

380 WILLIAM AVENUE – CARNEGIE LIBRARY (WILLIAM AVENUE BRANCH)
S. Hooper, 1903-05 Hooper and Walker, 1908-11



The City of Winnipeg opened its first public library building in 1905 due to the initiative of provincial librarian J.P. Robertson. In 1901, he wrote to American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie requesting that the city be given a grant similar to that provided to Ottawa for the construction of a library. He argued convincingly for Carnegie to furnish \$75,000 if Winnipeg would pledge itself to maintain a free public library at a yearly cost of no less than \$7,500 and obtain a suitable site.

Previous to this, the library collection had been housed in the City Hall and was managed by a joint committee made up of the Manitoba Historical Society and City Council. Inadequate facilities and constant funding shortages prompted the provincial librarian to ask for outside help.

Scottish-born, Andrew Carnegie, in a typical rags-to-riches story, worked in factories and on the railroad as a youth, but went on to establish a steel firm in Pittsburgh, that became the major

source of his wealth. Committed to the philosophy that the growth of knowledge would make a better world, he provided endowments for numerous libraries, colleges, research grants, etc., that totaled \$333 million. He established 2,500 libraries throughout the English-speaking world, among which 125 were built in Canada, three of which are in Winnipeg.

With the assurance of the grant from Carnegie, the City purchased ten lots on the corner of William Avenue and Ellen Street for \$12,000, in a residential district away from the city's commercial area. The City Clerk announced the architectural competition in late 1902 and stipulated that the cost of the building, including architect's fees and all permanent fittings, was fixed at \$75,000. The library was also to be faced in native stone. Prizes of \$300, \$200 and \$100 would be awarded, but was to be deducted from the winning architect's commission. Eight drawings were submitted under *nom de plumes*. H.S. Griffith's plan won first prize, S. Hooper's second, and J. Chisholm's came third. Local contractors refused to submit bids for the first two prize-winning plans, arguing that they could not build the structures under the stipulated costs. Although Chisholm's design could be built for \$71,000, the library committee rejected his work and asked the first two prizewinners to revise and resubmit their work. Contractors Smith and Sharpe accepted Hooper's revised drawing as within the budget allowed.

Samuel Hooper had studied architecture in England and had been employed as Inspector of Civic Works by the City of Winnipeg but resigned in 1895 to establish his own private practice. In 1907 he was appointed as Manitoba's first Provincial Architect, a position he held until his death in 1911.

Built with exterior details that symbolize civic grandeur, the Neo-classical style of the building followed the accepted idiom for public structures in central Canada. Hooper designed a square box with simplified classical details arranged in a symmetrical manner. Above the main entrance are carved the words "Free to All," while stone cartouches on the piers that flank the entrance proclaim "History and Literature" and "Arts and Science." A grandiose entrance is achieved by placing a projecting temple façade with paired columns and Ionic capitals on the second storey. Rusticated stone is used on the lower level while the upper floors are of smooth grey limestone. *The Manitoba Free Press* reported that the solid and permanent appearance of

the stone “has driven the fear out of the recesses of our souls that Winnipeg was after all an evanescent boomtown.” That the stone was a veneer, and the building beneath brick like most others, was of little concern to the local citizens.

Plain rectangular windows on the main floor are juxtaposed with round-headed windows on the second floor that have projecting frames resting on sills with brackets. Delicate pilasters give a bay-by-bay division, while a full entablature and parapet that extends around the sides of the building ties the temple façade into the roofline.

The new library became so popular that three years after its completion, the architectural firm of Hooper and Walker was asked to draw up plans for a two-storey addition, also financed by Carnegie. Completed in 1911, the expansion was located at the rear of the building and was designed in complete sympathy to the older section.

In 1977, this library was closed when the new Centennial Library opened, but the following year it was renovated as a Branch Library and now houses the City of Winnipeg archives.