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## Establishing an Institution: The Public Library Movement in Iowa 1900 - 1920

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# Establishing an Institution: The Public Library Movement in Iowa 1900 - 1920

Abigail Weaver

As the world becomes increasingly digitally-oriented it is important for public libraries to reexamine their history as they formulate strategies to secure their place as an irreplaceable community institution. The situation today is similar to the beginnings of the public library movement when libraries had to create their place in society and market the idea of what we now call the public library so that citizens and towns would support that effort. Establishing support for early libraries depended on funding for such an endeavor. Carnegie library grants increased the number of libraries by providing the capital needed to pay for the library buildings. It was difficult for communities to save the amount of money needed to construct a separate building for a library, and the Carnegie library grants were a solution to that problem. However, the communities faced a battery of challenges during the application process including defending their population size and need for a library, controversies surrounding the proposed locations of the new buildings, passing maintenance legislation, and constructing a suitable building within the grant amount awarded. Successful communities banded together and proved that their citizens were involved in the library movement as well as using the support of political figures to strengthen their applications. It is only through the requirements of the Carnegie library grants, and the community-driven nature of the grants, that permanent free public libraries were established throughout Iowa, cementing the place of the free public library as a community institution.

Citizens throughout Iowa served as advocates for their communities to prove that the population of their community and their location deserved a

free public library with a new building. Political figures were enlisted to help convince Andrew Carnegie of the suitability of Iowa towns. Within the community, resolutions had to be passed to fill the tax requirements of the grant, as well as to accept the grant amount. Women and women's clubs were crucial to the public library movement in Iowa. Women often founded and staffed early libraries within communities, and reached out to Andrew Carnegie to request money for their communities. The Carnegie library grant period also coincided with two Iowa organizations who worked throughout the state to increase the numbers of free public libraries, the Iowa Library Association and the Iowa Library Commission. These two organizations sent members and information to communities to help increase public support and to help with organizational logistics. It was the community-driven nature of the public library movement in Iowa that helped make the period of 1890 to 1920 the golden age of library development in Iowa as Iowa received ninety-nine Carnegie library grants, the fourth highest number of grants of any state in the nation.<sup>1</sup>

## The Public Library Movement in the United States and Iowa

The public library movement in the United States can be traced back to the 1800s. Between 1850 and 1875, ten different states created laws that enabled the founding of 'free town libraries'.<sup>2</sup> On a national level, the American Library Association was founded in 1876.<sup>3</sup> The United States Bureau of Education in its report on public libraries in the United States of America in 1876 defined 'free town libraries' as "those partly or wholly supported by a direct or indirect tax ... to furnish to all without cost the means for instruction and recreation."<sup>4</sup> Iowa passed such a law in 1870.<sup>5</sup> Iowa's act of March 30, 1870 allowed cities to raise money for a free public library if the city had a suitable building for the

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<sup>1</sup> George S. Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Rosemary Ruhig Du Mont, *Reform and Reaction: The Big City Public Library in American Life* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977), 24.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Goldstein, "The Spirit of an Age: Iowa Public Libraries and Professional Librarians as Solutions to Society's Problems, 1890-1940," *Libraries and Culture* 38 No. 3 (Summer 2003): 214.

<sup>4</sup> United States Bureau of Education, "Chapter XXII Free town libraries," in *Public libraries in the United States of America; their history, condition, and management. Special report, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education. Part I* (1876), 445.

<sup>5</sup> Du Mont, *Reform and Reaction*, 24.

library prior to passing the tax.<sup>6</sup> Another law passed in 1872 allowed cities in Iowa to create a tax for the purpose of buying books for a free public library, and allowed cities to accept donations for a library.<sup>7</sup>

The United States Bureau of Education report from 1876 on public libraries noted that “There are a number of prosperous subscription or social libraries in the State [Iowa], but the plan of free libraries supported by tax does not seem as yet to have attracted public attention and interest.”<sup>8</sup> In 1890, Iowa still laid claim to only ten public libraries supported by a municipal tax.<sup>9</sup> However, Iowa’s subscription and social libraries were precursors to free public libraries. Subscription libraries “were of necessity exclusive, restricted to those who could pay the fee... [and] fees, no matter how small, did prevent many from joining.”<sup>10</sup> This exclusivity worked against subscription libraries which had to compete in communities to stay financially viable.<sup>11</sup>

Libraries were viewed as a way of “encouraging virtue and discouraging vice” through “the moral and social effects of occupying the leisure hours of youth in the wholesome pastime of reading.”<sup>12</sup> Such rhetoric became common amongst supporters of public libraries as they gained strength in the late nineteenth century. Public interest in free public libraries had been awakened in Iowa by 1890.

The Iowa Library Association (ILA) was one of the strongest advocates for free public libraries in Iowa. The Iowa Library society was organized by a group of librarians in 1890 with an annual meeting at the State Library during the week of the State Fair.<sup>13</sup> The Iowa Library Society was officially incorporated as the Iowa Library Association (ILA) at the 1897 meeting.<sup>14</sup> The ILA kept track of library statistics for the whole state, and offered a course of professional study for librarians within Iowa.<sup>15</sup> At the 1899 meeting in Cedar Rapids, the ILA appointed a committee to prepare a proposal for a state library

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<sup>6</sup> United States Bureau of Education, 453.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Goldstein, “The Spirit of an Age,” 216.

<sup>10</sup> Du Mont, *Reform and Reaction*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>13</sup> William M. Cochran, *A Century of Iowa Libraries in Association: A History of the Iowa Library Association 1890-1990* (Des Moines: Iowa Library Association, 1990), 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

commission.<sup>16</sup> The outcome of this proposal would be the Iowa Library Commission.

An offshoot of the ILA, the Iowa Library Commission (ILC) was founded in 1901 with the express purpose of promoting the growth of public libraries throughout the state.<sup>17</sup> The ILC's goal was "a free public library on every county seat and in every town and city in the state large enough to insure its support by municipal tax (2 mills) under State law".<sup>18</sup> The careful wording of the objective of the ILC shows how the focus on library extension was on making free public libraries a permanent part of their communities. The libraries needed to be supported by funding from their communities, and a two mill tax levy was a fairly small tax. The mill rate is based on property value, and is the amount of tax payable per dollar where one mill is 0.001 dollars. The mill rate is multiplied by the assessed property value, so a two mill tax on a property worth \$10,000 would be twenty dollars.

Another aspect of making public libraries permanent institutions was creating a sense of professionalism in the library field. The 1903 ILC report, "Library Extension in Iowa," stressed that "in the founding of new libraries, it is important that systematic and business-like methods for conducting them should be adopted."<sup>19</sup> To this end, the ILC also assisted communities in the more practical matters related to running a library, such as the cataloguing of books and professional training for librarians.<sup>20</sup> The officers of the ILC, especially the secretary, Alice Tyler, were also involved in community campaigns that encouraged the establishment of free public libraries. The officers were willing to work with local movements, such as women's clubs, to supply printed materials with information about libraries. They also attended town meetings to answer questions.<sup>21</sup> The ILC published reports on towns that successfully passed legislation to create libraries, as well as lists of those towns that received gifts of money from private citizens or from the library grants offered by Andrew Carnegie.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> 1903 Iowa Library Commission Report, Library Extension in Iowa, Iowa Library Association Papers, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa. Hereafter noted as ILAP.

<sup>19</sup> 1903 Iowa Library Commission Report, Library Extension in Iowa, ILAP.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

The campaigns of the ILC and ILA focused on bringing permanent free public libraries to communities throughout Iowa. The library grants by Carnegie offered the capital that communities needed to build a free public library. Andrew Carnegie believed that the best use of personal wealth was for the money to be distributed during the lifetime of the possessor.<sup>22</sup> He had gained his wealth through the Carnegie Steel Corporation, which was the largest steel manufacturing company in the world.<sup>23</sup> His philanthropic philosophy, the “Gospel of Wealth,” dictated that “the main consideration should be to help those who will help themselves; to provide part of the means by which those who desire to improve may do so.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, Andrew Carnegie offered money to communities so that they could build permanent buildings for their libraries.

Such philanthropy took place in two phases. Initial grants from 1886 to 1896 provided \$1,860,869 to six communities for the construction of fourteen buildings.<sup>25</sup> Each of these communities also received gifts of money, or endowments, for their libraries, something that did not apply to the bulk of Carnegie’s library grants.<sup>26</sup> Fairfield, Iowa received money for a library during this initial period in 1892, and was the first community outside of Pennsylvania to receive money.<sup>27</sup> Senator James F. Wilson, on behalf of his hometown, secured a gift of \$40,000 for Fairfield with no conditions attached to the gift.<sup>28</sup>

The second period of Carnegie’s library philanthropy lasted from 1898 to 1919.<sup>29</sup> The library gifts were from Carnegie personally until the organization of the Carnegie Corporation in 1911; Andrew Carnegie was still involved as he served as president of the Carnegie Corporation until his death in 1919.<sup>30</sup> During this period, philanthropy came in the form of grants, rather than the gifts of the previous period. Andrew Carnegie believed that the best gift

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<sup>22</sup> Andrew Carnegie, “Gospel of Wealth,” in *The Gospel of Wealth and other timely essays*. Edited by Edward C. Kirkland (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962), 19.

<sup>23</sup> Theodore Jones, *Carnegie Libraries Across America: A Public Legacy* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1997), 5.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Carnegie, “Gospel of Wealth,” 27.

<sup>25</sup> Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* 13.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, 14. Also, 1903 Iowa Library Commission Report, Library Extension in Iowa, ILAP.

<sup>28</sup> 1903 Iowa Library Commission Report, Library Extension in Iowa, ILAP.

<sup>29</sup> Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

that could be given to a community was a free public library as long as “the community will accept and maintain its place as a public institution, as much a part of city property as its public schools.”<sup>31</sup>

This determination to force communities to help themselves, and his desire for the free public libraries to become important permanent institutions within their communities led to stipulations on library grants. There were two main requirements for every grant during the 1898 to 1919 period of philanthropy. The requirements were that a community had to provide a site for the library building and pass a tax equal to 10% of the grant to provide for the maintenance and running of the library.<sup>32</sup> Towns interested in a library grant also had to fill out an application. The application asked for the population of the town, whether or not there was a library at present and how it was housed, the amount of taxes paid to support the library, the amount of taxes that the government was willing to guarantee, and if a site for the library building was available.<sup>33</sup> Andrew Carnegie, and later his personal secretary James Bertram, who would handle most of the library grant correspondence, used this battery of questions to evaluate the suitability of the town for a permanent library.<sup>34</sup>

Communities in Iowa were particularly successful in obtaining Carnegie library grants. Iowa received \$1,495,706 during 1899-1917, which was the eighth highest amount granted to any state.<sup>35</sup> Communities in Iowa received 99 grants to build 101 public libraries; this meant that Iowa had the fourth highest number of communities that received grants in the United States.<sup>36</sup> Table 1 includes statistics for the accepted Carnegie library grants for Iowa. The first library grant in Iowa during the period of library grants rather than gifts was Davenport in 1899 for \$75,000.<sup>37</sup> The last community to receive a Carnegie library grant was Montezuma which received \$8,000 in 1917.<sup>38</sup> The success of Iowa communities in obtaining grants depended largely on

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<sup>31</sup> Carnegie, “Gospel of Wealth,” 36.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>33</sup> Carnegie Corporation of New York Records. Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Columbia University Libraries (IIA.1 Libraries). Hereafter noted as CCNYP.

<sup>34</sup> Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, 31.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>37</sup> John M. Witt, *The Carnegie Libraries of Iowa* (Washington, MO: Robidoux Books, 2003), 13.

<sup>38</sup> Witt, *The Carnegie Libraries of Iowa*, 295.

community involvement and local support for the establishment of a public library.

Table 1 Carnegie Library Grants in Iowa – Statistics

	<b>Grant Amount (Dollars)</b>	<b>Town</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Smallest Amount Granted</b>	3,800	Laurens	1907
<b>Largest Amount Granted</b>	75,000*	Cedar Rapids	1901
-	75,000*	Davenport	1899
<b>Average Grant Amount</b>	15,108	-	-
<b>Median Grant Size</b>	10,000	-	-
<b>Most Common Grant Amount</b>	10,000	34 towns	-

Within communities, women’s clubs often led the campaign to bring libraries to their communities. The Iowa Federation of Women’s clubs (IFWC) was organized in 1893 by “thirty-five ‘social, literary, artistic or scientific’ women’s clubs.”<sup>39</sup> The IFWC worked in concert with the ILA and ILC on the matter of public libraries. In 1895, at the IFWC’s first biennial meeting in Cedar Rapids, a standing committee on public libraries was organized “whose task was to encourage and assist affiliated clubs in their library work.”<sup>40</sup> At the 1901 meeting of the ILA in Burlington, Iowa, the State Librarian Brigham urged librarians to be more active in women’s clubs.<sup>41</sup> Harriet C. Towner, a member of the State Library Commission and a columnist for the *Midland Monthly* covering women’s clubs activities, wrote in her column in January 1899 that

“There is no line of work in which women’s club activities can exercise an influence for good to greater advantage than in work for libraries, and it is

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\* Sioux City received two different grants that amounted to \$85,000 to build a main and a branch library. The number used for this table is the highest grant amount for a single library building.

<sup>39</sup> Goldstein, “The Spirit of An Age,” 216.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>41</sup> Cochran, *A Century of Iowa Libraries in Association*, 5.

hoped there will be a growing interest not only in local library work but in the work of the State Library and the Iowa Library Association.”<sup>42</sup>

Women also had ‘partial suffrage’ in Iowa. Chapter 39 of the Iowa Code, passed in 1894, allowed women to vote “in any election hereafter held in any city, incorporated town or school district for the purpose of issuing any bonds for municipal or school purposes, or for the purpose of borrowing money or for the purpose of increasing the tax levy.”<sup>43</sup> This meant that when the issue of a maintenance tax for a Carnegie library grant was put to the vote in a community, both women and men were able to vote for or against the proposal. The local clubwomen were sensitive to local politics and social issues, and the IFWC’s partnership with the ILC gave the women’s clubs access to a knowledge base on organizing and establishing public libraries to suit the needs of their communities.<sup>44</sup>

Even before the advent of the ILA and ILC, the women’s clubs of Iowa had a hand in local libraries. Women’s clubs were often involved in the local subscription or social libraries, and members would volunteer time and money to keep these libraries running.<sup>45</sup> When Andrew Carnegie offered library grants, clubwomen often made the first inquiries about applying for a grant, and male applicants pointed to libraries created by the clubwomen of their town as evidence of community commitment to the library issue.<sup>46</sup> The Marshalltown, Iowa application for a Carnegie grant includes a history of the Marshalltown Public Library, and indicates that in 1898 the Marshalltown Women’s club collected subscriptions in order to found a library. The Women’s club donated fifty dollars to support the library until a tax was approved when it became a free public library under the control of the newly created Marshalltown Library Association during that same year.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, Miss Adeliza Daniels, the correspondent for Marion, Iowa wrote to Andrew Carnegie to ask for a library grant and noted in her application that the current library was supported by the

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Acts and Resolutions Passed at the Regular Session of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the General Assembly of the State of Iowa*, Chapter 39, Approved April 13th, 1894, <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/publications/iactc/25.1/CH0039.pdf> (Accessed 11/7/15).

<sup>44</sup> Goldstein, “The Spirit of an Age,” 218 -19.

<sup>45</sup> Paula D. Watson, “Carnegie Ladies, Lady Carnegies: Women and the Building of Libraries,” *Libraries and Culture* 31, No. 1. (Winter 1996): 163.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 164.

<sup>47</sup> History of Marshalltown Public Library, (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 19 – Marshalltown, IA), CCNYP.

Marion Federation of Women's Clubs and not by a municipal tax.<sup>48</sup> Local women's involvement in public libraries prior to the Carnegie library grants, as well as the fact that "most public librarians were women...and women were generally seen as being responsive to library issues" meant they were a key component of the public library movement in Iowa.<sup>49</sup>

The Carnegie library grants may have offered the capital for 101 library buildings throughout Iowa, but those were not the only libraries founded during the golden age of library development in Iowa from 1890-1920. Local citizens could also donate the money for a public library building. The ILC noted that General F.M. Drake donated the money to build the library in Centerville, while Judge Addison Oliver provided the money for Onawa, a gift that especially pleased the ILC since there had been no library in Onawa previously.<sup>50</sup> In Webster City, the passing of Mrs. Young led to her husband bequeathing a \$250,000 endowment for a Kendall Young Library, as well as \$25,000 for the construction of a building.<sup>51</sup>

Other citizens simply added to the Carnegie grants or helped pay for other aspects of the library establishment. According to the ILC, the Hon. E. S. Ellsworth of Iowa Falls contributed \$2,500, as well as the site for the Carnegie funded library building.<sup>52</sup> The citizens of Monticello collected \$2,100 through subscriptions to purchase books for their library building paid for by Andrew Carnegie.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Mrs. Virginia Gay of Vinton, Iowa donated a thousand dollars to purchase books for that town's Carnegie library in 1905.<sup>54</sup> Thus, even in the cases of Carnegie library grants, community involvement helped cover building expenses that exceeded the grant budget, and helped to pay for furniture, books, and other necessities.

## Opposition to Carnegie Library Grants

Not every community that succeeded in securing a library grant from Andrew Carnegie accepted the money. Nation-wide, two hundred and twenty-

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<sup>48</sup> Free Public Library Application - Marion, Iowa, (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 18 – Marion, IA), CCNYP.

<sup>49</sup> Goldstein, "The Spirit of an Age," 225.

<sup>50</sup> 1903 Iowa Library Commission Report, Library Extension in Iowa, ILAP.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Letter of Building Committee to Carnegie, January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1905. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 33: Vinton, Iowa), CCNYP.

five communities that received an offer of funding from Andrew Carnegie did not accept or use the money; five communities in Iowa rejected the library grants offered to them.<sup>55</sup> Belmond, Iowa received an offer of \$7,500 in 1916, but rejected the offer because a local philanthropist provided the money for a public library instead.<sup>56</sup> Harlan, Iowa rejected the \$10,000 grant offered to the community in 1915 because the town wanted more funds from Carnegie for a permanent building.<sup>57</sup> Mason, Iowa was unable to secure the \$6,000 offered in 1905 when the town, either because the tax base was too small to support the mandated 10 percent tax levy or because the tax levy of the town was already at its maximum, was “legally unable to support [the tax] at 10%”.<sup>58</sup> The Iowa towns of Guthrie Center and Oelwein rejected their offers for entirely different reasons than the previous towns; both of these towns rejected the offers through deliberate action on the community’s part.<sup>59</sup> Guthrie Center and Oelwein belong to a group of 47 communities whose rejections stem from local opposition; in 26 of these communities, town councils were unable to pass the tax levy due to opposition, and in 21 communities, the grant was rejected in a popular election.<sup>60</sup>

The opposition to the Carnegie library grants manifested itself in different ways in Guthrie Center and Oelwein. In 1903 Charles Ashton, a former newspaper editor and Methodist minister living in Gunthrie Center, contacted Andrew Carnegie but James Bertram, Carnegie’s personal secretary and the Secretary of the Carnegie Corporation, responded that a town of 1,200 people

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<sup>55</sup> Bobinski’s chapter “Libraries Which Never Materialized” from *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development* offers a detailed analysis in Table 13 of all of the 225 communities, and his information was gathered from the microfilmed Carnegie Correspondence as well as a questionnaire sent by Bobinski to libraries in communities when the reason for a rejection was missing from the existing Carnegie Corporation.

<sup>56</sup> Bobinski, “Libraries Which Never Materialized,” in Table 13, pp.116-117.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 124-125.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 126-127, and 141.

<sup>59</sup> Bobinski, “Libraries Which Never Materialized,” in Table 13, pp. 116.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*. All but seven of these communities are the topic of further research in *Carnegie Denied: Communities Rejecting Carnegie Library Construction Grants 1898-1925*, edited by Robert Sidney Martin, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993). Guthrie Center, and Oelwein are addressed in Chapter Six “Mistaken Pride, Unseasonable Rush: Rejected Carnegie Grants in Missouri, Iowa, and Nebraska” by Robert Sidney Martin, Anne P. Diffendal, Loren Nelson Horton, and Randy Roberts.

did not seem large enough to need a library building.<sup>61</sup> In 1905 the city council held a referendum on the issue of a tax levy of two mills on the dollar after the Women's Club successfully lobbied to have it put to a vote.<sup>62</sup> The president of the Women's Club, Mrs. E. W. Weeks, evidently felt confident that the referendum would pass, and she wrote again to ask for a library grant: Bertram wrote back offering a \$5,000 grant, if the city could guarantee \$500 in yearly taxes to support it.<sup>63</sup> In a bizarre turn of events, by the time the offer arrived, the referendum had been voted down by the citizens of Guthrie Center – *The Guthrie Newspaper* reporting that men voted 174 to 103 against it while 114 women voted for it.<sup>64</sup> Carnegie's offer to the town was renewed in 1906, and the matter of a library tax was once again put to a vote, but failed again, with a newspaper opinion reporting that "Carnegie, the steel king, with his tainted money, has been thwarted in his efforts to build a public library in Guthrie Center".<sup>65</sup> The reference to 'tainted money' was likely a jab at Carnegie as the Carnegie Steel Corporation had gained a poor reputation with unions after it employed strike breakers leading to injuries to the laborers in Homestead, Pennsylvania.<sup>66</sup> It can only be speculated that the citizens of Guthrie Center, a coal mining center with a strong union presence, objected as much to the reputation of the donor, as to the size of the tax for the support of the library, since no voting statistics for this referendum were included in *The Guthrie*.

In Oelwein there was also significant opposition to accepting money from Andrew Carnegie. Oelwein was offered \$12,500 in 1903 after J. W. Kint, a real-estate and insurance salesman as well as a cashier of Oelwein's major bank, completed the standard questionnaire. Union labor of the Oelwein railroad shops campaigned strongly against accepting money from Carnegie with one union worker writing in the local newspaper "As a union man I will not vote to accept a gift from a man who has been the enemy of organized labor, and who employed Pinkerton men to shoot down men in the Homestead,

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<sup>61</sup> Robert Sidney Martin et. al., "Mistaken Pride, Unseasonable Rush: Rejected Carnegie Grants in Missouri, Iowa, and Nebraska" (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 116.

<sup>62</sup> Martin et. al., "Mistaken Pride, Unseasonable Rush," 117.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>66</sup> Jones, *Carnegie Libraries Across America*, 9 and "Guthrie County Coal Mines," Accessed November 28, 2015.  
[http://panora.org/museum/index\\_files/coal\\_mines.htm](http://panora.org/museum/index_files/coal_mines.htm)

Pennsylvania strike some years ago.”<sup>67</sup> Other citizens in the town objected that an annual tax of \$1,250 to match the grant was too much for a town the size of Oelwein, which had a population of only 5,142 in 1900.<sup>68</sup> The referendum for a library tax was rejected by a slim margin of only 46 votes of 1,200 total votes cast.<sup>69</sup> Mr. Kint wrote to Carnegie to request the renewal of the offer in 1904, and 1908, but he received no reply.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile the citizens of Oelwein created a free public library association in 1909. Two years later, the town council took over the subscription library and passed a tax to support it.<sup>71</sup> Interest grew again in obtaining a grant for a larger library building, and the president of the library board, John R. Bane, wrote in 1914 to request the renewal of the 1903 offer.<sup>72</sup> Carnegie Corporation secretary, James Bertram, invited Oelwein to submit a new application, but Bane waited three years before requesting the application form and then never submitted it.<sup>73</sup> The mayor and community officials wrote again in 1919, and were informed that the Carnegie Corporation had suspended its library building program during the First World War and did not expect to begin the program again.<sup>74</sup> By the time public opinion had shifted to support a library grant from Carnegie, Oelwein had waited too long and missed its chance.

The failure of campaigns for establishing a library tax in Guthrie Center and Oelwein evidently alarmed the ILC, which was certain the elections would have turned out differently if the citizens had been better informed. In an attempt to prevent other towns from failing to secure the necessary taxes because of Andrew Carnegie’s involvement, the ILC in its 1903 report urged “communities to vote upon the establishment and maintenance of a library tax under the state law as a separate proposition, before applying to Mr. Carnegie for the gift of a building, thus permitting the question of the institution to stand or fall on its own merits without regard to a building in which the institution may be housed.”<sup>75</sup> The ILC’s fear did not play out in any other communities.

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<sup>67</sup> Martin et. al., “Mistaken Pride, Unseasonable Rush,” 120.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 119 -120.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 121-122.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>75</sup> 1903 Iowa Library Commission Report, Library Extension in Iowa, ILAP.

Iowa would successfully receive grants for 99 communities, and only five failed to secure their grants.<sup>76</sup>

## Iowa Carnegie Library Grant Case Study

While Iowa communities did establish libraries without outside assistance, the information collected by Andrew Carnegie and James Bertram, as well as the correspondence during the application process, makes it possible to use towns that successfully obtained Carnegie library grants as case studies to examine the challenges that communities faced as they attempted to establish free public libraries. However, further research is necessary to determine whether the challenges faced by those applying for Carnegie grants were common across Iowa. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that some opposition to the library tax would have been present wherever an election called for the establishment of a free public library that was meant to be a permanent institution as championed by the ILC.

The thirteen towns in the following tables represent a wide variety of Iowa communities who received Carnegie grants. The towns were chosen to cover a range of population sizes, grant amounts, and the thirteen communities are spread throughout the state (Table 2, and Figure 1). The grant amounts range from \$7, 516 (DeWitt) to \$85,000 for Sioux City.<sup>77</sup> While most of the communities built one library building, Waterloo received enough money for two, and Sioux City built a main library and a branch library.<sup>78</sup> A closer examination of the circumstances of each town's application for a Carnegie library grant allowed conclusions to be drawn about the challenges facing Iowa's communities and how they were overcome to successfully establish public libraries.

The six towns analyzed in greater depth in this paper showcase the common hurdles that communities faced as well as some of the unique situations that towns faced as they struggled to establish free permanent public libraries. One of the very first hurdles that a community applying for a Carnegie grant faced was related to the population of the town. Communities had to prove that their population was large enough to require a separate library building. The population size was ultimately tied to how much money a town

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<sup>76</sup> Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, 116-127.

<sup>77</sup> (IIA.1 Libraries Reels), CCNYP.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

would be offered. Other challenges that occur frequently throughout the following applications are issues with the location of the proposed building, the difficulties surrounding passing a maintenance tax, and actually constructing the building within the amount awarded. Community involvement and the enlistment of political figures to bolster applications prove to be a running theme throughout the successful applications.

Table 2: Brief Overview of the 13 Iowa Communities

<b>Name:</b>	<b>County:</b>	<b>Grant Date:</b>	<b>Amount Granted:</b>	<b>Free Library Prior to Grant?</b>	<b>Federal 1900 Census Population:</b>
Denison	Crawford	1902	\$12,500	Yes	2,771
DeWitt	Clinton	1907	\$7,116	Yes	1,383
Dubuque	Dubuque	1901	\$71,500	No	36,297
Indianola	Warren	1903	\$12,000	Yes	3,261
Iowa City	Johnson	1902	\$35,000	Yes	7,987
Marengo	Iowa	1903	\$10,000	No	2,007
Marion	Linn	1903	\$11,500	Yes	4,102
Marshalltown	Marshall	1901	\$30,000	Yes	11,544
Mason City	Cerro Gordo	1902	\$20,000	Yes	6,746
Sheldon	O'Brien	1906	\$10,000	Yes	2,282
Sioux City (Main)	Woodbury	1911	\$75,000	Yes	33,111
Sioux City (Leeds Branch)	Woodbury	1916	\$10,000	-	-
Vinton	Benton	1903	\$12,500	Yes	3,499
Waterloo	Black Hawk	1902	\$45,000	Yes	12,580

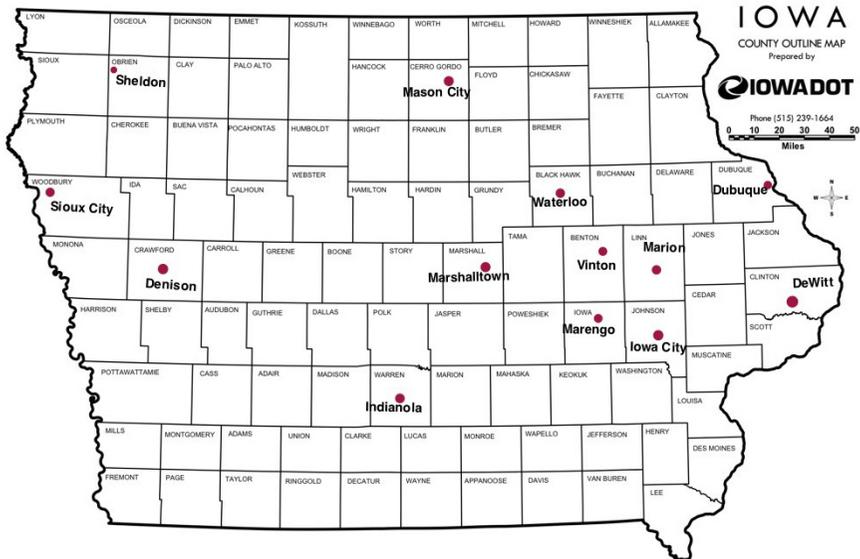


Figure 1: Map of the 13 Iowa Communities

### Denison

Denison is county seat of Crawford County, Iowa and located along the Chicago and North Western Railway. J. P. Conner and Chas Tobor submitted an application for a Carnegie library grant on November 23, 1901. The pair carefully noted that Denison had increased in population since the last federal census from 2,870 to 3,100 persons. They noted that the library situation of Denison at that time was “a limited one,” as it was housed in a rented building.<sup>79</sup> The applicants cited the Denison Normal School, which was erected “by the voluntary contributions of its citizens at an expense of over thirty thousand dollars, and now in successful operation,” as evidence of their interest in educational matters.<sup>80</sup> As further evidence of the town’s commitment, \$3,500 was collected through subscriptions to purchase books for the library. J. P. Conner, the main correspondent for the application, wrote that he could be reached in Washington as he fulfilled his duties at the House of Representatives. Denison was also the hometown of Secretary of the Treasury, L. M. Shaw, who wrote to Andrew Carnegie on February 4, 1902 to

<sup>79</sup> Free Public Library Application, and Letter from Conner and Tobor to Carnegie, November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1901. (IIA.1 Librarians Reel 8: Denison, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

mention that he would “be personally gratified to learn that you have granted its request.”<sup>81</sup>

Denison was granted \$10,000 on November 14, 1902 once the town provided evidence that it had passed a tax worth 10 percent of the grant through a city council resolution on May 19, 1902.<sup>82</sup> The costs exceeded the grant amount by \$2,500 due to high building costs, and J. P. Conner wrote to Carnegie to request that he cover the excess. After Carnegie suggested that \$10,000 should have been enough to cover the cost of a library, Conner submitted the building expenses and defended the request for additional funds by declaring that they “could not have selected a better building for the amount of money...the building will not prove too large for our progressive city.”<sup>83</sup> Carnegie agreed to grant an additional \$2,500, provided that the city council increased the tax by \$250, which they did.<sup>84</sup> Five years after Denison’s library was opened, on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1909, Grace Emily Meyer, the librarian, wrote to Andrew Carnegie to thank him for his generosity and to inform him that the library now has “5372 volumes, and the circulation last year was 16732...the library has been a great and increasing influence for good, and that our people all read more and better because of your gift.”<sup>85</sup> The residents of Denison were so grateful to Andrew Carnegie that the Women’s Clubs commissioned a portrait of him to be hung “where it is the first object one sees on entering the library.”<sup>86</sup>

Denison, Iowa successfully leveraged a growing population, politically well-connected figures, and community involvement to gain an increase to the amount that Andrew Carnegie offered. The amount Denison received was above the usual \$10,000 offered to many Iowa communities to pay for their new library building (Table 1, page 9). The applicants immediately stressed that the population of Denison was growing and that the current library situation would not be suitable in the future since it was only in a rented building. The

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<sup>81</sup> Letter from Shaw to Carnegie, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1902 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 8: Denison, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>82</sup> Denison City Tax Resolution, May 19, 1902 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 8: Denison, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>83</sup> Letter from Conner to Carnegie, June 16, 1904 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 8: Denison, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>84</sup> Letter from Conner to R. A. Frank, August 2, 1904 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 8: Denison, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>85</sup> Letter from Meyer to Carnegie, October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1909 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 8: Denison, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

applicants also demonstrated that the citizens were dedicated to helping themselves by mentioning that they had already gathered money to purchase books for the library. Carnegie's own philanthropic efforts were driven by the idea that money should only be given to those that prove that they wanted to lift themselves up, and Denison's community successfully showcased that determination. Denison also had the benefit of politically well connected figures who endorsed their application. House Representative J. P. Conner, who served from 1900 to 1909, lived in Denison, and he was instrumental in helping acquire the \$2,500 increase.<sup>87</sup> L. M. Shaw was less involved in the application process, but the Secretary of the Treasury from 1902 to 1907 also expressed his wish that his hometown would receive a grant.<sup>88</sup>

### *Dubuque*

Dubuque is the county seat of Dubuque County, Iowa. The population of Dubuque was 36,297 in 1900. Dubuque's path to a Carnegie library grant followed a very different path compared to other communities in Iowa. In April 1899, Senator W. B. Allison, whose hometown was Dubuque, and Jacob Rich, the President of the Young Man's Library Association of Dubuque, secured an in person interview with Andrew Carnegie and were verbally promised \$50,000 to build a library in Dubuque.<sup>89</sup> Dubuque's library grant depended on a handful of requirements that Carnegie had laid out in the interview, many of which would be the basis of the later library grant applications: a maintenance tax needed to be levied to support a free public library, a lot had to be acquired by the city, and the Young Man's Library Association of Dubuque agreed to turn over its books to form the basis of the library.<sup>90</sup> The maintenance tax was passed on during a special election on November 26, 1900 with 2,061 men and 1027 women voting in favor of a free public library and tax, and 694 men and 38 women voting against.<sup>91</sup> The acquisition of a lot took longer, but F. D. Stout donated land worth \$17,000 in the memory of his father, one that was described as "reasonably centered as to

<sup>87</sup> "Conner, James Perry (1851 -1924)," accessed November 6, 2015.  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=C000690>

<sup>88</sup> "Leslie M. Shaw, (1902 – 1907)," accessed November 6, 2015.  
<http://www.treasury.gov/about/history/pages/lmshaw.aspx>

<sup>89</sup> Letter from Young to Carnegie, December 1, 1900. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 8: Dubuque, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Letter from Berg to Young Men's Library Association, November 28, 1900. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 8: Dubuque, Iowa), CCNYP.

population both east and west and north and south...it is but little distance from the high school.”<sup>92</sup>

On November 26, 1901, Senator Allison secured another interview with Andrew Carnegie and gained a promise of a \$10,000 increase that matched the ¼ mill tax that produced \$6,000 annually.<sup>93</sup> Construction then proceeded smoothly, and in October 1902 the library opened to the public. Jacob Rich sent Carnegie eleven framed photographs of the building as a thank you.<sup>94</sup> On February 2, 1903, Carnegie received a request for an additional \$10,000-15,000 to purchase metal stacks for the building.<sup>95</sup> Bertram initially denied the request and wrote that “Mr. Carnegie only gives money for a building. It is difficult to see on what he could base an increased amount.”<sup>96</sup> Rich successfully convinced Carnegie that the new metal stacks were needed to house all of the books of the library in order to “complete and perfect its facilities.”<sup>97</sup> Andrew Carnegie authorized his banker to pay for the \$11,500 installation of the metal stacks without demanding a matching increase in the maintenance tax for Dubuque.<sup>98</sup> The citizens of Dubuque named the completed library the Carnegie-Stout Free Public Library and hung large portraits of the two important donors in the rotunda of the library as a sign of gratitude.<sup>99</sup>

Dubuque, Iowa had the benefit of being one of the early recipients of a Carnegie grant, claiming a large population and the support of an important political figure. Senator W. B. Allison had moved to Dubuque in 1857 and lived there until his death in 1908. In Congress, he served as the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee for twenty-five years preceding his death.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> “The Free Public Library,” (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 8: Dubuque, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>93</sup> Letter from Rich to Bertram, March 30, 1905. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 8: Dubuque, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>94</sup> Letter from Rich to Carnegie, January 28, 1903. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 8: Dubuque, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>95</sup> Letter from Rich to Carnegie, February 2, 1903. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 8: Dubuque, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>96</sup> Letter from Bertram to Rich, February 11, 1903. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 8: Dubuque, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>97</sup> Letter from Rich to Bertram, March 30, 1905. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 8: Dubuque, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>98</sup> Letter from Bertram to Rich, April 11, 1905. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 8: Dubuque, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>99</sup> Letter to Pritchett from Guiffen, April 18, 1923. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 8: Dubuque, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>100</sup> “Allison, William Boyd (1829- 1908),” accessed November 6, 2015.  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=A000160>

Dubuque clearly benefited from having such an influential politician throwing his weight behind the application of his hometown. Allison secured interviews in person with Andrew Carnegie to request money for Dubuque's library building, which resulted in an increase in Dubuque's grant from \$50,000 to \$71,500. The final increase of \$11,500 is particularly interesting since it was meant to pay for the shelves of an already complete building and carried no stipulation for an increase in the maintenance tax.

The influence of Senator W. B. Allison appears great indeed, but the date of the application should also be considered. The verbal agreement in 1899 and the additional money from 1901 are during the very early times of library grants when Carnegie's restrictions regarding grant amount and what exactly it could be used for were not in place yet. Dubuque also had the benefit of community involvement through the generous lot donation of F. D. Stout and the donations of the Young Men's Library Association. Unlike other communities in Iowa, there is no evidence that the women's clubs were involved in Dubuque. Instead, the Young Man's Library Association led the way for a public library in Dubuque. Since a library association already existed, and it was a male organization, the role of women in Dubuque was not as strong as it was in other Iowa communities. Still, a combination of generous donors and community involvement set up both Dubuque's application and library for long-term success.

### *Iowa City*

Iowa City is the county seat of Johnson County, Iowa and is the location of the State University of Iowa (now the University of Iowa). The mayor of Iowa City, F. K. Stebbins, submitted an application for a Carnegie library grant in July of 1901 and noted that the population of Iowa City was 8,000, not including a suburban and student population of 2,500, whose public library was a rented room on a second floor over a store.<sup>101</sup> The mayor enlisted state senator, George W. Ball, to request that U.S. Senator W. B. Allison present Iowa City's request which he sent along on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1902.<sup>102</sup> W. B. Allison made note of the increased city population, now 12,000, and stated that a public library building would "be a great boon to the people and will be patronized

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<sup>101</sup> Free Public Library Application, Iowa City, Iowa. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 15: Iowa City, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>102</sup> Letter from Allison to Carnegie, January 31, 1902. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 15: Iowa City, Iowa), CCNYP.

by a great body of students, mechanics, and businessmen.”<sup>103</sup> The City Council of Iowa City submitted a statement that indicated that the Iowa City Public Library was organized in January 1897 by businessmen who started the collection through subscriptions until the two-mill tax levy was passed in March 1897 and it came under the control of the city.<sup>104</sup> The tax in 1901 was to be \$3,720.64. Carnegie evidently only offered a grant for \$25,000 which Mayor Stebbins accepted on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1902.<sup>105</sup>

Barely three months later in July, the contracted architects warned that “twenty five thousand dollars will not, especially now when prices are high, build such a building as your natural wants require...and if so built your people will always regret it.”<sup>106</sup> The warnings prompted the Iowa City Council to pass a tax guaranteeing \$3,500 a year, and the state senator Ball as well as the president of the Iowa City Library Board contacted Carnegie to request an increase.<sup>107</sup> Another request was sent on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1902 and denied by Bertram a few weeks later.<sup>108</sup> In March 1903, Judge M. J. Wade, an elected U.S. congressman for 1903 and the president of the Iowa City public library board, enlisted the aid of Senator W. B. Allison to present the argument that the suburban population, as well as the student population, contributed to the 75,221 visits to the library in 1902 that required a larger library building.<sup>109</sup> On April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1903 Carnegie and Bertram reversed their decision and offered an additional \$10,000.<sup>110</sup> A short time later M. J. Wade submitted the required proof of the \$3,500 tax resolution and offered the citizens thanks.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Letter from City Council of Iowa City to Carnegie, 1902. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 15: Iowa City, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>105</sup> Letter from Stebbins to Carnegie, March 24, 1902. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 15: Iowa City, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>106</sup> Letter from Liebhe, Nourse, and Rasmussen to Wade, July 7, 1902. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 15: Iowa City, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>107</sup> Letter from Wade to Carnegie, July 8, 1903. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 15: Iowa City, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>108</sup> Letter from Bertram to Wade, December 23, 1902. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 15: Iowa City, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>109</sup> Letter from Wade to Allison, March 11, 1903. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 15: Iowa City, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>110</sup> Letter from Bartram to Wade, April 10, 1903. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 15: Iowa City, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>111</sup> Letter from Wade to Bertram, April 14, 1903. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 15: Iowa City, Iowa), CCNYP.

Iowa City, Iowa's application is an example of how a community could use both its population and influential political figures in order to gain an increase to the amount that Andrew Carnegie offered. Iowa City had a number of political figures who submitted letters to Carnegie to show their support, including U.S. Senator W. B. Allison, State Senator George W. Ball, and Congressman Judge M. J. Wade. Allison and Wade both used the community's population to make the argument for an increase in the grant. The federal census population records did not include the suburban populations around Iowa City or the student population of the university, although both of these groups would need the space offered by a new library building. The combination of a persuasive argument for an increased population size, one of the aspects that was used to decide a grant amount, and the support of political figures led to Iowa City's success in obtaining a grant that was much larger than the average grant offered to Iowa communities (Table 1, page 9).

### *Marion*

Marion is located in Linn County, Iowa. The United States Federal Census of 1900 put Marion's population at 4,102, although residents claimed that the population was over 5,000 by the time of the 1902 application for a Carnegie library grant.<sup>112</sup> The original correspondent, James D. Giffen, wrote Carnegie on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1902 to request money for Marion, a railroad town with four sections of the Chicago Milwaukee & St. Paul line: "Hence many railroad employees and in need of a good library."<sup>113</sup> Adeliza Daniels, the President of the Federation of Women's Clubs of Marion, wrote on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1903 to provide an accurate picture of Marion's library situation, one in which the women of the community were deeply involved.<sup>114</sup> The nine women's clubs of Marion federated in November 1900 for the purpose of founding a public library in Marion, and to that end they raised money, sent a woman to the Cedar Rapids library to study library work in November 1902, and partnered with the Secretary of the Library Commission, Alice Tyler, to learn how to organize a library.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Free Public Library Application, Marion, Iowa. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 18: Marion, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>113</sup> Letter from Giffen to Carnegie, January 16, 1902. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 18: Marion, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>114</sup> Letter from Daniels to Carnegie, January 6, 1903. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 18: Marion, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

The women's clubs, on February 12, 1903, in a room donated by a local man, successfully opened the public library of Marion.<sup>116</sup> Bertram noted that the local man had offered a larger room, and Bertram thought that this room would be sufficient enough for a library.<sup>117</sup> Adeliza Daniels wrote back to stress the delicate situation of the public library in Marion since the lease for the larger room could only be guaranteed for a year.<sup>118</sup> This argument evidently convinced Bertram and Carnegie who extended an offer of \$10,000 to Marion on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1903, and by June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1904 Marion had provided proof of the tax and the land acquired.<sup>119</sup> The residents of Marion apparently requested an increase to their grant and Bertram rebuked them stating that they "should see what you can do with the ten thousand dollars before seeking an addition to the appropriation."<sup>120</sup>

However, this chastisement did not stop J. B. Alexander, the new President of the Library Board, from requesting an addition \$2,500 for shelves, furniture, lighting, wiring, and cement sidewalks.<sup>121</sup> An additional \$2,500 was offered on November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1904, provided that the maintenance tax was increased, which was not accomplished since by December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1904 Bertram was writing to Alexander again to stress that a two mill tax was not the same as a guarantee of a specific amount of income per year.<sup>122</sup> Bertram was still displeased when he wrote to Alexander in December 30<sup>th</sup>, 1904 since the resolution provided only guaranteed the maintenance fund amount for ten years, but wrote that "Mr. Carnegie considers the good faith of Marion sufficiently pledged to provide eleven hundred and fifty dollars a year," granting Marion access to an additional

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Letter from Bertram to Daniels, January 9, 1903. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 18: Marion, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>118</sup> Letter from Daniels to Bertram, January 1903. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 18: Marion, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>119</sup> Letter from Bertram to Daniels, January 22, 1903. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 18: Marion, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>120</sup> Letter from Bertram to Alexander, August 16, 1904. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 18: Marion, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>121</sup> Letter from Alexander to Carnegie, October 24, 1904. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 18: Marion, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>122</sup> Letter from Bertram to Alexander, December 2, 1904. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 18: Marion, Iowa), CCNYP.

\$1,500 (but not the \$2,500 originally offered) to complete the public library building.<sup>123</sup>

Marion, Iowa did not have the benefit of a political figure as many of the other towns did, but a section of the population was deeply involved in the community's library movement. The women's clubs had been working to open a public library since 1900, and had already opened a public library, limited in size as it was since it was housed in a donated room, by the time of the application in 1902. But they had already gained the experience that was needed to truly open a permanent public library, both in terms of fundraising, library staff, and community use since the number of visitors had increased from 1,180 in February 1903 to 1,645 in November of the same year.<sup>124</sup> Like in many other Iowa communities, in the absence of male dominated library boards or political figures, it was the women of the community who were the driving force behind the application.

All of this community involvement provided support for the argument that a building rather a single room would be the best way to house a library in Marion. The main stumbling block for Marion's application was the tax requirement, and their gaffe regarding an increase in the grant. It took almost a year and a half for Marion's city council to pass the first maintenance tax for the \$10,000 grant. Then, after the addition was granted, it took another month to provide proof of a two mill tax increase, which Bertram refused to accept since the amount of money that a two mill tax provides fluctuates based on the value of property in a town. It was the failure of the town to provide evidence of a maintenance tax without a time limit that doomed Marion's attempt to gain the whole \$2,500 to cover the entire cost of the library building, although Carnegie was generous enough to provide an additional \$1,500, regardless of the fact that Marion had failed to meet all of his tax requirements.

### *Sioux City*

Sioux City is the county seat of Woodbury County, Iowa. Sioux City represents a very different case than the communities examined previously. Sioux City received two Carnegie library grants, one for a main library and one for a branch library that would be located in Leeds. The application resulting

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<sup>123</sup> Letter from Bertram to Alexander, December 30, 1904. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 18: Marion, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>124</sup> Letter from Daniels to Carnegie, January 6, 1903. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 18: Marion, Iowa), CCNYP.

in the grant for the main library was submitted first. The population of Sioux City was 30,311 according in the 1900 Federal census. R. H. Burton-Smith wrote to Andrew Carnegie on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1910 to request \$150,000 for a central library with two or three branch libraries to benefit a town that was the second largest in Iowa and an important agricultural and industrial city.<sup>125</sup> The public library had existed in Sioux City for thirty-two years, was supported by a public tax and was housed in rooms in the city hall. Burton-Smith lobbied for a central and branch library because “the city covers 44 square miles thus making certain parts of the city remote from the central building.”<sup>126</sup> Bertram was evidently unimpressed by the argument and noted that the rooms were “75 ft x 85 ft, which is a fairly large library, you are hardly within Mr. Carnegie’s scope of needing a Library Bilding [sic].”<sup>127</sup> Burton-Smith was not deterred and continued to write describing the inadequate conditions of the current rooms until Carnegie and Bertram extended an offer of \$75,000 on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1911 with the warning that “it should be noted that the amount indicated is to cover the cost of Library bilding[sic] complete, redy[sic] for occupancy, and for the purpose intended.”<sup>128</sup> A. A. Smith, the Mayor of Sioux City, submitted proof that Sioux City had passed a \$10,000 a year tax and then had to resubmit proof of the tax when Bertram objected that the tax should be \$7,500 a year not above that.<sup>129</sup> The building of the main library would run into issues and the final payment of the money for the grant, \$5,000, would end up delayed until January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1914.

The branch library application was submitted just a little over two years later on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1916 and it requested \$10,000 to build on a lot that Sioux City already owned.<sup>130</sup> The application listed the population of Sioux City from the 1915 census as 61,757.<sup>131</sup> The applicant noted that the previous Carnegie library grant had “done much to stimulate the intellectual activity of citizens as

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<sup>125</sup> Letter from Burton-Smith to Carnegie, October 31, 1910 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 29: Sioux City, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> Letter from Bertram to Burton-Smith, January 28, 1911 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 29: Sioux City, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>128</sup> Letter from Bertram to Burton-Smith, April 8, 1911 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 29: Sioux City, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>129</sup> Letter from Smith to Bertram, April 13, 1911 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 29: Sioux City, Iowa), CCNYP.

<sup>130</sup> Free Public Library Application, Sioux City, Branch. (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 29: Sioux City, Iowa – Branch Application), CCNYP.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

indicated by the increased circulation.”<sup>132</sup> The application for the branch library was submitted after supervision of the library grants had been transferred to the Carnegie Corporation and the application was voted upon at a Carnegie Corporation meeting, which led to Sioux City being offered \$10,000 on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1916. On April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1916 the city council passed the required \$1,000 a year maintenance tax, and submitted plans for the Leeds Branch Library.<sup>133</sup> After reviewing the building plans, the Carnegie Corporation authorized the beginning of payments to Sioux City on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1916.<sup>134</sup>

Sioux City, Iowa is a unique case, since the city applied twice in order to obtain a grant for a main library and for a branch library. The applications show the difference between the grants when Andrew Carnegie had sole control and when the library grants were under the control of the Carnegie Corporation. The Carnegie Corporation distributed instructions on the resolutions for taxes, and the submission of the library building plans was required before any payments would be authorized. Under the control of Carnegie and Bertram, the library grants were more subject to their personal whims, as can be seen with Bertram originally dismissing the city hall rooms as large and adequate. Sioux City had the benefit of a large population and successfully made the case for a new library building, if not the branch libraries, that they also desired in 1910. When the separate application for the branch library at Leeds was submitted, an increase in both the population of Sioux City, an increase in the circulation of books, and a map of the library locations for Sioux City proved to be enough for the Carnegie Corporation to vote in favor of Sioux City’s request. Sioux City’s success and dedication to the free public library would not stop with the main and Leeds branch libraries, and by 1918, Sioux City had five branch libraries.<sup>135</sup>

### *Waterloo*

Waterloo is the county seat of Black Hawk County, Iowa. Emmons Johnson, a banker of Waterloo, requested the Carnegie library grant application

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> Letter from Carnegie Corporation to Sioux City, March 31, 1916, and City Council Resolution, April 15, 1916 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 29: Sioux City, Iowa – Branch Application), CCNYP.

<sup>134</sup> Letter from Carnegie Corporation to Sioux City, June 5, 1916 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 29: Sioux City, Iowa – Branch Application), CCNYP.

<sup>135</sup> “Sioux City’s Public Library Leading in Service to Public,” (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 29: Sioux City, Iowa – Branch Application), CCNYP.

materials and submitted the application on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1902.<sup>136</sup> Waterloo's population was 12,530 according to the federal census of 1900, and Waterloo was supporting two separate libraries, one on each side of the Cedar River that divided the town in half.<sup>137</sup> The east side library was in a back room on the second floor of City Hall, located there free of charge, while the west side library rented a room for \$400 a year, gathered through subscriptions from west side residents, in the local YMCA.<sup>138</sup> Johnson requested money for two buildings and cited that the "bridge is about 600 feet long and in winter it is very cold...so that a library on each side of the river has been considered most desirable, being of the greatest service to the greatest number."<sup>139</sup>

Senator W. B. Allison was again enlisted to pass along information from Waterloo to Andrew Carnegie.<sup>140</sup> Carnegie offered Waterloo \$30,000 on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1902, but this money was meant for only one building and the residents struggled to find an acceptable location for their new library.<sup>141</sup> The tax was passed and a site was located in Lincoln Park in Waterloo, but the mayor voted to approve it without having the correct number of council members in support and two concerned citizens wrote to Carnegie to inform him that the decision and proposition was illegal and challenged in court.<sup>142</sup> On November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1902 R. A. Franks, Carnegie's banker, wrote to inform the city council of Waterloo that, due to the concerns of the taxpayers, the approval of money for Waterloo had been rescinded and they would need to clear up concerns about the local site.<sup>143</sup>

In response, on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1903, the city council again guaranteed the required \$3,000 a year tax and declared the city's intentions to build the new library on piers in the middle of a concrete bridge currently being constructed over the Cedar River, a proposal that Bertram deemed 'far-fetched' and

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<sup>136</sup> Letter from Johnson to Carnegie, March 8, 1902 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 33: Waterloo), CCNYP.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Letter from Johnson to Allison, January 28, 1902 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 33: Waterloo), CCNYP.

<sup>141</sup> Letter from Bertram to Johnson, April 8, 1902.

<sup>142</sup> Letter from Leavitt to Carnegie, September 16, 1902 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 33: Waterloo), CCNYP.

<sup>143</sup> Letter from Franks to Waterloo, November 19, 1902 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 33: Waterloo), CCNYP.

expensive.<sup>144</sup> Disagreements over the feasibility led to Martin, the mayor of Waterloo, requesting that Carnegie increase his donation (Waterloo would match the increase with a tax increase) so that two buildings could be constructed.<sup>145</sup> The offer to Waterloo was increased to \$40,000 total for two buildings with Bertram writing on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1904 that “Mr. Carnegie says he had been trying to figure a Library in the middle of a stream. Lincoln’s story, showing the undesirability of changing horses in the middle of a stream is recalled to him and he says he rejoices that Waterloo has made such a good swap.”<sup>146</sup> Waterloo ran into difficulties completing the two buildings within the amount granted and submitted a resolution on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1905 guaranteeing \$4,500 a year as a maintenance tax, if Carnegie increased his donation by \$5,000.<sup>147</sup> On November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1905 Bertram wrote to approve the requested \$5,000 increase.<sup>148</sup> The two library buildings were complete and opened to the public in February of 1906, although Carnegie regretfully declined the invitation to attend the ceremony.<sup>149</sup>

Waterloo, Iowa faced an interesting challenge in its attempts to secure the capital that it needed to construct two permanent library buildings. Waterloo had already been successful in maintaining two libraries to help reach all community members since the Cedar River divided the town in half, but Carnegie and Bertram evidently did not see the challenge of such a river dividing the town. Waterloo was successful in obtaining a grant and enlisted Senator W. B. Allison to pass along information (although he was less involved than in many of the other applications examined) but it was a grant that provided for only one building. The ensuing squabble over the location of a new library on one side of the river indicates that a library was seen as a benefit by the citizens and neither side was willing to relinquish the right to have the library on their side of the river.

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<sup>144</sup> Letter from Bertram to Johnson, November 17, 1903 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 33: Waterloo), CCNYP.

<sup>145</sup> Letter from Martin to Carnegie, January 18, 1904 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 33: Waterloo), CCNYP.

<sup>146</sup> Letter from Bertram to Martin, January 26, 1904 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 33: Waterloo), CCNYP.

<sup>147</sup> City Resolution, October 31, 1905 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 33: Waterloo), CCNYP.

<sup>148</sup> Letter from Bertram to Martin, November 23, 1905 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 33: Waterloo), CCNYP.

<sup>149</sup> Letter from Bertram to Martin, January 1906 (IIA.1 Libraries Reel 33: Waterloo), CCNYP.

The citizens' involvement in the library issue was revealed to Carnegie and Bertram when citizens wrote to Carnegie to protest the illegal proposition and vote of the city council and mayor. The proposal to situate the new library on a bridge in the middle of the river, no matter how far-fetched it seemed, was an admirable attempt to solve the location issue and end the community strife that was hampering the Carnegie library grant approval process. As the correspondence stretched on over a period of years the original request for money for two separate buildings was submitted again, and this time granted. Waterloo was also successful in obtaining an increase by requesting only a small addition and having the tax requirement already fulfilled by a legal vote. Waterloo's unique situation revealed the importance of the library to a community while also highlighting how challenging it could be for communities to obtain locations acceptable to their populaces.

## Conclusion

Some of the biggest challenges that faced towns who applied for Carnegie library grants were related to population size, the location of the library, the tax requirement, and the final amount offered. Towns also had to prove that they would be suitable for a library grant. This need was important because it was based on Carnegie's personal philanthropy philosophy for which "the main consideration should be to help those who will help themselves."<sup>150</sup> Towns had to prove that they were dedicated to the establishment of a free public library, and that they could support such an institution. Iowa's small towns had to prove that their population was willing to pay a tax to support a free public library in addition to proving that their population was big enough to warrant a separate building. The Carnegie library grant provided the capital that communities were unable to gather to fund new library buildings, but it was up to the communities to advocate for themselves in their applications. Political figures could be employed to move an application through the process quicker or to gain support for an increase, while towns highlighted the community involvement in their applications to prove that they desired a library.

Ultimately, Iowa was very successful in obtaining library grants from Andrew Carnegie. This success was largely the result of community involvement, particularly with respect to efforts by Women's clubs, the Iowa Library Association and the Iowa Library Commission. The Carnegie library

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<sup>150</sup> Andrew Carnegie, "Gospel of Wealth," 27.

grants had a meaningful impact on cementing the free public libraries as a permanent and beneficial institution within Iowa communities. Although the role of the public library is evolving with changes in technology, it remains a social institution and its continued success will be driven, as the past has shown, by community involvement.

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