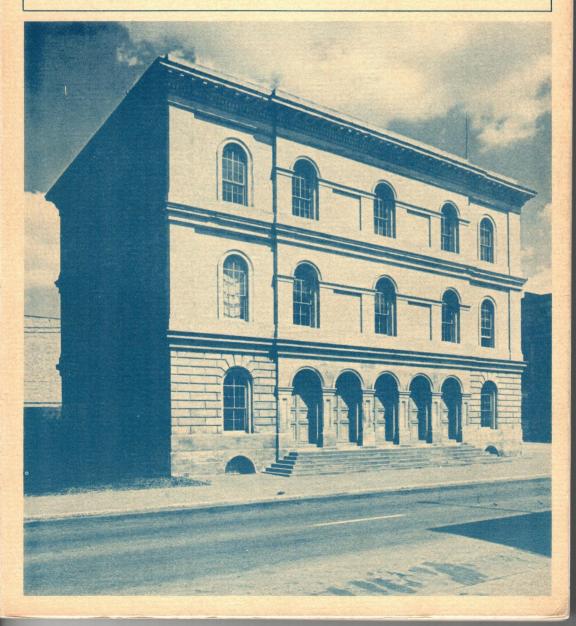
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"One Place on this Great Green Planet Where Andrew Carnegie can't get a Monument with His Money"

David T. Javersak

Andrew Carnegie, our nation's greatest Horatio Alger personification, achieved the American dream in its fullest glory. Emigrating from Scotland in 1848, he took a job as a bobbin boy in a Pittsburgh cotton mill for \$1.20 a week; by century's end, he was a multi-millionaire. The greatest steel man of his day or any day, he turned that metal into gold.

A recent biographer assesses his impact on American capitalism:

... he should be remembered as a businessman. . . He was a child of the old world, but he did much to bring on the new one. He found the iron industry a collection of small, scattered enterprises; he left it a giant, integrated business. What he learned on the railroad he brought to manufacturing. In generations to come, others would follow the trail of cost control, low prices, low profits, and high volume in building America into the world's richest society; Carnegie blazed it with vision and courage. Where he led, Henry Ford, Pierre du Pont, and the others followed.

Carnegie, however, was more than a captain of industry; he was a "collection of paradoxes, . . . violent and peace-loving, ruthless and loyal, greedy and generous, boastful and diffident, vain and doubting, brash and shy." He spent a lifetime seeking money, to be acknowledged by J. P. Morgan as "the richest man in the world." But he was never quite comfortable with all his wealth. "With most of my thoughts wholly upon the way to make more money in the shortest time," he wrote, "must degrade me beyond hope of permanent recovery." He acknowledged in "The Gospel of Wealth" that a rich man should "only be a trustee of the surplus that comes to him . . . , that his trust shall be so administered as to stimu-

Harold C. Livesay, Andrew Carnegie and the Rise of Big Business (Boston, 1975), 188-189.

²Ibid., 189.

³Ibid., 188.

⁴Joseph Frazier Wall, Andrew Carnegie (New York, 1970), 812-813.

late the best and most aspiring poor of the community to further efforts for their own improvement." So, Carnegie gave away his fortune, in all \$333,299,460! The money went for universities, institutes, foundations, hospitals, parks, swimming pools, concert halls, churches, organs, world peace, and libraries.

Library giving became Carnegie's specialty, and the Carnegie Free Library became "as much a part of America as the schoolhouse or church." In all, he and later the Carnegie Foundation funded 2,811 libraries, 1,946 of which were constructed in the United States. The costs ran to almost \$60 millions.

In the Scotsman's logic, a library fostered the principle of self-help, "the basis of every improvement—material, intellectual or spiritual." Charity, thought Carnegie, must give the poor opportunities to better themselves. The library, then, became "the true university, entitled to a first place for the elevation of the masses of the people." Whatever his altruism, he "knew that no other gifts were as popular or had as direct an impact upon as large a number of people as did his public libraries."

Yet, the funding of the libraries followed Carnegie's idea of self-help: "Mr. Carnegie never gave libraries. He gave money for the erection of library buildings." A community applied for funding, but Carnegie only gave money to those municipalities which provided the land and an annual appropriation for books and maintenance. With the erection of the first Carnegie Library in Allegheny, Pennsylvania in 1886, the nation witnessed a frenzy of construction. According to the Manual of the Public Benefactors of Andrew Carnegie, "for

⁵The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, A Manual of the Public Benefactions of Andrew Carnegie (Washington, 1919), 295.

many years an average of five hundred applications annually [came] from communities in the United States and Canada alone." Indiana, for example, received grants to build 164 libraries, and New York City got 65. Overseas, libraries could be found in the United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa, the West Indies, the Seychelles, Mauritius, and Fiji. The essence of this gigantic give-away was captured most humorously by Finley Peter Dunne's *Mister Dooley*:

'Has Andrew Carnaygie given ye a libry yet?' asked Mr.

'Not hat I know iv,' said Mr. Hennessy.

'He will,' said Mr. Dooley.

'Ye'll not escape him. Befure he dies he hopes to crowd a libry on ivry man, woman, an' child in the' counthry. He's given thim to cities, towns, villages, an' whistlin' stations. They're tearin' down gas-houses an' poor-houses to put up libries. Befure another year, ivry house in Pittsburg that ain't a blast-furnace will be a Carnaygie libry. In some places all the' buildin's is libries. If ye write hime f'r an autygraft he sinds ye a libry. No begger is iver turned impty-handed fr'm the' dure. Th' panhandler knowcks an' asts f'r a glass iv milk an' a roll. 'No sir,' says Andhrew Carnaygie, 'I will not pauperize this unworthy man. Nawthin is worst f'r a beggar-man thin to make a pauper iv him. Yet it shall not be said iv me that I give nawthin' to th' poor. Saunders, give him a libry, an' if he still insists on a rill tell him to roll th' library. F'r I'm humorous as well as wise," he says. 16

Not all cities got their Carnegie Libraries. Nationwide, two hundred and twenty-five communities, after formal application for the Scotsman's philanthropy, failed to follow through with the requests. Most often, a community's initial interest and enthusiasm waned, and municipal leaders did not complete all aspects of the funding process. In twenty-one cities, however, refusal of a library came at the hands of the voters. A 1969 study by G. S. Bobinski identifies two reasons why electorates rejected Carnegie's offers: (1) opposition to a tax levy needed to support the library and (2) organized labor's opposition to Carnegie's employment practices.¹⁹

The only West Virginia city to defeat a library levy was Wheeling, where, in 1904, residents rejected a bond levy by

⁶Robert M. Lester, Forty Years of Carnegie Giving: A Summary of the Benefactions of Andrew Carnegie and of the Work of the Philanthropic Trusts Which He Created (New York, 1941), 7.

⁷For a detailed list of all Carnegie benefactions, consult Lester's work.

⁸Wall, 828-829.

⁹Ibid. 828 and Lester. 97.

¹⁰Manual of Public Benefactions, 296.

¹¹Ralph Munson, "Hindsight on the Gifts of Carnegie. . . " Library Journal (December 1, 1951), 1967.

¹²Wall, 829.

¹³Lester, 92.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Manual of Public Benefactions, 297.

¹⁶George S. Bobinski, Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development (Chicago, 1969), 19; see also Wall, 829; Manual of Public Benefactions, 314-317.

¹⁷Lester, 93.

¹⁰ Finley Peter Dunne, "The Carnegie Libraries" in America Through The Looking Glass (Englewood Cliffs, 1974), II. 19.

¹⁹Bobinski, 140; for a discussion of opposition to Carnegie see Chapter 6, 87-114. A list of all communities who refused a library appears in Chapter 7, 115-142.

which the city fathers proposed to construct a Carnegie Free Library. Why did Wheeling's citizens turn down the offer of America's best-known benefactor? The answer lies with Andrew Carnegie, the Homestead Strike and a labor organization, the Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly.

Homestead, Pennsylvania, just south of Pittsburgh, was the site of a bitter and bloody labor-management war in 1892; here Carnegie best displayed his "collection of paradoxes." Before Homestead, Carnegie cut a figure as a benevolent employer, one who recognized the right of workers to unionize as "no less sacred than the right of the manufacturer to enter into associations . . . with his fellows." His enlightened attitudes resulted in praise from the nation's labor leaders. Homestead was to change all of this, for his display of power against the workers in the Carnegie Steel Corporation revealed that in practice he differed not one whit from his contemporaries of the Vanderbilt school of "The Public be damned!" "Emperors," writes one labor historian, "even benevolent ones are invariably tempted to wield their power especially when they are in contention with midgets."

The Homestead plant employed workers affiliated with the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel and Tin Workers. Their contract with the company expired in 1892 and the union expected little difficulty reaching a settlement with Carnegie Steel. Before negotiations began, however, Carnegie sailed for Scotland, leaving Henry Clay Frick, "the strongest anti-labor man in business" and President of Carnegie Steel, a blank check in dealing with the Association.22 Frick first presented the Association a proposal which reduced wages. Next, he erected a protective stockade of barbed wire around the plant and hired Pinkerton detectives to guard the plant. Faced with these actions, the Amalgamated struck on July 1. Several days later, Frick locked out the union workers and brought in scabs, protected by the Pinkertons. On July 6, the union men and the Pinkertons engaged each other in an all-out conflict, resulting in scores killed and wounded.

An outraged public, reacting to the horrible bloodshed at Homestead, criticized the tactics of Carnegie Steel, but Frick was not deterred, even turning a deaf ear to an appeal by the 1892 Republican Vice-Presidential nominee, Whitelaw Reid. Through the summer and into the late fall the strike dragged on; the union weakened with each passing week. The company, protected by the state militia, continued to operate with non-union workers. On November 20, the strike ended; the Amalgamated, however, was shattered and steel unions virtually eliminated in Pittsburgh.²³

Homestead forever tarnished Carnegie's reputation as an employer and lingered heavily on his conscience for the rest of his days. He could not erase it: "Nothing . . . wounded me so deeply. No pangs remain of any wound received in my business career save that of Homestead." To one-time admirers, he became "Baron Carnage-y." The nation's press would not let him forget his part in the strike:

Three months ago Andrew Carnegie was a man to be envied. Today he is an object of mingled pity and contempt. Runs off to Scotland out of harm's way to await the issue of the battle he was too pusillanimous to share. A single word from him might have saved the bloodshed—but the word was never spoken . . . Ten thousand 'Carnegie Public Libraries' would not compensate the country for the direct and indirect evils resulting from the Homestead lockout. Say what you will of Carnegie, he is a coward. And gods and men hate cowards. 26

Thereafter, according to Joseph Wall, his most definitive biographer, "Carnegie had to justify his life to himself." Perhaps, public philanthropy could make some restitution for the Homestead tragedy: a "refuge from self-questioning in the thought of the much greater portion of [my wealth] which is being spent upon others." Pittsburgh and surrounding towns received a very large share of Carnegie's benefactions, the Carnegie Institute, the Carnegie Museum, and many libraries, including one in Homestead. In mill towns of the Ohio Valley, like Steubenville and East Liverpool in Ohio and Beaver Falls in Pennsylvania, Carnegie's money built more libraries. In

² Sidney Lens, The Labor Wars: From the Molly Maguires to the Sitdowns (New York, 1973), 71.

²¹Ibid.

²²Livesay, 140.

²³See Lens, 70-77; Livesay, 139-145 and Wall, Chapter 16.

²⁴Wall, 570.

²⁵Lens, 74.

²⁶Wall, 572-573.

²⁷Ibid., 813.

²⁰Ibid., 812.

August, 1899, Carnegie received a proposal for a \$75,000 grant to erect a library in Wheeling, an important iron and steel center and the most unionized city in West Virginia, but the city failed to take any further action until 1903.²⁹

At the century's turn, Wheeling, although no longer the state capital, was the premier city and manufacturing center of West Virginia, producing iron, steel, glass, pottery, calico, and tobacco products. Thirty-one percent of the state's wage earners lived here, many in the working class neighborhoods of South and East Wheeling. While the socio-economic position of the city's laboring class was not good by modern standards, it was no worse, and probably better, than that of workers elsewhere.

Wheeling was a progressive, enlightened city, modern in every way. It contained sixteen banks; 'was served by seven railroads; had eighty miles of street car tracks; and had the state's first skyscraper. Most of the streets were paved with bricks, and at night they were lighted by gas. The state's two best daily newspapers were also Wheeling's: *The Intelligencer* and the *Register*. Still there was more: vaudevillian theatres, opera houses, roller rinks, Wheeling Park, public playgrounds, the State Fair, the Market Auditorium convention center, the YMCA, the YWCA, and the Wheeling Public Library.³⁰

The library, originally chartered in 1859, opened in 1860 as a private subscription library. Its early years were ones of difficulty; financial hardship closed its doors in July, 1880. Three years later, the library reopened as a public institution, operated with real estate taxes "for the use and benefit of all the residents of the city . . . "31 While the library did not occupy its own building before 1911, it seems to have served the community well.

In late 1903, Wheeling expressed a renewed interest in a Carnegie Library. According to one source, the city fathers "began to feel considerable pressure from the Carnegie interests . ." Although this statement runs counter to the



Ohio County Public Library opened to the public January 11, 1911 and served as main headquarters until May 1973. Courtesy: Ohio County Public Library.



Carnegie Public Library built in Huntington, W. Va. in 1903 represents one of the standard architectural styles which Wheeling might have obtained. Courtesy: Department of Culture and History.

²⁹David T. Javersak, "The Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly: The Formative Years, 1882-1915" (Ph.D. diss. West Virginia University, 1977), 149.

³⁰Charles A. Wingerter, History of Greater Wheeling and Vicinity (Wheeling, 1912), is the best account of Wheeling; see also Javersak, 5-8.

³¹Ibid., 481.

³² Victor G. Reuther, The Brothers Reuther (Boston, 1976), 24.

usual procedure of a city's initiating the application for funding, the city did advance a plan to have its citizens approve the acquisition of the best-known public institution in America. Specifically, the voters were asked to go to the polls on January 26, 1904 to pass on a \$50,000 bond levy for acquisition of a building site and for books and maintenance.³³ A sixty percent majority, in accordance with state law, was necessary for approval.³⁴

This percentage, at first, did not appear problematic. The proposed library had its powerful supporters: the Mayor, City Council, the Board of Education, the Board of Trade, and the daily papers, the Democratic Register, and the Republican Intelligencer.³⁵ With the advocacy of the leading business interests and the city's leading citizens, approval was expected, and probably would have been given, if not for the opposition of the Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly.³⁶

As the Valley's central labor organization and the first of its kind in West Virginia, the Trades Assembly served as the guardian and advocate of the laboring class: arbitrating disputes, settling strikes, conducting selected boycotts, aiding the unemployed, lobbying for labor programs in the state legislature, and providing social and recreational opportunities for workers and their families. As it worked for the betterment of the working class, the Assembly earned the respect of the larger community. Its basic conservatism, its non-violence, and its stand against virulent radicalism and anarchy of any kind all met with public approval. At a time when labor in general felt exploited, if not oppressed, the Assembly played an integral role in Wheeling's community development. Its influence manifested itself in the lobbying which gave West Virginia one of the nation's first workmen's compensation laws and the campaign which brought Wheeling its first water filtration system. To be sure, the Assembly had an enlightened social consciousness which kept it in the vanguard of reformism and public improvement. So, when the Assembly voiced its opposition of the proposed Carnegie Library, many in Wheeling

listened closely and were swayed by the labor organization's logic.

Holding membership with the Assembly were several locals of iron and steel workers, most notably the Amalgamated Association, whose brothers were shot down by the Pinkertons at Homestead. Moreover, one-time Assembly President and the best-known labor leader of the Wheeling vicinity, Michael Tighe, held the post of Executive Secretary of the Amalgamated.37 Back in 1892, when news of the Homestead violence first reached Wheeling, the Assembly sent a resolution of support to the strikers, expressing sympathy for "them in their unequal struggle for right and justice. . . . "38 Throughout the summer and fall of 1892, the delegates discussed the labor impasse on the Assembly floor. On several occasions, the body sent money to the strikers, amounting to over \$700.00, a substantial sum when one recognizes that the Assembly's treasury never exceeded \$660.00 at any one time. Even after the strike ended, the Assembly sponsored a "Homestead Day" to continue financial support for the defeated strikers.39 As it did for Carnegie, the Homestead Strike left scars on the steel workers of Wheeling, and they would never forgive the man they held responsible: Andrew Carnegie.

When the Assembly learned of the city's application for a Carnegie Library and of the bond levy to support it, the memories of Homestead still had not faded. The delegates prung into action. At a December 27, 1903 meeting, Mike Mahoney, a member of the Amalgamated Association, presented a resolution denouncing the Carnegie project. In his lengthy vituperation, Mahoney called the steel magnate, "the greatest of oppressors", a foe "who gave with one hand and took away with the other." Carnegie's "so-called libraries", said Mahoney, were "disgraceful monument[s]" to a man whose "crippled and maimed sacrifice of avarice and blind greed at Homestead contributed to a cold-blooded outrage." Rather than erect a tribute to Carnegie, Mahoney asked the Assembly and the citizens of Wheeling to defeat the bond levy, thereby paying tribute "to our murdered comrades, whose ashes repose

³³Wheeling Register, January 25, 1904.

³⁴Ibid, December 28, 1903.

³⁵Ibid; Reuther, Chapter 3.

³⁶See Javersak, especially Chapters 1 and 3.

West-Birl, Connecticut, 1974), 353.

^{**}Wheeling Intelligencer, July 10, 1892.

³⁹Javersak, 189.

in the precious soil at Homestead."⁴⁰ Approving this resolution, the Assembly vowed to defeat the project.

In the weeks before the levy date, Assembly delegates went into every precinct of the city, voicing their concerns and distributing *The Tribune of the People*, a leaflet printed in both German and English, which outlined the Assembly objections. Public meetings were held, and delegates like Valentine Reuther, father of Walter Reuther, founder of the UAW, "mounted...soapbox[es]...[to] warn that a Carnegie-built library would undoubtedly contain... an anti-labor bias." Labor's attack on the library, directed to all city residents, was strongest in the southern wards, the working class neighborhoods.

Countering the assembly's propaganda campaign, the two city dailies advocated acceptance of the library. Local editors cautioned workingmen not to cut "off the nose to spite the face . . ." Pointing out that Pittsburgh and Homestead had erected Carnegie Libraries, the papers implored the laboring class to accept the generosity of Carnegie. Other community leaders also advocated acceptance of the library, but their tenacity in support of the bond levy could not match the perseverance of the Assembly. Two days before the balloting, the supporters of the project recognized for the first time that the project might well go down to defeat, if the Assembly's opposition could not be ameliorated to some degree.

The Chairman of the Library Commission knowing the "fairness and disposition" of the Assembly asked permission to send an advocate of the project to the labor body's regular meeting on January 24. J. J. Coniff, prominent attorney, appeared before the delegates, and in a lengthy address asked the union men to reconsider their actions, culminating with the reminder that "taste for good reading makes a happy man." Although the delegates extended the attorney a vote of thanks for his speech, Coniff could not get the Assembly to 'withdraw

its resolution of opposition, but his presentation did precipitate debate among Assembly members.⁴⁴

Delegate after delegate rose to express his view on the Carnegie Library. The opponents of the project held that the levy would cause increased expenses and taxes which would fall heaviest on the lower classes; moreover, they believed that tax money would be better spent on city improvements: street repairs, water mains, garbage disposal, and a reservoir. The real issue, these arguments notwithstanding, was Carnegie and what he represented. Mike Mahoney summed up the opposition: "We don't want a monument to Carnegie," a man who "has driven down women and children to the workship!" Wondering how any workmen could feel at home in a Carnegie Library, Mahoney rued: "God forbid that one of my children should ever bring home a book from a Carnegie Library." Reaching an emotional highpoint, the steel worker stated: "The poor man can't go into any such a library. Why it would be like me taking my furnishings and carpets from the simple . . . cottage that protects my family . . . and trying to place them in a mansion." The working class must vote no, concluded Mahoney so "there will be one place on this great green planet where Andrew Carnegie can't get a monument with his money."45

The majority of the other speakers went along with Mahoney's intonations, agreeing with Delegate N. S. Wood, who called the project "a fraud", a convenience for the rich, paid for by the poor. But there were supporters of the library within the Assembly ranks, led by Delegate McNamara. Along with two other men, he moved to have a new vote taken on the original resolution of opposition. The minority believed that a Carnegie Library would provide an educational opportunity for the city's children. They also cited facts to show that the Carnegie Library of Steubenville contained a larger collection than the Wheeling Library, including more books on subjects to labor. Reacting angrily to these remarks, Mahoney main took the floor and denounced McNamara as "a Judas."

⁴⁰Intelligencer, December 28, 1903; The Ohio Valley Trades & Labor Assembly, "Minute Book No. 4" (December 27, 1903), West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University Library, Morgantown, W. Va., hereafter WVC.

⁴¹ Intelligencer, February 14, 1904.

⁴²Reuther, 26.

⁴³ Register, December 28, 1903.

Valley Trades & Labor Assembly, "Minute Book No. 4" (January 24, 1904),

ment; unfortunately, for the supporters of the library, the President ruled the McNamara motion out of order. 46

Last minute maneuverings continued. As the fight for the library continued The Intelligencer, on election-eve, accused the Assembly and other opponents of the library of being guilty of "prejudice only". The editor pleaded with residents to "Vote for Ratification." However Wheelingites defeated the project: of 4,153 votes cast, 2,291 were affirmative, 201 votes short of the necessary three-fifths' majority.48 According to the Register, ratification lost for three reasons: lack of organized support, flood conditions which kept many voters away, and a strong, organized opposition. 49 The Intelligencer agreed, calling the Assembly the major factor in setting Wheeling "against progress... It also submits," continued the editorial, "to the domination of a class that has rejected growth in the past, whose methods are unreasonable and prejudicial to the common welfare of all ... "50 Needless to say, The Intelligencer did not take the defeat kindly.

The library issue won in all districts except the working class sections of the city, especially those wards where most of the iron and steel workers lived. A vote analysis by *The Intelligencer* showed that in Webster and Ritchie Districts of South Wheeling the vote was three to one against the library. ⁵¹ Assembly tactics and hard work by members paid off in a sweet victory, well worth the expenditure of \$500 from the treasury.

The Carnegie Library was a dead issue until another effort to bring the Library to Wheeling was revived in March, 1909. Rumors circulated within labor neighborhoods that the Board of Education entertained such an idea. Immediately, the Assembly formed ward committees to oppose the action. Delegates buttonholed Board members to express labor's revulsion. Plans were also made to appear in mass at a Board meeting to impress upon its members the sincerity of the Assembly's stand.

The Board, however, postponed its deliberations for a Carnegie Library.⁵²

In January, 1910, the library plan surfaced once more. Carnegie's representatives and the Wheeling Board again engaged in discussions, but no agreement could be reached. The Board then voted to end its correspondence with the Carnegie Corporation and erect a building with its own resources.⁵³ The Assembly ecstatically received the news of the rejection of "Candy Andy's" library and the decision to build the Wheeling Public Library. According to *The Wheeling Majority*, Wheeling became the first American city to refuse a Carnegie grant.⁵⁴ When the Wheeling facility opened in early 1911, Assembly delegates, especially those from the Amalgamated Association, could not but feel a sense of accomplishment, for as Mike Mahoney once said, "Wheeling should not be dictated to from a man in Scotland."⁵⁵

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Intelligencer, January 26, 1904.

⁴⁸ Ibid., January 27, 1904.

⁴⁹ Register, January 27, 1904.

⁵⁰Intelligencer, January 27, 1904.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Wingerter, 481.
Wingerter, 481.