

THE JEWEL OF THE VALLEY:
THE CARNEGIE LIBRARY OF HOMESTEAD

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The Carnegie Library of Homestead, PA was among Andrew Carnegie's initial attempts at library philanthropy. Built during an era when library construction and services were changing, this facility included not only a library, but also a bowling alley, indoor swimming pool, concert hall, billiard rooms, and classrooms, which were heavily utilized by all segments of a diverse population. Located in a one-industry town, the library was not only dependent on the largess of the steel industry, but was also linked to the region's economy. Over the past 100 years, it has seen its management radically change as well sources for revenue, in reaction to changing community needs and the economic realities of a once wealthy, now relatively poor populace.



Andrew Carnegie

Described by some during his lifetime as the grand benefactor, robber baron, great industrialist, union buster, draft dodger, and peacemaker, Andrew Carnegie was born in 1835 in the Scottish village of Dunfermline, son of a prosperous handloom weaver and industrious mother. His family were leaders in the Chartism Movement, which called for universal suffrage for men and had firm opinions against all forms of privilege including the monarchy and the church. By 1848, William Carnegie decided to move his family to Pittsburgh following an economic decline as the industrialization of the textile industry left him destitute; they settled in "Slab City," the most impoverished section of the booming, smoky city. William was not to earn a decent living again; rather, he depended on his wife Margaret's ability as a seamstress and Andrew's earnings. Margaret was to remain in Andrew's life for many years as a strong matriarchal figure to whom Andrew was very attached. He did not marry until his mother passed away: she more than once was heard to say to a prospective daughters-in-law, "No one is good enough for my Andra!"

Young Andrew first worked as a bobbin boy in a cotton factory for just over \$1.00 per week; he later became a messenger boy, often not reaching home until 11 p.m. He soon heard of the small private library of Colonel James Anderson, but was excluded since it was open only to *working boys* (those with trades). Anderson, who fought in the War of 1812, was a successful businessman and was active in public affairs. He took 400 books from his library of 1,500 volumes and established a lending library that was open on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Since Carnegie did not consider learning a trade,

he would be required to pay \$2.00 a year for borrowing privileges (nearly a week's salary for the young man).¹ An outraged Andrew wrote a letter to the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* urging the library be open to all working boys regardless of their position, signing with a working boy, though without a trade. Within a short time, Carnegie was reading there most every Saturday: "The windows were opened in the walls of my dungeon through which the light of knowledge streamed in."² One of the first acts of the wealthy Carnegie was to erect a monument to Anderson, which still stands outside a Pittsburgh area library. The bronze plaque reads:

*To Colonel James Anderson, Founder of Free Libraries in Western Pennsylvania. He opened his Library to working boys and upon Saturday afternoons acted as librarian, thus dedicating not only his books but himself to the noble work. This monument is erected in grateful remembrance by Andrew Carnegie, one of the "working boys" to whom were thus opened the precious treasures of knowledge and imagination through which youth may ascend.*³

Carnegie's rags to riches story is well known, including the infamous 1892 Homestead strike which was to haunt him until his death in 1919. In 1889, Carnegie expounded his thoughts on the sharing of riches in a book titled *The Gospel of Wealth*. "The problem of our age is the proper administration of wealth, so that the ties of brotherhood may still bind together the rich and the poor in harmonious relationship."⁴ Writing that "The man who dies thus rich dies disgraced."⁵ He indicated three ways to dispose of wealth: leaving it to heirs (which would not necessarily be spent well), bequeaths for public purposes (which may or not be allocated how one wished), or (as he favored)



Library Athletic Club Wrestling Match, early 1900s. (Carnegie Library of Homestead)

administering the funds during one's life. His main consideration was helping those who could help themselves: "to give those who desire to rise the aids by which they may rise: to assist, but rarely or never do all."⁶

By 1890, he had decided that libraries would be his main field for spending nearly \$300 million, which is valued at over \$5.5 billion in today's dollars (he also went on to establish among many endeavors, the forerunner of pensions for widowers and injured steel workers, and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace). In recalling Colonel Anderson's library, Carnegie stated: "I resolved, if ever wealth came to me, that it should be used to establish free libraries, that other poor boys might receive opportunities similar to those for which we were indebted to that noble man."⁷ Carnegie greatly admired fellow iron-baron Enoch Pratt, who had recently established Baltimore's public library and noted that Pratt required the city to provide 5 percent of the \$1 million gift towards the library's maintenance and development of library branches (this probably was the spark that led to a similar requirement once Carnegie's large scale library program began). Carnegie called for, if possible, art galleries, lecture halls, and museums to be attached to libraries (although he believed that such non-library activities should be supported by those who made use of those facilities, which he knew were attended mainly by the wealthier class with more leisure time). He felt "that one building combining many allied uses implies a degree of economy in their housing and operation, and that the social and cultural needs of the community are so obvious to the librarian, so appealing in their variety, and suggest so many relationships with the library staff and its books, that any "community-minded" librarian must consider seriously the obligation to house and encourage such worthy functions."⁸

By 1901, Carnegie sold his steel empire to J.P. Morgan for \$300 million, becoming the richest man in the world. Carnegie's generosity was not without critics. "Has not Pittsburgh's great coke and steel king given pipe organs to many churches and public libraries to a number of cities, even though it is a common remark in the mills that every act of this kind is followed by a cut in the wages of his workmen to reimburse himself? Some of our millionaires are magnificent in their charities as well as in their wealth."⁹ At a dinner in his honor, a story was told about Carnegie's trip to heaven and that St. Peter sent him back to earth with half a halo, ordering him to raise money for the other half.¹⁰

Other worthy fields for philanthropy in Carnegie's estimation, in priority order, included hospitals (which he noted Vanderbilt's gift to the medical department at Columbia College); public parks (such as the Phipps

Conservatory in Pittsburgh), concert halls (Cincinnati's Springer Hall), and swimming pools (he highlighted Great Britain's experiences with lives saved from shipwrecks by knowing how to swim). On the bottom end of worthy causes were churches, which he thought were necessarily sectarian and therefore of less worth to the entire community, although he did donate many pipe organs to churches.¹¹

Carnegie realized that he had many critics: his road to the top included crushing unions, ruthlessly destroying competitors, forming monopolies and keeping his workers in poverty. As Patricia O'Toole wrote:

As a builder of bridges between social classes, Carnegie accomplished little. His relations with his own workers were paternalistic at best. When he laid a plank across the trench between capitol and labor, neither side trusted it would hold... He could not see the millionaire as anything but a hero, the creator of prosperity for the masses... His view of millionaires would meet not serious challenge from Americans until the Great Depression.¹²

During his last visit to Pittsburgh in 1914, Carnegie attended the 25th anniversary of his first library in Braddock and summed up his experiences of his huge gifts to America:

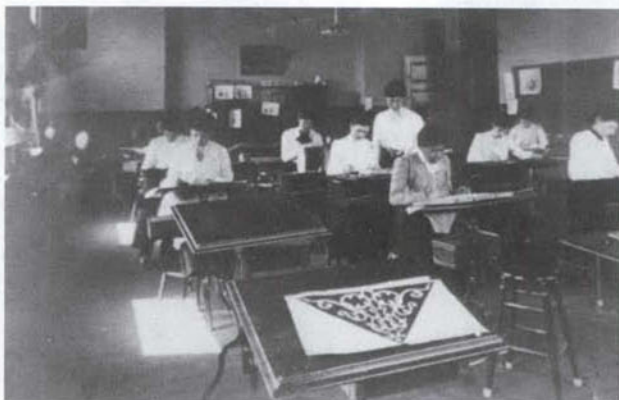
I don't know how everyone thinks about the way I spend money but I'm willing to put this library and institutions against any other form of benevolence; it's the best kind of philanthropy I can think of and I'm willing to stand on that record.... And when I go for a trial for the things done on earth, I think I'll get a verdict of Not Guilty through my efforts to make earth a little better than I found it.¹³

The Retail Period

Carnegie began what he described as his *retail* period of giving to libraries, an era from 1886 to 1898, in which he donated relatively large benefactions for sixteen libraries, and took an active interest in their creation and development (his *wholesale* period followed, in which he had little personal involvement, with stipulations of on-going local revenue to support close to 2,800 libraries). The first Carnegie library in the United States was

given to Braddock, a steel making community in the Pittsburgh area, in 1889 (at a final cost of \$500,000), four years later he added a music hall, swimming pool, gymnasium, baths, barber shop, billiards room, and bowling alleys. During the dedication of the Braddock Library, located close to his massive Edgar Thomson Steel Works, Carnegie made an offer (some say a threatening offer) in response to a letter from the nearby Homestead district for a library such as Braddock's (Homestead residents were still despondent over the world-known labor strike and the resulting defeat of the union movement):

Our works at Homestead are not our works at Edgar Thomson. Our men there are not partners. They are not interested with us.... A few workmen at Homestead make far more than the managers of the works, and the great mass suffer in consequence. When the labor in Homestead Works, like the labor in the Edgar Thomsom, goes hand in hand with us as partners, I trust that able men there will come forward... and establish their Co-operative Society.... This I gladly promise—The first dollar, or the first hundred thousand dollars I receive from Homestead will be devoted to the building of such a Library as this.¹⁴



Office Skills Class, 1900s. (Carnegie Library of Homestead)

The Homestead Library

The idea of erecting community centers in the form of a library, athletic club, and music hall is thought to have emanated from Carnegie's advisors. His

first plan (which he conceived of during the famous labor strike) was to give Homestead a library only. It took nearly ten years to after the Braddock Library to construct a similar one in Homestead. As Carnegie remarked: "I never doubted that finally I should get the money needed to build this institute, but I assure you I had occasion to exercise my full stock in patience."¹⁵ Ground was broken in August 1896 on the very site where the state militia camped out following the famous labor strike, with construction for the 60,000 square foot facility taking nearly two years to complete, at a cost of \$300,000. It fulfilled Carnegie's dream of meeting the workers' needs from *the three fountains* for the mind (the library), the body (the sports facilities) and the spirit (the music hall). In fact, Carnegie wrote to his business partner Henry Clay Frick that perhaps Carnegie would declare his retirement from business at the Homestead Library dedication. "Suppose I announce then, this day I have handed over all my business interests to my dear friends and trusted partners... All of you take the wealth and give me a dignified retirement. You will have my blessing."¹⁶ Still bitter at Carnegie because of the bloodshed during the Homestead labor strike, Frick wanted no part of arranging a fond farewell for Carnegie.

Prior to the building's opening, an examination was held for library clerical positions. Eleven applicants faced the following written questions: name the five great nations of ancient times; describe the ideas of Waterloo, the Crusades, Hastings, the Reformation and the Renaissance; indicate the nationality of Pericles, Alexander the Great, Caesar, Hannibal, Joan of Arc, Machiavelli, Cromwell, John Bright and Henry Clay; describe the founding of Pennsylvania, the causes of the American Revolution, the Monroe Doctrine; explain the "realistic" and "romantic" schools of diction; three reasons for liking your favorite novel; and name the Secretary of the Treasury and his policies.¹⁷

It was announced that the library would commence service following an "Informal Opening" on August 1, 1898:

Knowing that the public is anxious to have access to the magnificent library and grand billiard rooms, bowling alley, etc. as early as possible, the management concluded to throw open these departments... having an Informal Reception... in order that the public may see for itself the magnificent structure that has been set apart by the generous donor, Mr. Andrew Carnegie and nothing will give him more pleasure than to know that it has availed itself of the opportunity and has kept the librarians busy recording the books loaned to many citizens.¹⁸

Several thousand curious residents attended that evening and the first books charged out were *The Electrical Boy* by Towbridge and *Tom Sawyer*. By the end of the first week, 800 books were borrowed (80 percent of them were fiction), with the children's department experiencing crowding every evening. The Music Hall, with seating for 1,100 people, was among the grandest in the area, the billiard and pool rooms with eight tables were heavily used as were the nine tables in the card room, the two bowling alleys, twelve baths, the indoor swimming pool, and the gymnasium complete with an elevated indoor jogging track.

Membership was required to utilize the athletic facilities at a cost per three months of \$1.50 for Carnegie Steel employees, \$2 for others, \$.50 for juveniles and \$1 for women. The maintenance of a membership dues system for *The Club* was to effectively restrict Afro-Americans from making use of any of the recreational facilities. In some of the earliest Library recorded minutes from August 1898, the question was stated by the superintendent of the gymnasium: "The admission of colored people, as members of the Club, should be definitely decided, but I believe policy would indicate their exclusion—the Library of course being free to them." The Library Board indicated that the admission of African-Americans to the Club would not be allowed, which was quietly enforced for another eighty years.¹⁹

The Grand Opening

Carnegie and his wife arranged to visit the Pittsburgh area to formally dedicate the Homestead Library early November 1898, along with fellow industrialists Henry Phipps, Charles M. Schwab (who was to donate a large vocational school used by the Homestead schools for many years) and Henry C. Frick. Thousands marched in a procession for hours, despite a heavy downpour. So taken with the day's events that a teenager, Charles Wakefield Cadman, composed *The Carnegie Library March*. Over 1,500 invitations were issued for the formal dedication and the library's music hall was filled predominantly with the families of steelworkers. In his opening remarks, Schwab said, "I am glad to be able to say tonight that I believe the workmen and all the people of Homestead fully realize the great value of Mr. Carnegie's gift and the spirit which prompted its inception. The measure of your appreciation has been shown by the use you have already made of its privileges."²⁰ A representative of the workers, John Bell (a blacksmith from the mills) said

I am proud tonight that I am a Scotchman, proud that I came from the land which gave birth to one, who... has made it possible not only for the more enlightened and intelligent, but for the common people to elevate and improve themselves. Forty or fifty years ago, there were no free public libraries. Even in my school days, there were no such opportunities as this for the young mind to expand and develop.

Carnegie went onto address the enthusiastic crowd:

This hall is to be the headquarters for the educational, intellectual and philanthropic life of the town.... I consider such an institution... among the most powerful of agencies for the lifting up of labor. The (recreational) club is managed by the workers themselves... and produce the class of men incapable of anything disgraceful, a sober, self respecting, industrious, educated saving workman... It is because this institution will do nothing for any man who does not first help himself that I take such unalloyed pleasure in thinking of its future.²¹

He ended his speech with thoughts of the bloody labor strike that occurred only a few years earlier:

By this meeting, by your welcome, by these smiling faces, all regretful thoughts, all unpleasant memories, are henceforth and forever in the deep bosom of the ocean buried.... This building, which



Athletic Club Newsletter (Carnegie Library of Homestead)

I now dedicate, may it indeed be between capital and labor, an emblem of peace, reconciliation, harmony and union... As it was by the labor of my hands I first earned my living, my title to the name of workingman, must past unchallenged in any part of this world. Take therefore this building as the gift of one workingman to other workingmen.²²

The Early Years

According to the library's yearly reports, the library, music hall, and recreational facilities were heavily used by the families of steelworkers, many of whom lived adjacent to the mills in the poorest, dirtiest part of town, as well as by the families of the wealthier managers, many of whom lived on the hills close to the Library which overlooked the mills (in fact, the magnificent, Carnegie-financed, mill supervisor's mansion stood the next block from the library building). In 1899, the library introduced small circulating collections in the fire hall, at several industrial sites and even one for trolley workers. In addition, since the library was somewhat geographically remote from the center of town and on such a high incline, several stations were established at local businesses such as pharmacies where residents could scan monthly library bulletins and request books to be delivered and returned at these sites.

Many youngsters would often first participate in library swimming lessons followed by a visit to the children's room. One librarian's diary described them as "ignorant and untrained, needing sympathetic guidance and firm discipline, both for their own good and for the sake of the older people whom they are frequently disturbing." The aim of the children's librarian was that "she teaches the children to be clean and mannerly, to treat books with care, and inculcate the sentiment of gratitude which is the parent of many moral qualities."²³ A children's story hour was commenced with tales from *The Odyssey* that proved so successful that additional groups were organized. In fact, the library itself was growing with a book collection of over 10,000 volumes and 3,600 borrowers; "the fact that the library has ceased to be a novelty, and the popular books have lost the charm of cleanliness, is an encouraging sign of the permanent hold which the library has upon the community."²⁴

Dozens of study clubs began forming as a means of self-culturalization and adult education, which also resulted in increased book circulation. *The*

Thursday Night Club, which began in 1902 and lasted for over forty years, was originally limited to twenty-five teachers. Their motto was *All our strength is in our union; all our danger is discord*.²⁵ Some study clubs included those formed around neighborhoods, while others were based on ethnic and religious origins. The Greek Catholic Society and the Lithuanian Book Club (which donated foreign language materials to the library) both had memberships of 100. The Slovak American Club eventually formed its own clubhouse to service its 300 members. Homestead Library Director, W. F. Stevens, commented on the clubs: "The hearty support given all altruistic and educational efforts is not only a compliment to the altruistic agencies, but to the people of the community as well."²⁶

Educational activities included: mechanical drawing and metallurgy classes popular with young mill workers; a common-branches class that covered elementary reading, spelling, writing, math, grammar and geography; and higher-branches (such as algebra, geometry, trigonometry, geography, composition, Latin, and physics, which enrolled thirty-five students). Newly arrived immigrants heavily attended a penmanship course. By 1918, the need for more office workers to help in the war effort resulted in a demand for stenography, typing and bookkeeping while classes for the immigrants and the common branches were discarded. Every year, a program was held to honor the graduates of all the programs as well as students who had an attendance of at least 75 percent.

The Music Hall was busy not only with all kinds of entertainment and lectures, but also with a performance band of fifty members, an orchestra, a string class of over 125 students, a mixed chorus of 100, a male-only chorus, and a 140-member children's chorus. At an annual program to inform the citizenry of the year's activities, the library director boasted, "Come here with all your aches and pains for it is said music will cure everything but the toothache."²⁷

The athletic club provided all sorts of physical activities for its members. In the billiard and poolrooms, including separate facilities for ladies, over 60,000 games were played each year. The game room included shuffleboard, checkers, chess and Parcheesi. The bowling alleys were popular with the workingmen who also frequented the baths over 200,000 times annually. The basketball courts were in continual use by the forty male and female home teams. Classes for both sexes were also provided in wrestling, fencing, and boxing, as well as individual workouts on the running track and weight rooms. The indoor swimming pool proved to be popular with all residents for instructional classes

and recreational use, at all times segregated by sex. Baseball games often drew 500 to 600 fans. The swimming, water polo, baseball, basketball, and football teams quickly gained a regional reputation as champions.

Financial Support and Company Control

A perpetual problem from the day the library opened was the issue of financing library operations and materials. At the time Carnegie began his library philanthropy, localities were securing the legal right to raise revenue through local taxation. Once Carnegie's large scale building program got underway, following these first few libraries to Pittsburgh, it was stipulated that towns had to raise at least 5 percent of the library building cost towards yearly financial support; however this was not to be the case in Homestead. The libraries in Braddock, Homestead and Duquesne initially shared the interest from a Carnegie gift of \$250,000. In 1901, Carnegie provided an endowment of \$1 million to be shared by all three libraries, which furnished each facility with one-third of the \$50,000 interest. The library originally included one professional librarian as well as a superintendent to direct all other activities (eventually the librarian took over all responsibilities). Building repairs were provided gratis by the local steel mill personnel. Utilities and budget overruns were covered by the steel company, which effectively retained control of the library through the board membership.

By 1916, all three libraries appealed to Carnegie for additional funds to keep their facilities operating, for such items as additional stack room, branch extensions, materials, and wages (the steel company and boroughs refused additional support). James Bertram, Carnegie's secretary who was given authority to administer all of Carnegie's library-giving by this time, requested that the Carnegie Corporation study all three of these community facilities. Allen T. Burns, Secretary of the Cleveland Foundation was hired to conduct the study. He had previously conducted a major examination of Cleveland's educational and recreational facilities for the Carnegie Corporation. Entitled *Report on the Carnegie Institutions at Braddock, Duquesne and Homestead, PA*,²⁸ it was particularly critical over the lack of help provided to immigrant populations. Homestead and the other two libraries had 38 percent foreign-born residents and another 35 percent native-born of foreign-born parents, yet no classes for learning English or how to register

to vote were held. Perhaps the cost of 50 cents per month was an inhibiting factor—in nearby Duquesne, instruction was free to workers (paid by the steel company) and had 106 students enrolled. It was noted that the libraries came closest to helping the immigrants through their children's department, by their visits to the schools, playgrounds and settlement houses, which provided story hours and books. More than 75 percent of each library's circulation was attributed to children. Funds for books and shelving space were in much need; in Homestead, parts of the overflowing adult collection were placed in the children's area. Low salaries were also a problem: while the directors received salaries of over \$200 per month, the library assistants received between \$30 to \$75 per month, the children's librarians received \$60 per month and the catalogers from \$48 to \$65 per month (all salaries were paid by the steel company).

Mostly second-generation youths frequented the athletic club for recreation and socializing. Members complained about turnover of instructors and the lack of female teachers. The 1,500 club members paid approximately 75% of the operating costs, with light, fuel and water furnished by the steel company and borough.

Burns also noted the company's control of the community. "The fundamental lack in these communities is independence of action, initiative in meeting public needs... The need of applying this principle in these steel towns is evidenced by a statement of one of the plant superintendents that community spirit is dead and the declaration of a librarian that the town has been spoiled by philanthropy."²⁹

Burns suggested that needed additional funds could be sought from the Carnegie Corporation, the Carnegie Steel Company and the local governments. The library trustees said that they asked for help only from the Carnegie Corporation since they believed that it was Mr. Carnegie's intention that no money but his should go into these facilities. The municipalities were not permitted to have board representation (which was changed some years later) and thus were unlikely to provide some tax support. In noting that one librarian said that the localities were spoiled by philanthropy, it was suggested that the Carnegie Corporation match whatever the communities provided from tax revenue.

Shortly thereafter, the Carnegie Corporation decided to provide an additional endowment of up to \$500,000 if the Carnegie U.S. Steel Company matched the offer and hoped the localities would also contribute. The steel company (the area's largest taxpayer) refused, stating that they already

supported many expensive welfare activities. The endowment offer was increased to \$2 million, but was retracted in 1921 with the view that the necessary aid should come from agencies other than the Carnegie Corporation (Andrew Carnegie had died in 1919). In 1924, over James Bertram's objections, the Corporation gave the libraries \$82,500 for repair work, but noted that their role in future funding was over. This did not deter another request in 1928 from the president of Carnegie Steel. He noted that the original endowment's buying power had decreased 60 percent since the fund was established and was now inadequate to meet the growing populations needs; he was turned down.

Throughout much of its history, steel dominated areas like Munhall, Homestead and Braddock were under the control of the local steel mill management. As Miner pointed out, the first meeting of the Munhall Council was held at the Carnegie Land Company. The borough used company-supplied electricity and building supplies. The Coal and Iron Police, who brutally enforced the no-union mill policy, maintained law and order in the community as well. "Carnegie Steel continued to dominate civic life in Munhall for the first two decades of the twentieth century... Between 1898 and 1920, the lines between the interests of the company and the town became mired and more blurred. The company seems to be as concerned with shaping the lives of the workers as it was with making and shaping steel... Indeed, working people viewed Carnegie's philanthropies in the way they viewed most forms of welfare capitalism, i.e. as company public relations and as attempts to appease and distract them."³⁰



Carnegie Library of Homestead (Photo by the author)

The Depression Years

The Homestead area was not exempt from the effects of the 1930's economic down slide. With more people out of work and those employed finding their overtime hours cut, there evolved an interest in education. The idea of supplementary education was first developed at a local church in 1932 with six students. More space was soon required and classes shifted to the Library. Students were composed of high school graduates as well as those who failed to finish schooling (referred to as *semi-graduates*). The teachers, all college graduates, volunteered their services leading the study of 500 eager pupils. The studies included shorthand, trigonometry, economics, business math, physics, Spanish, drama, English, childcare, history, public speaking, business law, and "an appropriate and inspirational address each week given to the entire school in the Music Hall."³¹ There was no formal prescribed course of study since no thought was given to the need of granting diplomas. The Library usually underwrote costs of the textbooks from funds raised by plays and dances. One-third of the students were young women and the remaining men from eighteen to twenty-five. When added to the 500 students in the nearby Schwab Night School (for industrial trades), as well as those in various community study clubs estimated at 1,400 participants, that total of 2,400 students was larger than many small colleges. The local steel mills became increasingly involved in welfare activities, including a pension fund was available; stock in the company could be purchased at reduced prices; the Carnegie Land Company rented homes to employees at subsidized rates; coal for heating homes was sold at cost; free hospital services, visiting nurses and social workers were provided; a day nursery was established while mothers worked away from home; and many were given plots for gardens. The welfare activities were headquartered in the Library. It also operated four playgrounds, folk dances and parties for youngsters, athletic contests in the elementary schools, and conducted a kindergarten, mothers' circle, as well as boys' and girls' clubs.³²

By this time, organized water sports produced successful results. Two local women, Susan Laird and Josephine McKim both won medals in the 1928 Olympic Games. At the Los Angeles 1932 Games, Lenore Kight won a medal in swimming and went on to win again in the 1936 Berlin Games. The men's swim team won the national outdoors senior championship in the 1933 competition at Coney Island. The men's water polo team won second place in the 1936 National Amateur Championships in New York, NY. They went on to win other national meets, as did the ladies' teams.

Other youths who started in the Library's athletic club went on to gain fame in boxing, baseball, wrestling and basketball. Through athletics and the Library's professional coaching staff, many residents obtained much needed college scholarships.³³

The 1938 Reorganization Proposal

During the very depths of the Great Depression, Malcolm McConnell of the Homestead Steel Company, requested a formal study of the Library by the Federation of Social Agencies of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. The report, *Proposal to the Carnegie Library Foundation* by W. Langhorne Leitch, issued in late 1938, was quite explicit in its evaluation of the Library's mission, its operation and the quality of the employees. While no great changes occurred as a result, it nonetheless provided an in-depth and most disturbing description of a facility that was not well managed or utilized to its fullest extent.

Straightforward comments and recommendations were made in six areas. In organization and administration, it was found that the ten member Board of Directors always had the Chair filled by the superintendent of the local mills. There was a great deal of confusion over the purposes of the Board, as well as little reaction of what role the Library met in meeting community needs, nor was there any accounting to the community of the work accomplished by the various branches of the Library. There was no organized budget plan. Staff organization was not clearly defined. "Library services are not publicized and interpreted sufficiently with the result that there has been a loss in understanding, confidence, and support on the part of the community."³⁴ It was recommended the Board be enlarged to include community leaders, the purposes of the Library be revised to better meet the area's needs, that staff members participate in programming and policy decisions, a yearly budget plan be prepared, and clear organizational responsibilities of each employee be developed.

While the building was in good repair, its location was far removed from the greatest needs in Homestead. Subsequent, renovations were not well planned and it was suggested that future remodeling be supervised by an architect.

The finance section indicated that revenue from the endowment remained steady and that demands for additional funds be justified on the basis of

expanded programs. Revenue from the Music Hall, Library, and Athletic Club were steadily declining, expenditures fluctuated widely over the years, and membership in the Club as well as Music Hall attendance were seriously low, "that the immediate problem facing the Carnegie Library is not one of financing but of proper management."³⁵

It was proposed that dues be reviewed and a more aggressive outreach plan be implemented to secure new members. Programs were found to be inadequate. Sports were planned more for skilled athletes than for persons of average ability. It was recommended that coed sports be provided and that non-athletic activities such as hobby clubs, discussion groups, dancing, crafts, etc. be developed to appeal to a wider audience, especially with adults.

It was suggested that there be a complete change of personnel starting with a new Director (who had been serving the Library for nearly forty years), an experienced athletic supervisor, a director of educational and special activities and a game room manager. There were no immediate changes made and the entire Library continued to function as usual, until an administrative change was made following the Director's death in 1942. The new librarian, Catherine Butler, was given full responsibility of all activities under the title of Superintendent. Budgets were established, fund raising support was initiated, and more outreach was implemented.

Friends of the Library

Previous to 1923, children in Homestead received professionally supervised services along with a juvenile collection of 18,400 books. Over 7,00 of those books were for school supplementary reading, a highly successful program that was gradually being discontinued and ended by 1933. In 1923, for the first time, the Children's Room (a gift from Carnegie) was operated without a professional children's librarian. The number of children's books decreased from 18,400 in 1924 to 2,800 in 1938, but the demand remained high. No children's books were purchased with Library funds since 1932, and donations for such materials stopped entirely by 1937. There were reference books that were ten to eighteen years old and much of the circulating collection was in terrible condition.³⁶ The juvenile bookshelves were so bare that every other row of book shelving was covered over with large sheets of brown wrapping paper illustrated with crayon drawings.

In 1929, a gift of \$100 for the children's collection was received from a local nursery school that was closing. In 1933, a community wide appeal for gift books fell on deaf ears. A committee that included Reverend Callahan, who gave Sunday sermons about the children's reading needs, initiated another appeal in 1937.

Things seemed bleak until an offer was made in 1938 to bring a series of four plays to the Homestead Library. Half the profits would go to the Pittsburgh Children's Theater and other half to a new group, The Friends of the Library, which did not formally organize for another three years. By 1941, the plays were scheduled on Friday afternoons and students were excused early from school to attend. The plays became so popular that two additional performances were provided. Between 1941 and 1961, the \$1.25 season ticket was increased only once to cover an amusement tax. After 1950, other companies were invited to present ballet, marionette and magic shows. During the local Halloween Parade, the Library Friends made a float that displayed an open bookcase with very few books, with children looking for books; some even had magnifying glasses. A banner read "We want books for our library, help us to get them." Local civic and professional groups raised whatever they could for the children's collection.

Eventually, the Friends refurbished the Children's Room, established a young adult collection and section for reading aloud books. They also helped to coordinate *President's Night* where community service clubs, such as Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, Optimists, etc., met in the Library for dinner during Children's Book Week. Many of the friends donated gifts of money, books,



Reference and Reading Room, early 1900s. (Carnegie Library of Homestead)

and equipment. A traveling exhibit on their activities was arranged for national and regional library conferences from 1947 to 1951.

The group continues to the present, helping in a time of very limited public revenue. Annual donations now average \$1,500 (and totaling over \$75,000 since their inception) from the plays, magic shows, card parties and flea markets.

The 1958 Proposal

As a result of a major fire in 1944 to their administrative offices, the U.S. Steel Company occupied space in several recreational areas of the Library, leaving only the bowling alleys and swimming pools open. The activities in the gymnasium, card rooms and billiard halls were closed. A local sports reporter wrote:

The necessity of occupying the library after the destruction of the general office by fire was accepted by most everyone. But, the consensus of opinion of thousands of athletes who were "raised" on the library floor is that the time is ripe for the return of the building to the people to alleviate an acute situation. Basketball six days a week, afternoon and evening on the library floor is still a fond recollection throughout the district and could again be a reality if the proper people got together and worked out the solution.³⁷

By 1958, the steel company was ready to relocate to a new building and would provide \$50,000 for library renovations. Local residents were eager to resume many of the Club's activities, although the Library faced a major loss of rental revenue the steel company provided.

Earlier that same year, at the request of the Library's Board of Managers, a report was prepared by the Health and Welfare Federation of Allegheny County, to study the Library's role in meeting the recreational and informal educational needs of the community. In their report, *The Carnegie Library of Homestead: A Report to the Board of Managers*, it stated "fifty years ago such an institution undoubtedly represented the last word in community centers and met a need unmet in any other way. However, times have changed. Today the institution finds itself faced with several realities."³⁸ It noted that the local area had lost population and that other institutions, such as schools, churches and social agencies, had begun to provide many recreational activities. It also

raised the issues having both a library and recreational center under the same administration, the relatively low wages of the staff, the Steel Company's desire to free itself of the financial burden, and the trend of meeting recreational needs through United Way types of contributions in addition to tax support. The building was in good condition and a new facility was out of the question. The report also foresaw the transfer of control to the community. It urged that renovations be financed through foundation grants, and that operating costs be covered by public revenue and the endowment.

It was pointed out that the Club membership of 1,600 (two-thirds of whom were boys and girls) was still open only to whites since sponsorship of a member in good standing was needed to join. The report strongly advised of a proactive outreach program towards minorities if integration was to be successful. Much of the Afro-Americans' recreational needs were provided at the Homestead Community Center, an agency of the Methodist Church Union and financed through fees and United Way contributions. By this time, there were no special requirements upon employment in the mills for membership, and steel employees and non-employees were in equal numbers, nor was there any distinction in dues. Most members viewed the Club as a private swimming or bowling club.

It was suggested that a renovation program with priorities in this order: the swimming pool, gymnasium, general activity room, banquet room and kitchen, bowling alleys, meeting rooms, and music hall. It also recommended an order of priorities among various age groups: teens, out-of-school youth, young couples, elementary school children, the aged, and adults in general, and that all activities be on a coed basis. They advised the Board to hire a general manager to supervise the entire operation, except for the Library.

Foundation grants were proposed as the focus for capital improvements. Operating expenses should be covered through user fees, tenant rentals, municipal subsidies, contributions and, for the first three years, a subsidy by the local steel company.

To insure that the library portion of the study received competent attention, Walter T. Brahm, of the Ohio State Library, was retained as a professional consultant. Brahm found that although library services were ostensibly managed by a local board responsible to the parent corporation *Carnegie Libraries of Braddock, Homestead and Duquesne* (often referred to as *The City Board*), this was in effect the U.S. Steel Corporation since key members of all boards were steel company executives. He noted that:

Private industry should not be managing a public service. No matter how public spirited or well intentioned its leadership may be, the interests of the company have priority and rightly so. What is in the best interest of a particular service is not always in the best interest of a particular industry. Likewise, a public service has no right to expect that its support shall be provided by one industry. Responsibility for a needed or desirable public service belongs to every industry, to every citizen. The representative of all groups is government, in this case local government.³⁹

The six library employees were doing an excellent job despite their low pay and poor training, and by accepted standards the 40,000-volume collection should have been 100,000. The Library was also poorly financed; national standards suggested a total budget of \$150,000; Homestead's was only \$33,000.

There were a number of conditional recommendations if U.S. Steel were to remain in control. First, the Library Board should meet regularly and be a policy making group; often the mill managers approved or rejected items without any discussion or explanation. Second, the Book Committee should be discontinued; not only was this an antiquated philosophy, but it took much longer for books to get on the shelves. Next, if the Library were to stay in its present location, that extensive remodeling was suggested. Finally, as long as both Library and Club activities were housed in the same building, each should have its own professional manager.

As a result of this study, the governing boards unanimously agreed that: (1) it did not appear possible to dispose of the libraries either by transfer to another organization or by closing; (2) it was in the best interests of community relations that the facilities be maintained in good condition; (3) the chairs of each local library board develop a program that would provide for the minimum basis on which the libraries and activities could be maintained to do a creditable job; and (4) the U.S. Steel Corporation would determine whether or not the necessary additional funding would be forthcoming on a continuing basis.

Within a few years, Duquesne's building would be leveled into a parking lot and Braddock's temporarily closed, vandalized and reopened with severely limited services; only Homestead was to continue its vast array of activities and resources.

Declining Communities

By the early 1980's, the entire Pittsburgh region was experiencing a major population decrease as mill workers migrated to other areas due to the rapid decline of the steel industry. The massive steel works in Homestead covered over four miles along the Monongahela River, was one-half-mile wide, and employed 7,200 in 1978 (down from the 15,000 workers who labored there during World War II). In 1982 six regional plants were consolidated and employment dipped between 2,000 and 2,800. By 1983, almost 5,000 workers were unemployed. One-industry towns such as Homestead found their local tax base quickly eroding, unemployment rolls increasing and the housing stock deteriorating; the steel workers that were leaving usually earned much higher salaries than those who remained. A significantly larger portion of those below the poverty levels were in the mill towns. By 1988, a total close down of the mills devastated whatever hope there was for a quick upturn in the local economy.⁴⁰ Homestead could not meet the local payroll and was declared "distressed" by Pennsylvania which took control over the municipal budget and provided a special subsidy. "The bombed-out looks of boarded-up downtowns and the abandoned houses of residential areas came to represent the death of the Mon Valley... The sight of a stately Carnegie public library building crying out for repainting and repointing of the bricks epitomized the tragedy that hit these communities."⁴¹

Reorganization and Hope

Notwithstanding rising costs, the Homestead Library persevered thanks to the financial support of U.S. Steel. However, the building's roof required constant attention that many local contractors refused to work on because of its steep slate surface, the boilers did not provide adequate heat and the pool's water was difficult to warm. The budget included the endowment and grew to only \$1,339,000 (Homestead was granted Braddock's and Duquesne's share when they closed), providing an income of \$167,000 from ultra-conservative investments. The shortfall between income and expenses totaled \$87,000 in 1987, which was formerly covered by U.S. Steel. Along with some state and regional revenue, Club membership dues provided \$16,000. The swimming pool's use reflected the aged population who filled it on weekdays along with lunch hour visits by working people. The once

popular swimming lessons were ceased due to futile attempts to obtain certified lifeguards at a low pay scale. Bowling alley use was down to one league as it became difficult to recruit youngsters as pinsetters (the alleys were recently removed due to termite damage). The Music Hall continued to have magnificent acoustics, but stage lighting was poor. Many of the meeting rooms remained vacant since numerous local professional and social groups started to disband as members grew older, relocated or feared leaving their homes due to increased crime. Reference activity decreased, despite outreach efforts to nearby Duquesne residents whose similar Carnegie library was now just a memory.

By late 1987, the USX Foundation, a subsidiary of U.S. Steel, announced that it would be officially withdrawing management of the library "because we are not in the library business. We have been part-time managers and we believe the facility would generate more community involvement through direct management by a citizens committee."⁴² A transition team was organized. Tempers flared at organizational meetings over U.S. Steel's departure from the community. Eventually, the team examined other library operations, started work on being designated an historic landmark, conducted a complete building inspection and had a professional examination of their finances. By the deadline of June 1988, a twelve-member citizens group, which included an accountant, retired engineer, realtor, funeral director, social worker, dentist and pastor assumed control, ending an eighty-seven year guardianship by the steel giant.

The Library and Club now have income from several major sources: interest on the endowment which is managed by professionals, income from state library aid, revenue from a regional asset sales tax to assist cultural institutions, and foundation support. Several Board members have been very successful in obtaining restoration and library services grants. In 1990, an architectural firm created a five-year plan of facility improvements. The first stage, completed at a cost of \$1.2 million, included restoring the outside of the building to its original appearance, installing handicapped ramps, landscaping, upgraded electrical service, a computer center, and many renovations in the Music Hall. Other planned projects have been successfully completed in time for a yearlong centennial celebration in 1998. No loans were taken; instead the goal was to spend, as money was available. Smaller projects were implemented to permit local contractors a chance at bidding.

The Carnegie Library of Homestead is now entering a milestone: a second century of service recently kicked off by the governor of Pennsylvania.

Countless children still learn to swim in the pool, seniors exercise in the gymnasium, teens utilize the weight room, the Music Hall hosts numerous musical and educational events, and the library is busy with patrons searching the Internet as well as still studying the history of their community. The entire community was host to an international conference on the Homestead Strike. A developer is creating a large business and tourist attraction along the waterfront that once housed the massive steel works.

In seeking foundation support for a building project, a board member very well summed up the role of the Library:

The Carnegie Library Complex was a very important part of our lives as it is in the lives of new residents. It not only is used as a research and education center, it is a place where people can go to meet, exercise and enjoy cultural events. It fits as well into our lives, nor, as it has for five generations.⁴³

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