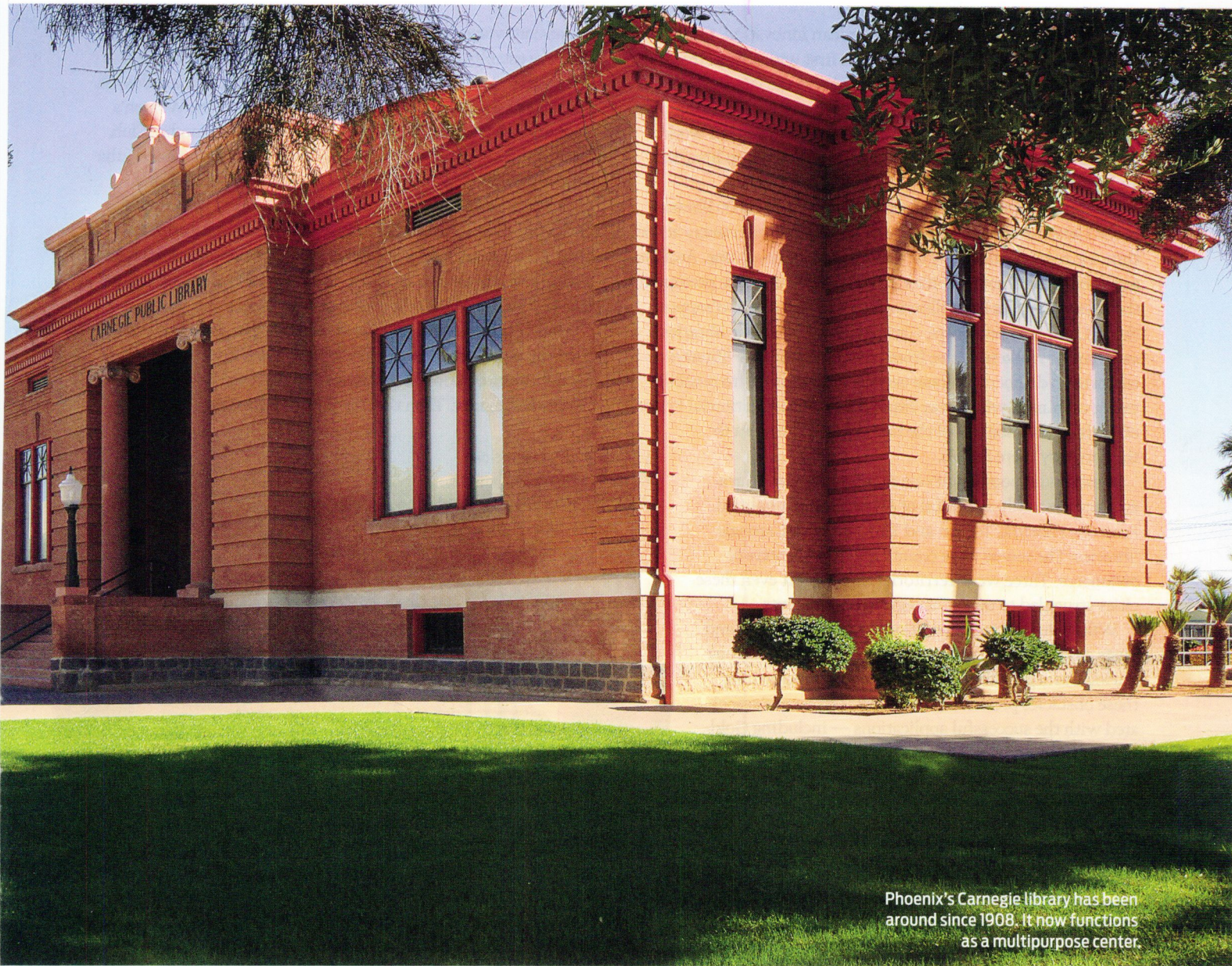




CHECK THIS OUT

Between 1886 and 1919, Andrew Carnegie funded nearly 1,700 libraries in the United States, including four in Arizona. At the time, the buildings stood as proof that the dusty frontier towns where they were located had achieved stability, prosperity and class. Today, however, only the library in Yuma is still checking out books. **By Kathy Montgomery** Photographs by Craig Smith



Phoenix's Carnegie library has been around since 1908. It now functions as a multipurpose center.

IN 1901, the *Arizona Daily Star* announced the triumphal opening of a building of great consequence — the culmination of decades of work on the part of Tucson's leading citizens.

“The occasion should call out a large assemblage of people,” the paper predicted, “as the event will be one which will mark an important epoch in the growth of Tucson from a small hamlet to what promises to be a city of large importance ... a milestone in the history of the development and growth of the intelligence of the citizens of Tucson and the material progress of the city.”

It wasn't the university, the railroad or the new City Hall. Rather, the event marked the opening of the city's Carnegie library, the first freestanding public library to open in Tucson and likely in all of Territorial Arizona.

Today, public libraries are common even in small communities, so it's hard to imagine the achievement they represented in Arizona's early days. Back then, libraries stood as symbols of sophistication, proof that dusty frontier towns had achieved stability, prosperity and class. Over the next two decades, three other Arizona cities would celebrate this milestone with the help of businessman and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie.

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY is an American innovation. Clergyman Thomas Bray established the first widespread free lending libraries in the American colonies in the late 1600s. Yet it wasn't until 1833 that residents of Peterborough, New Hampshire, founded the first tax-supported free library in the world. In those days, most patrons paid dues to subscription libraries and reading rooms.

Between 1886 and 1919, Carnegie funded nearly 1,700 libraries in the United States, almost half the libraries in the country at the time. He required that they be free and open to everyone. And his requirement that communities fund their maintenance prompted the passage of state laws allowing cities to levy taxes to support them. Like many reformers, Carnegie saw free public libraries as a way for workers to rise from poverty. Many saw libraries as essential to democracy. Some even saw them as key to rehabilitating criminals, which may explain why Yuma Territorial Prison officials established one of the first "public" libraries in the Territory there in 1876.

A minimum population was required to win a Carnegie grant, so only a handful of Arizona cities qualified. Prescott, Phoenix, Tucson and Yuma all built Carnegie libraries. The towns were county seats and centers of commerce. Three were Territorial capitals. Yet even these cities struggled to meet Carnegie's requirements.

Wildly fluctuating populations, economic booms and busts, and devastating fires and floods plagued Arizona during Carnegie's library-building years. Overcoming these obstacles proved no small task. The names associated with the successful applications — including Goldwater, Heard and McClintock — belonged to some of Arizona's most influential citizens, and their names are familiar to Arizonans even today.

THE LIBRARY MOVEMENT grew with the rise of women's groups, which founded about 75 percent of the public libraries in the country, though that number was likely higher in the West. About 1870, bookseller Jacob Mansfield opened a circulating library at his Tucson bookstore. But it was a women's group that pushed for a free municipal library. Likewise, women's groups were behind all four of Arizona's Carnegie libraries, as well as the subscription reading rooms that preceded them.

These women argued for libraries as an alternative to saloons for the largely male, often itinerant population. Yet many had more personal motives. These mostly well-educated women wanted libraries for themselves. Many had moved from Eastern cities to isolated frontier towns with muddy streets teeming with cowboys, Indians, miners and fortune seekers. A 1902 magazine writer said that before the railroad came to town, Tucson was "almost as unknown and as remote from civilization as the interior of Africa." Libraries offered a bridge to the world.

Territorial Secretary Richard C. McCormick carried Arizona's first public library collection to Fort Whipple in 1863 with the first Territorial government. Maintained by the secretary of state, the books were available to anyone, though only Territorial officials could check them out. The collection moved with the Territorial government from Prescott to Tucson and back again. When Phoenix became the capital in 1889, much of the collection was scattered.

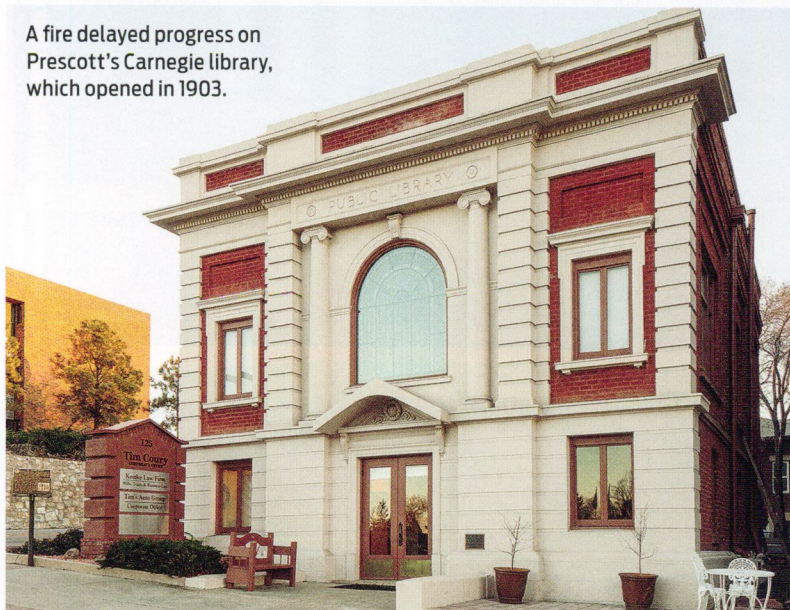
Prescott women had tried to organize a lending library almost since the establishment of the Territorial capital there, but they had failed to gain a foothold through the economic ups and downs.

In 1895, a group of prominent women founded the Women's Club, though they soon changed the name to the Monday Club, lest people think they were suffragettes. Members included Julia Goldwater and the wife of former Governor Frederick Tritle.

The Monday Club organized a library board of directors in 1897, advertised for book donations and opened a subscription library. Two years later, Goldwater wrote to Carnegie asking for \$8,000 to \$10,000 to build a free library. Carnegie agreed to fund "the last half of \$8,000" as a kind of matching grant.

Monday Club members hosted teas and dances, sometimes charging book donations for admission. Their husbands canvassed Whiskey Row for donations. By 1900, the club had raised the needed money. Then the fire of July 14 devastated the town,

A fire delayed progress on Prescott's Carnegie library, which opened in 1903.



destroying the commercial district and all the library's books.

Two years later, the Monday Club had recovered sufficiently to open a temporary free library in the Bank of Arizona building. But the fire and the search for a suitable site delayed library construction, angering Carnegie's unsympathetic secretary.

When restrictions concerning the club's preferred site on the square proved too burdensome, the group bought a lot on Gurley and Marina streets. Construction took just six months, and the Carnegie library opened in November 1903. It featured a colored-glass window memorializing Marie F. Gage, one of the principal fundraisers, who didn't live to see the library completed.

Tucson filed its Carnegie application shortly after Prescott, in 1899. The women who had organized the Tucson Library Association had petitioned the City Council in 1883 to accept the contents of its subscription library and furnish a location for a free public library.

The council voted unanimously to dedicate the upper story of its planned City Hall for the purpose, but it failed to fund it. That delayed the opening of Tucson's first municipal library until 1886, when the library board had raised enough money for bookcases and furniture.

By the time Tucson applied for its grant, Carnegie had imposed other conditions. He offered Tucson \$25,000, but he required that the city provide a location and guarantee \$2,000 a year to maintain the library. The council donated land on Military Plaza, the former site of Fort Lowell. It set up a library fund and hired renowned architect Henry Trost. In 1900, while Prescott was struggling to recover from the fire, Tucson broke ground on its library, which opened the following year.

About that time, Phoenix also was eyeing a grant. The city was bursting at the seams thanks to the National Reclamation Act of 1902, which made the Salt River Project one of its first undertakings. That was in large part the work of a couple of wealthy, well-connected speculators — Benjamin A. Fowler and Dwight B. Heard — who came to Arizona for their health and used their considerable influence to make Phoenix a major city.

Ironically, both Fowler and the male president of the Phoenix Library Association failed to interest Carnegie in their cause. Then the Woman's Club of Phoenix, led by Dorothy McClintock, formed a library committee, took up the matter and began a lengthy correspondence with Carnegie's secretary. In 1902, Carnegie promised \$15,000. The women believed the city's mushrooming population entitled it to a grant as large as Tucson's, but their appeals went nowhere.

With the grant stalled, Colonel James McClintock, Fowler and Heard swung into action. They collected post office, school census, assessed valuation and any other statistics they could think of to prove a larger population, and they called on their friends for help. The census director and the director of the U.S. Geological Survey, who also served as secretary of the Carnegie Institution, wrote letters of support, predicting the land rush inspired by the Salt River Project. Fowler traveled to New York three times to press the issue with Carnegie's representatives.

In January 1904, Carnegie relented. Despite protests that the site was farthest from those who needed it most, the city chose Neahr's Park on Washington Street. The library opened to great fanfare on February 14, 1908, with a design similar to Tucson's library, with stacks arranged like spokes on a wheel and men's and women's reading rooms on either side of an ornate skylight.



The Carnegie library in Yuma opened in 1921 but has been extensively remodeled since then.

A zinc-lined closet permitted fumigation of returned books. In an era of segregation, it likely was the only integrated public building in the city.

Yuma also prospered from the Reclamation Act, and the future looked bright when the Yuma City Club deputized the husband of one of its members to apply for a Carnegie grant. A 1913 letter to Carnegie boasted that Yuma was “assured of one of the greatest futures that will not be found in any part of the country.”

Until a library could be built, City Club members set up a free reading room in the former home of Colorado River steamboat pilot Isaac Polhamus, furnishing it with donations and soliciting subscriptions from area businesses.

The reading room's annual maintenance requirement proved a sticking point with the City Council, however. Then, the flood of 1916 devastated the town, destroying 150 buildings and leaving a third of Yuma's citizens homeless. The Polhamus library was spared and, for a time, served as flood-relief headquarters.

Amid a fever of rebuilding, the City Club petitioned the City Council to apply for a \$10,000 Carnegie grant. This time the council agreed to Carnegie's terms, including \$600 toward the required \$1,000 annual maintenance. The City Club committed to raising the rest. The last of Arizona's Carnegie libraries opened on city-donated land in Sunset Park in February 1921.

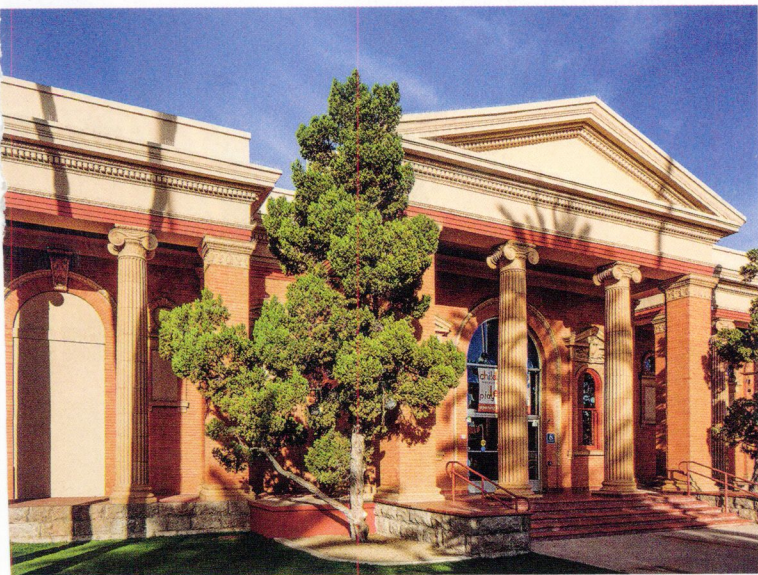
Yuma's 1917 grant was among Carnegie's last. After 1919, he redirected his focus to library education.

With time, the cities all outgrew their Carnegie libraries. All but Yuma built new libraries and repurposed their Carnegie buildings. The Prescott library became an office building. Though refreshed, its exterior remains essentially unchanged. The Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records now manages Phoenix's Carnegie library as a multipurpose center. Both are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Tucson Children's Museum moved into that city's Carnegie library. Only Yuma's Carnegie building still operates as a library. It also houses the Arizona Historical Society archives for the area. Called the Heritage Branch, it's been expanded and remodeled beyond recognition.

“One of the basement areas is part of the original,” says Laurie Boone, special-collections librarian. “I like to think it's the part where the Arizona Historical Society is now.”

EDITOR'S NOTE: We are grateful to the Sharlot Hall Museum Library and Archives; the Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records; and Laurie Boone, special-collections librarian for the Yuma County Library District, for their help researching this story. [AH](#)



Tucson's Carnegie library was the first to open in Arizona, in 1901.