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The American Public Library Building: A Social History and Feminist Critique

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The American Public Library Building:

A Social History and Feminist Critique

By

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A Senior Honors Thesis
Submitted to the
Oberlin College History Department
April 23, 1993

Corrected and expanded final draft
May 20, 1993

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the many people who helped me to complete this paper, and those who helped me retain my sanity through the process of research and writing. My greatest thanks go to my honors advisor, Geoffrey Blodgett, who gently and patiently guided me through the honors program and whose comments on many chapter drafts greatly improved the final quality of this paper. Thanks also go to the Jerome Davis Award Committee for providing important financial support for my research.

I would like to thank all the members of Baldwin Co-op, especially Nick Borland, Tanya Lee, Heather Edes, and Uvini Gunawardena, who listened sympathetically whenever I ranted and raved about honors, libraries, and library architecture. Without the support of such friends, I would never have made it through. Many thanks as well to Marj and Norm Henderson for allowing me to stay at their house when I got kicked out of my dorm for Spring Break and needed a quiet, cheap place to stay so that I could write, and to Ellen Broadwell for being a friend and a boss who believes in flexible scheduling.

To the Reference librarians, Archivists, and other staff of the Oberlin College Library, thank you for helping me in my research and inspiring me to pursue a career in librarianship. Without this incredibly positive influence, this paper would never have been written because I would never have recognized the potential that a career in library science offers.

Finally, I want to thank my parents, Mike and Bubbles Lincicum, for supporting me, both financially and morally, as I completed this paper and throughout my years at Oberlin. I have no words with which to express the depth of my gratitude for what their unwavering, unobtrusive support has enabled me to accomplish and become during the past four years.

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Chapter 1

Introduction:
The Cultural Heritage of the American Public Library

This paper seeks to place the development of the American

public library building in its social and historical context from

1876 to 1950 and to present a preliminary feminist analysis of

the public library as a building type. Like all social

constructs, architecture reflects the values and rituals of its

makers. Too often in America we reduce architecture to its

functional and technological components and do not recognize the

social implications of the built environment we create and

inhabit. Though technology has played a major role in

determining the shape of our physical environment, social forces

have also been very important. Indeed, developing new technology

and new methods of building is an important aspect of American

culture.

The library building was adapted to use in America during

the late nineteenth century and has continued to develop

throughout the twentieth. This study focuses primarily on the

public library building for a number of reasons. It is mainly

due to the rise of the American public library that the American

library building developed in unique ways. Never before in the

Western world had such a system of public libraries been

established as in America, and this presented new, uniquely

American demands and imposed new social values upon libraries.

Never before in the Western world had such a large number of

libraries been constructed to service such a broad section of
society. American middle class concepts of morality and
democracy played a major role in developing what we know as
public libraries today, and these same concepts played a major
role in determining library architecture.

The origins of the American public library lie deep in
American history. America's first book collections were built in
the New England colonies through the cooperative efforts of
citizens, many of whom wanted to read widely, but were limited by
the relative scarcity of reading material and the expense of
importing books to the New World. Begun as informal literary or
debating circles in which members would share the books they
individually owned or pool their money to purchase books
collectively, social libraries emerged in great numbers in New
England during the eighteenth century. The most famous of the
American social libraries was the Library Company of
Philadelphia, founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1731.[1]

Often housed in a town hall or church, social libraries
required citizens to contribute a certain amount of money in
order to become eligible to use their collections. By the 1850s,
however, New Englanders had developed a new American canon of
democratic egalitarianism incompatible with the elitism inherent
in the social library.[2] Thus, after 1850, social libraries in

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[1] Jesse Hauk Shera, Foundations of the Public Library
(Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1949): 32, 246-47.

[2] Ibid, 247.

New England began to decline and public libraries, supported by taxes and open to all, began to appear slowly. This trend spread slowly to the remainder of the country until the public library became an accepted institution nationwide. From the outset, public library ideology emphasized individualism, "democratic" principles, and other white, protestant, middle-class values, and these concepts were given spatial representation in library architecture.

Playing a more minor role in my study will be an analysis of academic library architecture, primarily as a means of comparison and illustration of important developments which apply to both public and academic library design. Academic and public libraries in America "grew up" together, faced similar problems, and have experienced similar architectural development. Because of the number of different types of library and their unique positions and needs in society, it is impossible to address all the variations in library architecture which are represented in our country. The most prominent type of library in our country, however, and therefore the type of architecture most commonly associated with libraries, is the public library, an institution with which many modern Americans have at least passing contact throughout their lives. The public library building is what most people experience when they use a library, and it is the type of library building most reflective of certain pervasive societal values.

This paper consists of two interrelated parts. First, I

will present a selective survey of the development of the public library building, with emphasis on aspects of its social history and on library buildings constructed by Oberlin College. Second, I will examine the library building from a feminist standpoint. One of the newest areas in feminist criticism concerns architectural analysis, and I want to apply this to the public library building. This should prove interesting since library buildings have traditionally been occupied mainly by women, both as staff and users, though this was not always the intent of the men who were primarily responsible for the design of the buildings.

I would like to state from the beginning that I recognize the limits of this study. Before I embarked upon this adventure, I had many grand ambitions which I discovered were impossible to achieve given my own limitations and those of a Senior Honors paper. Indeed, I now believe that my original goals would be difficult to achieve in a 400 page book. This paper represents, therefore, a preliminary examination of the many possibilities of this topic. I hope to express clearly ideas which will be worthy of further study; I plan to continue in a master's thesis and beyond. For me, this paper has become an important point of departure not a point of closure.

Chapter 2

First Principles Defined, 1876-1900

1876 was a pivotal year in the history of the American public library. In this centennial year, the American Library Association was established as the national professional organization for librarians; Library Journal, America's first periodical devoted specifically to discussion and communication between librarians, was founded; the Dewey decimal classification system was introduced; and the U.S. Bureau of Education published its first comprehensive report on public libraries in the United States. These events formed the base upon which the modern public library would develop.

The library building had yet to be adapted to the American environment. Indeed, a building devoted entirely to library services was something of a rarity in the United States in 1876, even at institutions of higher education. When such buildings did exist, they borrowed heavily from the architectural and cultural heritage of Europe. With the number of tax-supported libraries, professionally trained librarians, and affordable books increasing rapidly during the last decades of the nineteenth century, libraries designed using antiquated European models became increasingly ill-suited to the emerging demands of American public library service.

American library buildings constructed before 1890 often used a system of book storage imported from Europe commonly known

as the alcove system (Fig. 1). In this system, single-face shelves were placed around the perimeter of a large and lofty rectangular hall, some flat against the wall and others placed perpendicular to the wall creating a number of alcoves in which books on a particular subject were shelved. Shelves were often from 10 to 12 feet tall, making the use of movable ladders or footstools necessary in order to reach the highest shelves. If the entire book collection could not be accommodated on one floor, similar alcoves were carried up along the walls as high as necessary through the construction of galleries above the alcoves on the ground floor. These galleries were accessible via fixed stairs, often space-saving spiral staircases, placed at one or both ends of the hall. Large windows placed in the walls of the one of the short ends of the hall to provided reading light in most buildings. Clerestory windows and skylights were also used in some buildings. The center of the book hall was left completely open from floor to ceiling, and reading tables, chairs, and the librarian's service desk occupied some of the ground level floor space. Additional patron and staff work tables could be placed between the protruding shelves of the alcoves allowing for more private working conditions. This system created impressive, monumental architectural spaces because of the vast size of the room it required, the opulent architectural decoration often employed, and the way the books themselves were exploited as a form of decoration by displaying them openly around the interior walls of the building.

Sir Christopher Wren invented this system for the Trinity College Library at Cambridge (1675) and it was well-suited to the library needs and practices of that time. The alcove system simplified library organization and administration because it made the division of books by subject easy, and this was an important benefit before a standardized subject classification system was widely accepted. Intended to serve a small, scholarly population, alcoves were desirable because they provided the scholar with secluded study space and convenient access to books on a certain subject. The massive opulence of the architecture was also considered appropriate for a library building because it expressed the beauty and extraordinary value of the books the building was constructed to house.[1]

The alcove system had a number of disadvantages from an American librarian's point of view, however, and library design was one of the first issues American librarians addressed upon organizing in 1876. Librarians harbored both practical and ideological complaints against conventional library design. Never before had so many books been published, and librarians began to realize that to house even a significant portion of these books in the traditional alcove format, buildings would have to become so enormous that they would be impossible to administer effectively and economically. In addition, because collections could only increase, provision for indefinite future

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[1] Arthur T. Hamlin, The University Library in the United States (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1981), 147.

expansion became an important planning consideration and this was not a feature easily incorporated into an alcove library.[2] The environment created by the combination of an alcove library and a central heating system was detrimental to the health of books. William Frederick Poole, an early library leader and one of the most outspoken critics of contemporary library architecture, attributed the rapid deterioration of leather bindings in many of the country's alcove libraries to excessive temperatures that occurred near the ceilings of book halls.[3] The books stored in the higher galleries were literally being cooked, sometimes at temperatures in excess of 130 degrees Fahrenheit. The unavoidable heat and smoke produced by gas systems of artificial lighting only added to the deterioration of books stored in the alcove format.[4]

Justin Winsor, superintendent of the Boston Public Library and later librarian at Harvard College, articulated in print librarians' early objections to traditional library design in a chapter he contributed to the Bureau of Education's 1876 report on public libraries. In this article, Winsor established the basic principles upon which the debates over library design would emerge during the late nineteenth century: economy, efficiency, provision for expansion, protection of library materials, and

[2] John William Wallace, "Mr. Wallace's Address," Library Journal 1 (Nov. 30, 1876): 92.

[3] "Bindings," Library Journal 1 (Nov. 30, 1876): 125.

[4] "Library Architecture," Library Journal 7 (July-August 1882): 196.

arrangement for the utmost convenience of both staff and patron. The alcove system, which was originally intended to allow the scholarly patron seclusion and open access to the shelves, was no longer a practical or economical method of arrangement because neither of these provisions were desirable in an American free library. To maintain order on the shelves and protect the bookstock from theft, it was necessary to construct a barrier between the books and the "multitudes" who now had free use of the public library. A delivery desk placed midway between readers and a compact book storage room served as a successful barrier and also made book retrieval as economical as possible. To Winsor and many of his peers, the ultimate goal of "modern" library design was to provide for maximum book protection and maximum library service in the most economical way possible.[5]

Until the 1880s, the overwhelming function of an American library building had been the storage and protection of books. Libraries were storehouses, not reading rooms or community centers, and were generally open to the "public" for only a few hours each week in order to allow approved, upper class patrons to withdraw and return books which were read at home. The new free library ideology articulated by members of the cultural elite added education and social reform to the library's mission. Library advocates believed that by providing free access to their "great" literature, the lower classes of society could be

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[5] Justin Winsor, "Library Buildings," in <u>Public Libraries in the United States of America</u>, vol. 1, U.S. Bureau of Education (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1876), 466.

socially and morally uplifted. Thus, beginning in the 1880s, libraries took on a dual function, that of protecting books and that of providing for the use of books by all classes of Americans.

The cultural elite worried about allowing the lower classes free access to libraries, however. Not able to restrict use of their collections to honorable upper class citizens who could be trusted to withdraw books for home use, librarians placed restrictions upon how and what books could be removed from their buildings. They also believed that the "general public" needed special instruction and close supervision in the use of books and elite guidance in choosing what to read.[6] These class-based concerns made the provision of ample reader space within the library building an important design consideration. The increased availability and decreased cost of books made them less precious and thus decreased the library's need to protect through exclusion.[7] Technological advances in artificial heating and lighting made human habitation of library buildings comfortable for longer periods of time. Similar elite conceptions made closed shelving standard in most public libraries in the late nineteenth century. In order to use books, patrons had to identify them for retrieval by library staff. Efficiency demanded a new shelving system more compact than the alcove

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[6] John Cotton Dana, "The Public and its Public Library," Popular Science Monthly 51 (1897): 251.

[7] Ibid, 244.

system. The new emphasis on reforming and meeting the perceived
needs and demands of the masses created a need for a new building
model specifically designed and suited to elite conceptions of
the free public library's practical requirements and social
functions in American society.

The pursuit of middle-class moral ideals in library
service prompted librarians to demand a new type of library
building better suited to the new functional requirements of
library work. As the century progressed and communication
between librarians increased, mounting frustration with
traditional building design made the improvement of library
architecture a major concern of many early library leaders.
These librarians explicitly linked their ideas concerning library
architecture with ideals which anticipated those of the
Progressive movement of the early twentieth century.

William Frederick Poole emerged as the most outspoken critic
of conventional library architecture and architects who failed to
take librarians' functional arguments into consideration in their
designs. He condemned the alcove system because he considered it
wasteful of space, time, and energy. It made heating a building
difficult and even dangerous for books, its internal arrangement
made no practical use of vast amounts of interior space, and it
made book retrieval very time-consuming and inconvenient for
library staff.[a] Poole's alternative to the alcove system was the

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[a] William Frederick Poole, "The Construction of Library
Buildings," Library Journal 6 (March 1881): 70-71.

subject department system. In this system, the library building
was divided into a series of moderately sized rooms, each of
which would contain books on a certain subject and be staffed by
a subject specialist who would supervise and assist patrons. In
the subject rooms, wall shelving would hold all of the most
current and commonly used volumes, allowing tables to be placed
in the center of the room. Additional rooms filled with
compactly arranged free-standing, double-faced shelves would
house lesser-used volumes which could be retrieved for a patron
upon request. Each room would be 14 to 15 feet in height in
order to allow for adequate lighting and ventilation (Fig. 2).

Poole's model was calculated to provide the best possible
natural light and ventilation in the interior of the building, as
well as some open shelving and expert service throughout. Though
his model received a great deal of attention in print, in
practice only one contemporary library was designed using his
system, the Newberry Library in Chicago (1890s) where Poole
served as librarian at the time of construction. A number of
factors combined to preclude the widespread acceptance of Poole's
system. Among these were the cost of employing experts to staff
the subject rooms, the difficulties of internal control and
flexibility in a building with so many interior load-bearing
walls, and, most importantly, the acceptance of a rival system of
book storage, known as the stack system.

The first modern bookstack was designed by Henri Labrouste

Ibid, 69-77.

for the Biblioteque Nationale in Paris in the 1850s.[10] Henry Van Brunt based his design for the first American bookstack, an addition to Gore Hall at Harvard College (1876-77), on Labrouste's model.[11] Stacks were intended to house the greatest number of books in the smallest amount of space. The height of each floor of stacks was reduced to the minimum necessary to accommodate 7 1/2 foot double-faced shelves and several tiers of stacks would be placed atop one another. Shelves were not free-standing but directly attached to the iron or steel columns which provided vertical support for the entire structure. Narrow windows located opposite the aisles between bookcases provided natural light and ventilation. This system was more economical to construct than Poole's subject department system, especially with the development of iron and steel construction methods. It required fewer attendants for supervision; provided protection against theft, mutilation, and displacement of books through physical separation of books and readers; and provided for more convenient and centralized book retrieval than Poole's system did. The display of a full-scale stack model at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 and the eventual adoption of the stack in the design of the Library of Congress (1897) helped to popularize the stack model. By the first decade of the twentieth

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[10] Alfred Morton Githens, "Libraries" in Forms and Functions in Twentieth Century Architecture, Talbot Hamlin, ed., vol. 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 679.

[11] Donald Oehlerts, "The Development of American Public Library Architecture from 1850 to 1940" (Unpublished doctoral diss., Indiana University, 1975), 17.

century, some form of stack had replaced the alcove in buildings large enough to need some form of book storage beyond simple wall shelving.

Many library leaders loudly condemned traditional library design and architects who refused to abandon old forms. This created serious friction between the newly emerging professions of architecture and librarianship, which would affect the politics of library design until well into the twentieth century. Librarians were particularly enraged when Henry Hobson Richardson, one of the foremost architects of the era, seemingly ignored all of their advice by designing massive libraries that employed the alcove system and resembled European churches in plan (Fig. 3-6). Ultimately librarians' protest achieved its purpose, however: the alcove system was abandoned and other architectural forms which better reflected librarians' ideals in library service were eventually adopted.

Two of the most hotly contested libraries of the nineteenth century were also the most influential in design. The Boston Public Library building (completed 1895), designed by McKim, Mead and White, was influential in its style, which was Italian Renaissance in an age of Richardsonian Romanesque (Fig. 7). Until the International Style hit the library building in the 1930s, many buildings throughout the country, from Massachusetts to Oregon, unabashedly imitated Boston's building in style and exterior appearance. The Boston building was less influential in planning and interior design, though its placement of the main

reading room on the second floor and its use of a monumental staircase were widely imitated.

The Library of Congress (1897) set the standard for stack design (Fig. 8-10). Bernard Green, the construction superintendent for the building, patented his design for the stack that replaced the five story alcoves designed by architect J. L. Smithmeyer in the building's original plan. He later sold the patent to Snead and Co. Iron Works, the firm which manufactured the Library of Congress stack. Applying recently developed iron and steel construction techniques, Green's nine-tier stack relied on slender, evenly spaced metal columns and beams for support. Floors were made of highly reflective white marble slabs suspended in the structural grid. The enormous size of the stack made it necessary to supplement natural light with electric light. All windows in the stack were fixed, so an artificial ventilation system was also necessary.[12] No library constructed before 1900 had the same needs as the Library of Congress in terms of book preservation and storage capacity and hence had no reason to construct a stack which incorporated comparable artificial lighting and ventilation systems. It was the basic structural features of Green's stack that were duplicated across the country, especially in academic and large city libraries, for the next 40 years.

One of architects' most frequent responses to librarians'

[12] Herbert Small, Handbook of the New Library of Congress (Boston: Curtis and Cameron, 1897), 80-84.

complaints about their buildings was that they could never possibly make librarians happy because librarians didn't know what they wanted; librarians had no set of widely accepted governing principles to aid architects in design, so it was impossible for architects to design acceptable buildings.[13] In 1891, Charles Soule, a trustee of the Brookline (MA) Public Library, responded to this criticism by publishing an article which listed plainly librarians' basic principles so that architects could not help but understand them.[14] Soule listed 22 "fundamental principles of library architecture" which ranged from the very broad to the very specific.[15] These principles stated that libraries should be designed from the inside out with emphasis upon efficiently and economically meeting functional requirements, that buildings should be adapted to the needs of individual communities, and that libraries should be constructed with future expansion in mind. Inside, buildings should be planned to allow for adequate supervision by a minimum of attendants, decoration should be minimal to promote a studious atmosphere and save on costs, and large windows should provide as much natural light as possible because "No artificial light can be as healthy for attendants and for books, so agreeable to the

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[13] Bernard Green, "Planning and Construction of Library Buildings," Library Journal 25 (November 1900): 677.

[14] Charles C. Soule, "Points of Agreement Among Librarians as to Library Architecture," Library Journal 16 (December 1891): 17-19.

[15] Ibid, 17.

eyes, or so economical, as daylight."[16] Soule's principles

regarding shelving reflect the ambiguity in this area at the time

the article was published; before the completion of the Library

of Congress stack, librarians were still searching for a

satisfactory alternative to the alcove system.[17]

Changes in educational philosophy, increasing numbers of

students, and increased publication all combined to create a

crisis in academic library design in the late nineteenth century

as well. The general acceptance of Charles Eliot's elective

system in undergraduate education made larger and more diverse

library collections necessary and this required a larger, more

complex library building. Increased emphasis upon individual

study and course reading supplemental to course texts also put

new demands on academic libraries. One room in a chapel or

classroom building was no longer sufficient in size or complexity

to adequately house an academic library. The need for specially

designed, separate buildings had arisen.

Oberlin College constructed its first library building

during this period. Dedication exercises were held at Spear

Library on November 2, 1885. Located on what is today building-

free Tappan Square, Spear Library occupied a physical space on

campus which reflected its builders' belief in the centrality of

the library's position in academic life (Fig. 11). The building

itself was by modern standards very small; the entire building

[16] Ibid, 18.

[17] Ibid, 18-19.

covered about 70 square feet of ground and originally had 2 1/2 floors. Though it seems difficult to believe, Spear Library provided a great deal of excess library space when it was built and was purposely built with expansion in mind. At the time of construction, the Oberlin College Library held approximately 13,000 books and 3,000 pamphlets. President Fairchild made an appeal to alumni on behalf of the library's acquisition budget as a part of the dedication program, calling for $25,000 to be raised (the same amount spent to construct the building) in order to purchase and process new books. The college was in desperate need because in the eleven years preceding the opening of Spear Library the library had purchased fewer than 2000 books.[18]

The library's plan followed the trend in contemporary library design and rejected alcove system of shelving. Instead, wall shelving was used in the 64 x 40 foot reading room in the rear portion of the second floor of the building. It is not clear if this provided enough shelf space for the entire collection or if a separate stack room was designated in the original design. Small windows were placed high in the reading room walls, and the architect provided a large central skylight which provided most of the necessary reading light. The library was also equipped with a gas-powered artificial lighting system

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[18] "Order of Exercises at the Dedication of the Spear Library, Oberlin, Ohio" (Boston: Press of the Deland and Barta, 1885), Remarks by W.G. Frost, E.M. Ellis, Pres. Fairchild, and J.B.T. Marsh.

which was converted to electricity in 1904.[19]

When the building opened, the Department of Natural History occupied the first floor, with the understanding that as soon as the library grew to a sufficient size, this floor would be given over to library use. This time came sooner than anyone expected, and by 1896 Librarian Azariah Root had commissioned Snead and Co. to design enough iron stack shelving for 69,615 volumes.[20] It appears that this iron stack was never actually built, however. Instead, additional wooden bookcases were installed and rearranged regularly in various rooms of the library to house the growing book collection.[21] Photos of the library housed in the Oberlin College archives reveal the intense overcrowding present toward the end to Spear Library's service as the college library. According to Keyes D. Metcalf, a library assistant in 1908 who later became the director of the library at Harvard University: "The Spear Library, with some aid, for which I can claim responsibility by becoming an expert in tucking away more and more books after the shelves were all full, by the end of my freshman year in 1908 had burst its seams and had overflown into

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[19] "New Lights," Oberlin Review (Jan. 21, 1904): 311.

[20] Snead & Co., "Specifications for Stacks for the Oberlin College Library" (May 25, 1896), Oberlin College Archives, building file: "Spear Library."

[21] Azariah Root, "Annual Report of the Librarian of Oberlin College" Oberlin College Library: Annual Reports, 1893-1928 (1896-1900), 5-7.

various parts of other college buildings."[22] Indeed the

situation was grave, and the college constructed a new building

in 1908, a short 23 years after the dedication of Spear Library.

The situation at Oberlin was not unique. Most American colleges

and universities during this period experienced a tremendous

growth in both library collections and student library use as the

theories and practices of higher education changed during the

late nineteenth century.

Education became an increasingly important component in

American culture in general during the last decades of the

nineteenth century. Social reform became a primary concern of

the upper and middle classes in their attempts to deal with the

changes industrialization and the rapid growth of American cities

brought to American society. Education became one of the primary

elements in this reform movement. Americans were very proud of

the system of public elementary and secondary schools which had

grown in the country during the nineteenth century, and many

members of the upper and middle classes felt that if only the

lower classes could be educated, many evils in society would be

thwarted. Hence, public library enthusiasts emphasized the

educational and morally uplifting qualities of libraries in

society in arguing for their widespread acceptance.[23]

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[22] Keyes D. Metcalf, _Personal Reminiscences on the History of the Oberlin College Library System_ (Oberlin, OH: Oberlin College, 1974), [6].

[23] Sidney Herbert Ditzion, _Arsenals of a Democratic Culture_ (Chicago: ALA, 1947), 133-135, 166.

In the 1890s, librarians managed to convince architects and library boards to allow them to play some role in the design of library buildings, even if this did not always result in an ideal building from the librarian's point of view. Librarians were hostile to any form of monumentality or ornamentation in their buildings because they considered such elements both excessively expensive and contrary to their image of the library as a workshop rather than a monument. This contradicted nearly all of the contemporary trends in architectural design, however, especially after the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 when monumental neo-classicism swept the country.

Architects acknowledged that public libraries, especially those built or maintained with public funds, should be economical in construction and should be well-suited to the needs of efficient library administration and service. But they argued that decoration and monumentality were also necessary because these were elements that the public required in a library building.[24] When buildings were donated by philanthropic "fathers," even if they were to be maintained with public funds, monumentality was all the more appropriate in order to impress upon the lower classes a sense of awe and perpetual gratitude for the precious gift they had received. So buildings were designed with monumental staircases, high ceilings, grand entry halls, and large amounts of ornamentation in spite of librarian's vociferous

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[24] J.L. Smithmeyer, Suggestions on Library Architecture (Washington, D.C.: Gibson Brothers, 1883), 11-12.

objections.

By 1900, librarians and other free library enthusiasts,
under the organized coordination of the American Library
Association, had established the free public library as a
significant American institution. Librarians had also been
effective in beginning to transform library architecture.
Articles by Poole and others about the insensitivity of
architects to the practical considerations of library design
caused architects to both strike back at librarians and attempt
to learn more about library service as they designed an ever
increasing number of new buildings. Charles Soule's laundry list
of basic principles of library architecture served as the
foundation for the development of a new type of building uniquely
suited to elite conceptions of the needs and purposes of the
American public library.

The 1880s and 1890s also saw a dramatic increase in the
amount of philanthropic activity in the library movement.
Charles Cutter, in his 1888 presidential address to the American
Library Association conference, lamented the apparent preference
of donors towards furnishing library buildings, instead of funds
to purchase books or endowments for post-construction support.[25]
Yet this trend indicates the progress librarians and other free
library advocates were making in convincing Americans of the
value of public libraries. A philanthropist's offer to donate

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[25] Charles A. Cutter, "President's Address," Library Journal
13 (Sept.-Oct. 1888): 307.

funds for a building often prompted a community to appeal to the
state legislature for the right to tax itself for the support of
library services. This trend would continue well into the
twentieth century with the benefactions of Andrew Carnegie.

Chapter 3

The Carnegie Era, 1900-1920

Andrew Carnegie. In the study of American library history, this name is unavoidable. Few other individuals have had so much impact on the development of public libraries in this country. Between 1889 and 1923, Carnegie gave over $41 million for the construction of 1679 public library buildings in 1412 American communities. Many of these buildings are still used as libraries today, some without significant alteration.[1] Carnegie, and other library philanthropists who contributed on a more localized scale, aided tremendously in increasing the number of American public libraries from 900 in 1896 to 3,873 in 1925 and establishing the public library as a permanent American institution.[2]

Carnegie's library philanthropy began in 1881 with a gift to his hometown of Dumfernline, Scotland. His first American contribution was a new library and community center for Allegheny, Pennsylvania, completed in 1890. Carnegie claimed that the impulse for his library gifts came from his experience as an immigrant and his belief that the working man would and could improve himself through independent study. He believed that the wealthy had an obligation to provide resources for such

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[1] "Survey of Fate of Carnegie Libraries," Library Hotline 19 (17 Dec. 1990): 5.

[2] George S. Bobinski, "Carnegies," American Libraries 21 (April 1990): 296.

study to those who deserved them but could not afford them.[3]

Carnegie's early benefactions conformed to the typical paternalistic model of late nineteenth century philanthropy. An average library philanthropist of this era would finance the construction of a library building in a community with which he had personal ties, and would, on occasion, also provide funds for the purchase of books or an endowment to help with the cost of library administration and facility maintenance. The gift of a library created a tacit social contract between the philanthropist and the recipient community. The philanthropist agreed to give the community a valuable cultural institution and the community was then obligated to respect, admire, and even love the philanthropist as a father. "Nineteenth-century philanthropy, like paternal love, imposed upon its recipients a debt of gratitude that they had not asked to incur and that, no matter how hard they tried, they could never adequately repay."[4]

The overt motivations for nineteenth century philanthropy were completely altruistic. Carnegie professed to contribute to public library development out of gratitude to those who had helped him succeed in America; he built libraries so that other hardworking and ambitious working men like himself could realize

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[3] Andrew Carnegie, "Wealth," North American Review 148 (1889): 653-664; "The Best Fields for Philanthropy," North American Review 149 (1889): 682-690.

[4] Abigail A. Van Slyck, "'The Utmost Amount of Effectiv [sic] Accommodation': Andrew Carnegie and the Reform of the American Library," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 50 (Dec. 1991): 360-61.

the American dream. Librarians and other members of the cultural elite generally accepted these as Carnegie's motives and filled articles and speeches with praise for Carnegie's benevolence.[5] The working class people at whom Carnegie's generosity was aimed, however, often saw his gifts in a different light. In large industrial cities like Pittsburgh and Detroit, labor groups protested the acceptance of Carnegie grants sought by elected officials on the grounds that Carnegie's money was "tainted" by the harsh realities of capitalism and that his real motives in financing library construction were egotism and deceptive self-promotion. Many workers argued that if Carnegie really wanted to help them he would share more of his profits with them directly in the form of higher wages.[6] This type of resistance arose repeatedly throughout the Carnegie era in large cities contemplating library construction and it undoubtedly helped to shift the focus of Carnegie's building program from urban to small-town America after 1900.

Carnegie's ambitions concerning the establishment of public libraries in the United States could not be fulfilled under the constraints of nineteenth century philanthropy, so Carnegie developed an entirely new system of giving which transformed American philanthropy. After 1898, Carnegie began to standardize his methods for making library construction grants. His new

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[5] George Bobinski, Carnegie Libraries (Chicago: ALA, 1969), 86-87.

[6] Ibid, 88-105.

system was based on the structure of the American corporation rather than that of the Victorian family. This allowed Carnegie to expand the scope of his donations and increase greatly their number. In 1899 alone, Carnegie promised building funds to 26 cities, more than doubling the total number of gifts made in the previous thirteen years. Carnegie created a clearly defined formula so that any community could apply for and be granted funds to construct a library building so long as they met Carnegie's conditions of providing a site for the building and promising to provide support for the library through taxation. Taxes had to yield an annual amount equal to at least ten percent of Carnegie's donation or $1,000, whichever amount was greater.[7]

This system was particularly suited to Carnegie's philanthropic philosophy and personality. He firmly believed that indiscriminate giving only added to society's problems, so he required that communities prove their genuine interest in building a public library and their worthiness for receiving such a gift by promising to support their library through taxation. He refused to provide any funds for library administration or the purchase of books on the principle that the community enjoying the privilege of library service must be actively involved in supporting it and making sacrifices to maintain it. Carnegie's system also permitted the utmost efficiency in selecting communities to receive gifts because the selection criteria were

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[7] Van Slyck, "The Utmost Amount...", 369; Susan Richards, "Carnegie Library Architecture for South Dakota & Montana: A Comparative Study," Journal of the West 30:3 (July 1991): 70.

reduced to an objective, scientific formula. This allowed
Carnegie to turn the administration of the library program over
to his personal secretary, James Bertram, and thus avoid any
personal contact with recipient communities whatsoever. This
provision obliterated one of the most important elements of the
earlier paternalistic model of American philanthropy.[*]

Carnegie imported James Bertram from Scotland to serve as
his private secretary in 1897. A conservative, ambitious, and
energetic man, Bertram quickly became Carnegie's devoted buffer
with the outside world, serving Carnegie privately from 1897
until 1914 and acting as secretary of the Carnegie Corporation
from 1911 until his death in 1934. Bertram and Carnegie shared a
passion for efficiency in all things, and when the building
program was essentially turned over to his control around the
turn of the century, Bertram immediately began refining the
system to an exact, efficient science. His style of
communication with grant applicants and recipients was indicative
of his life philosophy; he communicated only through brief
letters (in order to maintain his objectivity), and he assumed
that librarians and town officials understood completely
everything he wrote and seldom responded kindly to the requests
for clarification and additional information which frequently
arose. This aloofness contributed to much confusion about the
procedures for obtaining and the obligations of receiving a
Carnegie grant and led to many conflicts between Bertram and

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[*]Van Slyck, "The Utmost Amount...", 369.

community officials.[9]

Carnegie had only an indirect role in the development of library architecture. As primary administrator of the library program, Bertram had more direct control over architectural issues, but even his influence came more from his control over the purse strings than actual creative contributions to design. Bertram began reviewing plans for all projects which ran over budget in 1904. By 1908, all plans for buildings constructed using Carnegie funds had to be approved by Bertram.[10] An efficiency fanatic, Bertram accepted easily most of the principles espoused by contemporary librarians concerning library design and did not waste any time or effort in formulating new principles of his own.

During this period librarians continued the campaign for efficient, economical, and purely functional buildings that they had begun in the 1880s. The alcove system was all but forgotten during the Carnegie Era and was replaced with various shelving arrangements appropriate to library size. With the alcove problem resolved, librarians focused their energy on developing plans which would minimize the costs of library administration and provide for the maximum amount of service and control. This led librarians to begin to push for the elimination of permanent interior walls in public areas. The ideal plan would allow one assistant to supervise the stack and all public space within the

[9] Bobinski, Carnegie Libraries, 24-31.

[10] Van Slyck, "'The Utmost Amount...", 376.

building from her position behind the circulation desk. Openness was also valued because it allowed better air circulation and light penetration into the interior and provided flexibility when changes in service or function demanded changes in interior arrangement (Fig. 12).[11]

Librarians didn't have the influence necessary to eliminate all the inefficiencies they saw in design, however, especially those involving architectural effect and decoration. In response to this situation, Bertram issued a pamphlet entitled "Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings" which summarized the principles of library planning generally accepted by librarians and included sample building plans (Fig. 13).[12] This pamphlet was sent with each grant award letter beginning in 1911 in order to guide communities through the design process.[13]

Bertram had a power that librarians did not; he had control over the disbursement of Carnegie's money. So when he decided that library buildings should be as efficient and economical as possible, his control of the purse strings pressured communities into designing buildings which conformed to librarians' established principles.[14] Thus, with the aid of James Bertram's

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[11] Chalmers Hadley, "Some Recent Features in Library Architecture," ALA Bulletin 9 (July 1915): 126-128.

[12] "Notes on the Erection of Library Bildings," Library Journal 40 (April 1915): 243-47.

[13] Bobinski, Carnegie Libraries, 58.

[14] Abigail A. Van Slyck, "Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and the Transformation of American Culture, 1886-1917" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1989), 171.

administrative policies and Andrew Carnegie's money, architects

and town officials were forced to incorporate librarians' ideas

in library design into their buildings.

Throughout the Carnegie era, however, many town officials

and architects maintained a conception very different from that

of library theoreticians and James Bertram as to what a library

building should be. Socialized in the context of monumental

public architecture and traditional paternalistic philanthropy,

architects and town officials often clung to what Bertram and

leading librarians considered inefficient and unnecessary

elements when designing new library buildings. Community

officials and their architects often produced buildings which

suited their conception of their community's social and practical

needs.

To the elite members of a small community responsible for

programming library buildings, libraries had many practical and

social functions which the library profession's official

conception of ideal library architecture did not consider

appropriate, and therefore, did not accommodate. In many towns,

the library was often the most important institution of high

culture that the community possessed. Many small communities,

therefore, sought to identify themselves as "civilized" and

cultured by constructing a library building which imitated highly

respected buildings in large cities such as Boston or New York.

This resulted in buildings which featured Classical detailing,

unnecessarily large hall spaces, scaled-down versions of

monumental staircases, and other extra-functional elements which added significantly to construction costs (Fig. 14-15).

A large city could afford to dedicate an entire building to library services, but in a small or moderately-sized town, the library was one of only a few public buildings and often needed to house more than just books, readers, and staff. Town officials often wanted their library building to serve as a complete community center capable of accommodating town meetings, local social and cultural events, adult and children's education classes, and museum and local history functions.[15] While librarians did not object to a modest auditorium or local history room tucked into the basement of a library building, they argued strongly against providing space for too many community activities in the library. Many librarians had learned through experience that when such combination buildings were constructed, the library often suffered from lack of space, unnecessary disturbances, or financial neglect.[16] Carnegie also objected to buildings which combined libraries and other community facilities. During the corporate phase of his philanthropy, he refused to grant money to communities that proposed community center-type buildings because his objective was to construct library buildings, not museums, town halls, schools, or community

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[15] Van Slyck, "Free to All", 279-320.

[16] Cornelia Marvin, Small Library Buildings (Boston: ALA Publishing Board, 1908), 9.

recreation facilities.[17]

Though some large buildings were constructed during this period, by far the most building activity occurred in the construction of small to medium-sized libraries. Most of these buildings were built with funds donated by Carnegie or a local private organization or philanthropist. Some small communities used tax money to finance construction, but this was most often in combination with a significant amount in donated funds. Large city libraries constructed during this period depended more heavily upon tax dollars because after the turn of the century, Carnegie favored the construction of urban branch libraries over large central libraries through the grant program. Portland (OR), Cleveland, Los Angeles, and many other cities constructed branch libraries with Carnegie grant money, but had to rely on local donation and public funds in the construction of their central buildings. Carnegie objected to what he believed to be the inefficient monumentality which characterized most public architecture during this period and the inaccessibility of central buildings to those who lived beyond walking distance of the downtown business areas where most central buildings were built.[18]

The town of Norwalk, Ohio used funds from a variety of sources to construct its Carnegie library between 1903 and 1905.

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[17] "Notes on the Erection of Library Bildings" Library Journal 40 (April 1915): 244; Bobinski, Carnegie Libraries, 63-70.

[18] Bobinski, Carnegie Libraries, 70-73.

Carnegie promised Norwalk $15,000 for the construction of a
library building on February 2, 1903.[19] Over the course of
construction, this sum proved to be inadequate to complete the
rather large and internally ornate building which town officials
desired. After Carnegie refused an appeal for additional funds,
the town raised $13,440.50 by appealing to several local cultural
organizations for donations and completed the building with a
minimum of ornamental reduction at a total cost of $28,440.50.[20]

Aside from its elaborate interior decoration, Norwalk's
building was fairly typical of the type built in small towns
(Fig. 16-17). The building has a main floor and a daylight
basement. Access to the front door is via a substantial set of
exterior stairs. Adult and children's reading rooms were
originally located in the front portion of the main floor and a
delivery desk stood in the center of this floor separating the
general reading room and the stack room which occupied the back
of the building. A librarian's room, reference room, and women's
restroom were positioned close to the central delivery desk and
separated from the general reading room by windowless load-
bearing walls. The basement originally housed a local history
reading room, an auditorium, a receiving room, a janitor's room,
a men's restroom, and a heating equipment room. This floor also
has its own side entrance at ground level which originally opened

[19] Ibid, 229.

[20] Laureen Drapp, "Norwalk Public Library," Ohio Libraries 4
(Nov.-Dec. 1991): inside front cover.

into a large lobby.[21]

Carnegie also financed a number of academic library
buildings through his library grant program. He promised Oberlin
College $125,000 for the construction of a library building in
January 1905. The grant was contingent upon raising $100,000 in
additional endowment for the college.[22] This stipulation was
standard in Carnegie's donations for academic libraries and it
paralleled his ten percent tax requirement for public libraries.
It was presumably intended to ensure that adequate funds would be
available for library support after the new building was
completed. Construction began in 1906, but was suspended in
early 1907 because the cost of building materials had increased
unexpectedly, causing the premature exhaustion of the Carnegie
grant. Carnegie agreed to donate an additional $25,000 if the
college could raise an equal additional amount in endowment.[23]
Dedicated at Commencement in June 1908, the building opened for
service in the fall of 1908 (Fig. 18-19).[24] The total cost of
the building was $155,600.[25]

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[21] Seville Young, "History of the Norwalk Public Library
from 1853-1927," The Firelands Pioneer 6 (1985): 34; Shirley
Lincicum, personal visit, Mar. 2, 1993.

[22] "Andrew Carnegie," The Oberlin Review 32 (Jan. 26, 1905):
1.

[23] "The Carnegie Library at Last," The Oberlin Review 34
(Mar. 27, 1907): 539.

[24] "Dedication of Carnegie Library," The Oberlin Review 35
(June 25, 1908): 643.

[25] "Carnegie," Info. card no. 1, Oberlin College archives.

By 1905, college librarian Azariah Root had been reminding
the college administration about the inadequacies of Spear
library for over ten years, so he was determined to ensure that
Oberlin's Carnegie library would be able to meet the college's
immediate and future library needs. Root, therefore, wrote a
detailed building program for Normand Patton, one of the most
experienced library architects in the country during the Carnegie
era and the architect selected by the college to design the new
building.

This program spelled out Root's general requirements for the
building and explained Oberlin's unique library needs so that the
architect could understand these needs thoroughly and adequately
provide for them in his design. Root wanted a fireproof building
with an interior modeled after contemporary office buildings in
the use of movable internal partitions whenever possible in place
of load bearing internal walls in order to allow for utmost
interior flexibility. Economy in administration, ample
provisions for natural light in reading and staff work areas,
electric lighting and ventilation, and simplicity in interior and
exterior ornamentation were also requirements.[26]

Root explained that Oberlin's new library building would
have to house both the college and the public library and
emphasized this as an important design consideration. In Root's
ideal plan, this meant providing separate public and college

[26] Azariah Smith Root, "Statement in Regard to the Proposed
New Library Building for Oberlin College," Oberlin College
Archives, acc. class 16, box 1, c.1906, 1-4.

reading spaces that could be supervised and serviced from a single circulation desk, and providing a children's room in the building. Root specified the type and size of staff workrooms to be provided in the plan. He called for an administration suite to include a private office for the librarian, a bibliography room, an ordering room, a cataloging room, an accessioning room, and a receiving room. Reflecting the contemporary methods of compact stack construction, Root listed his requirements for book storage facilities separately from his discussion of the other parts of the building. Root desired a self-supporting metal stack with little ornamentation and glass floors which relied on natural light as much as possible, but was fully equipped with electric lights for use when natural light proved inadequate. [27]

A program of this detail was unusual in contemporary library planning. Keyes Metcalf, one of the most highly respected personalities in twentieth century academic library design, told college librarian Eileen Thornton in 1971 that Root's might have been the first real program ever written for an academic library building. Metcalf also believed that Oberlin's Carnegie library was the best college library ever constructed up to 1908, and credited Root with playing a significant role in designing a building which served the college and the town for 62 years, an exceptionally long time for an academic library.[28] Metcalf's

[27] Root, "Statement," 9-22.

[28] Keyes D. Metcalf to Eileen Thornton, (January 13, 1971), Oberlin College Archives.

praise echoed that of Normand Patton who, in 1908, praised Root

for preparing a thorough building program and acknowledged his

important contributions to the design of Oberlin's complex and

unprecedented type of combination academic and public library

building.[29]

In order to help individual communities, especially small

towns, erect functional buildings, several "how to" manuals and

books critiquing plans, as well as numerous journal articles were

published by librarians, architects, and others during the

Carnegie era. Charles Soule's How to Plan a Library Building for

Library Work (1912) was the first of several treatises published

in the twentieth century to describe the design process down to

the most minute detail.[30] This publication, Bertram's "Notes"

and other similar pamphlets and articles helped to standardize

library design. All around the country, architects, librarians,

and building committees consulted these volumes when involved in

building projects.

No standard library plan was ever established, however, and

though many Carnegie libraries resemble each other in size and

plan, each community was encouraged to create a building suited

to its site and the community's unique library service needs.

Stylistically, town officials and architects were left largely on

[29] Normand Patton, "The Carnegie Library Building," The
Oberlin Alumni Magazine 5 (Dec. 1908): 88-90; Joseph Wheeler and
Alfred Githens, The American Public Library Building (New York:
Schribner, 1941), 214.

[30] Charles C. Soule, How to Plan a Library Building for
Library Work (Boston: Boston Book Co., 1912).

their own since librarians were concerned primarily with interior planning, not exterior appearance. Librarians had only two demands concerning the exterior of a building: that the exterior be planned according to the functional needs and plan of the interior, and that it not be expensively ornate.

Though book storage was an issue in the design of Carnegie libraries, service and provisions for the in-house use of materials tended to be more important. This was mostly a result of the size of most Carnegie buildings. A town or urban branch library did not generally acquire and have to store as many books as a large city or research library did, so more emphasis could be placed on providing reader space. In many Carnegie libraries, wall shelving was sufficient to house the entire collection and many librarians considered this optimal because it allowed patrons easy open access to the book shelves. When libraries were large enough to need compact storage, free-standing double-faced bookcases were often employed as "stacks". These were generally located on the main floor of the building separated from the main reading room by a service desk (Fig. 20-21). Sometimes these shelves were closed to the public, but often patrons were allowed heavily supervised access. Unlike academic libraries of the day, public libraries attempted to provide open shelving whenever possible, partly because of the ideological implications of such an arrangement, and partly due to the cost savings that resulted from reduced staff needs.

The Carnegie library building program resulted in the

establishment of the first nation-wide, uniquely American library
building type. Largely resolved by 1900, conflict between
librarians and architects was a recent memory during this period
as librarians' views on library design were codified and
disseminated through society by architects specializing in
library design and the large number of local architects and
community building committees who consulted newly published
planning manuals as they sought help in solving the problems of
library design for the first time.

The Carnegie era represents the last period of large scale
private support for public library construction in America.
While donations financed most of the buildings, the cost of
library administration and maintenance was placed squarely on the
shoulders of individual communities. This set the stage for an
important transition toward the development of the fully tax-
supported public library. Not until the 1960s would a building
program of magnitude equal to that of the Carnegie years again be
undertaken, and by that time, library construction, like all
public library services, would be predominantly publicly financed.

Chapter 4

The Origins of the Modular Plan, 1920-1950

During the early 1920s, a number of factors combined to end
the library construction boom of the Carnegie Era. The most
important of these was the Carnegie Corporation's decision to
discontinue its building program. The program was suspended
temporarily in response to the United States' mobilization for
World War I, but the Corporation decided to make this permanent
after a series of reports commissioned by the Corporation
criticized the building program and suggested other priorities
for the support of public library development. After November
1917, the Corporation refused to accept any new applications for
building grants, though it continued to act on those that it had
received prior to this date until the mid-1920s.[1] The suspension
of the Carnegie grant program, World War I, and skyrocketing
construction costs, and later the Depression and World War II,
led to a decline and eventual hiatus in new library construction
between 1920 and 1945.

With the end of the Carnegie grant program, most building
activity once again centered in the nation's largest cities where
new construction subsided more slowly than in small-town America.
Because the construction of central buildings for large cities
had never received much Carnegie support, this area of

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[1] George S. Bobinski, <u>Carnegie Libraries</u> (Chicago: ALA,
1969): 144-160, 196-201.

construction was not heavily impacted by the conclusion of the
grant program. Accelerating urban growth fueled the expansion of
library facilities in many cities. Burgeoning cities in all
parts of the country completed new central buildings during the
1920s. Among these were Detroit (1921), Cleveland (1925),
Houston (1925), Los Angeles (1926), and Philadelphia (1927). The
widespread construction of branch library buildings, begun with
Carnegie support, also continued as cities expanded to become
metropolitan centers (Fig. 22-24).

The large central buildings completed during the 1920s
brought to a climactic conclusion the era of Neoclassical
monumentalism in library architecture that was first inspired by
the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. Conservatism reigned
in these buildings which essentially conformed to the stylistic
and planning standards established during the Carnegie era. They
all contained multi-tier steel bookstacks which separated books
and readers, though they all also featured some open shelf space,
either in a specially designated room or in the form of wall
shelving in reading rooms. Interior spaces for readers, books,
and staff were divided by permanent load-bearing walls.
Efficient interior arrangement and economical supervision
continued to be primary planning concerns, and reading rooms
remained vast, formal spaces furnished with long, sturdy tables
and chairs which allowed for little privacy or comfort.

In the tradition established by the Boston Public Library of
1895, the second floor acts as the main floor in all five of

these buildings, containing all of the major adult reading rooms
and the library's main delivery and circulation desks.
Substantial exterior entrance steps, monumental interior
staircases and grand entry halls adorned with murals and full-
scale statuary were standard equipment in these buildings which
sought to impress patrons at least as much as they sought to
serve them. Librarians praised these buildings as being well-
arranged, inviting, and attractive and were, at least in their
published articles, overwhelmingly positive about their new
buildings.[2]

When central libraries departed from design norms, they did
so in relatively conservative ways. Cleveland, for example,
constructed the first major building to arrange a series of
subject reading rooms around a central stack (Fig. 25-26). This
stack was divided into sections corresponding to the building's
sixteen subject reading rooms to allow for convenient and open
access.[3] No radically new design concepts were introduced here;
two established concepts were simply combined in an innovative
way. Though widely admired, Cleveland's design was not

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[2] Detroit Public Library, Library Service 5 (June 15, 1922):
3-30; Edna G. Moore, "Detroit's New Main Library" Library Journal
46 (May 1, 1921): 405-408; Linda A. Eastman, "Cleveland's New
Public Library," Library Journal 50 (June 1, 1925): 491-92;
"Houston's New Library Building" Library Journal 51 (Oct. 1,
1926): 839-842; Faith Holmes Hyers, "Expansion of the Los Angeles
Public Library," Library Journal 51 (Feb. 1, 1926): 121-124;
Faith Holmes Hyers, "Significance of Los Angeles' New Library,"
Library Journal 51 (Aug. 1926): 663-666; "The New Free Library of
Philadelphia Library Journal 52 (June 15, 1927), 633-639.

[3] Linda Eastman, "Some Features of the New Cleveland
Library," Library Journal 50 (Nov. 15, 1925): 943-948.

immediately widely imitated. Its large number of separate departments required a large staff and its interior, heavily divided by load-bearing walls, limited the flexibility and expandability of the building.[4]

During the 1920s and 1930s, important technological innovations were integrated into library building design, but this did not at first lead to many departures from the conventional forms developed during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Electricity became standard in library lighting, and as it became cheaper and more widely trusted, it allowed new interior arrangements which would have been unsatisfactory or even impossible without it, Cleveland's central stack for example. Designers also began to experiment with new artificial heating and ventilation systems in buildings, though systems such as these would not be accepted and incorporated into buildings on a wide scale until after World War II. Modern structural steel replaced iron in stack design, making equally sturdy supports and shelves smaller and lighter.[5] While horizontality continued to be highly valued in library design, the development of electric elevators and book conveyor systems allowed library buildings a degree of upward mobility, especially in bookstacks, and addressed the problems faced by central urban libraries in rapid retrieval and transportation of books from

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[4] Walter C. Allen, "Library Buildings," Library Trends 25 (July 1976): 97.

[5] Ibid, 100-101.

distant compact storage areas to readers. These mechanical devices were not new ideas but old ones improved with 1920s and 1930s technology. The Boston Public Library featured an extensive book conveyor system in its original design and both freight and passenger elevators had been used in large public library buildings for years. In the 1920s, the application of new technology increased the internal efficiency, convenience, and flexibility of library buildings, but in style and interior arrangement, public library buildings changed only slightly in response to technological advance. This would change in the 1930s.

Monumental architecture was virtually the only reminder in the 1920s of the library's original mission as an agency of Progressive moral reform. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the need to attract the public had gradually overwhelmed the higher social obligations of librarians established in the late nineteenth century: to sustain Victorian morality through careful guidance of reading and censorship of popular fiction in library collections. As Progressive moral ideals gave way to the new, undefined, unrestricted morality of the 1920s, librarians were willing to supply works of popular fiction and to allow patrons to choose freely what they wanted to read, even if this meant that non-fiction and the "classics" circulated far less frequently than did popular fiction.[6]

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[6] Dee Garrison, Apostles of Culture (New York: The Free Press, 1979): 92, 100.

In relaxing their moral stance, however, librarians also lessened the importance of their institution because they failed to define a replacement function of equal social value for the public library. Providing recreational reading for middle class women and children, not educational reading for the immigrant and working classes, had become the dominant function of the public library by the 1920s.[7] While librarians clung to the library's educational functions as their claim to equal status with other public agencies in budgeting by expanding foreign language collections and outreach programs aimed at attracting immigrants and working class Americans to the library, in reality most patrons received little in the way of intellectual enlightenment from public libraries during the 1920s. Reflecting American society during the Roaring Twenties, library architecture hid the decaying moral stature of the public library behind a conventional rich, imposing, and magnificent facade.

Perfectly safe in the bullish, carefree days of the twenties, the subversion of the public library's moral/educational functions had a profound impact upon libraries in the economically depressed 1930s. Librarians were distressed to discover that when city officials undertook reductions in municipal spending in response to Depression conditions, library allotments were strong candidates for suspension because

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[7] Garrison, Apostles of Culture, 221-223.

officials did not consider library services to be "essential."[8] Fortunately for libraries, the public remembered the educational function of the public library and as unemployment soared so did circulation figures, thus insuring that even if they could cut budgets drastically, city officials could not completely eliminate library services from their budgets. In 27 cities of over 100,000 inhabitants between 1929 and 1933, both library circulation increased and library expenditures decreased by 23 percent.[9] During the Depression, more than any other time in the American public library's history, the masses turned to the library to meet its needs for both education and recreation.

Library architecture also entered a new era of crisis and transformation during the 1930s. Just as Winsor, Poole, and Soule had emerged during the architectural transformation of the late nineteenth century, a group of men emerged as the leaders and innovators in library design during the 1930s. This group was composed of librarians, architects, and others concerned in some way, due to their business or profession, with the construction of library buildings. These men worked cooperatively to develop and refine library design and they had a profound impact upon library architecture which is still evident today.

Angus Snead Macdonald was an important member of this group.

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    [8] Carl B. Roden, "The Library in Hard Times," Library Journal 56 (Dec. 1, 1931): 981-982.

    [9] Paul Dickson, The Library in America (New York: Facts on File, 1986), 119.

As the president of Snead and Company Ironworks, the company
which became the leading manufacturer of iron and steel
bookstacks after acquiring the patent for Bernard Green's Library
of Congress stack design around the turn of the century,
Macdonald became intimately involved with library design issues.
Trained as an architect at Columbia University, Macdonald chose
to enter the family business in 1905 and as a result, he never
formally practiced architecture. He did use his architectural
training in his work at Snead and Co., however.   As new
commissions presented new problems to be resolved, new materials
became available and new construction techniques were invented,
Macdonald refined Green's design. He also used his training to
theorize about library architecture, and in 1933 he published an
article entitled "A Library of the Future" in Library Journal
which prefaced a new chapter in library design.

Reflecting attitudes held by many Americans in the pit of
the Depression, this article seeks to define a position for the
public library in a permanently industrialized society. Macdonald
argues that in order to preserve culture and provide popular and
productive leisure activities for the multitudes who will now
have a great deal of leisure time as a result of
industrialization, the public library must shed its image of
elitism and prove its social value as the equal of the public
school in American society. In order to do this, the library
building must "attract and adequately serve a large and

representative cross section of [the] national population."[10]
Because the library would be competing with new commercial
sources like the radio and the movie theater for patrons' leisure
time, attracting many to the library would be difficult, but
Macdonald believed it was possible if library architecture were
altered. Macdonald believed that "traditional library
architecture" (including the type developed during the Carnegie
Era) had "three fundamental faults: lack of intimate charm,
inadequate accommodation, and narrow class interest."[11]

Macdonald urged the removal of restrictions which
discouraged certain, presumably lower, classes from using the
public library. He also advocated more generous appropriation of
funds for library support. He believed this latter consideration
would be easier to achieve after the Depression because people
were, "beginning to see the futility of over-investing free
capital in the production of consumables alone and the distress
that results when culture is allowed to become static or
decline."[12]

After noting the social factors which demanded a revision
contemporary library design, Macdonald described his vision of
the ideal library of the future which would service the social
functions he had in mind. This library would be located not in

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[10] Angus Snead Macdonald, "A Library of the Future," _Library Journal_ 58 (Dec 1, 1933): 971.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

the center city but in a residential park which would allow
sufficient room for future expansion. Though his building is
impressive and towering, it avoids intimidating the patron with
monumentality or an "institutional" character through its
architectural simplicity and the exterior setting in which it is
carefully placed. The entrance to the building is level with the
ground, so there are no exterior entrance stairs to climb, and is
set back in a porch covered with vines rather than being an
imposing exterior statement.[13] In visualizing his conception, it
is helpful to know that Macdonald was a great admirer of Frank
Lloyd Wright.[14]

Macdonald's ideal library also included ample underground
parking facilities, open shelving for new and popular books, a
mechanical book conveyor system for retrieving books from the
stack, a club-like atmosphere enhanced through the use of
informal lounge-type furniture, fixed windows intended for view
not light or ventilation, and an artificial climate control
system which would maintain perfect temperature and humidity year
round. Macdonald sought to create a building which had "a
feeling of homelike intimacy rather than monumental
impressiveness" and depended upon "good proportions and the frank
use of logical materials, particularly local ones, rather than on

[13] Ibid, 972.

[14] C.H. Baumann, The Influence of Angus Snead Macdonald and
the Snead Bookstack on Library Architecture (Metuchen, NJ:
Scarecrow, 1972), 220.

architectural splendor and decoration."[15] The elimination of internal load bearing walls allowed Macdonald's interior to be completely open and flexible.[16] This last feature was the most important of those Macdonald suggested for the transformation of library architecture. The ideal of complete interior flexibility would determine to shape of library architecture as it emerged when library construction began anew after World War II.

Macdonald's peers shared his dissatisfaction with early twentieth century library design, but they did not immediately accept his vision of the "library of the future." With a renewed democratic vigor, librarians now sought to "humanize" the library building; to make it as inviting and accessible to the general public as possible. This meant giving the library a new exterior "look" which would distinguish it from other public buildings and attract users, applying rapidly new technology which could improve library service, deemphasizing the institutional in library design by doing away with grand entrance halls and monumental staircases and bringing users directly into the beating heart of the library, expanding provisions for open shelving and home use of books, and providing better quarters for library staff in order to promote friendly and prompt service.[17] Librarians began to look to contemporary urban commercial

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[15] Macdonald, "A Library of the Future," 972-973.

[16] Ibid, p. 973-74.

[17] Arthur Elmore Bostwick, "Humanizing a Library Building," Library Journal 52 (Sept. 1, 1927): 807-810.

architecture, especially the department store and the office building, for examples to follow in creating a new type of library building which would attract "modern" Americans to their services and make "the building and its equipment an active agent in getting their service to the people."[18]

Though the Great Depression greatly retarded the rate of library construction, a few new buildings were constructed during the 1930s. One of these was a new building for the Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore (Fig. 27-29). Completed in 1933, this building represented an important departure from conventional design. Architects Edward Tilton and Alfred Githens and librarian Joseph Wheeler collaborated to produce a scheme which they named the Open Plan.

The Pratt building occupied a full acre of prime downtown land and borrowed heavily from contemporary trends in urban commercial architecture. Like a contemporary department store, the library's main service floor was at street level and structural piers replaced load bearing walls, thus yielding a vast, completely open interior space. Movable bookcases seven feet tall divided this space into subject reading areas and provided shelving for the rooms' reference and open shelf collections. Walls enclosed only staircases, a few staff work spaces, and the building's large central skylit hall where noisy traffic was expected. Secondary specialized reading rooms, a

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[18] Samuel H. Ranck, "The Library Building of the Future," Library Journal 51 (Nov. 1, 1926): 959.

lecture hall, and staff quarters were placed on the second and third floors of the building, and bookstacks in three tiers were located in the basement directly underneath the main service floor. Also located immediately below the main service floor was the children's room.[19]

The building's primary facade met the sidewalk and contained plate glass windows 25 feet tall. These allowed ample sunlight to enter the reading rooms and allowed people passing on the street to look inside the building. Showcases installed in the lower portion of these windows gave librarians a space in which to organize displays intended to entice the public to enter the building. All stairs in the building were concealed and a modest elevator lobby with two passenger elevators greeted patrons when they entered the building. Several staff elevators were also provided.[20]

This building set a new standard in library design. Reflecting 1930s concepts of modernity and a renewed sense of democratic idealism expressed by librarians, the Pratt library gave the ideal of modern, unbiased, and equal service a spatial form which had been lacking in the eclectic and Neoclassical architecture of the previous twenty years. Modern technology in the form of electric lighting, ventilation, and transportation all combined with the building's commercialized architecture to

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[19] Pauline M. McCauley and Joseph L. Wheeler, "Baltimore's New Public Library Building," Library Journal 58 (May 1, 1933): 387-393.

[20] Ibid.

create a working model of library design which many librarians
and architects found attractive and imitated. One librarian
remarked: "The public library has come out into the open and, in
coming into the open, has gone a long way toward coming into its
own."[21]

One of the most attractive features about the Pratt design
was its flexibility. This element became increasingly important
to librarians as they outgrew their Carnegie era buildings far
more quickly than they had expected to and had to either adapt
their old buildings as best the could to modern conditions and
swollen collections or beg for money to construct new buildings.
Needless to say, the latter option was not a happy or easily
accomplished one in Depression years. So those librarians who
got the opportunity to build, and many of those who did not,
tried to avoid the mistakes of the past by emphasizing
flexibility along with function, economy, attractiveness, and
convenience in library design. The Open Plan was a step in the
right direction, but it still had limitations. A multi-tier
stack, for example, could never be moved, nor could it be
successfully adapted to use as reader or staff space. Not until
after World War II would a satisfactory solution to the problem
of interior flexibility be fully formulated and implemented in
library design.

The beginning of World War II halted virtually all library

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[21] Carl B. Roden, "Recent Trends in Library Architecture,"
The Architect and Engineer 134 (July 1938): 46.

construction. If not for the publication of a landmark library planning manual in 1941, the topic of library architecture might also have lain dormant until the conclusion of the war. Alfred Githens' and Joseph Wheeler's The American Public Library Building appeared in 1941 as the definitive work on library design. It seems rather ironic that such an important and useful book would be published at a time when new construction was impossible. Yet, its timing might have been ideal because it kept the issues raised and ideas developed in the 1930s alive, providing librarians and architects with a master guide for study during and use after the war.

Wheeler and Githens' stated objectives in writing the book were to provide the foundation for the creation of a new type of library building completely divorced from the designs of the past. They criticized most earlier libraries for having given the general public the false impression that public libraries were "aloof, unaware of what is going on in the world, [and] unresponsive to current problems and demands."[22] The authors believed that library buildings needed to appeal to the people in the same way that contemporary stores, banks, and post offices did.[23]

Reflected in the book is the functionalism which had been a part of public library design since the 1880s, but only achieved

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[22] Joseph Wheeler and Alfred Githens, The American Public Library Building (New York: Schribner, 1941), 11-12.

[23] Ibid.

dominance in architecture during the 1930s. Throughout the book, the authors supply formulas, tables, lists, and complex architectural diagrams which seemingly attempt to reduce both library administration and design to an exact science. Monumentalism and architectural ornament are constantly derided throughout the book, and metaphors which relate a well-designed library to a "smoothly working machine" are common.[24] Wheeler and Githens reprint both the text and diagrams of James Bertram's "Notes on the Erection of Library Bildings [sic]" and praise the basic principles found therein for their emphasis upon meeting functional needs economically. Chapter two expands Charles Soule's list of fundamental library planning principles to 33, maintaining the list's emphasis upon functionalism in library design and adding primarily principles which reflect technological changes perceived as improvements.[25] Wheeler and Githens also criticize symmetry and formality in library design because these limit interior flexibility.[26]

The American Public Library Building was both reflective of its generation and of the tradition of American public library design. This book demonstrates how architects had by the 1940s finally reached a point of consensus with librarians about library design. Only with the arrival of the machine age and the International Style could architects finally provide what

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[24] Ibid, 216.

[25] Ibid, 13-14.

[26] Ibid, 222.

librarians had been asking for since the 1880s; an adaptable
building which at least theoretically emphasized function over
architectural effect. All the history of the American public
library building was bought to a climax in Wheeler and Githens'
manual and out of this climax a new form of library building
grew.

This new form was the "modular" library. In formulating his
vision of "A Library of the Future," Angus Snead Macdonald had
begun to develop a library design based upon the concept of
modular design which was introduced during the 1930s. In 1934,
Macdonald and Alfred Githens collaborated to produce a design for
a library using modular principles, but the proposed building was
never constructed and few in either the library or architectural
professions were immediately attracted to the idea of a modular
library.[27] Finally in 1943, when Macdonald had all but given up
on his concept, the University of Iowa contacted Macdonald about
constructing a modular building.[28] This prompted Macdonald to
refine his concept and reintroduce his Modular Plan to the
library and architectural professions. In the post-war era, the
modular idea caught on immediately.

A 1945 article in Library Journal explained in pragmatic
terms how and to what advantages modularity could be applied to

[27] Charles Baumann, The Influence of Angus Snead Macdonald
and the Snead Bookstack on Library Architecture (Metuchen, NJ:
Scarecrow, 1972), 237-249.

[28] Ralph Ellsworth, "Library Architecture and Buildings,"
Library Quarterly 25 (Jan. 1955): 70.

library design.[29] The primary objective the Modular Plan was to, "build both beautifully and dynamically, utilizing the resources of modern science and technology, and give readers what they want now and what they may need in the future."[30] A modular building could accomplish this because it would provide a completely standardized and flexible interior. The structure actually resembled closely the traditional format of the multi-tier stack; the entire building would be supported by regularly spaced vertical and horizontal load-bearing columns within which free standing bookcases, furniture, etc. could be conveniently arranged. Expansion and interior rearrangement would be simple because none of the walls would be load-bearing. The only permanent features in the building would be columns, staircases, elevator shafts, and restroom facilities. Even considering the fact that parts of the building would have be over-built in order to be able to accommodate bookcases or other special functions if necessary in the future, the modular library would be cheaper to construct than traditional buildings, especially in the post-war economy, because it relied heavily upon accurate mass production methods which would reduce materials waste and skilled labor costs. Macdonald's conception of modular construction also had advantages in the application of new florescent lighting and central air conditioning technologies to the library building.

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[29] Angus Snead Macdonald, "New Possibilities in Library Planning," Library Journal 70 (Dec. 15, 1945): 1169-1174.

[30] Ibid, 1169.

He proposed that support columns be made hollow, thereby allowing wiring and duct work to be channeled evenly throughout the building (Fig. 30).[31]

Macdonald believed that a modular building could also be more effective than traditional architecture in attracting and serving patrons. Aesthetically, a modular library could be furnished and styled to reduce its repetitiveness if this became a concern. The modular building offered greater possibilities for providing a variety of intimate reading environments ranging from the traditional table and chair to individual carrels or even informal lounge-type furnishings. It also allowed readers and books to mix freely. Its lower ceiling heights would be more economical to build and would provide more intimate surroundings, and could be relieved in areas where higher ceilings were desired for any reason, including architectural effect, by removing a few horizontal ceiling sections.[32] To Macdonald, the Modular Plan represented the ideal scheme for the design of library buildings which needed to meet the ever changing needs of a dynamic society.

The first buildings to be constructed using the Modular Plan were academic libraries. Most academic buildings constructed during the 1930s continued to conform to 1920s standards; they incorporated subject departmentalization, but failed to develop

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[31] Ibid, 1170-1172.

[32] Ibid, 1172-1174.

the Open Plan as public libraries had.[33] By the late 1940s, many

institutions, especially large state schools, were in desperate

need of new buildings. Collections and enrollments were

mushrooming and modernization of lighting, ventilation, and other

electrical facilities were needed desperately to keep up with

rapidly developing information technology.[34] During the war, the

Co-operative Committee on Library Building Plans was formed by

librarians, architects, and academic administrators to discuss

issues in library design. In studying the subject, this group

saw possibilities in Macdonald's ideas. Immediately after the

war, several institutions incorporated aspects of the Modular

Plan into their buildings.[35] This trend would continue and by

the 1960s, when library construction exploded as a result of the

infusion of federal grant money, most new academic libraries

would use the Modular Plan in their designs.

Though the Modular Plan seemed ideal for public library

design both practically and ideologically, public libraries did

not adopt the Modular Plan on a wide scale until the 1960s.

Relatively few large central buildings were constructed during

the late 1940s and the 1950s primarily as a result of America's

continued military activities and the trend toward

suburbanization. Those that were constructed tended to combine

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[33] Ellsworth, "Library Architecture and Buildings," 67-69.

[34] Arthur T. Hamlin, The University Library in the United States (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1981), 162-163.

[35] Ellsworth, "Library Architecture and Buildings," 70.

some modular elements with more traditional design. Many
maintained the multi-tier stack because the need for compact
storage was great and the potential of book theft and destruction
continued to restrain librarians from allowing completely open
access to all of their shelves. The small buildings that were
more readily constructed had no need to use the modular system
because their demands were not as complex as those of larger
buildings. By the time federal grants for new construction
became available the 1960s, modular construction had become the
standard established by academic libraries and was quickly
accepted in public library design.

Chapter 5

A Feminist Interpretation

In this chapter, I will depart from the more or less

traditional social history survey I have pursued in the preceding

chapters. Instead, here I wish to apply some recent ideas in

feminist architectural criticism to library architecture. This

still emerging type of criticism is predicated on the fact that

architecture is created in a specific social context and, like

all social constructs, architecture embodies the values and

biases of those who create it. Architecture is a language and as

such is not neutral, but architecture differs from other

languages because it defines space; it both reflects and shapes

physical reality.[1] This affects all those who interact with the

built environment, and it influences how people interact with

others within that environment and within society as a whole.

Yet, many people do not recognize what a significant role

architecture plays in reinforcing and defining social

relationships.

Feminist architectural criticism seeks to expose the nature

of architecture as a social construct and to support social

transformation by creating an inclusive architecture. In doing

this, contemporary critics do not limit themselves to examining

"women's issues," but take a more complex approach aimed at

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[1] Leslie Kanes Weisman Discrimination by Design (Urbana and
Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 2.

defining and eliminating oppression based on class, race, and
gender which is spatially represented in the built environment.
One of the ultimate objectives of feminist architectural
criticism is the elimination of patriarchy because, "Patriarchy
constructs an architecture of exclusion that segregates and
manipulates people according to social caste."[2]

The history of American public library architecture is
inseparable from the history of the American public library as an
institution. It is also inseparable from the development of
librarianship as a feminized service profession. Patriarchy has
played a major role in both of these developments. In the
context of American public library history, patriarchy refers
primarily to that social, political, and economic caste system
which climaxed during the Victorian era and has been slowly
deteriorating over the course of the twentieth century. This
system places the WASP male at the top of the social hierarchy
and encourages futile competition between other gender, class,
religious, and racial groups for status equal to that of the
dominant white male.[3] Patriarchy has played a major role in the
development of American society and culture and it has had a
profound affect on the development of the American public
library.

In chapter two, I argued that the public library was founded
by the cultural elite for the supposed benefit of the "masses,"

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[2] Weisman, Discrimination by Design, 63.

[3] Weisman, Discrimination by Design, 63.

meaning the working class. Though many of the women and men who advocated the establishment of public libraries truly sought to help those whom they considered less fortunate than themselves, they also had what are now considered to be less altruistic motives in promoting public libraries. Feeling the social order in which they occupied the upper most position threatened by the social changes brought on by the "triple threat" of rapid industrialization, urbanization, and mass immigration, members of the cultural elite worked to preserve the traditional social order.[4] They turned to agencies of public welfare and education as their primary means of accomplishing this goal.

Until the late nineteenth century, libraries had been a privilege enjoyed only by the cultural elite. In response to the perceived threat to the social order, however, the elite imbued the library with a new ideology emphasizing moral reform, education, and free public access to "high culture" and thrust it upon the masses. In so doing, the elite consciously imposed its middle-class values upon the library's intended working-class patrons and regarded this as an important and positive contribution to the salvation of American society.[5] In creating the public library, the elite sought to preserve its own social, political, and economic values through an act of democratic

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[4] Geoffrey Blodgett, Honors Discussion (April 8, 1993). Dee Garrison, _Apostles of Culture_ (New York: The Free Press, 1979), xii-xiii.

[5] Dee Garrison, _Apostles of Culture_ (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 10.

altruism.[6]

We have already seen how the resultant changes in library function created a crisis in library planning from librarians' point of view and led to the development of a new type of library building in the last decades of the nineteenth century. What we have not yet fully recognized is how the cultural elite built their favored social order into the 'buildings they constructed and how this affected later public library development. To fully understand the evolution of library architecture, one must focus upon the public library's early role as a Progressive reform agency controlled by the cultural elite and deeply concerned with working class behavior.

Philanthropy was the basis of much social reform in the late nineteenth century and it played a major role in defining the spatial form of the public library; most public library buildings were constructed using donated funds until the 1920s. The structure of philanthropy in the late nineteenth century was overtly paternalistic; a wealthy white male would become a community's "father" by financing some public welfare program and the public would then owe the philanthropist eternal gratitude, respect, and affection.[7] This social structure is clearly represented in public libraries constructed prior to 1900.

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[6] Ditzion, Arsenals of a Democratic Culture, 133-35, 166, 180, 190-91.

[7] Abigail Ayres Van Slyck "The Utmost Amount of Effectiv Accommodation" Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 50 (Dec. 1991), 360-61.

The libraries of Henry Hobson Richardson and his imitators, though condemned for various functional reasons by librarians, were greatly admired by other members of the cultural elite because they successfully expressed the family metaphor explicit in late nineteenth century philanthropy.[8] These buildings were massive and ornate, executed in the Romanesque architectural style most admired by the contemporary cultural elite. The central sites these libraries occupied and their exterior styling immediately identified them as buildings housing an institution of high culture, and the styling and spatial arrangement of their interiors reinforced this status. In these libraries, books were displayed in the European tradition of a monumental alcoved book hall into which patrons could see but could not enter. Patrons could only gain access to books through an approved intermediary, the librarian or library assistant. The spatial restrictions placed upon patrons reminded them of their position as guests in the library and placed the librarian in an authoritative position as the designated supervisor of patrons and staff and as the guardian of the books. These libraries were designed to be inspiring showcases for precious books, not efficient or inviting centers for their study or distribution.

Reading rooms, often separated into men's and ladies', were

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[8] Abigail Ayres Van Slyck "The Utmost Amount of Effectiv [sic] Accommodation" <u>Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians</u> 50 (Dec. 1991), 364.

the primary spaces allocated to patrons in libraries.[9]   These

were more domestic in style and scale than the monumental book

halls. Drawing inspiration from the ideals of the Victorian

home, reading rooms were the philanthropist's public parlors

where patrons were allowed to enrich themselves under the

librarian's watchful eye.[10] The donor's portrait, often

displayed conspicuously over an ornamental fireplace, reminded

patrons of their debt to the man who had made this magnificent

library possible. In these ways, the patriarchal social order

was clearly delineated in most pre-1900 library architecture with

the philanthropist at the top and the female patron at the bottom

of the spatial hierarchy. Children had no place in the library

building. The harsh economic aspects of this order were

minimized through the juxtaposition of monumental and domestic

spaces within the library building which reinforced the familial

relationships associated with contemporary conceptions of

philanthropy.[11]

The paternalistic design of these early libraries also had

important implications for librarians. The libraries constructed

in the Richardsonian era were designed upon the assumption that

they would be supervised by male librarians, yet these men were

[9] Donald Oelherts, "The Development of American Public
Library Architecture from 1850 to 1940" (Unpublished doctoral
diss., Indiana University, 1975), 132.

[10] Abigail Ayres Van Slyck "Free to All" (unpublished
doctoral dissertation, University of California, 1989), 41-42.

[11] Van Slyck, "The Utmost Amount of Effectiv Accommodation",
368.

placed in a feminine position within the buildings. The librarian was responsible for the day to day operation of a building provided by one man who assumed the role of the father to the entire community. Like an upper class Victorian mother running her household, the librarian supervised a staff of attendants who did the actual physical labor involved in operating the library, and he was responsible for supervising and educating the library's patrons just as a nineteenth century mother was responsible for her children's well-being and practical education. Thus, even before a significant number of women entered the field, librarians had assumed some feminine characteristics as a result of the patriarchal spatial relationships established in early public library design. Certainly this was only one relatively minor factor among many that contributed to the feminization of librarianship, but it illustrates how architectural form can affect larger social development.

Overtly patriarchal design dominated library architecture until the turn of the century and had an impact on all subsequent library buildings, but it did not remain the dominant force in library design after 1900. By the 1890s, other factors had begun to have a profound impact upon library architecture. Male librarians had formulated a set of basic functional principles in library planning, many of which survive to this day, and had begun to assert their role alongside architects and community building committees in the design process. At the same time, the

library profession became feminized.

Several conditions present in the late nineteenth century made the feminization of librarianship a relatively easy process. Public libraries needed a cheap, well-educated, and well-bred work force because whether funded through donation or taxes, libraries were chronically underfunded institutions of high culture attempting to aid Progressive reform. Many newly educated upper and middle class white women imbued with Progressive values were looking for opportunities to move into the public sphere which did not conflict with the Victorian ideals of femininity in which many of them still strongly believed. Taking advantage of this complementary set of circumstances, a number of male library leaders immediately set out to make librarianship an attractive field for women. This involved a glorification of the public library's Progressive mission to compensate for low wages and the reduction of library work to a series of simplified technical tasks that were suited to women's "limited" intellectual abilities. These two "innovations" continue to plague librarianship today.

The feminization of library work had an impact on all aspects of the profession. Because the processes of feminization and professionalization occurred simultaneously, it is impossible to separate them in analysis. The institution we know today as the public library has been profoundly affected by the feminization of the library profession. Feminization prevented the library profession from developing an intellectual basis thus

insuring low professional status, it encouraged low salaries for
all library workers and inadequate financial support for public
libraries, it was predicated upon and at the same time helped to
undermine the class-based conceptions of the public library as an
agency of social and moral reform, it encouraged passivity in
library service, and it created a gender-based hierarchy within
the profession itself. Feminization also helped to shift the
educational focus of the public library from adults to children.
Dee Garrison's book, Apostles of Culture, explains in detail the
process and impact of feminization on librarianship.[12] I do not
wish to reinvent her arguments here but show how the process she
describes affected library design.

The most direct architectural result of feminization was the
incorporation of children's reading rooms into public library
design. With feminization, children were welcomed into the
library for the first time and they quickly became its largest
and most impressionable user group. The nature of and importance
placed on children's work made separate, specially adapted
reading space necessary. Children's room design reflects how
traditional methods of library service were miniaturized for
children's use. The earliest children's rooms were simply
miniature versions of traditional adult reading rooms; they
emphasized domesticity in scale and style, they often featured
ornamental fireplaces, and they were equipped with conventional

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[12] Dee Garrison, Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian
and American Society, 1876-1920, (New York: The Free Press, 1979).

furniture appropriate to their patrons' size.

By 1900, children's services had become a major area of service in American public libraries. In objectives, children's library service did not differ markedly from adult service because most female librarians earnestly believed in the social values upon which contemporary library service was based.[13] Librarians were gradually discovering that they had little influence over parents' reading and social habits, so they turned to children's work in the hope of "improving" at least the next generation of Americans.[14] Developed by women and based on contemporary models of social service and educational work, library service for children emphasized interaction between library staff and patrons. Early children's librarians sought to encourage children to read "good" books and to behave according to white, middle class standards of conduct.

The children's librarian also sought to minimize barriers between herself and readers and between readers and books, and to work amongst children as a sort of combination teacher and settlement house worker. From the beginning, most children's books were stored on open shelves, giving children direct access to the vast majority of books which might interest them long before such an arrangement was available to adults.[15] The "story

[13] Garrison, Apostles of Culture, 180.

[14] Arthur E. Bostwick, The American Public Library (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1910), 92-94.

[15] John Cotton Dana, Library Primer, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Library Bureau, 1903), 163.

hour," an appointed time when the librarian would sit surrounded by her small patrons and read aloud, became so important in library service that rooms were designed especially for this purpose in many buildings. The overtly maternal character of children's service also prompted library planners to place the librarian's desk, often her sole private work space, in the midst of the children's room itself where she could carefully supervise and be easily and constantly available to guide and assist her young patrons. Though the overt moral program of early children's librarianship has long since been discarded, the basic structure of children's service and children's room design established during the early twentieth century survive to this day.

The acceptance of women into librarianship had other important implications for library design as well. On the most basic level, the overwhelming presence of women in library work has kept wages and library administration budgets low. This has made efficiency and economy in library planning absolutely essential and originally led to the adoption of the single, central control desk plan. Here, the female library employee was placed in a unique position; she was both an authority figure and a passive public servant.[16] In many small libraries, where women were more likely to work, the central desk often represented the only designated staff work space within the building. Thus the unstated problem of library architecture in the late nineteenth

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[16] Van Slyck, "The Utmost Amount...," 380.

century was to design a public building in which a woman could hold a position of authority. But in keeping with Victorian ideals of femininity, this authority had to be disguised as a position of service. As Progressive morality declined, the service function gradually became dominant over the authority function.

In adapting library buildings for women, planners have also looked to various other types of buildings which have housed women workers for precedents upon which to base their library designs. Two of these, the department store and the office building, are particularly important. Like early department stores, public libraries originally placed women behind highly specialized service counters. As American society has become more thoroughly consumerized, libraries have adopted more store-like devices. Among these are display cases, modular construction, and, recently, escalators.[17] This has helped to associate female library employees, invariably the class responsible for staffing the delivery or circulation counter, with department store employees in the public's mind, thus further deemphasizing any type of intellectual role for the public service librarian.

In technical services workrooms, especially in large libraries where tasks tend to be heavily specialized and men are most likely to hold supervisory positions, worker space tends to

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[17] Philip Bess, "In the Public Domain: Chicago's Harold Washington Library Center," Inland Architect 36 (Mar.-Apr. 1992): 38.

be heavily regimented, sometimes actually organized assembly-line style (Fig. 31). These workrooms resemble contemporary office design in that private office space denotes authority and open work space denotes subordinate status (Fig. 32). Regardless of which arrangement is more efficient or creates the best work environment, the hierarchical juxtaposition of private offices and open work spaces reflects the dominant pattern of patriarchal hierarchy in the public library's work system.

Staff spaces have traditionally received the least attention in public library planning because the best planning and interior spaces must be reserved for the public. Even book storage has traditionally taken precedence over staff accommodation.[18] This often leaves staff spaces to be fit into nooks and crannies and basement spaces which are the least desirable. Often, the amount of staff space allocated in a building is entirely too small for all of the functions which it has to accommodate. And staff space continues to be the first sacrificed when additional storage or public space is needed. Librarians in small libraries, most likely to be women, may or may not have private offices, while large city librarians, most likely to be men, often have entire suites of offices and a number of personal support staff.

Public libraries are firmly established as a building type of "high architecture." Many prestigious architects have

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[18] Joseph L. Wheeler and Alfred Morton Githens The American Public Library Building (New York: Schribner, 1941), 23.

designed and continue to design library buildings. Most American architects are white men. Libraries continue to be important public buildings that symbolize a community's level of "civilization" and "culture." These buildings have always been representatives of the architectural fashions observed by the cultural elite and are therefore subject to the same kinds of feminist functional and aesthetic criticisms as other public buildings in America.

Though public library architecture clearly reflects some aspects of the patriarchy still so visible in American society, some elements of library design deserve careful consideration as feminist architects seek to create inclusive public buildings. Because of the sheer number of women in librarianship and the cooperative methods often used in library design, women have had some influence upon public library design, even if this has been heavily mediated by "great" male architects and detailed planning manuals. Since the 1930s, accessibility and flexibility have been heavily emphasized in library design. This has led to the development of forms such as the Modular Plan which allow a building's inhabitants to manipulate space relatively freely. A modular building is about as passive a space as one can get, and while this does not guarantee an inclusive space, it at least allows inhabitants the possibility of easily modifying interior spaces to meet varying needs.

The evolution of the American public library building has followed a relatively straight path from the late nineteenth

century to the late twentieth. The basic principles first formulated by Charles Soule in 1891 continue to be valid in library design today, and the social function of the library continues to emphasize the achievement of relatively liberal goals through relatively conservative means. As we move into the next century, a number of new challenges and possibilities have emerged for the public library and its still predominantly female employees.

The expansion of telecommunications technology presents new problems to be addressed in library design and new opportunities for librarians to develop a truly professional image in American society, hopefully something that can be accomplished without denying their feminized history. An emerging social awareness of the value of cultural diversity and the preservation of the natural environment also present new challenges for public libraries to overcome historical class and racial biases in service and architectural design, and to create an equally effective, but more environmentally friendly type of building than that which exists now. Unlike Angus Snead Macdonald, I cannot now imagine what the American public library building of the future will be like.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1
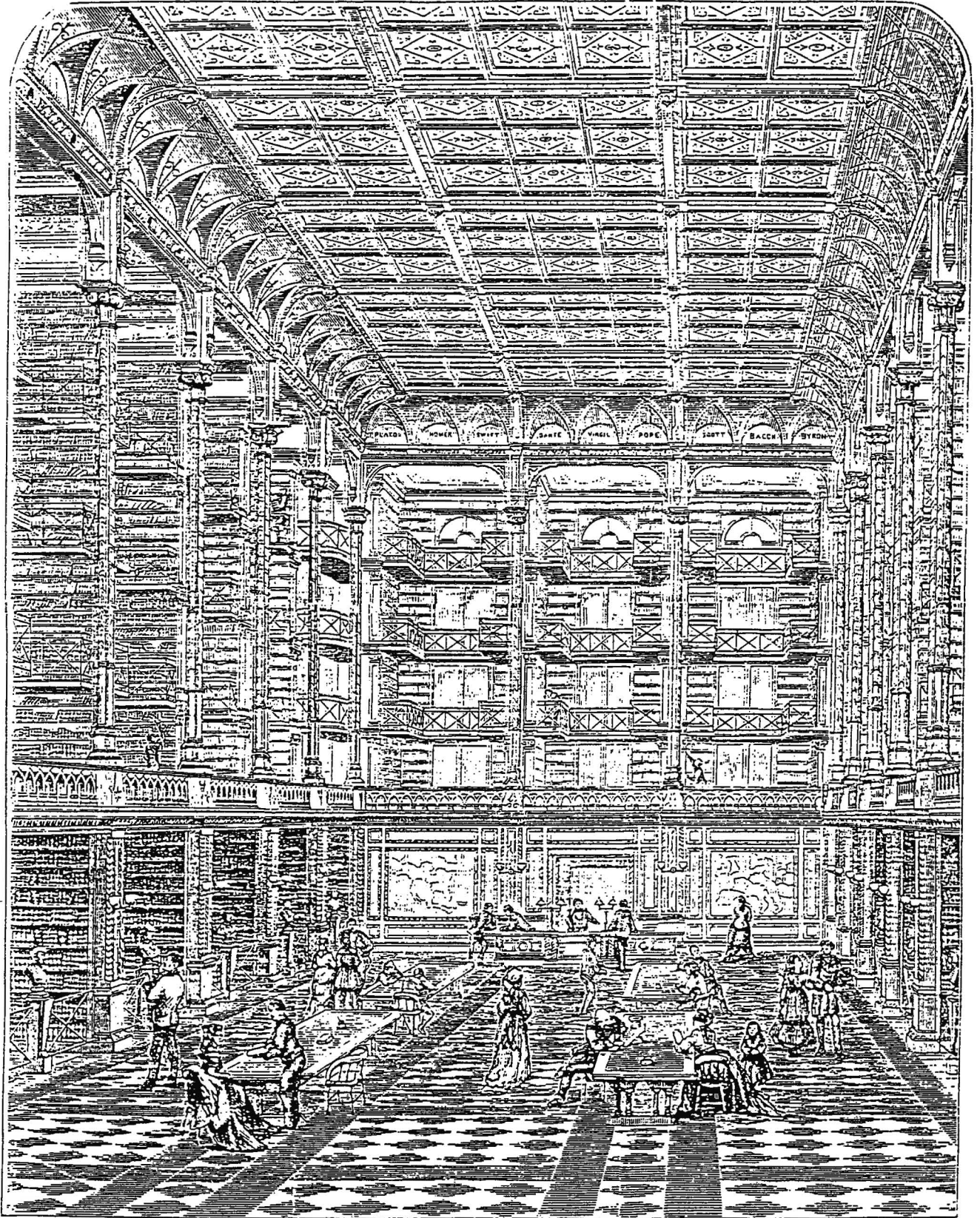
Example of a book hall in an alcove library.
Main Hall of the Cincinnati Public Library. Engraving originally appeared
in Harper's Weekly Mar. 21, 1874.

Figure 2
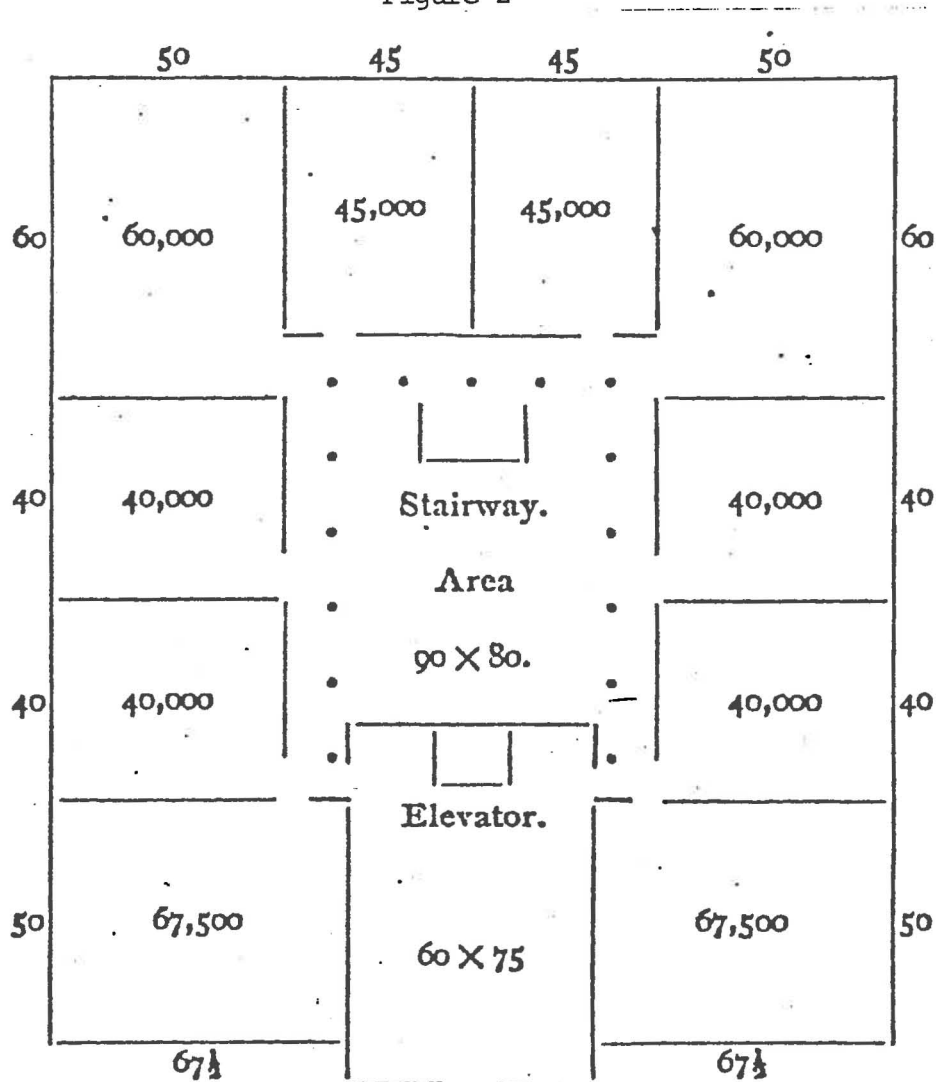
NOTE. — A rough sketch (made with printer's rules) may give a general idea of the plan of a single floor. The figures on the outside indicate the dimensions in feet, and on the inside, the storage capacity, in volumes, of each room. The dots within the quadrangle indicate the pillars which support the corridors. The drawings and sketches used by the author in reading his paper at Washington will be given in the edition printed by the United States Bureau of Education.

W.F. Poole's plan for a "subject departmentalized" library. Printed in Library Journal March, 1881.

Figure 3

80
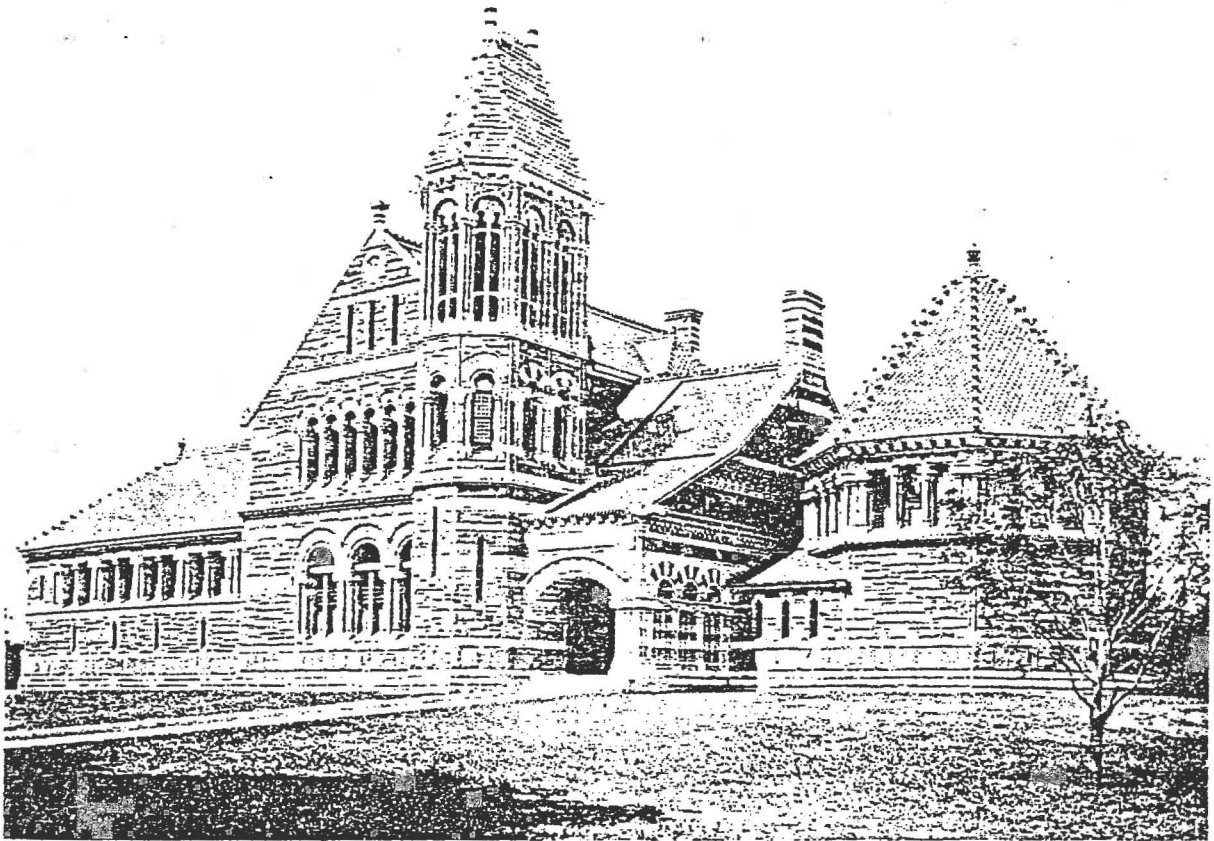
Winn Memorial Library, Woburn. Exterior, 1877-78.
H. H. Richardson

Figure 4
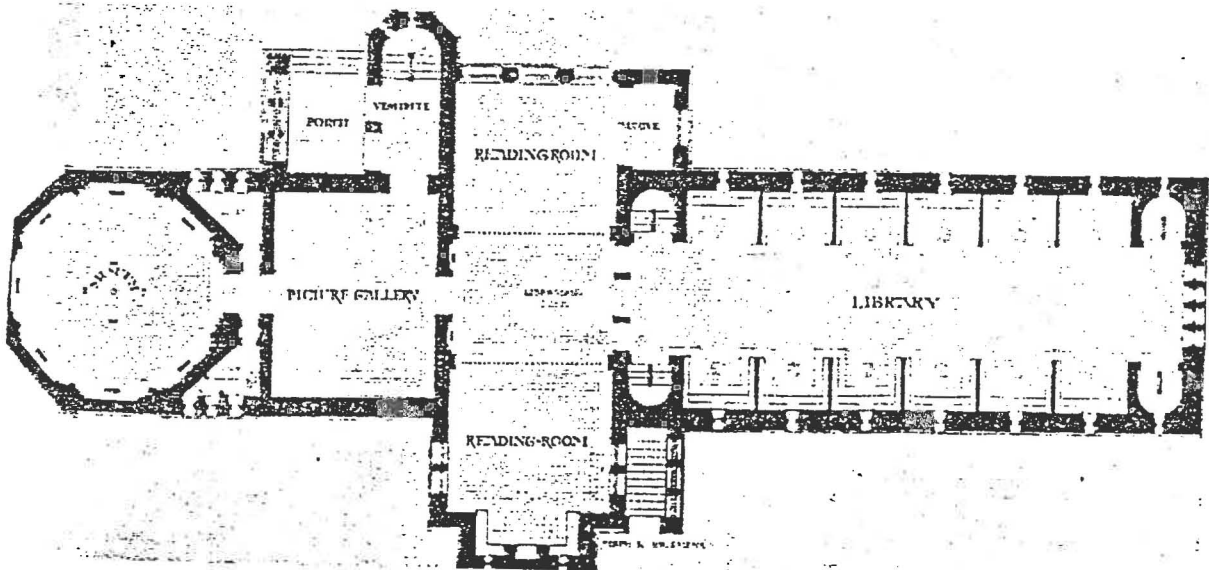
Winn Memorial Library, Woburn. Plan, 1877-78.
H. H. Richardson

Figure 5

81
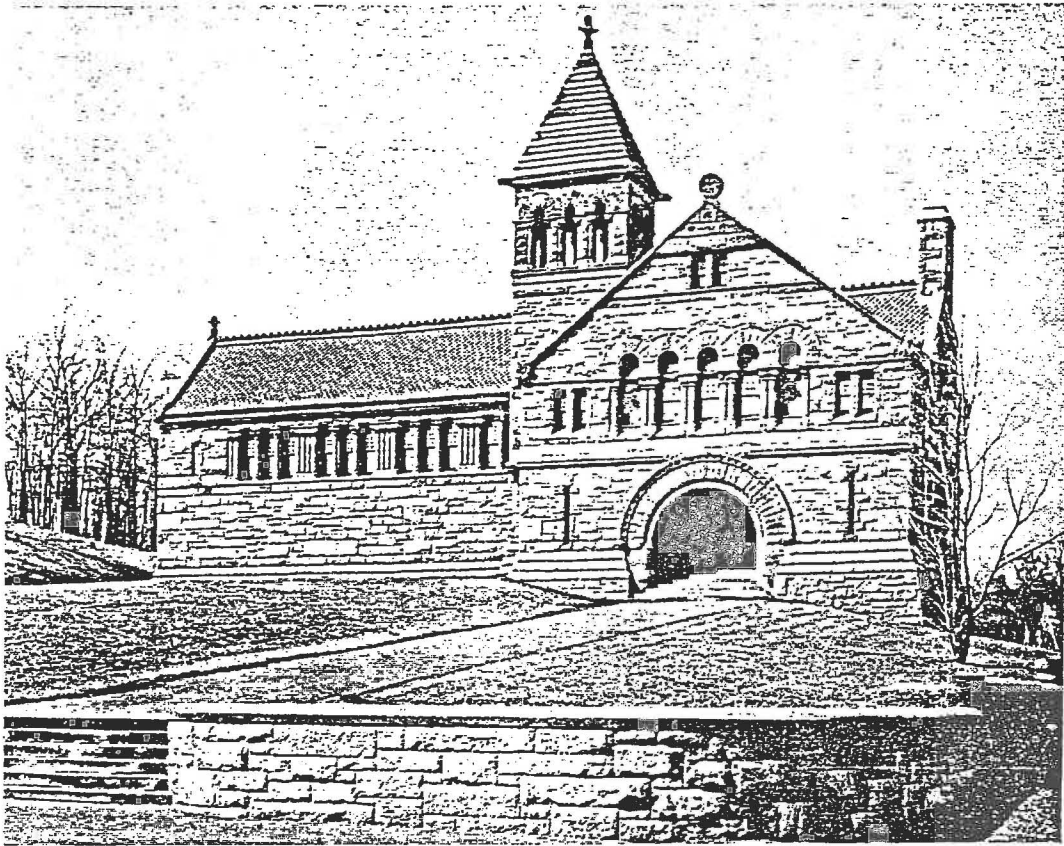
Ames Memorial Library, North Easton. Exterior, 1877-79.
H. H. Richardson

Figure 6
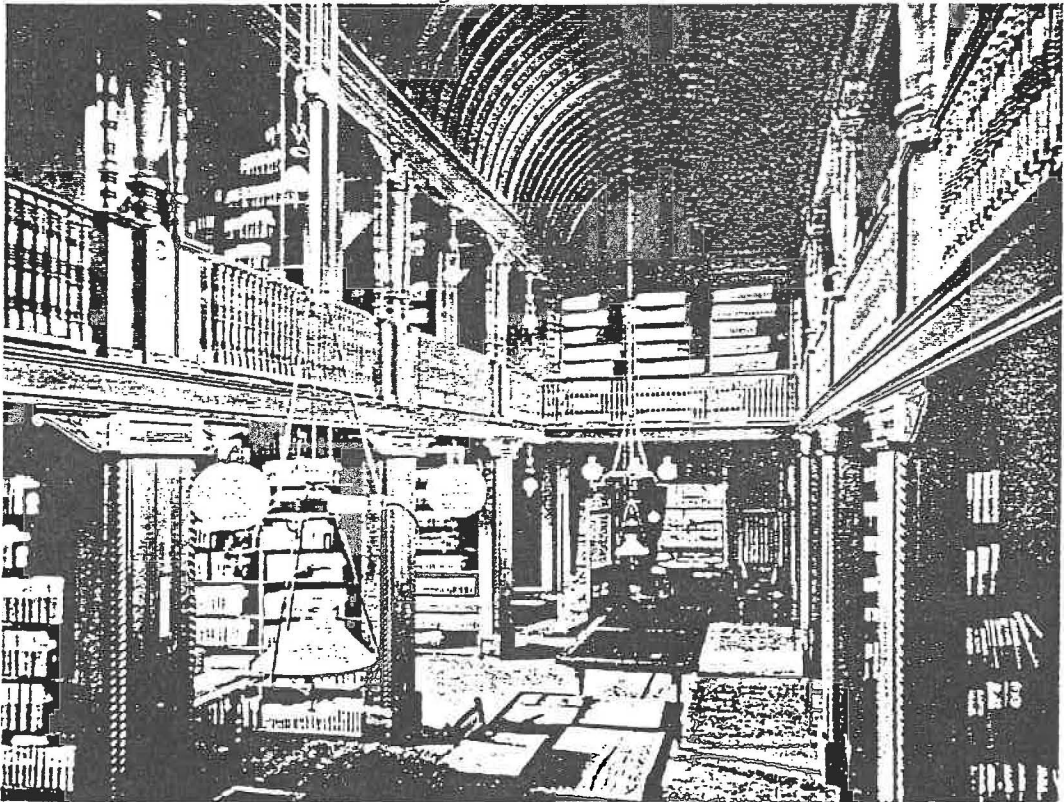
Ames Memorial Library, North Easton. Interior of stack wing, 1877-79.

Figure 7
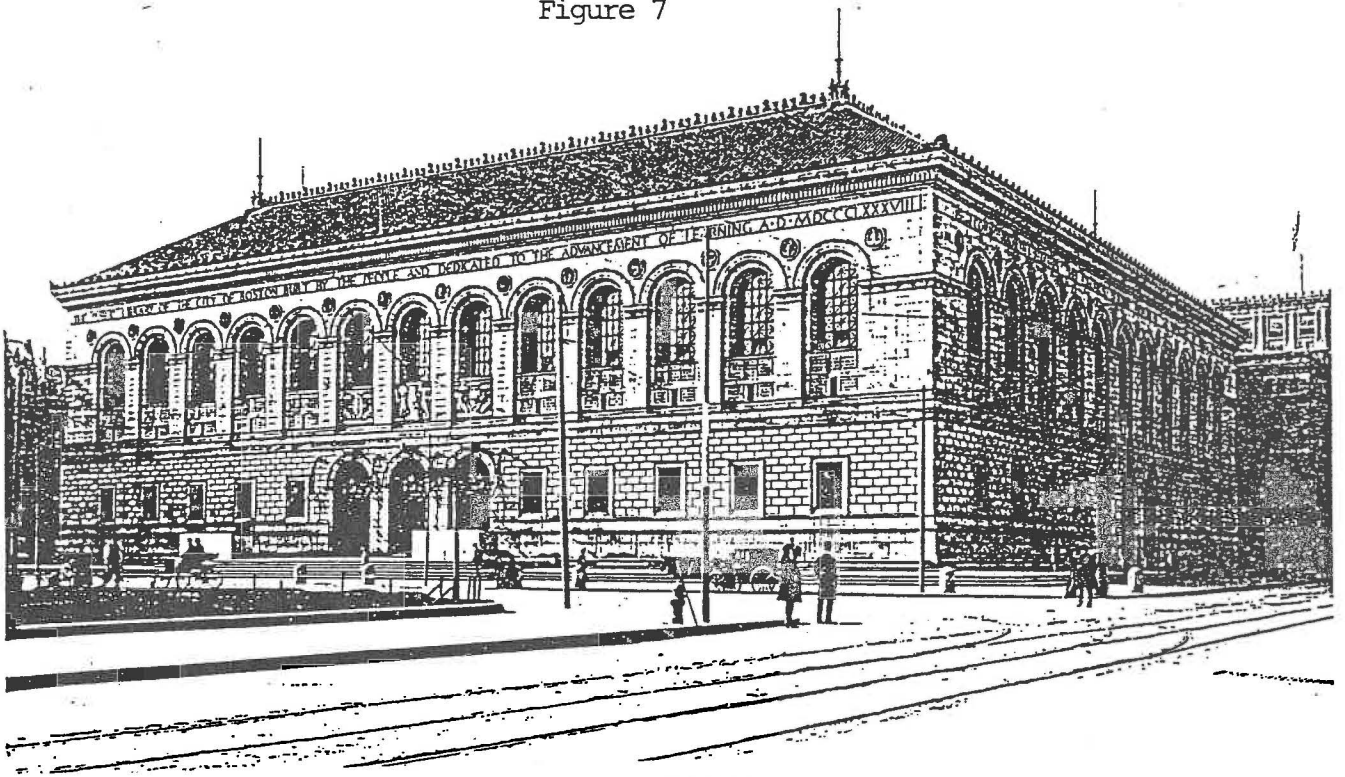
Main Facade, Boston Public Library, (1895)
McKim, Mead, & White

Figure 8
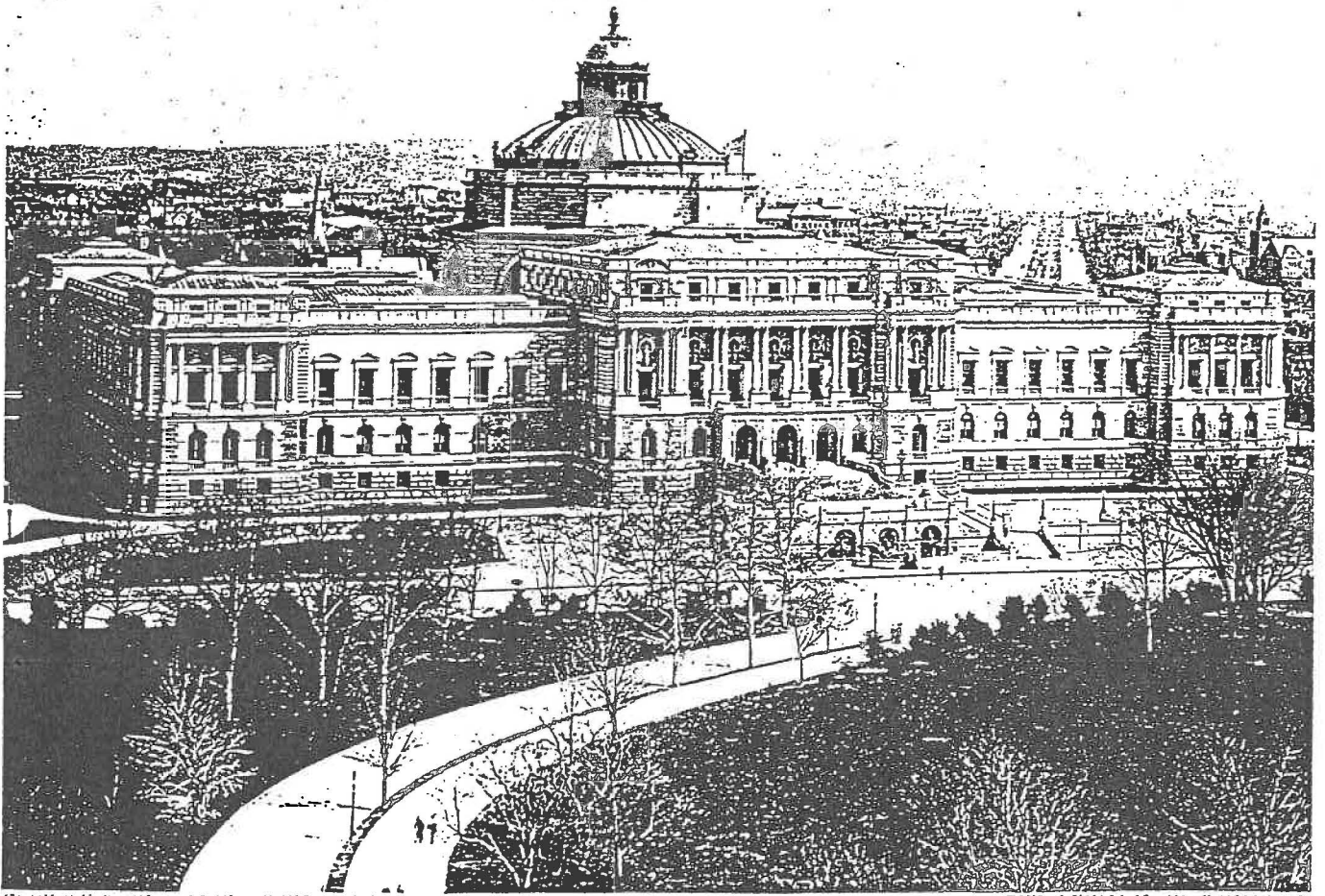
Library of Congress (1897) J. L. Smithmeyer

Figure 9

NORTH-EAST PAVILION

EAST PAVILION

SOUTH-EAST PAVILION

N W E S

N W E S

ROTUNDA
OR
MAIN
READING ROOM

N W E S

N W E S

MAIN

ENTRANCE

NORTH-WEST PAVILION

SOUTH-WEST PAVILION

HALL

PLAN OF FIRST STORY   LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
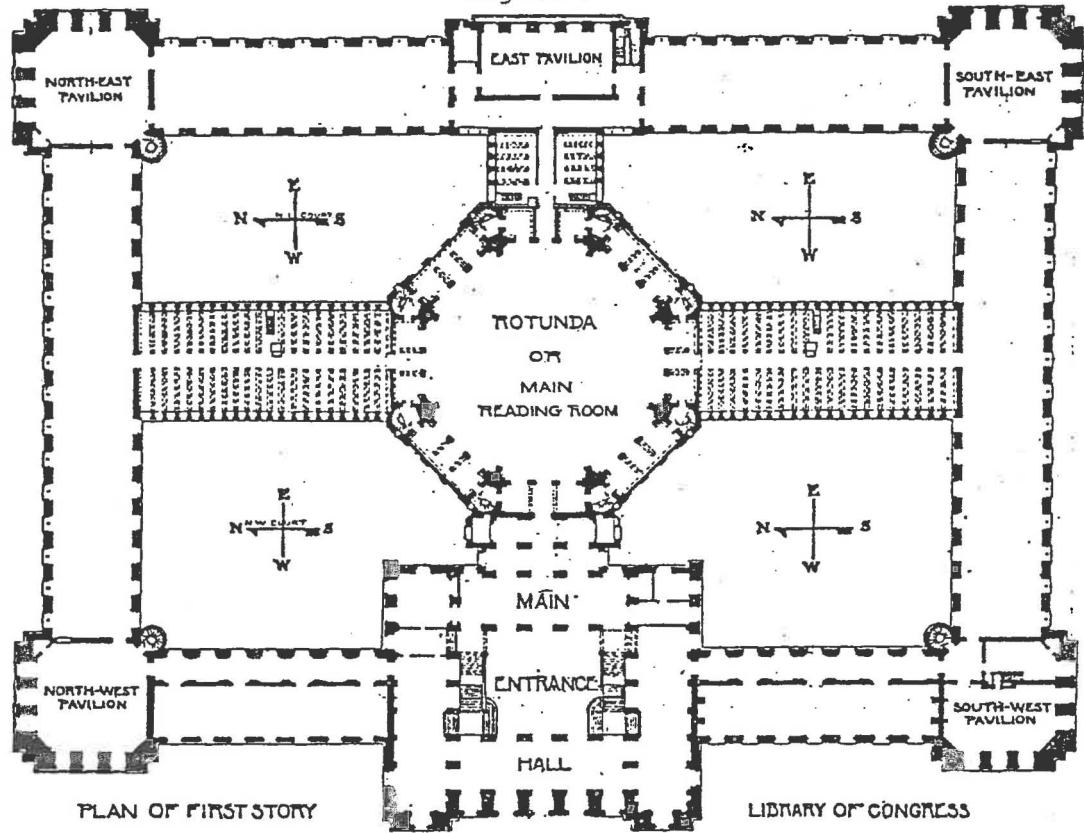
Figure 10

Design drawing for the Library of Congress stack.

Figure 11
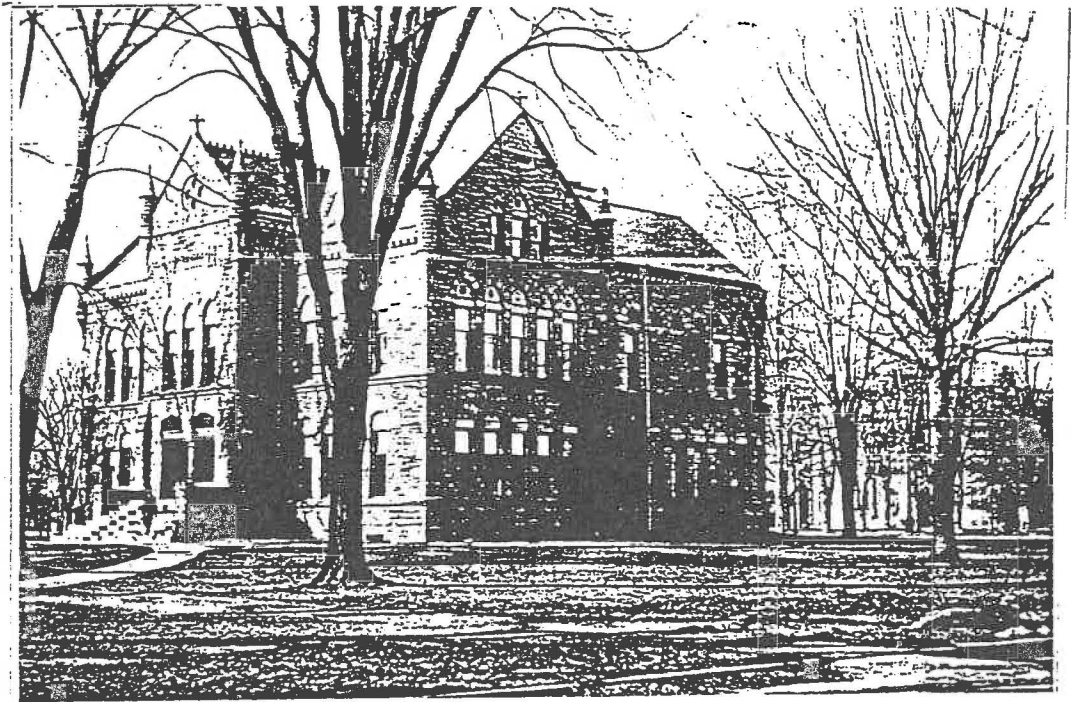
Spear Library, Oberlin College, 1885.

Figure 11a

Reading Room, Spear Library.

Figure 12
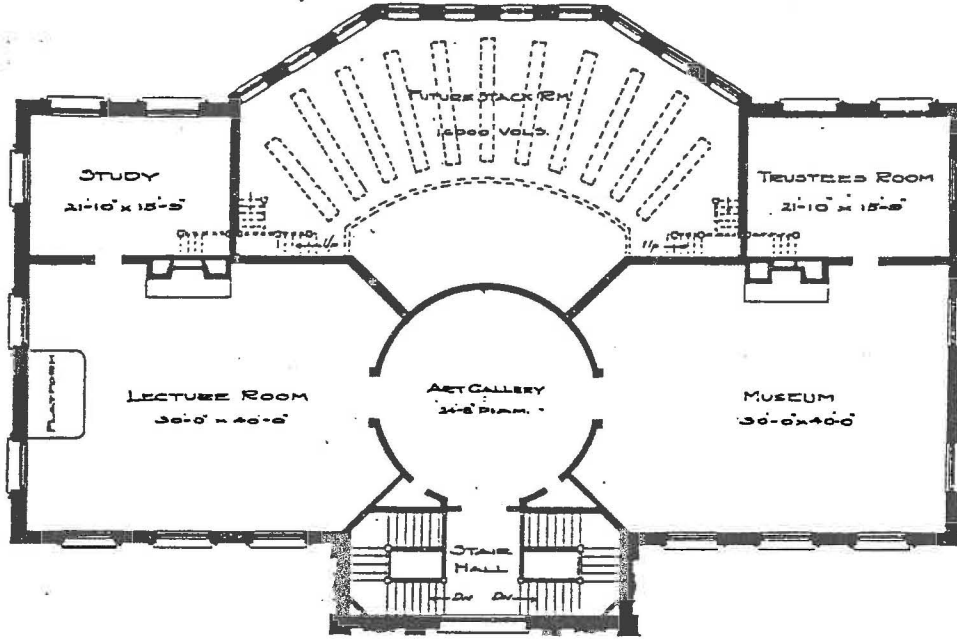
SECOND FLOOR PLAN

105'-0"
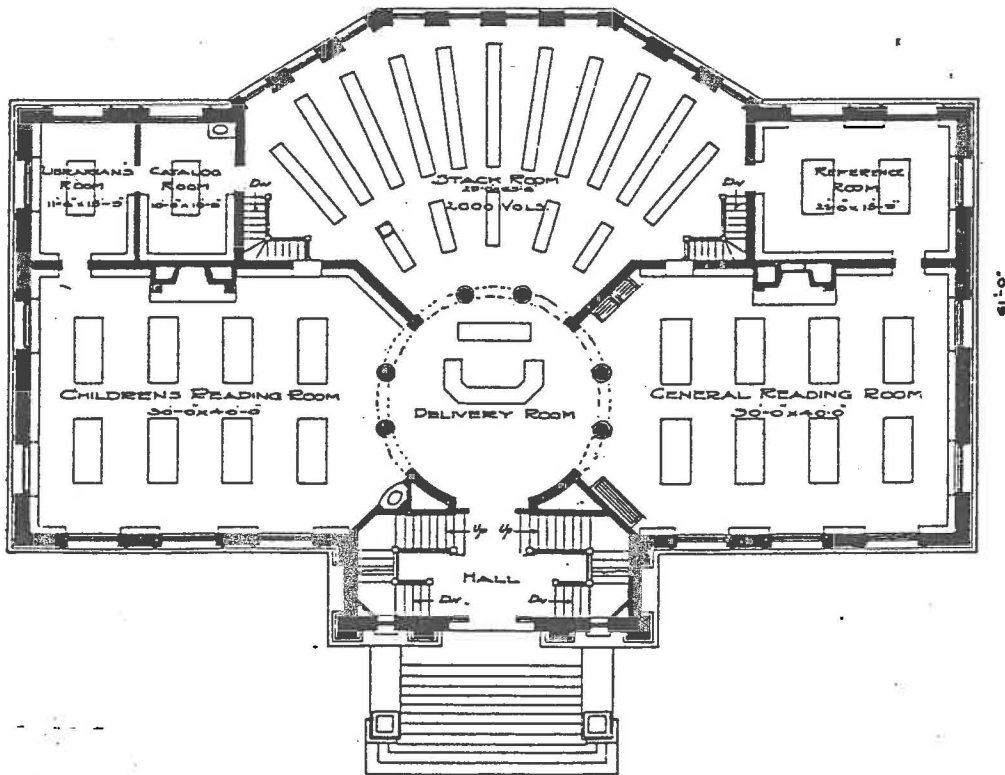
FIRST FLOOR PLAN
PUBLIC · LIBRARY   1904
PORT HURON - MICH.   by Patton & Miller

Example of Carnegie Library showing centrally located circulation desk and open interior.

Figure 13

PLANS FROM THE CARNEGIE LEAFLET.

A. Right-Left. Ch 23
B.   "   "   "   "
C. cf. Durham: " 25
D. cf. Salient V: "   "
E. no examples:
F. cf. N.J. branches: 27.

TYPICAL LIBRARY BUILDING
COST 50.000. AT PREWAR PRICES
CARNEGIE CORPORATION 1918
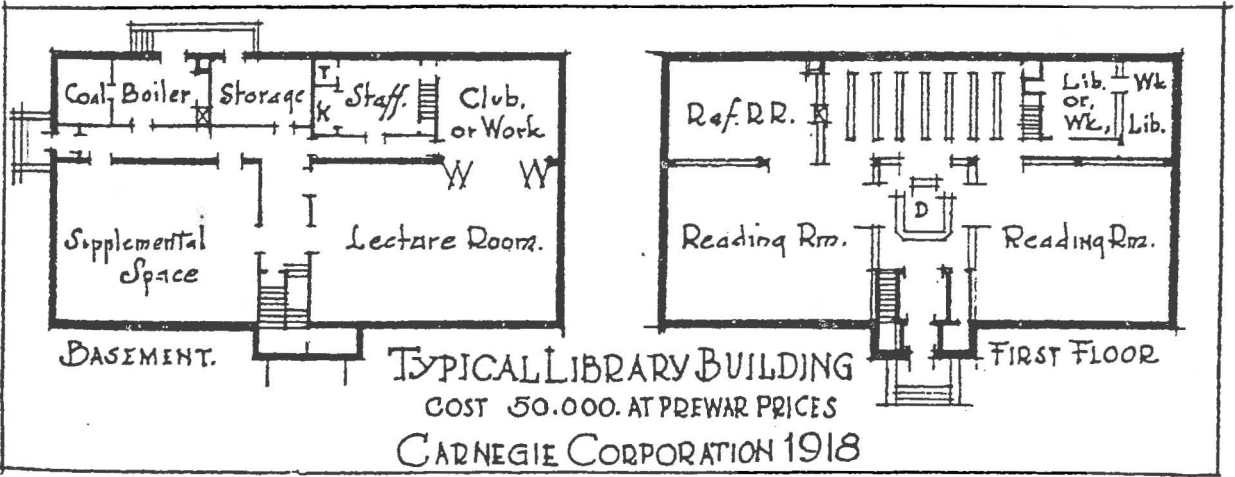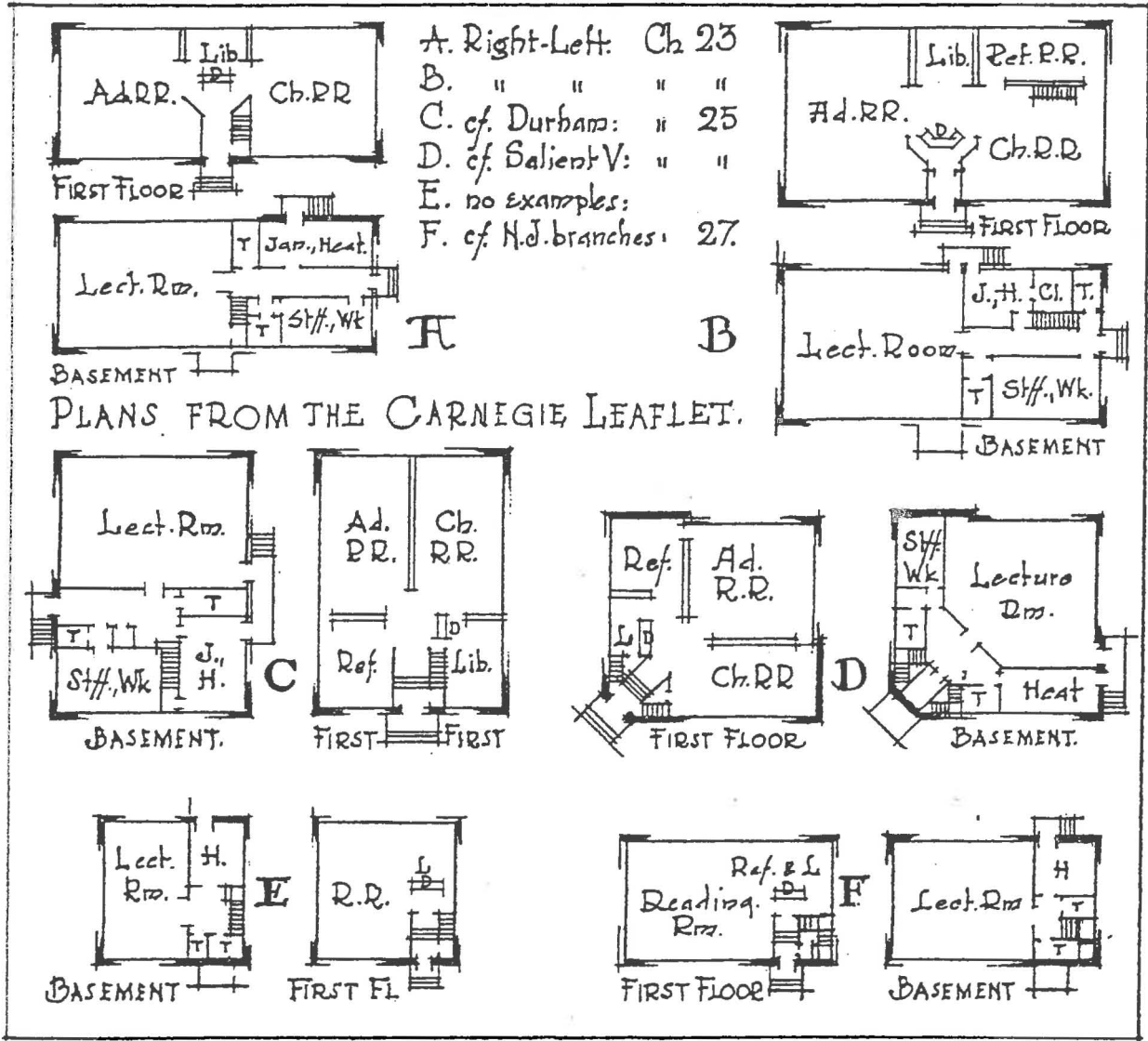
Above: Plans published in Bertram's pamphlet.
Below: Plan of a "typical" Carnegie Library building.

Figure 14
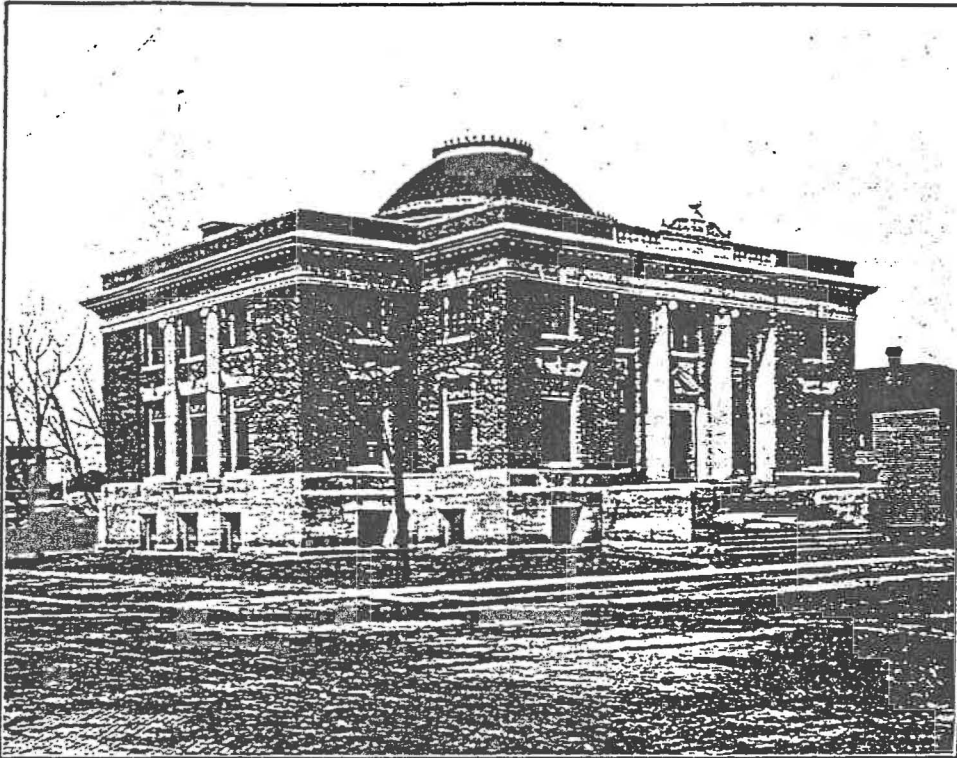
PATTON & MILLER, ARCHITECTS, CHICAGO   PHOTO. BY J. L. ARTHUR

STREATOR, ILLINOIS
Carnegie Library, 1903.

Figure 15
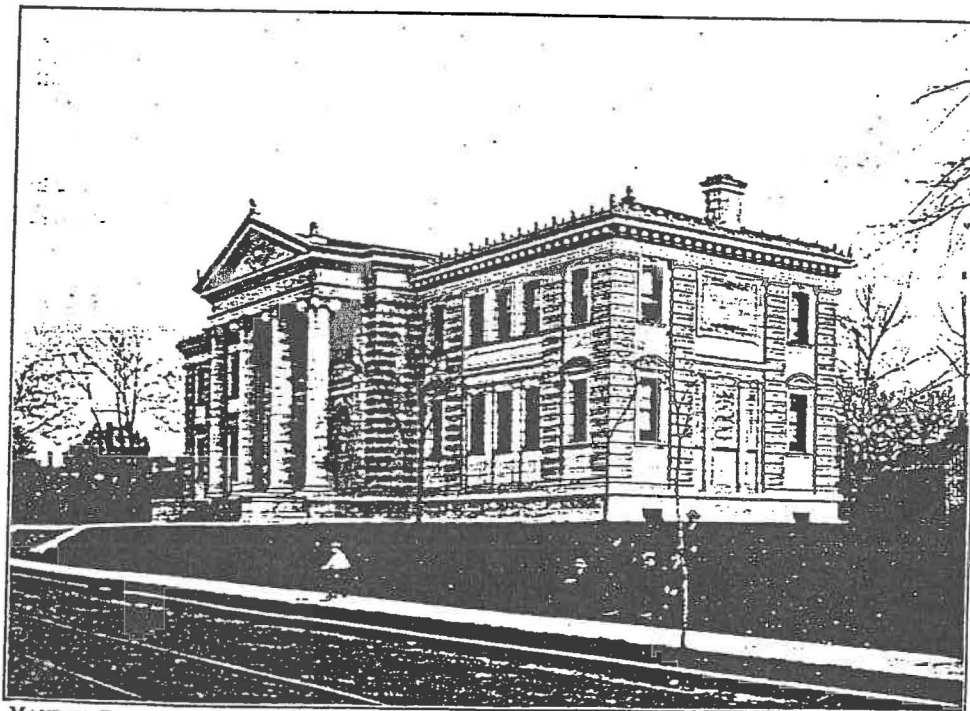
MAURAN, RUSSELL & GARDEN, ARCHITECTS, ST. LOUIS   PHOTO. BY W. H. SHERER

SEDALIA, MISSOURI
Carnegie Library, 1901

Figure 16
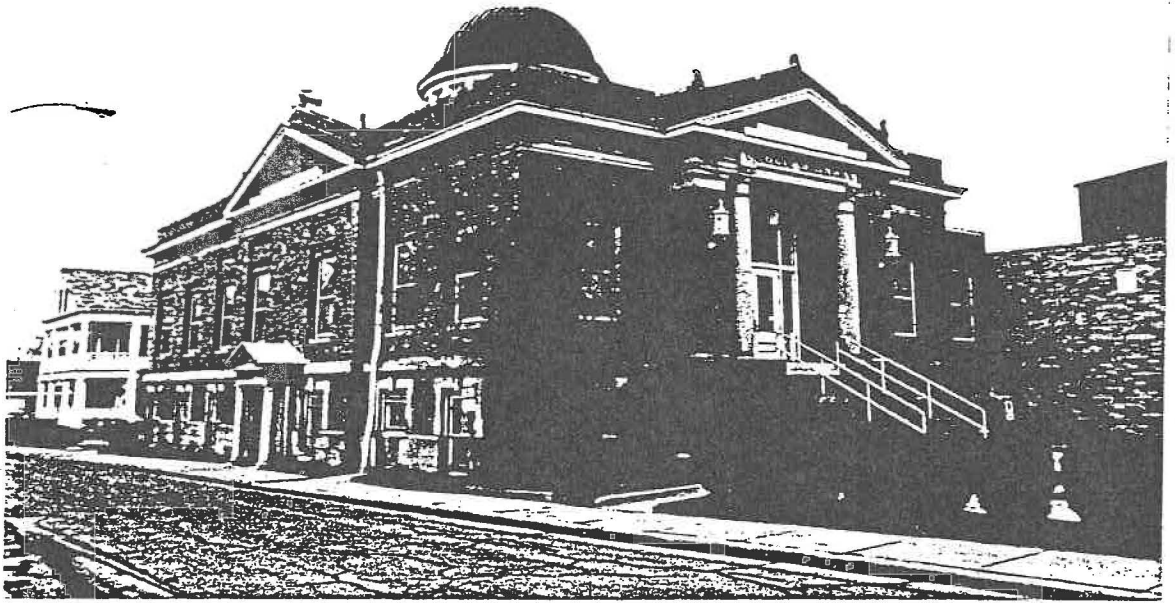
Norwalk, Ohio Carnegie Library 1905

Figure 17

STACK ROOM

HISTORICAL ROOM

LIBRARIAN
W. LAV.
DELIVERY
TRUSTEES AND REF. ROOM
PACKING ROOM
MEN'S LAV.
JANITOR'S ROOM

STAIRS

GENERAL READING ROOM

LOBBY

HEATING ROOM

CHILDREN'S READING ROOM

AUDITORIUM

PLATFORM

BASEMENT PLAN

MAIN FLOOR PLAN
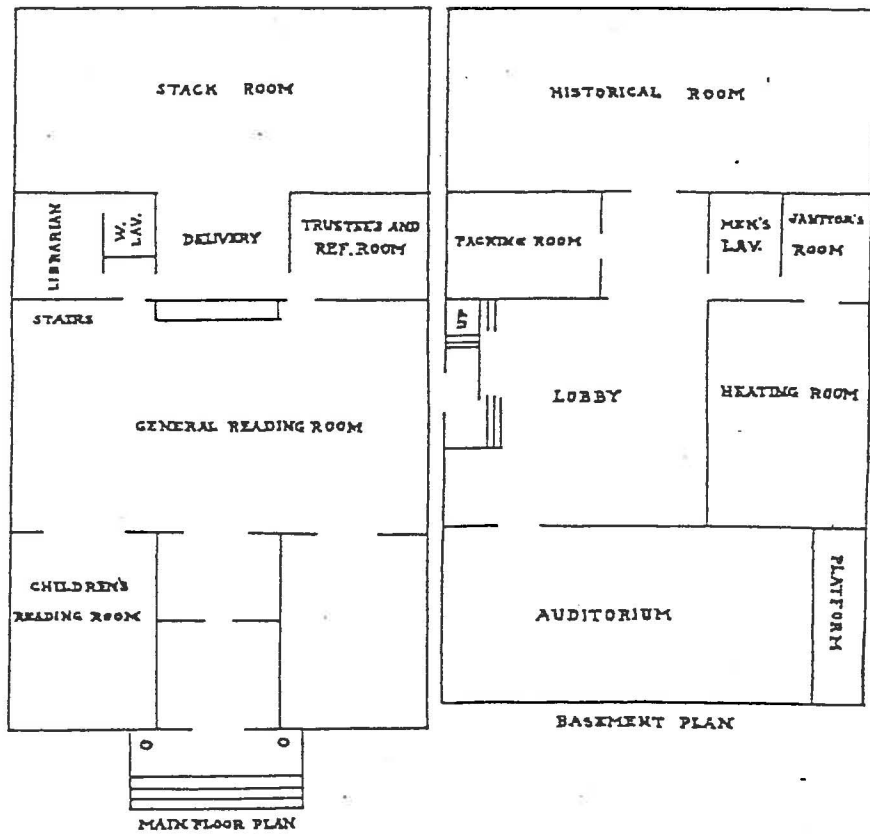
TRACING FROM ORIGINAL PUBLISHED IN
THE NORWALK REFLECTOR-HERALD JANUARY 17, 1905.

Plan of Norwalk Carnegie Library

Figure 18
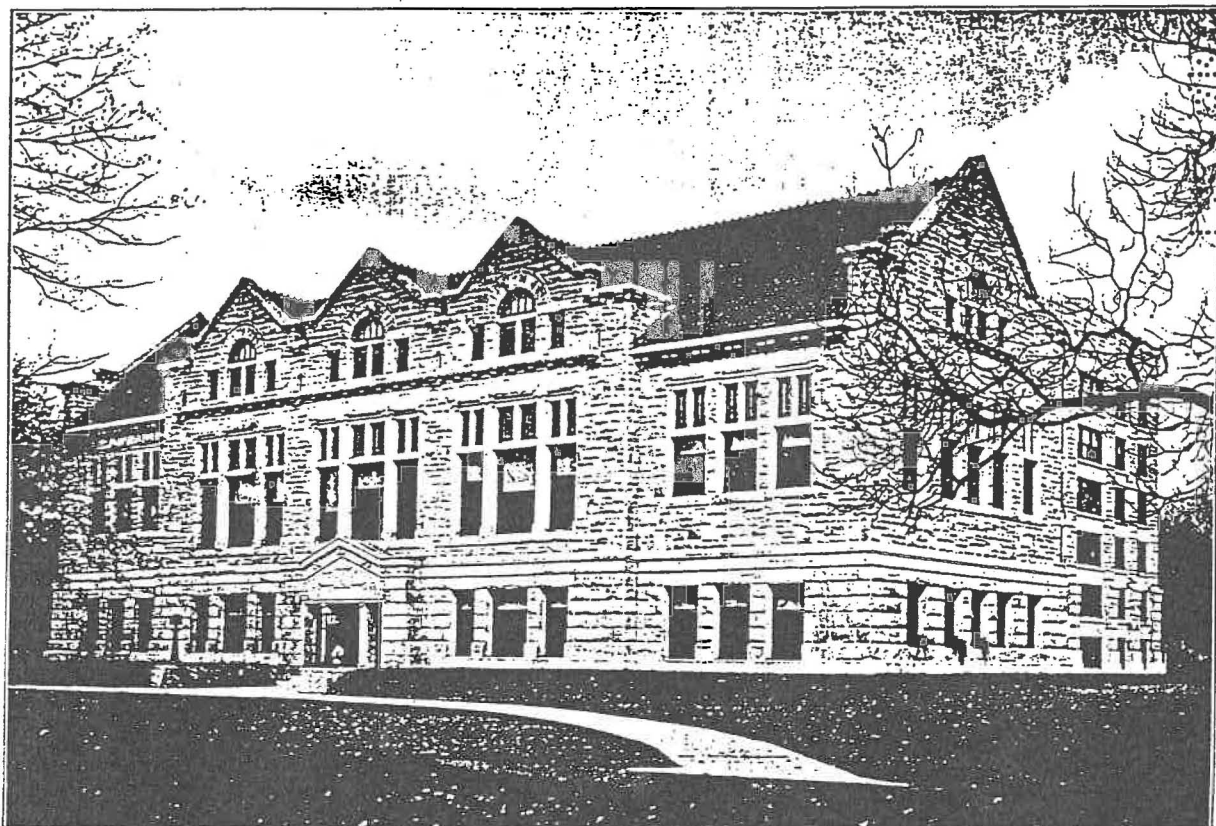
CARNEGIE LIBRARY·

Oberlin College, 1908.   Normand Patton

Figure 19
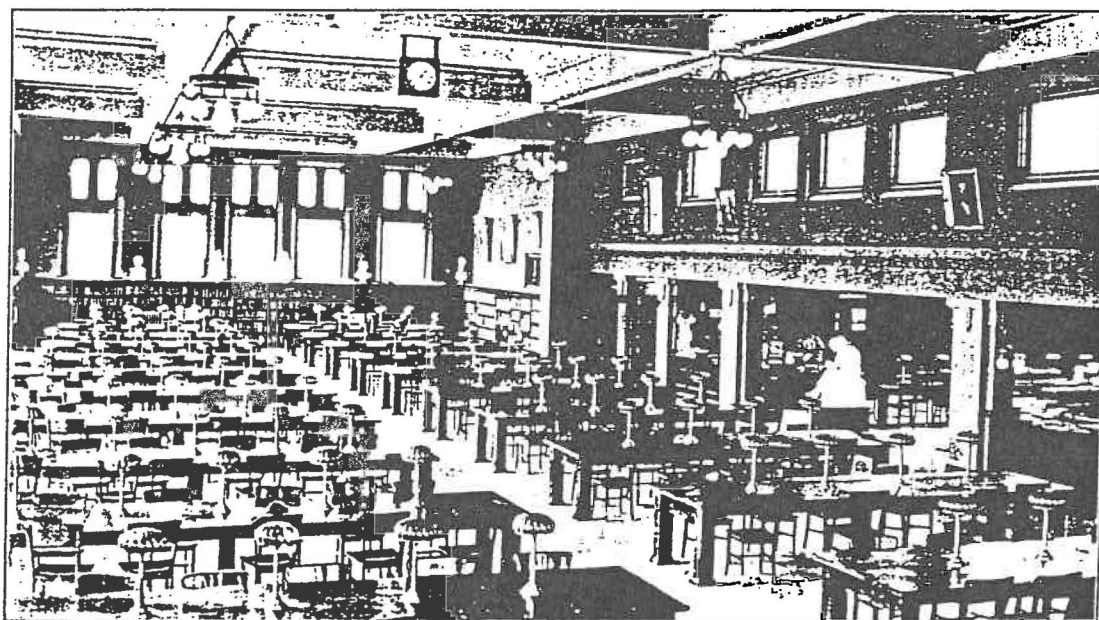
CARNEGIE LIBRARY READING ROOM

Figure 20
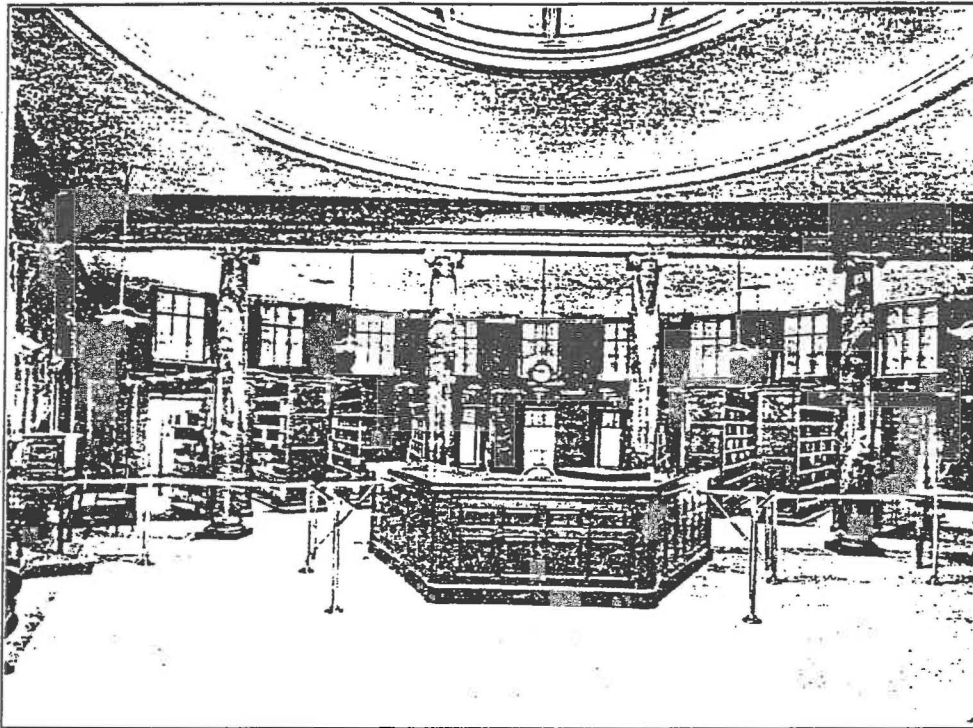
SHOWING THE RELATION OF THE DELIVERY DESK TO THE
RADIATING STACK

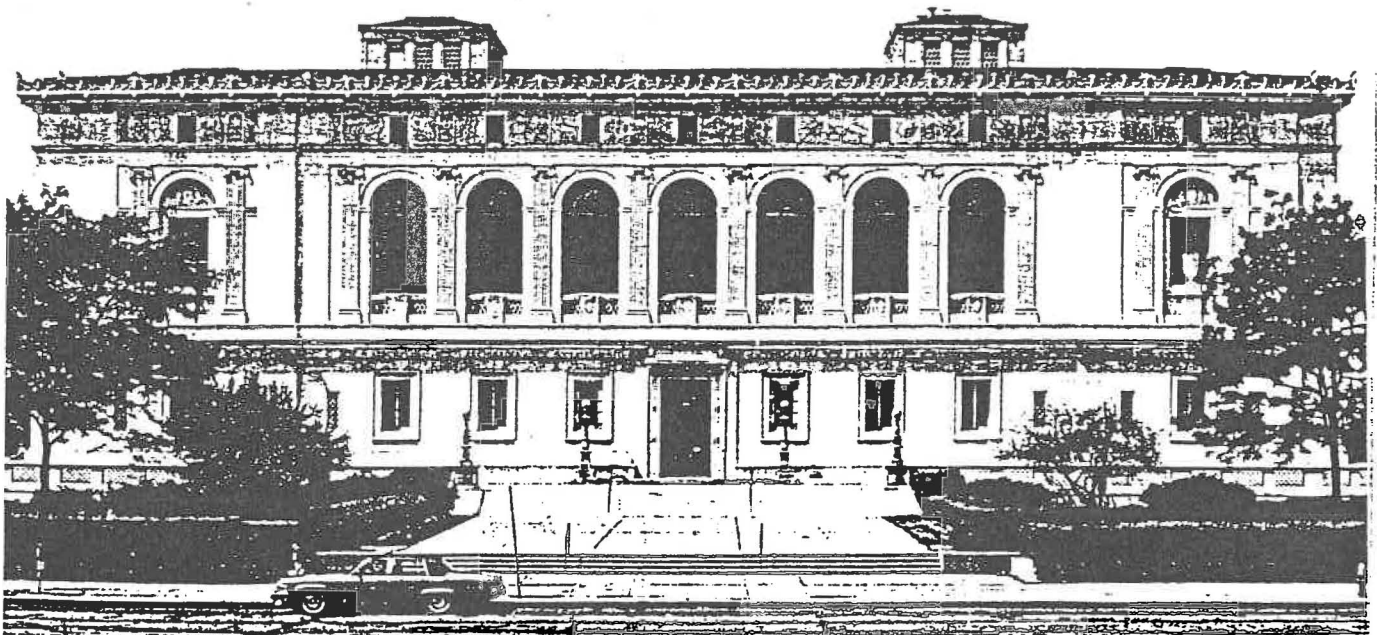East Orange, NJ Carnegie Library   Jardine, Kent & Jardine, NY

Figure 21
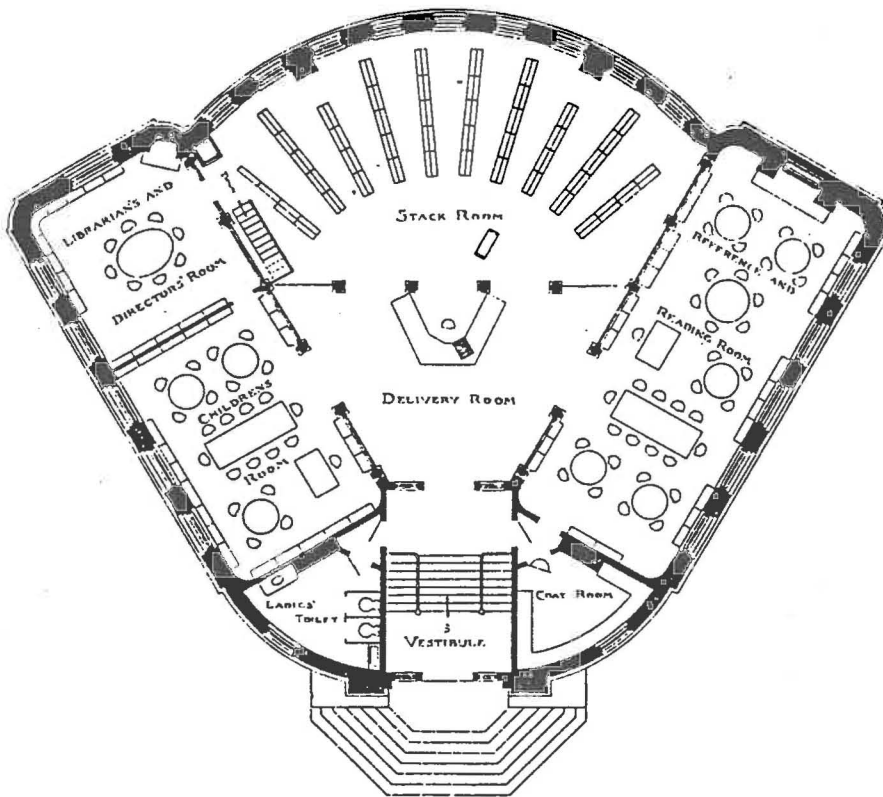
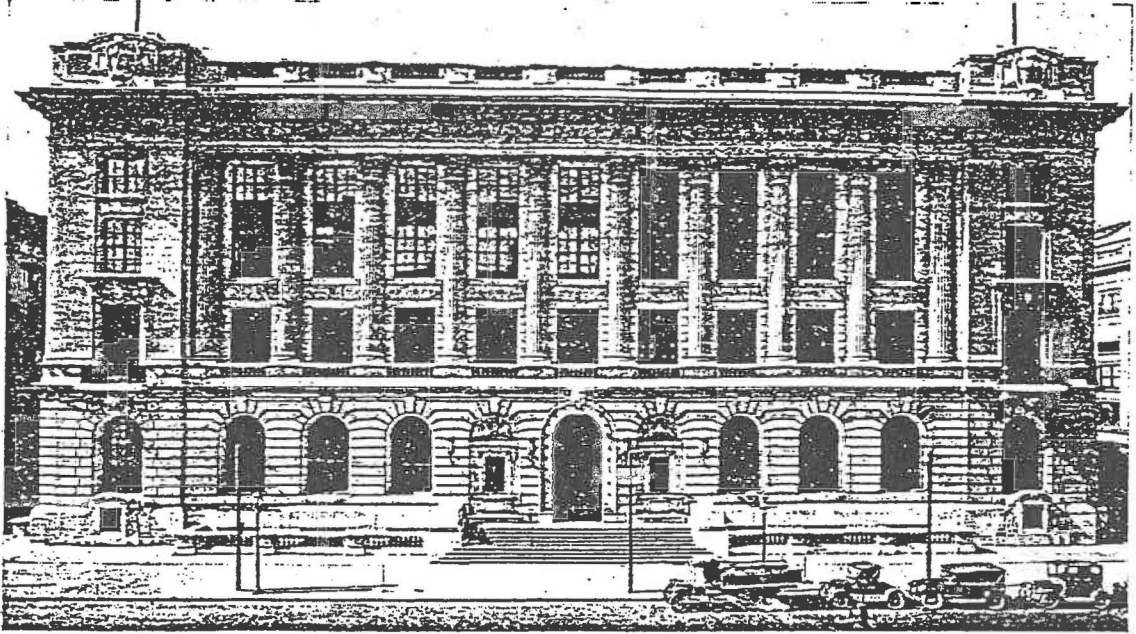EAST ORANGE FREE LIBRARY

SCALE IN FEET

Figure 22   91

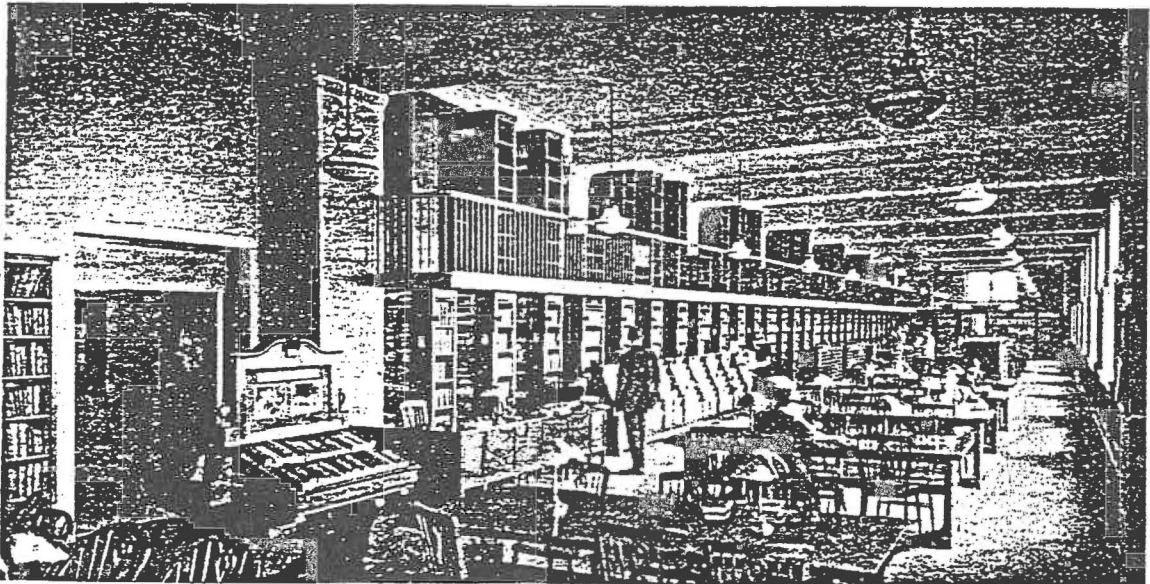The Free Library of Philadelphia (1927)
Horace Trumbauer

Figure 23

Detroit Public Library (1921)   Cass Gilbert
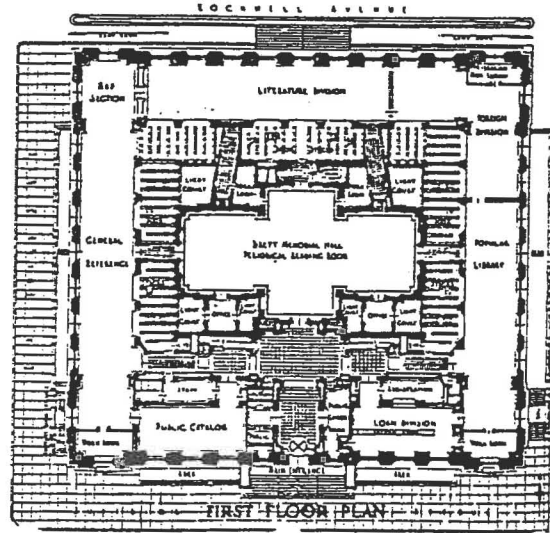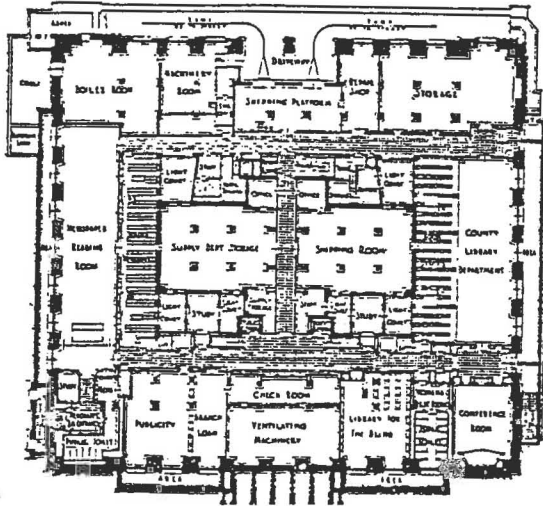
Figure 24

THE EXTERIOR HARMONIZES WITH OTHER CIVIC BUILDINGS ADJOINING IT

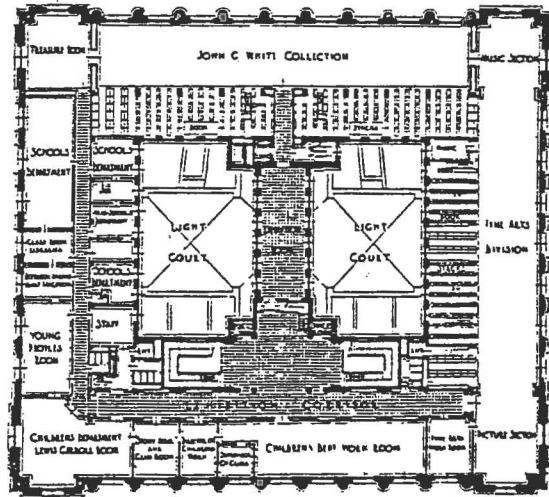Cleveland Public Library, 1925. Walker and Weeks, Cleveland.
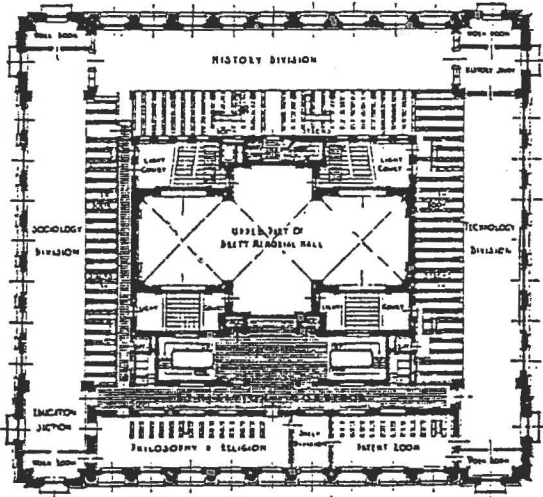
Figure 25

IN THE TECHNOLOGY DIVISION

Cleveland Public Library
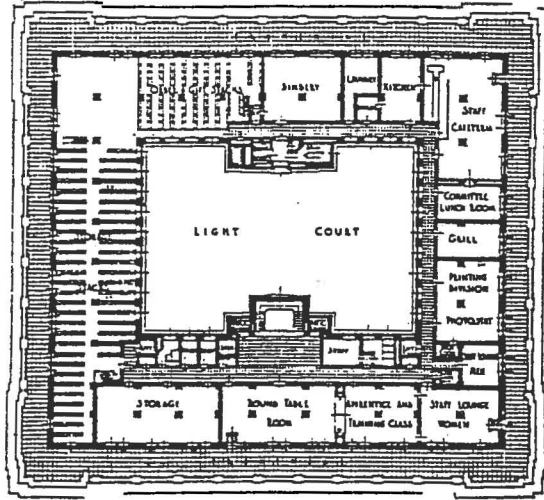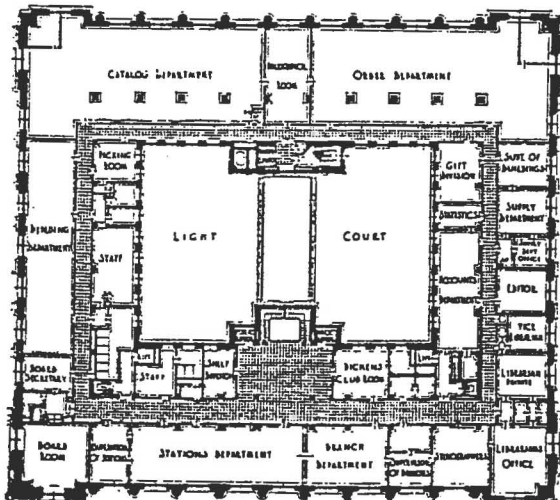
Showing Stack configuration.

Figure 26

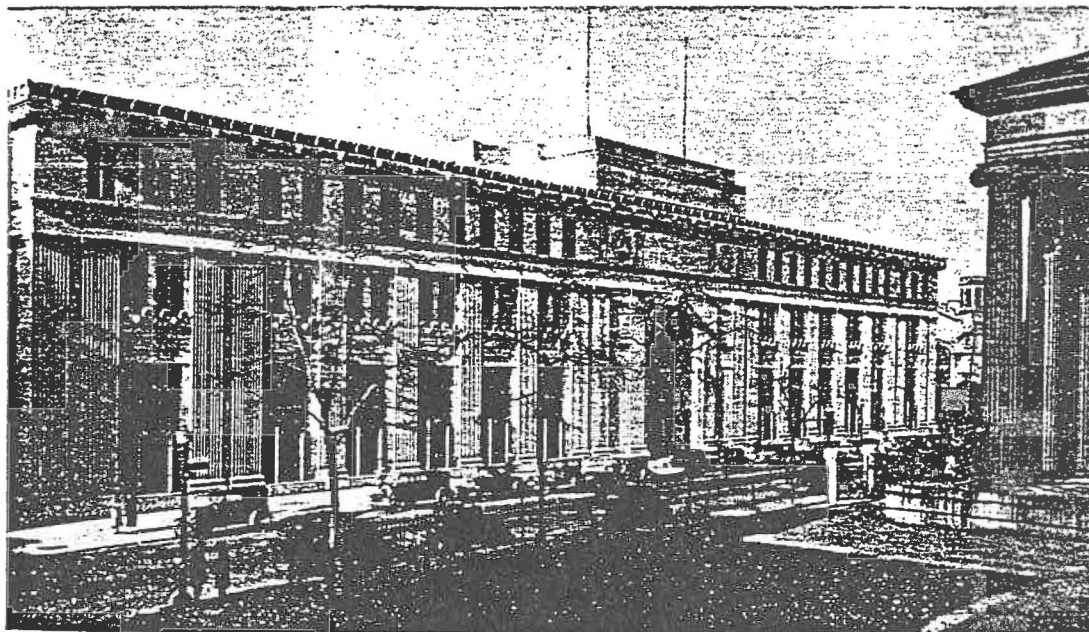BASEMENT (LEFT) AND MAIN FLOOR (RIGHT) PLANS

TO THE LEFT, SECOND FLOOR; RIGHT, THIRD FLOOR

FOURTH (LEFT) AND FIFTH (RIGHT) FLOOR PLANS

Cleveland Public Library, Plan.

Figure 27

The New Library, Extending Along Cathedral Street From Mulberry To Franklin, Is Characterized By A Quiet Gracefulness. Its Main Entrance Is Almost Directly Opposite The Cathedral Made Famous By The Late Cardinal Gibbons. Besides The Three Stories Revealed By The Exterior, There Are Mezzanine Balconies Over Certain Portions Of The Main Floor, And Three Stack Levels Below The Front Side-Walk.

Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, 1933.
Clyde Friz and Nelson Friz, architects.
Edward Tilton and Alfred Githens, associate architects.

Figure 28
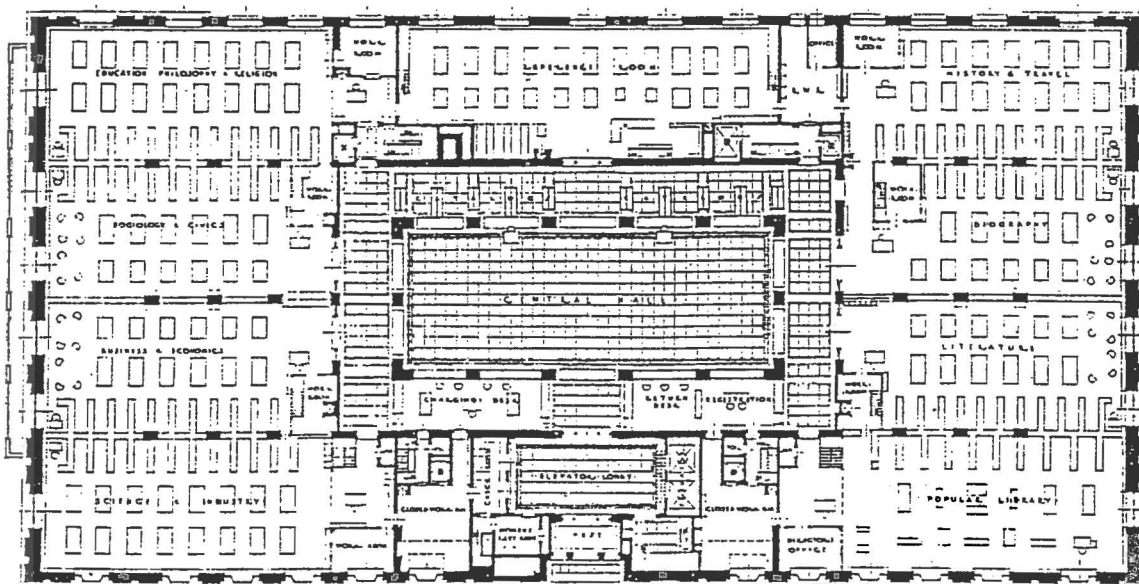
Main Floor: *One Acre In Extent, Opening On Sidewalk Level. All The Lending, Returning And Registration Of Borrowers And The Use Of The Public Catalog Is Concentrated In The Central Hall. Readers Pass Thence To The Service Desks At The Entrance Of Each Of The Seven Subject Departments, The Popular Library And The General Reference Department. Each Department Has An Adequate Workroom Adjoining, With Entire Staff Quickly Available To Serve The Public. At The Four Corners Of The Central Area Are Stairs And Automatic Staff Elevators For Quick Access Between Departments. All Adult Patrons Are Checked As They Leave The Single Exit At The Front.*

Enoch Pratt Free Library, 1933.
Plan of Main Floor.

Figure 29

Ground Floor: (*Second Stack Level*) *The Slope Of The Land From The Cathedral Street Sidewalk Back To The Rear Gives Full Length Windows To Public And Staff Workrooms, With Fourteen Foot Ceilings. From Mulberry Street (At Left) Children Pass Through The Sunken Garden To The Entrance To The Children's Room. The Lobby Leads Also To The Headquarters For Children's Work, School Work And Stations. The Rear Public Alley Passes The Shipping Room And Loading Platform. At The North Is The Newspaper Room, Entered From Franklin Street. For Readers This Is Not Accessible From The Rest Of The Building.*

Second Floor: *Along The Cathedral Street Front Are The Two Additional Subject Departments: Fine Arts And Maryland. The General Magazine Reading Room With Adjacent Stack Room, Are Provided For Future Expansion. The Offices At The South End And The Book Selection And Preparation Departments At The Rear, Come Together At The Office Of The Trustees And Librarian In The Southwest Corner, Giving The Librarian Contact With Both These Aspects Of The Work. Lighted Exhibition Cases In The Main Corridor Provide For Material Having To Do With Fine Arts And Maryland Subjects, Including The Cator Collection Of Baltimore Prints.*

Enoch Pratt Free Library, 1933.
Plans of Ground and Second Floors.

Figure 30

Angus Snead Macdonald's modular concept illustrated in
Library Journal December, 1945.
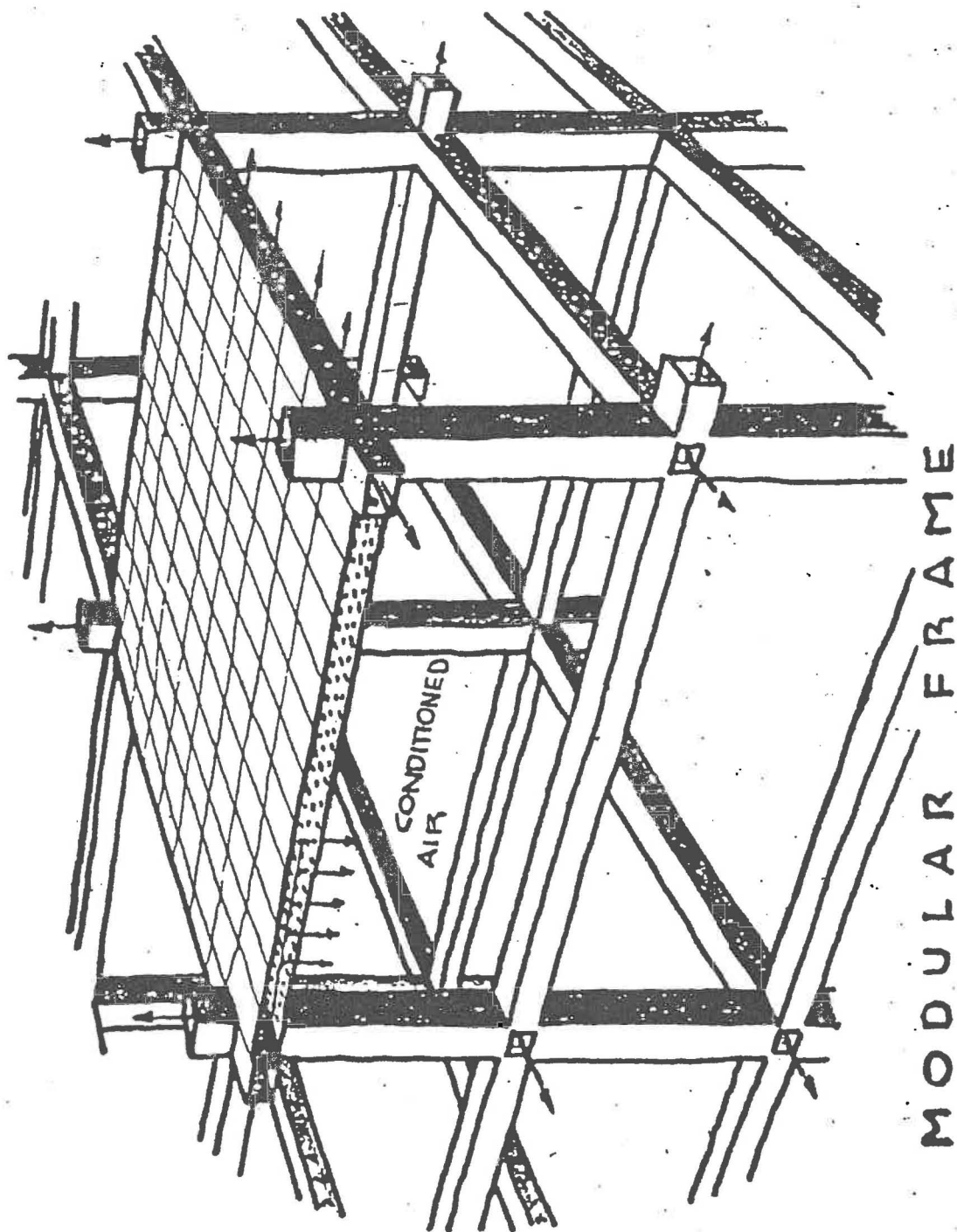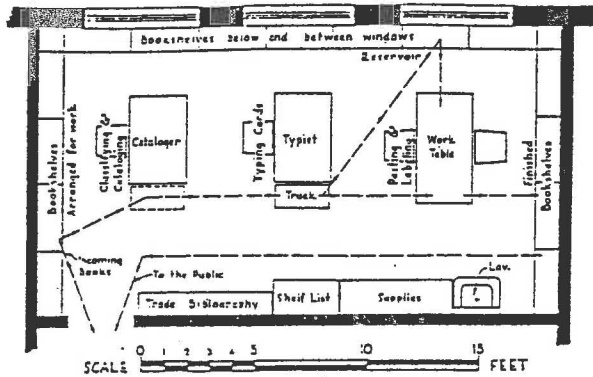

CONDITIONED
AIR

MODULAR FRAME

Figure 31

Above. *A small catalog room (though one city ordered and cataloged 8000 new books a year in a room like this, an unusual load for so small a room and staff). One cataloger, one clerical assistant-typist and one part-time paster-labeler, give the desirable continuous progression of the book from the reservoir shelves behind the cataloger, to the finished-work shelves at opposite end, with no back tracking or lost motion. Extra chair for temporary or part-time worker at rush times, a provision needed in all workrooms.*

Below. *General workroom for all preparatory processes, assuming that order librarian and cataloger give part time to other work, e.g., book selection, reference or circulation during rush hours. Two full-time professional workers, with only 2 or 3 clerical assistants, are out of proportion, in view of the tendency to assign to skilled but not professionally trained staff as much typing, routine and mechanical work as possible. These points suggest careful study of the library's policies, methods and staff organization, before laying out any department.*
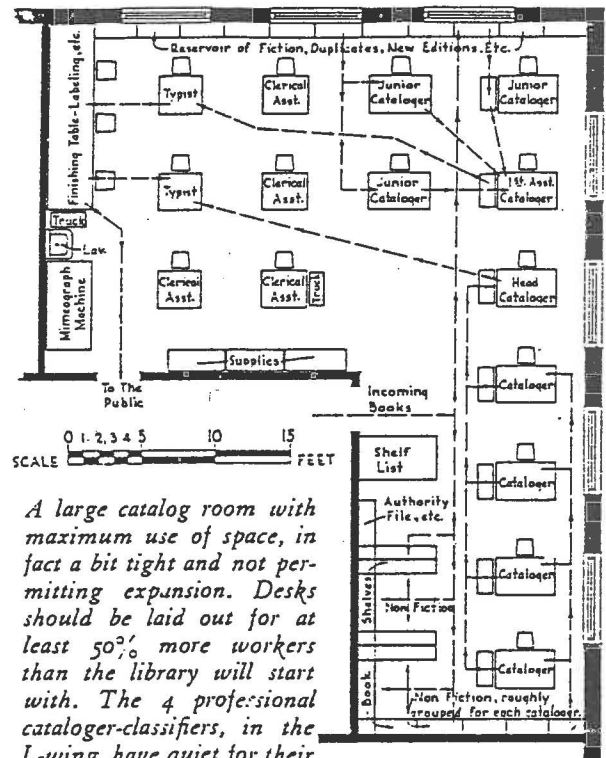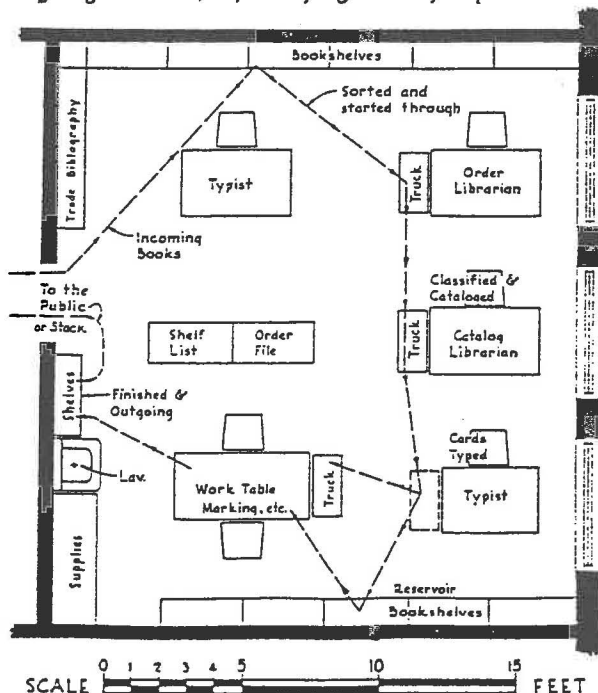
A large catalog room with maximum use of space, in fact a bit tight and not permitting expansion. Desks should be laid out for at least 50% more workers than the library will start with. The 4 professional cataloger-classifiers, in the L-wing, have quiet for their more careful work on non-fiction, supervised by the Head and first assistant who can also supervise the whole room. The 3 juniors (sub-professional) and 6 clerical-typists handle fiction, added copies and other simple work, all revised by first assistant. The L-alcove with its short double-faced cases standing out from the wall gives sufficient shelf room close to the assistants handling them; many such books have to wait for L. C. cards, special data, etc.

Diagrams of technical services work areas from Wheeler & Githens' The American Public Library Building (1941).

Figure 32
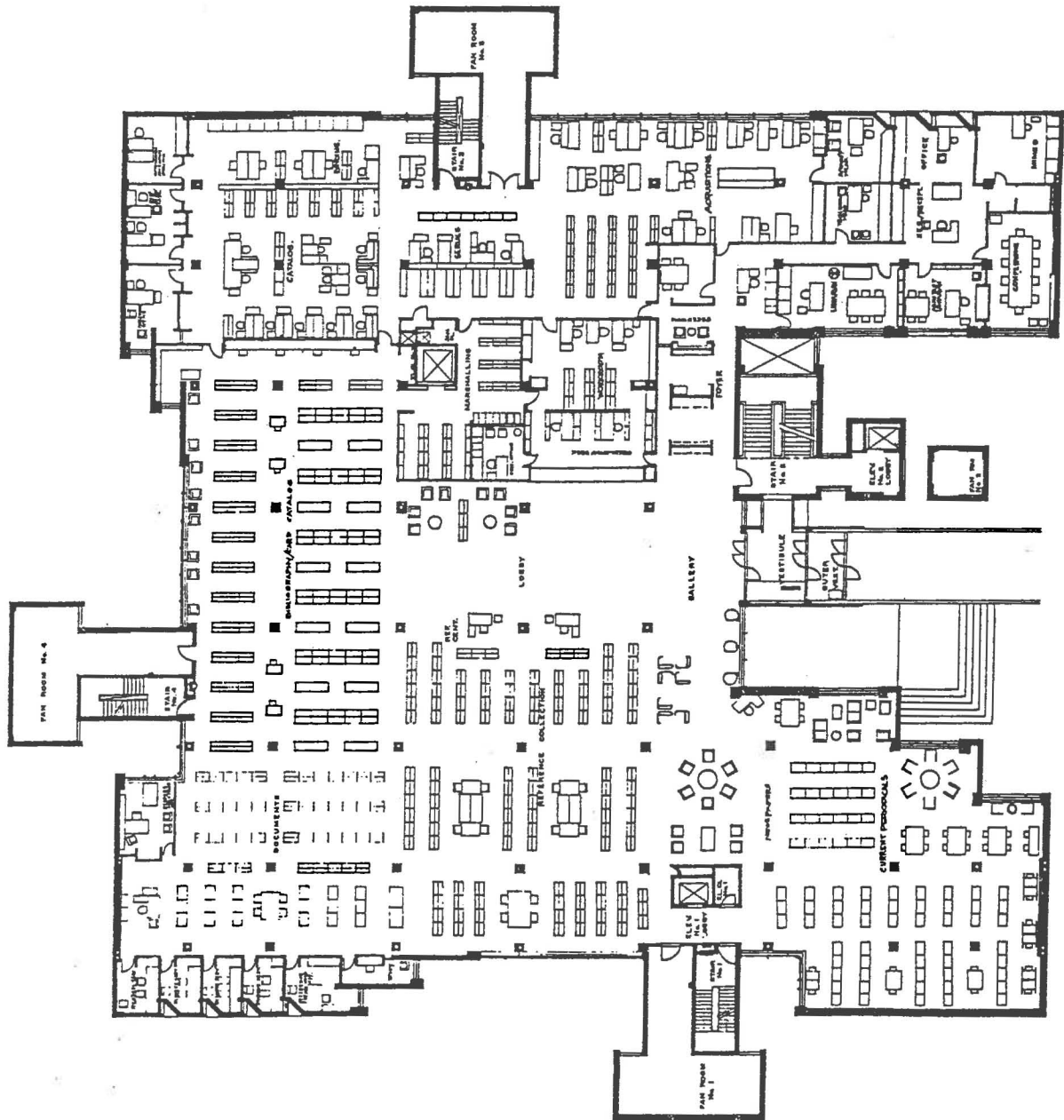
Mudd Learning Center, Oberlin College, 1973.   Warner Burns Toan & Lunde.
Note layout of technical services work area (top/right) and placement
of public services desks in the Reference dept.

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