



The Best Gift: A Record of the Carnegie Libraries in Ontario

Margaret Beckman, Stephen Langmead, John Black

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This book is a vivid reminder of the early days of library development in Ontario. The beautiful buildings which still grace Ontario towns and villages, as illustrated, are a part of our provincial heritage.

By the turn of the century, a public library was perceived as an important element in the civic fabric of almost every Ontario community. However, the introduction of the Carnegie grants for library buildings gave impetus to the Ontario government programme for library development, and provided a focus for increased support of library services. Rivalry among neighbouring communities to secure a Carnegie library heightened this awareness, as did the publicity – in some instances even controversy – which surrounded each step of the grant seeking, site selection and plan approval process.

As well, the hitherto unexplored story of Carnegie grant process in each community has been examined, and the role of one man, James Bertram, secretary to Andrew Carnegie, is revealed in absorbing detail. Library plans and design elements are also discussed, and the influence of a few architects on the building designs is revealed; the fascinating involvement of Frank Lloyd Wright in the Pembroke Carnegie library building is one such example.



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