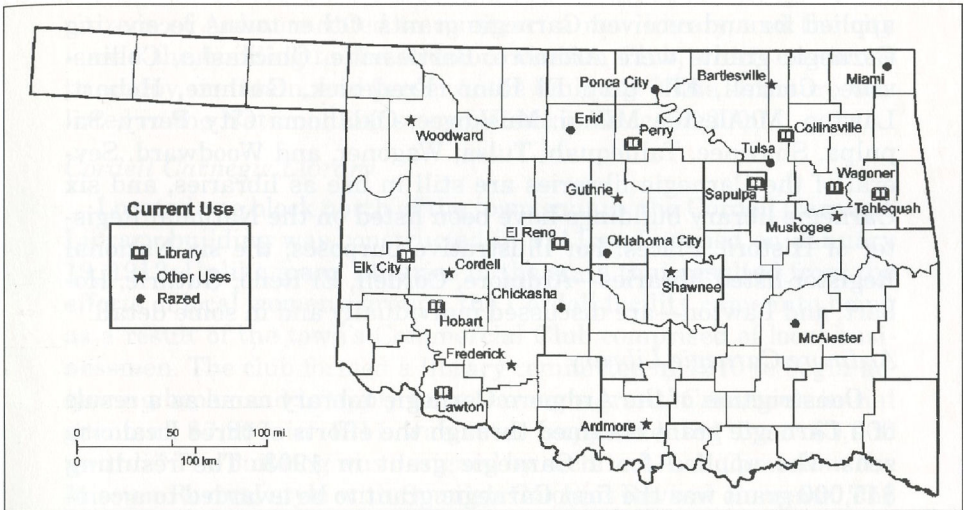


Fig. 1 Carnegie Libraries of Oklahoma (Courtesy the authors).

residents, schools groups, and civic organizations used their libraries in a variety of ways as a community center.<sup>18</sup>

### Carnegie's Presence in Oklahoma

Oklahoma communities were the recipients of twenty-four Carnegie library building grants. Five other communities applied for grants but failed to receive them for various reasons. Ada applied in 1911 and Okmulgee in 1916, but both wanted more funds than Carnegie offered. Fairview City attempted to get a Carnegie grant but was unable to comply with the 10 percent support and maintenance requirement. Altus applied for a grant in 1917 but was unsuccessful. Alva applied in 1916 but World War I and increased building costs prevented the building of a Carnegie library. Lastly, Claremore applied in 1917 but ran into architectural problems.<sup>19</sup>

Oklahoma had forty-four communities of 1,000+ population in 1923 with public libraries unaided by Carnegie funds.<sup>20</sup> Okmulgee was the first public library built in the state with city funds and one of the most costly. After Carnegie offered an unacceptable amount, the city issued bonds for \$75,000 and then added \$25,000 for furnishings. The building was opened in 1923.<sup>21</sup>

According to early Oklahoma law, only first-class cities (those having a population of more than 5,000) could appropriate funds for the support of a library. Ponca City and Enid ignored that detail and

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

applied for and received Carnegie grants. Other towns receiving Carnegie grants were Ardmore, Bartlesville, Chickasha, Collinsville, Cordell, Elk City, El Reno, Frederick, Guthrie, Hobart, Lawton, McAlester, Miami, Muskogee, Oklahoma City, Perry, Sapulpa, Shawnee, Tahlequah, Tulsa, Wagoner, and Woodward. Several of the Carnegie libraries are still in use as libraries, and six Carnegie library buildings have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. For illustrative purposes, the six National Register-listed libraries—Ardmore, Cordell, El Reno, Guthrie, Hobart, and Lawton—are discussed individually and in some detail.

### *Ardmore Carnegie Library*

Construction of the Ardmore Carnegie Library came as a result of a Carnegie grant obtained through the efforts of three local citizens who applied for a Carnegie grant in 1903. The resulting \$15,000 grant was the first Carnegie grant to be awarded to a community in Indian Territory. The city hired architect S. Wemyss Smith of Fort Worth, Texas, to design the building and awarded the construction contract to A. O. Campbell of Oklahoma City. Construction began in the fall of 1904 and was completed in the fall of 1905. In the interim before the formal opening on October 1, 1906, a local women's group, the Orio Club, acquired 300 books for the library's existing 300-volume collection. Individuals, school children, and civic groups such as the Sons of the Confederacy and the Ladies of the Leaf assisted in building the collections.<sup>22</sup> The city provided no regular operating funds for the library before 1919.

Smith designed a rectangular two-story edifice in Classical Revival style. The 1905 building was constructed of brown cast stone with a raised segmental pediment over the main entry supported by Ionic columns. Structural problems in the mid-1920s caused the city to move the library to another location while repairs were made to the structure. To avoid continuing stress on the load-bearing walls, contractors removed the upper story including the massive classical pediment. A flat roof with Craftsman-style elements was added. The portico was scaled down and the columns made to support a full entablature with plain cornice.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout its history, the Ardmore Carnegie Library served a public educational role. In the 1910-1912 period, the city's public high school held classes in the second-floor auditorium.<sup>24</sup> Overcrowding became a problem by the mid-1930s and the city received New Deal funds in 1941 to construct an addition which replicated the existing materials and form of the original building. In 1963 the

citizens of Ardmore voted to construct a new library, and the city leased the building to the Ardmore Garden Club, which continues to occupy, maintain, and preserve the building.<sup>25</sup> The structure was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2000.

#### *Cordell Carnegie Library*

Located one block north of the town square, the Cordell Carnegie Library building was constructed in 1911 and opened on January 19, 1912. Unlike many libraries in the state that resulted from the efforts of local women's groups, the Cordell facility came into being as a result of the town's Commercial Club comprised of local businessmen. The club formed a library committee in 1910 to begin acquiring books and to apply for a Carnegie grant. Carnegie's initial grant of \$7,967 in 1911 was later supplemented by a \$1,000 award.<sup>26</sup> The building was designed by architect A. A. Crowell in the Mission Revival style with Spanish Colonial Revival elements. The construction contract went to the D. C. Bass Company of Enid.<sup>27</sup>

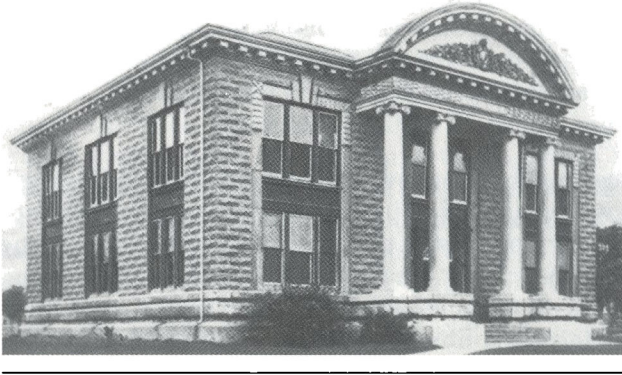
Until the 1960s the Cordell library was the only public library in Washita County and served as a meeting place for school groups, civic groups, and individuals. The Cordell Carnegie building suffered from the same problems as many other Carnegie libraries. The wooden beams became unsafe under the weight of additional books over the years. The red tile roof was thus removed in the 1950s to help ease the load on the structure. Since 1982, when the city constructed a new library, the Washita County Historical Society has used the building as a museum.<sup>28</sup> The building was listed on the National Register in 1989.

#### *El Reno Carnegie Library*

El Reno in Canadian County had a public library as early as 1902, when the city council approved a public library for the town and rented rooms to house it. The city also hired a librarian who began acquiring books and sought funding for construction of a building. El Reno received a \$12,500 Carnegie grant in 1904; a local citizen donated the land. The library was officially dedicated and opened on June 14, 1905, becoming the fourth Carnegie library in Oklahoma Territory.<sup>29</sup>

The structure, designed by architects Smith and Moore and constructed by A. C. Kreipke, is a two-story, essentially classical building of cream-colored brick complemented by a classic portico supported by four massive Ionic columns, a pedimented entry, and white stone cornices separating the first- and second-story



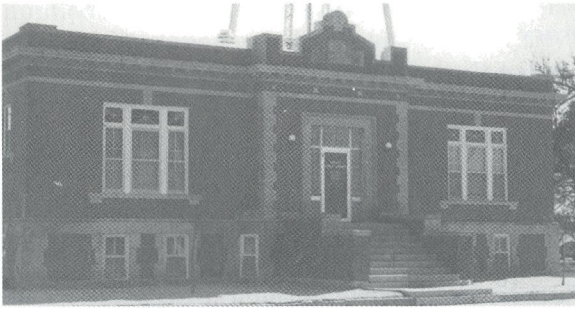


*Oklahoma Carnegie Library buildings listed in the National Register of Historic Places are (top to bottom) Ardmore, shown as originally constructed, Cordell, and El Reno.*



*(Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society, No. 21246.7, top; State Historic Preservation Office, middle and bottom).*

## CARNEGIE LIBRARIES



*National Register-listed library buildings also are (top to bottom) Guthrie, Hobart, and Lawton. The state's first Carnegie Library, in Oklahoma City (p. 454), was razed in 1951.*

*(Courtesy the authors, top; Oklahoma Historical Society, No. 19687. TO.H104.38.2.5, middle, and No. 10109a, p. 454; State Historic Preservation Office, bottom).*



## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

windows. Changes to the building over the years have included in 1927 alterations to the second-floor auditorium to provide storage in the stage area and the creation of a children's library in the former auditorium. In 1964 the city added a one-story, fire-proof archives room on the northwest corner of the building.<sup>30</sup>

The El Reno library was the scene of high school graduation ceremonies until 1912 and served a variety of other community functions. After a children's librarian was hired in 1912 the library provided a number of programs for El Reno's youngest residents.<sup>31</sup> One of the early summer reading programs was centered around a new globe. The youngest children met every Saturday morning for a story-telling hour, which included several stories about children of other lands. The older boys were organized into a Pirate Club that charted its course around the world.<sup>32</sup> In the 1970s the library began a popular series of informal lectures about early Canadian County history during the lunch-hour period.<sup>33</sup> The El Reno Carnegie Library was listed in the National Register in 1980.

### *Guthrie Carnegie Library*

The Carnegie Library of Guthrie is credited with being the first library in Oklahoma to be tax-supported. In 1901 the original library law was passed giving cities with a population of more than 5,000 the right to support a library with tax money. Guthrie had a club library at the time, and it was transferred to the city and became a free library with 300 volumes. The library became tax-supported on August 8, 1901. A native of Andrew Carnegie's hometown in Scotland lived in Guthrie at the time and sent an appeal to Carnegie on behalf of the library. Carnegie gave \$25,000, and the cornerstone was laid July 2, 1902, with the formal opening in February, 1903.<sup>34</sup>

Designed by architect J. H. Bennett, the Guthrie library building is a massive Second Renaissance Revival classical structure of buff brick, white limestone, and rough-cut red sandstone with a towering dome and a large portico over the front entrance.<sup>35</sup> In general, Carnegie disapproved of domes for library buildings, but approved the design after modifications were made.<sup>36</sup> Other elements of which Carnegie disapproved, but which were used in the Guthrie library building, were tall windows, fireplaces, and specialized meeting rooms.<sup>37</sup>

The Guthrie library also served a variety of community needs over the years. Tom Mix operated a gymnasium in the basement for a number of years. At about the same time, the YMCA and a music

studio used rooms in the building. In the 1950s and 1960s, the library was the site of local Teen Town activities.<sup>38</sup> The building also played an important role in Oklahoma history. In 1907 when Oklahoma became a state, the ceremony was held on the steps of the Guthrie Carnegie Library. The festivities included a symbolic marriage representing the union of the Oklahoma and Indian territories, today a scene reenacted annually by area school children on Statehood Day.<sup>39</sup> The Oklahoma Betsy Ross Association met in the library to design and work on Oklahoma's state flag in 1908.<sup>40</sup> The Guthrie Carnegie library building was listed on the National Register in 1971 and is currently being used as a museum.

### *Hobart Carnegie Library*

Four weeks after the first settler arrived in Hobart in 1901, a pair of women began soliciting subscriptions for a free library and reading room. Ten days later they opened a reading room. Within two years, the library held more than 300 volumes. In 1903 the city applied for but did not receive a Carnegie library grant. In 1911 citizens donated money to buy a site and the city made another appeal to the Carnegie Corporation. That time it was successful and received \$10,000.<sup>41</sup> Five-hundred dollars went unspent for construction, but instead were used to purchase additional books. Designed by architect William McCause, the one-story, traditional-style building plus basement was constructed of Carthage and Bedford cut stone and red-face brick with a belt course between the basement and main floor.<sup>42</sup>

After the library opened in 1912, residents donated hundreds of books. One early librarian even refused her salary, so the money could be used for improving the facility.<sup>43</sup> During 1914 and 1915 the librarian combined the school library with the public library; the library's motto was "Open 365 days a year." That was the first successful experiment in Oklahoma in merging school and public libraries under the administration of the public library.<sup>44</sup>

Like other libraries in the state, the Hobart library was used by a number of local groups including the Fortnightly Club, Great Books Club, and Yamparika.<sup>45</sup> The Hobart Carnegie building is still in use as a library and was listed on the National Register in 1980.

### *Lawton Carnegie Library*

In 1902 a local attorney applied for a Carnegie grant for Lawton, a town only then one year old. However, the grant was not forthcoming.<sup>46</sup> In 1904 Lawton's City Federation of Women's Clubs won

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

500 books in a contest sponsored by the local merchants; that constituted the beginning of the Lawton library. The women immediately organized the books into a new library for the city. The collection was initially housed in a bank and then in the city hall. The collection continued to grow, and the question of a library building grew pressing over the next two decades. In 1910 the city clerk sent an appeal to Carnegie, but before a grant could be awarded, Carnegie blacklisted Oklahoma because two or three libraries had not fulfilled their part of the financial support agreement.<sup>47</sup> Although residents on several occasions voted to approve the city's share of support, some also had reservations about the cost and thus construction was delayed for many years. The city also was hampered in its quest for a Carnegie library by the intervention of World War I and the temporary suspension of Carnegie grants.<sup>48</sup> Finally, in 1921 Carnegie approved a \$20,000 grant for Lawton, and the Carnegie library building opened in June, 1922.<sup>49</sup>

Lawton architect J. W. Smith designed a modified Federal-style building of locally manufactured, buff brick with white limestone window trim and ornamentation and large French Renaissance-style columns at the main entrance. An addition to the north end of the library was constructed in the early 1940s, and the interior has been remodeled several times.<sup>50</sup> Over the years, the library served the local community, public schools, Cameron University, Fort Sill, and much of Comanche County, and was in continuous use until 1973 when a new library was constructed. The Lawton Carnegie Library was listed in the National Register in 1976 and is designated as the last Carnegie library building completed in Oklahoma. The building is currently used as a town hall for various community and city functions.<sup>51</sup>

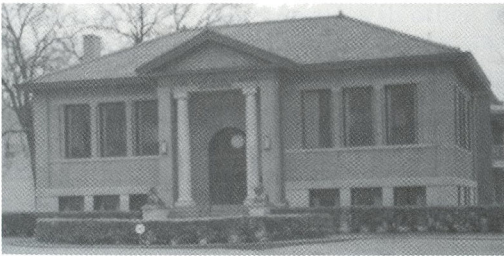
### **Other Existing Carnegie Buildings**

In 1904 a congressman from the area acquired a corner on the Perry town square and the city received a \$10,000 Carnegie grant. After construction was complete, the mayor attempted to make the building a city hall as well as a library. That was contrary to the agreement signed by the board; the matter was eventually settled when the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled that the mayor was wrong.<sup>52</sup> The building was recently renovated and is still being used as a library. The Tahlequah Carnegie Library opened in 1905 and is an example of an exception to Carnegie's rules on size of a town. The town had a population of 1,800, and Carnegie normally did not consider such a small town but he donated \$10,000 nonetheless.<sup>53</sup>

## CARNEGIE LIBRARIES



*Perry Carnegie Library  
(above); Tahlequah Carnegie  
Library (right) (Courtesy the  
authors).*



*Bartlesville Carnegie Library  
(left); Frederick Carnegie Li-  
brary (below) (Courtesy the  
authors, left; Oklahoma His-  
torical Society, No. 20682.TO.  
F093.71.1.34, below).*





*Muskogee Carnegie Library (above); Wagoner Carnegie Library (right) (Courtesy the authors).*



*Sapulpa Carnegie Library (above); Woodward Public Library (right) (Courtesy the authors, above; Woodward Public Library and Plains Indians and Pioneers Museum, right).*



Shawnee had a library association as early as 1901 and received a \$15,500 Carnegie grant in 1906. Pottawatomie County was the second in the state to receive a systematized county library service, which was established through the agency of the Shawnee Carnegie Library before the county library law was passed in 1929.<sup>54</sup> The library suffered severe fire damage in 1929, resulting in the removal of the building's dome and replacement of the wooden floor by a concrete floor.<sup>55</sup> Bartlesville also received a Carnegie library grant in 1908 and constructed a building it quickly outgrew; a local benefactor donated money for a new building. The Carnegie building is now owned by a law firm and has been well maintained.<sup>56</sup>

A Muskogee Women's History Club started a local library in 1908 which was housed in various locations until the city received a \$60,000 Carnegie grant in 1910 (later reduced to \$45,000) and constructed a library in 1913 on land purchased from Sen. Robert L. Owen. In 1937 artist Acee Blue Eagle painted two large murals on the library's interior walls.<sup>57</sup> Today the building serves as office space. The Elk City Carnegie Library was built with a \$10,000 grant from Andrew Carnegie in 1914 and the first librarian was paid \$335 yearly.<sup>58</sup> Collinsville's COE Club organized and operated the town's first library in various locations before the town received a \$5,000 Carnegie grant in 1915 and constructed a library which opened in 1917. Like libraries in other communities, over the years the building served as a meeting place for local groups such as Boy Scouts, Sunday School classes, and Red Cross headquarters during World War II.<sup>59</sup>

Frederick received a Carnegie grant in the amount of \$10,000 and opened the doors to its library in 1916 with 2,000 volumes on the shelves. In 1935 the library was redecorated by workers on a project of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration.<sup>60</sup> Sapulpa added \$10,000 to its Carnegie grant of \$25,000 and completed its library in 1918. The entire town contributed towards fundraising for the library. A grand piano was purchased with money donated by the symphony club for use in the basement auditorium which was to serve as a community center. During World War I, the Red Cross made its headquarters in the library and after the war the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) used the auditorium.<sup>61</sup>

In 1911 Wagoner received news that their application for a Carnegie grant had been approved and gratefully accepted it even though it was for \$10,000 instead of the \$15,000 that had been requested. The building was completed in 1913 and was initially opened six afternoons each week.<sup>62</sup> Woodward opened its Carnegie



## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

library in 1917 with 450 books on the shelves. Shortly after the opening people became focused on the war effort and the librarian redirected her attention to soliciting books for the soldiers' camps instead of for the library. In 1919 the book collection was only 2,000 volumes, but by 1936 it had grown to more than 11,000. The librarian in those early days was a scout counselor who worked with both Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and books associated with these activities took a prominent place in the collection.<sup>63</sup>

### **Razed Carnegie Buildings**

Carnegie library grants were calculated on the community's current size and did not consider future growth. According to Jones, "overcrowding, population shifts, urban development, new technology, and old age resulted in some one hundred Carnegie Libraries being razed during the 1960s—one every six weeks."<sup>64</sup> Seven of the original Oklahoma libraries have been razed over the years. Ponca City razed its Carnegie building in 1937, followed by Oklahoma City in 1951, and Miami in 1962. The Chickasha building was razed in 1963, followed by Tulsa in 1965, Enid in 1972, and McAlester in 1973.<sup>65</sup>

After receiving a \$10,000 Carnegie grant in 1903, the Chickasha Carnegie Library was opened in 1905 and was the first free public library in Indian Territory.<sup>66</sup> Enid applied for a grant and Carnegie offered \$10,000, but when Enid said that was not enough he increased the grant to \$25,000 in 1908. The building was dedicated in 1910 and in 1920 Garfield County became the first county library in Oklahoma.<sup>67</sup>

Ponca City, with a population of only 2,500 applied for and received a \$6,500 Carnegie grant in 1909. At that time according to state law only those cities with a population of 5,000 or more were allowed to appropriate public funds for a library. The building was completed in 1910 and opened with 500 volumes. As a result of the oil boom the population of the city and the number of volumes grew such that by 1932 the library held over 17,000 volumes. Attention was turned toward a new building.<sup>68</sup> Miami made an application to Carnegie and was awarded \$10,000 for a building but did not receive the funds until the Oklahoma towns that were delinquent in their maintenance pledges had fulfilled their pledges. The Carnegie building in Miami was dedicated in 1921. That was the last grant approved for a new Carnegie library in Oklahoma. By 1936 the library had 15,000 volumes and the collection was cataloged in 1927.<sup>69</sup>

## CARNEGIE LIBRARIES

### STATUS OF CARNEGIE LIBRARY BUILDINGS

<u>City</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Grant</u>	<u>Current Use</u>
Ardmore	1903	Carter	\$15,000	Garden Center
Bartlesville	1908	Washington	12,500	Offices
Chickasha	1903	Grady	10,500	Razed, 1963
Collinsville	1915	Tulsa	7,500	Library
Cordell	1911	Washita	10,000	Museum
Elk City	1914	Beckham	10,000	Library
El Reno	1903	Canadian	12,500	Library
Enid	1904	Garfield	25,000	Razed, 1972
Frederick	1914	Tillman	10,000	Library
Guthrie	1901	Logan	26,000	Museum
Hobart	1911	Kiowa	10,000	Library
Lawton	1916	Comanche	20,000	Town Hall
McAlester	1906	Pittsburg	25,000	Razed, 1973
Miami	1916	Ottawa	10,000	Razed, 1962
Muskogee	1910	Muskogee	60,000	Offices
Oklahoma City	1899	Oklahoma	60,000	Razed, 1951
Perry	1909	Noble	10,000	Library
Ponca City	1908	Kay	6,500	Razed, 1937
Sapulpa	1916	Creek	25,000	Library
Shawnee	1904	Pottawatomie	15,500	Offices
Tahlequah	1905	Cherokee	10,000	Library
Tulsa	1910	Tulsa	55,000	Razed, ca. 1965
Wagoner	1911	Wagoner	10,000	Library
Woodward	1915	Woodward	10,000	Offices

The cornerstone of the Oklahoma City Carnegie library was laid on August 16, 1900, and the first book was checked out on August 29, 1901. The original Carnegie grant was for \$25,000, but by 1909 the building was already too small for the growing capital city. Carnegie provided an additional gift of \$35,000 for the building to be expanded. In 1905 Tulsa had a population of 6,000 when it first requested and was denied a Carnegie grant. By 1910 the population had grown to 25,000 and a second request for a grant was made. Carnegie approved a grant for \$35,000, but the city voted not to accept the gift. In 1914 Carnegie increased the approved grant to \$42,000 and after further negotiation increased the amount to \$55,000. It was accepted and the building opened on May 1, 1916.<sup>70</sup> While the Tulsa Carnegie Library had twenty-two rooms, McAlester had a library with five rooms on the main floor and four rooms

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

for club meetings and other public gatherings in the basement of the building. The building grant for the McAlester Carnegie Library had been applied for in 1913, and after the building was completed it quickly became a community center. The library originally opened with 3,500 volumes and by 1928 had become so crowded that expansion was being considered.<sup>71</sup>

Nine of the original twenty-four Carnegie libraries in Oklahoma are still in use as libraries. They are Collinsville, Elk City, El Reno, Frederick, Hobart, Perry, Sapulpa, Tahlequah, and Wagoner. Most have undergone structural improvements to become accessible and/or increase the physical size of the library facility. In the early 1900s when all of the facilities were constructed, wheelchair accessibility was not required or considered, as is openly evident by the stepped entrances found at many of the libraries. The remaining existing Carnegie facilities continue to be used for numerous purposes, ranging from public and government offices to facilities for private organizations and businesses.

### Conclusion

As Oklahomans plan for the centennial of statehood in 2007, it is important not to forget the public libraries that can be attributed in some part to the first gift of Andrew Carnegie 100 years ago. Carnegie's dream was to provide common people with access to books and information that he lacked as a child growing up in Scotland. In helping to construct public libraries in twenty-four communities across Oklahoma, as well as in communities across the United States, he certainly fulfilled that dream. Oklahoma sits in an unusual position in the Carnegie legacy, because the library grants came to the state in the period of its earliest settlement and development. Thus, the Carnegie library is a part of the historical geography of towns and cities across Oklahoma. Each of the libraries aided in the provision of information, entertainment, and educational opportunity for the community. Regardless of their status today, these realities should be celebrated along with the rest of the state's history.

### ENDNOTES

\* Tanya D. Finchum is an Assistant Professor in the Government Documents Department of the Edmon Low Library at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma. G. Allen Finchum is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography at Oklahoma State University.

<sup>1</sup> *Oklahoma Libraries*, 4 (November, 1935): 21.

## CARNEGIE LIBRARIES

- <sup>2</sup> Oklahoma Library Commission, *Oklahoma Libraries: 1900–1937* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Library Commission, 1937), 48.
- <sup>3</sup> Theodore Jones, *Carnegie Libraries Across America: A Public Legacy* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997), 5.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>5</sup> George S. Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969), 43.
- <sup>6</sup> T. W. Koch, *A Book of Carnegie Libraries* (White Plains, New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1917), 18.
- <sup>7</sup> Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, 17–18.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>9</sup> Jones, *Carnegie Libraries Across America*, 23.
- <sup>10</sup> Oklahoma Library Commission, *Biennial Report, 1926–1928*, 3.
- <sup>11</sup> Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, 6.
- <sup>12</sup> Jones, *Carnegie Libraries Across America*, 15.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.
- <sup>14</sup> U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States: Population Report by States, Oklahoma*, 484.
- <sup>15</sup> Oklahoma Library Commission, *Oklahoma Libraries*, 9.
- <sup>16</sup> *Oklahoma Libraries*, 5 (December, 1936): 28.
- <sup>17</sup> J. W. Morris, ed., *Cities of Oklahoma* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1979), 150–151.
- <sup>18</sup> Oklahoma Library Commission, *Oklahoma Libraries*, passim.
- <sup>19</sup> Robert S. Martin, *Carnegie Denied: Communities Rejecting Carnegie Library Construction Grants 1898–1928* (Westpoint, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), 116.
- <sup>20</sup> Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, 195.
- <sup>21</sup> Oklahoma Library Commission, *Oklahoma Libraries*, 76.
- <sup>22</sup> Registration Form, National Register of Historic Places, sec. 7: 18–19, in folder Carnegie Library, Ardmore, Carter County, Oklahoma, State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (hereafter cited as NRHP and SHPO).
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 7: 9, sec. 8: 20.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 8: 16.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 8: 20, 21.
- <sup>26</sup> Registration Form, NRHP, sec. 8: 2, in folder Carnegie Library, Cordell, Washita County, Oklahoma, SHPO.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 8: 2–3.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 8: 2.
- <sup>29</sup> Inventory-Nomination Form, Statement of Significance, NRHP, in folder Carnegie Library, El Reno, Canadian County, Oklahoma, SHPO.
- <sup>30</sup> Inventory-Nomination Form, Statement of Present and Original Physical Appearance, NRHP, in folder Carnegie Library, El Reno, Canadian County, Oklahoma, SHPO.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 8: 1, in folder Carnegie Library, El Reno, Canadian County, Oklahoma, SHPO.
- <sup>32</sup> *Oklahoma Libraries*, 2 (October, 1932): 20.
- <sup>33</sup> Inventory-Nomination Form, NRHP, sec. 8: 1, in folder Carnegie Library, El Reno, Canadian County, Oklahoma, SHPO.
- <sup>34</sup> Oklahoma Library Commission, *Oklahoma Libraries*, 48.

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

<sup>35</sup> Historic Structures Report, June 6, 1990, 2-1, 3-1, Inventory-Nomination Form, NRHP, in folder Carnegie Library, Guthrie, Logan County, Oklahoma, SHPO.

<sup>36</sup> Historic American Buildings Survey Report, 1, 6-7, Inventory-Nomination Form, NRHP, in folder Carnegie Library, Guthrie, Logan County, Oklahoma, SHPO.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 12-13.

<sup>38</sup> Historic Structures Report, 2-2, Inventory-Nomination Form, NRHP, in folder Carnegie Library, Guthrie, Logan County, Oklahoma, SHPO.

<sup>39</sup> Edward E. Dale and Morris L. Wardell, *History of Oklahoma* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1948), 315.

<sup>40</sup> Inventory-Nomination Form, NRHP, in folder Carnegie Library, Guthrie, Logan County, Oklahoma, SHPO.

<sup>41</sup> Oklahoma Library Commission, *Oklahoma Libraries*, 52.

<sup>42</sup> Inventory-Nomination Form, NRHP, in folder Carnegie Library, Hobart, Kiowa County, Oklahoma, SHPO.

<sup>43</sup> "History of Hobart Library," 1, NRHP, in folder Carnegie Library, Hobart, Kiowa County, Oklahoma, SHPO.

<sup>44</sup> Oklahoma Library Commission, *Oklahoma Libraries*, 51.

<sup>45</sup> Inventory-Nomination Form, NRHP, in folder Carnegie Library, Hobart, Kiowa County, Oklahoma, SHPO.

<sup>46</sup> Inventory-Nomination Form, Statement of Significance, NRHP, in folder Carnegie Library, Lawton, Comanche County, Oklahoma, SHPO.

<sup>47</sup> *Oklahoma Libraries*, 1 (March, 1932): 4.

<sup>48</sup> Inventory-Nomination Form, sec. 8: 1, NRHP, in folder Carnegie Library, Lawton, Comanche County, Oklahoma, SHPO.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Inventory-Nomination Form, Statement of Present and Original Physical Appearance, NRHP, in folder Carnegie Library, Lawton, Comanche County, Oklahoma, SHPO.

<sup>51</sup> Inventory-Nomination Form, sec. 8: 1, NRHP, in folder Carnegie Library, Lawton, Comanche County, Oklahoma, SHPO.

<sup>52</sup> Robert E. Cunningham, *Perry: Pride of the Prairie* (Stillwater, Oklahoma: Frontier Printers), 35.

<sup>53</sup> Oklahoma Library Commission, *Oklahoma Libraries*, 92.

<sup>54</sup> *Oklahoma Libraries*, 1 (May, 1932): 11.

<sup>55</sup> Inventory-Nomination Form, Statement of Present and Original Physical Appearance, NRHP, in folder Carnegie Library, Shawnee, Pottawatomie County, Oklahoma, SHPO.

<sup>56</sup> Oklahoma Library Commission, *Oklahoma Libraries*, 21.

<sup>57</sup> Building-Structure Inventory Form, NRHP, in folder Carnegie Library, Muskogee, Muskogee County, Oklahoma, SHPO; C. W. "Dub" West, untitled and undated newspaper clipping, in folder Carnegie Library, Muskogee, Muskogee County, Oklahoma, SHPO.

<sup>58</sup> Oklahoma Library Commission, *Oklahoma Libraries*, 38-39.

<sup>59</sup> Inventory-Nomination Form, Statement of Significance, NRHP, in folder Carnegie Library, Collinsville, Tulsa County, Oklahoma, SHPO; History of Collinsville Library, undated, in folder Carnegie Library, Collinsville, Tulsa County, Oklahoma, SHPO.

<sup>60</sup> *Oklahoma Libraries*, 4 (January, 1936): 35.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 (October, 1936): 13.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 (April, 1933): 83.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 5 (November, 1936): 22.

<sup>64</sup> Jones, *Carnegie Libraries Across America*, 116.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>66</sup> Oklahoma Library Commission, *Oklahoma Libraries*, 26.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 41–43.

<sup>68</sup> *Oklahoma Libraries*, 2 (March, 1933): 75.

<sup>69</sup> Oklahoma Library Commission, *Oklahoma Libraries*, 65.

<sup>70</sup> *Oklahoma Libraries*, 4 (September, 1935): 9.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 4 (November, 1935): 25.