Landmark Nomination
Carnegie Branch Libraries
# of San Francisco

January, 2001

ORIGINS OF THE SEVEN SAN FRANCISCO CARNEGIE BRANCH LIBRARIES
1901-1921

CARNEGIE LIBRARY GRANT PROGRAM

Beginning in 1886, Andrew Carnegie, then one of the wealthiest industrialists in America, commenced what he later referred to as his “retail period” of library philanthropy. Carnegie had earlier advocated the disposal of surplus wealth to further social goals during the lifetime of the donor, a philosophy he committed to publication in 1889.[1] Although he financed a variety of public facilities, including schools, swimming pools, and New York’s Carnegie Hall, Carnegie favored libraries because they encouraged the active participation of the “deserving poor” for self improvement, a process with which he strongly identified due to his own early circumstances.

At first, he operated well within an established tradition of paternalistic library donorship, in which wealthy benefactors, typically on their own initiative, constructed monumental buildings in locales where they themselves either lived, did business, or were otherwise associated. Nominally dedicated to public use, these institutions were usually closely controlled by trustees drawn from the social elite and beholding to the donor. In practice, access to them was often limited. Operating expenses were met by private endowments, supplemented occasionally with public monies. However, continuity of funding was usually uncertain.[2]

Carnegie first donated library buildings in his Scottish birthplace, Dunfermline, followed by several Pennsylvania towns where his steel mill operations were concentrated. In Homestead, the last of these mill towns, he encountered, for the first time, public opposition to acceptance of his largesse. This resistance, strongest among union workers, stemmed from the virulent political conflict of the day between capital and labor in general, and particularly from the legacy of a bitter, violent strike and lockout that had occurred at the Carnegie Homestead Mill in 1892. During four months of conflict, armed company guards had killed several striking workers, and the Pennsylvania National Guard had been called out to protect strikebreakers. For years after this, organized labor fiercely resisted the use of Carnegie’s “tainted money” — even for public benefit.[3]

Stung by the growing resistance to his benevolence, Carnegie reorganized his approach to philanthropy. In 1898, he announced that he would no longer initiate library grants himself, but instead would entertain funding requests from interested municipalities, thus shifting the initiative for the creation of a library to the community itself. In addition, he began to require successful applicants to supply the building site, and commit to levying a tax of at least 10% of the grant amount *per annum*, specifically allocated to the continued operation of the new library. This new system had the effect of displacing political controversy away from Carnegie himself by requiring the basic commitment, and the necessary political decisions, to be resolved at the local level prior to his involvement.

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[1] Andrew Carnegie, “Wealth” (1889), quoted in Kortum, Lucy Deam. “Carnegie Library Development in California and the Architecture It Produced, 1899-1921”. M.A. Thesis, Sonoma State University, 1990, p27

[2] For a discussion of 19th century library philanthropy prior to Carnegie, see : Van Slyck, Abigail A. *Free to All, Carnegie Libraries and American Culture: 1890-1920,* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1995, Chapter One

[3] Kortum, Lucy Deam. “Carnegie Library Development in California and the Architecture It Produced, 1899-1921”. M.A. Thesis, Sonoma State University, 1990, p28, also Van Slyck, 19, 102

At the same time, the new Carnegie system strengthened the role of elected officials and the public *vis a vis* unelected boards of trustees. Since, at the very least, a municipality was required to institute a tax for library support, trustees—generally drawn from the social and cultural elite—were forced to negotiate with elected officials in order to receive Carnegie money.[4] In large cities, these officials were often members of recent immigrant groups who had not previously had any influence in cultural matters.

With the advent of this new system, Carnegie entered his “wholesale” period of giving. Beginning with 26 libraries funded in 1898, he went on to build an average of more than sixty per year until the program effectively ended in 1917. The peak years of activity were 1901-1903, when the now-retired Carnegie financed nearly 500 libraries. In all, he was responsible for the construction of 1,681 libraries in the United States, as well as 828 others worldwide.[5]

Carnegie’s private secretary, James Bertram, conducted most of the day-to-day business of evaluating requests and administering grants. Although there were no rigid requirements governing the architecture of a Carnegie library, Bertram, with the support of his employer, eventually came to exercise greater and greater influence over design, in the avowed interests of cost control and the avoidance of wasted space. By 1907, Bertram began to require that building plans be submitted for prior approval. He often demanded changes in order to avoid what he saw as wasted space or money. In 1911, he codified his views on library design in a pamphlet titled *“Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings.”*[6] In the same year, the newly created Carnegie Corporation of New York took over administration of the library program, with Bertram remaining the principal administrator.[7]

EVOLVING ARCHITECTURE OF BRANCH LIBRARIES

The earliest buildings designed as libraries in this country were typically monumental structures, often in the Richardsonian Romanesque style, usually located in the business or governmental center of a municipality. Their asymmetrical plans and high ceilinged spaces were ill suited to library use, but reflected a hierarchical social order in which trustees were accorded spacious, elegant private rooms; books were guarded from unsupervised public contact; and the public reading space was often dominated by a large portrait of the benefactor or founder. These buildings frequently housed non-library cultural facilities as well, such as art and natural history collections, concert rooms, or theaters.[8]

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[4] Van Slyck, Abigail A. *Free to All, Carnegie Libraries and American Culture: 1890-1920,* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1995, 65

[5] Carnegie Corporation of New York, website, “Andrew Carnegie’s Legacy”

[6] Reproduced in appendix to this report, pages 31-35

[7] Kortum, 30

Carnegie's early libraries were constructed in this mode, one even containing a gymnasium and swimming pool. However, as he entered his "wholesale period" Carnegie came to adopt the views of professional librarians, which emphasized more practical aspects of design, e.g. efficient handling of books, even heating of spaces, adequate storage and work space, etc. At the same time he espoused the theories of social Progressives concerned with the growing masses of foreign immigrants in American cities. Progressive theories saw libraries as sites for acculturation and education of both immigrants and native born members of the lower social classes. For those purposes, Progressives called for libraries located convenient to immigrant and working class neighborhoods, featuring open stacks, good lighting and ventilation, and an official attitude both welcoming and, at the same time, ordering.[9]

However, most early branch libraries were actually housed in rented or donated spaces—commercial storefronts, offices, or unneeded storage areas—spaces that generally lacked the qualities sought by Progressives. With his extensive program of grants, Andrew Carnegie ultimately came to be the single most influential force giving shape to the new branch library, a building type that had not previously existed. He increasingly favored the construction of branches over central libraries—after 1905 he refused to fund central libraries at all — and the branch buildings he financed were expected to conform to social-progressive concepts.

These views, ultimately codified by Bertram in *Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings*,[10] called for a symmetrical rectangular plan, a single story with basement, and windows six feet above the floor to allow continuous open shelves beneath them. On the main floor were to be a large reading room, entered through a small vestibule, and the librarian's service desk. The library collection was to be housed in open shelves lining the walls beneath the windows, and in low freestanding shelves which could be used as room dividers without restricting the librarian's ability to oversee the entire space from the service desk.[11] The basement was to contain a public lecture room, toilets, and service spaces. Eventually, Carnegie also came to require a separate children's reading room, again in accordance with Progressive social theory.

No such detailed guidelines governed the exterior design. Instead, *Notes on the*

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[8] Van Slyck, 4

[9] ibid, 65

[10] Here and elsewhere, the bothersome simplified spelling used by both Carnegie and Bertram has been modified to standard usage, hence 'building' rather than 'bilding' and 'are' not 'ar.'

[11] Although the librarian's desk location is not specified by *Notes,* it is centrally located in the San Francisco Carnegie branches, perhaps because staffing levels were typically lower here than in other parts of the country. In the Carnegie designs, a decline in levels of comfort for staff work space coincides with a redefinition of the librarian's profession from male to female work. See Van Slyck, Chapter 5

Erection of Library Buildings, states:

> "It will be noted that no elevations are given or suggestions made about the exteriors. These are features in which the community and architect may express their individuality, keeping to a plain, dignified structure and not aiming at such exterior effects as may make impossible an effective and economical layout of the interior."

The interpretation of these guidelines would lead repeatedly to disagreement between Bertram and local authorities, who were frequently more interested in the exterior appearance than the interior functionality. It would also involve Bertram and Carnegie in conflict between librarians and architects, two groups then engaged in professionalizing their respective fields. Bertram, speaking for Carnegie in these situations, declared a clear bias for the needs of librarians. However, he was also deferential to the generally greater social standing of local elites and their architects.[12]

Most Carnegie libraries utilized Beaux-Arts historic revival styles. The "Carnegie Classical" style, a somewhat stripped down version of Classical Revival, evolved especially to enable the use of a classical vocabulary within a usually limited budget. These styles were thought to impart an appropriate dignity to the building, to make it immediately recognizable as an important civic structure. They generally feature a three part vertical composition, with base, body, and capital clearly delineated by cornices or string courses. The entrance, usually elaborated with columns, pediments, and ornate surrounds, is located in the center of the main facade. Windows and doors are deeply inset. Masonry construction is favored, using the best materials affordable in the budget.[13]

INSTITUTIONAL ORIGINS OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN SAN FRANCISCO

The earliest libraries in San Francisco derived institutionally from American models that had existed since colonial times in the eastern states. These were usually organized around a collection of books made available by an individual or family, and were described as "social", "membership", or "subscription" libraries, the distinctions resting on how significant a fee was charged for use.[14] Membership was typically limited along social or professional lines. Early examples of the type in San Francisco include the 1851 Mercantile Association, the 1855 Mechanics Institute, and the 1853 Athenaeum, organized for African Americans.

Public financial support and broad general access to libraries in this country was first instituted in mid-nineteenth century New England. The earliest authorizing legislation was passed by Massachusetts in 1851, with the 1854 Boston Public Library becoming the first tax supported institution open to all.[15] These early public libraries were commonly created with the donated collection of a social or subscription library. In California, the Rogers Act of 1878 authorized municipalities to levy taxes for the support of libraries, and to accept contributions of books. However, the legislation specifically barred San Francisco from accepting donated collections.[16]

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[12] In the case of San Francisco, many of Bertram's decisions were influenced by the personal intervention of former mayor James D. Phelan or G. Albert Lansburgh, architect of four branches.

[13] Jones, Theodore. *Carnegie Libraries Across America, a Public Legacy.* Washington, D.C. Preservation Press; New York: John Wiley, 1997.

[14] Kortum, 3

The Rogers Act also spoke to a recurring question in the evolution of the American public library system, that is the nature of the governing bodies. Social and subscription libraries were usually controlled by self-perpetuating boards of trustees, often dominated by the founding family. As government funding became available, these elite bodies typically acted to preserve their authority over the newly public institutions, which they continued to see as preserves of high culture. However, especially in large cities, the advent of tax support gave rise to demands for more democratically selected governing bodies. The Rogers Act undertook to preserve libraries as elite cultural bastions by requiring tax-funded California libraries to be administered by self-perpetuating boards of trustees—purportedly to remove them from politics. But the new libraries were, by their nature, political creations, and were to remain contentious in many localities, certainly including San Francisco.[17]

In large cities, this basic political tension often translated also into a question of priority between a central library—usually favored by entrenched elites—or branch libraries—seen as a more accessible and democratic distribution plan by both Progressives and ward-based political leaders. Librarians, then just emerging as a professionalized group, tended to favor systems of branches. In most cases, early public libraries, both central and branches, were housed in makeshift quarters, either rented or made available in existing public buildings.

POLITICS OF THE SAN FRANCISCO CARNEGIE GRANT

In 1901, Mayor James D. Phelan secured a commitment from Andrew Carnegie for a grant of $750,000 to be used for the construction of a central main library and an unspecified number of branches. In a rare personal letter, Carnegie stipulated that “About half (not more, I think less) of this sum should be expended on the central library and the remainder on branch libraries.”[18] The grant also included the standard Carnegie stipulations that the city furnish building sites and commit $75,000 per year for maintenance and operations.

Carnegie’s grant offer was immediately caught up in what was the beginning of a decade of tumultuous political conflict in San Francisco.[19] As a result, its implementation was to be delayed for eleven years. Organized labor opposed acceptance of the money on grounds that had been voiced elsewhere across the country—that it was unseemly to put the city in the debt of a man such as Carnegie, who had acquired his fortune through the ruthless exploitation of working people, and had used lethal force against them when they struck for improved work conditions. Phelan and his supporters, on the other hand, stalled any action on the Carnegie branch libraries, and instead focused entirely on their cherished main library, eventually even attempting to usurp the funds set aside for branches.

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[15] ibid 6

[16] ibid 22

[17] Van Slyck, 65

[18] Carnegie letter to Phelan, 20th June 1901, (reproduced p 36 of this report) All correspondence citations are from the Carnegie Corporation of New York Archives, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, unless otherwise noted.

The whole library question was further complicated by near simultaneous local events. In the summer of 1901, as Andrew Carnegie was making his initial offer, Mayor Phelan, who had until then enjoyed some support from working class neighborhoods, interjected the police force into a strike by teamsters and waterfront workers. Police dispersed picket lines with billy clubs, hounded strikers off the streets, and rode as guards on non-union wagons, thus helping to break the strike.[20] Phelan, quoted as warning strikers "If you don't want to be clubbed…go back to work," now came to be seen as anti-labor, a local version of Carnegie himself—which further stiffened opposition to accepting the grant.

That November, largely as a result of Phelan's anti-labor image, Eugene Schmitz, president of the Musicians Union and candidate of the newly formed Union Labor Party, was elected mayor. The Phelan Democrats, who retained control of the Board of Supervisors, were reluctant to cooperate with Schmitz. They did, however, formally accept the Carnegie grant, enact a charter amendment to increase the annual minimum library budget to $75,000, in accordance with Carnegie's requirements—and sponsor a $1.6 million bond issue to cover land acquisition and supplemental construction costs for a new main library. The bond issue contained no supplemental funding for branch libraries.[21]

This political standoff continued until 1912. During that time nothing was done to move forward the Carnegie branch libraries, despite all necessary conditions apparently having been met. When the Main Library bond issue failed to sell—due partially to a low interest rate, but probably also to a nationwide boycott of San Francisco bonds issued under the Union Labor regime[22] —Phelan personally intervened with local bankers to arrange their sale. Enough bond revenue was obtained to finance the acquisition of land for the new main library. However, the remaining bonds rapidly became even less saleable with a rise in the market rate.

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[19] For a discussion of the conflict, see especially— Kahn, Judd. *Imperial San Francisco; Politics and Planning in an American City, 1897-1906.* Lincoln, NB, University of Nebraska Press. 1979 and Issel, William and Robert W. Cherny. *San Francisco 1865-1932; Politics, Power, and Urban Development.* Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press. 1986

[20] Kazin, Michael. *Barons of Labor*. University of Illinois Press. Urbana and Chicago. 1987 p54

[21] *San Francisco Municipal Reports 1901*

[22] Kahn, p46-47

During this period, five purpose-built branch libraries were erected, none of them utilizing the Carnegie money. Two were donated to the city, one South of Market by Phelan,[23] the other in Eureka Valley by businessman Andrew J. McCreery.[24] Both were built on city owned land. Two more, one in the Mission and one in North Beach were privately constructed as libraries, and leased back from the private owners. The fifth, the Park Branch, was built on Page Street, near Cole. Building and land costs for the latter were met by city funds, with no Carnegie money involved.[25]

Despite the Union Labor government's removal from office in 1907,[26] relations between the Library Trustees and the Board of Supervisors continued to be antagonistic. Although he was a long time Library Trustee, Dr. Edward R. Taylor, installed as interim mayor to replace Schmitz, was personally opposed to accepting the Carnegie funds. His opposition, plus a dispute over the location of a new main library, meant continued inaction on the Carnegie branches. In 1910, Taylor was succeeded as mayor by the new Union Labor candidate, Patrick H. McCarthy, President of the Building Trades Council. Under McCarthy, relations between Trustees and Supervisors deteriorated even further.

Shortly after McCarthy's election, Phelan, once again serving on the Board of Trustees, attempted to secure the entire Carnegie grant moneys for construction of a new main library, thereby eliminating any branches. He appears to have claimed that Carnegie had agreed to modify the original grant conditions. Rebuffed by Bertram,[27] Phelan and the trustees continued to pursue this end until Carnegie himself delivered a stinging rebuke in a letter to R. B. Hale, President of the Trustees, on April 16, 1910.[28] If the city wanted to erect a monumental central library, Carnegie remonstrated, it should finance that project itself, and use his money entirely for branches. He declined also to assist in the sale of the bonds for the trustee-favored main library.

McCarthy and his supporters then placed a measure on the ballot to make the Library Trustees an elected body. This was defeated at the polls, whereupon the Board of Supervisors promptly cut the library budget to the minimum allowable under the charter—which nevertheless remained high enough to satisfy the Carnegie requirements. Still, Phelan and the Trustees took no action to build the much-needed branches.

In 1912, with the Union Labor Party again out of office—this time through a legitimate election— the Trustees placed a measure on the ballot to increase the interest rate on the yet unsold main library bonds. Edward Taylor, Trustee, former mayor, and opponent of the Carnegie grant, took this opportunity to put the underlying question of accepting the grant money directly to the voters. His measure calling for refusal of the grant was soundly defeated, while the bond rate increase passed. After this, Phelan again approached Carnegie to revalidate the original grant offer. Carnegie agreed to stand by his 1901 terms, with half the money to go for the planned main building, although he reminded the Trustees that he had since then ceased funding any central libraries, saying:

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[23] *Reports 1901*

[24] *Reports 1904*

[25] *Reports 1909*

[26] Schmitz and the entire Board of Supervisors were forced from office as the result of a privately financed graft investigation led by Phelan and Rudolph Spreckels. Schmitz was convicted, but his conviction was reversed on appeal. See Bean, Walton. *Boss Ruef's San Francisco.* U.C. Press. 1952

[27] Bertram to Phelan Feb.11,1910 — "You only refer to the modification of the promise or the conditions attached to it. You should send us copy of the letter making such modifications." (reproduced p 46 of this report)

[28] Carnegie to Hale April 15,1910 (reproduced p 47 of this report)

> "I attach most importance to branch libraries, bringing books close to the homes of the people, and have for many years confined my library gifts to branch libraries exclusively…"[29]

Finally, between 1914 and 1921, seven new branch libraries were built, using $375,000 in Carnegie money. The new (now old) Main Library was also opened in 1917, financed with the other half of the Carnegie funds, supplemented by $780,000 in bond money. The branch construction budget received no local funds. Branch locations chosen, in chronological order, were: The Richmond (1914), Mission (1915), Noe Valley (1916), Sunset (1918), Golden Gate Valley (1918), North Beach, now Chinatown (1921)[30], and Presidio (1921). These locations were at least partially determined by the influence of district "Improvement Clubs" which had arisen in the mainly middle class newer neighborhoods, and had proven valuable allies in ousting the Union Labor Party. The names chosen for the buildings reflect both the political impossibility of using the Carnegie name in San Francisco[31] and the Progressive desire to label urban geography without reference to political wards or precincts. Previous practice in San Francisco, and in other large cities, had been to designate branch libraries by number.

PRE-CARNEGIE BRANCH LIBRARIES IN SAN FRANCISCO

The earliest branch libraries in San Francisco were opened in 1888, the same year the nine year old Main Library was moved from rented space on Bush Street to the new City Hall building. The first branches were located in rented spaces in North Beach, the Mission, and Potrero Hill. By 1901, their number had grown to six, with additions in the Richmond district, South of Market, and the Western Addition/Fillmore. Both branches and main were under the direction of the self-perpetuating board of trustees, with George H. Rogers, author of the Rogers Act, as President.

In 1901, the city acquired its first purpose-built library structure, donated by James D. Phelan and located at 4th and Clara streets. Phelan was still serving as mayor and was a member *ex officio* of the board of library trustees. The new building was architecturally derived from the emerging Carnegie library type found all across the country by this time. It was a rectangular plan, single story over basement masonry structure, classical revival in styling, with a central entrance framed in a monumental pediment. Phelan had donated the $16,000 construction costs, and the site was obtained from the Public School Department. In San Francisco, all of the early purpose-built branch libraries conformed, in general, to the Carnegie guidelines. The 1904 McCreery branch cost $50,000 and featured finer detailing and finishes than the Phelan, but was designed in the same mode. The Park branch, opened in 1909, the first to be built with City funds, ($30,000) was designed by the McDougall Brothers, again to the Carnegie recommendations.

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[29] Carnegie to Phelan December 28, 1912

[30] The name change took place in 1958, reflecting both a shift in the composition of the neighborhood and the construction of a new North Beach branch.

[31] Not a requirement of the grants, although many smaller communities, where political resistance was less intense, did incorporate the Carnegie name into the new buildings.

Indeed, the Carnegie guidelines had by that time become generally accepted as the standards for branch libraries nationally. However, actual Carnegie projects continued to experience some tension between local sponsors, with their architects, and James Bertram, who insisted, on behalf of the Carnegie Corporation, on the most efficient use of Carnegie money.

THE SAN FRANCISCO CARNEGIE BRANCHES

In San Francisco, when Phelan and the trustees were finally forced to use half of the $750,000 grant on branches rather than on their coveted Main Library, the result was a fairly lush branch budget. At an average of over $50,000 each, the seven buildings were conceived as stately adjuncts of the City Beautiful movement, although their fine exteriors were somewhat squandered by their mid-block or secondary corner placement—site acquisition being the financial responsibility of the trustees.

All seem to conform to the basic Carnegie prescription. Plans are rectangular, except for the Golden Gate Valley branch which is rounded at one end with an apse, and entrances are centrally located in symmetrical compositions. Entry is via a small, generally wood paneled, vestibule. All seven buildings have two levels, with a community meeting room, toilets, and service spaces on the lower floors. The upper floors all contain a grand, high ceilinged reading room occupying most of the floor, illuminated by natural light from tall windows. Perimeter shelving runs under the windows and low shelving is used to divide the space and control circulation, as prescribed in *"Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings"*. The main rooms are embellished with ornate plaster ceilings and, in some, plaster pilasters and arches. Delivery or checkout desks are centrally located.

The first two Carnegie branches, the Richmond (1914) and Mission (1916), were built without separate children's rooms. In 1923, both were retrofitted with children's rooms on the lower levels.[32] The latter five, Noe Valley (1916), Golden Gate Valley (1918), Sunset (1918), Presidio (1921) and North Beach (now Chinatown, 1921) were designed with children's rooms on the main level. In all but Golden Gate Valley, these occupied rear extensions of the main building, and were divided from the main rooms by wood paneled partitions with glazed upper portions, again in accord with Carnegie guidelines which allowed the glass for sound deadening, while preserving the sight lines, so that one librarian could supervise both rooms.

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[32] *San Francisco Municipal Reports 1923*

Despite general conformity to Carnegie standards, there were near constant disagreements over design throughout the period of construction, between James Bertram on the one hand, and the San Francisco Trustees and their architects on the other. Matters began well, with Bertram assuring Phelan in a letter of August 13, 1913, regarding the Richmond branch, designed by Bliss and Faville—

> ”As far as I remember the plans they were admirably simple and practicable, and I hope that the other plans will follow the same line.”[33]

But the honeymoon was brief. The design for the Mission branch, second to be built, did not please Bertram, who complained to George Mullin, Secretary of the Trustees —

> “The exterior plans you sent are attractive pictorially, but cannot commend the scheme of accommodation. It does not appear to be a good plan to project a two-story building, and make the second story the main floor.”[34]

In fact, he had already sent the plans to W. H. Brett, Chief Librarian of Cleveland, as well as to several eastern architects, for comment. All dutifully criticized the location of the main spaces up one flight, and all agreed that the central stairway protruding in to the middle of the reading room both wasted precious space and created a potential nuisance.

Mullin defended the design, claiming it would be unwise to locate the main room on a basement level because of lighting and ventilation concerns—and noting that there had been no complaints about the stairs at the Richmond branch, which were mostly exterior. He also mentioned that the Mission branch architect, G. Albert Lansburgh, would soon be in New York, and would be pleased to discuss the plans with Bertram.[35]

Thus was established a pattern that would be repeated—disapproval by Bertram, followed by a visit from Lansburgh—who was to design four of the buildings, and maintained an office in New York—and finally acquiescence. Constant points of contention were the placement of the main spaces upstairs and the height of the ceilings in those spaces. Both problems stemmed, in Bertram’s view, from giving priority to architectural effects over practical concerns—as expressed in his letter of October 11, 1916 to the President of the Trustees—

> “Rather than conceive his exterior architectural scheme first and then make his interior accommodation fit it, you will agree that the contrary should be the process of the architect, but generally speaking one does not get this impression from the San Francisco Branch Library plans.”[36]

The Noe Valley branch, next to be constructed, was designed by John Reid Jr. with a central interior stairway like the Mission's. It elicited the same objections from Bertram. Edward Taylor, then serving as President of the Trustees, replied forcefully, citing Carnegie libraries in Massachusetts and New Jersey with more stairs than the Noe Valley plan.[37] Bertram retreated, but sent the plans to Edward L. Tilton, a New York architect, who criticized the lack of librarian work space, and recommended a side entrance to avoid the need for the stairway.[38] Bertram finally approved the plans, but sniffed—

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[33] Bertram to Phelan August 13,1913

[34] Bertram to Mullin, January 14, 1915

[35] Mullin to Bertram, January 29, 1915

[36] Bertram to O’Connor, October 11, 1916 — Although these aspects of the San Francisco designs vexed James Bertram, and today continue to present problems of access, the resulting verticality of the compositions clearly enhances the grandeur and civic presence of the buildings.

> "One is somewhat disposed to think that an architectural achievement has been aimed at."[39]

Bertram raised the same complaints about Lansburgh's subsequent design for the Sunset branch and Ernest Coxhead's Golden Gate Valley basilica model. In the case of the Sunset, he was additionally offended by the wasted space of the loggia.[40] Another personal visit from Lansburgh seemed to smooth the way for both projects, but six months later, after construction had begun, Bertram grumbled that the Sunset ceiling was too high.[41] Lansburgh paid another visit to him in New York, and explained in a follow up letter—

> "I feel that the proportions of the exterior could not be conveniently altered…"[42]

Bertram again reluctantly acceded. Virtually the same dialogue accompanied approval of the last two branches, Presidio and North Beach (now Chinatown) both Lansburgh's designs.[43]

ARCHITECTS

As can be seen in the correspondence regarding the San Francisco Carnegie branches, James Bertram and the Carnegie Corporation were impatient with architectural adventures they perceived as detrimental to the functioning of a library. Nonetheless, they expected a measure of architectural distinction that would suitably communicate the importance of the building—and they insisted on the use of trained architects for each building they financed. Nationwide, this led several firms to specialize in Carnegie libraries, with Bertram eager to recommend those with a successful track record.

However, the pool of architectural talent in San Francisco by the time these branches were built, having been augmented by the needs of the post-earthquake reconstruction, was quite adequate without outside help. However, the branch libraries were relatively small projects compared to the simultaneous building of the new Civic Center, including the new main library, and to the Panama Pacific International Exposition (PPIE), as well as to the growing downtown area. The architects who designed the branches were all quite prominent in the profession, and, with the exception of Ernest Coxhead, they were all involved in the larger projects of the day.

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[37] Taylor to Bertram, October 27, 1915

[38] Tilton to Bertram, December 8, 1915

[39] Bertram to Taylor, December 10, 1915

[40] Bertram to O'Connor, October 11, 1916; In an intriguing aside, Bertram also comments "The octagonal plans put forward are quite impossible and need not have been sent here."

[41] Bertram to O'Connor, March 23, 1917

[42] Lansburgh to Bertram, March 29, 1917

[43] Bertram to Mullin, February 3, 1920: "The clearance of the main floor in the North Beach Branch is unnecessarily high, architectural affect having evidently been the controlling factor."

G. ALBERT LANSBURGH

G. (Gustave) Albert Lansburgh, designer of the Mission, Sunset, North Beach, and Presidio branches, was one of the chosen finalists in the competition for the Main Library. His proposal there was rejected because of what the judges considered a dysfunctional plan, with the delivery room located one floor below the reading room.[44]

Lansburgh was born in Panama, and immigrated to this country in 1882, at the age of six. He attended the University of California, Berkeley, but left after two years to enroll in the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, on the strong encouragement of Bernard Maybeck, with whom he had worked in the summers. He graduated from the Ecole in 1906 with highest honors and was awarded a medal for his design of a projected new Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco.[45] He returned to San Francisco just in time to participate in the rebuilding of the city after the earthquake and fire of April 18.

In practice on his own by 1908, he also continued to study under Maybeck for a period of time. Lansburgh is remembered largely for his numerous theater designs, which often displayed his Beaux Arts training and made copious use of polychrome terra cotta—traits that his branch libraries here share. His Wiltern Theater in Los Angeles is a designated landmark. Locally, his best known theater works are the adjacent Golden Gate and Fox Warfield at Golden Gate, Taylor and Market. Lanburgh's theater work included a sophisticated understanding of acoustics as well. His design for the interior of the San Francisco War Memorial Opera House was highly praised for its acoustical qualities and innovative stage arrangements.

In addition to theaters, Lansburgh, a Jew himself, did a number of projects for Jewish organizations. These include the Jewish Concordia Club on Van Ness Avenue; the B'nai B'rith Grand Lodge; the Sinai Temple in Oakland, and a second unexecuted design for Temple Emanu-El. Lansburgh consulted with Arthur Brown in the design of the present temple at Lake and Arguello.

Lansburgh practiced for over 40 years. Headquartered in San Francisco, he also maintained offices in New York and Los Angeles. His theater work, especially for the Orpheum chain, where his brother was a corporate officer, kept him busy nationwide. He also executed public auditoriums in widespread locations, including Sacramento and Salt Lake City. During World War II, with theater and auditorium work generally on hold, he made drawings for seaplanes and naval vessels, before going into semi-retirement.

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[44] Cahilll, B. J. S. "The San Francisco Public Library Competition". The Architect and Engineer of California, May 1914.

[45] Never built due to the post-earthquake relocation of the congregation

He died in San Francisco in 1969.[46]

BLISS & FAVILLE

Designers of the Richmond Branch, this firm consisted of Walter D. Bliss and William B. Faville, both native Californians and MIT graduates. The two trained under McKim, Mead & White before establishing their own firm in 1898.[47]

One of the partnership's earliest triumphs was the Carnegie-financed Oakland Public Library (1901).[48] This was followed by their original St. Francis Hotel (1904), which they rebuilt in 1907 and added to in 1913.[49] In the downtown rebuild following the earthquake and fire of 1906, the firm was also responsible for the Bank of California building (1907), the Geary Theater (built as the Columbia in 1909), the Geary Theater Annex (1909), the Savings Union Bank at Grant, O'Farrell & Market (1910), and the Masonic Temple (1911) at Van Ness & Market. The Bank of California, Geary Theater, and Savings Union Bank are San Francisco Landmarks, while the Geary is also listed individually on the National Register.

Bliss and Faville were also active in the design of several PPIE pavilions from 1913 to 1915. Their work for the exposition included an innovative design for the " great wall" which surrounded the fair grounds. A temporary structure covered with ice plant, the wall was intended to shelter the bay front site from the blustery San Francisco summer weather.[50]

The partners were unsuccessful competitors, with a massively domed entrant, in the Main Library competition. They nonetheless contributed magnificently to the new Civic Center with their State Building (1926), at 350 McAllister. Throughout the teens and 20s, they continued to establish a strong presence in the emerging downtown, with their 1916 Southern Pacific Building at 1 Market, the Bank of America at 1 Powell (1920), and the National Register listed Matson Building (1921) at the corner of Main & Market. In addition to the Masonic Temple, their club work includes the University Club, 800 Powell (1912), and the Metropolitan Club (1916).[51] Much of their best work incorporates polychrome terra cotta ornament, as does their Richmond Branch Library.

William B. Faville served as president of the San Francisco Chapter of the American Institute of Architecture from 1922 to 1924. The Bliss and Faville firm dissolved in 1925, with both partners pursuing separate careers.

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[46] Stern, Norton B. & William M. Kramer. "G. Albert Lansburgh, San Francisco's Jewish Architect from Panama" Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly. April-May 1981

[47] Longstreth, Richard W. *On the Edge of the World: Four Architects in San Francisco at the Turn of the Century.* New York. Architectural History Foundation; Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press. 1983

[48] Cahill, B. J. S. "The Work of Bliss & Faville" The Architect and Engineer of California. Jan 1914

[49] Corbett, Michael R. & The Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage. *Splendid Survivors; San Francisco's Downtown Architectural Heritage.* San Francisco. California Living Books. 1979

[50] Faville, W. B., F. A. I. A. "Phases of Panama-Pacific International Exposition Architecture" The American Architect. January 6, 1915

[51] Corbett. *op. cit.* Of the St. Francis Hotel, which is not a designated landmark, Corbett says, "…almost as much as any other building, it serves as the architectural image of the city of San Francisco."

JOHN REID JR.

Reid, a native San Franciscan, was educated at the University of California and the Ecole de Beaux Arts. Upon returning to San Francisco, he was associated with Willis Polk and the Daniel Burnham firm, before opening his own office in 1911. His work was mainly public buildings—for many years he was the City Architect or Consulting Architect. The most prominent of his many school buildings is the former High School of Commerce (1927)[52], now the Unified School District Administrative Building, at 135 Van Ness Avenue (San Francisco Landmark #140). Others include the Twin Peaks School[53] and Mission High School (1926).

As a member, with John Galen Howard and Frederick H. Meyer, of the Board of Consulting Architects for the design of the Civic Center, Reid had a great deal of influence over the most important project of that era. The three architects are jointly credited with the Exposition Auditorium (1914), one of the key buildings in the National Register and local Civic Center historic districts. The Board also oversaw the design of smaller school and Fire Department buildings throughout the city, and Reid designed many of these himself. His Noe Valley Branch Library shares with them a proclivity for classically derived design and lavish polychrome terra cotta ornament.

ERNEST COXHEAD

English born and educated, Coxhead first came to San Francisco in 1890. His most notable early works here were a number of churches done for the Episcopal diocese. Of these, only the Church of the Holy Innocents at 455 Fair Oaks (1890) survives. Later, he specialized in residential work.[54]

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[52] Corbett. *op. cit.*

[53] Morrow, Irving F. “Work by John Reid, Jr., A. I. A.” The Architect and Engineer. February 1920

[54] “The Bay Region Styles: 1890-1930; Ernest Coxhead and the Regional Scene: The Transformation Game & Other Delights”. The Foundation for San Francisco’s Architectural Heritage.(no date or author)

By 1918, when he designed the Golden Gate Valley branch, Coxhead was still well regarded, although his career was in a period of eclipse.

His library, which many consider the jewel of the seven Carnegie branches, is somewhat atypical of his work. To begin with, he most often used shingled rustic styles, quite unlike this terra cotta clad basilica. Even his other classically inspired work, such as his 1908 Home Telephone Building at 333 Grant Avenue (San Francisco Landmark #141) often featured surprising outsized elements that tweak the classical sense of order. Such departures are absent in the Golden Gate Valley building, which instead presents a studied elegance.

PROPERTY TYPES AND IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS

The seven San Francisco Carnegie branch libraries are the only property type significant under this context. All seven remain in use as branch libraries.

The physical characteristics that unite and define the property type include those promulgated in *"Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings",* the Carnegie sponsored guidelines first published in 1911:

- symmetrical rectangular plan
- single story with basement
- large windows six feet above the floor
- small vestibule
- large main floor reading room
- open shelves lining the walls beneath the windows
- low free-standing shelves used as room dividers
- basement level public lecture room

Other defining physical characteristics specific to the San Francisco Carnegie branches include:

- high ornamental plaster ceilings in the main reading spaces
- smaller rear extensions of the main rectangular volume, often containing children's rooms in the later buildings, some now converted to staff space
- glazed and paneled partitions separating main room from rear spaces
- decorative paneling in vestibules and at main desk
- three part vertical facade compositions defined by cornices and plinths
- glazed terra cotta, sometimes polychrome, used for ornament and/or cladding
- deep-set wooden windows with ornate surrounds

The Carnegie branch libraries are significant as:

- examples of early 20th century development in library design
- manifestations of social goals of political progressives in the same time period
- indicators of the political, cultural, and architectural history of San Francisco, also in the same period.

The buildings convey their significance in several ways:

- By their conformance to the general Carnegie guidelines in *"Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings"* they typify the state of library design during the period. The inclusion of separate main floor children's rooms in the later buildings also contributes in this category.
- By their neighborhood locations, incorporation of open stacks, lecture rooms, and large comfortable common reading spaces, as well as their symbolic entry sequences, they speak to Progressive social goals of acculturation.
- By their delayed dates of construction, and the absence of the Carnegie name in their historical designations, they represent the political and class conflict of their historical period in San Francisco.
- By their rich exteriors, they represent the cultural and architectural history of San Francisco, especially the importance of the City Beautiful movement, during the period of construction.

The physical characteristics described above, which are almost entirely intact in the seven Carnegie branches, are the attributes necessary to list these buildings as local landmarks.

GOALS AND PRIORITIES

The main goal is to nominate the seven San Francisco Carnegie branch libraries as local landmarks, significant not only for their national and state historical associations, but also for their specific connections with the cultural, political and social history of San Francisco. The intention is to encourage historical understanding and respect for the buildings, while embracing extensive necessary alterations related to safety, accessibility, modern information technology, and shifts in the social role of public libraries.

DEFINING FEATURES

Priority should be given to the preservation of the exteriors, and retention of the high ceilinged main reading rooms and symbolic entrances, which are major interior architectural features. Interior spaces other than the main reading rooms and vestibules are not defining features.

Within the reading rooms, the ornate ceilings, high windows, peripheral shelving, and pilasters are defining features. The introduction of free standing shelving, elevator structures, modern furniture, etc., as has already taken place, does not diminish the historic integrity of these spaces. Overhead lighting, if replaced, should respect historic models and should not destroy the fabric of the ceilings. Low shelving used for space division and to direct circulation, while historically significant, could be realigned or removed if necessary to accommodate changing usages, as could librarian's desks. The conversion of main floor children's rooms to other uses may also take place without reducing historic integrity. However, the glazed and paneled partitions should be preserved if possible. Although disabled access must be provided, care should be taken also to preserve the historically significant entry sequences where possible.

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Skibo Castle

Ardgay, N. B.

20th June, 1901.

Mayor James D. Phelan,
San Francisco.

Dear Mr. Mayor:

Your letter of March 22 is before me this morning.

If San Francisco will furnish proper sites for libraries and agree to spend $75,000 a year in their maintenance, I shall be very glad to give $750,000 as needed to pay for the buildings. About half (not more, I think less) of this sum should be expended on the central library and the remainder on branch libraries. The site for the central library should be amply sufficient to provide for additions in the future for San Francisco is a growing city.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) Andrew Carnegie

Feb. 11, 1910

Hon. James D. Phelan
Phelan Bilding,
San Francisco, Cal.

Dear Sir,

Yours of February 5th receivd. You send copy of letter of Mr. Carnegie making the original promise of money for Library Bildings for San Francisco. You only refer to the modification of the promise or the conditions attacht to it. You should send us copy of the letter making such modifications.

Mr. Carnegie made the promise to San Francisco before he had decided not to give central library bildings for large cities, leaving that to the community. Of course his promise to San Francisco stands as made, but he will not add to the amount allowed for Central Bilding.

Respectfully yours,

(James Bertram P. Secretary

April 15, 1910

Dear Mr. Hale -

Please consider this letter personal and unofficial, because I wish to understand the situation fully.

I red, while at Santa Barbara, a speech by the Mayor saying That there would never be a Carnegie Library accepted by San Francisco, or words to that effect. I supposed the whole matter was off and concluded to say nothing about it. The gentleman who waited on me only askt me to take the bonds or arrange in some way to sell bonds for the main Library Bilding, which the city had undertaken to bild, I supposed entirely independent of any offer from us. I replied that I could not engage in any business transaction of that kind.

Now it appears that the city undertook the bilding of a great Main Library Bilding. Such Library Bildings as these do not present them-selves to me as proper objects for gifts from private individuals. They should be erected by the cities themselves.

Should San Francisco insted of spending the half million I promised, which should be ample to pay for a suitable Central Library Bilding, conclude to spend a million and a half, I naturally supposed that my money would all go to branches, and this I hope will be done. I am …? sure that the seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars that I undertook to give will be spent in the …? and all that I saw of that vigorous community.

We cannot hold San Francisco back.

…? talk this over among yourselves and see whether you cannot devote my $750,000. to Branch Library Bildings as they are needed, a policy I pursued with New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Cleveland and Cincinnati.

We see a sad example in New York upon the great Central Library question. I believe that its cost, redy for occupancy, will reach …? think will stagger people.

There is one point which I wish you to consider. The half million I agreed to devote to the erection of a Main Library Bilding was to be the whole cost of the Library Bilding. I was not to be a partner with the city in the Main Bilding to the extent of a third. On the contrary, it was to be a bilding furnished by me. When the city resolved on an extravagant architectural ornament that will be enterd only by the well-to-do who have books of their own, my heart is not in it.

Do let us provide your Branch Library Bildings and the city take its grand architectural monument in its own hands and relieve us.

Very truly yours

(signed) A. Carnegie