

Brodie Resource Library
216 Brodie Street South



Year Built: 1912

Architect: Hood and Scott

Style: Classic Revival

Notable Features: Stained glass windows illustrating famous authors

Built in accordance with the Carnegie Foundation's 'Notes on the Erection of Library Building'

Date of Designation: February 27th, 1982

By-Law No: 76-1981

Registration No: 234508

Current Owner: Thunder Bay Public Library Board

Description:

The Library was originally organized as the CPR Employees Library, in 1885 and was housed in the old CPR Roundhouse at West Fort William "to promote among the employees a desire for good wholesome literature."¹ The roundhouse was also home to a smoking and recreation room, bath (with hot, cold and lukewarm water) and a reading room. More than one hundred people were present for the opening of the "library and social club," and the institution continued to enjoy success for the next few years.² By 1891, there were 107 members and \$1,019.67 in the treasury.³

Nearing the end of the century, the library committee concerned itself mainly with the organization of the annual picnic which helped to raise funds for maintenance.

¹ Fort William Journal, *C.P.R. Library, its present flourishing condition*. Jan 30, 1892

² Fort William Public Library, *The Story...* (1959)

³ Fort William Journal, *C.P.R. Library, its present flourishing condition*. Jan 30, 1892

During the picnics, games were to be played and “steps taken for the safety of women and children.” This meant “no liquors or rowdyism.”(sic)⁴

Although membership was maintained at “nearly one hundred” people, by 1903 the financial state of the library was dismal. Discussion arose in the next few years as to whether the library site should be moved to a “more central part of town.” The collection of 2000 books was moved from the Roundhouse to the northeast corner of the basement of Fort William Town Hall in 1905. Membership cost \$1 annually, although the board was working towards a free library for the community.⁵

Miss Mary J. L. Black was appointed head librarian in 1909, and she saw the opening of the public library at the Brodie Street location.⁶ The board had been negotiating with the Carnegie Foundation, established by Scottish-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, and received a grant of \$50,000. Carnegie had been offering grants to hundreds of small towns and cities so more communities could enjoy the benefits of a public library. Although he asserted each community was responsible for acquiring their own architect, so as to promote individuality, Carnegie did create some guidelines for the style of building he envisioned for the libraries. Classic in style and symmetrical in design, Carnegie libraries are instantly recognizable as welcoming public buildings. The interior is designed in an efficient and practical manner, which enables only one librarian to effectively supervise the entire library.⁷

Brodie Resource Library opened its doors in 1912 and, under the leadership of Mary J. L. Black was considered one of the “finest libraries in Ontario.”⁸ Black proved herself to be a competent and fair librarian, collecting the first late fine from the first man to enter the building upon opening, a Times Journal representative.⁹ Her service to the library was described as “long, devoted and able.”¹⁰ In honour of her work as head librarian from 1909-1937, the Westfort branch library, which opened in 1938, was named the Mary J. L. Black Library. Interestingly, Mary J. L. Black was also the first woman to be elected president of the Ontario Library Association, in 1916-1917. She was noted for her “progressive methods and tireless devotion to service ethic library work.”¹¹

Architecture

The Brodie Resource Library, which opened in 1912, followed the architectural guidelines established by its benefactor, Mr. Andrew Carnegie. The firm of Hood and Scott, Architect and Contractor were hired as architects for the project.¹² Designed in

⁴ Sentinel, *minutes for the CPR employees library meeting*. July 15, 1891

⁵ Fort William Public Library, *The Story...* (1959)

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ <http://www.carnegie-libraries.org/styles.html>

⁸ Amy Donati, *Fort William Public Library*. Bookman Vol. III, #4. May 1967

⁹ Lakehead Living, *Brodie Resource's 70th anniversary*, Wednesday May 5th, 1982.

¹⁰ Alexander Calhoun, letter of memories to Mr. Donovan, Chief Librarian

¹¹ Libraries Today, Mary J. L. Black < <http://www.uoguelph.ca/~lbruce/photos/Blackmj.htm> >

¹² J. Spooner, Publicity Chairman, *Chronological Order of Events Leading up to the Establishment of Brodie Street Library*.

1910, it is a good example of the eclectic style of architecture which developed in America after 1900. The library design is very formal. Resembling Palladian Renaissance architecture, the library's symmetrical staircase entrance was embellished with a pair of Ionic columns enclosed by pilasters.¹³ Carnegie generally approached library design with symbolism in mind, and the staircase entrance was supposed to have denoted a person's rise through intellectual learning. Brodie Street Resource Library's entrance however, was renovated in 1966, because in modern times, the staircase tends to represent inaccessibility more than higher learning. To accommodate the renovations, the pilasters were translated into square piers at this time.

The overall composition of the exterior is Neo-Renaissance in character. Red brick and limestone pilasters and columns rest on a heavy stone plinth. Arches and columns arranged symmetrically about the main entrance support a bracketed cornice. The cornice in turn supports a brick parapet which corresponds to the Renaissance balustrade. It has been suggested that the purpose of the library design was to provide the appearance of a pleasing building, rhythmic and inviting.

Other notable architectural features of the library, which have remained intact are the arched windows and their surrounding decorative stonework, the stained-glass windows depicting famous authors, from Dante to Ibsen, the parapet inscribed 'Public Library,' and the ornamental scrolls which adorn it.¹⁴

¹³ Fraser and Brown Architects; Restorations Proposed for the Brodie Street Resource Library

¹⁴ J.A. MacDONald, *Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee*. October 15, 1979