

1330

## National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

### 1. Name of Property

**historic name** Black River Falls Public Library  
**other names/site number** Black River Falls Carnegie Library

### 2. Location

<b>street &amp; number</b>	321 Main Street			N/A	<b>not for publication</b>
<b>city or town</b>	Black River Falls			N/A	<b>vicinity</b>
<b>state</b> Wisconsin	<b>code</b> WI	<b>county</b> Jackson		<b>code</b> 053	<b>zip code</b> 54615

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State Historic Preservation Officer - Wisconsin

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  
( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Black River Falls Public Library

County Jackson

Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that the property is:  
 entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.  
 determined eligible for the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.  
 determined not eligible for the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.  
 removed from the National Register.  
 other, (explain:)

*Edson H. Beall*

12.27.07

*[Signature]*  
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property (check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count)	
		contributing	noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	1	0
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district		buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> structure		sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> site		structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object		objects
		1	0 total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
(Enter "N/A" if property not part of a multiple property listing.)

Public Library Facilities of Wisconsin

Number of contributing resources is previously listed in the National Register

0

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/Library

Current Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/Museum

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Movements

Materials  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
Foundation concrete  
Walls brick

roof ceramic tile  
other terra cotta

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Black River Falls Public Library  
Name of Property

County Jackson  
County and State

Wisconsin

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION  
SOCIAL HISTORY  
ARCHITECTURE

### Period of Significance

1915-1957

### Significant Dates

1915

### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Ottenheimer, Henry L.: Architect  
McGillivray, J.J.: Builder

### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Black River Falls Public Library  
Name of Property

County Jackson  
County and State

Wisconsin

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

### Previous Documentation on File (National Park Service):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

### Primary location of additional data:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State Agency
  - Federal Agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - X Other
- Name of repository: Jackson County History Room

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property Less than one acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 15 671423 4906692  
Zone Easting Northing

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

2 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

4 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

See Continuation Sheet

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Cortney A. Cain	date	10/1/2006
organization		telephone	206-734-5213
street & number	5003 15 <sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, Apartment 201	zip code	98105
city or town	Seattle	state	WA

Black River Falls Public Library

County Jackson

Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps** A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.  
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs** Representative black and white photographs of the property.

**Additional Items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

<b>name/title</b>		<b>date</b>	10/1/2006
<b>organization</b>	Jackson County Historical Society	<b>telephone</b>	715-284-5314
<b>street &amp; number</b>	13 South 1 <sup>st</sup> Street	<b>zip code</b>	54615
<b>city or town</b>	Black River Falls	<b>state</b>	WI

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Section 7 Page 1      Black River Falls Public Library  
Black River Falls, Jackson County, Wisconsin

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**INTRODUCTION**

The Black River Falls Public Library is a one-story, Prairie influenced building that is accentuated with classical details. Henry L. Ottenheimer, a well-known Chicago architect, designed the building in the early 1910s. Construction began in 1914 with financial assistance provided by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The building was completed in 1915 and immediately opened as a library.

This building, known as both the Carnegie Library and the Black River Falls Public Library, is located on the western border of the Black River Falls commercial downtown district in Black River Falls, Jackson County, Wisconsin. Many early 20th century library planners considered sites such as this one, near the edge of the downtown district, a desirable building location.<sup>1</sup> Immediately to the west of the library is a historic Baptist church and immediately to the east of the building lies the Jackson County Courthouse. Both of these buildings were situated in their present locations at the time of the construction of the library in 1914-1915. As a result, the spatial context of the buildings surrounding the library remains historically intact.

The lot upon which the Carnegie Library is sited leaves little open space for public use. The Jackson County Courthouse maintains the adjoining lawn space on the eastern side of the building. This area provides a large expanse of open lawn that can be used for public enjoyment. In addition, it also provides a view shed in which one can observe the ornate terra cotta lion's head fountain and public library nameplate. Landscape features around the library include several large deciduous trees towards the rear of the lot and a well-maintained lawn. In addition, a concrete sidewalk runs in front of the library (east to west), parallel with Main Street. The physical appearance of the landscape features remains largely unchanged.

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<sup>1</sup>Medford Public Library National Register Nomination, 1993. Nomination located in the Wisconsin Historical Society Division of Historic Preservation Office.

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**EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION**

The Black River Falls Public Library is a freestanding rectangular block that is approximately 60 feet long by 30 feet wide. Its Prairie inspired features were commonly accepted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a type of informal library design.<sup>2</sup> The one-story building sits atop a high raised basement of poured concrete construction. The exterior wall surface is finished with brick veneer set in common bond. The low-hipped roof, defined by its projecting eaves, features a segmental-arched dormer on the south slope.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the roof is finished with red ceramic tile.

The library features a large amount of wall space dedicated to fenestration. It has a regular fenestration pattern that consists of three-pane awnings in the basement. Where the land slopes away from the building the window size is increased with three over three double hung windows and larger double hung windows on the back elevation.<sup>4</sup> The majority of the windows of the building are original; however, several windows have been replaced throughout the years. Replacement windows are evident on the northern and southern elevations. Regardless, the exterior integrity of the building has not compromised as a result of these minor changes.

The main entry façade, located on the southern elevation, has a front entrance, set back from the main plane of the façade on the far right. At basement level are five three-pane windows. The main level has five windows as well. The three central windows consist of three parts. The two bottom panes are singles with a divided light sash at the upper level. The central window's six light upper sash has been replaced with a single pane. Flanking the three large windows are three over three double hung sashes. An eyebrow dormer is centered over the central window.

The main entrance, located in a projecting vestibule on the eastern side of the building, consists of a door set in a metal frame. Surrounding the door is a terra cotta casement with decorative classical moldings. In addition, there is a four-light window over the door. The stairs for the main entrance are of concrete construction and are flanked on each side with a metal handrail. Finally, the east face of the projecting vestibule is enriched with a terra cotta fountain with a lion's head spout and an

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Mead and Hunt, "Intensive Survey Report of Wisconsin's Historic Public Libraries." Prepared for the Wisconsin Historical Society Division of Historic Preservation, June 1999, 42-43.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

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associated water pool at its base. Above the lion's head sits a terra cotta panel inscribed, 'Public Library Black River Falls.' Fenestration on this portion of the building includes two, three-over-three double-hung windows flanking a four over four pane window. All are centered over the terra cotta nameplate.

The east elevation contains the centrally located projecting vestibule mentioned above. To either side of the projecting pavilion are three widows. The central window of each section is of three parts, with two single light sashes topped by a six light sash. Flanking each of the larger windows is a three over three light opening. The basement has three, three-paned awnings on the southern end, while the northern end contains two, three-over-three double-hung windows. While the south elevation faces the street and has the main entrance, the east elevation is the most prominent. It visually contains the most concentrated mass of decorative elements on the entire building. With the windows, the lion's head fountain and water collection pool, as well as the terra cotta panel indicating its function, this elevation was the source of pride for the community. It should come as no surprise that this elevation was featured on a post card shortly after its construction.

The north elevation of the library contains a brick chimney that is centered on the back wall. Furthermore, three, three-over-three double-hung windows are located near the frieze. Originally, there were four, three-over-three windows; however, the fourth window was covered to allow the installation of a modern heating and cooling system. Additionally, there are two, two-over-two double-hung windows and one, three-over-three double-hung window at the basement level. When considering the integrity of all of the elevations of the library, this has the least. Two windows on the rear have aluminum storm window replacements, while another window has been sealed shut with a board to support the systems mentioned above. Additionally, the heating and cooling equipment, phone installation wires and other obtrusive elements exist at the rear of the building on this elevation.

Finally, the west elevation of the library runs parallel to the Baptist church next door. The library and church buildings are in close proximity as they are situated only six feet apart. In between the two buildings there is a small concrete sidewalk that leads from a wooden door of the basement of the library to Main Street. As a result of the close quarters, there is no decorative detail associated with this elevation due to its lack of visibility. However, there are eleven evenly spaced, three-over-three double-hung windows that provide light for the main library floor. Additionally, there are three, double-hung windows located near the northern end of the building and three, three-pane awning



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windows on the southern end of the building. Undoubtedly, these windows were placed to provide adequate lighting for the basement.

**INTERIOR DESCRIPTION**

The interior of the building is intact; however, minor changes have occurred throughout the years. The main floor is a large rectangular room interrupted only by a door located in the center of the eastern wall. High ceilings and built-in bookshelves line the walls, which serve to dictate the space. The high windows located above the bookcases provide natural lighting. A white plaster finish exists above the bookshelves. Furthermore, a simple brick fireplace is centered on the north wall, which was historically the children's reading room. The fireplace was bricked in during the 1970s (as a result of the adoption of a modern heating system).<sup>5</sup> The maple floor also remains intact. Historically, the wood floor was covered with "cork carpeting"; however, the carpet that exists today is a replacement. Finally, the marble on the stairs and in the entry way has been removed and replaced by carpet and concrete.

Today the library's main-level is crowded with museum exhibits and other material. Historically, the particular beauty of the library was on the inside. According to an article in a local newspaper, the library's interior was spectacular. The author of the article recalls, "upon entering one is immediately struck with the mild harmonious effect, which is characteristic of Mr. Ottenheimer's work."<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the author described the interior of the library as follows:

The finish of the woodwork is in Kaiser gray, including the chairs, desks, tables etc. While the floor is of fine maple, it is covered with the finest cork carpeting that could be found, of a harmonizing shade. This was in the interest of quietude, which is a necessary element in a library room. The librarian's desk is near the west center of the library room and there is shelving around the balance of the room except at the entryway. In the south portion is the main reading room in which there are ample reading tables and desks, with chairs. The little ones are similarly provided for in the juvenile department at the north end. This room has particularly pleasing appearance in the evening when the 27,000 candle power semi-indirect lights are turned on.<sup>7</sup>

Another account described the interior of the library in the following manner:

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<sup>5</sup> Donn Holder, Oral History Interview by Cortney A. Cain, 17 April 2004.

<sup>6</sup> "Dedication of the Carnegie Library." *Badger State Banner*, 4 November 1915.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

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The library and reading room occupies the entire main floor. The shelving, fixtures and furniture are all of silver finished oak. A large fireplace stands at the north end. Light enters from many windows on all sides. At night it is lighted from fifteen indirect electrolers. The main entrance corridor and the stairways are of marble. A fountain adorns the east front, and an ornamental lighting pedestal stands in the lobby.<sup>8</sup>

Today, the basement also remains intact. This space included an assembly and community room, boiler room, restrooms, small kitchen, and a storage area. Historically, the space was described as follows:

The stairs to the basement are in the rear of the entryway. The basement rooms are finished in white, with aluminum finish on the plumbing fixtures. In the front end there is a fair sized room, which will doubtless be used for various assemblage purposes. This room is also provided with some indirect lights. The basement floor is concrete with a smooth and very hard finish of what is known as Lapidolith.<sup>9</sup>

Another historic account of the basement indicated the following:

In the basement is a large lecture room, which comfortably seats 150 people. There is an entrance from the west side as well as from the library stairway. The hot water heating plant and coal bin take up another portion of the basement, and there are also two good store-rooms and two toilets.<sup>10</sup>

Minor interior changes, which are visible on the main floor of the library as well as in the basement, include the installation of a modern heating and cooling system and florescent lighting. Additional changes include the installation of modern toilets due to state codes as well as the replacement of the original cork carpeting. These changes do not detract from the interior integrity of the building.

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<sup>8</sup> "New Library Dedicated." *Badger State Banner*, 1 November 1915.

<sup>9</sup> "Dedication of the Carnegie Library." *Badger State Banner*, 4 November 1915.

<sup>10</sup> "New Library Dedicated." *Badger State Banner*, 1 November 1915.

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While architecturally the interior of the library remains largely intact, the original furnishings did not fare as well. In 1995, due to insufficient space, a new library was constructed, thereby abandoning the Carnegie Library. As a result of the move, a majority of the library's original furnishings were auctioned after the library closed.<sup>11</sup> These items included the original library tables and chairs, as well as the large checkout desk. Luckily, the original portrait of Andrew Carnegie, as well as the original magazine rack, still remain in the building.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the original built-in bookshelves also remain.

**INTEGRITY STATEMENT**

The library has maintained both its interior and exterior integrity. The primary architectural characteristics that define this building as a freestanding public library remain unchanged. Furthermore, the location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and overall feeling remain largely intact, thereby allowing the building to possess authenticity. While minor maintenance-related changes have altered the building throughout the years, these changes do not detract from the overall integrity of the building as a whole.

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<sup>11</sup> Donn Holder, Oral History Interview by Cortney A. Cain, 17 April 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Black River Falls Public Library is locally significant as defined by the *Public Library Development in Wisconsin* Multiple Property Form, through two criteria.<sup>13</sup> The property meets requirements for Criterion A in areas of education and social history. The Black River Falls Carnegie Library, since its dedication in 1915, has remained an important social and educational center for the citizens of Jackson County through the end of the historic period (1957) and beyond. Furthermore, the library meets the requirements for Criterion C for architecture. The building serves as a fine example of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Prairie-style library with classically influenced details. This is demonstrated by the library's low-hipped roof with projecting eaves as well as by the façade, which emphasizes horizontal lines and defined vertical detailing. In addition, the building contains numerous classical details, including moldings over the entrance as well as a terra cotta fountain with lion's head spout and nameplate on the projecting vestibule. Today, the building no longer functions as library; however, it retains integrity to its original use and design.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Jacob Spaulding established Black River Falls in 1839.<sup>14</sup> Initially, logging interests drew many pioneers to the area. After the supply of white pine dwindled, the lush forests were decimated, leaving a region defined by cleared lands. As a result, many agriculturalists were drawn to the area. As the surrounding countryside continued to grow due to agricultural expansion, the city also flourished. Unfortunately, the residents of Black River Falls endured many catastrophes, which serves as a testament to their commitment to the development and continued expansion of the city. In 1860, the city was destroyed by fire; however, it was rebuilt in 1861. It has since survived several floods, namely the infamous flood of 1911, which destroyed a large portion of the downtown area. Today, Black River Falls is the largest city in Jackson County and serves as the county seat. The city continues to thrive and has made significant progress since Jacob Spaulding established it in 1839.

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<sup>13</sup> The history of libraries in Wisconsin and of Carnegie funding is discussed in the multiple property nomination and is not repeated here.

<sup>14</sup> "Jackson County History." Black River Falls website < [www.blackriverfalls.com](http://www.blackriverfalls.com) > 2 April 2004.

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## EDUCATION

Historically, the Black River Falls public library system is significant as it is one of the oldest legal public library systems in the State of Wisconsin.<sup>15</sup> The implementation of this early library system indicates that the community of Black River Falls valued libraries and books very early in its history. In 1873, the library boasted 240 books with patrons checking out 15 to 20 books daily.<sup>16</sup> By 1910, the library had a total of 2,338 books and continued to grow.<sup>17</sup> As the demand for books and related library services overwhelmed the limited space of the library, local residents petitioned for a new library building. Ultimately, the Carnegie Corporation of New York would fund the new library building.

Throughout its long and rich history, the Black River Falls Public Library provided many educational and social opportunities. It made books available to any citizen residing in Jackson County. This allowed residents from rural areas of the county the opportunity to utilize the library and check out books. Furthermore, the Carnegie Library housed many social events. These events included music ensembles, Boy Scout activities and educational lectures. By serving as an educational and cultural center through the loan of books, as well as by serving as a social center for the community and county, the Library remains significant.

## SOCIAL HISTORY

In 1868, the first library opened in Black River Falls, Wisconsin. Situated in the Jackson County Courthouse, the library was private and charged a fee to non-members.<sup>18</sup> After only three years in the courthouse, the *Young Men's Literary Association* took responsibility of the library in 1871 and moved it to a new location on the second floor of the Masonic Block.<sup>19</sup> In 1872, the Village of Black River Falls acquired the right to control the library as a result of the ratification of the Wisconsin Public

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<sup>15</sup> "Black River Falls Public Library: Wisconsin's First Public Library 1879-1997, A Brief History of 125 Years." Location: Jackson County History Room in the General Library History file.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Betty Epstein, "BRF Library 100 Years Old," *Jackson County Reader*, Vol. 1, December 1975.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

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Library Act.<sup>20</sup> This new law “permitted the establishment of free public libraries and reading rooms in cities and towns in Wisconsin.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, this law indicated that libraries should “forever be free for the use of the inhabitants” and further indicated that they provide “the greatest good to the greatest number.”<sup>22</sup> As a result of the new law, the Black River Falls public library system was created, making it one of the first legal public libraries in the State of Wisconsin.

After the establishment of the first public library in Black River Falls there was a period of flux and uncertainty concerning the future of the library system. During the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the library was moved to at least twelve different locations before the city purchased the Congregational Church building in 1902.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, the city’s first permanent library, located in the old church, soon became too small to house the growing number of books. At this time, the city was forced to find consider alternative locations for the library. As a result, local residents began preparing an application for a Carnegie library grant. In 1902, the principal of the Black River Falls High School, C.D. Kipp, composed a library application letter and sent it to Andrew Carnegie in New York with the hope of receiving funds to build a new library. Two years later, in March 1904, the principal received a letter from the Carnegie Corporation indicating that the request had been recognized; however, before the Corporation would consider the application, the city would have to provide a suitable site and some funds to support a library.<sup>24</sup>

Several years would pass with little progress towards obtaining Carnegie funds. It is possible that the community could not agree on a suitable site for the proposed library, which inevitably delayed the process. It was clear that the site of the old church, which served as the current library, was not large enough to house a new library. Therefore, those involved with the library and city board needed to find a new site on which to construct a library. After a great deal of deliberation, the Gebhardt site, located between the Baptist Church and the County Courthouse, was selected. Unfortunately, the site had a building on it that needed to be removed.<sup>25</sup> By 1914 a local newspaper reported that this location had

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<sup>20</sup> Mead and Hunt, “Intensive Survey Report of Wisconsin’s Historic Libraries,” 1999.

<sup>21</sup> Pearl B. Porath, “Public Library Houses Books,” *Jackson County Reader*, Vol. 3, July 1986.

<sup>22</sup> Georgia Voelker, News release: 3 April 1972. Location: Jackson Counter History Room.

<sup>23</sup> “A History of the Black River Falls, Wisconsin, Public Library,” Jackson County History Room, General Library History file and Betty Epstein, “BRF Library 100 Years Old,” *Jackson County Reader*, Vol. 1, December 1975, 57.

<sup>24</sup> “Library Notes.” *Badger State Banner*, 10 March 1904.

<sup>25</sup> “Library Contract Let,” unknown 1914 newspaper, Jackson County History Room, Library History 1866-1915 file.

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been selected, but not without controversy.

There has been some little opposition talked regarding the location of this library, which was probably in a measure responsible for the delay in getting ready to let the contract. The only plausible opposition was on the ground of the smallness of the lot. The location surely could not be objectionable to anybody as to convenience of the public. No better location in this particular could have been found, except possibly, one down in the heart of the business district. But it is hardly customary to put libraries in such a location. The fact that the court house yard is just east of the Gebhardt lot will in a measure; do away with the objection of the smallness of the lot, as surely nothing will ever be built on the court house lot to interfere with the library.<sup>26</sup>

Ten years after the last correspondence with the Carnegie Corporation, on March 11, 1914, the Carnegie Corporation awarded members of the Black River Falls community \$10,000 to construct and furnish a library.<sup>27</sup> In April 1914, the library board accepted the offer from the Carnegie Commission. At the time, the city council also “passed the required ordinance for procuring a site and providing the necessary ten percent payments.”<sup>28</sup> The site was purchased from Dr. R.C. Gebhardt in June of 1914. The cost of the 44 by 120 foot lot was \$1,300.<sup>29</sup> Construction began in 1914 and was completed the following year. Ultimately, the receipt of Carnegie funds is attributed to the work of Merlin Hull who played an active role in establishing communication with the chairman of the Carnegie Library Foundation. After the flood of 1911, Hull pleaded for Carnegie money to build a library, which would help restore the appearance of Black River Falls.<sup>30</sup>

The new library officially opened on November 1, 1915. The total cost of the building was estimated at \$10,500.<sup>31</sup> The Carnegie Corporation supplied a \$10,000 grant and donations by the “tradesmen who erected the building” left only \$217.63 to be paid as the city’s ten percent.<sup>32</sup> After the building was completed, a reporter from the Black River Falls *Badger State Banner* indicated the following:

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Mead and Hunt, “Intensive Survey Report of Wisconsin’s Historic Libraries,” 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Pearl B. Porath, “Public Library Houses Books,” *Jackson County Reader*, Vol. 3, July 1986.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> “A History of the Black River Falls, Wisconsin, Public Library,” Jackson County History Room, General Library History file.

<sup>31</sup> “New Library Dedicated,” *Badger State Banner*, 1 November 1915.

<sup>32</sup> Pearl B. Porath, “Public Library Houses Books,” *Jackson County Reader*, Vol. 3, July 1986.

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While the library is not large, nor does it present anything like a fancy appearance, it is ample in size for the purpose for which it was constructed and has a rather uncommon style of architecture which is pleasing to the eye and will be lasting in this effect. It was designed particularly to fit the purpose provided and the fact that ends were made to meet so closely shows accurate designing, as well as careful management on the part of the building committee.<sup>33</sup>

The Black River Falls Public Library successfully served as an educational center for many years. Not only did the library provide an environment in which to read and learn, but it also served as a meeting place for the Commercial Club. In addition, the Ladies' Club supervised a playroom in the basement area for young people to meet and play games.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, by the late 1980s, the building had become overwhelmed with books and could no longer function as a library. As a result, a new public library was constructed in Black River Falls and the Carnegie Public Library building was vacated in 1995. After the historic building was abandoned, the city police department occupied the building until the new city hall was constructed. The building again stood vacant for several years until the Hoffman family of Black River Falls purchased the library and donated it to the Jackson County Historical Society. Currently, the old Public Library building is owned by the Jackson County Historical Society and houses a local history museum. Today, the library continues to serve as a recreational and cultural center. Andrew Carnegie, in his quest to provide cultural awareness by donating funds for libraries, would appreciate the fact that the library continues to provide awareness for future generations.

HENRY L. OTTENHEIMER

Constructed in 1914-1915, with Carnegie funds, the Black River Falls Public Library was designed by Henry L. Ottenheimer. Architect Ottenheimer was born in Chicago in 1869 and received an education in the same city. While pursuing his degree he traveled to Paris, France to study architecture. After his studies he returned to Chicago and established the architectural firm Ottenheimer, Stearn & Reichert.<sup>35</sup> He worked on several large buildings in the "metropolis of the central west."<sup>36</sup> In addition, he also worked on many buildings in other cities, including Duluth and St. Paul. Furthermore, Ottenheimer is

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<sup>33</sup> Dedication of the Carnegie Library," *Badger State Banner*, 4 November 1915.

<sup>34</sup> "A History of the Black River Falls, Wisconsin, Public Library," Jackson County History Room, General Library History file.

<sup>35</sup> "Passing of Architect Ottenheimer." *Badger State Banner*, 22 May 1919.

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



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noted for his work on the Elks National Home in Bellford, VA.<sup>37</sup>

In Jackson County, Ottenheimer was known for the design of the Black River Falls Public Library, as well as the Jackson County Bank. Interestingly, both of the above mentioned buildings were located on Main Street in the City of Black River Falls, Wisconsin. Reportedly, the community was pleased with the work of Ottenheimer indicating: "the library plans were excellent, and library experts state that, for the amount invested, we have a building unexcelled in appearance, in conveniences and in exterior and interior finish."<sup>38</sup>

## ARCHITECTURE

Prairie School architecture is most commonly found in the upper Midwestern portions of the United States and was popular between the years 1900-1920. It is often associated with architects Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright. Several features are predominant in Prairie School architecture and are easily identified in the architecture of the Library. Generally, Prairie School buildings have low-pitched, hipped roofs with widely overhanging eaves. In addition, this style of building usually has at least two stories with one story wings or porches. Finally, this type of building often has horizontal rows of windows with defined vertical details.<sup>39</sup> Clearly, the Library exhibits many of the characteristics stated above; however, it also has variations in style with features drawn from classical vocabulary.

The Prairie School is defined by four principal subtypes. These types are characterized as follows: hipped roof, symmetrical, with front entry; hipped roof, symmetrical, no front entry; hipped roof, asymmetrical and gabled roof.<sup>40</sup> The Black River Falls Public Library does not clearly fall within any of the four subtypes. Rather, it reflects a combination of features that serve to represent a variant, symbolizing the tastes and trends that were popular in the community during this period of time and the design sensibilities of the architect. It should come as no surprise that many variations exist within this type of architecture. Clearly the Carnegie Library can be classified as a Prairie influenced building; however, it also contains classical elements that were used in its ornamentation and design.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> "New Library Dedicated." *Badger State Banner*, 1 November 1915.

<sup>39</sup> Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998. (439)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

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Classically inspired architecture became widespread in the United States in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This type of architecture is comprised of several styles, which include Greek Revival, Italian Revival and Beaux-Arts Classicism. The influence of the Beaux-Arts style of architecture can be seen in many public buildings in the United States between the 1890s and 1920s. Characteristics of this type of architecture include elaborate stone detailing, columns or pediments and a symmetrical façade.<sup>41</sup> The Black River Falls Public Library exhibits numerous classical details, which can be associated with the concurrently popular classical tradition. These details occur as decorative features on the library and include the moldings around the entrance, as well as a terra cotta fountain with a lion's head spout and a nameplate on the projecting vestibule.

The combination of the two styles reflects the two most popular architectural vocabularies for public libraries in Wisconsin. The form, massing and rooflines of the Black River Falls Public Library reflect the influence of the Prairie School. The decorative features defining the entrance and the embellishment of the east facade draw from the concurrent classical tradition. While minimal in their application, the classical features provide visual emphasis at the main entrance and on the most public façade.

#### REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

The Black River Falls Public Library meets the registration requirements for Free-Standing Library Facilities specified in the Multiple Property Form under the following criteria:

- a) Criterion A: The Black River Falls Public Library served an integral role in the development of the Black River Falls community as an educational and cultural center for Jackson County.
- b) Criterion C: The library, designed by Henry L. Ottenheimer, serves as a fine example of Prairie School Architecture and associated classical details.

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<sup>41</sup> Norman Tyler, *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to its History, Principals, and Practice*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000. (116)

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- c) Integrity: The library has served as an educational center for the Black River Falls community since its construction in 1915, and its primary physical characteristics are largely unchanged.

**SUMMARY**

The Black River Falls Carnegie Library serves as an intact example of the philanthropy of Andrew Carnegie towards the construction of public library buildings in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, the library represents a fine example of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century building with both Prairie and classically inspired features. Finally, the library represents this community's commitment to educational and cultural awareness by serving as a community center and educational institution.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lot numbered Eight (8) of Block Numbered Twelve (12) of Knapp and Williamson's plat of the village (now city) of Black River Falls, Wisconsin, according to the plat thereof, on file or record in the office of the Registrar of Deeds in and for said Jackson County, Wisconsin.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

This is the parcel associated with the building since its construction.

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Photo 1 of 8.  
BLACK RIVER FALLS PUBLIC LIBRARY  
Black River Falls, Jackson County, WI.  
Photo by C.A. Cain, January 2006.  
Negative at the Wisconsin Historical Society  
View of the exterior, southern (front) façade, looking north.

Photo 2 of 8.  
BLACK RIVER FALLS PUBLIC LIBRARY  
Black River Falls, Jackson County, WI.  
Photo by C.A. Cain, January 2006.  
Negative at the Wisconsin Historical Society  
View of the exterior, eastern elevation, looking west.

Photo 3 of 8.  
BLACK RIVER FALLS PUBLIC LIBRARY  
Black River Falls, Jackson County, WI.  
Photo by C.A. Cain, January 2006.  
Negative at the Wisconsin Historical Society  
View of the exterior, eastern elevation classical detail, looking west.

Photo 4 of 8.  
BLACK RIVER FALLS PUBLIC LIBRARY  
Black River Falls, Jackson County, WI.  
Photo by C.A. Cain, January 2006.  
Negative at the Wisconsin Historical Society  
View of the exterior, northern elevation, looking south.

Photo 5 of 8.  
BLACK RIVER FALLS PUBLIC LIBRARY  
Black River Falls, Jackson County, WI.  
Photo by C.A. Cain, January 2006.  
Negative at the Wisconsin Historical Society  
View of the exterior, western elevation, looking southeast.



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Photo 6 of 8.

**BLACK RIVER FALLS PUBLIC LIBRARY**

Black River Falls, Jackson County, WI.

Photo by C.A. Cain, January 2006.

Negative at the Wisconsin Historical Society

View of the exterior, street scene showing the Baptist church, library and Jackson County Courthouse, looking northeast.

Photo 7 of 8.

**BLACK RIVER FALLS PUBLIC LIBRARY**

Black River Falls, Jackson County, WI.

Photo by C.A. Cain, January 2006.

Negative at the Wisconsin Historical Society

View of the interior, main level looking northwest.

Photo 8 of 8.

**BLACK RIVER FALLS PUBLIC LIBRARY**

Black River Falls, Jackson County, WI.

Photo by C.A. Cain, January 2006.

Negative at the Wisconsin Historical Society

View of the interior, basement, looking south.

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Figure 1. Historic postcard of the Black River Falls Public Library, showing the library shortly after its construction.



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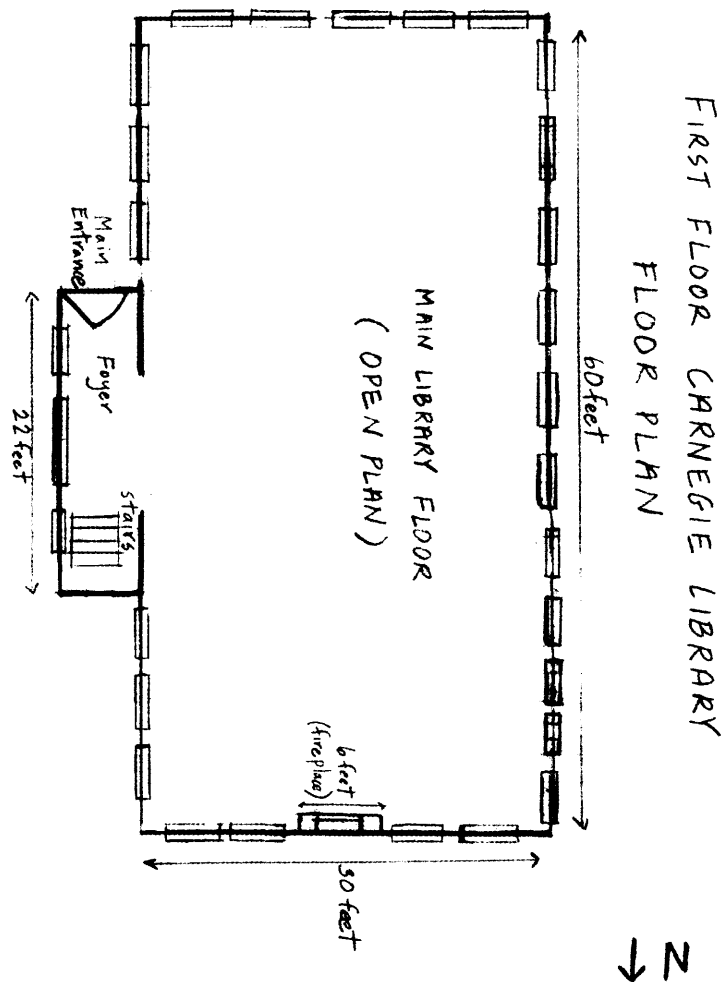


Figure 3. Main level floor plan of the Black River Falls Public Library. (Drawing by Cortney A. Cain, May 2004).

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Black River Falls Public Library  
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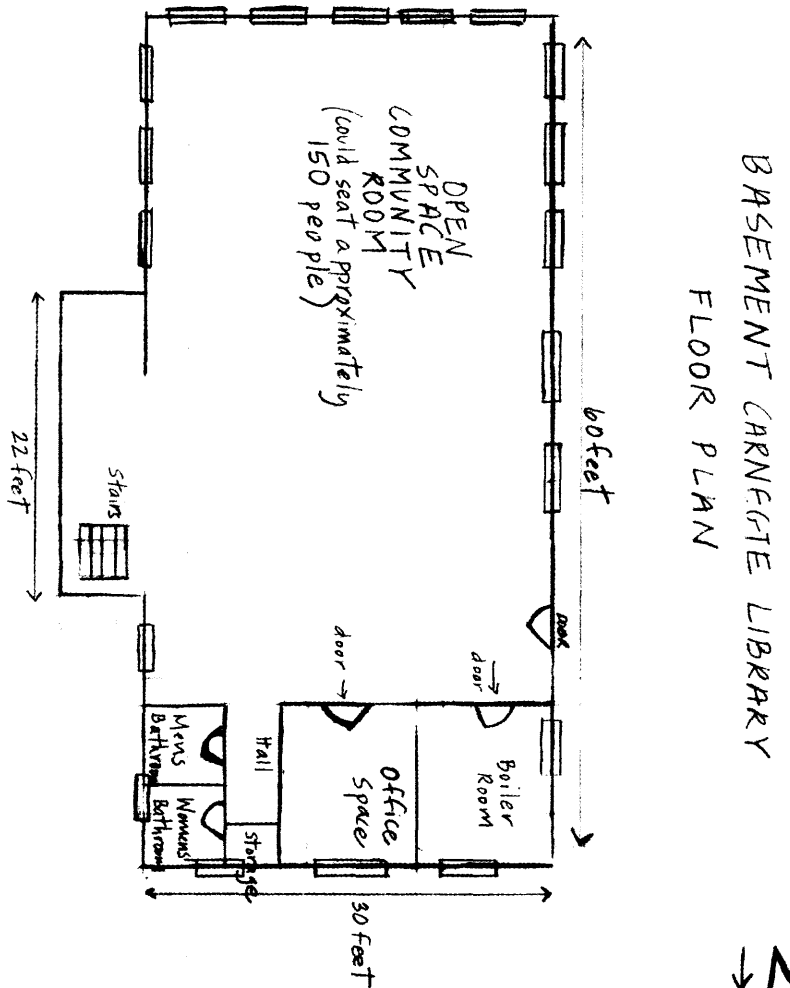


Figure 4. Basement floor plan of the Black River Falls Public Library. (Drawing by Courtney A. Cain, May 2004).