



NATIONAL REGISTER *of* HISTORIC PLACES

Carnegie Library



THE
CARNEGIE
LIBRARY
1913



IN LATE 1842, THE FIRST PUBLIC LIBRARY IN CLACKAMAS COUNTY was established in Willamette Falls, or as we know it, Oregon City. The library was called the “Multnomah Circulating Library” and was stocked with 300 volumes. This first library was a subscription library; members were charged a \$5.00 a share.

The first librarian was William H. Gray and it is likely that the books were kept at the City Hotel, just south of the mint which produced five and ten dollar tokens known as “Beaver Money”. The Multnomah Circulating Library was incorporated on August 19, 1845, the second corporation to form under the Oregon Provisional Government.

But this effort did not stick. Between the 1850’s and the beginning of the 20th century, many groups embarked on creating reading rooms and library associations for the Oregon City community. Many of these efforts were successful for a time, including the Free Reading Room which was opened on October 14, 1892 and housed in a one-story building rented from George Harding on South Main Street, next to the Livery Stable. However, by the end of the century, the reading room had become a ‘hobo resort’, containing more dust than books.

In 1906 another strong effort was launched to establish a public library in Oregon City. This attempt seemed to have enough drive to realize it’s dream, but having established that the city should manage the library, the city council decided to lay the matter aside. No real progress was made until 1909 when a group of citizens created the “Oregon City Library Association”. Money to support a reading room was raised from membership dues which were set at \$12 per year, payable monthly. In addition, the managers of the Willamette and Crown Mills, recognizing the value of a library to their workers, each agreed to provide gener-

ous monthly support. Mrs. Edith Truscott of Jennings Lodge was selected to the position of ‘house attendant’. The Reading Room opened on December 13, 1909 to the music of the Concert Band with 60 people in attendance. The location on the third floor of the Masonic Temple was made even more accessible by the modern elevator erected in this 1907 building. By 1910, city residents had agreed to support the public library with a special library tax. These events mark the foundations of the public library in Oregon City.

BY 1911, SEVERAL LIBRARIES IN OREGON HAD BEEN BUILT using



Interior photo of Carnegie Library

HISTORIC LANDMARKS *in* OREGON CITY

funds from steel king, Andrew Carnegie, and the ‘Carnegie Formula’, which stipulated that the city must provide a site and annual funds in the amount of at least 10% of the cost of the building. Oregon City submitted an application for a sum of \$12,500, the estimated cost of the building plus furniture. The lot at 7th and John Adams, set aside by Dr. John McLoughlin as a public space, was selected as the site of the new library. The application was approved on the condition that Mr. Carnegie authorize final building plans.

In 1912 work began on the new Carnegie Library in the Seventh Street Park using a design by E. E. McClaran of Portland, which was approved by Mr. Carnegie. Robert Shelley of Portland was retained as the builder. After many changes to the plans and slowdowns which caused the need for the library to temporarily relocate to the basement of the Masonic Building, the building was finally completed. On June 21, 1913, the library was officially opened for business. For the event, fine music was provided by Mrs. DesLarzes, a piano solo was played by Miss Grace, and singing was provided by Oscar Woodfin. Speakers included Joseph E. Hedges, President of the Library Board, Miss Marvin, State Librarian from Salem, and B. T. McBain.

Over the years, the library underwent several renovations. In 1963 the city installed a large, modern addition on the primary façade, enclosing a new entrance with stairs to the basement. But in 2002, a restoration removed the incompatible addition, removed the added stair and the original entry was restored to its original design. The restoration also exposed and restored existing materials, changed interior configurations to improve traffic flow between the main floor and the basement, and updated systems including public bathrooms. They enlarged the basement entry on the south elevation to accommodate two swinging doors. This alteration, along with a new concrete ramp, helped the building meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. This restoration also included shifting the interior stairs. The original stairs were oriented east to west and they are now oriented north to south. Though this change slightly alters historic traffic patterns, the stair is located in the same portion of the building and retains its historic use. With restored porch, columns, and pathways, the building once again expressed integrity of design, materials, workmanship, site, location, feeling and association.

The Carnegie facility served as the city library until 1995, long after the Library had outgrown it. After that, several non-profit businesses collaborated to operate in the building; these included a coffee shop, a children’s museum, and an art gallery. The library moved into a leased facility in a former hardware store in Danielson’s Hilltop Mall until 2010, when the building housing it was sold to make way for a Safeway grocery store. A canvassing of the Oregon City area showed that the most advantageous temporary location for the library



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was the original Carnegie Library. The library reopened in the Carnegie building in June of 2011, 98 years from the date of its original opening.

The population of Oregon City is growing rapidly. In November 2008, voters of a proposed Clackamas County Library District approved the District and agreed to pay for library services in the District, an area including almost the entire county. This funding provides stable operating funds for the libraries of Clackamas County, including Oregon City Public Library. With funding in place, the library continued its efforts to obtain a site and capital funds to provide the city with a library that will serve the growing population of the Oregon City area.

The library was decades overdue for an expanded space and over the next several months staff investigated over 30 sites all over Oregon City. However, because of zoning, size, availability, location and other factors, none of them was as good a fit for the future library as the present site of the Carnegie building. The Library Board recommended that the best site for a new library was at the site of the Carnegie Building and Carnegie Park. On June 19, 2013, the same night when Mayor Doug Neeley read the proclamation celebrating the Carnegie Building's 100th anniversary, the City Commission designated this site as the home of the new, expanded library. Now that bonds for capital improvements have been approved and funding is in place, all efforts are focused on steps to add a 15,000 sq ft addition to the original Carnegie building. The addition will be connected to the back of the existing building, retaining the marvelous entry and iconic façade of the original Carnegie. Nestling in the slope behind the Carnegie, the addition's two stories will house space for a large community



room, larger collections for all age groups, and study and conference rooms while further improving ADA access through new entries. Retaining this building as a library and meeting current community needs truly honors the intention of Andrew Carnegie's grant to Oregon City.



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