

The Carnegie Libraries in Iowa Project, headed by Dr. Shana L. Stuart, is requesting formal permission to use excerpts from Lolly Parker Eggers' book, *A Century of Stories, The History of the Iowa City Public Library, 1896-1997*, for inclusion on the website.

The relevant section will be scanned and uploaded to the website: carnegielibrariesiowa.org. The materials from the book will be used to support the research mission of a nonprofit academic website which intends to provide a record of the acquisition of the funding for public libraries across the state of Iowa.

I hereby give my permission to Shana Stuart and the Carnegie Libraries in Iowa Project to utilize the relevant portions of Lolly Parker Egger's *A Century of Stories, The History of the Iowa City Public Library, 1896-1997* (Iowa City Public Library Friends Foundation, c. 1997).

Del Eggers (Hand)
Del Eggers

5/10/21
Date

A Century of Stories

³⁰ Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996).

³¹ U.S. Bureau of Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States; Two Centuries of the Census, 1790-1990* (Greenwood Press, 1993).

³² Henry Bliss, *The Organization of Knowledge in Libraries and the Subject Approach to Knowledge* (New York: Wilson, 1934), 3, and Virginia H. Holtz, "Measures of Excellence: the Search for the Gold Standard," *MLA Bulletin* 74 (Oct. 1986), 307-308. Cited in Musmann, 16.

³³ Perelman, S.J., introduction to reprint of the 1987 *Sears Roebuck Catalog* (Broomall, PA: Chelsea House, 1968).

³⁴ Shera, 114.

³⁵ *Republican*, March 26, 1902.

■ 4. Building the "People's Palace," 1902—1904

On March 14, 1902, James Bertram, personal secretary to Andrew Carnegie, signed letters awarding grants for public library buildings to thirty-five communities in fifteen states. It was just another workday for Bertram, who sent these grant notifications at the rate of one every other day during the first three years of the new century, but it was a very important date for Iowa City. One letter confirmed that Carnegie would give Iowa City \$25,000 "for the erection of a Free Public Library Building" if the city would provide a suitable site and a promise of no less than \$2,500 a year in library support.¹

Why Seek a Carnegie Building?

Was it a dire need for more space or a judicious response to Andrew Carnegie's standing offer to provide funds for library buildings that motivated the library board to quietly send off an inquiry to Carnegie in the summer of 1901 just after the move to College Street? Did the move to new quarters alert the trustees to the advantages of a permanent building?

There was a tremendous increase in library use after the move and all through 1902. Twenty-five percent more visitors checked out 21 percent more books from the Cannon & Pratt building on College Street in 1902 than during the previous year which was divided between two locations. Did this represent new demands for library services based on the growth of the community and the needs of its residents, or did the news about the Carnegie gift and the site dispute that followed stir interest in the library? The library's collection had grown more than 40 percent, to over 7,000 volumes, since the move to College Street in mid-1901. The combination of a larger collection and increased traffic plus five years

A Century of Stories

of experience as a reliable and respected community library easily made a case for more space and a permanent building.

The library board and city council had more in mind than just following a popular national trend in seeking funds for a new library. The years 1901 and 1902 saw great growth for Iowa City. Business and community leaders were working "for the betterment of the Athens in all . . . phases of municipal life," as the *Press* wrote in its report of the Commercial Club's first annual banquet in February 1902. Besides talks about improving the riverfront, purchasing property for parks, and attracting new industry, members of the year-old organization heard a report on public buildings from Max Mayer, local retailer and library trustee.

"We need them and need them badly," Mayer declared. "No honorable method to attain [them] ought to be neglected." In addition to a library building he mentioned the new high school already planned, the post office building under consideration by Congress, and some new university medical buildings proposed for approval by the state legislature. By the end of 1902 all had been funded. The new courthouse and Schaeffer Hall had opened the year before.

Iowa City's promoters could point to other civic and business accomplishments in this period. During 1902 Mayer had become the first president of the new Retail Merchants Association and organized Iowa City's first country club;² a franchise for an electric street railway was approved; and a question about annexing land on the west side of the Iowa River was on the ballot. Two new hotels and one hundred new homes had been completed in the previous twelve months. As a speaker at that first Commercial Club banquet noted, Iowa City was looking for every possible way to grow and improve, "to become the hub of [Iowa's] educational world even more than it is now."

Library trustees were involved in most of these efforts to build a greater Iowa City and were among the most influential Iowa City citizens. Along with Mayer, trustees Wade and Coast spoke at the Commercial Club banquet. And all three, plus George Ball, served on the board of directors for the new organization. Ball, now a state senator, and Wade, who had just announced he would not run again for district judge, were both mentioned as possible Democratic candidates for Congress in the November election.

Getting a permanent library building for Iowa City would provide library users better service, of course, but a Carnegie award would also be another step in the community's growth "from a hamlet to a city through the energetic efforts of all its citizens," Judge Wade told the business community in his remarks to the Commercial Club that evening.³

After five years it was time for a permanent library building and such an effort fit nicely with the long-term plans of Iowa City's business community.

Building the "People's Palace," 1902–1904

Andrew Carnegie: Life and Legend

By 1902 Andrew Carnegie was easily one of the most famous men in America. Today his reputation is often that of a cold-blooded, insensitive industrialist who sought fame as well as redemption for his years of business sins by giving away some of his massive wealth to over 1,400 U.S. communities in the form of public library buildings. While this \$40 million philanthropic project had a major impact on the development of public libraries in the United States, it was only a part of his contribution to libraries throughout the English-speaking world and was a very small portion of the \$333 million he donated to an amazingly wide variety of causes before his death in 1919.

Carnegie is one of the best examples of a Horatio Alger rags-to-riches career. He was born in Dunfermline, Scotland, where his father was a master weaver. The elder Carnegie would soon be replaced as power looms changed the cottage industry of damask linen to a factory-based operation. Brought up among politically radical relatives fighting social inequality and the threat of approaching technology under the banner of the People's Charter or Chartism, young Carnegie was drilled from birth on the reform program of the working class: manhood suffrage, secret ballot, and the abolition of property qualifications for membership in Parliament. An early reader, Andrew used the Tradesman's Subscription Library which his uncle had helped found.

In 1848, "seeing his fellow weavers queuing daily in bread lines and at soup kitchens,"⁴ Andrew's father took his small savings and brought his family to Allegheny, Pennsylvania, where relatives lived. William Carnegie never recovered economically or psychologically from the loss of his job and his independence as a handloom weaver. By 1850, at the age of fifteen, young Carnegie was the principal wage earner for his family—father, mother, and a younger brother. He first worked as a bobbin boy in a cotton factory, then as a messenger boy and operator at the Pittsburgh telegraph office. By 1853 he was the chief telegraph operator for the Pennsylvania Railroad and the protege of Superintendent Thomas A. Scott.

With no formal schooling after leaving Scotland, Carnegie remained a voracious reader and became a serious one. He had great difficulty finding books and so he greatly appreciated the opportunity to borrow from the four-hundred-volume private library of Colonel James Anderson. Carnegie remembered reading many classics of American literature and history for the first time from the Anderson collection, and once said Anderson's library "opened to me the intellectual wealth of the world." Anderson's offer was to any young working boy who wanted to borrow a book for a week's time. Just a year or two after Carnegie began borrowing from him, Anderson gave his library to form the Mechanics' and Apprentices' Library. Carnegie's first published writing—he

A Century of Stories

wrote books and magazine articles throughout his lifetime—was an anonymous letter to the Allegheny newspaper in 1853 complaining that since he was not an apprentice he was being forced to pay for the use of a collection he formerly used for free. Signing his letter “Working Boy,” he wrote again, provoking an editorial from the paper, and when the dispute came to Anderson’s attention the rule was changed to let all working boys under a certain age, whether a bound apprentice or not, use the library free.⁵ The Mechanics’ and Apprentices’ Library eventually became Allegheny’s first public library and the first U.S. public library built from the Carnegie fortune. (Dunfermline, Carnegie’s birthplace, received the very first library in 1881.)

In his amazingly successful career, first as an investor in railroad cars, then a builder of bridges, and finally as the world’s largest producer of iron and steel, Carnegie made his first million by his early thirties and sold his holdings to the organizers of United States Steel in 1901 for \$300 million. He then spent more than thirty years at the serious job of giving away his fortune.

He became the friend of presidents, statesmen, scholars, and other public figures participating in political and world affairs and corresponded regularly with many famous and influential individuals. From the late 1880s he was preoccupied with the abolition of war and the world peace movement. He provided the funds and some of the ideas for The Hague, his “Temple of Peace,” and, according to Joseph Wall’s definitive biography, he gave Wilson the term “League of Nations.” He contributed \$10 million to establish the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in 1910. He was involved in negotiations for a potential arms-reducing treaty between the United States, Germany, France, and England just before the start of World War I.⁶

In what was probably his best-known work, *The Gospel of Wealth*,⁷ Carnegie said a man may accumulate great wealth in a democracy, but he has a responsibility to return that wealth in a way that will not destroy society’s own responsibility to preserve individual initiative. “Surplus wealth should be considered as a sacred trust to be administered by those into whose hands it falls, during their lives, for the good of the community,” Carnegie wrote in one of the essays.⁸ Under the rubric of “The Best Fields for Philanthropy,” he listed what he considered the best uses to which a millionaire could devote his surplus funds: colleges and universities, libraries, art museums, concert and meeting halls, parks, gardens and swimming pools, hospitals and research labs. Antichurch and committed to democracy, he gave only limited approval to gifts to churches. He considered these to be not gifts to the community but rather to special classes.

An evolutionist—he read both Darwin and Herbert Spencer and became a close friend of Spencer—Carnegie believed in the possibility of a continually improving social organization. Prejudice, hatred, superstition, in short all the evils

Building the “People’s Palace,” 1902–1904

born of ignorance, constituted the greatest threat to progressive civilization. Like the advances he fostered in the processing of iron ore that succeeded in removing disruptive elements and allowed the production of steel, so, he thought, would the glories of advancing civilization be achieved by “dephosphorizing” man of his unruly characteristics.

Education was the formula for this transformation, and the public library was the place where practical general knowledge to enhance a man’s ability to function effectively was dispensed. As a student of Spencer, as were many U.S. educational reformers at the end of the nineteenth century, Carnegie agreed that education should be practical and made interesting to the student. Also the ultimate goal of the library was to implant a taste for reading in the working classes in order to start them on the road to higher intellectual achievements. Carnegie supported the sometimes controversial policy of supplying large numbers of novels to public library readers, not only to sow the seeds for better literature but also to give emotional relief “to the tired and weary toiler [who] is subjected to monotonous labour day after day, week after week. . . .”⁹ He also was uninterested in having libraries provide a narrow list of accepted “good books” as some of his critics suggested. “Every free library . . . should contain . . . all contributions bearing upon the relations of labor and capital from every point of view—socialistic, communistic, co-operative, and individualistic—and librarians should encourage visitors to read them all,” Carnegie once wrote.¹⁰

His enthusiasm for funding public libraries was part of a strong interest in promoting educational opportunities for the workingman and for generally supporting educational institutions. Carnegie funds financed the Flexner report that helped revolutionize medical education. He used his fortune to endow several technical and vocational colleges in the U.S. as well as the major universities of Scotland and to establish the Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. From his desire to provide pensions for college teachers he created the College Teachers’ Pension Fund, the first retirement program for academicians and the beginning of today’s massive TIAA/CREF fund found at most major colleges and universities.

Attacked then and now for the way he exploited his workers through low pay and long hours, Carnegie, always a man of ideas and intellectual pursuits, believed that the prevailing political and economic system produced the capital investment required to create jobs. He argued that it was not in the worker’s interest to have higher wages. This “indiscriminate distribution of wealth stifled initiative, and the trifling sums handed out in the form of wage increases would result in funding earthly pleasures beneficial to neither rich or poor.” The distribution of wealth through the establishment of cultural agencies created gains of a “higher spiritual type.” The worker received his share of the profits in the form

A Century of Stories

of a public library, for instance, which was, after all, built mostly for the benefit of the wage-earner, was supported by his taxes, and was subject to his control as a citizen of the community. Carnegie frequently celebrated "the precious heritage of poverty" because it gave a person born poor a chance to fight his own way upward, and "it is from the ranks of the poor [that] so many strong eminent, self-reliant men have always sprung and always must spring."¹¹ Carnegie thought that through public libraries he was giving the ambitious poor worker the tools to do just that.

The Carnegie Impact

No matter how you evaluate Carnegie the man—the powerful and wealthy industrialist, the lifelong writer and intellectual, the ambitious philanthropist—the impact of his contributions to public libraries cannot be denied. And despite major initiatives and huge sums of money spent in other areas, he is best remembered today for his library philanthropy.

Most historians agree that Carnegie's gifts were the most important turn-of-the-century stimulus to a public library movement well established by the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In many places, and especially in smaller communities, public libraries critically needed larger quarters and better yet, permanent buildings. In some communities the Carnegie offer generated interest in organizing a library for the first time, but about 65 percent of libraries getting a Carnegie grant for a building were already in operation. The timing was perfect; the country was growing and urban centers were accumulating growing numbers of workers, immigrants, and others with limited means and limited education. Not the creator but rather the patron saint of the American public library, Carnegie structured his awards in a way that made it clear that public libraries were the responsibility of local government and guaranteed that they were free and under local control. The sheer size and number of his gifts gave increased standing and importance to public libraries in general and gave clear evidence about the central role that books, reading, and education played in society in general and for individuals struggling to improve themselves.

Finally, the construction of more than 1,600 buildings with Carnegie dollars helped develop and define library architecture. The boom in the building of libraries benefited the growing profession of architecture and generated firms specializing in Carnegie libraries. Over time the awards carried more architectural requirements, and local officials received more advice and oversight from Carnegie staff and were more apt to turn to established library architects for their design.

After 1911, Bertram and the Carnegie Corporation sent each award winner a booklet called "Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings." This publication

Building the "People's Palace," 1902–1904

included several sample floor plans, and both the plans and the narrative strove to encourage libraries designed primarily for the efficient distribution of books. While these guidelines and Bertram's increased oversight helped produce buildings that were more functionally efficient than some earlier buildings where the architectural design was determined by each locality, what was gained in efficiency may have been lost in architectural variety. Wall described it this way: "In small towns all over America, there came to be an architectural style popularly known as Carnegie Classical, as easily recognizable as another small town standard, Wesley Romanesque. A stranger in the community had little difficulty in spotting the Carnegie Library and the Methodist Church, which in many towns confronted each other across the square."¹²

This impression is confirmed by Abigail Van Slyck in her 1995 architectural and social history of Carnegie libraries.¹³ She found that despite pleas by the Carnegie staff to eliminate domes, columns, and other architectural flourishes, only 10 percent of Carnegie libraries varied from the classical styles she terms "Temple Front" or "Triumphal Arch." The interior floor plans, while equally uniform, conformed closer to Carnegie recommendations, and the open plan with a central charge desk, flanking reading rooms, and books shelved around the walls—known in some circles as the "Carnegie rectangle"—influenced library design until World War II.

The Carnegie Award-Making Process

There were several ways that Iowa City library officials would have known about the availability of Carnegie funds in addition to the nationwide publicity Carnegie regularly received for his library philanthropy. The newly formed State Library Commission, established in 1900, provided information and advice to Iowa communities seeking Carnegie money. Also, by 1902 thirteen Iowa communities had successfully qualified for Carnegie awards and were planning, constructing, or occupying Carnegie libraries. Fairfield received \$30,000 in 1892—the fourth U.S. library that Carnegie funded—primarily at the request of Senator James F. Wilson, an old friend of Carnegie who had been helpful to him in building railroads in Iowa. Wilson was president of Fairfield's Jefferson County Library Association. Other Iowa beneficiaries were Carroll in 1898, Davenport in 1899, Ottumwa in 1900, and Cedar Rapids, Clinton, Dubuque, Eldora, Fort Dodge, Hawarden, and Marshalltown in 1901. Newton and Estherville received notification in early 1902 and six Iowa cities in addition to Iowa City were mailed Bertram letters on March 14, 1902.¹⁴ Thus, while Iowa City was late in establishing its public library, it was relatively early among the the ninety-nine Iowa libraries to receive Carnegie building awards before the flow of money was

A Century of Stories

turned off by the Carnegie Corporation in 1919. Carnegie gave nearly \$1.5 million to build public libraries in Iowa.¹⁵

The requirements for receiving funds from Andrew Carnegie to construct a library building gradually became more restrictive and also more uniform as the number of awards increased. In what Carnegie himself called his "retail" period, 1890 to 1896, he funded fourteen buildings in six communities (including Fairfield). In the "wholesale" era, from 1898 to 1919, Carnegie, his staff and, after 1911, the Carnegie Corporation approved 1,665 buildings in 1,406 U.S. communities. In the peak year of 1903 he offered Philadelphia, for example, \$1.5 million to build a main library and twenty-four branches. His largest gift went to New York City in 1899—\$5.2 million for sixty-six buildings. After 1898 library giving became a business, "as efficient and standardized in procedure as the filling of orders for steel billets" from one of Carnegie's steel plants, according to Carnegie biographer Joseph Wall.¹⁶ The thirty-five buildings approved on March 14, 1902, gave local color to this prodigious operation.

The initial inquiry about a Carnegie award could be submitted by anyone—librarian, trustee, teacher, women's club representative. Carnegie and Bertram both insisted that all business pertaining to a gift be carried on by mail, so on receipt of an inquiry, a standard letter of reply was sent stating the major requirements: an official letter from the mayor or city council saying that the community could provide a site and levy a tax equal to 10 percent of the Carnegie grant for the annual support of the library. Also, each community received a "Schedule of Questions" to complete, asking the town's population and information about current library facilities. Later versions of the questionnaire asked about the assessed valuation of the city. Some communities were turned down because Carnegie officials felt the community's current accommodations adequate or because the request was for a type of library not within Carnegie guidelines. Carnegie funded only communities in English-speaking countries. Any town of 1,000 or more with a locally controlled municipal library was eligible.

Carnegie's representative next sent out a tentative letter of approval, like the one received by Iowa City Mayor Frank Stebbins in March of 1902, promising funds of a certain amount if the site and annual support requirements were met. In fact, the Stebbins letter, carefully preserved by the library since its receipt in 1902, is almost word-for-word the letter received by the hundreds of U.S. Carnegie libraries found in the Carnegie archives and analyzed by George Bobinski for his 1969 study of U.S. Carnegie libraries.¹⁷ Before any money was received, however, communities had to provide proof of their ability to provide annual support at the level requested (10 percent of the amount granted), describe the site, and show proof of community ownership.

Getting everyone to agree on a location was a big issue in many communities.

Building the "People's Palace," 1902–1904

Towns bisected by a river were the most prone to controversy, according to Bobinski. Most such disputes were resolved by placing the building on one side of the river or the other. For Waterloo, Iowa, however, Carnegie finally raised his gift from \$30,000 to \$45,000 and "main" buildings were built on both sides, a rarity among communities of any size. Cedar Rapids initially planned to build its Carnegie library on the island in the Cedar River where other municipal buildings now stand until a flood in 1902 drowned public support for that location and it was constructed farther east on Third Avenue.¹⁸

The amount of the gift depended on the community's population according to the latest official United States census. The standard was about two dollars per capita usually rounded off to the nearest thousand. Communities used all kinds of appeals and statistics to argue that the latest census figures misrepresented their community. Bertram said in 1903 that "the local population statements, if believed, would give the United States a population of 150,000,000," nearly double the 1900 census total.¹⁹

The gift money was never sent in advance nor in one large sum. As proof of progress on the building was submitted, Bertram sent a letter to Carnegie's cashier, Robert F. Franks—later the treasurer of the Carnegie Corporation—authorizing payment of the approved share of the award. Carnegie's money continued to earn interest for Carnegie until the community had to pay its construction bills.

On completion of the building Carnegie staff asked the community to send a simple, unmounted photograph of the building plus a complete set of plans, "preferably on a sheet not more than twelve by sixteen inches." Despite hundreds of requests, Carnegie rarely attended dedication ceremonies and when asked to provide a bust or picture to display in a new building, Bertram would supply names and addresses of commercial outlets that could sell the library various forms of Carnegie's likeness.

The Library Site War

The library board began its formal pursuit of Carnegie dollars in mid-1901 and had hoped to get \$35,000 or more from the first. Although seeking the Carnegie gift was never mentioned in board minutes until July of 1902, the newspaper report announcing the \$25,000 gift which appeared in the *Press* on March 22, 1902, eight days after Bertram's letter, said the board had been endeavoring for more than a year "to secure a donation of \$35,000."²⁰ To be exact, the board wrote Carnegie on July 16, 1901. It was signed by all members of the library board and the city council and stressed that Iowa City already levied two mills a year for the library and that two mills currently produced over \$3,700. Also, the signers reported that they were expecting funds from "private endowment, so

A Century of Stories

that the income may be safely placed at four thousand dollars a year." After describing the "phenomenal" growth, "exceeding by far the record of any other public library established in the state in cities of equal, or even one-third greater, population," they promised to furnish a site "suitable for a structure which will cost forty thousand dollars, or such other sum as you may in your kindness feel disposed to donate."²¹

As noted above, Carnegie looked at population, not current library income, when determining the size of an award. Based on the *Press* report, however, and from the emphasis in the board's letter on having \$4,000 per year in income to match their plan for a \$40,000 structure, it appears the board misinterpreted one of Carnegie's basic requirements. While Carnegie required that at least 10 percent of the value of his gift be pledged for annual support, the Iowa City library officials believed, as quoted in the newspaper, that it was "Mr. Carnegie's custom to make a gift of ten times the library's annual income." The same story said that the library board and library friends had "figured hitherto" on about a \$40,000 building. The board indeed had expected more from Carnegie and the search for at least an additional \$10,000 began the day Bertram's letter arrived.

With the final amount still undetermined but with at least \$25,000 guaranteed, the library board immediately began searching for a site. At the April 14, 1902 meeting, trustees discussed the merits of several sites, and the *Press* report of the meeting speculated on various other locations including the southwest corner of Linn and College streets and the northeast corner of Washington and Linn. It appears that the trustees gave serious consideration only to the Koser-owned site on the southeast corner of Linn and College and to the Calkins Laundry site at the southwest corner of Iowa and Linn. (See table of proposed sites, page 99 and site map, page 101.)

At this same April 14 meeting the trustees empowered their committee to negotiate an option for the Iowa and Linn corner—the Calkins Laundry site—at a price not to exceed \$6,500. Their resolution said "subject to city council approval," but the very next day the *Press* reported that the library board had bought the Calkins corner. The paper said the council would be asked to ratify the purchase, "but the deal is binding and will be cared for by private parties if necessary."²² By this step, in the midst of its search for an additional \$10,000, the board set off a "library site war"²³ that would not be resolved for several weeks. The agreement with owners W.E.C. Foster and F.D. Lindsey was a five-day option to buy at \$6,500 but with a net cost of about \$5,000 after the income from selling the buildings on the land. This corner site was 160 by 80 feet with the longer dimension on Linn Street.

Before board members had a chance to discuss their choice with the council, a group of fifty taxpayers led by lawyer Ira J. Alder appeared at the next council

Building the "People's Palace," 1902-1904

LOCATION	1902 USE	OWNER	SIZE	COST	1996 USE
SE corner, Linn and College	J. Edwards residence	Koser	150 x 80 feet	\$8,500	UI Office of Public Information
SW corner, Linn and Iowa	Calkins Laundry	Lindsey and Foster	160 x 80 feet	\$6,500	Three early 20th century homes, now apartments and offices.
SW corner Gilbert and Washington	Griffith residence	Will Musser	150 x 80 feet	\$4,500	Chamber of Commerce office, restaurant
NE corner, Linn and Washington	Residence	Bloom family	150 x 80 feet	Not for sale	Senior Center
NE corner, Linn and College	Coldren residence	Solomon Coldren	150 x 80 feet	Not for sale	Meardon, Sueppel, Downer, & Hayes law offices.
SE corner, Johnson and Jefferson	St. John's Church [to be moved]	Iowa City School Board	150 x 160 feet	\$5,500	Pediatric Associates.

Sites considered for Carnegie library building, 1902

meeting with a petition asking that the board's site choice be rejected. Their petition, written by Alder, listed several reasons for their objections. The Iowa and Linn corner was not a desirable location for a permanent library building because it was not an attractive or conspicuous spot. It was obscured by university buildings, they said, and was too close and overshadowed by the university hospital directly across the street (now Seashore Hall). Since Linn ended at Iowa and Iowa went only two blocks farther west, they complained that the site was on dark and partly closed streets. Finally, they claimed its surroundings were "encumbered" by the wood and hay market on the north side of Iowa and on both sides of nearby Dubuque Street. It would not look like a city building in this setting, they concluded.

Board President Wade immediately defended the board's site choice against the unexpected attack. He noted the low net price, the size, and the approval of many individuals who had expressed themselves on the subject. The board could not dictate to the council, he said, but in their role as trustees of the library, they deemed this the best place. He asked the council to take immediate action before the option ran out. Owners Lindsey and Foster could easily get more than \$6,500 for the site, he explained.

Alder's response was less concrete than the complaints in his petition. He warned that Carnegie might withdraw his gift if he saw the site and suggested

A Century of Stories

that "something about the deal savored of a scandal." He begged the councilors to delay their decision and not select a site that would make the city ashamed afterward.

The council and Alder reviewed the Koser site, which, Alder reported, would cost no more than \$5,000 for a piece eighty by eighty feet or \$9,000 for the whole eighty by one hundred fifty feet plus the house. Wade questioned Alder's suggestion that the city spend up to \$4,000 more of taxpayers' dollars for a smaller site. On motion, the council then voted 4 to 4 to refer the decision to the finance and building committees. Six votes were needed to approve an appropriation, Mayor Stebbins explained, so he voted to refer. The vote, in effect, killed the Calkins site for the option had run out and the owners confirmed they would not extend the offer.

Following this abrupt turndown on the site of its choice, the library board met the next day and prepared a resolution to submit to the council. Because the council had not yet met officially to consider the library board's latest communication and the library would not release the text, *Press* reporter Reizenstein contacted several board members to try to get details. Ball, Hummer, and Wade all gave vague, noncommittal statements—"no bitterness," "we recognized [their] . . . right to endorse or reject . . . but we need a site as soon as possible." One unidentified board member warned that if the council "wrangles long enough and keeps delaying, the board will need a new president." According to the story in the *Press* there was general belief throughout the community that the library board was "very sore over the turn down" and that the resolution message, no matter how carefully crafted sent the message: "You sat on us; now you make your own selection." Enjoying the dispute, Reizenstein offered a paraphrase of Shakespeare to describe the board's feelings. "If t'were done, t'were well t'were done quickly."²⁴

Just two days later the headlines in the *Press* read: "Want Koser Corner: Prominent Citizens Will Spend Money to Secure it as Library Site." A group of citizens, spearheaded by John Pickering, local proprietor of a glass and china shop, wanted the library on the corner of Linn and College streets. "Grant us our wish on this matter and we will pay the difference between the net cost of the Calkins site and the Koser site plus pay the City's bill for brick paving College Street in front of the property," the group told the council, according to the newspaper report. (College was already paved but Linn, the front of the eventual library, was not.) They proposed to raise about \$1,000—\$500 for the difference in cost between the two sites after the house and some of the land are sold and \$500 for brick paving. Contributions were already coming in, the group reported. In the war over the library site, all the troops seemed to be fighting against the library board.

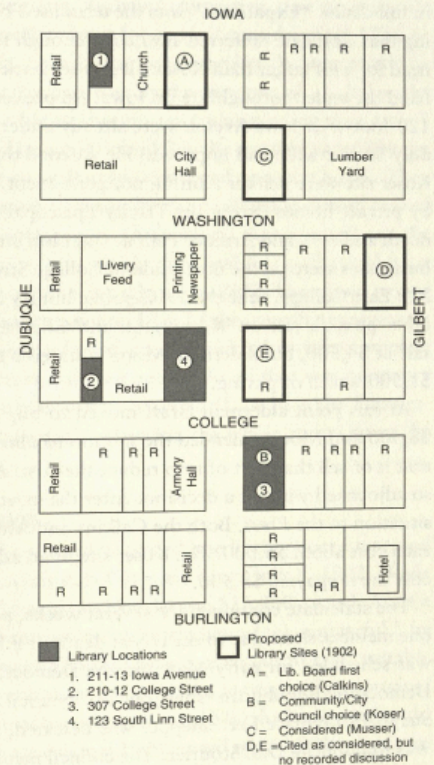
Building the "People's Palace," 1902-1904

The next day the *Iowa State Press* entered the fray editorially by suggesting a third site. Following a recent change in the school board, its members had reversed their decision to build the new high school on the southeast corner of Jefferson and Johnson streets. The school board had purchased this 150-by-160-foot site for \$5,500, and the *Press* suggested the board sell it to the city for its purchase price and explained why the paper thought it was a suitable location. The Democratic *Press* seemed to agree reluctantly that the Calkins corner fought for by the Democrats on the council and the library board was not the best place for the library, but no one evidently responded to this alternative suggestion.

The council met on April 28 to discuss the library board's resolution and the request from the group supporting the Koser site. Aldermen Graff and

Yavorsky argued price and convenience plus some less-than-compelling reasons for reconsidering the Calkins site: It is not in a noisy part of town and it is removed from the stress and turmoil of the business world, they said. Their strongest words, however, were reserved for Koser himself whom they accused of putting an outrageous price on his site. While Koser had already reduced his price from \$9,000 to \$8,500, the two aldermen reminded the council and the audience that recently when the city tried to raise the assessed valuation of the site from \$5,400 to \$5,700, the council agreed to cut it back to \$5,400 after owner Koser complained about the increase. "Show me how the property adjoining Koser has increased in value to any such extent," Yavorsky asked.

Wade returned to the podium to once again present the library board position



Locations of ICPL and Sites Considered in 1902

A Century of Stories

in full detail. "Expatiated" was the term used by Reizenstein in the *Press*. Noting that Carnegie preferred sites large enough for expansion, Wade stressed the need for a lot larger than Koser's if it is cut back to reduce the purchase price. He liked the wide thoroughfare on Iowa. (Improvements to the center boulevard of 120-foot-wide Iowa Avenue were already under consideration in 1902. Linn was only 80 feet wide and unpaved.) He worried that the buildings surrounding the Koser site were neither alluring nor permanent. (The Koser site was surrounded by private homes except for Trinity Episcopal Church on College Street to the north and east, and Armory Hall across Linn Street to the west. The closest retail businesses were on the north side of College Street with Miller Marble Works at 220 East College, near the 1902 public library at 212.) Wade also discussed another possible site on Washington and Gilbert, owned by Will Musser and for sale at \$4,500, but alderman Moon countered that Gilbert Street would require \$1,500 worth of paving.

At this point alderman Graff moved to buy the Koser site for no more than \$8,500 and Moon amended the motion to allow the city to keep the house and rent it or sell that part of it to reduce the cost. Again the council split 5 to 4 and so adjourned without a decision. After the meeting library trustees described the situation to the *Press*. Both the Calkins and Musser sites were large enough and each cost about \$5,000. The Koser site, if an adequate size was acquired, would cost the taxpayers \$8,500.²⁵

The stalemate continued for several weeks, primarily because the council was one member short due to the recent death of F.F. Lee. An election to replace Lee was scheduled for early May and the Democrats hoped to preserve the 5-to-5 Democratic/Republican split on the council by electing Democrat George Sueppel to replace Lee. Sueppel was defeated, however, and Lee's replacement was Republican D.S. Stouffer. The council met in just a few days, ready to let its sixth Republican get them out of the library site crisis. Stouffer, however, said he did not have enough information yet to make a decision and requested that he be excused from casting a ballot. The aldermen who were still maneuvering to get approval for either the Calkins or Musser sites were inclined to grant his request, but the motion to excuse failed, as did motions to buy the Calkins site (5 to 5) and the Musser site (6 to 4). The motion to spend up to \$8,000 for the Koser corner then carried 6 to 4. Stouffer had voted "yes" on all three locations. The headline the next day read, "Library Located; Koser Corner Will Be Bought by Council at Price Not to Exceed \$8,000." The story said the haunting fear of some of the councilmen had come true. "They were to pay \$8,000 for the property that they had assisted in assessing at but \$5,400."²⁶

Shaken by the failure to get the site they preferred, the trustees felt the need to clarify the relationship between the council and the board concerning the whole

Building the "People's Palace," 1902-1904

process of constructing the new building. At their first meeting after the council's site decision, trustees prepared another letter for council consideration. "The library board desires the city council shall determine whether the new public library building shall be erected by this board or by the city council. . . . [It] ought to be determined as early as possible so that no misunderstanding may arise." They suggested that since it would be a public building the erection should be the duty and responsibility of the city council unless conferred upon the board. They indicated they would like a resolution on the matter and offered to do any part of the process which the council might assign. Once again, they pointed out the need to use the entire Koser corner for a satisfactory building and asked for a prompt response so that construction could still begin in 1902. There is no record of council discussion on these questions, but on May 24 the council unanimously passed a resolution saying the library board was authorized to take complete charge of construction of the library building and to do all that was necessary and proper without further reference to the city council. In June the *Press* reported that the council was not adverse to allowing the whole site to go to the library.

Carnegie Award Is Just Not Enough

With the location and size of the site at last settled, the library board returned to the search for more funds. In a letter to Carnegie dated July 8, 1902, Wade submitted his first request that Carnegie reconsider the \$25,000 award. After a short statement about his fear of appearing "presumptuous [or] ungrateful," he reported that the architect believed \$25,000 was inadequate for a "suitable building" and noted that "other towns had secured an increase of the original donation upon a proper guarantee of income." He cited Marshalltown and could have mentioned Cedar Rapids whose original 1901 award of \$50,000 award was raised to \$75,000 one month after the city council promised \$7,500 per year support. He attached a supporting note from the mayor and another sworn copy of the council resolution promising at least \$3,500 a year in annual support. The Carnegie staff provided a prompt reply dated July 11, just three days later. Unfortunately, it was not from Carnegie or his secretary James Bertram. They were abroad for the summer and the person handling the correspondence in their absence (with the foreboding initials B.A.D.) advised them that asking for more money would just delay their project because "Mr. Carnegie bases his allowances for the library buildings on the population" of the community and "the offer made [conforms] to the standard." The cover note attached to the Wade letter and found in the Carnegie Corporation archives summarized the request and added, "Request not sent to Mr. Bertram as the chances are that Mr. Carnegie would not grant the increase. B.A.D., 7/11/02."

A Century of Stories

Still determined to get the extra \$10,000 and with overtures to Carnegie not producing the funds, the board tried another approach to the city council. At a special meeting on July 19 the board adopted a resolution asking the city council to provide an additional \$10,000 for the construction of the library. The trustees explained that they had already requested an additional amount from Carnegie and attached a copy of their request, along with B.A.D.'s reply, to this latest council communication. The council asked for a private meeting with the library board to discuss the proposal. From an idea developed by Wade, the trustees suggested that the council give the library the \$1,700 from the sale of the house on the site and then issue \$8,500 in bonds that the library board would pay off over the next ten years out of its two-mill annual levy. It is the board's opinion, Wade wrote, "that a little less be expended in books and equipment for a few years so that more [can be] put in the building which will serve the needs of the city for the next half century."

Both the *Press* and the *Republican* editorialized against the proposal. The *Press* felt the purpose of the library was to provide books and to shortchange this fund for several years was a mistake. Build what you can with the \$25,000, the *Press* said, and use the full two-mill levy to "keep the library abreast of the times."²⁷ The *Republican* worried about the city's debt and felt the city should not borrow more. If you are already in debt, the paper said, and "a rich uncle gives you a barn large enough to meet all pressing and immediate necessities," would you rush into deeper debt?²⁸

The council evidently agreed. At its next regular meeting after the joint board-council discussion, as the final item of business at a session that had lasted past 11:00 p.m., the council produced what the *Press* called "short and sweet" legislation. Graff moved that the library proposal be rejected and the vote was "prompt and unanimous." At the next library board meeting, citing high prices for steel, plumbing, and other components, the trustees agreed to put off the letting of bids for library construction until 1903. It was more than high prices, however, that board members were facing. They had received a quick turnaround by Carnegie underlings in July, the city council had said no to their pay-as-you-go proposal, and their leader, Judge Wade, was involved in a political campaign to win election to Congress as Iowa's representative from the Second District.

By December, following his successful first try for national office, Wade was ready to continue the struggle to find \$10,000 more to build the size library he and his fellow trustees felt the city needed. Ignoring the response he and the board received in July, Wade wrote another letter to Carnegie on December 17, 1902, requesting the additional funds. This short, rather awkwardly worded letter simply restated the need for more money due to "our inability to construct an appropriate building for the amount donated." He once again apologized if he

Building the "People's Palace," 1902-1904

sounded ungrateful and noted that State Senator Ball and University of Iowa President McLean had gone to New York in August to explain the matter to Carnegie but "found you had departed for Europe," a fact they apparently knew from the July 11 reply from B.A.D. If Wade was name-dropping by referring to the visit of Ball and McLean, he overlooked the opportunity to note his own recent election to Congress and signed his name simply as president of the library board.²⁹

Just six days later, longtime Carnegie secretary James Bertram sent a terse reply. Recorded in the board minutes of January 23, 1903, and also in the *Press* under the headline, "Carnegie Closes Coin-Holder; Generous Magnate believes Iowa City has had More than her Share Already," Bertram explained in a one-sentence letter that "Inasmuch as the usual sum allowed for library building for a city of the size of yours is about \$17,500 and you have been allowed \$25,000, Mr. Carnegie does not see his way to give any consideration to the request to increase it." The 1900 U.S. census gave Iowa City 7,887 residents; the 1905 Iowa census recorded 8,497 Iowa Citizens. At the standard two dollars per capita, Carnegie could argue that even \$17,500 would be a generous award.

At the January meeting where the letter was officially read and acted upon, board members adopted a resolution that "we proceed to build library with funds available." But this was not acceptance of defeat; at least for Wade. Board President Wade was now Congressman-elect Wade after successfully defeating Republican William H. Hoffman for the Second District seat (Wade was only the second Johnson County resident to be elected to Congress and the first Democrat in many years) and he proceeded to use his newly expanded political influence with Iowa's most powerful politician, Senator William Boyd Allison. He sent the senator a three-page letter dated March 11, 1903, explaining the Iowa City predicament vis-a-vis Carnegie, and asked Allison to "personally call Mr. Carnegie's attention to the situation, and see if something could not be done to enable us to construct a building which will meet public needs and which will be worthy the generosity of the giver." Wade, citing his six years as board president as making him "personally familiar with all the details," proceeded to use classic political, demographic, financial, architectural, and statistical arguments for why Iowa City needed and Carnegie, for the sake of his reputation, ought to give \$10,000 more for a library building.

Wade's strongest arguments explained how \$25,000 would not buy the library as much space as the board currently was renting and that the city was already providing \$3,700 a year in support, more than would be required under an increased award. The architects, Wade said, had determined that \$25,000 "will not give us a building much larger than 40 to 45 by 80 feet," and yet, he explained, the library was already crowded in larger rented quarters of fifty-five by

eighty feet. "Prices are high and if we had ten or twelve thousand more it would enable us to enlarge the building to a very considerable degree."

Strong community support has been shown, Wade argued, by citizens' willingness to tax themselves at the rate of two mills by a vote "carried almost unanimously. . . . The two-mill levy now brings about \$3,700 per year and is constantly on the increase." (The fact that the "almost unanimous" vote was for a one-mill levy was ignored by Wade.) He attached a copy of the council's resolution showing that it promised \$3,500, not the \$2,500 required by Carnegie's \$25,000 offer, and added that in addition to the two mills, the taxpayer was bearing the \$8,500 for the library site.³⁰

On another front, Wade explained, for perhaps the first but certainly not the last time in the library's history, that the presence of the university in Iowa City put special burdens on the local public library. Like the many fund-seekers described by Bertram, Wade objected to the population limit set upon the award by Carnegie and his staff. It is "a gross misrepresentation of our present population," Wade wrote to Allison. "We have over ten thousand within the city limits, and we have a large suburban population . . . who will soon be a part of the city by annexation [*sic*]. We are . . . a University City and the presence of from fourteen to seventeen hundred students makes a tax upon the public library and especially upon the reading rooms." (Eight years later the 1910 U.S. census gave Iowa City a population of 10,091. University students were not included in the official count until the 1960s.)

Next came the statistical arguments. Wade used the large 1902 circulation, 25 percent higher than just the year before, and the annual number of library visitors to build his case. He gave five years of figures for people entering the library but judiciously skipped over 1900 when the figure dropped by about 8 percent. The size and the recent growth of these indicators made the case for a building larger than the present quarters and larger than \$25,000 would buy.³¹

The final point in Wade's case for the additional funds challenged Carnegie's pride in the buildings constructed in his name. Wade noted that "Iowa City is fast becoming a city of fine public buildings." He noted a new university building costing nearly \$200,000 (Schaeffer Hall), another \$700,000 in university buildings recently approved by the Iowa legislature and a new post office "to be erected under an appropriation already made by Congress . . . [and] . . . just one block from the library site." Wade continued, "in the midst of all these large structures, a \$25,000 library will appear very insignificant. It is hardly just to Mr. Carnegie that such a building be constructed, as it will be over shadowed by other building[s] larger in size and of finer types of architecture than we can afford with that much money."

After giving Allison this arsenal of reasons for asking Carnegie to increase his

gift, Wade closed with a sentence of acceptance for whatever is given. "Of course if Mr. Carnegie cannot add to his gift, we will do the best we can with the sum already provided, but we feel that if he understands the situation he will see the necessity as we do, and that he may extend his generosity by an additional donation."

Attached to Wade's long narrative was a letter of introduction to Allison from University President George McLean. This was at least the second attempt by McLean to assist the library with its efforts for a larger donation from Carnegie. He confirmed the rate of new buildings scheduled to be built on the University of Iowa campus and closed with, "A building bearing Mr. Carnegie's name, to say nothing of the needs of the community, cannot comport with these buildings of the state unless more than \$25,000 is put into it."

It is not known whether Senator Allison ever went through this list of carefully constructed arguments with Carnegie or just drew on his political influence and friendship with Carnegie to urge him to give a little extra money to a deserving community in his home state. Allison, who had been a U.S. senator since 1872, and the soft-spoken but powerful leader of Iowa's Republican Party for as long, had been elected to his sixth term in 1902 and would now welcome Wade, a Democrat, to Iowa's congressional delegation. Senators were still elected by the state legislatures in these years, and Allison's influence at all levels of government was strong. Wade had been an active Democrat all his life and Allison was from Dubuque, one of the other bastions of Democratic strength besides Johnson County in strongly Republican Iowa. According to Wall's history of Iowa, Allison valued the power of his office more than strict conservative principles.³² Although his roots were in the conservative wing of the Iowa Republican Party, he was known as a compromiser, one who could find a satisfactory middle ground and bring both sides together. Thus good relations with all Iowa politicians would be important to him and doing a favor for the Democrats of Johnson County, particularly Congressman-elect Wade, would be a natural act. It is not known if Allison and Carnegie were close friends. The University of Iowa Library has an 1895 letter from Carnegie to Senator Allison in its manuscript collection. It expresses Carnegie's regrets at being unable to stop and visit Allison while in Iowa as planned.

At a minimum, however, Allison gave Carnegie a copy of Wade's letter. The Carnegie Corporation archives holds a copy of the letter but with this note written across the top: "Increase it to 35 on 3500 from council. A.C." The official 1900 population of Iowa City—7,987—has been noted in the upper right corner.³³

In just thirty days Wade and the library board received the good news. Writing from Dubuque on April 11, Allison reported that "I saw Mr. Carnegie when in

A Century of Stories

New York and he spoke encouragingly of your request and . . . if he could have a little time to examine the papers with his sec'y he thought he could come to a favorable conclusion. I have telegraphed him today that I hope he can decide before leaving for Europe. Will send you the response."³⁴ The telegram, as it turned out, was unnecessary. In a letter dated one day earlier, April 10, 1903, Bertram

sent another typically terse reply. Bertram wrote: "Mr Carnegie desires me to say that if a pledge is received from Iowa City that Thirty-five Hundred Dollars a year will be appropriated and spent on the Library, he will increase his allowance for building to Thirty-five Thousand Dollars."

Bertram, for seventeen years confidential



The site on Linn Street eventually selected for the new library was surrounded by private homes except for Trinity Episcopal Church on College Street and Smith's Armory west across Linn.

secretary to Carnegie and secretary of the Carnegie Corporation until 1934, was described by his contemporaries as methodical, systematic, and a stickler for precedent. Brevity was his strong trait; he was inclined to be irritable, but also thrifty, very religious, and a man of irrefutable integrity. His position was difficult, according to Bobinski. "He had to decide on the disposition of a vast sum of money and see that it was properly expended. He judged proposals strictly on their merit. Personal relations or considerations never influenced his judgment. No worthy applicant was to be rejected, and yet, no unworthy one was to be accepted."³⁵ The phrase "Mr. Carnegie desires me to say" in the March 10, 1903 letter to Wade is not found in other routine notification letters. Bertram, whose life's work had become evaluating and recommending funds for public libraries, was obviously not convinced of the worthiness of Iowa City's appeal but was taking care of a special favor for Carnegie.

At a special board meeting just three days later the board discussed the latest letter from Carnegie via Bertram and adopted two resolutions thanking Allison and Carnegie. Board members also requested that their architect visit Iowa City as soon as possible. The fully funded project was a "go" and they were ready.

Planning the Palace

After the site had been determined in the spring of 1902, board members had

Building the "People's Palace," 1902–1904

turned to the selection of an architect. They asked several architects to submit sketches giving floor space for one- and two-story buildings at a cost not to exceed \$35,000. They were still determined to build a larger building than \$25,000 would buy. It is not clear how many architectural firms were considered, but at the end of June the board accepted the proposal of Liebbe, Nourse and Rasmussen of Des Moines and authorized the president, Henry Liebbe, to draw up a contract not to exceed \$600 for plans for a \$35,000 building and for five visits from the architect.

There is no evidence that Liebbe, Nourse and Rasmussen had previously designed a library, but Liebbe, in addition to heading the firm, had been state architect since 1898. The firm was able to cram over sixty listings of current and former design projects on its 1902 letterhead. On the list were many high schools including the one currently under construction in Iowa City, courthouses, banks, churches (including Iowa City's English Lutheran), college buildings, and both Frankels' and Younker Brothers department stores in Des Moines. They named twenty clients for whom the firm had designed homes on Des Moines's Grand Avenue, a prestigious address in 1902, and a few other residences including the home of W.F. Main, prominent Iowa City businessman.³⁶ The firm had designed Iowa City's "old" high school as well, so there were at least four former and current clients in Iowa City. S.K. Stevenson, as school superintendent, was working with Liebbe, Nourse and Rasmussen on the high school. The architectural firm's lack of apparent experience in planning public libraries did not seem to be an issue with the library board, but there were at least two architectural firms that were designing Carnegie libraries in Iowa during this time period. F.E. Wetherell designed seven Iowa Carnegie buildings between 1902 and 1917, and Patton and Miller of Chicago was the architect for fifteen of the forty-six communities that received Carnegie grants between 1901 and 1904.³⁷

The exterior, as designed by Liebbe and company, matched the 90 percent of the buildings Van Slyck describes as having architectural features that Carnegie (in the person of James Bertram) later came to believe were excessive and too costly: domes, temple fronts, triumphant arches, and "pillars and Greek temple features costing much money and giving no effective library accommodation."³⁸ It had the standard temple front—"a massive portico supported by four heavy columns"—and a lobby ceiling supported by six Corinthian columns and topped by a dome with a stained glass skylight. The 9,000-square-foot building, with its lower level a few feet below grade, featured a grand stairway from the sidewalk to the upper level main entrance.

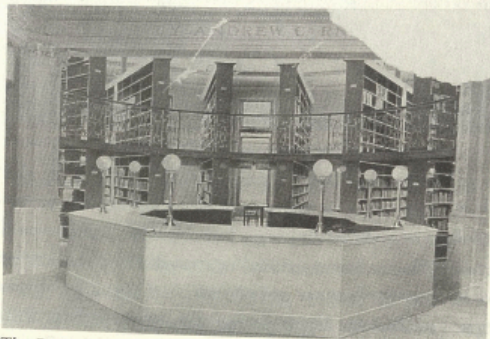
The interior floor plans were similar to those recommended by the Carnegie staff for awards made after 1908. They did contain a couple of features which Carnegie discouraged and, in later years when plans had to be approved, would

A Century of Stories

reject: radial stacks placed in a semicircular wing instead of bookshelves around the walls of a rectangular building, and fireplaces which Bertram claimed used valuable wall space that could be devoted to storage and display of books. The radial stacks were expensive to build and impossible to expand. (They remain in the building to this day.) Storing the books around the walls of the room saved floor space, opened up the rooms, and were easier to build, expand, and move. Although the building had central heating from the first day, fireplaces were placed in both reading rooms, the offices, and at least one of the seven lower level rooms. They did indeed reduce the wall space available for bookshelves in the reading rooms and, as far as can be ascertained, never were used as fireplaces.

The Liebke design, however, called for one major feature found in all the plans in Bertram's "Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings": the centrally placed

charging desk as the aesthetic and functional focal point of the entire main floor. The small marble-lined vestibule and domed lobby of the Liebke design led directly to the main desk. There were reading rooms on either side of the lobby with the angled stacks behind the desk. There were two small offices, one for the librarian and the other a staff work-



The Carnegie's centrally placed, octagon-shaped, marble charging desk was the aesthetic and functional focal point of the entire main floor.

room, to the right and left of the stacks. Any staff on duty at the desk (and there would be no other duty posts until the children's room was opened) would be able to oversee all public areas including the radial stacks which fanned out directly behind the desk. Van Slyck notes that when the dome was placed over the desk as it was in Iowa City it offered symbolic opportunities, "literally and figuratively transform[ing] the centrally placed delivery desk into the locus of public enlightenment."³⁹

The term "charging desk" was significant. "Delivery desk" was the designation before 1900 when many libraries had closed stacks. The desk served then as a barrier to the carefully guarded collection and as a delivery point for titles requested by library users. After the public was allowed free access to the bookstacks, the process was reversed and the reader presented his choices to the desk for charging out. Today the desk has moved from its central position in

Building the "People's Palace," 1902-1904

most larger libraries and is now called the "check-out desk" or "circulation desk."

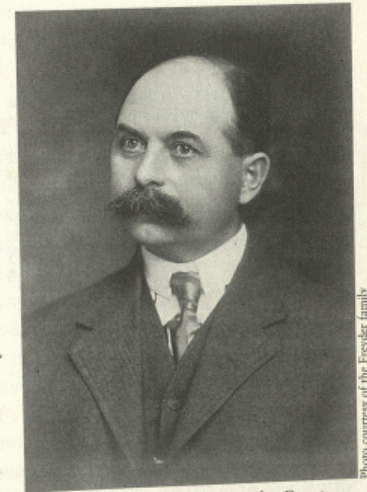
Construction: 1903-04

By late spring the architects had finished the plans and prepared the construction bids. The board approved a bid announcement with opening set for June 17, 1903, and received four bids ranging from \$37,637 to \$30,989. The low bid from Sheets and Freyder was just eleven dollars below the next bid. In addition to Sheets and Freyder as general contractor, the trustees awarded the heating and plumbing bid to C. Hurley. There were no electrical bidders.

Sheets and Freyder's low bid was a fortuitous circumstance for the library. By the luck of the bidding process, the board had acquired the building contractor with the oldest and best reputation in Iowa City. The firm was started about 1855 by three men who learned their trade in Germany: J.M. Sheets and Bernard Gesberg, the original owners, and their talented cabinetmaker, Harry Hazelhorst.

Gesberg arrived in this country first and spent 1854 in Rock Island, Illinois, helping to build the first railroad bridge over the Mississippi. Gesberg and the railroad came to Iowa City in 1855. After thirty years in the construction business as Sheets & Gesberg, Gesberg died in a construction accident in 1885, the same year that Hazelhorst retired. Several Freyders had joined the firm by then and it became known as Sheets and Freyder. After Sheets died in 1906, F.X. Freyder ran the firm under his own name until 1935, eighty years after Gesberg arrived in Iowa City. Freyder lived in Iowa City until he died in 1944—in the house he built at 1010 College Street, torn down to build apartments in 1996.

According to Weber, the firm built all Iowa City churches constructed before 1908 except the English Lutheran Church designed by Liebke, Nourse and Rasmussen (now known as Gloria Dei with a new building at the same location). Trinity Episcopal (1871), St. Patrick's (1879), and First Methodist (1907) are still standing. Sheets & Gesberg built the



F.X. Freyder of Sheets and Freyder Construction oversaw the construction of the Carnegie library. The firm built many churches, homes, and other buildings in Iowa City between 1855 and 1940.

A Century of Stories

Opera House on the southeast corner of College and Clinton streets in 1877 and parts of it survive to this day in the Savings and Loan Building on that site. Calvin Hall (1875), the Carson home (1875, now Alpha Phi Sorority), and Close Mansion (1874) are other well-known buildings from this firm which are still standing. Sheets/Gesberg/Freyder were known for their millwork, and until 1983 their own building, which housed a planing mill and a sash and door factory, stood at 320 South Gilbert Street. Weber wrote, "Inside these brick walls the rich heritage of many of Iowa City's finest churches, business buildings, homes and mansions was crafted."⁴⁰

At the same meeting in April of 1903 when the library board celebrated the news that Carnegie would provide the extra \$10,000, it received a petition from the local stonecutters' union. Because of strong feelings about how Carnegie mills treated workers, organized labor mounted protests against accepting Carnegie funds to build local libraries in several large cities—Pittsburgh, Detroit, Indianapolis. The award was delayed for over ten years in Detroit. While this opposition was general and consistent in urban areas, the relatively unorganized workers in Iowa left no record of concern about the appropriateness of using Carnegie money. In Iowa City, the issue was one of using local versus out-of-town stonecutters for the work on the library building as the architect evidently had specified. In June after the bids had been opened and the board was ready to write a final contract with Sheets and Freyder, President Wade, who had received the undivided support of Iowa City's labor leaders in the Congressional election the previous fall, proposed that the contractor "be required to cut all stone in Iowa City except the molded stone which may be cut at other places if desired." Representatives of Sheets and Freyder opposed the change and, on motion, the resolution lost and no action was taken. Just four days later, however, at a special meeting to consider contracts with Sheets and Freyder, building committee chairman Coast submitted an amendment to the contract. Sheets and Freyder had agreed to do all stone cutting on the building that could be done without increase in cost to the contractor in Iowa City. The resolution mentioned both the ashlar stone—the blocks used for wall construction—and the ends and fittings for the molded stone—columns and decorative work on the portico. Clearly, the committee had negotiated a compromise between the contractors and the union, for the next document in the minutes is the text of a letter from B. Price, president of the Iowa City Stonecutters' Union. "We, the stonecutters' union of Iowa City, feel that the library board would not be justified in paying six hundred dollars additional for having all stone cut in Iowa City, and that they are doing what they can to have all the stone cut here that is possible."⁴¹

Construction began in the summer of 1903. The *Press* carried Reizenstein's whimsical report of the July 10 groundbreaking. "Just as St. Mary's clock

Building the "People's Palace," 1902–1904

chimed seven the first man of the gang thrust a spade into the damp earth and the echo had not ceased ere that first spadeful had been tossed aside. The long-awaited step towards a great civic improvement had been taken. . . . As a matter of fact, the surveyors had not finished their work . . . and the groundbreaking was really an error . . . but easily rectified when contractor Freyder arrived on the scene a few minutes later."

The stone, however, not the surveyors, proved to be the greatest barrier to a smooth and timely construction schedule. In January 1904 Coast reported that work was behind schedule due to a delay in getting stone. The pale gray limestone (the 1904 library, the 1907 Methodist Church, and the 1904 post office are the only non-university limestone buildings in Iowa City) came from the large Bedford quarries in Indiana where a two-month strike had just ended about the time the contract was signed. Hundreds of building projects and thousands of workers had been idled by the lack of this popular stone. In Iowa City, that included the new Hall of Natural Science (now Macbride Hall) and other university buildings under construction that summer. While the library's delay was assumed to be caused by the backlog in delivery of uncut stone, there have been



Iowa City Public Library Archives

The building's progress was well documented through a series of twenty photographs. Here excavation work is well underway.



Iowa City Public Library Archives

Workers placing some of the limestone blocks. Construction had been slowed by a two-month strike at the Bedford stone quarry in Indiana.

unconfirmed stories in Iowa City for many years that the first columns prepared for the new building were too short and had to be redone. If the column story is true, it is an open question whether it was the result of local stonecutters who failed to deliver the skills they petitioned to use, an error on the part of the contractor and the off-site stonecutters, or a rumor started by the locals who still felt cheated out of some work they felt belonged to them.⁴²

W.P. Coast, George Hummer, and George Ball were formally appointed to the building committee by President Wade in the summer of 1903 when construction got underway. They actually had been functioning in that capacity since early 1902 when they were the three designated to seek a library site that the city council would approve and buy. As construction got underway and the basic con-

A Century of Stories

tracts with Sheets and Freyder and with Hurley were confirmed, the responsibilities of the three trustees increased. They coordinated work with the architect who made periodic inspections and with J.J. Hotz, a local contractor they hired to be the board's general superintendent to monitor the quality of the



The front of the new library under construction, facing west on Linn Street

construction work. They approved periodic payments to the architect and contractor after sending confirming documents to Carnegie's staff to get funds released. With no bidders in the first round, they spent a great deal of effort getting firms interested in providing the electrical wiring for the building and had to settle for the only company to bid in the second try, Tri-Electric of Davenport.

As suggestions arose, the committee evaluated proposed changes to the contract and made recommendations to the library board which approved all changes to the original specifications. None of the approved changes entailed dramatic revisions to the original plans, but two provided major savings to the tight budget and released funds for additions identified during the building process. The board saved \$3,300, nearly 10 percent of the total project cost, by substituting cork for rubber as the floor material and copper-trimmed tin for copper on the roof.

These major savings, plus the unexpected generosity of the council in giving the project the \$1,700 the city received from selling the house that formerly stood on the library site, gave the committee some funds to furnish and equip the building. Otherwise, the basic costs of architect, general contractor, plumbing, heating, and wiring would have taken the entire \$35,000 with nothing left to go inside the finished structure.



A rare back view of the original Carnegie building which was enclosed by the addition of 1963

Building the "People's Palace," 1902-1904

By the spring of 1904 the building committee was getting bids on steel book stacks and lighting fixtures. The search for shelving was assigned to the board's newest trustee, J.W. Rich. With five years of experience as head librarian at the university library, he may have had more familiarity with the specifications for and layout of steel shelving than anyone in the community.

After shelving was underway, the focus of the committee turned to equipping the building for public use. Members reviewed types of light fixtures, ordered sixteen tables—two of lower height for use by children—plus two settees and eight dozen chairs, including a dozen proportioned for children, and selected a charge desk, the most distinctive piece of furniture in the new building. It cost three hundred dollars, was called a "delivery desk" in the minutes, and was ordered from Library Bureau, probably from the 1902 "charging desks" catalog. It was a boom time for equipping libraries and Melvil Dewey's firm was the premier supplier of most kinds of library equipment and supplies. The catalog description noted that "this charging desk is so arranged that the person using it can reach all necessary material with the minimum of effort and without change of position,"⁴³ a feature that efficiency-driven Dewey would have required. Stressing standardization and library efficiency, Library Bureau catalogs were "teaching tools that spread the lessons of modern library administration far beyond the . . . library school classroom."⁴⁴

According to the post-dedication description written by Reizenstein in the *Press*, the walls were "frescoed, [with] quietly beautiful and harmonious designs and colors [of] red, gray, and green." With board approval the committee dropped the fresco from the general contract and hired its own fresco artist, Charles Morris of Des Moines, for an additional one hundred dollars. They saved one hundred dollars, however, by shortening each row of steel shelving by one section (three feet) to allow easier movement in the aisle on the curved back wall of the stack area. The committee rejected the supplier's recommendation to add a second story of stacks because of lack of funds but this expansion became the board's first priority for post-opening additions when money became available. The board approved bottle-green, color #29 of the Art-Metal Shelving Company, for the shelving and a chocolate color for the cork carpet. Some of the original green stacks remain in the old Carnegie building (leased since 1981 by the University of Iowa for its Office of University Relations). Sodding and grading for eighty-two dollars was one of the final pre-opening expenses.

Who Supervises the Janitor?

At its August 1904 meeting the board heard a first report from Adelaide Lloyd on moving into the new building. This was a repeat performance for her, having directed the library's move from Iowa Avenue to College Street three years ear-

A Century of Stories

lier. Under her plan no more books would be issued from the old quarters after August 20 and borrowers were asked to return all items currently checked out by August 27. After that the library staff took ten days to inventory the collection, called an "invoice" by librarians of that period. By the second week in September they were moving items to the new building and they vacated the rooms at 214 East College about the middle of September.

While the staff was arranging materials and furniture in the new library, the board held frequent meetings (trustees met twenty-two times in 1904) in the law offices of Baker and Ball, the same place where many of the plans for organizing a public library were launched in the fall of 1896. At one of these meetings the board hired the library's first full-time janitor to start October 1.

The hiring of the janitor gave rise to a pre-dedication crisis similar to the resignation of librarian Howell just before the 1897 library election. Congressman Wade did not resign from the library board until the fall of 1903. The first session of the new Congress did not begin until December 1903, thirteen months after his election to Congress, as was the custom before the Twentieth Amendment to the Constitution. The mayor appointed J.W. Rich to replace Wade and at his first meeting the board also elected him president. Born in 1838 and a Civil War veteran wounded at the Battle of Shiloh, Rich had been a school teacher, editor of the *Vinton Eagle*, and member of the University of Iowa Board of Regents. He had replaced university librarian Ada North in 1892 and had served in that position until 1898. Retired by 1903, Rich was elected to the school board early in 1903 and also served on the board of directors of the Iowa City State Bank.

Rich's transition from university library administrator—with much less oversight than at a public library—to the presidency of a public library board with relatively strong administrative powers, may have confused Rich or caused him, through age and gender differences, to make authoritarian demands on Lloyd and her staff. Whatever the reasons, less than a year after his appointment and election, one week after the hiring of the janitor, and just a few days before the library was due to open, President Rich called a special library board meeting "to settle a misunderstanding between the president and librarian as to the powers and duties of the president." After discussion, the board appointed a committee—Coast, Ball, and Elizabeth Felkner—to draw up rules defining the powers and duties of officers and employees of the board.

In a week the committee was ready, and for the first time that year, all nine board members attended to hear the report. While the minutes do not record the discussion, the response from the committee and from President Rich makes it fairly clear that the appointment of a new janitor brought to a head a conflict about the administrative powers of the librarian. The committee recommended an amendment to the bylaws that would make it clear that "the Librarian shall

Building the "People's Palace," 1902—1904

have direct charge and supervision of the janitor and instruct him as to his work in the library as to heating, cleaning, and doing other work of the library." The report continued, "The President is the executive officer of the Board of Trustees, and as such has general supervision of the Library Building and the employees, subject, however, to the approval and direction of the Board of Trustees. The heating apparatus and the care and management of the same shall be under the control of the janitor, and he shall be held responsible therefor." Trustee Hummer moved adoption of the recommended rules and the motion carried. Immediately President Rich called trustee Ball to the chair and handed in his written resignation as president, asking immediate acceptance. Hummer recommended that Rich's request be deferred until the board's next regular meeting. A week later the board agreed to defer acceptance of the resignation until the December meeting and at the same time by motion they appointed Rich, Ball, and Coast the committee to arrange the program for the formal opening of the library.

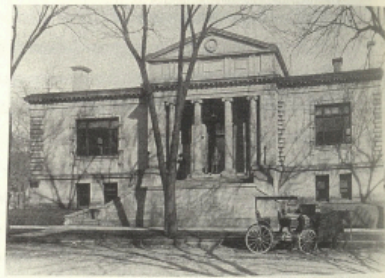
Opening and Dedicating the "People's Palace"

On Thursday, October 27, 1904, the new library building opened its doors to the public for the first time. During the first month, while library regulars, after nearly ten weeks of no library service, hungrily checked out books and caught up on their favorite magazines, the dedication committee planned and the board approved the dedicatory exercises. Scheduled for Thursday evening, November 29, there would be speeches and presentations at the Coldren Opera House followed by an open house to let the public inspect Iowa City's newest public building.

The opera house had suffered a serious fire since the 1897 performance of *Honor Before Wealth* which benefited the library in its first year. In March of 1902 most of the upper parts of the house were damaged. Owner John Coldren estimated losses at \$20,000. As one of its first major projects the new Commercial Club, started just a year earlier, decided to help raise money for the complete restoration and refurbishing of the 1877 building. Noting that Coldren had donated the use of the house "scores and scores of times to the university, the high school, the academy, commercial colleges, churches, civil, religious, and military organizations, charging no more than his expense of keeping up the institution," club members argued that Iowa City citizens should consider investing in its restoration and remodeling. The club organized a campaign to raise \$5,000 through the sale of \$5 tickets good for one admission to the revitalized house. The opera house reopened in the fall of 1902 with better seating, a larger stage able to accommodate "the highest scenery . . . used by the biggest traveling companies," and a completely redecorated interior. Reizenstein, the community's biggest theater devotee, described the changes in loving detail several times in the *Press* over

A Century of Stories

the course of the reconstruction.⁴⁵ Now able to book larger and more prestigious traveling companies, the new and improved Coldren Opera House also continued to serve the community for the occasions which celebrated Iowa City's progress and growth.



The new Carnegie library at 212 South Linn opened its doors to the public on Thursday, October 27, 1904.

The dedication of the Carnegie library was one of these historic occasions. The board of trustees issued formal invitations to the event and asked members of the city council to sit with them on the stage. Reporters from the *Press* and the *Republican* attended with notebook and pencil in hand to record the activities. Although his name was not on the program, Congressman Wade was introduced as the evening's master of

ceremonies by his library board replacement, J.W. Rich. Wade, Iowa City's most popular citizen, was back from his first session of Congress as well as his unexpected defeat for a second term just three weeks earlier. (Even the *Republican*, fresh from a series of editorials attacking Wade's record in Congress, carefully outlined his long record of service to the li-



Dedication ceremonies for the new library were held at the Coldren Opera House. This was also the site of the 1897 benefit performance of *Honor Before Wealth*.

brary, especially his perseverance in getting a larger Carnegie grant, in its report of the opening ceremonies.)⁴⁶

Wade's remarks were described as brief, atypical for the congressman. After speaking, he introduced trustee and building committee chairman W.P. Coast who gave a complete report on the money expended in the erection and furnishing of the new structure. Filled with all the details (such as \$19.25 income from the sale of dirt from the site), Coast's report listed expenditures of \$35,819 from income of \$36,719, leaving the board a balance of \$900 to fund the variety of incidental expenses expected in the first few weeks. Coast presented the building keys to the next speaker, Mayor Stebbins. Stebbins, after his speech about Iowa

Building the "People's Palace," 1902-1904

City's remarkable progress toward becoming a "metropolitan center," returned the keys in trust to Board President Rich. Rich gave a brief history of the public library movement in Iowa City, a well-researched paper that has been useful since that day for information about nineteenth-century library activities in Iowa City.

To hear two selections by the grammar school orchestra, the audience was ready to hear the dedicatory address from University President George E. McLean. As a member of the Iowa Library Commission, McLean brought official greetings from that body, but he delivered his principal remarks under the title, "The People's Palace—the Free Public Library—the Sign and Seal of Triumphant Democracy." His theme: The free school, the free press, and the free public library make education universal and with these institutions democracy will triumph. He used the term "triumphant democracy," the same as the title of Carnegie's best-selling book. Through the public library—"the people's palace," McLean said, the great institutions of our society can be coordinated—the school, the church, the press, and the newly developing university extension movement.⁴⁷

The last event on the program that evening was a resolution presented by trustee George W. Ball from the library board, the mayor and city council, and the citizens of Iowa City acknowledging their obligation to Andrew Carnegie "for his noble gift, which has made possible our beautiful and convenient new library." On request for a standing vote, every person in the house "rose at once."

Wade then invited the audience to a reception and "housewarming" and most of those in attendance walked two blocks down College Street and "spent some time going over the structure which kept open . . . until long after its usual closing hour."

Open and properly dedicated, the Carnegie library would stand relatively unchanged for the next sixty years, welcoming generation after generation of Iowa Citians. In the fall of 1904 it joined the growing number of Carnegie buildings throughout the United States that signaled their mission to resident and visitor alike: To serve curious and enterprising minds and to support individuals who seek information, knowledge, and self-improvement. Through the vision and persistence of the library's early trustees, Iowa City's share of Carnegie's legacy was a little larger. They had built the first library building in Iowa City. The university would not follow suit until 1951.

¹ Letter to F.K. Stebbins from James Bertram on Andrew Carnegie letterhead, dated March 14, 1902.

² The club was located on the east end of Taft Speedway near the Iowa River. It was destroyed in the

A Century of Stories

flood of 1918, the first of three golf clubhouses built off of Taft Speedway including the present Ellis course.

³ *Press*, Feb. 26, 1902, and May 14, 1902.

⁴ Vivian Thomas, "The First Carnegie Library," *Wilson Library Bulletin*, June 1995, 53.

⁵ Wall, *Andrew Carnegie*, 107-08.

⁶ Wall, *Andrew Carnegie*, 885-940.

⁷ Andrew Carnegie, *Gospel of Wealth and Other Essays* (N.Y.: Century, 1901. Reprinted by Bellnap Press, Cambridge, 1962).

⁸ Carnegie, 55.

⁹ From a speech given by Carnegie in Jedland, Scotland, n.d. Quoted by Ditizion, 153.

¹⁰ Cited by Bobinski, 109.

¹¹ Carnegie, "How I served My Apprenticeship," *Gospel of Wealth*, 6-7.

¹² Wall, *Andrew Carnegie*, 819.

¹³ Abigail Van Slyck, *Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890-1920* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), 148-51.

¹⁴ Other Iowa cities notified on March 14, 1902: Cedar Falls, Dennison, Atlantic, Hampton, Maquoketa, and Oskaloosa. Other lucky communities included Denver, Las Vegas, and San Bernardino, CA. Data from Bobinski.

¹⁵ Iowa was fourth in the number of communities receiving Carnegie buildings, surpassed only by Indiana [155], California [121], Illinois [105]. After 1911 the distribution of awards was taken over by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the major Carnegie philanthropic foundation.

¹⁶ Wall, *Andrew Carnegie*, 818.

¹⁷ Most of the statistical data and the Carnegie gift requirements are taken from Bobinski.

¹⁸ *Cedar Rapids Public Library; The First 100 Years* (Cedar Rapids Public Library, 1996), 18.

¹⁹ James Bertram to Melvil Dewey, State Librarian, Feb. 20, 1903, Carnegie Library Correspondence, Reel no. 9. Quoted by Bobinski, 46.

²⁰ *Press*, March 22, 1902. The article contained one of Reizenstein's best alliterative phrases, describing Carnegie as "a multi-millionaire, manufacturing midas and many times maligned money-maker."

²¹ Letter from Iowa City Library Board and City Council to Andrew Carnegie, July 16, 1901. Carnegie Corporation Archives.

²² *Press*, May 15, 1902.

²³ Headline in the *Press*, April 19, 1902.

²⁴ *Press*, April 22, 1902.

²⁵ *Press*, April 28, 1902.

²⁶ *Press*, May 14, 1902.

²⁷ *Press*, July 31, 1902.

²⁸ *Republican*, July 24, 1902.

²⁹ Letter from Wade to Carnegie, December 17, 1902. Carnegie Corporation Archives.

³⁰ The city council resolution to buy said \$8,000 but the price cited through history has always been \$8,500. Perhaps the offer of some private funds was accepted.

³¹ The 1901 report of the State Library Commission backs up most of Wade's claims. Of 77 tax-supported public libraries, Iowa City was sixth in total hours open, 8th in annual income, 13th in annual circulation and 23rd in volumes owned.

³² Wall, *Iowa, A Centennial History*, 159-67.

³³ The words "from council" are almost unreadable on Carnegie archives microfilm. This is the author's best judgment of what it says.

Building the "People's Palace," 1902-1904

³⁴ Letter from Allison to Wade, April 11, 1903. Iowa City Public Library archives.

³⁵ Bobinski, 26-31.

³⁶ The home was at the northwest corner of College and Summit streets. The lot extended all the way to Washington and had a three-foot deep swimming pool and an eight-foot iron fence around it. Conversation with Irving Weber, May 28, 1996.

³⁷ Van Slyck, 60. Kruty, Paul. "Patton and Miller: Designers of Carnegie Libraries." *Palimpsest*, 64, 1983, 122.

³⁸ James Bertram, letter to Flora Johnson, Feb 13, 1912, Carnegie Corporation Archives. Quoted by Van Slyck, 150.

³⁹ Van Slyck, 128-29.

⁴⁰ Irving Weber, "Sheets and Gesberg were Early Builders," *Press-Citizen*, July 23, 1983, 5B.

⁴¹ Library Board minutes, June 6 and 26, 1903. *Press*, June 26, 1903. The *Press* had noted on Oct. 10, 1902 that all the local labor unions had endorsed Wade: bricklayers, carpenters, stonemasons, teamsters, typographical, and laborers. Other reports indicated that the last two had been organized recently.

⁴² Irving Weber heard the story from Will Goodwin, who did architectural work for Sheets and Freyder. Weber never used the story for he could never confirm it. The question always arose, what happened to the discarded columns?

⁴³ Library Bureau, *Catalog*, 1902. Cited by Van Slyck, 168.

⁴⁴ Van Slyck, 48. Dewey had lost control and then sold his stock in Library Bureau by 1902, but his concern for library efficiency was the driving force behind many of the company's products. See Wayne Wiegand, *Irrepressible Reformer, a Biography of Melvil Dewey* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1996), chapter 11.

⁴⁵ *Press*, Mar. 19, Mar. 29, May 14, and Sept. 2, 1902.

⁴⁶ *Republican*, Nov. 30, 1904. Despite wildly optimistic predictions by his supporters, Wade had a difficult campaign. National Democrats gave him neither the support nor the money they furnished in 1902; Roosevelt's opponent, Judge Parker, got only 40 percent of the national vote; several charges of poor attendance and hypocrisy in regard to Wade's opposition to trusts hurt him in the district. He lost by 186 votes but carried Johnson County by 875, seven times Parker's plurality in the county.

⁴⁷ Cooperation between public libraries and university extension activities was a fashionable idea in the 1890s. Melvil Dewey, who was both New York state librarian and secretary to the board of regents at this time, wanted New York to send lecturers and exams to the state's public libraries. He proposed that anyone reading the university-approved books in the library and passing the exams could obtain a university degree without coming to the campus. See Wiegand, chap. 7.