The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

700 Third Avenue · 4th floor · Seattle, Washington 98104 · (206) 684-0228

REPORT ON DESIGNATION LPB 331/01

Name and Address of Property: **West Seattle Library**
2306 42nd Ave. SW

Legal Description: NIESZ UR & ASA B ADD, BLOCK 2, LOTS 1-6

At the public meeting held on September 19, 2001, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the West Seattle Library as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standards for designation of SMC 25. 12.350:

C. It is associated in a significant way with a significant aspect of the cultural, political, or economic heritage of the community, city, state or nation.

D. It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, period, or of a method of construction; and

E. It is an outstanding work of a designer or builder

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Historic Context: National

These buildings are to this day, fully functional and living examples of early American industrial philanthropy and early 20th Century civic architecture. To fully appreciate their place in history it is important to understand their genesis through the life of Andrew Carnegie – from his childhood in Dunfermline, Scotland, through his introduction to libraries by Colonel James Anderson of Allegheny, Pennsylvania, to the personal fortune made in the steel industry. Mr. Carnegie's grants totaled more than $56,000,000 and helped to build over 2,500 libraries worldwide and have been assured their place in history. At a time when municipalities were poor and had few methods for raising revenue, Mr. Carnegie helped to provide libraries to communities who may not otherwise be able to afford them. His ultimate goal was to foster the concept of knowledge as a tool, and in turn, help people understand the rapid industrialization, and tremendous social and economic change being experienced in our country.

The following 4 sections are excerpted from the National Park Service's Park Net website, Teaching With Historic Places: Carnegie Libraries: The Future Made Bright.

Carnegie Libraries: The Future Made Bright

Many Americans first entered the worlds of information and imagination offered by reading when they walked through the front doors of a Carnegie library. One of 19th-century industrialist Andrew Carnegie's many philanthropies, these libraries entertained and educated millions. Between 1886 and 1919, Carnegie's donations of more than $40 million paid for 1,679 new library buildings in communities large and small across America. Many still serve as civic centers, continuing in their original roles or fulfilling new ones as museums, offices, or restaurants.

The patron of these libraries stands out in the history of philanthropy. Carnegie was exceptional in part because of the scale of his contributions. He gave away $350 million, nearly 90 percent of the fortune he accumulated through the railroad and steel industries. Carnegie was also unusual because he supported such a variety of charities. His philanthropies included a Simplified Spelling Board, a fund that built 7,000 church organs, the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and the Carnegie Endowment for Peace. Carnegie also stood out because some questioned his motivations for constructing libraries and criticized the methods he used to make the fortune that supported his gifts.

Setting the Stage

Libraries arrived on the North American continent with the first European settlers. Religious books, primarily for the use of the clergy, formed the center of most 17th-century collections. The richest colonial merchants and planters often developed their own libraries, but the number of people regularly reading books, other than the Bible, was quite small.

Books became available to a broader public as the 18th century progressed. Improvements in printing methods lowered their cost, making them affordable to more people. Increased interest in commerce, science, and art spurred a demand for more information--a demand that was often best satisfied through reading. Colonists began to form social libraries in which individuals contributed money to purchase books. Library societies sprang up in urban centers; outstanding examples include those still existing in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Charleston, South Carolina, and New York, New York. However, such societies generally only lent their books to those who had donated money.

Libraries continued to develop after the Revolutionary War. Women, for example, created their own collections, with books often circulating great distances among farms and plantations. Between 1815 and 1850, library societies increasingly concentrated on specialized subjects. Mercantile libraries

held books of interest to clerks and businessmen while the collections of mechanics and seamen's libraries specialized in their particular trades. These libraries were supported by business owners and provided educational and social opportunities for young men.

During the second half of the 19th century the "free" library movement--that is, open to the public at no charge--began to spread. Reformers saw libraries as a valuable tool in their attempts to repair what they saw as the flaws in a rapidly industrializing nation. More directly, libraries provided information about an increasingly complicated and technical world. Reformers believed libraries could teach millions of immigrants how to succeed in America, and provide the poor with the knowledge they needed to rise in society. Also, reformers thought well-educated voters would be better able to resist the lure of dishonest politicians. Finally, libraries offered an alternative to unwholesome pursuits such as drinking and gambling.

Making libraries a tool for reform, however, proved difficult. Lack of money, insufficient book collections, and limited memberships prevented social libraries from expanding as fast as the American population. America's rapidly growing towns and cities demanded many services, such as better transportation, sanitation, and schools. Buying books and building libraries were, for most citizens, a lower priority.

Even though a relatively small number of places had developed public libraries before the 1880s, enough progress had occurred to give supporters hope. Cities gradually gained the right to tax, which held the potential to supply funds. The growth in public schools indicated an increasing interest in education. It was at this point that the generosity of Andrew Carnegie accelerated the development of American libraries. His donations provided communities across the country with millions of dollars to build new libraries

Andrew Carnegie

Andrew Carnegie's decision to support library construction developed out of his own experience. Born in 1835, he spent his first 12 years in the coastal town of Dunfermline, Scotland. There he listened to men read aloud and discuss books borrowed from the Tradesmen's Subscription Library that his father, a weaver, had helped create. Carnegie began his formal education at age eight, but had to stop after only three years. The rapid industrialization of the textile trade forced small businessmen like Carnegie's father out of business. As a result, the family sold their belongings and immigrated to Allegheny, a suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
Although these new circumstances required the young Carnegie to go to work, his learning did not end. After a year in a textile factory, he became a messenger boy for the local telegraph company. Some of his fellow messengers introduced him to Col. James Anderson of Allegheny, who every Saturday opened his personal library to any young worker who wished to borrow a book. Carnegie later said the colonel opened the windows through which the light of knowledge streamed. In 1853, when the colonel's representatives tried to restrict the library's use, Carnegie wrote a letter to the

editor of the Pittsburgh Dispatch defending the right of all working boys to enjoy the pleasures of the library. More important, he resolved that, should he ever be wealthy, he would make similar opportunities available to other poor workers.

Over the next half-century Carnegie accumulated the fortune that would enable him to fulfill that pledge. During his years as a messenger, Carnegie had taught himself the art of telegraphy. This skill helped him make contacts with the Pennsylvania Railroad, where he went to work at age 18. During his 12-year railroad association he rose quickly, ultimately becoming superintendent of the Pennsylvania's Pittsburgh division. He simultaneously invested in a number of other businesses, including railroad locomotives, oil, and iron and steel. In 1865, Carnegie left the railroad to manage the Keystone Bridge Company, which was successfully replacing wooden railroad bridges with iron ones. By the 1870s he was concentrating on steel manufacturing, ultimately creating the Carnegie Steel Company. In 1901 he sold that business for $250 million.

Carnegie then retired and devoted the remainder of his life to philanthropy. Even before selling Carnegie Steel he had begun to consider what to do with his immense fortune. In 1889 he wrote a famous essay entitled "The Gospel of Wealth," in which he stated that wealthy men should live without extravagance, provide moderately for their dependents, and distribute the rest of their riches to benefit the welfare and happiness of the common man--with the consideration to help only those who would help themselves. "The Best Fields for Philanthropy," his second essay, listed seven fields to which the wealthy should donate: universities, libraries, medical centers, public parks, meeting and concert halls, public baths, and churches. He later expanded this list to include gifts that promoted scientific research, the general spread of knowledge, and the promotion of world peace. Many of these organizations continue to this day: the Carnegie Corporation in New York, for example, helps support "Sesame Street."

Because of his background, Carnegie was particularly interested in public libraries. At one point he stated a library was the best possible gift for a community, since it gave people the opportunity to improve themselves. His confidence was based on the results of similar gifts from earlier philanthropists. In Baltimore, for example, a library given by Enoch Pratt had been used by 37,000 people in one year. Carnegie believed that the relatively small number of public library patrons were of more value to their community than the masses who chose not to benefit from the library.

Carnegie divided his donations to libraries into the "retail" and "wholesale" periods. During the retail period, 1886 to 1896, he gave $1,860,869 for 14 endowed buildings in six communities in the United States. These buildings were actually community centers, containing recreational facilities such as swimming pools as well as libraries. In the years after 1896, known as the wholesale period, Carnegie no longer supported urban multipurpose buildings. Instead he gave $39,172,981 to smaller communities that had limited access to cultural institutions. His gifts provided 1,406 towns with buildings devoted exclusively to libraries. Over half his grants were for less than $10,000. Although most of the towns receiving gifts were in the Midwest, in total 46 states benefited from Carnegie's plan.

Andrew Carnegie stopped making gifts for library construction following a report made to him by Dr. Alvin Johnson, an economics professor. In 1916 Dr. Johnson visited 100 of the existing Carnegie libraries and studied their social significance, physical aspects, effectiveness, and financial condition. His final report concluded that to be really effective, the libraries needed trained personnel. Buildings had been provided, but now it was time to staff them with professionals who would stimulate active, efficient libraries in their communities. Libraries already promised continued to be built until 1923, but after 1919 all financial support was turned to library education.

When Andrew Carnegie died in 1919 at age 84, he had given nearly one-fourth of his life to causes in which he believed. His gifts to various charities totaled nearly $350 million, almost 90 percent of his fortune. Carnegie regarded all education as a means to improve people's lives, and libraries provided one of his main tools to help Americans build a brighter future.

Obtaining a Carnegie Library

Andrew Carnegie began his philanthropy to public libraries at a time when they desperately needed help. Even with tax levies, many communities could not afford to build their own library. Most libraries were collections of books located in highly unusual places: wooden shacks, millinery shops, offices, stables, and churches. One town even had their "library" in a rest room, where the matron doubled as a librarian. It was during his "wholesale" period of giving that Carnegie helped communities like these obtain libraries. A town in any English-speaking nation desiring a grant began by writing a letter of request to Carnegie's secretary, James Bertram. Carnegie and Bertram were willing to consider any completed application. Some people, however, did not even want to ask for a grant. They objected to receiving money from Carnegie, who after 1892 had developed a reputation as a ruthless businessman. Carnegie had always said that when workers were on strike, plants such as his steel mills should be shut down. Strikebreakers (often known as "scabs") should never be used, and disputes should be peaceably negotiated.

In July 1892 the union workers at Carnegie's Homestead steel plant near Pittsburgh went on strike. Carnegie was at his home in Scotland, leaving Henry Clay Frick, second in command at Carnegie Steel, in charge. Frick decided to stop negotiating, and he locked the workers out of the plant. Frick, who was more aggressive than Carnegie in asserting management's authority, soon hired 300 Pinkerton detectives from Pinkerton National Detective Agency to protect the plant and the nonunion work force he intended to hire. When the Pinkerton men arrived via rafts on the Monongahela River, they were met by an army of angry strikers. The next several hours of gunfire and other attacks resulted in a number of deaths and injuries. The Pennsylvania National Guard finally restored order and protected the plant until the union broke that fall. Although Carnegie did not call in the detectives, he also made no effort to tell Frick not to do so, nor did he settle the strike after the violence erupted.

Homestead forever stained Carnegie's reputation. Some people accused him of building his fortune on the backs of underpaid labor; others found it ironic that he would build libraries for working men who, because of long hours on the job, could not use them. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch illustrated the feelings of many when it wrote, "Ten thousand 'Carnegie Public Libraries' would not compensate for the direct and indirect evils resulting from the Homestead strike."

For the most part, however, communities still chose to complete their applications. Though Carnegie readily granted money, he also placed several conditions on his gifts. Municipalities had to own the site on which the library would be built, which often meant spending taxpayer money. The property also had to be large enough that the library could be expanded if demand rose.

The maintenance pledges that were another part of the contract could prove a major stumbling block. Carnegie required that the grant recipients agree to pay each year an amount equal to 10 percent of his gift to maintain the building his donation provided. He believed that "the community which is not willing to maintain a Library had better not possess it," but opponents argued that their taxes were already too high and that Carnegie's rules would raise them even more.

The designs towns wanted for their libraries also caused problems. Until 1908, communities that satisfied the site and maintenance pledges were free to build whatever they saw fit. However, Carnegie and Bertram thought that many of the plans were not practical, because they had expensive exteriors and inefficient interiors. For instance, Bertram discouraged fireplaces, believing that they wasted space and benefited only those closest to the heat.

In 1908 Bertram began exerting more control over designs. For three years he required grant recipients to submit plans before building began, and then he wrote a book entitled Notes on Library Buildings. Sent to every community that won a grant, Notes reflected the thinking of leading architects of libraries. It contained minimum standards and six model floor plans that provided the greatest amount of usable space consistent with good taste. It suggested a basement 9 to 10 feet high and 4 feet below natural grade and a second level 12 to 15 feet high. The most commonly adopted of the plans called for a main floor with an adult reading area on one side, a children's area on the other, and the librarian's desk between the two . The front door was located in the middle, opposite the librarian. The exterior was left to the discretion of the community, but they were warned to keep the structure plain and dignified. Bertram wanted usable, practical libraries, not elaborate "Greek Temples."

Communities which failed to meet Bertram's increasingly demanding standards found their designs rejected. Using some of the simplified spellings Carnegie advocated, Bertram sent the following letter to one town in Washington state: "...the plans...in no way interpret the ideas expressed in Notes on Library Building. A schoolboy could do that better than the plans show. If the architect's object had been how to waste space instead of how to economize it, he could not have succeeded better. If the architect cannot make a better attempt at interpreting the Notes on Library Building, I shall be pleased to put you in communication with architects who have shown their ability to do so."

Bertram's standards combined with the tastes of the times to create many libraries that looked similar. The high ceilings and the second-level public areas suggested by Bertram resulted in spacious interior rooms with splendid natural lighting and ventilation. Due to these qualities, the need for a flight of stairs from the street arose. The stairs, in fact, are commonly regarded as the identifying characteristic of a Carnegie library. Some feel that Carnegie felt anybody who wanted to read ought to be willing to climb a few steps. It is true he thought that ambitious young people would be the primary users of these libraries, and that they would presumably not be troubled by a few stairs. Some say the stairs carry a symbolic message, as in "thirteen steps to wisdom." The stairs, however, created problems for older people and those who have difficulty walking.

Although Bertram insisted on the implementation of his ideas about basic design, he did not try to influence style, except to hope that it would be dignified. Perhaps this explains to some extent the frequent use of classical architectural elements in these buildings, but it is not true that stylistic similarities are the result of dictates by Bertram and Carnegie.

One matter of design, however, may be indirectly related to Carnegie's involvement. Although some big-city libraries made extensive use of sandstone, a large majority of the existing Carnegie libraries are brick. This may be explained by the fact that they were intended to be permanent public buildings. However, it may not have escaped the notice of city officials that brick, while more expensive in terms of construction costs, is less expensive than other materials to maintain. The city only had to take care of the building, while Carnegie agreed to pay for materials. None of the libraries are wood, even in communities where the lumber industry was the mainstay of the economy.

Historic Context: Local

The following excerpt, "The Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Seattle Public Library" is from the Seattle Public Library: Conservator's Report, dated June 26, 1981.

The Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Seattle Public Library

The great value that the Seattle Public Library derived from Carnegie's contributions can not be overestimated. Carnegie's first gift resulted in a stately central library structure, which served the city for over half a century. Subsequent gifts for the construction of six branch buildings are still appreciated, as they continue to serve as libraries today.

Seattle first received funds in 1901, when the library, housed in the residence of Henry Yesler, was destroyed by fire which devastated the estate. The Library Board appealed to Mr. Carnegie, and although considerations of such requests often took as long as four years, Carnegie promised funds

in the sum of $200,000 after only one week. Later, he added another $20,000 to spend on furnishings.

The massive stone structure with marble interior, designed by P.J. Weber of Chicago, was dedicated on December 19, 1906. The inscription on the front of the building, taken from one of Carnegie's speeches stated:

The surplus wealth of the few shall
Become in the best sense of the property
Of the many because administered for
The common good.

Seattle Public Library's Historic Branches

Carnegie first offered funds for the construction of branch buildings in 1908. One of the considerations in determining his contribution was whether or not the population was sufficient to warrant additional libraries.

In response to Carnegie's query, the Library Board sent statistics "proving" that the population of the city was about 240,000. This figure was based upon the increase in post office returns, names published in the city directory, school census and the increase in streetcar revenue since 1900.

Carnegie's reply indicated that he was not accustomed to accepting such information in compiling population estimates. However, he was convinced of the need for more libraries in Seattle and offered the sum of $105,000 to be divided equally for the construction of three buildings.

Although strapped for funds, the City immediately accepted Carnegie's gift. The Library Board appealed to "public minded citizens" to donate land, and the location of the branch buildings was apparently dependent upon these donations.

In April, 1908, the Library Board accepted a one-half block, 28,800 sq. ft. lot from Mr. And Mrs. Allen Watson, located at what was then known as 50th Street and 10th Avenue (now N.E. 50th Street and Roosevelt Way) in the University district.

Also donated was a site in West Seattle at the corner of 42nd and West College Streets (now 42nd Avenue SW and SW College Street) by U.R. Niesz. This consisted of four lots measuring a total of 106' x 115'. However, the proposed library building measured 40' x 80', and the Board deemed the site too small. An appeal was made to secure the 50' lot adjoining the property t the south, and this was accomplished by a number of leading citizens who worked together to obtain it.

The third library was to be located at either Green Lake or Fremont, if a suitable site was offered. Encouraged by this possibility, the citizens of Green Lake joined together and raised $3,000 toward the purchase of a site. The Library Board provided another $1,000, and a 110' x 115' lot was obtained.

Following the acquisition of the three sites, construction of the buildings was simultaneously planned. The new libraries, the first of six funded by Carnegie, were dedicated and opened in 1910.

Subsequent years brought additional Carnegie funds and more branch libraries. In 1914, the Yesler and Queen Anne Libraries were completed and opened for service. The following year, the Columbia branch was erected. The Fremont branch, built during 1920-21, was actually constructed three years after the Carnegie Corporation of New York ceased to issue library building grants. However, since the negotiations between Seattle and the Corporation had been substantially completed prior to 1917, the money was allocated.

The $430,000 Carnegie contribution to the City of Seattle did not include a $15,000 appropriation for construction of the Ballard Carnegie Library. Built in 1903 from a grant issued to the City of Ballard, the library was later inherited by the Seattle Public Library when the smaller city was annexed in 1907.

It is interesting to note that only one of Seattle's seven remaining historic libraries was constructed solely from City funds. In 1913, the Library Board turned over to the City a small, triangular downtown lot to be used for park purposes. Originally deeded to the library by Henry L. Yesler in 1889, the lot was found to be too small even for a branch. In return for the triangle, the City purchased property selected by the Library Board at 23rd Avenue South and Yesler Way as the site for a memorial branch library to Henry Yesler, and appropriated $40,000 for construction of the building.

Libraries and The Community

The branch libraries have always received enthusiastic support from their communities. Prior to the establishment of the Seattle Public Library's branch system, several of the communities began their own informal library operations. When Carnegie funds became available, communities began to vie with each other in hopes that a permanent branch would be built in their area.

In several instances, community members rallied together to raise money to purchase library sites. Through such activities and door to door canvassing, dances, card parties, men's smokers, street fairs, rummage sales and bake sales, several thousand dollars were raised by residents of Columbia City and Green Lake. Most successful were the people of Fremont who collected $7,000 towards the purchase of their site.

In other instances, property in the University District and West Seattle was donated by the owners. On Queen Anne, a Colonel Blethen contributed $500 towards the City's purchase of a lot, and the Yesler Library, as previously mentioned, obtained its site through an original donation by Henry Yesler.

Once the site was acquired and construction underway, the people of the communities eagerly awaited the opening. From newspaper accounts, each event was met by celebration and ceremony; formal announcements were printed, and people turned out in great numbers. In most cases, the buildings could not accommodate all who attended. The crowds, spilling out onto the grounds, heard speeches from members of the Library Board, the Mayor and other dignitaries. Thousands of people registered for library cards on opening days.

This same community spirit has contributed throughout the years of branch library service. Since the buildings were imposing structures in comparison to neighborhood scale, they often became the source of community pride. With the use of the auditoriums for meetings and lectures, the library served as a multi-purpose facilities, often binding together the community. As related in the 1923 Annual Report of the Seattle Public Library:

> Seattle has nine branch libraries (note: included Ballard and Georgetown) and each is the center of community pride. During the afternoon, they are filled to overflowing with school children. In the evening, older students and adults predominate. Improvement clubs, women's clubs, Boy Scouts and other groups use the auditorium.

Community use of the branch libraries appears as an indicator of larger scale economic and social events. During "good times", library use has fallen off. During "hard times", the library provided an interest and diversion, and idle hours were filled with reading. In fact, only recently has the Seattle Public Library been able to attain circulation figures to match those of the depression years.

Librarians have always noted with interest how the trends of the times are perfectly reflected in library work. For instance, with the high cost of goods and services come innumerable requests for "do-it-yourself" type books.

Today, patrons continue to look towards the library for information, problem solving, and recreation. Due to increased demand for services, the Seattle Public Library maintains 22 branches and a fleet of bookmobiles. Community interest has continued, as indicated by library use.

The Buildings

The seven historical branch libraries were all constructed during the Carnegie Corporation's increased controls on library design. The plans are only slightly varied versions of those

recommended by James Bertram in his pamphlet, "Notes on Library Buildings". Thus, the architects were allowed little in the way of design discretion.

According to Bertram, the best results for a small library consisted of a rectangular building with main floor and basement. The main floor was to be from 12' to 15' high and accommodate book stacks, circulation area and reading rooms for both adults and children. Windows were to be 6 to 7 feet above the floor to allow placement of bookshelves beneath. The floor area was to be divided by arrangement of book stacks. Glass partitions were to be placed above these to act as noise barriers while allowing the librarian an unobstructed view.

Seattle's historical branch libraries, although varied in exterior materials and design, are basically similar in plan, and follow Bertram's design concepts. They are two story, rectangular structures. In most buildings, the first floor consists of a lobby with a delivery desk, an open shelf room a children's room, librarian's office, and staff room. The basement housed an auditorium, workroom, storage area, furnace room, and children's story hour room (later converted to other use). Exceptions are Columbia and Fremont, whose first floors consist of a one-room plan. However, furniture arrangement and placement of reading material carry out a similar concept. Another exception is West Seattle, which does not contain an auditorium.

West Seattle Library Architects: Somervell and Cote

Woodruff Marbury Somervell was born in 1872 Washington, D.C., and studied architecture at Cornell University. Joseph Cote, born in 1874 in Quebec, had studied architecture at Columbia University. Both Somervell and Cote came to Seattle in 1904. Employed by the New York firm of Heins and LaFarge, noted ecclesiastical and institutional designers, they were sent here to supervise the construction of St. James Cathedral.

After the completion of the cathedral, instead of returning to New York, Somervell and Cote formed a partnership in Seattle which lasted from 1906 to 1910. Due to the success of the cathedral, they received commissions for other large scale projects in Seattle, including projects with the public library system. The public library commissions they won included the entrance stairs and terraces for the downtown Carnegie library, and three branch libraries: Green Lake, West Seattle, and University. Together Somervell and Cote worked on many other notable buildings, including Providence Hospital, Minor Hospital (formerly at Spring Street and Harvard Avenue), Orthopedic Hospital (Warren Avenue North and Crockett Street), and the Hotel Perry (now Cabrini Hospital). Somervell and Cote became known for their ability to synthesize local tradition with beaux-arts classicism.

Following the termination of his partnership with Cote in 1910, Somervell undertook the design of three additional branch libraries (Queen Anne, Columbia, Yesler/Douglass Truth), as well as a remodel of the old main library; the Florence Henry Memorial Chapel in the Highlands, and various

residences. Active in the American Institute of Architects, he was a member of the Board of Architects for the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition for which he designed the Manufacturers building. He served with the Corps of Engineers and the Chemical Warfare service in France during World War I. Following the war, he worked on the restoration of monuments damaged during the war. He then moved to Los Angeles to continue his architectural practice, and then eventually moved back to France. He died in 1939.

Cote practiced independently until 1940. His work included the original Swedish Hospital, the Perry Apartments and the Sunset Club. He served with the Army Corps of Engineers during World War I until 1920, when he returned to Seattle. From 1920 until 1948, his practice was primarily residential work. He is well known for his traditional Georgian and Federal Revival style homes located throughout the city.

Historic Context: West Seattle Library

The West Seattle Library has the distinction of being the City's first permanent branch library building to be opened. Constructed simultaneously with two "sister" branches, the West Seattle Library began to circulate books on July 25, 1910, nearly a week before the Green Lake Library, and two weeks before the University Library.

The citizens of West Seattle played a great role in assuring that a branch library would be located in their community. In 1908, $105,000 in Carnegie funds became available for the construction of three libraries. An appeal was made by the Library Board for "public minded citizens" to donate property for the location of the branch buildings.

One of the first responses came from U.R. Niesz. His donation consisted of four lots measuring 106' x 115' at the corner of 42nd and West College streets (now 42 Avenue Southwest and Southwest College Street). The Library Board, however, felt that since the dimensions of the proposed building were 40' x 80', the site was too small.

Rather than lose the opportunity to have a branch library built in their neighborhood, the people of West Seattle began working to obtain more property. The result was the purchase of another 50-foot lot adjoining the southern portion of the Niesz donation. With this addition, the Library Board was pleased to accept the site for a branch location.

Preparations were begun for planning building construction. Suitable sites at Green Lake and the University area were also donated, and the Library Board decided that the three libraries should be built together.

A design competition limited to local architects was held. Specifications for the design required a 40' x 80' building consisting of one main floor and a basement, with various spaces for reading, office classrooms, storage, etc.

Out of the 33 entries, the design submitted by the firm of Somervell and Cote was judged best. Their presentation was French Renaissance in style. The interior main floor plan contained two reading rooms, each 30' x 40' on either side of the main entrance and lobby. A desk for charging and discharging books was at the rear of the lobby and between the reading rooms. Bookcases were placed behind the desk and the entire floor space could be supervised by the librarian. A small office for the librarian and a toilet room were also on this floor. The basement contained rooms for the heating plant, storage, toilets and classrooms.

The design contract for the three libraries was awarded to Somervell and Cote in September 1908. In November, the Library Board recommended that Judson T. Jennings, City Librarian, conduct a trip to twenty-two eastern cities to study recently constructed branch libraries in actual use. Upon his return, Jennings consulted with the architects and plans and specifications were refined. When completed, they closely followed the design which was submitted for the competition.

The Library Board felt that the three branch buildings under consideration should be distinctive in style and of different exterior material. Hollow terra cotta blocks faced with red paving bricks and blue slate for the roof were materials selected for the West Seattle Library. It was constructed in a classical style, and completed at a cost of $38,344.48, of which $35,000 was funded by a Carnegie grant.

The community anticipated the building's completion with great enthusiasm. The projected March 1, 1910 opening, however, had to be postponed due to incomplete electrical facilities. Finally, on June 23, 1910, with jubilation and celebration, the Library was officially dedicated. Judge G.A.C. Rochester, President of the Library Board lead the ceremony.

Two days later, the West Seattle Library opened its doors for the circulation of books. By the end of its first month in operation, the Library had attained a total circulation of 3,268, of which 1,824 was adult and 1,444 was juvenile. This proved the Library's immediate popularity to the small community.

The Library, situated in the northern portion of West Seattle, was very accessible to early library patrons. Close by the business district, it was also near the streetcar line. Commuters from Seattle would come by streetcar from the ferry dock, up the hill toward the library and from there could continue on the "Junction" (at Admiral Way).

Always and integral part of the community, the West Seattle Library would cooperate with the schools and playfields to hold socials, picnics and other events to bring people of all the neighboring

districts together. The library advertised its services by placing notices in the Post Office and on the West Seattle ferry.

In later years, as the permanent population of West Seattle began to increase, library substations were opened in different parts of the community. These were always popular, but when they were closed during periods of hard economic times, patrons always returned to the main branch. This trend towards increased demand for library use has continued throughout the years.

The library building itself is an extant symbol of West Seattle's history. Constructed a few years after the incorporated City of West Seattle was annexed by Seattle in 1907, the structure has withstood many changes to the area. As a character giving element to the neighborhood, the West Seattle Library has become a community landmark.

DESCRIPTION

The West Seattle Branch of the Seattle Public Library is located at 2306 42nd Avenue Southwest on the block bounded by California Avenue Southwest, College Street, 42nd Avenue Southwest and Southwest Waite Street. It is sited on a raised, grassy lot that is landscaped with tall shrubs and trees. Shaped in a "T" plan and faced in brick with terra cotta trim and ornament, the building sits on a raised basement and is a one-story, double height space with smaller, one-story, single height wings to each side in the rear.

The 42nd Avenue facade is symmetrically arranged with a slightly projecting, central entrance flanked by wings which are each five-bay wide. Each wing features five recessed, three-over-three windows separated by brick piers. Below each window is a recessed brick panel. The expansive windows on each wing indicate the presence of two large interior reading rooms.

As with many Carnegie libraries, the entrance to the West Seattle branch library is highly ornamented and serves as the spine to the symmetrically composed facade. The main approach to the library is located in the center of the 42nd Avenue streetfront and is marked by 4 steps up to a concrete plaza with low rounded walls. Another stairway flanked by the continuation of the low walls leads up to the building's main entrance. Two tall, wrought iron lampposts with globe lights mark the top of the stairs. To the north side of the central stairway, a handicap access ramp leads down to College Street.

The double-height entrance pavilion features a double-leaf, multi-light oak door with a tri-partite transom above. The transom is covered with a wrought iron grate painted blue. A blue-painted, cast-iron door-surround features square rosettes. The door and cast-iron surround are located within a wide, stone trimmed squared archway crowned by carved brackets and panels featuring classically inspired details including both carved rosettes as well as Acanthus leaves and other highly-detailed carving. Centered above the doors a flat panel engraved with the words "Public Library."

Large piers anchor the building at the corners and feature cast-iron globe lights set below the building's decorative frieze. The frieze is composed of 4 parts. At the top is a flat band of buff colored terra cotta block, which rests on a terra cotta dentil band. Below the dentil band are alternating square and rectangular panels of buff-colored terra cotta. The square panels are centered above each pillar on both the primary and secondary facades; the rectangular panels are centered above each window and wrap the large corner piers. The frieze ends with a second band of flat terra cotta blocks similar to those above. A brick parapet rises above this, interrupted at each bay by a panel of decorative brick. The parapet is topped with a terra cotta coping cap. A hip roof and decorative iron ridge top the building. A large skylight is located above the entrance near the ridge-line and a second skylights sits in the same location on the west side of the roof.

The north and south facades of the West Seattle Library are identical and share many of the same design elements with the primary facade. Each is composed of three bays of alternating windows and brick piers. As with the windows on the building's primary facade, these window have simple terra cotta lintels and a recessed brick panel below each window. The rear facade and one-story wings feature one-over-one double hung windows and smaller globe lights. Both the north, south and rear facades feature decorative downspouts and leader boxes which are original to the building.

The main floor of the West Seattle Branch is based on an open plan with oak and glass walls dividing the three large reading rooms from the checkout desk, which is located adjacent to the entry vestibule. A large multi-pane skylight illuminates the interior along with 14 non-historic light fixtures, which hang from the ceiling and are similar to those originally found in the building. At the entrance, flanking the main door, and in the north and south reading rooms are 4 original gas lamp brackets. Two plaster scrollwork brackets beneath an oak trimmed square archway divide the eastern and western portions of the building.

Within the public portion of the library, the floor is carpeted, the plaster walls are painted off-white and the checkout desk, window trim, door surrounds and all trim work are made of oak. A private, staff office is located in the southeast corner of the main floor and public restrooms are located in the northwest corner. The building also has a basement level containing a staff lounge, storage and other utilitarian spaces.

Building Alterations

Changes to architectural and character giving features and historical elements include:

1930's	coal furnace replaced by manual oil burner
1939	original lighting system consisting of uplighting baskets replaced

1947	new roof - Library Board considered slate material, by cost exceed appropriation of City Council by $2,000. Architect then suggested use of light asbestos shingle normally used for residences, but not commonly used for public buildings. Due to constant problem with leaking, skylight removed.
1950	handrails - installation of railings by Rainier Ornamental and Wire Works
1959	brick window sills covered by copper deteriorated - allows moisture to enter building. Replaced with waterproof seal coat of asphalt base embedded with glass cloth
1961	overhaul and conversion of old steam plant to hot water system
1962	replaced front door with aluminum frame
1962	replaced 1,265' of sidewalk
1965	original battleship linoleum replaced with vinyl asbestos tile
1965	lighting upgraded to 50' candles illumination 30" above floor
1968	upgrade lighting of basement storage - installed 47 8' single tube fixtures between bookshelves; 2 8' two lamp fixtures in entry
1972	new roof - damaged extensively by winter storms; 6,800' re-roofed
1974	new concrete steps

The features of the Landmark to be preserved, include:

The site, the exterior of the building, and the interior of the building excluding movable furniture.

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