

VAN BUREN PUBLIC LIBRARY
115 South First Street
Van Buren
Grant County
Indiana

HABS IN-318
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS
FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

VAN BUREN PUBLIC LIBRARY

HABS No. IN-318

Location: 115 South First Street, Van Buren, Grant County, Indiana

The coordinates for Van Buren Public Library are lat: 40.616851 long:-85.504687, and they were obtained through Google Earth in January 2012 with WGS84 datum. There is no restriction on the release of the location data to the public.

Present Owner/
Occupant: City of Van Buren, Grant County, Indiana

Present Use: Public Library

Significance: Constructed in 1918-19 with a grant from the Carnegie Corporation, the Van Buren Public Library represents the broad educational program established by the Carnegie libraries across the country. Designed by local architect Hiram Elder, it also reflects the popularity of Prairie/Craftsman Style building elements during this period.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of Erection: 1918-1919. Construction was funded by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation.
2. Architect: Hiram Elder. Elder was a local architect in Grant County. He designed the two other Carnegie libraries in Grant County for the towns of Marion and Gas City.
3. Builder: August Ruedlinger
4. Original and subsequent owners: City of Van Buren, Grant County, Indiana has owned the property since its construction.
5. Original and subsequent occupants: The building historically and currently serves as a library.
6. Original plans and construction: Except for a few minor alterations the building retains its original appearance.

7. Alterations and additions: The building has only had a few alterations. All the original light fixtures on the interior have been removed and replaced. New carpet was also added to the interior. All the exterior doors have been replaced and one window on the north facade has been removed and the opening was filled in with siding.

B. Historical Context

The Van Buren Public Library represents the broad educational program established by the Carnegie Corporation-funded libraries across the country. The public library movement's initial emphasis was to construct central or main libraries in mid- to large-size cities. But a need for more facilities was becoming evident in the first decades of the twentieth century. Resources were required to satisfy the needs of the residents of rapidly growing cities and outlying rural areas. The small rural town library was the solution to this need. The goal of the rural and branch library system was "to bring people and books together." They were designed to be more comfortable for the local citizens; the buildings were neither as large nor as formal as the main library. The Van Buren Public Library is an excellent example of the movement to increase the number of small town libraries of this era and the successful impact of the Carnegie library program in Indiana, which has more Carnegie libraries than any other state.

The town of Van Buren was laid out in 1880 by G. W. Champ on the Toledo, Cincinnati, and St. Louis railroad line. The discovery of natural gas in Grant County in 1887 led to the steady growth of Van Buren and Grant County into the early twentieth century. The growth of the town led to the desire for a branch library and in February 1917 a library board was established to plan a library for the town. A plot of land on the southern edge of the downtown commercial district was selected for the library site. The land was contracted for purchase from Eunice and Claude Peters of Stoy, Illinois, with the condition that a Carnegie library construction grant must first be approved. The property was originally part of the Swan Homestead. Shortly after the first board meeting, a letter was written to the Carnegie Corporation asking for funding for the new library. The Carnegie Corporation approved a \$10,000 grant on May 3, 1917.

Hiram Elder was hired as the architect of the new library building. Elder had previously designed the two other Carnegie libraries in Grant County, located in Marion and Gas City. Construction of the Van Buren library began in early 1918.

The Van Buren Public Library was dedicated and opened on September 3, 1919. The Carnegie Corporation grant to the city of Van Buren made it possible for the small town to construct a modern library. The Van Buren Public Library became a central feature of the community and fostered civic, social, and educational growth throughout its history. The success of the library illustrates the prominent role Andrew Carnegie and the Carnegie Corporation played in enhancing the education of America through the library grant program.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Van Buren Public Library is a red brick masonry institutional structure one story high on a raised basement, with a rectangular footprint. It has a hipped roof and symmetrical façade. Decorative details include windows with limestone sills and square red brick columns with stylized limestone capitals at the entrance portico. These details recall Prairie Style or Craftsman architecture popular during this period. The original wood circulation desk is located at the center of the large open first floor main reading room. A children's reading room occupies a large portion of the basement while the rest of the space is divided into service and mechanical rooms.

2. Condition of fabric: Good

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

"Formal Opening of New Library." *News Eagle*. 4 September 1919.

Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana. *Grant County Interim Report*. Indianapolis, Indiana: Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, 1993.

Jones, Theodore. *Carnegie Libraries Across America*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997.

Letter from Carnegie Corporation to Van Buren Library Board, 3 May 1917, Vertical Files, Van Buren Public Library, Van Buren, Indiana, United States.

Lowe, John Adams. "The Rural Library Building." *Architectural Record* (1919): 451.

Van Buren Library Board. *Correspondance and Minutes of Van Buren Public Library*. Van Buren, Indiana: Van Buren Library Board, 1917 - 1922.

Wells, John Roy. *Architecture of the Carnegie Libraries in Indiana*. Muncie, Indiana: Ball State University, 1981.

Witmer, C.R., Trustee Document/Purchase Contract, 18 June 1917, Vertical Files, Van Buren Public Library, Van Buren, Indiana, United States.

"Work on Library Will Begin Soon." *News Eagle*. 13 March 1918.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

Documentation of Van Buren Public Library was submitted to the 2011 Holland Prize competition by Jonathan Spodek and Steve Herron.