the history of

carnegie centre

Prepared by Pat Hood
for Carnegie Branch Library
Scottish-born American steel magnate Andrew Carnegie gave $56,162,622 for construction of 2,509 libraries throughout the English-speaking world.

Carnegie donated $50,000 for a public library in Vancouver.

The building was designed by Vancouver architect George Grant.

The style is Romanesque Renaissance, with a domed Ionic portico and French mansard roof.

Granite for the foundation came from Indian Arm.

Sandstone for the 10 inch thick walls came from Gabriola Island.

The spiral staircase was built by Albion Iron Works of Victoria and cost $2,279; 9888 pounds of iron and steel were used.

The rooms were heated by fireplaces.

The walls and ceilings were panelled in hardwood; the floors were oak.

The cornerstone was laid by the Grand Lodge of the Masonic Order on March 29, 1902.

Under the cornerstone were placed Masonic documents, a copy of the city's Act of Incorporation, lists of various officials and examples of the postage stamps and coins then in use.

The building opened in 1903, with the City Museum on the third floor, the public library on the first and second floors, and a book bindery in the basement.

The library was closed for the summer of 1933 due to Depression budget cuts.

The library's budget for 1935 was only 9¢ more than 1934; the Library Board threatened to sue the City for more funds.

The Vancouver Public Library moved to its present Central Branch at Burrard and Robson Street in 1957.
The building's finest architectural feature is its etched and painted stained glass windows.

They were designed and crafted by N.T. Lyon of Toronto, who also made the memorial window in St. George's Church, Geulph, Ontario.

The large windows contain the figures of Milton, Shakespeare and Spenser.

The B.C. Shield above Shakespeare is heraldically incorrect, as it places the sun above the Union Jack. The College of Arms in London switched these in 1906 before approving the Shield design as B.C.'s crest.

Below the poets' feet were 3 smaller windows depicting Scott, Moore and Burns. These windows were removed when the library was converted into the museum building in 1958.

The windows were located intact in 1985 and plans are underway to place them back in the building.
Sympathetic Vancouverites filled buckets with food to be hauled up by rope to the third floor museum.

During the Depression, forced labour camps for the unemployed were set up in the Interior.

The men were paid 20¢ a day to build roads and clear land.

In protest against lack of work and camp living conditions, a corps of well-organized workers barricaded themselves in the 3rd floor museum on May 18, 1935.

No damage was done to the building.

Mayor G.G. McGeer agreed to pay the strikers $1800 for food and lodgings.

Two weeks later, 1800 men left Vancouver by rail on the On-To-Ottawa-Trek. Their slogan was "Work and Wages!"

The Trek was stopped by the R.C.M.P. with the Regina Riot, on July 1, 1935.
1957 - Vancouver Public Library moved to its present location at Burrard and Robson Streets.

1958 - After an eight month closure for conversion, the City Museum took over the whole building in 1958.
- The most popular exhibit was the mummified body of an Egyptian child, which was donated by Dr. George Kidd in 1922. Adults still talk about seeing the mummy when they were children. The stuffed bear was also popular.
- The collection of 500 stuffed B.C. birds was the largest of its kind in the world.

1967 - The Museum relocated to Vanier Park in Kitsilano. At that time an auction of items, including a Chinese bamboo temple front, netted the city $2,855.25.

1968 - Carnegie was boarded up; the mayor suggested demolishing it.

1972 - It was declared a historic site and could not be demolished without a permit from the Provincial Government.

1973 - City council voted to "patch up the building" and use it for the health and social services departments; this idea was later dropped.

1975 - D.E.R.A. (Downtown Eastside Residents Association) and other neighbourhood groups wanted the building converted to a community centre for the areas' citizens.

1975 - The mayor wanted to sell, lease or give away the building.

1976 - City council okayed renovations to the building for community use.

1978 - Council approved funding for the restoration of the building.
- Eventually, $1.2 million was spent on the renovations, to bring the building up to seismic standards and add a concrete addition on the adjacent lot.

1980 - The building was opened as a community centre on January 20, 1980.

1981 - The renovations to the building won architects Downs-Archenbault the Award of Honour from the Canada Heritage Foundation.
The Community Centre

- The Centre is owned by the City of Vancouver and funded through its Social Planning Department.
- The Director is hired by Social Planning to administer staff and budgets.
- Membership in the Centre is open to all residents of Vancouver.
- The Board of Directors is elected annually from the membership, they organize fundraising and plan programming for the community.
- A core of about 120 volunteers donate approximately 5,400 hours per month to the Centre, serving coffee, cooking meals and organizing programmes.
- The Centre operates:
  - an art gallery where local artists receive one man shows
  - a Learning Centre teaching educational upgrading, English-as-a-second language, basic literacy and university courses
  - a billiards room, gymnasium and weight training room
  - a kitchen serving full-course meals as well as ongoing sandwiches and soup
  - a theatre used for films, plays, dances, bingo and public meetings
  - lounge space where cards, chess and conversation occur
  - programmes at Oppenheimer Park
The library is a branch of the Vancouver Public Library.
Books are stocked in English, French, Chinese and Japanese.
The branch circulates about 11 - 13,000 books per month.
Books are also supplied to community groups, temporary shelters in the area, and the Learning Centre.
The library was awarded the 1986 B.C. Library Association Merit Award for its services.
Our Patrons

The Downtown Eastside is the oldest neighbourhood in Vancouver, being its original Town site. There are approximately 14,850 people in the area. 60% of the population is over 45 years of age. 84% of our patrons are single, divorced or widowed; 89% are male. There are an equal number of Chinese and English speaking people in the area; smaller numbers of Japanese, Native Indian and French people use the facilities. Approximately 1500 people use the Centre in a day, making it the busiest Community Centre in Vancouver. Almost all patrons live in hotels or rooming houses.
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**Wilson Liang; Joseph Sparovec**

This community-generated work was digitized and deposited to cIRcle, UBC’s open access digital repository, as part of the *Digitizing Community Memories* project of the *Making Research Accessible in the Downtown Eastside initiative (MRAi)*. In collaboration with the UBC Learning Exchange and UBC Library, the project provided training and support for community members in the Downtown Eastside to digitize and make openly available community-generated materials. This project aimed to increase access to historic Carnegie Centre publications and preserve these unique materials for years to come.

For more information on this project and the UBC Learning Exchange, please visit learningexchange.ubc.ca

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