



CALIFORNIA Office of HISTORIC PRESERVATION NEWSLETTER

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California's Carnegie Libraries

The Office of Historic Preservation has launched a special project designed to identify, register, and protect California's remaining Carnegie Library buildings, which are among the state's most interesting and architecturally valuable structures. The Office has contracted with Sonoma State University Foundation to survey the structures and prepare National Register nominations for them. The libraries will be nominated as a group under the multiple property format, and a number of libraries will be nominated as individual properties. It is hoped that this project will help to bring about the favorable recognition the libraries deserve.

If your community has a Carnegie Library you would like to see listed in the National Register of Historic Places, please send a brief description and photo to the office, together with your name, address and phone number so that researcher Lucy Kortum may contact you for further information. Lucy is

presently pursuing her master's degree in history with Professor Dennis Harris of SSU. The subject of her thesis is the history of California's libraries.

At the end of the nineteenth century, California joined the movement to establish separate library buildings to house community book collections. By then, libraries had come to be viewed as a panacea for such social problems as drunkenness and prostitution. Women's clubs and groups like the YMCA were instrumental in promoting libraries for the benefit of the community.

After the turn of the century, Andrew Carnegie emerged as the major benefactor of public libraries in America and abroad. Carnegie devoted the years following his retirement at age 66 to philanthropy, which included library grants to local communities.

As a state, California was fortunate to receive the second largest number of libraries in the United States under the Carnegie program. In 1899, San Diego

received the first California grant, followed by Oakland and Alameda the same year. In all, 142 Carnegie libraries were built in 122 different California communities.

Prior to the Carnegie era, book collections were commonly housed in



Healdsburg Carnegie Library

odd corners of buildings constructed for other purposes. The Carnegie libraries were often the first and the only libraries in town for many years, and among the finest buildings in their communities.

In the mid-twentieth century, ever-growing book collections required expanded and updated facilities, beyond the capability of the Carnegie libraries, which were beginning to seem outmoded. By 1967, 37 had been demolished and others were threatened. Some survived through adaptive re-use; many became museums. A number have received OHP state bond act funds for rehabilitation, fitting them for a new life as non-library buildings. If others are to be saved, it is important to identify them and to raise public awareness of their significance through National Register listing.

The Carnegie Library project is a major effort at preservation planning for the OHP. Spending federal and state dollars in the most effective way requires a fuller understanding of the historic contexts of our remaining architectural resources. Armed with this knowledge, the OHP will be better prepared to channel local, state, and federal funding where it can best preserve our most valuable historic properties. □



Anaheim Carnegie Library