

The Carnegie Connection

In 1902 our library became a tax supported institution as a condition of Andrew Carnegie's gift for construction. Carnegie's requirement of community support shaped the development of public libraries across the country. Here are a few facts:

- In the U. S. in 1898 there were 637 public libraries that held at least 3000 books. Few were housed in buildings dedicated to that purpose. By the time of Carnegie's last grant in 1919, there were 3500 public libraries. Carnegie gifts paid for half of them. The total cost of all U. S. Carnegie libraries was \$41,478,689 (about \$800 million in 1996 dollars!).
- The library program was never formally named or announced, but news was passed in the press, by the growing number of state library commissions and by word of mouth. It was administered by Carnegie's personal secretary James Bertram.
- Grants were loosely figured at \$2-3 per resident and required communities to commit tax funds for library support, equal to 10% of the total grant annually. Carnegie's grant was in effect "matched" by the community every ten years!
- Indiana heads the list with the most grants per state at 156. Second is California (121) and Illinois (105).
- In some communities there was concern that Carnegie's money was "tainted" by questionable labor practices. Others feared Carnegie was building tax-supported monuments to himself. In fact, Carnegie's name was not required to appear in the name or on the building, though nearly 1/3 of the recipients included it.

Facts from:

Carnegie Libraries Across America: a Public Legacy / Theodore Jones (027.473 J79)

Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture 1890-1920 / Abigail Van Slyke (727.8 V279)

See also: Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie (B C288) Andrew Carnegie / Katherine Shippen (JB C280s)

Richest Man in the World, Andrew Carnegie (Class B video)