

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: PRESERVING CARNEGIE LIBRARIES IN LOUISVILLE,
KENTUCKY

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The great industrialist, Andrew Carnegie, believed he had a moral responsibility to share his considerable wealth in a manner that would best serve the public good. He chose public libraries as his principal philanthropy because he held the democratic ideal that access to culture, education, and enlightenment should be shared by rich and poor alike, based on an easily accessible public education made available through the public library. The scale of his philanthropic endeavor was unprecedented. Between 1893 and 1917, Andrew Carnegie gave a total of \$41,748,689 to fund 1,689 public libraries in 1,419 communities across the country. When the last grant was made in 1917, Carnegie was responsible for the construction of over one half of the public libraries in the nation and had implemented the largest and most influential philanthropic program in American history. On the one hundredth anniversary of their construction, only 772 of the 1,689

public libraries constructed still function as public libraries while another 350 still stand but have been adapted to new, non library-related uses. Others have been lost to the wrecking ball and some remain vacant. Their future is uncertain.

This thesis finds that Carnegie libraries provide tangible evidence of the Andrew Carnegie's imprint on American education, culture, and architecture. They are an important resource set worthy of preservation. The author examined Carnegie libraries in Louisville, Kentucky, Cincinnati, Ohio, and in other cities, and has determined that a preservation plan for continued library stewardship is needed. The plan should speak to the potentials that Carnegie library buildings hold for the community. A multi-faceted approach should be used that addresses architectural styles, character-defining features, and inherent design issues. Identification of the character-defining exterior and interior features of the Carnegie library building should serve as the basis for a preservation plan. After rehabilitation, a cyclical building maintenance plan should be developed and adopted to ensure responsible, long-term stewardship. Protective mechanisms such as local landmark designations and restrictive covenants or easements should also be explored and implemented.

By learning more about Carnegie library buildings, librarians and public officials will recognize the functional as well as historic values of these buildings and will realize that these buildings, when rehabilitated "to work" are cost effective.