



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

This form is for use in documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

## A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Carnegie Libraries in Nebraska, 1899 to 1922

## B. Associated Historic Contexts

Education: Enrichment: Libraries: Carnegie Libraries in Nebraska

## C. Geographical Data

Carnegie grants were awarded to 68 communities, townships, or counties in Nebraska. The communities in which the libraries were located are: Albion, Alliance, Alma, Arcadia, Ashland, Aurora, Beatrice, Blair, Bloomfield, Broken Bow, Burwell, Chadron, Clarks, Clay Center, College View (now part of Lincoln), Columbus, Cozad, Crete, David City, DeWitt, Fairbury, Fairfield, Franklin, Fremont, Fullerton, Geneva, Gibbon, Gothenburg, Grand Island, Hartington, Harvard, Hastings, Havelock (now part of Lincoln), Holdrege, Kearney, Lexington, Lincoln, Loup City, McCook, Madison, Neligh, Norfolk, North Bend, O'Neill, Pawnee City, Pierce, Plainview, Plattsmouth, Ponca, Randolph, Ravenna, Schuyler, Scottsbluff, Seward, Shelton, Sidney, South Omaha, Spencer, Stanton, Stromsburg, Superior, Sutton, Tecumseh, Tekamah, University Place (now part of Lincoln), Wayne, and Wymore.

See continuation sheet

## D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.

*James A. Hanson*  
Signature of certifying official

5-17-91

Date

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

State or Federal agency and bureau

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

*Beth Boland*  
Signature of the Keeper of the National Register

7/3/91  
Date

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## E. Statement of Historic Contexts

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Discuss each historic context listed in Section B.

### The Carnegie Library Program

Libraries have been present in American towns since the mid-eighteenth century. Most of these libraries were proprietary and subscription libraries, serving only selected portions of the population. Often called "social libraries", these institutions peaked in importance shortly after the turn of the nineteenth century. Soon after, citizens and legislators alike began to recognize the need for libraries serving the general populace, and began defining the role of government in providing them. Legislation was passed by various states in the vanguard of the public education and library movement beginning in 1835 with a law that provided for tax-supported, free library service in each school district in New York. The first state enabling legislation for public libraries was passed in Massachusetts in 1848. The philosophy of progressivism, the rapid spread of free public education, the growth of democracy, industrialization, urbanization, and rising prosperity all influenced the burgeoning of public libraries. State library associations and state library commissions were organized and became guiding forces helping to build library services. By 1900 public libraries were an established--although young, and struggling--institution in the United States.

It was during this period of enthusiasm for the establishment of public libraries that philanthropist Andrew Carnegie began his program of giving libraries to communities. Although he had indicated a leaning toward philanthropy as early as 1868, he did not formalize his philosophy of the trusteeship of wealth (or the Gospel of Wealth, as it came to be called) until 1898 when he began writing essays on the subject. While Carnegie endowed many worthwhile causes in his lifetime, libraries were among the first and foremost of his benefactions. He himself divided his gifts of libraries into two periods, which he called "retail" and "wholesale."

The "retail" period covered the years 1886 to 1896. During this time Carnegie gave a total of \$1,860,869 to six communities, five located in Pennsylvania and one in Iowa. Fourteen buildings were erected as a result of these gifts. Many were community centers as well as libraries and Carnegie's gifts included books, swimming pools, organs and, most importantly, endowments for continued support of the facilities.

The "wholesale" period of library philanthropy lasted from 1898 to 1919. During this period Carnegie gave \$39,172,981 to 1406 communities for the sole purpose of constructing library buildings. Every state was represented in the list of awards except Rhode Island and Delaware. Fifty nine cities received main library buildings and/or branch libraries. The 1,349 other communities received only one building and the vast majority of those were small towns obtaining small structures. Awards of

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\$10,000 or less were given to 698 communities, while 404 communities received awards in the \$10,001 to \$20,000 range, totalling 1,102 buildings, or two-thirds of the buildings erected and 78 percent of the total number of communities receiving libraries. The top ten states in both number of buildings erected and number of communities served were located in the Midwest, with the exception of California. Several eastern states topped the list of total amount of money contributed, due to the many large single gifts received (several in the "retail" period).

To apply for a Carnegie library award a community had to first send a formal inquiry or request. The reply from Carnegie (or, in the later years, James Bertram, his secretary) was comprised of a brief letter asking the community to fill out and return a "Schedule of Questions", which included questions on town population, a library site, amount of money guaranteed from taxes for building support, and amount of money already collected for a library. Barring complications, a decision was made based on this information. The amount of the award was based on the town's population. Small towns, particularly those with a population under 1,000, were not eligible for grants. However, it was urged that such towns join together with other towns or governmental units to form a township or county library. If a town was awarded money for a library, it had to agree to meet certain stipulations. The community had to make an annual maintenance pledge that totalled ten percent of the Carnegie gift amount. The site for the library had to be purchased and paid for, although Carnegie interfered little with the selection.

Other restrictions, primarily involving library plans, placed on communities applying for Carnegie grants during the "wholesale" period varied considerably as the award process evolved. On this basis, the "wholesale" period can be broken down into three distinct phases: 1898 to 1907, 1908 to 1910, and 1911 to 1919.

Townspeople who obtained gift funds between the years 1898 and 1907 had few obstacles from Carnegie once their pledge was made and site purchased. They were free to build their library utilizing any design and style they wished. Since few public library buildings had been built prior to 1898, particularly in small towns, there were no architects experienced in library design. Many of the Carnegie libraries from this period were planned with expensive and elaborate exteriors, often employing the Beaux Arts style, and inefficient and uneconomical interiors.

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In 1908, James Bertram decided to attempt to prevent what Carnegie and many of the nation's librarians perceived to be "building blunders." Bertram began requiring that building plans be submitted for approval before construction began. He rejected plans that used interior space inefficiently, such as incorporating large foyers or wide stairways, and that placed too much emphasis on ornamentation. An early plan for the Denver library, for example, was rejected for "too many pillars."

By 1911 Bertram had formalized his ideas about library design into a leaflet entitled "Notes On Library Bildings" (sic), which was based on suggestions from librarians and his own common sense ideas concerning efficiency. Beginning in that year the leaflet was sent as a guide to all communities when funds were promised. The leaflet, in combination with pressure from Bertram, usually resulted in a desirable building. The year 1911 also marked the formation of the Carnegie Corporation and the move of Bertram from Andrew Carnegie's private secretary to corporation secretary.

Carnegie actually stopped making library grants in 1917 with the advent of World War I, but extended the date of his "wholesale" period to 1919 to cover the completion of the buildings begun prior to the war. Grants to towns for library buildings were not resumed following the war. The period 1920 to 1945 was a time when the corporation emphasized education. It funded college libraries, books and furnishings for college libraries, and educational programs for librarians. Two \$6,000 grants were made for "library development" (most often book purchases) in Nebraska: one to Doane College and one to the Nebraska State Teachers College at Kearney.

After World War II Carnegie library funding declined. The nation's library needs were being met by other sources, especially after the 1956 passage of the Library Services Act and the 1964 passage of the Library Services and Construction Act, which provided federal funds for public library services and construction.

## Nebraska Carnegie Libraries

In Nebraska, public libraries were part of the effort to bring culture and educational opportunities to the people of the state from its early days. In 1872, for example, the city of

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Omaha established its first circulating library. Smaller towns, such as Pawnee City, often had reading rooms. The local efforts to establish reading rooms or libraries were often initiated by community organizations, such as women's clubs, fraternal organizations, and commercial clubs. Most facilities, even when they were full-scale libraries, were not housed in their own building. They were located instead in such diverse locations as office building blocks, city halls, millinery shops, and buildings owned by fraternal organizations. In 1877 the state passed legislation that enabled towns to establish and maintain public libraries. Omaha was the first community to take advantage of this opportunity, completing its public library building in 1894. However, few communities followed suit, due perhaps in part to the economic depression of the 1890s.

The offer of grants for public library buildings made by Andrew Carnegie was the catalyst for a boom in library construction in Nebraska. The first award, and the largest made in Nebraska, was given to Lincoln in 1899, for a main library building and a branch library. During the first phase of the "wholesale" period, awards were approved for 19 Nebraska communities for Carnegie libraries, 18 of which eventually erected buildings. One community, Holdrege, was unable to meet the population requirements at the time of their application, so in 1904 the award was made for the Phelps County Library, to be built in Holdrege. The smallest grant--\$3,000 to DeWitt--was also made during this time.

In the transition years of 1908 to 1910, six communities received Carnegie awards. The majority of Nebraska's Carnegie libraries were built during the last phase of the "wholesale" period--between 1911 and 1919. Forty-six communities were approved for awards, with 44 actually constructing libraries. Most of these awards went to small communities, with seven of them being township libraries. The last awards in Nebraska were made in 1917, to Clarks Township, Cozad, and Scottsbluff. The Scottsbluff Carnegie Library was not completed, however, until 1922.

The construction of library buildings in Nebraska communities had an impact beyond the provision of reading material to the public. In fact, many of the communities already had that service available to them prior to the Carnegie grants. The buildings were designed to provide facilities for other educational activities as well as the library. Most had a lecture room, often

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with a podium on a raised platform at one end, or an actual stage. These rooms provided the opportunity for cultural and educational activities that might not otherwise have been offered, due to lack of facilities. This was especially true in the smaller towns where, at best, there may have been a church lecture room available on a very limited basis.

All of the 68 Carnegie libraries built in Nebraska served their intended purpose for several decades. In 1981, 46 were still in use as libraries, 14 had been adapted for other uses, and 8 had been demolished.

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**F. Associated Property Types**

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I. Name of Property Type Carnegie Libraries in Nebraska

II. Description

Carnegie giving in Nebraska began in 1899, during the first phase of Carnegie's "wholesale" period. Eighteen buildings were erected during this period. In the second phase of the "wholesale" period six libraries were built, and forty-four were constructed during the last phase. Andrew Carnegie felt that his gifts could be maximized if libraries were limited to towns of a minimum population of 1000 (or a township or county with 1000 people). Carnegie Libraries, therefore, are found in towns throughout the state, but are predominant in the more heavily settled portions in the eastern half of the state.

III. Significance

Carnegie Libraries in Nebraska have the potential to be significant under three criteria and on any of the three possible levels. If evaluated on the local level, a Carnegie Library may be significant under Criterion A for its contribution to the education of the community. If no previous library or reading room existed, the Carnegie provided access to reading material for the general public never before available. If such services had been previously offered, the Carnegie was often the first permanent structure to house a library. It also provided facilities for other types of cultural and educational activities, such as lectures or readings, that may not have been possible up to that time.

IV. Registration Requirements

For Carnegie Library buildings to be eligible within this context they must first meet the significance requirements outlined above. That is, a library must be significant under Criterion A for events that are of a historic nature to the particular library in question or within the Carnegie funding program, under Criterion B as closely associated with a person who can be documented to have had historic importance, or under Criterion C as an example of a style or technique, work of a master, or of a specific Carnegie plan.

Secondly, properties must meet integrity requirements to be considered eligible. They must remain in the place where they were during their important association (location and setting), and must retain sufficient historical appearance to recall that association (design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association). This would include essential physical features such as floor plan, materials, and exterior finishes.

See continuation sheet

See continuation sheet for additional property types

## G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

The multiple property listing includes all Carnegie Library buildings identified by the Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey, an inventory of historic properties which includes locational and photographic documentation and has covered approximately 80 percent of the state to date. The systematic state survey was supplemented in January, 1987, by a letter from the Nebraska Historic Preservation Office to all communities identified as having received Carnegie grants. The letter requested that a survey form, designed specifically for Carnegie Libraries, be filled out and returned.

The typology of significant property types has been based on function and association with education as provided through public libraries. The property type identified is associated with the single historic context, Carnegie Libraries in Nebraska, 1899 to 1922, which has been identified in the statewide planning process as outlined in "Topical Listing. Historic and Prehistoric Contexts in Nebraska." The Carnegie Library building was selected for its obvious close association with the theme and its illustration of structural types and functions related to important aspects of public library education.  See continuation sheet

## H. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional documentation:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> State historic preservation office | <input type="checkbox"/> Local government |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other State agency                            | <input type="checkbox"/> University       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Federal agency                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Other            |

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

## I. Form Prepared By

name/title Dr. Kathleen Fimple, Preservation Consultant  
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In the "retail" period, between 1886 and 1896, and during the first phase of the "wholesale" period, between 1898 and 1907, Andrew Carnegie placed almost no restrictions on the design of the libraries for which he granted awards. Few public library buildings had been built prior to this time, so there were no architects available with experience in library design. The early buildings often exhibited uneconomical and inefficient interior spaces, frequently incorporating large foyers into the floor plan. The entranceway, often 12 to 18 feet wide, extended 20 feet inside the building to a distant circulation desk. The exteriors displayed those architectural styles in vogue during this time period, including Beaux Arts, Neo-Classical, and Renaissance Revival. These buildings were, therefore, frequently rendered in a grand and expensive fashion with elaborate ornamentation. Many of the buildings constructed in the earliest years were located in bigger cities, and were quite large, in order to serve the sizeable population. Since there was no consistency in design during these two periods, there are few similarities or shared physical characteristics sufficient to define a property type.

The second phase of the "wholesale" period was a transition between the previous unrestricted years and the time of strict design regulation that was to follow. Carnegie or his secretary, James Bertram, had to approve all plans before construction could be initiated. The majority of the libraries were modest in size to serve the populations of the smaller towns in which they were built. Buildings were compact and efficient users of space, with some general similarities such as small entranceways. There was no common plan or plans. Exteriors were simple, but styles varied, including Neo-Classical, Jacobethan, Renaissance Revival, and Prairie.

In 1911 Bertram published his leaflet "Notes on Library Buildings" (sic), in which he outlined several ideal plans for libraries, as well as giving guidelines for interior spaces. Six plans were suggested, all aimed at small communities. All were rectangular-shaped, although the dimensions varied, as did the orientation to the street. All buildings were to have a raised basement and one story. The main level would be 12 to 15 feet high, with rear and side windows 6 to 7 feet from the floor (to permit shelving). The main entry was most often in the center of the primary facade, but could also be to one side of center or in the corner of the building. There was always a side or rear entrance, usually to the basement. The basement was to be 9 to 10 feet high and about four feet below the natural grade. Larger

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libraries could be constructed by adding a small stack room at the rear, about one third the width of the core, resulting in a T-plan. Or an entire rear wing could be added to the plans for larger buildings or to existing buildings in later years if expansion was required.

The key word for interior organization, as always, was efficiency. The circulation desk was to be located close to the entrance and placed so that the librarian could supervise as much of the library as possible. A small vestibule entering into one large room allowed for two well-lighted areas or spaces on either side of the passageway in which readers were undisturbed by patron traffic or circulation desk conversation. Subdivisions could be made by means of bookstacks, with glass partitions built in above them to provide additional noise reduction if desired. In the T-plan, a librarian's office was located between the stackroom and the desk. The basement housed the storage, work, and lecture rooms, as well as the heating plant and restrooms. Care was to be taken so as not to allot too much space to stairs, toilets, cloakrooms, and entries.

Additional rules often conveyed to cities included no fireplaces and no smoking rooms. Building costs were not to include shrubs, walks, or other grounds improvement. The building was to be exclusively for library purposes, and Carnegie would not buy existing buildings for conversion into libraries.

No suggestions were made about the exterior, but it was clear that the goal was a plain, dignified structure. In fact, Bertram warned against building "Greek temples" instead of libraries. Equally favored styles in Nebraska were Neo-Classical, Renaissance Revival, and Prairie, with Craftsman, Jacobethan, and Georgian also represented. With their rectangular plan, the majority of buildings featured hipped roofs, although gable and flat could also be found.

The building materials were brick or stone. Only a very few small libraries were of frame construction.

The majority of the Carnegie Libraries are still standing and should be in good to excellent condition due to continuous use. Integrity may have been compromised on many of the buildings. In some small towns located in areas with declining rural populations, the city has been unable to afford the costs incurred in maintaining a public library. The buildings could

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then be left empty and subject to rapid deterioration or could be adapted to another use, possibly suffering alterations in the process. In towns with growing populations, some libraries have been unable to meet the needs of the people and have been expanded, sometimes compromising the integrity of the building. Others, in the process of maintenance, have experienced changes, such as window replacement.

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Under Criterion B on the local level, a Carnegie Library may be significant if it was the property that best represents the significant activities of a local person who can be documented to have had historic importance.

A Carnegie Library may be locally significant under Criterion C for its architecture if it is the best example of its particular style as compared to the other buildings in the community. This is more likely to be the case in the earlier time period (1899 to 1907) when communities were free to select their own design and style.

On the state or national level, a Carnegie Library could be significant under Criterion A if it were the best example of a specific event within the Carnegie funding program, such as the establishment of township libraries in low population areas. It could also qualify if an event of historic significance took place in the library. For example, a library association meeting at which an important policy decision effecting the region or state was made could qualify a structure for state or national level significance.

Under Criterion B, a Carnegie could be considered significant on the state or national level if it was the best example of the influence of a significant person within the Carnegie program, such as Carnegie himself, Bertram, Louise Carnegie, Andrew's wife, who took an active role in the early library grants, and Alvin S. Johnson, a Nebraska-educated economist who, in 1916, extensively analyzed and reported upon Carnegie's library giving.

To be considered significant on the state or national level under Criterion C, a Carnegie would have to be the best example in the state (or nation) of the style or construction technique employed, the work of a master, or the design of the building. In the case of the later, there were six different plans suggested by the Carnegie Corporation after 1911. Adaptations were also possible in the form of a rear wing to accommodate the need for more space.

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Under Criteria A and B, where significance is derived from associations with important persons or events, integrity must be sufficient to convey the original function and design of the building. A high degree of historical architectural integrity will be required of all potentially eligible Carnegie Libraries under Criterion C. Of primary importance are the exterior plan and style, with secondary emphasis on the building materials and interior layout.

Libraries eligible under Criterion C need to be evaluated within the appropriate time frame within the period of Carnegie awards. The date of the award is the basis for the determination of the time period, for that was the point at which Carnegie or the Corporation did or did not influence architecture. During the "retail" period and the first phase of the "wholesale" period, Carnegie had minimal influence on the design of the library buildings. These buildings will have to be judged as examples of the individual architectural style utilized in their construction as applied to comparable public buildings.

Buildings begun in the second phase of the "wholesale" period must be judged on the basis of the restrictions Bertram applied during this phase, such as efficient use of space and simple detailing.

Libraries built in the final phase should be evaluated on the basis of conformity to the plans and suggestions made in Bertram's "Notes on Library Buildings"(sic), as outlined in the Property Type Description (Section F-II). The retention of the original design is of primary importance.

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The standards of integrity were based on the National Register standards for assessing integrity. Information from research literature, survey data, and the Section 106 review process was used to assess the relative condition and scarcity of each property type and to determine the degree to which allowances should be made for alteration and deterioration.

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