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# The Design of the Carnegie Library in Danville, Illinois (1904)

## REREADING THE REPUTATION OF THE CARNEGIE LIBRARY BUILT-FORM IN AMERICA

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**ABSTRACT:** Opened in 1904, the Carnegie public library in Danville, Illinois, was much praised as a civic institution, not only for the services it provided but also for its impressive architectural presence. Responding negatively to a request made in 1910 by the Danville Library Board for additional funding to enlarge the library, Andrew Carnegie's private secretary and overseer of building applications and plans, James Bertram, was retrospectively critical of what he viewed as the space-wastefulness of the original Danville design. Using this criticism as a sounding board, as well as by drawing on ideas about library architecture debated by librarians over the previous generation, this article attempts to highlight the progressive elements of the Danville design, thus suggesting the possibility of a wider re-reading of the Carnegie library building type, including buildings designed before the more systematic scrutiny and guidance introduced by Carnegie from 1908.

**KEYWORDS:** public libraries, architecture, Andrew Carnegie, United States, twentieth century

Between 1889 and 1923 philanthropic grants from the steel magnate Andrew Carnegie helped build 1,679 public libraries across the United States (no new grants were pledged there after 1917).<sup>1</sup> Despite the torrent of gratitude that came his way, Carnegie's philanthropic library program was not free of controversy. Some at the time took issue with what they saw as the tainted nature of the money he offered and gifted, the ill-gotten gains of an industrial-age robber baron.<sup>2</sup> Carnegie's perceived "trampling asunder . . . of workingmen,"

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as one of his biographers has put it, has even found its way into a recent celebration of the philanthropist's work marking the centenary of his death, with the author foregrounding the deadly confrontation in 1892 at the Carnegie's Steel Company's Homestead Mills between strikers and hired special operatives and asking the question: was Carnegie "an altruistic, philanthropic pacifist" or "a cynical hypocrite who ruthlessly exploited his workers"?<sup>3</sup> Even today, therefore, a century after his death (August 11, 1919), controversy continues to circle Carnegie's library philanthropy. However, that controversy is not just ideological centered on the reputation of the Carnegie library building type; it is also technical with respect to the continued viability of extant Carnegie library buildings.

### Attitudes to Extant Carnegie Libraries

Many Carnegie libraries continue to function as libraries, but negative perceptions of this inherited stock of buildings are not uncommon.<sup>4</sup> For many of those who run them, civic authorities and professionals alike, Carnegie libraries, once welcomed gifts, have become burdens. In an age of recycling, despite the seemingly attractive benefits of upgrading Carnegie buildings, their age and the nature of their original design make them costly to maintain, heat, cool, repair, and remodel, as well as difficult to adapt to accessibility codes and to the needs of the digital age. Many Carnegie libraries have developed serious defects, from leaking skylights to unstable foundations. Final costs and resulting functional efficiency in renovation projects can be, respectively, higher and lower than expected.<sup>5</sup> In many cases, bringing a Carnegie library into alignment with the requirements expected of a modern library service may cost as much as building a new library from scratch.<sup>6</sup> Many are "landmarked" (a special status awarded in recognition of outstanding historical, cultural, or architectural value), making renovations even more expensive. Even additions can be problematic, being difficult to blend with existing structures. As one leading consultant on Carnegie library remodeling has put it: "They are fun to work with, but the challenges are significant. . . . I've seen too many expanded Carnegie libraries where the original library is down the hall and around the corner, and essentially forgotten."<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, preserving an old, dysfunctional library in a historically responsible way can involve massive complications and costs.<sup>8</sup> They have been described as problematic in terms of providing the "openness, transparency, and flexibility" expected in a pluralist, inclusive society.<sup>9</sup> Today's library patrons,

exposed to the demanding communication-age services that the original libraries cannot easily meet, have not necessarily shared the enthusiasm for Carnegie library buildings expressed by earlier generations. As one New York patron remarked in 2013, after seeing her Carnegie library replaced by a modern facility: “I miss the old library, but it’s good to have something more helpful for people.”<sup>10</sup> For many users, Carnegie libraries present and represent obstacles to progress.<sup>11</sup> Seeking to modernize both image and services, library professionals too have questioned the worth of Carnegie library built-form. In 1976, for example, in contributing to a celebration of the centenary of the American Library Association, Walter Allen wrote: “it is doubtful . . . that they [Carnegie libraries] added much to the development of library architecture.”<sup>12</sup> Positing Carnegie libraries as “mistakes” is certainly a discourse that has gained traction in an age where digital spaces have increasingly displaced physical places.

Despite these negative attitudes, old Carnegie library buildings continue to contribute significantly to a community’s shared identity and sense of heritage. While some communities have been anxious to welcome modern, information-age libraries designed in accordance with an intensifying “green” zeitgeist and in compliance with sustainability objectives, others, pushing to one side characterizations of environmental inappropriateness, have mounted fierce campaigns to save old library buildings threatened with closure—buildings that over many decades, if not for over a century, had been cherished as valuable generators of social capital.<sup>13</sup> The sentimentality attached to older libraries has been poetically captured by Abigail Van Slyck in her forensic social-causes-of-design study of American Carnegie library buildings, when she observed that for the public Carnegie libraries have often been “as familiar as old friends,” redolent of a nostalgia for “a golden era in which children skated on library grounds through long, warm summer afternoons, undisturbed by the social disruptions of our own less perfect time.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, such is the potency of the nostalgia generated by the Carnegie library built-form that in Nashville in 2001 the city’s authorities opened a new, technically up-to-date, yet stylistically historic, version of its old Carnegie library.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the digital revolution, Carnegie library buildings continue to feature on the cultural and urban landscapes, given new leases of life by having been adapted for a new purpose or, more commonly, by increased investment in additions, renovations, and remodels (ARRs), which are generally on the rise.<sup>16</sup> Drawing on a growing wider culture of preservation and conservation, public interest in the fate of existing library structures in the United States

has strengthened.<sup>17</sup> This is not surprising, in that in many places the local Carnegie library is among the most revered structures in the community.<sup>18</sup> Thus, despite the challenges involved in recycling Carnegie libraries, including those adapted for nonlibrary purposes, it is important, it has been argued, not to underestimate their potential, especially if they can be successfully reused or repaired with a view to securing a revitalized, sustainable future.<sup>19</sup>

Any tendency to underestimate the possibilities for extant Carnegie library buildings can be reduced by rehabilitating the reputation of their original designs. This study offers an attempt at such a rehabilitation through an examination of the planning and early history of the Carnegie library in Danville, Illinois, based on local records held by the Danville Public Library and the records of the Carnegie Corporation deposited in Columbia University, New York. The second half of the study is formed by an interpretation of the design of Danville's Carnegie building by drawing on secondary accounts of the early material culture of Carnegie libraries, as well as by referring to policy on architectural control operated by the Carnegie library building program at the time, especially in the context of an application by the Danville Public Library Board in 1910 for a second Carnegie grant to help fund additions and alterations to the original buildings.

### Danville Public Library and the Carnegie Grant

A large Carnegie library was opened in Danville, Illinois, in November 1904 (see fig. 1). The building's cornerstone had been laid in ceremonial style just a little over a year earlier (on October 28, 1903). Under the cornerstone had been buried a time capsule "for the information of future generations." Among the capsule's contents were a complete collection of US coins, some local newspapers, a booklet advertising Danville Public Library produced by the local Chamber of Commerce, a roster of the library staff and members of the library board, the business cards of the building's architects and the various contractors involved in its construction, and a history of Danville Public Library written in manuscript by the president of the library board.<sup>20</sup> The burying of a time capsule clearly signaled that Danville's Carnegie library was to be *built to last*, the building's anticipated appearance being marked out as a significant historical event for the town.

By the early twentieth century Danville was seen to be well on its way to becoming a modern town with an expanding and diversifying economy, prominent sectors being agriculture, mining, brick manufacture, smelting,



Figure 1 Danville Public Library, c. 1910. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

and printing. A sign of its push toward modernity, by 1910 over 25,000 miles of gas lines had been laid as well as eighteen miles of track for a fleet of tram-cars that carried upwards of 10,000 passengers a day.<sup>21</sup>

A public library in Danville had been founded in 1883.<sup>22</sup> For a number of years before the construction of the Carnegie building, the library had occupied cramped premises over the Coffeen and Brothers book and music store. The accommodation was far from perfect. Neither was general accessibility, as there was a fee for book borrowing, albeit on “easy terms” according to promotional material produced by the library.<sup>23</sup> By 1900 the 13,000-volume collection had “grown to be one of the largest and most important . . . in the state.”<sup>24</sup> Some 6,500 registered readers, with access to the library six days a week, accounted for an annual circulation of over 40,000 items.<sup>25</sup> The library had benefited from a continuity of excellent professional service. The librarian, Josephine Durham, had been in place since 1890 and was revered in Danville and across the state, her qualities entitling her to “the high rank she holds in library circles.”<sup>26</sup> Through their taxes, local citizens were funding the library to the tune of \$3,500 annually.

This impressive record of commitment and self-help encouraged Carnegie, once approached, working through the office of his private secretary James Bertram, to donate \$40,000 in December 1901 toward the cost of providing a

purpose-built library, the site being supplied by the city authority at a cost of \$25,000.<sup>27</sup> Compared to other donations at the time for buildings of a similar size, Carnegie's gift was a large one.

### The Building and Its Design

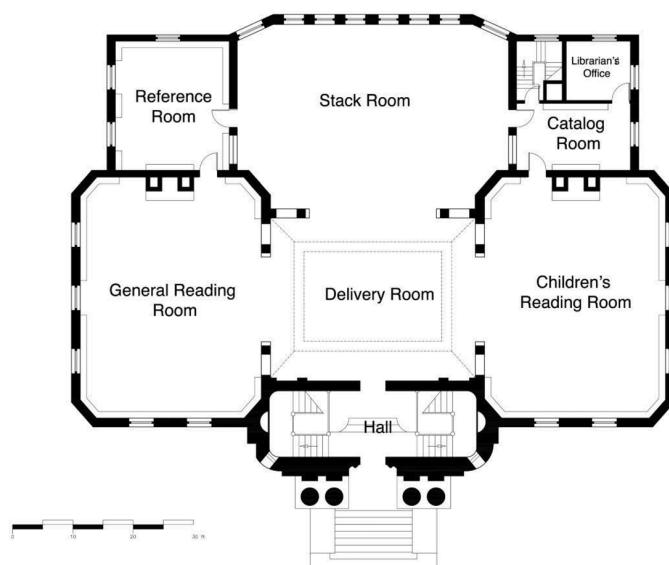
The Chicago architectural practice of Normand Patton and Grant Miller was selected to draw up plans for the building. During the time of their partnership (1901–12) Patton and Miller designed over a hundred Carnegie libraries, mostly in the Midwest.<sup>28</sup> The building, as the Library Board was keen to inform Carnegie, occupied a prominent location in the city, a stone's throw from the retail district. Surrounded by up-market residential properties, it was proximate to the business district, with its government building, county courthouse, public square, city high school, hotels, and opera house.<sup>29</sup> Like the book collection, the new building was to be one of the largest Carnegie libraries in the state, with a footprint 100 feet wide by 65 feet deep.

Patton and Miller created an unbridled Beaux Arts design for the building, which was finished in Bedford stone and dark paving brick and framed by a generously landscaped frontage. The building, which was lit by electricity and heated by city gas, was opened to the public on November 7, 1904. Five hundred people attended the opening "inspection" ceremony. According to the local press, visitors expressed admiration for the "spacious and beautifully lighted" rooms and were generally impressed by the "magnificent interior" and "commodious arrangement of the fixtures." They were said to be

highly pleased with the building, the fixtures and appointments of the place and the cozy, inviting rooms in which there were 16,000 volumes. All were especially pleased with the cork carpet which completely deadens the sound of foot-falls and at the same time adds to the attractiveness of the rooms. All breathed thankfulness to the man who had made such a building possible in Danville—Andrew Carnegie.<sup>30</sup>

Local elites believed it wasn't necessary to inscribe Carnegie's name on the building as they understood that "the building itself is sufficient to perpetuate his name."<sup>31</sup>

The library's main floor (see fig. 2) had two large (each 30×40 feet) reading rooms: one for adults, to the left upon entry, the other, a mirror image of the adult room, for children, to the right.<sup>32</sup> The children's room became very



**Figure 2** Main floor plan, Danville Public Library. Source: Danville Public Library Annual Report, 1909–10. Redrawn by Mahdi Boughanmi.

popular, story hours attracting throngs of children on Saturday afternoons.<sup>33</sup> The main floor also housed a reference room (off the much larger adult reading room with direct access to the stack room) as well as a cataloging room and a librarian's office. The library operated the Dewey classification system and provided a dictionary card catalog.

The main-floor delivery, or entrance, hall housed a librarians' desk, located directly facing patrons as they gained entry. Beyond the hall, and behind the librarian's desk (see fig. 3), which had been centrally located “to command a view of the entire interior,” the architects placed a radially arranged, open-access stack room.<sup>34</sup> As fiction reading and library use generally boomed, this room proved to be inadequate in size.<sup>35</sup> Within just a decade and a half, indeed, it had to be enlarged considerably. An extension to the stack, doubling its capacity, was built in 1929 (a memorial bronze tablet was mounted on one of its walls, dedicated to local philanthropist Augustus Webster, who contributed \$7,000 of the \$8,000 cost of the extension) (see fig. 4).<sup>36</sup> Because the extension was located at the rear of the building, those responsible for its design appeared to believe they could get away with supplying only a utilitarian, dark-brick exterior (see fig. 5). Unfortunately, its ugliness was highly visible from the buildings of the



Figure 3 Delivery room and hall, Danville Public Library, at the time of opening in 1904.  
Courtesy of Danville Public Library Archives.



Figure 4 Expanded stack room, Danville Public Library, c. 1930. Courtesy of Danville Public Library Archives.



Figure 5 Stack-room addition, Danville Public Library, in 2018. Source: The authors.

business district behind and on either side of the library. Shelving in the stacks was made of steel. Originally, the stack room was organized in a radial fashion, on one level, but when the extra space was added in 1929 shelves were placed in parallel, on both the main level and the additional mezzanine level.

A “light, dry basement” with half-windows provided space for “such books as are little called for” as well as a work room and a staff room with lavatory (see fig. 6).<sup>37</sup> In addition, there was a reading room for newspapers and congressional documents, a lecture room, a classroom, and a study room. Access to the basement was gained via twin staircases descending from either side of the ornate vestibule, the elegance of the top of the staircase visible to those

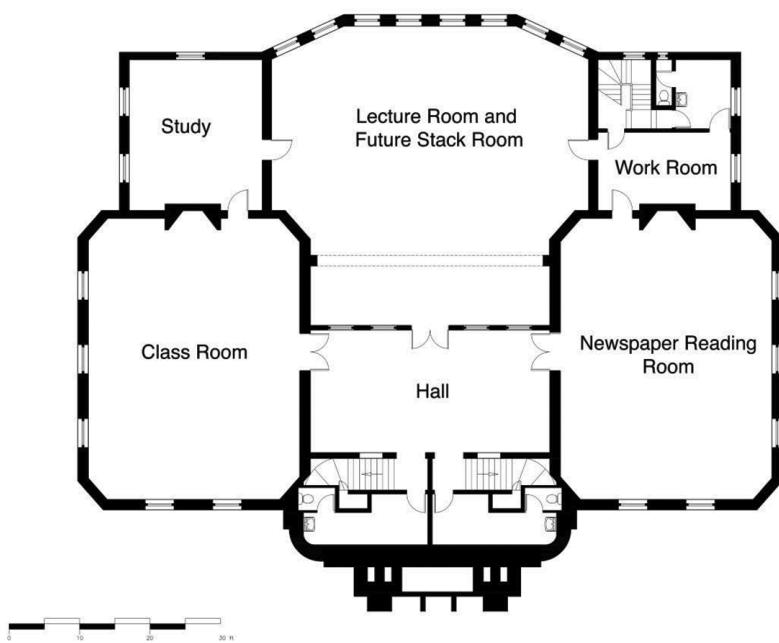


Figure 6 Basement plan, Danville Public Library. Source: Danville Public Library Archives. Redrawn by Mahdi Boughanmi.

entering the library, giving way to a much plainer staircase as visitors reached basement level.

### A Second Grant Application

In 1910 the Danville Public Library Board asked for a second grant of up to \$30,000 to extend and enlarge the 1904 structure (mainly a new reference room and extra stack space) on the grounds that the city's population had expanded from 25,000 in 1904 to 42,000, with a commensurate increase in stock from 16,000 to 25,000, including a healthy reference stock to assist public school students in particular. By way of talking up Danville's civic progress, the board was anxious to let Carnegie know that the federal government was happy to invest in Danville by erecting a new post office and courthouse building opposite the library.<sup>38</sup>

Bertram informed the board that to consider a second application Carnegie's office had to "take under review the manner in which the funds already given have been spent." Having undertaken that review, Bertram concluded that in respect of the original Danville design the principle that "the maximum of useful accommodation consistent with good taste in b[u]ilding was secured" had been lost sight of. He reserved particular criticism for the "massive and expensive" delivery hall, where, he estimated, two-thirds of the area was "space wasted." He believed that utility had been surrendered in the name of "a desire to create and impression of importance." The new plan, he implied, would be equally wasteful, providing, as it did, accommodation for an extra 100,000 volumes—"Do you ever expect to own that number [of volumes]?", he asked rhetorically.<sup>39</sup>

When Bertram quizzed the building's architects, Patton and Miller, about the "unnecessarily large hall and delivery room," they replied that this aspect of the design, along with other possible negative aspects, had not been their responsibility but that of the Library Board, explaining:

It is with great difficulty that we are able to convince library boards that it is not necessary to build libraries in the classical style of architecture, with elaborate cut stone, in order to produce good architecture. This also applies to the interior. They invariably want a monumental delivery room.<sup>40</sup>

The cost spent on interior space at Danville had been relatively high, he added.

Surprisingly, Carnegie did not dismiss the board's request out of hand, requesting evidence of the increase in the city's population since 1904. The board explained that an authoritative figure could not yet be provided as the city had not yet received, even by March 1911, the federal government's bulletin for the 1910 census.<sup>41</sup> Annoyed—unreasonably, it might be suggested—with Danville's lack of compliance on the matter, Bertram fired back that "you are wasting our time. Please [sic] do not write us again until you can giv[e] the figure of the last Federal Census."<sup>42</sup>

Within a few days the board informed Bertram that it had received the result of the 1910 census for Danville and confirmed that the population had increased to over 27,000.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, Bertram finally ran out of patience and ended the dialogue, unhappy that not enough details of the proposed building work had been provided, including no plan for the main floor.<sup>44</sup> He was also unhappy that the proposed new reference accommodation was too

large, which was, he wrote, “contrary to Library practis [sic],” as such rooms, he argued, were “used by the few.”<sup>45</sup>

### In Defense of the Original Design

In the second half of this study we offer a discussion of the ways in which the Carnegie library in Danville fits into the general story of Carnegie library design, with particular attention paid to architectural control, siting, style, and interior spaces. At various points the opportunity is taken to defend the design of the library and highlight its progressive aspects, especially in light of the criticism made by Carnegie’s office in the wake the second application for a Carnegie grant in 1910.

#### Architectural Control

In the area of architectural control, Bertram acted as Carnegie’s chief enforcer. Scottish-born like Carnegie, he was appointed as his personal secretary in 1897. Bertram championed delivery of the “utmost effectiv[e] accommodation” in library design, as Van Slyck has highlighted.<sup>46</sup> It is characteristic of his preference for modest buildings that having visited the humble Cambus and Tullibody Institute in his father-in-law’s hometown, Alloa, Scotland, on his honeymoon in 1904, it was reported: “So entirely gratified was he that he has asked me to forward a plan which he hopes Dr Carnegie may be useful as a type for similar structures elsewhere.”<sup>47</sup> Indeed, by then Bertram was regularly reviewing blueprints generally, and especially where there was an indication of a breaching of the planned budget. From 1908 in the United States, the submission of plans became a requirement before construction began and money released, with Bertram engaging in detailed and blunt correspondence over the effectiveness of plans, frequently often offering suggestions or demanding significant changes. After 1911 the expectation was that the principles set out in Bertram’s *Notes* were followed religiously by applicants in the United States.<sup>48</sup> Bertram endeavored to exercise control over what he viewed as wasted space, superfluous ornament, and architectural embellishments in designs. His control regime was formalized in 1911 with the publication for applicants in the United States of his *Notes on Library B[u]ildings*, written with small libraries in mind but applicable in its fundamental messages to larger libraries also. *Notes* began as a leaflet but on five occasions was revised (the last time being in 1919) into something more substantial, with the longer title *Notes on the Erection of Library*

*B[u]ildings.*<sup>49</sup> In the final analysis, it has been argued, efforts to curb excesses were fairly successful, dampening, as they did, enthusiasm for buildings “characterised by an imposing exterior and a space-wasteful interior.”<sup>50</sup> The greatest effect of building control operated by the Carnegie building program, however, was an acceleration of tacit knowledge for library design supported by the development of transatlantic standards and widespread simultaneous deployment of manufactured building components.<sup>51</sup>

The library in Danville predated by four years Bertram’s introduction of more rigorous architectural control. However, this is not to say that the Danville design was by definition essentially substandard compared to what might have been achieved after 1908. It should be remembered that in distilling his thinking on library design into his post-1908 protocol, Bertram had consulted the library profession fairly widely (the architectural profession much less so).<sup>52</sup> For a generation, librarians had been debating the issue of library design and developing progressive ideas about it. In many respects Danville was a product of this progressivism—something that Bertram’s position in relation to the second application tends to obscure.

#### *Location*

Bertram’s *Notes* had nothing to say about the planned location of Carnegie libraries; nor did he comment about this important aspect of library planning in the specific case of Danville. Commonly, Carnegie library buildings were sited in exposed or elevated positions, on street corners or detached from other buildings. This not only made them prominent, it also aimed to secure as much access to natural light and ventilation as possible. In the late twentieth century, of course, this exposure has served as a disadvantage in terms of the increased demand of heating costs and associated carbon-dioxide emissions. In many communities controversy surrounded the choice of location for a Carnegie library, but in Danville it appears that there was a strong consensus regarding the siting of the building, which was located close to the homes of leading local citizens but also on the main tramcar route, as well as proximate to the business district, with its government building, hotels, and large and prestigious opera house. In 1917, in an evaluation of the Carnegie program commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation and undertaken by Cornell University economics professor Alvin Johnson, it was reported that a large proportion of Carnegie libraries had been sited unsatisfactorily, but no such criticism was leveled at the library in Danville.<sup>53</sup> Centrally located, the Danville Public Library became a prominent civic landmark, one that was celebrated

as an investment in public culture and education and reflective of the town's progress. Its civic prominence was underlined by the plans, announced in the 1910 application for a second grant, to build a new post office and courthouse opposite the library

### Style

Bertram had little to say about style, although his *Notes* did warn against communities opting for Classical architecture in attempting to achieve an impressive entrance; as he wrote: "Another caus[e] of waste space in this direction is when parties attem[p]t to get a Greek temple, or modification of it, for \$10,000, and all they get is the entrance and the waste referd [sic] to." As has been noted previously, however, Bertram was not original in emphasizing library economy. His *Notes* were in fact a direct reiteration of the Victorian liberal ambitions of British library campaigner Edward Edwards.<sup>54</sup> Carnegie's program did not indicate any stylistic preference; rather, buildings tended to share a commonality of layout. It was plans of libraries that came to be issued as standards, not their ornamentation or architectural language. The notion, as popular historical belief would have it, is that the buildings were clothed in a homogeneous style: summed up in the sweeping descriptor "Carnegie Classical" or the common saying "seen one Carnegie library, seen 'em all."<sup>55</sup> In fact, styles deployed for libraries at the time (and in architectural practice generally) ranged widely, from the popular Scottish Baronial to Classical Revival and Italian Renaissance, to a scattering of other popular styles, such as Tudor Revival, Mission and Spanish Revival, Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau and Romanesque.<sup>56</sup> Theodore Koch's *Portfolio of Carnegie Libraries* (1917) noted the systematic review of library design that had taken place in New York and the illustrations of subsequent buildings demonstrates the consistency of their plans contrasted by the wide variety of their stylistic demeanors.<sup>57</sup>

However, to be clear, historical styles of architecture dominated, and this was the case with the Danville Public Library, dressed as it was in a free Beaux Arts style. This traditionalism was typical of the premodernist era of architectural design for public spaces. The fact that such a vast number of public buildings were erected during this period also means that for subsequent generations, their apparent cap-doffing reverence for the past has been perceived as synonymous with old world values of inequality and intransigence. However, by failing to acknowledge the emergent ambitions for leanness behind the Carnegie library program there is a risk of losing sight of a critical, if subtle, transitional link.<sup>58</sup>

The design of Danville Public Library reflected both the personal trajectory of its main architect, Normand Patton, in the field of library design and more general developments in the planning of the library building type. Patton's early libraries (with Reynolds Fisher) were akin to Richardson Romanesque, which aped pre-Gothic medieval architecture. His first Carnegie design with Grant Miller (Freeport Public Library, Illinois, 1901) was in the Classical Revival style made popular by the Chicago Colombian Exposition (1893). Danville Public Library fitted this change of stylistic preference.<sup>59</sup>

Examining the style of the Danville Public Library retrospectively, it is all too easy to denigrate the building. Although imposing, the building was, however, of its time stylistically and not out of line with contemporary practice. Arguably, the building was not overblown or ostentatious, judged according to the standards of the day. At the time, librarians were certainly warning against overgenerous investment in the aesthetic aspects of architecture. John Cotton Dana, for example, enthusiastically endorsed the rules for good library design laid down by Charles Soule at the 1891 American Library Association conference in San Francisco, among them the recommendation that "no convenience of arrangement should ever be sacrificed for more architectural effect."<sup>60</sup> However, it is worth noting that he also advised that planners: "Make the exterior attractive, and the entrance inviting."<sup>61</sup>

Irrespective of Carnegie's criticism of architectural excess, there is little evidence that patrons were repulsed by classical colonnades, flights of steps, imposing circulation desks, or grand interiors. These facets of design did not prevent generations of users from visiting their local Carnegie library, which, grand or plain, provided inviting places where literacy and citizenship were tightly intertwined.<sup>62</sup> It is difficult to suggest that the dramatic experience that many libraries offered, where environments tended toward "beauty" rather than "utility," induced a sense of intimidation in patrons. Rather, as Wiegand has argued forcefully, public libraries were cherished by citizens who welcomed them as agencies of community, real and imagined.<sup>63</sup>

### *Delivery Hall*

In his dialogue with the Danville Library Board in 1911 Bertram characteristically reserved special criticism for the size of the delivery hall. It is true that the library's footprint was relatively large, and this was reflected in the space awarded to the delivery hall (and the prominent entrance). However, it could be argued that Danville's planners sensed the ongoing and future expansion of the town's population and economic activity, and that the spaciousness of

the delivery hall was consistent with the heavy traffic that they believed would soon be moving through it with increasing numbers of readers approaching the open stacks at the rear of the building, as well as fanning out to the left to access the adult reading and reference rooms, and to the right to access the children's reading room.

Data on the population of Danville in the early twentieth century supports this idea. The town's population of 11,491 in 1890 increased by a notable 42 percent to reach 16,554 in 1900. However, over the next ten years the increase in population to 27,871, a rise of 70 percent, was spectacular, going some way to justifying the delivery room's proportions. Arguably, even the rise of 42 percent seen in the 1890s would have justified the space allotted.<sup>64</sup>

In 1897, in considering the question of library buildings, Dana warned that monumental library architecture was potentially a handicap on library administration. However, critically, it has to be said in respect of Danville, he was not against generous treatments of delivery halls:

The public side of the delivery counter should be a room of easy access . . . large enough to accommodate comfortably the greatest crowd the library expects ever to attract; and so closed in that the talk and movement which necessarily accompany intercourse between visitors and library staff will not disturb . . . readers in other parts of the library.<sup>65</sup>

At Danville the architects, Patton and Miller, were seemingly not unhappy to deliver a generous delivery room. In 1911, having been approached by Bertram after Danville's application for a second grant, they appeared to lay blame for the monumentality of the room at the door of the Danville Library Board. But in doing this it should be noted that Patton and Miller had by then become firm favorites of Bertram, who by 1908 was recommending them to towns in receipt of Carnegie pledges. Knowing of Bertram's dislike of additional, repeat requests for funding, Patton and Miller had become mindful to keep a tight rein on costs and would probably have been enticed in this context to distance themselves as much as possible from earlier designs that Bertram now retrospectively criticized.<sup>66</sup>

#### *Open Access, Supervision, and the Separate Stack Room*

At the start of the twentieth century Carnegie libraries with the open-access, or open-shelves, system were in a minority, although it was one that was soon to grow rapidly.<sup>67</sup> In its design, Danville was part of that growth. Allowing

patrons to roam among the books represented a growing trust in the public, a desire to foster public culture, and an investment in streamlined operations and rational efficiency. In many respects, open access to the shelves aped the free browsing of the street market and the new department stores.

The widespread implementation of open access necessitated increased supervision of patrons by staff. At Danville the position of the librarians' desk at the center-rear of the delivery hall gave staff a fairly full view of the two reading rooms. Unlike in smaller libraries, barriers such as sight-friendly timber-and-glass partitions or flexibly positioned low-bookcases were not appropriate at Danville; where, in any case, investment was made in the provision of spaces for separate purposes, as many librarians had been recommending for some time (more about this below). Central observation was not, of course, something invented by Carnegie library planners, but they did place a premium on it. At Danville observation was enhanced by the employment of a radial book-stack plan. When an addition was built in 1930, however, stacks on both floors of the new two-floor stack room were set up in parallel. Within the space of just a decade and a half, therefore, it can be seen that attitudes to surveillance had loosened considerably.

The main mechanism for allowing patrons to move among the books freely was the separate stack room, hived off from the reading room. Bertram's *Notes* advised that stack rooms be placed at the rear of buildings and be amenable to future enlargement. Both criteria were satisfied at Danville—this before both the publication of *Notes* and the introduction of tight architectural controls from 1908 onwards. The inclusion of separate storage spaces for books, away from the main reading and consulting space, had been advocated a generation earlier by librarian William Frederick Poole. A leading spokesman in the quest for new library design, Poole argued that utility and convenience (contemporary terms similar to the later term "functional") should take precedence over pretentiousness, architectural effect, and the picturesque. In planning libraries, Poole asserted, it was important to "apply the same common-sense practical judgement and good taste which are used in the construction of houses to live in, stores to do business in, and hotels to accommodate transient visitors in."<sup>68</sup> Poole was particularly critical of libraries designed with lofty rooms—show-rooms, in effect, for pleasurable spectating rather than serious reading—with vast areas of closed access shelving, supplemented by galleries and alcoves, sometimes in multiple tiers.<sup>69</sup> Such rooms, said Poole, were costly to construct, wasteful of space, difficult to heat, harmful to books stored at height (as heat rises), too busy and noisy, difficult to expand, and drafty

(a dangerous accelerant if fire broke out).<sup>70</sup> Poole advocated the storage of books in a room separate from the reading room. Although this room was to be closed access (open access was yet to come), he did anticipate the more open library by suggesting that, apart from areas set aside for the exclusive use of library staff, spaces should not be fully walled but should have half partitions or screens, which would allow a more equal distribution of light.<sup>71</sup>

Danville's second application for funding, which included a substantial enlargement of the stack room, represented a considerable endorsement in the concept of the separate stack. Bertram doubted the validity of the planned enlargement. However, if the size of the library's stock in the future was to increase (from 25,000 in 1910) in line with the continuation, noted above, of the trend in population expansion (70% in the ten years to 1910), then the proposed accommodation to house an extra 100,000 volumes, a figure at which Bertram scoffed, would in fact have been achieved by as early as the late 1930s. In this regard, it could be argued that the actions of the Danville Library Board was in tune with Dana's assertion that "libraries increase more rapidly than is generally supposed."<sup>72</sup>

### *Children's, Community, and Reference Rooms*

Aside from separate stack rooms, Poole also suggested the provision of separate function- and subject-specific rooms.<sup>73</sup> The increased investment in public-sphere culture that open shelves in Carnegie libraries represented was complemented by the allocation, almost everywhere, of spaces for children and for community meetings, variously labeled club rooms, assembly halls, and lecture halls. Regarding community rooms, at Danville relatively spacious non-book community rooms were provided in the basement: a classroom, a study room, and a lecture room with space for accommodating extra storage in stacks. As for the children's section, Danville was in line with the trend in Carnegie library design in providing a generous amount of space for the young, the room being allocated the same space as the adult reading room. Democratic culture was further underlined by the inclusion of a separate newspaper reading room.

The education and information needs of patrons were met by the attachment of a reference room to the general reading room. Given the increasing size of the population in Danville, and the commensurate growth of the intake of the local public school, the 1910 request to make use of new funding partly to build a much larger reference facility would appear reasonable. Further, although separate reference rooms in medium-size and large libraries (they

were not especially relevant to small libraries) were far from ubiquitous, by the early twentieth century their inclusion in designs was on the increase, not least in Carnegie buildings.<sup>74</sup> This trend would appear to fly in the face of Bertram's belief, expressed in his correspondence with the Danville Library Board in 1911, that reference facilities were used by the few.

### Conclusion

When opened and in the decades that followed, the Carnegie public library in Danville, Illinois, was a highly praised civic institution, valued and cherished not only for the services it provided but also for its impressive architectural presence. It eventually served its citizens for over nine decades. Having struggled for many years with problems relating to space, the fabric of the building, and the integration of new services and technology, in 1995 the Carnegie library was closed, its services transferred to a new, purpose-built library nearby.<sup>75</sup> Since 1999 the entire Carnegie library (both basement and main floor) has been occupied by the Vermillion County War Museum, which displays memorabilia and artifacts from the Revolutionary War to the second Iraq War, and has been receiving over 10,000 visitors annually.<sup>76</sup>

A world away from the "show," and often alcoved and galleried, renaissance-hall style of public library of an earlier generation, the Danville design had multiple progressive components: open access in a separate stack room; a generous children's library; lecture, study, and reference rooms; a newspaper room and storage for government documents; and the absence of a segregated reading room for women. Together, the various components of the design amounted to a powerful endorsement of the ethos of the public education and culture, and democracy indeed, that Carnegie himself endorsed.

Although highly influential, Carnegie libraries didn't hold a monopoly on determining the progressivism that marked library design in the early twentieth century. Bertram's *Notes*, as well as the strict controls on plans that preceded them by three years, drew on debates concerning the question of library planning that had been circulating for a generation, especially among librarians. Danville appears to have been a positive product of these debates. Bertram's negative response to the Danville Library Board's bid in 1910 for additional funding did not take account of the functional advances contained in the 1904 building, although it has provided a solid sounding board for mounting a defense of the original design.

As noted above, the majority of Carnegie public libraries in the United States are extant, some converted to other purposes, but many still functioning as libraries. It is true that, despite the support they receive when threatened with closure, Carnegie libraries have sometimes received bad press from the library community, denigrated as self-indulgent, poorly functioning pompous temples of knowledge. For architects rejecting pre-modernist dalliances with a range of architectural styles, the functional and progressive aspects of these buildings have been overlooked. Highlighting the progressive elements of the Danville design suggests the possibility of a wider rehabilitation of the reputation of the Carnegie library building type, including libraries that were designed before the architectural control introduced by Carnegie in 1908. In turn, this rehabilitation can reduce any tendency to underestimate the possibilities for extant Carnegie library buildings. Either upgraded for the continuing delivery of a library service or, as in the case of Danville, adapted for another use entirely, extant Carnegie libraries, if evaluated with broader contextual insights, surely have a future.

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## NOTES

1. G. S. Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969), 3. Also on Carnegie libraries, see K. Breisch, *American Libraries 1730–1950* (New York: Norton, 2017), 241–80; T. Jones, *Carnegie Libraries Across America: A Public Legacy* (New York: Wiley, 1997); O. Prizeman, *Philanthropy and Light: Carnegie Libraries and the Advent of Transatlantic Standards for Public Space* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); and A. Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
2. The negative reactions to his library grants, and applications for them, are covered in Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, 86–114.
3. P. Krass, *Carnegie* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2002), xi; J. Crawford, “The Scottish Library Benefactions of Andrew Carnegie,” *History Scotland* (May–June, 2020): 40. Ten workers died in the confrontation and a further seventy were injured. In addition, for some, Carnegie and his library legacy remain symbolic of a society that predates the struggle for diversity and inclusivity, a society where white, middle-class values operated freely and where libraries were categorically not free to all: C. Knott, *Not Free, Not for All: Libraries in the Age of Jim Crow* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015). For a celebratory treatment of Carnegie, see M. Lorenzen, “Deconstructing the Carnegie Libraries: The Sociological Reasons Behind Carnegie’s Millions to Public Libraries,” *Illinois Libraries* 81, no. 2 (1999): 75–78.
4. An updated census of razed and extant (either in continued or adapted use) Carnegie public libraries is required. Jones, *Carnegie Libraries Across America*, 105, reported that in 1996 the number of Carnegie libraries that had been razed or destroyed by fire represented around 16 percent of the total originally built. This rate of destruction was only a slight increase on the 12 percent recorded in the 1967 survey reported in Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, 172–73. Evidence of the longevity of Carnegie library stock can be gleaned from the fact that in the state that is the location of this article’s case study, Illinois, only 14 of the original 106 Carnegie libraries have been demolished: List of Carnegie Libraries in Illinois, *Wikipedia*, September 10, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Carnegie\\_libraries\\_in\\_Illinois](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Carnegie_libraries_in_Illinois). In 1991 just under 80 percent of existing Carnegie libraries still functioned as such, as reported by R. Bial and L. Bial, *The Carnegie Library in Illinois* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), iii, and there is no reason to believe that this percentage has fallen dramatically.
5. F. Schlipf, “Remodeling and Expanding Carnegie-Era Library Buildings,” *Library Trends* 62, no. 3 (Winter 2014): 556–80.
6. F. Schlipf and J. Moorman, *The Practical Handbook of Library Architecture: Creating Building Spaces that Work* (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2018), 343.
7. Correspondence from Fred Schlipf, May 5, 2019.
8. S. Mattern, *The New Downtown Library: Designing with Communities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 29.
9. R. T. Hille, *The New Public Library: Design Innovation for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 361.

10. Words of Samantha Flores, quoted in J. Maloney, "Rethinking Andrew Carnegie's Library Gift to New York City," *Wall Street Journal*, Eastern Edition, July 8, 2013.
11. J. Elmborg and C. Pawley, "Historical Research as Critical Practice and Relationship: The 'Carnegie Libraries in Iowa Project,'" *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 44, nos. 3–4 (Summer and Fall 2003): 237.
12. W. C. Allen, "Library Buildings," *Library Trends* 25, no. 1 (July 1976): 96.
13. B. Edwards, "Sustainability as a Driving Force in Contemporary Library Design," *Library Trends* 60, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 190–214. In this context, note the struggle recently in New York City, as discussed in Maloney, "Rethinking Andrew Carnegie's Library Gift to New York City."
14. Van Slyck, *Free to All*, xix. Similar nostalgic memories are reported in Elmborg and Pawley, "Historical Research as Critical Practice and Relationship," 235.
15. Mattern, *The New Downtown Library*, viii and *passim*.
16. M. Amara, "2014: A Retrospective on Libraries," *Demco Interiors* (January 10, 2015), <https://www.demcointeriors.com/blog/2014-a-retrospective-on-libraries/>; D. Barclay and E. Scott, *The Library Renovation, Maintenance, and Construction Handbook* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2011); Schlipf and Moorman, *Practical Handbook of Library Architecture*, 39I–4II.
17. L. Walser, "Public Libraries Across the Country are Ready for Their Next Chapter," *Preservation Magazine* (Winter 2018), <https://savingplaces.org/stories/public-libraries-across-the-country-are-ready-for-their-next-chapter#.XGWgPP5vKUk>
18. Schlipf and Moorman, *Practical Handbook of Library Architecture*, 343.
19. O. Prizeman, et al., "How Can Century-old Architectural Hierarchies for the Design of Public Libraries Be Re-interpreted and Re-used?," *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management* 8, no. 4 (November 19, 2018): 481–94. Ongoing documentation, or cataloguing, is also important given that the survival of Carnegie libraries is naturally not guaranteed and most, if not all, will be altered in some way: B. Grimes, *Irish Carnegie Libraries: A Catalogue and Architectural History* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1998), 4.
20. "Public Library of the City of Danville," *Danville Daily Democrat*, October 28, 1903, Danville Public Library Archives (hereafter DPLA).
21. L. Jones, *History of Vermillion County* (Chicago: Pioneer Publishing Company, 1911), 298–99.
22. "Public Library of the City of Danville" gives a history of the library up to the commencement of construction of the new building in 1903, as does *Report of the Board of Directors of the Danville Public Library* (1909–10), 13–14, DPLA, and Jones, *History of Vermillion County*, 338–39.
23. *Catalog of the Danville Library and Free Reading Room* (c. 1900), DPLA.
24. "Public Library of the City of Danville."
25. D. G. Moore to A. Carnegie, February 25, 1901, Carnegie Corporation of New York Archives, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York (hereafter CCNYA).
26. "Public Library of the City of Danville."

27. *Report of the Board of Directors of the Danville Public Library* (1909–10), 14.
28. P. Kruty, “Patton and Miller: Designers of Carnegie Libraries,” *The Palimpsest* [Iowa] 64, no. 4 (July/August 1983): 110.
29. D. G. Moore to A. Carnegie, September 11, 1902, CCNYA.
30. “Danville’s New Public Library Building Thrown Open to Public,” news clipping, unidentified source, November 8, 1904, DPLA.
31. “Public Library of the City of Danville.”
32. A detailed description of the interior plan is given in *Report of the Board of Directors of the Danville Public Library* (1909–10), 6, 9.
33. “Story Hour at Public Library [on] Saturday Attracts Throngs of Children to Hear Delightful Program,” news clipping, source unidentified, 1924, DPLA.
34. *Report of the Board of Directors of the Danville Public Library* (1909–10), 14.
35. By 1910 fiction accounted for nearly half of the library’s total collection (adult and children’s book combined) of 22,000 volumes; and 88 percent of the total number of volumes (81,000 volumes) borrowed. Reflecting heavy demand, the library was open for twelve hours each day, from 9 am to 9 pm. In February 1906 Sunday opening (from 2 pm to 5 pm) was instituted for the months of October to June: *Report of the Board of Directors of the Danville Public Library* (1909–10), 6, 9.
36. “Pay Tribute to Donor as New Addition to Library Is Opened for Public Use,” *Danville Commercial News*, May 9, 1930, DPLA; Special Building Committee to the Library Board, January 16, 1930, DPLA.
37. *Report of the Board of Directors of the Danville Public Library* (1909–10), 14.
38. Danville Public Library Board to A. Carnegie, April 25, 1910, CCNYA.
39. J. Bertram to D. G. Moore, March 24, 1911, CCNYA. Note Bertram’s use of simplified spelling, which was also employed and propagated by the leading public library protagonist of the age, Melvil Dewey.
40. J. Bertram to Patton and Miller, February 25, 1911, and Patton and Miller to J. Bertram, February 27, 1911, CCNYA.
41. D. G. Moore to J. Bertram, March 3, 1911, CCNYA.
42. J. Bertram to D. G. Moore, March 9, 1911, CCNYA.
43. D. G. Moore to J. Bertram, March 16, 1911, CCNYA.
44. Bertram’s eventual loss of patience might be explained by the fact that technically the 1910 request for money was not the second but the third request for library funding from the greater Danville area. In early 1905 the Danville branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers applied to Carnegie for a grant to build a stand-alone library for its residents, to replace the existing library facility of 1,600 books in a small room above the dining hall. Carnegie initially denied the request, arguing that soldiers should avail themselves of the new public library in Danville. However, when it was pointed out to him by the home’s director that the institution was outside the city boundaries and so residents would incur charges to use Danville’s library, that most residents would find it difficult to afford the streetcar fare, and that traveling, especially in winter, would be impossible for many residents, who were very elderly, Carnegie reversed his decision and pledged \$25,000 for a library. See J. Bertram to T. J. Henderson, January 31, 1905, T.J. Henderson to J. Bertram, February 8, 1905, and J. Bertram to T.J. Henderson, March 16, 1905, CCNYA.

45. J. Bertram to D. G. Moore, March 18, 1911, CCNYA.
46. A. Van Slyck, "The Utmost Amount of Effectiv[e] Accommodation": Andrew Carnegie and the Reform of the American Library," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 50, no. 4 (December 1991): 378–79.
47. *Alloa Advertiser*, November 26, 1904.
48. Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, 47; Jones, *Carnegie Libraries Across America*, 33, 35; Van Slyck, *Free to All*, 34.
49. Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, 58. The third version of *Notes*, published in 1915, is reproduced in Van Slyck, *Free to All*, 221–23. The version used in this study is the first, carrying the shorter title *Notes on Library Buildings*, deposited in the Park Ridge Public Library Archives. It is hereafter referred to simply as *Notes*.
50. Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, 148.
51. Prizeman, *Philanthropy and Light*.
52. Although Bertram consulted some architects, he was much less confident about what he could learn from them, being of the opinion that the architectural profession had too often been a bad influence on library boards ill equipped to resist designs that lent more toward the artistic (and the costly) rather than the practical: Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, 31; Van Slyck, *Free to All*, 34–37.
53. A. V. Johnson, *A Report to the Carnegie Corporation of New York on the Policy Donations to Free Public Libraries* (New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1919), 37. In some ways Johnson's report can be taken as a negative commentary on the Carnegie program. He found that although Carnegie libraries had expanded opportunities for reading and study, in the words of Bobinski (*Carnegie Libraries*, 154), "the fruitfulness of building donations was subject to wide variations." Implying that the efficiency of library personnel did not always do justice to the buildings Carnegie gifted, Johnson advocated that future funding from Carnegie should aim at developing library staff and professionalism.
54. Prizeman, *Philanthropy and Light*, 44; E. Edwards, *Memoirs of Libraries: A Handbook of Library Economy* (London: Trübner, 1859).
55. Barclay and Scott, *The Library Renovation, Maintenance, and Construction Handbook*, 113.
56. Jones, *Carnegie Libraries Across America*, 61–71.
57. T. Koch, *A Book of Carnegie Libraries* (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1917).
58. O. Prizeman, "Function and Decoration, Tradition and Invention: Carnegie Libraries and Their Architectural Messages," *Library and Information History* 29, no. 4 (2013): 239–57.
59. Kruty, "Patton and Miller," 112.
60. J. C. Dana, *A Library Primer*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The Library Bureau, 1900), 25, citing C. Soule, "Points of Agreement Among Librarians as to Library Architecture," *Library Journal* 16 (December 1991): 17.
61. Dana, *A Library Primer*, 25.
62. Elmborg and Pawley, "Historical Research as Critical Practice and Relationship," 236, 244.
63. W. A. Wiegand, *Main Street Public Library: Community Places and Reading Spaces in the Rural Heartland, 1876–1956* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011). On imagined community, Wiegand invokes Benedict Anderson's definition of the concept: B. R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

64. Those who sought to expand the library in 1910 could not have foreseen that over the next three consecutive decades the rate of increase in population (21%, 8%, 0.4%) was to nosedive.
65. J. C. Dana, "The Public and Its Library." *Appleton's Popular Science Monthly* 51 (June 1897): 248–49.
66. On Bertram's relationship with Patton and Miller, see Van Slyck, *Free to All*, 61.
67. Van Slyck, *Free to All*, 32, 34.
68. W. Poole, *Remarks on Library Construction* (Chicago: Jansen McClurg and Co., 1884), 4.
69. The Library of the Peabody Institute, Baltimore (1878) was typical of the neo-Renaissance, great-hall reading room. Other classic examples of the redundant book-hall public library were the Bates Hall of the Boston Public Library (1859), where the collection was housed in three tiers of closed access alcoves; and in Concord, Massachusetts (1873), where readers were separated from the collection even though it was in plain sight, spread up and along the walls of a monumental book room: see K. A. Breisch, *Henry Hobson Richardson and the Small Public Library in America: A Study in Typology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 72–79, 80–81.
70. W. Poole, "The Construction of Library Buildings," *Library Journal* 6, no. 4 (April 1881): 74.
71. W. Poole, "Small Library Buildings," *Library Journal* 10, nos. 9–10 (1885): 250–56.
72. Dana, *A Library Primer*, 25.
73. Poole, "Small Library Buildings," 254.
74. Van Slyck, *Free to All*, 34.
75. Danville Public Library Board, *A Report on the Physical Facilities of the Danville Public Library Prepared for the Long-Range Planning Committee* (August 1984); *Danville Public Library: Mission and History* (2019), <https://danvillepubliclibrary.org/mission-history/>.
76. Vermillion County War Museum (2019), <http://www.vcwm.org/index.html>.