

Carnegie libraries in Ontario still play a vital role in communities to this day

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Not all very wealthy people light cigars with \$20 bills and bathe in gold-plated bathtubs.

Sometimes that's the perception of the public when individuals have achieved great success and along with that, a lot of money.

Many local libraries across the country, and especially in Ontario, were built due to the generosity of a single man.

Andrew Carnegie was born in Scotland in relatively modest surroundings.

After moving to the U.S. in 1848, Carnegie took on several rather menial jobs.

A local man in Pennsylvania opened his library every Saturday night to local working boys so they could self-educate.

Carnegie took full advantage of the opportunity and used the library to learn as much as he could. He realized how important books were, and resolved that 'If ever wealth came to me, that other poor boys might receive opportunities similar to those for which we were indebted to that nobleman.'

A self-made man, Carnegie had a keen natural business sense. He slowly started building his wealth through wise investments.

As he became wealthier, Carnegie was still a young man when he decided that he would only accept a salary and use the extra money for benevolent purposes.

Between 1875 and 1900, Carnegie made a vast fortune in the steel industry.

In 1901, Carnegie was 65 years old and one of the richest men in the U.S. He had already made sizable donations to several institutions.

Beginning in 1901, Carnegie turned his attention to philanthropic activities.

One of his most notable contributions was the establishment of public libraries - thus fulfilling his early promise.

He created 3,000 public libraries in the U.S., Canada, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and other English-speaking countries.

The libraries weren't just given to different towns. Each town had to have a vested interest in providing the land and ensuring the buildings would be maintained and follow codes of conduct.

The libraries were also designed and built to be a showcase building in the town. Carnegie libraries are all well-designed and impressive buildings and easily recognizable.

Carnegie built a total of 125 libraries in Canada. Fifty-three of those libraries are still in use, including the libraries in Shelburne and Orangeville.

The other libraries have been reused and are still standing and some have received special 'heritage designations' due to their impressive designs.

Over 125 years after his death, Carnegie's legacy lives on whenever someone enters a Carnegie library to read or borrow a book.