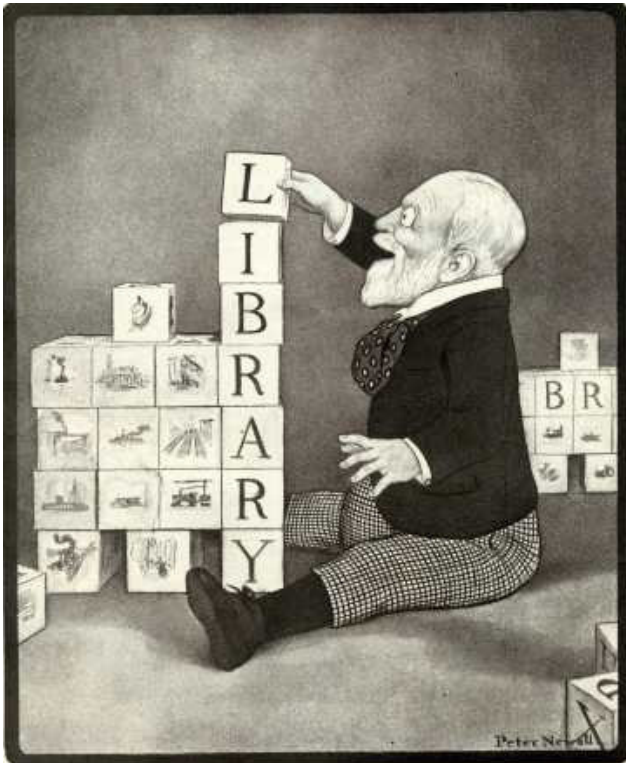


# Carnegie Libraries: An Overview



Cartoon from Harper's Weekly, April 11, 1903

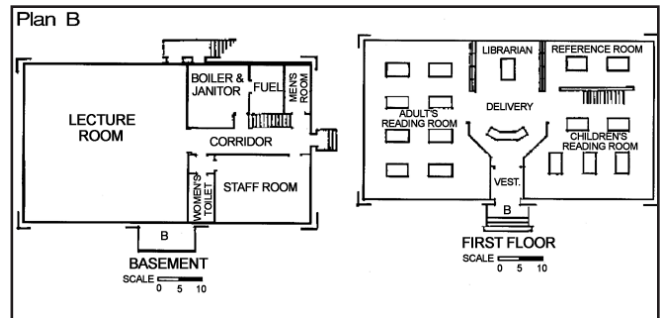
**T**HE STEEL MAGNATE Andrew Carnegie, sometimes called the “patron saint of libraries,” gave more than \$56 million between 1881 and the early 1920s — more than \$1 billion in today's dollars — for the construction of public libraries throughout the English-speaking world. In the United States alone, he was responsible for the building of 1,689 libraries at a cost of \$41.2 million. The Edgartown Free Public Library was one of them, built with a 1903 grant to the town of \$4,000.

Between 1901 and 1917, 43 public libraries were built in Massachusetts with grants totalling \$1,137,500 from the Carnegie Foundation. Of all the Carnegie grants for Massachusetts library projects, the gift to Edgartown was the smallest. One reason for this may have been that the grants came with strings attached: Recipient towns had to promise to spend 10% of the grant amount, each year, on operation of their new libraries. Before Edgartown's Carnegie library building opened, the library budget was \$129. After construction, it jumped to \$400, as promised — and stayed there for more than a decade.

Some of the best available information on Carnegie

libraries in New England is located on a site called, appropriately enough, [necarnegies.com](http://necarnegies.com). This site lists 85 Carnegie libraries in New England, 68 of which (Edgartown's included) are still in use as libraries. Of the remainder, 11 are in other uses (church, business, museum, town hall annex, private residence, school), four are vacant and three are no longer standing.

In the earlier years of the Carnegie library program, communities receiving grants were free to build pretty much whatever sort of library buildings they wanted. But in 1908, after finding many of the new libraries impractical, the foundation began exercising more control over the designs. Soon every town receiving a grant also received a printed set of minimum standards for space and six model floor plans. Interestingly, the foundation's model plans from 1916 included significant space for public programs — something the Edgartown Library lacks to this day.



*Andrew Carnegie wrote in his 1920 autobiography: “It was from my own early experience that I decided there was no use to which money could be applied so productive of good to boys and girls who have good within them and ability and ambition to develop it, as the founding of a public library in a community.”*