



380 WILLIAM AVENUE

**WINNIPEG PUBLIC LIBRARY
(FORMER CARNEGIE LIBRARY)**

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

30 April 1984

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Erected in 1903, this was the first public library building constructed for that purpose in Winnipeg. Winnipeg libraries date back to the days of the Red River settlement when retiring fur trader Peter Fidler donated his books and private citizens maintained their own collections. The Red River Library was subsequently organized in 1848, supported by subscription and continuing in operation until 1871.¹ The newly-organized Manitoba Historical Society then took up the cause when its 10,000 volumes became the public library early in the 1900s. This library was also dependent on subscriptions but donations from the Civic and Provincial government were supplemented by gifts from the American government and the Smithsonian Institution.²

In 1888, the library collection moved into City Hall. By 1891, there were 7,161 books in circulation besides a growing reference section. The library was now managed by a joint committee of the Historical Society and the City Council, but as such was vulnerable to civic cutbacks.³ Growing rapidly with the City in the next few years, the public library in City Hall opened a juvenile section in 1899 and had to cope with a great jump in circulation. To the chagrin of the learned librarian, fiction was still in the greatest demand.

This rather haphazard situation may have continued a good many years longer had not the librarian, Mr. J.P. Robertson, written to ask for assistance from the wealthy philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, who responded with the offer which led to the construction of the William Avenue Library.⁴

Carnegie was an American, born to a humble weaver's family in Dunfermline, Scotland in 1835. As a youth, he was sent out to work in a factory and later on the railroad. In one of America's favourite rags-to-riches stories, Andrew Carnegie built up his steel company in Pittsburgh into a mighty entrepreneurial domain. As a young millionaire, he was soon in a position to repay citizens in both his homeland and his adopted country through the endowment of numerous

libraries, institutes, colleges and research funds that eventually totalled \$333 million.⁵ He was committed to the growth of knowledge for a better world, funding technological institutes, specialized teaching funds and several peace funds. Two thousand five hundred libraries throughout the English-speaking world were funded by Carnegie who stated in his autobiography: “I decided there was no use to which money could be applied so productive of good — as the founding of a public library,”⁶ In Canada, Carnegie money built 125 libraries at a cost of \$2.5 million,⁷ three of which are in Winnipeg.

From Carnegie’s secretary came the offer in October 1901:

If Winnipeg will pledge itself to maintain a free public library at a cost of no less than \$7,500 yearly and provide a suitable site, Mr. Carnegie will be glad to give \$75,000 for the erection of a library building.⁸

Preoccupied with servicing the more immediate needs of the spreading city, City Council took several months before giving full approval to the offer. By March 1902, Council minutes record a resolution that the City accept the donation and “heartily pledge itself to comply with the requirements of said Andrew Carnegie”.⁹ A site was purchased consisting of 10 lots on the corner of William Avenue and Ellen Street for \$12,200 in what was a vibrant residential neighbourhood with good proximity to downtown.

A competition was held among Winnipeg architects for plans of the new library, with the only stipulations being the cost ceiling of \$71,000 for construction and furnishing of the building (plus the 5% commission) and that the library be faced in native stone. The prizes of \$300, \$200, and \$100, were to be deductible from the winning architect’s commission. Eight plans were submitted and three were chosen as finalists by the Council’s Library Committee. Architect H.S. Griffiths won the competition but when the tenders were called for, not a single contractor responded. The second prize winner’s plans, Samuel Hooper, were put up for tender but again there were no bids. To the great consternation of the Library committee, it was explained at a meeting with local contractors that they were unable to build either plan for the amount stated.¹⁰ When the third prize winner, James Chisholm, was asked to tender, the contracting firm of Smith and Sharpe thought they could build to his specifications for \$71,063. The Library Committee

then declined the bid. The process having been delayed several months, the councillors no doubt were becoming nervous about Carnegie's offer expiring. The Library Committee then asked Griffiths and Hooper to modify their plans to fit the budget, while contractors Smith and Sharpe finally considered that they could erect Hooper's revised specifications for the budgeted amount. Chisholm, in the meantime, threatened to sue the City for his time wasted while the first prize winner was left with nothing.¹¹ It was a lengthy and frustrating process for all concerned.

With a late start in the 1903 building season, most of the library construction took place in 1904 with the formal opening in 1905, four years after the Carnegie offer was initiated.¹² Following this period, Samuel Hooper was appointed Manitoba's first Provincial Architect, in a position in which he oversaw the creation of many fine government buildings until his death in 1911. The Carnegie Library may be Hooper's last design in private practice.¹³

Hooper chose a restrained and classical style for the Library which combines elements of the Greek and Roman Orders. The structure was originally a squared block, 85 feet by 90 feet,¹⁴ and two storeys tall. The walls are plain, with window shape and detailing providing interest. The visual focus of the building is the pedimented porticos with a heavy arched entranceway below and twin sets of Ionic columns supporting a carved pediment surmounted by a balustrade above. Within the pediment is the Manitoba crest, and immediately over the door archway with stone cartouches on either side reading "History & Literature" and "Arts and Science."

The smooth grey limestone finish of the new library was of particular importance to the city councillors and the citizens in general, both for its beauty and for its symbolism. The solid and permanent appearance of the stone "has driven fear out of the recesses of our souls that Winnipeg was after all an evanescent boom town."¹⁵ That the stone was a veneer, and the building beneath brick like most others, was of little concern to the happy spectators.

Inside, a staircase of marble led up to the main hall containing the counter and catalogues. The left was a large mens' reading room, loaded with newspapers from Great Britain, Canada and the United States. The space on the right was divided between the ladies' reading room and the

general reading room. To the rear was the reference department, stacks and office space. The second floor contained a large stack room, the children's department and a lecture hall for the regular Saturday afternoon lecture series. To the right of the main staircase were stairs that led to the basement newspaper room. All the tables, chairs, shelves and racks were made of Flemish oak, designed to match the woodwork of the interior.¹⁶ The rooms were spacious, well-lit and possessed an airy atmosphere that must have been a welcome change from the dark, cramped quarters.

The building was built and furnished for \$75,000, the sum of the Carnegie grant, with another \$25,000 spent on acquiring and landscaping the ground. The wrought iron fence around the grounds at present is original.

The Governor-General of Canada, Earl Grey, and his daughter, formally opened the new library in a grand ceremony on the 12 October 1905. This was the forty-ninth library built with Carnegie money in Canada at that time.¹⁷

Winnipeggers were quick to put the new library to good use. Within five years of its opening, Winnipeg's Carnegie Library became the second largest library in Canada in volume of books loaned. That year alone, 341,000 books were checked out with countless other reference books, periodicals and newspapers consulted on the premises.¹⁸ The demand was so great that three years after its completion, the library required additional space. The architectural firm of Hooper and Walker (minus Samuel Hooper) was again asked to draw up plans for a two-storey addition, built by contractor J.H. Tremblay at a cost of \$28,000.¹⁹ Finished in 1908, this 44 feet by 85 feet addition to the rear of the building brought the library to its present appearance and was designed with complete sympathy to the older section of the building. Carnegie also financed this expansion.

The pre-war years were a remarkably dynamic period in the library's history. Eventually, the city's physical size grew so large that two new libraries had to be built. Both the Cornish Library on West Gate, and the St. John's Library on Salter Street, were built in 1915 with twin grants of

\$35,000 from Andrew Carnegie. As well, “station” repositories were established in several drug stores, grocery stores and schools throughout the rest of the growing city. These stations were an interim solution to the voracious demands of the reading public. There were 28,000 volumes in the city’s library system. Book losses were heavy in the branch stations, which have gradually been replaced by branch libraries since the last station was closed in 1929.

In 1911, head librarian J.H. McCarthy milled over the demands for books in Jewish and Ruthenian (generally Ukrainian and Polish) literature. Naturally this demand reflected the large influx of people to the west from central Europe who wanted reading material in their native languages. McCarthy’s response reflected the attitude of the Anglo Saxon host culture. “Socialism and anarchy were rampant in these old countries and any books coming from them should be regulated closely and perhaps censored.”²⁰ Nevertheless, books in various languages were eventually supplied to the public libraries.

The Carnegie Library on William Avenue remained the main library until the Centennial Library on Donald Street and St. Mary Avenue was opened in March 1977. The opening of this new library resulted in the closing of both the William Avenue library and a branch at the corner of Portage Avenue and Kennedy Street. After a considerable wrangle on City Council, the Carnegie Library was reopened in June 1978 as the William Avenue Branch Library. It had \$55,000 worth of alterations done to it, the idea being that it continued to meet the special needs of the local community.²¹

Concrete piles were sunk under the library in 1948. Between 1959 and 1963, a mezzanine floor was added and the building was redecorated and rewired. Much of the original interior finishing remains while the exterior is in a remarkable state of preservation.

From 1903 to 1977, the Carnegie Library was the flagship of the Winnipeg public library system. The impact of such an institution cannot be measured in a community, but as a society as a whole, we must agree with philanthropist Andrew Carnegie that libraries play an important and positive role in the stimulation and distribution of the ideas to a great number of people. The

distinguished architecture of the library, in partnership with Hooper's Normal School down the block, is definitive to the street and the district.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Leslie D. Castling, "The Red River Library: A 1983 Search for Acknowledgement and Retirement" unpublished, pp. 1, 8, and 15.
- 2 Gerald A. Friesen, "The Manitoba Historical Society: A Centennial History" in Manitoba History, Autumn 1982, p. 3.
- 3 "History and Science," Manitoba Free Press, 11 February 1911.
- 4 "Developments at the Library," Winnipeg Tribune, 3 December 1900.
- 5 Robert M. Lester, Forty Years of Carnegie Giving, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1941, pp. 5-6.
- 6 Andrew Carnegie, Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston & New York 1941, pp. 5-6.
- 7 Lester, op. cit., p. 93.
- 8 "A Short History of the Winnipeg Public Library" vertical file, main branch of Winnipeg Public Library.
- 9 Motion 1098, 24 March 1902, Minutes of Winnipeg City Council.
- 10 "The Carnegie Library Plans," MFP, 21 November 1903, p. 3; "No Tenders for Carnegie Library," MFP, March 1903, p. 4.
- 11 "Tenders," MFP, 30 April 1903 and "Library May be Built After All," MFP, 11 July 1903, p. 6.
- 12 The cornerstone reads 1903.
- 13 Thomas Hooper, also of British origin, designed the Carnegie Library in Vancouver during this same period. Samuel Hooper studied architecture with his uncle's firm in England, so it is quite possible that the two architects are related. Anthony A. Barrett and Rhodri Windsor Liscombe Francis Rattenbury and British Columbia: Architecture and Challenge in the Imperial Age, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver 1983, pp. 2 & 148.
- 14 City of Winnipeg Building Permit No. 668, 20 July 1903.
- 15 "The Civic Improvements of 1904," Manitoba Free Press, 24 November 1904, p. 26.
- 16 "The Winnipeg Library," The Western Municipal News, February 1904, p. 33.

¹⁷ Loc. cit.

¹⁸ “Carnegie Demand on Public Library,” Winnipeg Telegram, 12 January 1911.

¹⁹ Permits, op. cit., No. 925, 7 August 1908.

²⁰ “Unusual Demand,” op. cit.

²¹ “Carnegie Library re-opening urged.” Winnipeg Free Press, 5 May 1978, p. 10.

APPENDIX I

Samuel Hooper (1851-1911)

Samuel Hooper was born in Devonshire, England in 1851, and studied architecture there under the tutelage of his uncle, a crown surveyor. He immigrated to Canada in 1869m settling first in Ontario where he worked as a stone carver. In 1881, Hooper moved to Winnipeg, entering into partnership with a monument maker. In 1883, the partner retired, leaving Hooper to build up Hooper's Marble Works. Besides many fine tombstones, his company produced the Volunteer Monument in the Centennial Complex, the Norquay Memorial in St. John's Cemetery and the Seven Oaks Monument.

With the marble business firmly established by 1895, Samuel Hooper returned to the practice of architecture. In the employ of the Winnipeg Catholic Archdiocese, Hooper designed many church buildings including St. Mary's Academy and the addition to St. Mary's Church and School. The Carnegie Library on William Avenue, the Isbister School, the Land Titles Building on Broadway are all his designs. In June 1907, Hooper was appointed Manitoba's first Provincial Architect, which he held until his death in 1911. In this government position, he designed the Agricultural College in Tuxedo and Fort Garry, the Winnipeg Normal School, court houses in Morden and Brandon, the asylum in Brandon and the Portage jailhouse.

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Plate 1 – Carnegie Library, 380 William Avenue shortly after its completion, ca.1905. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)



Plate 2 - Another shot from this period, ca.1905. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N7200.)

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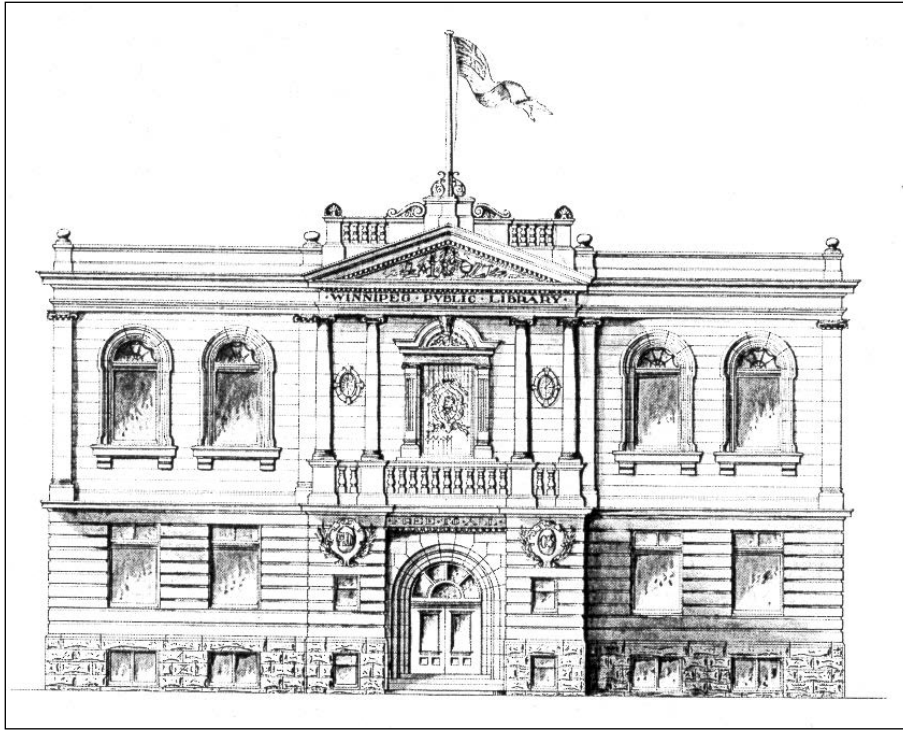


Plate 3 – Architect S. Hooper’s drawing of the William Avenue façade of the Carnegie Library. (Courtesy of City Archives – located in the former Carnegie Library.)



Plate 4 – Carnegie Library shortly after its addition, ca.1910. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N1044.)

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Plate 5 – A view of the second floor interior, 1912. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N233.)

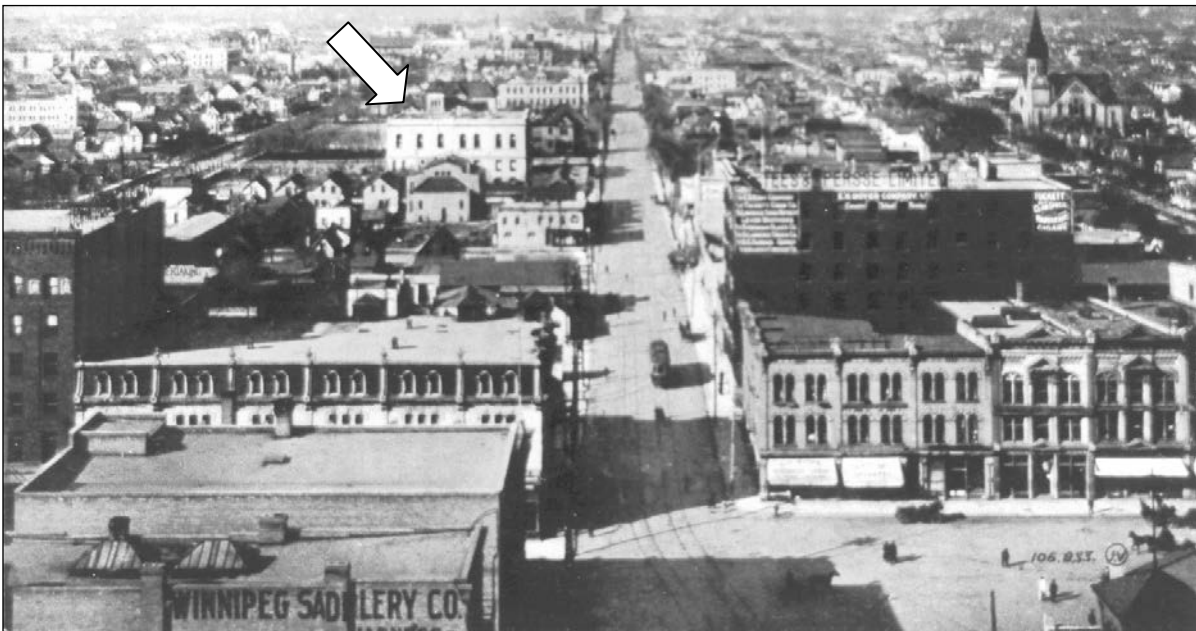


Plate 6 – Looking west down William Avenue, ca.1912, Carnegie Library at arrow. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

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Plate 7 – Front entrance, 1969. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey.)