

The Carnegie Library in Illinois

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The Carnegie Library in Illinois, by Raymond Bial and Linda LaPuma Bial. Visions of Illinois Series. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991. 184 pp. Photographs, map. \$39.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY KATHY PENNINGROTH, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Through contemporary photographs and brief historical sketches, Raymond Bial and Linda LaPuma Bial depict the origins and present conditions of the eighty-three extant Carnegie libraries in Illinois. The photographs document the enduring legacy of Carnegie funds in the development of public libraries across the United States, while the local histories provide glimpses into the cultural and social life of early twentieth-century midwestern communities.

The communities that successfully applied for Carnegie funds show common patterns of library development. Most often they had existing libraries begun by women or library associations housed in rented rooms. Community leaders' appeals to Carnegie or his secretary James Bertram conveyed a clear purpose of community development combined with moral and social uplift. They extolled the existing amenities of the town, invoked the moral qualities that a library would impart to the working class in particular, and mentioned the absence of saloons. Most felt they were as deserving of the Carnegie largess as surrounding communities and assured Carnegie that the community would provide a site and operating funds. The libraries, designed in most cases by Illinois architects, exhibit a wide range of architectural styles.

The authors make no claims to analyze or contextualize their material, but fragmented pieces of information in the text raise questions. What were the policies of the Carnegie Corporation in granting library building funds? Did they change over time? What was the role of James Bertram? What were the dates and substance of Illinois legislation that supported library development? The answers to these questions can be gleaned from George S. Bobinski's *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Library Development* (1969). However, *The Carnegie Library in Illinois* contains abundant material about women's agency in creating and promoting libraries. Iowa readers will gain insights about library development in the ninety-nine Iowa towns that received Carnegie funds between 1890 and 1917.

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