

FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA, SOUTH PHILADELPHIA  
BRANCH  
2407 South Broad Street  
Philadelphia  
Philadelphia  
Pennsylvania

HABS PA-6767  
PA-6767

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA, SOUTH PHILADELPHIA BRANCH

HABS No. PA-6767

Location: 2407 South Broad Street, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania

Present Owner: City of Philadelphia

Present Occupant: Samuel S. Fels South Philadelphia Community Center

Present Use: multi-purpose room for community center

Significance: South Philadelphia was one of twenty-five branch libraries constructed between 1904 and 1930 for the Free Library of Philadelphia using a \$1.5 million grant from the Carnegie Corporation. Andrew Carnegie's public library construction grants were a major impetus to the growth of these institutions throughout the country. Philadelphia was second only to New York City in the size of the Carnegie grant and number of branch libraries constructed. Each jurisdiction receiving Carnegie library funds was responsible for providing a site and operating expenses equal to ten percent of the cost of construction. Prior to receiving the Carnegie funds in 1903, branch libraries of the Free Library of Philadelphia (founded 1891) were housed in a variety of preexisting structures. The Carnegie library construction campaign provided twenty-five purpose-built branch libraries for the City of Philadelphia, each designed within the ideal of efficient operation and using fashionable, if conservative, architectural forms and motifs.

South Philadelphia was the sixteenth Carnegie branch library opened by the Free Library of Philadelphia. Plans for the structure were approved by the Free Library Board of Trustees Carnegie Fund Committee on July 25, 1912 and the branch opened to the public on November 24, 1914. The South Philadelphia Branch was designed by Philadelphia architect Charles Louis Borie, Jr.. Borie's firm, then Zantzinger & Borie, also designed the first Free Library Carnegie branch, West Philadelphia, in 1904-06.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

1. Date of erection: 1912-14, opened November 24, 1914
2. Architect: Charles Louis Borie, Jr.
3. Original and subsequent owners/uses:  
Free Library of Philadelphia branch library, 1914 to 1965  
Free Library of Philadelphia, Ritner Children's Library, 1965-1999  
Samuel S. Fels Community Center multipurpose room, 1999-present
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: N/A
5. Original plans and construction: Charles Borie, Jr.'s plans for the South Philadelphia branch were approved by the Free Library on July 25, 1912 and construction proceeded during 1912-14. Architectural drawings have not been located.
6. Alterations and additions: The library retains its original appearance on the main façade, but the rear ell has been removed or heavily altered. On the south elevation a new opening connects the former library space with the adjacent community center. The basic interior space and some historic features of the original main reading room are still intact.

## B. Historical Context:

In the nineteenth century most libraries in the United States were private or available only to subscribers. Starting in the late nineteenth century, many cities began to found "free library" systems with the goal of providing educational material and services to a wider array of citizens, particularly the burgeoning immigrant population. The Free Library of Philadelphia was founded in 1891 and proceeded to establish a central library and a network of neighborhood branches. Despite ambitious goals, however, these libraries remained rather modest affairs housed in rented space and utilizing mainly donated collections and volunteer staffing.

During this same period the library construction philanthropy of wealthy industrialist Andrew Carnegie would have a profound effect on both the development of professional library standards and the evolution of the building type. The Free Library of Philadelphia received a \$1.5 million grant in January 1903 from Andrew Carnegie and the Carnegie Corporation to build thirty branch libraries.<sup>1</sup> Carnegie had been engaged in library building philanthropy since 1886, but the program was expanded to jurisdictions

---

<sup>1</sup> While the original grant stipulated funding for 30 libraries at \$50,000 each, rising construction costs caused the number to be scaled back in 1918. For the remaining branches, the Carnegie fund provided only part of the construction cost with the city or neighborhood groups making up the difference. See letter from Librarian John Ashhurst to James Bertram, Secretary, Carnegie Corporation officially changing the total number of Carnegie branches to "25 or 26," (11 October 1918), Carnegie Corporation Correspondence microfilm, Reel 25, Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

outside of his personal and business sphere only in 1898. Carnegie library historian George Bobinski calls this later period the “wholesale phase” of Carnegie’s library philanthropy. From 1898 to 1919, he gave over \$39 million to 1,406 communities. The unprecedented scale of this effort contrasts with the “retail phase” between 1886 and 1898 when Carnegie donated \$1.8 million to six communities.<sup>2</sup> The \$1.5 million gift to Philadelphia’s fledgling free library system was quite generous. Only New York City, which received a \$5.2 million grant for sixty-six libraries in 1899, built more branches using Carnegie funds. The next largest grants went to Baltimore and Cleveland; each city built fourteen libraries.<sup>3</sup>

In Philadelphia there was a delay while the various government agencies worked out a mechanism to legally accept and administer such unprecedented largesse. According to Bobinski, “the Pennsylvania State legislature had to approve an act authorizing the Philadelphia city council to enter into contracts with the trustees of the public library so that the arrangements necessary for receiving the Carnegie gift could be carried into effect.”<sup>4</sup> After a year of bureaucratic maneuvering, the state legislature finally passed the law enabling the city to officially accept the gift. The final step before the Free Library could proceed was an ordinance approving this arrangement passed by Mayor John Weaver in January 1904. John Thomson quickly sent a letter to James Bertram, Carnegie’s personal secretary and gatekeeper for the library philanthropy program, expressing his relief that the Free Library could move forward with branch construction:

I have the pleasure of informing you that I have this morning received from the Clerk of Councils official notice that the Mayor has signed the Ordinance accepting Mr. Carnegie’s splendid gift to the City of Philadelphia. The matter has been one of great anxiety. . . . Arrangements are on foot to accept 4 or 5 sites and it is hoped that the preliminary arrangements for locating the system of Branch Libraries, made possible by Mr. Carnegie’s munificence, will be put in active motion at once. . . . I think we shall be able very rapidly to show our appreciation of what Mr. Carnegie has put it in our power to do.<sup>5</sup>

The year-long delay in officially accepting the gift gave the Free Library time to quietly prepare to construct new branch buildings and move rapidly once approval came. Carnegie did not specify architectural designs or review plans at this time, but he did express a strong preference that the branch libraries include lecture rooms.<sup>6</sup> In a letter

---

<sup>2</sup> George S. Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development*, (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969), 13-14.

<sup>3</sup> Bobinski 229, 231.

<sup>4</sup> Bobinski 44.

<sup>5</sup> Letter, John Thomson to James Bertram (13 January 1904), Carnegie Corporation Correspondence microfilm, Reel 25, Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

<sup>6</sup> “Carnegie Offers \$1,500,000 to City,” *Philadelphia Times*, 7 January 1903, clipping in Carnegie Corporation Correspondence microfilm, Reel 25, Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

officially accepting Carnegie's gift, Free Library Board of Trustees President Joseph G. Rosengarten noted that the Trustees "concur[red] fully" with his lecture room suggestion and planned to expand the already successful Free Library lecture program.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond a general desire for new branch buildings and an interest in including lecture rooms, it is not clear what guidelines or models informed the Free Library as they developed a fairly consistent branch library plan for their city. When Philadelphia received its Carnegie grant in 1903 there was no official design review by Carnegie or his staff. By 1908 Carnegie's secretary James Bertram had to approve the building plans for all new grants. The Carnegie publication "Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings" [sic.] was first issued in 1911 by Bertram.<sup>8</sup> Bertram was largely motivated by a distaste for what he viewed as wasteful features or extravagant designs that went over budget. He advocated prioritizing the needs of librarians over the opinions of architects. While the Philadelphia branch library plans progressed independent of Carnegie design oversight, it appears both were developing simultaneously and in harmony with the latest precepts in library planning for open stack branch libraries. The HABS research on the Carnegie branches in Philadelphia showed that the South Philadelphia branch was a fully realized example of the T-shaped, open plan library form as developed by the Free Library.

The Board of Trustees of the Free Library formed a Carnegie Fund Committee in March 1904 to oversee the details of this ambitious branch building effort. In response to a request from the Carnegie Fund Committee for instructions on how to select architects, the Board of Trustees implemented an ad hoc system. They sought to avoid the expense and complication of holding competitions so instead proposed to appoint an architect as branch sites were chosen. Selection seems to have been based on reputation and personal contacts, with some architects asking to be considered as work on the branches proceeded. The written record is thin on this point, but it seems apparent librarian John Thomson and assistant librarian John Ashhurst were instrumental in this process. John Thomson served as secretary of the Carnegie Fund Committee and the Free Library's leading staff member on all matters. Ashhurst's assistant librarian position was specifically created by the Board of Trustees "in order to undertake part of the very heavy extra work that would now be involved in carrying out the Andrew Carnegie Branch Library Building scheme."<sup>9</sup>

In the interest of moving quickly to open new branch buildings, projects on donated or city-owned property typically were launched first. Later branches would be built on a mix of donated and purchased sites to ensure even distribution across the city. In the 1908 *Annual Report*, Free Library of Philadelphia Board of Trustees President J. G. Rosengarten wrote:

---

<sup>7</sup> Letter, J. G. Rosengarten to Andrew Carnegie, (5 March 1904), Carnegie Corporation Correspondence microfilm, Reel 25, Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

<sup>8</sup> Abigail Van Slyck. *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 35-36.

<sup>9</sup> Free Library of Philadelphia, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, (12 February 1904).

The steady increase of Branch Library building shows that the value of the Carnegie fund is appreciated by those who have made generous gifts of land to the city, on which new Branch library buildings were erected with the fund generously provided by Mr. Carnegie. There still remain large sections of the city, notably the southeast, south, southwest and west wards, in need of libraries.<sup>10</sup>

After construction of the approximately the first dozen branch libraries on donated or already city-owned property, the Free Library moved to acquire library sites in underserved areas. This productive period of branch library construction focused on addressing the shortage of Carnegie branches in the southern and western parts of the city. In the 1911 *Annual Report*, all six new branches mentioned as in progress were located in these areas – Southwark, Falls of Schuylkill, South Philadelphia, Passyunk, Paschalville, and Haddington.<sup>11</sup> At the May 12, 1911 Carnegie Fund Committee meeting, it was noted that plans were moving forward for the city to purchase six lots on South Broad Street below Ritner for a branch library.<sup>12</sup> The densely developed working class neighborhood of South Philadelphia was a prime example of an area in need of branch library services.

Soon after the city acquired the lots on South Broad Street, the Carnegie Fund Committee requested \$50,000 for construction of the South Philadelphia Branch. Charles Louis Borie, Jr. (1870-1943), a well-known Philadelphia architect, was appointed to design this branch.<sup>13</sup> After being educated in Philadelphia and at St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire, Borie enrolled in the engineering course at the University of Pennsylvania. He left during his junior year and worked in his father's banking firm from 1894-1902. He then joined C.C. Zantzinger's (1872-1954) architectural firm, presumably combining his business and engineering expertise. Zantzinger was a fellow St. Paul's alumnus. In 1904-06 the firm designed the first new Carnegie-funded library in Philadelphia, the West Philadelphia Branch located near the University of Pennsylvania campus. During this time (1905) the firm was renamed Zantzinger and Borie. Borie was very active in various professional organizations and design committees, such as the American Institute of Architects (he became an AIA fellow in 1915), T-Square Club, and Fairmount Park Art Association.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Free Library of Philadelphia, *Thirteenth Annual Report* (1908), 9. The President's Letter included in this volume was dated January 1909.

<sup>11</sup> Free Library of Philadelphia, *Sixteenth Annual Report* (1911), 3. The President's Letter included in this volume was dated June 1912. The letter also mentioned planning for a branch at 49<sup>th</sup> and Chester that was never constructed.

<sup>12</sup> Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (12 May 1911), 7.

<sup>13</sup> Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (22 June 1911), 9. The Free Library received the funds from the Carnegie Corporation by November 1911. See Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (23 November 1911), 11.

<sup>14</sup> "Charles Louis Borie, Jr.," in Roger Moss and Sandra Tatman, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects, 1700-1930*. (New York: G.K. Hall & Company, 1984), 84; See also listing for "Charles Louis Borie, Jr." in [www.philadelphiabuildings.org](http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org)

From 1910 until 1929 the firm included partner Milton B. Medary, Jr. (1874-1929) and was known as Zantzinger, Borie & Medary. In addition to Borie's exposure to the West Philadelphia Branch library, Medary's former firm of Field & Medary designed the Spring Garden Branch in 1905-07 (now demolished). It is not clear why just Borie and not the entire firm is listed as the architect of record for South Philadelphia. Medary was particularly known for his skill in creating Gothic Revival structures and used that mode for the Spring Garden Branch. Perhaps he influenced Borie's decision to create a Medieval Revival exterior for South Philadelphia, rather than following the Neoclassical model of West Philadelphia. In January 1912, Borie submitted a sketch plan for the South Philadelphia Branch to the Carnegie Fund Committee. The Committee generally approved, and referred further approvals, including alterations to John Thomson.<sup>15</sup>

At a July 1912 Board of Trustees meeting the plans for South Philadelphia were again approved and referred to Thomson and Ashhurst for oversight. The architect was instructed to ask for bids at this time.<sup>16</sup> The contractors for the South Philadelphia Branch have not been identified and additional information about its design and construction process is scarce. Construction proceeded during 1912, through 1913 and into 1914. Finally the South Philadelphia Branch was dedicated and officially opened on November 24, 1914. The final cost of construction was \$42,969.74.<sup>17</sup>

The William Rau photographs of South Philadelphia Branch published in the 1914 Free Library *Annual Report* show the symmetrical brick library located right at sidewalk level in a closely developed urban neighborhood. This branch sits virtually at ground level rather than being elevated on a raised basement like the other branches. A narrow alley is located on either side of the free standing structure with a brick and cast iron fence across the opening. A group of men and young boys stand on the low entrance stoop. For the interior view, the large and open library space has four female librarians seated at the central desk. Male and female patrons of various ages are posed around the room or reading at the tables. The lecture room and side entrance are shown. Low shelves and desks divide the large spaces into more intimate areas while taller bookshelves line the outer walls under the windows. Additional photographs of the South Philadelphia Branch in the Free Library collection show large groups of patrons in the basement meeting rooms. This space was utilitarian and nearly windowless. One image is a large group shot of young men, many seated at tables with newspapers and periodicals. Another shows younger boys reading at tables. The people are not identified in the photograph, but it is likely they are members of the large working class Italian immigrant population in this part of South Philadelphia.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (5 January 1912), 13.

<sup>16</sup> Free Library of Philadelphia, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, (25 July 1912), 236.

<sup>17</sup> Free Library of Philadelphia, *Seventeenth Annual Report* (1912), 3; Free Library of Philadelphia, *Eighteenth Annual Report* (1913), 3; Free Library of Philadelphia, *Nineteenth Annual Report* (1914), 26; Photograph of South Philadelphia with cost figures on reverse in Director's Vault, Central Branch, Free Library of Philadelphia.

<sup>18</sup> William Rau photographs in Free Library of Philadelphia, *Nineteenth Annual Report* (1914); Additional photographs in Director's Vault, Central Branch, Free Library of Philadelphia.

South Philadelphia represents a typical example of the open plan, T-shaped library that became common for the Carnegie-funded Free Library branches. The Philadelphia approach shares a number of features with Carnegie Libraries nationwide. In 1917 author Theodore Wesley Koch pointed out that a large room undivided by partitions became a defining feature of Carnegie branches across the country, as was providing a space for lectures. He notes that the lecture program was particularly successful in Philadelphia, where “each branch has a recognized clientele and lecturers are always sure of a good sized audience.”<sup>19</sup>

In her study of the Carnegie Library, architectural historian Abigail Van Slyck discusses the contemporaneous struggle within the library profession over conflicting philosophies of restricting access to reading material and newer ideals of community involvement.<sup>20</sup> Van Slyck also discusses the importance of children’s rooms and specialized outreach to young readers as a new characteristic of libraries in this period.<sup>21</sup> The fact that this branch became the only exclusively children’s branch in the 1960s perhaps indicates that this was a particularly important clientele in this neighborhood. In the case of the South Philadelphia branch and its predominantly foreign born clientele, the Free Library considered outreach to the children as a key means to reach their parents and promote “Americanization.” As noted by librarian John Ashhurst in the 1920 *Annual Report*:

All books in the thirty Children’s Rooms are in English, and include large numbers of American histories and biographies. These books are taken home by the children, and in addition to being read by them, are often read by older members of the family who speak and read English with difficulty.<sup>22</sup>

South Philadelphia and other Philadelphia libraries demonstrate a progressive commitment to open stack branches and encouraging young patrons, but also a desire to control this public space. Here opposing impulses were balanced by stationing the main librarians’ desk in front of the entrance where patrons could be observed by the staff. This arrangement was used in all of the Free Library Carnegie branches and continues today.

On May 3, 1965 the South Philadelphia Branch reopened in a new structure at Board and Morris Streets. Protest from the local patrons helped almost immediately reopen the Carnegie building as the Ritner Children’s Library, the only Free Library branch devoted exclusively to young readers. When the Samuel S. Fels Community Center was attached to the south façade in 1999, the original library was incorporated as a

---

<sup>19</sup> Theodore Wesley Koch, *A Book of Carnegie Libraries*, (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1917), 86.

<sup>20</sup> Abigail Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890-1920*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 122.

<sup>21</sup> See Van Slyck, “Chapter 6 – Reading: The Experience of Children as Library Users.”

<sup>22</sup> Free Library of Philadelphia, *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report*, (1920), 19. Other branches specifically listed as performing “Americanization work” were Southwark, Haddington, and Richmond.



multipurpose room. A new branch library, the Fumo Family Branch, was built on the lot immediately south of the Fels Center and opened on September 3, 1999. Although no longer used as a branch library, the Carnegie structure retains its historic character and use as an important community space.<sup>23</sup>

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The South Philadelphia Branch library is a symmetrical Medieval Revival structure with a formal axial entrance at the center of the front façade. The Medieval Revival appearance is achieved mainly through the decorative details focused on the main entrance, the use of dark red brick laid in a English bond pattern, and square projections at the corners of the parapet and over the doorway that vaguely suggest a fortified structure. The library stands one tall story high, but is not elevated on a raised basement like many Carnegie libraries. It was essentially T-shaped in plan with a main block facing Broad Street and a square ell extending from the center of the rear façade. On recent satellite images, it appears that this ell is still extant, but from the interior it has been completely altered and subsumed by the community center additions on the east (rear) and south (side) façades.<sup>24</sup>

2. Condition of fabric: Good

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The main block of this formerly T-plan building is seven bays wide and three bays deep. The former main library room inside is 84 by 34 1/2 feet. The rear ell was three bays wide and three bays deep. Originally intended to house a 250-person lecture room, this space was 37 by 37 feet.

2. Foundation: The former South Philadelphia Branch sits just a few inches above street grade on a limestone foundation.

3. Walls: The walls are red brick laid in English bond. There is a belt course that runs between the top sashes of the window openings. The dentil belt course is formed by course of projecting headers with a course of alternating projecting headers below. There are square recessed spandrel panels above each window opening near the parapet and a similar rectangular one over the main entrance pavilion. These panels are filled with a pattern of overlapping vertical limestone rectangles. Brick headers are visible in the

---

<sup>23</sup> History of South Philadelphia Branch on the Free Library website at [www.freelibrary.org/branches/history.cfm?loc+SPB](http://www.freelibrary.org/branches/history.cfm?loc+SPB); Fumo Family Branch at [www.freelibrary.org/branches/history.cfm?loc+FFB](http://www.freelibrary.org/branches/history.cfm?loc+FFB).

<sup>24</sup> See Google maps satellite image for 2407 South Broad Street. <http://maps.google.com>.

shallow recesses between each panel. Each spandrel has a square limestone sill projecting slightly from the bottom edge.

4. Structural system, framing: This former library has load bearing brick masonry walls and foundation. The large trusses used to support the roof and span the open reading room spaces are hidden by the plaster ceiling. There were additional metal support columns in the basement meeting room.

5. Main entrance pavilion: The main entrance on South Broad Street is indicated by a front gable entry pavilion executed in matching English bond red brick. The pavilion has a carved limestone ovolo cornice that kicks out at the eaves. A recessed circle filled with brick also laid in a circular pattern is located in the gable over the opening. The tall round arch opening is formed by three courses of header bricks and has a shallow belt course at the spring of the arch. The belt course and the limestone cornice continue on the sides of the pavilion. Inside the shallow pavilion the brick walls are angled inward to the limestone door surround. The round arch also angles inward, stepping down three arches, each the depth of a brick with the headers facing outward. A heavy cast iron tie rod extends across the second arch; it appears to be original. The door opening is flanked by Romanesque pilasters, with half cushion capitals. The words "SOUTH PHILADELPHIA BRANCH" appear in relief over the doorway in the frieze. The arch is filled with a raised limestone circle and surrounding molding. "FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA" appears in relief curved along the top edge of the arch.

6. Chimney: N/A

#### 7. Openings

a. Doorways and Doors: The main doorway is located inside the main entrance pavilion described above. It has a pair of modern metal doors with glazing in the top and bottom. The original doorway appears to have had a column in the center and six light transom above. The transom opening is still there, but it is filled with a single sheet of replacement glazing. Information about other exterior doorways is not available due to alterations for the community center.

b. Windows: The openings still have their original windows. Each round arch window on the main floor of the library has a fixed section in the arch divided into five vertical lights. The rectangular wood sash below has fifteen over fifteen vertical lights, each sash arranged in three rows of five. Each window is in a plain wood frame set into the brick wall with queen closers at the edges. The round arch above each is formed by three courses of header bricks. Each opening has a shallow rectangular limestone sill. The basement level windows are located mostly below street grade in window wells.

8. Roof: The former South Philadelphia Branch has a flat or low pitched roof surrounded by a low brick parapet with limestone coping. The limestone coping is now covered with a metal sheathing in some areas. The parapet has higher sections at the corners and at either side of the main entrance pavilion. The visual effect is of a fortified or vaguely medieval structure.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The former branch library is now a large rectangular open space with a small entry pavilion and a stage located at the opening to the rear ell. Originally this branch had a T-shaped plan consistent with other Philadelphia Carnegie libraries. A modern community center now wraps around the historic library on the south and east sides. The basement level was not accessible.
2. Stairway: The original stairway for the former South Philadelphia Branch is no longer extant.
3. Flooring: The original hardwood floors are no longer visible or have been replaced. The current flooring is square linoleum or vinyl tiles.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Many original interior details are intact in spite of the other changes to the building. The interior decoration is Neoclassical in character, and does not correspond to the Medieval Revival exterior. The walls and ceiling are plaster painted in shades of ivory and pale blue. There is a thick cornice at the top of the walls with ornate scrolled brackets. The brackets are ornamented with a high relief acanthus leaf, beading, and additional foliage. The sides have rosettes at the top and bottom of the scroll, connected by a band of incised lines, and a low relief shell motif at the top edge. Another complex molding runs along the bottom edge of the brackets at the top of the window openings. The frieze between this molding and the cornice has rectangular flush panels between the brackets outlined by thin moldings. The ceiling has a series of beams creating rectangular coffers around the outer edge. At the center the beams outline four large squares – two plain plaster and two filled with skylights. The original skylights have been covered from the exterior and painted over, but are still visible on the interior. Each skylight consists of nine smaller squares of nine lights each, outlined on the outer edge by rectangular sections of three lights each. Thicker mullions accent each nine or three light section. A modern cloth wall covering is located on the lower section of the wall at approximately the original bookshelf height.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors:

Main entrance: There is a small wood interior vestibule projecting from the main doorway. It has a flat top with a simple cornice and arched parapet. The cornice is supported by two large scrolled brackets, one on each side of the doorway. The original doors and transom have been replaced by modern glass and metal ones.

The large rectangular cased opening between the main room and ell retains its original vaguely Neoclassical surround. The cornice is supported on each side by a large scrolled bracket. A plain peaked false parapet is located above the cornice. Originally this opening included pocket doors.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Interior photograph published in Free Library of Philadelphia *Annual Report*, 1914.

b. Windows: Rectangular window openings for the round arch windows are framed with a wide Neoclassical molding with mitred corners and feature a wide, plain reveal. This wood molding matches the bottom band of wall cornice molding. Each window has recessed panels in the spandrels flanking the arched upper sash. A wide, plain mullion sets the arches upper sash apart from the two rectangular sashes below. Each window has a very thin, slightly projecting sill with a simple molding below. The original interior windows survive as blind openings on the south and east walls now incorporated into the community center.

6. Decorative features and trim: The bookshelves are not longer extant.

7. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: It is likely that the original boiler system has been replaced. Any evidence has been removed of whether the original radiator system was located behind and below the bookshelves as specified for other Philadelphia Carnegie libraries.

b. Lighting: Historic photographs indicate that a series of four metal chandeliers with round globes hung from the main room ceiling, one at the center of each large square.<sup>26</sup> These electric chandeliers had eight sets of upward and downward fixtures arranged around an open hoop with s-curve arms and round glass globes. In addition, sconces with one upward and one downward round globe were mounted along the top edge of the outer wall book shelves. These fixtures are no longer extant. The current chandeliers with three curved yellow metal arms and round open top shades are modern in appearance, as are the half circle wall sconces throughout the room. A pair of cast iron sconces originally flanking the exterior entrance is no longer extant.

c. Plumbing: The library would have been built with basic bathroom and kitchen facilities, which have now been upgraded.

D. Site: The library is located right at the front of the property line at the sidewalk, a typical arrangement in this densely developed neighborhood with small lots. One set of original brick and limestone fence piers is still extant at the alley on the north side of the structure, with a replacement metal fence. Broad Street is a wide and busy thoroughfare that still features mainly low-rise commercial structures.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings: Drawings have not been located for this structure.

B. Early Views: William Rau photographs (one exterior and one interior) in the Free Library *Annual Report* for 1914.

C. Bibliography

---

<sup>26</sup> Interior photograph published in Free Library of Philadelphia *Annual Report*, 1914.

The records of the Free Library of Philadelphia are located at the Central Library on Vine Street. The *Annual Reports* are located in the Municipal Reference Division, Cities P53-1154; and the Carnegie Fund Committee Minute Books are located in the Director's Vault (access by special permission).

Bobinski, George S. *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1969.

Buschman, John E. and Gloria J. Leckie, eds. *The Library as Place: History, Community, and Culture*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2007.

Dierickx, Mary B. *The Architecture of Literacy: The Carnegie Libraries of New York City*. New York City: The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Art and Science & NYC Department of General Services, September 1996.

Jones, Theodore. *Carnegie Libraries Across America*. Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1997.

Koch, Theodore Wesley. *A Portfolio of Carnegie Libraries*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: George Wahr, Publisher, 1907.

Koch, Theodore Wesley. *A Book of Carnegie Libraries*. New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1917.

Moss, Roger and Sandra Tatman. *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects, 1700-1930*. New York: G.K. Hall & Company, 1984.

Van Slyck, Abigail. *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

#### PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of the former South Philadelphia Branch Library was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the Heritage Documentation Programs of the National Park Service, Richard O'Connor, Chief, during summer 2007 as part of a larger initiative to record the Carnegie funded branch libraries of the Free Library of Philadelphia. The project is sponsored by HABS in cooperation with the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, John A. Gallery, director; and the Free Library of Philadelphia, William J. Fleming, Administrative Services Director, and made possible through a Congressional appropriation for recording in Southeastern Pennsylvania. The historical reports were prepared by Lisa P. Davidson and Catherine C. Lavoie. Large-format photography was undertaken for HABS by Joseph Elliott.