



Opened in 1904, Brantford's library is considered one of the finest early Carnegie libraries in Ontario. Built in the Beaux-Arts style, the drama of the imposing entrance continues into the elaborate interior rotunda complete with a beautiful stained glass dome (photo on page 14).

La bibliothèque de Brantford, inaugurée en 1904, est considérée comme un des plus beaux exemples précoces de bibliothèques Carnegie en Ontario. Le bâtiment de style Beaux-Arts présente une entrée imposante menant à une rotonde intérieure élaborée surmontée d'un magnifique dôme en vitraux (photo en p. 14).

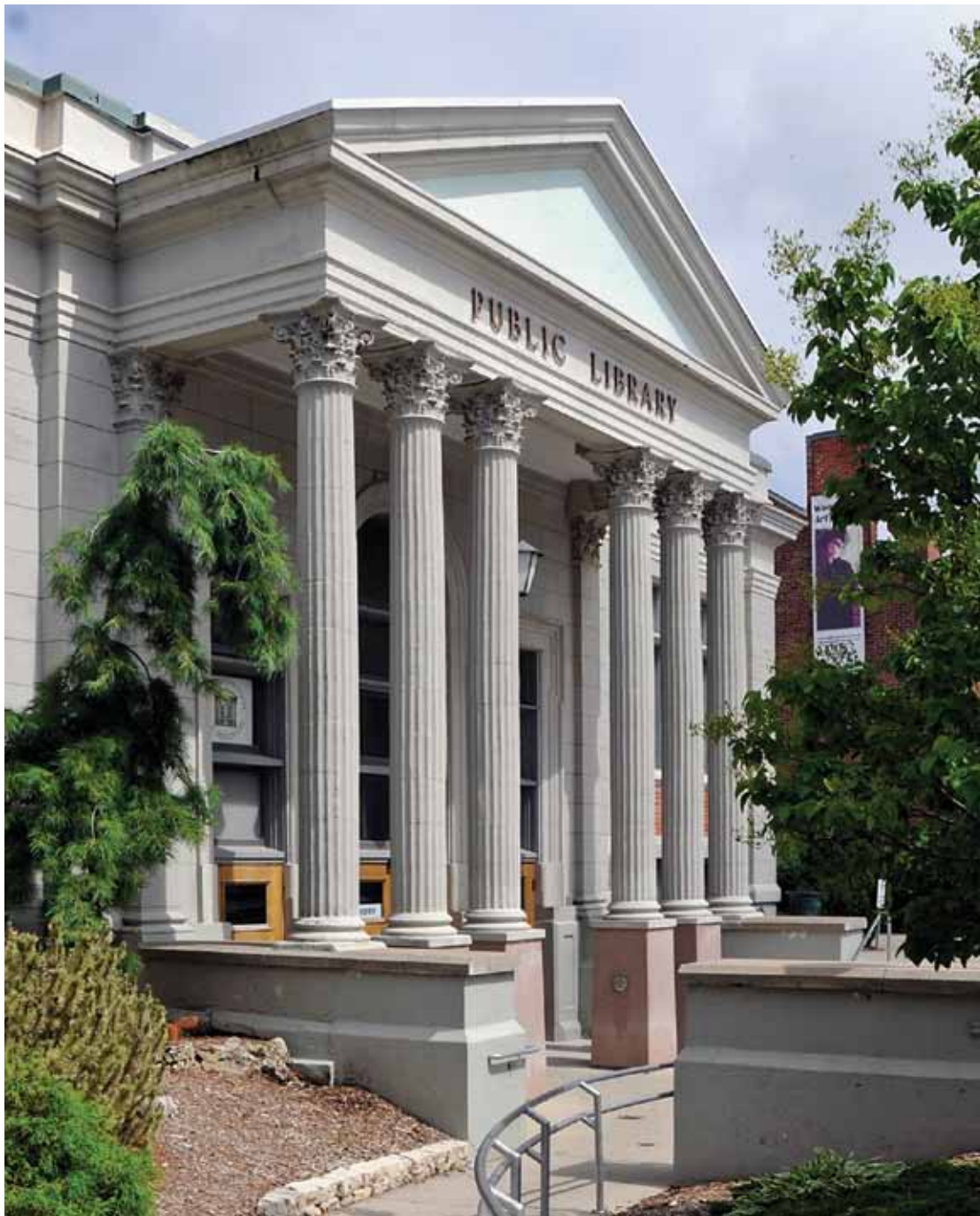


CARNEGIE'S LASTING GIFT

Andrew Carnegie gave Canada the gift of free access to libraries.

A Scottish-born American industrialist and philanthropist, he not only funded their construction, he provided communities from British Columbia to New Brunswick, and as far north as the Yukon, with outstanding examples of classically inspired architecture.

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS
BY ROBERT HULLEY



The Woodstock Carnegie Library has operated as a public library continuously since it opened in 1909. Like its counterpart in Brantford, it features an elaborate columned rotunda and was designated under the Ontario Heritage Act in the 1970s.

La bibliothèque Carnegie de Woodstock a été constamment exploitée comme bibliothèque publique depuis son ouverture en 1909. Tout comme la bibliothèque de Brantford, elle comporte une rotonde élaborée à colonnes et elle est désignée en vertu de la Loi sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario depuis les années 1970.

CARNEGIE'S CRUSADE

In his biography *Andrew Carnegie*, David Nasaw recounts how, as a boy growing up in Pennsylvania in the mid-1800s with very little money, he found the practice of charging a fee to borrow books particularly punitive for those with limited means. At the time, library fees were

more or less universal.

Along with other young apprentices and working boys, Carnegie was invited to visit the private library of Colonel James Anderson, a wealthy Allegheny city manufacturer, where they could borrow a book a week. An avid reader, such generosity left a lasting impression on the young Carnegie.

He never forgot it.

Carnegie was not alone in opposing fee-based libraries. Several Canadians had been advocating for free public library services, but with limited success; people like Toronto alderman John Hallman and Egerton Ryerson, Chief Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada. According to Florence Partridge's *The Slopes of the Speed [River]*, the first free public library in Ontario was opened in the city of Guelph in 1883. It was located in leased premises which were replaced by a permanent Carnegie-funded building in 1905.

When he sold his interest in his steel business to the newly formed U.S. Steel Corporation in 1901, Carnegie became

Carnegie put into practice a firmly held belief that “the millionaire’s wealth is not his own to spend, but to wisely give away.”

one of the richest men in the world. His new-found wealth gave him the means to pursue his dream and to put into practice a firmly held belief that “the millionaire’s wealth is not his own to spend, but to wisely give away.”

Carnegie remained true to his word. Although he had made limited donations to libraries close to home, his fortune enabled him to expand his library giving in earnest. At the time, state and local governments were beginning to invest in school and hospital construction and were reluctant to do the same for libraries. To stimulate interest, Carnegie devised what became known as the “Carnegie Formula.” It went like this: Carnegie offered a city the thousands of dollars

required to build a library. In exchange, the municipality had to obtain a site and agree to raise taxes to pay for books as well as the maintenance and staffing of the library.

In so doing, Carnegie obtained an agreement from the elected officials to provide free public library service to their communities on an ongoing basis.

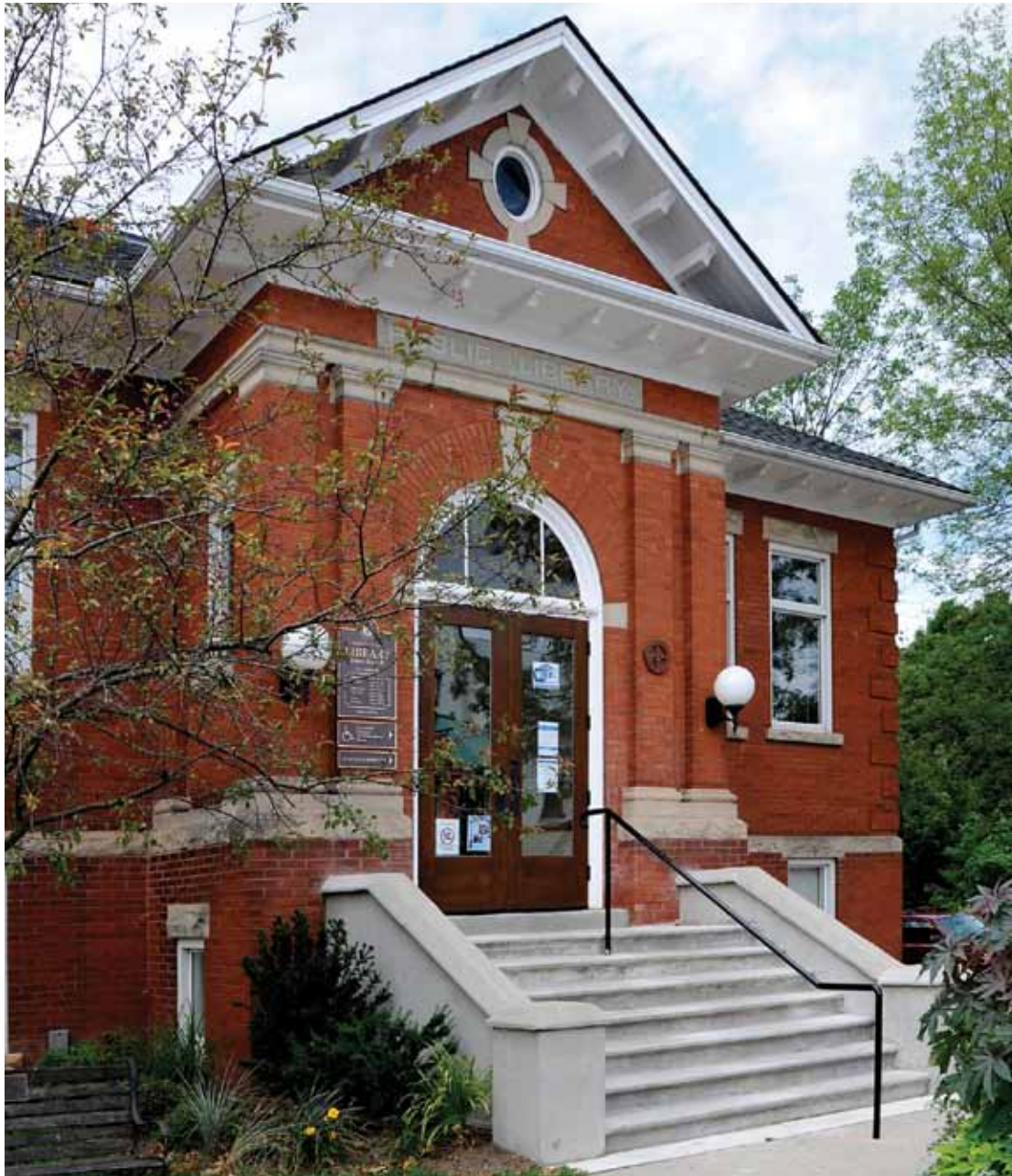
Once Carnegie’s letter of promise was given, plans would be prepared by a local architect or through a competition. These would often be sent to well-known and respected library authorities for their opinion and comments. Even the smallest community could be fortunate enough to receive input from noted library design authorities, under the guise of suggested improvements.

Because his generous offer came at an appropriate economic time, requests for funding poured in. On this basis, Carnegie funded the construction of some 2,500 libraries throughout the English-speaking world, of which 125 were located in Canada, with the greatest number, 111, being in Ontario. His largesse helped create many spectacular library buildings around the globe, which would cost billions of dollars if constructed today.

RECOGNIZING “A CARNEGIE”

In the early 1900s Carnegie libraries were often the most imposing structures in small-town Ontario. In larger centres they were integrated into downtown streetscapes. Wherever they were located, they remained instantly recognizable, even in the midst of classically styled city halls, post offices and federal government and university buildings.

It is not that the libraries were all similar in design; they were an eclectic assortment of architectural styles, including Beaux-Arts, Italian Renaissance, Baroque and Classical Revival. Nor did they carry Carnegie’s name. Most southern Ontario libraries were identified simply as “Public Library,” although there were exceptions.



One of five Carnegie libraries in Wellington County, Elora's Neo-Georgian-style branch (1909) represents the more restrained design favoured by Andrew Carnegie's private secretary, James Bertram, who became increasingly influential in approving library grants and designs. The imposing columns were reduced to simpler, yet nonetheless elegant pilasters. The Elora branch continues to operate as a library, and its heritage importance was recognized with its formal designation under the *Ontario Heritage Act* in 1988.

La succursale néo-georgienne d'Elora (1909) est une des cinq bibliothèques Carnegie du comté de Wellington. Elle relève du style plus discret favorisé par le secrétaire privé d'Andrew Carnegie, James Bertram, qui a joué un rôle croissant dans l'approbation des subventions et du style des bibliothèques. Les colonnes imposantes sont devenues des pilastres plus simples quoique toujours élégants. La succursale d'Elora est encore une bibliothèque aujourd'hui; son importance patrimoniale a été reconnue par sa désignation officielle en vertu de la Loi sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario en 1988.

PORTALS INTO LEARNING

What all the early Carnegie libraries did have in common was their formality and their impressive—at times monumental—entranceways. Designed to evoke a sense of presence, the Carnegie library entranceway was both inviting and formidable. To walk through its threshold was to step into a world of learning.

Brantford's library is considered to be one of the finest examples of early Carnegie libraries in Ontario. Designed in the Beaux-Arts style by Stewart, Stewart and Taylor, the grandeur of the entrance with its wide steps, Ionic pillars and bracketing continues into the interior rotunda, which features a large stained glass dome.

The building now forms part of Wilfrid Laurier University.

Carnegie also intended his libraries to be symbols of culture and enlightenment. Many popular Carnegie library designs emphasized a stately pedimented portico supported by columns with Doric or Ionic capitals, giving the libraries a dignified appearance.

Carnegie also intended his libraries to be symbols of culture and enlightenment.

The elaborate portico receded into a more decorative pilastered entrance, as exemplified by the former Toronto Public Reference Library, now part of the University of Toronto.

As Carnegie's confidant and private secretary, James Bertram, became more

involved in approving library grants, more utilitarian designs emerged. In her book *The Best Gift*, Margaret Beckman quotes him as saying, "Greek temples or a modification of it" were a waste.

Today, 82 Carnegie Library buildings remain in Ontario. Many have been designated under the *Ontario Heritage Act* for their cultural heritage significance. Some have been enlarged and remodelled. But most continue to serve as portals of learning, if not as libraries, then as community centres, university buildings, art galleries and scientific research facilities. Their doors are far from being closed and welcome the community, in some cases even after more than 100 years of continuous service.

ROBERT HULLEY is an advocate for heritage conservation in southwestern Ontario and a frequent contributor to a variety of heritage and community magazines and periodicals.

THE HESPELER CARNEGIE LIBRARY – NEW MEETS OLD IN CAMBRIDGE, ONTARIO

The rehabilitation of the Hespeler Carnegie Library was part of an urban revitalization initiative in the town of Hespeler in the district of Cambridge. Architect Alar Kongats came up with a solution that would keep the library in the downtown area and provide a unique environment for

expanded services. He accomplished this by encasing the historic Carnegie library in a cube of frittered glass. The environmentally responsible building includes recycled white oak floors and a ceramic treatment on the glass to reduce sunlight intensity.

