This paper examines and compares the philanthropic efforts of Andrew Carnegie and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in supporting public libraries in the United States of America. The history, function, criticisms, and successes of both the Carnegie library building program (ca. 1898-1917) and the Gates Foundation United States Libraries programs (1997-present) are discussed. A comparison of each program’s stated goals, parameters, and effects on information culture and the place of the public library in American community life is offered, providing useful commentary on the persistent and important relationship between public libraries and philanthropy in the United States.

Headings:

Public libraries – History – United States

Gifts, contributions, etc.

Carnegie, Andrew (1835-1919)

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
LIBRARIES AND PHILANTHROPY: THE ROLES OF ANDREW CARNEGIE AND THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

by
Sarah A. Everhart

A Master’s paper submitted to the faculty of the School of Information and Library Science of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina
April 2009

Approved by

______________________________
Katherine M. Wisser
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .................................................................................................................... 2

The Carnegie Library Building Program ................................................................. 5

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Library Program ........................................... 31

Carnegie and Gates: A Comparison of their Library Programs ............................... 43

Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 50

Works Cited .................................................................................................................. 52
Introduction

At the close of the nineteenth century, steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie set in motion an unprecedented program of philanthropic giving that forever altered the history of libraries in America, traditional ideas about philanthropy, and the very nature of information culture in the United States. Carnegie’s iconic personal history of ‘poor weaver’s son to millionaire’ always included a chapter on the positive influence that libraries and reading had on him during his youth. As an outgrowth of his own experience, Carnegie had a strong personal affinity for libraries and a deep and abiding conviction in libraries’ ability to elevate society by providing individuals with the knowledge and tools that would allow them to effect their own personal success.

Carnegie’s library building program (which was never given a formal title) changed the face of philanthropic giving while at the same time changing the physical face of the United States. For any community that would furnish a construction site and guarantee an annual 10% appropriation for maintenance and upkeep, Carnegie would provide grant money sufficient to erect a library building that would serve the population of the town or area. As a result of this remarkable program, Carnegie granted more than $41.7 million dollars for 1,679 public library buildings in 1,412 communities in the United States between 1898-1917 (Bobinski, “A Call” 367). Many of these buildings still stand today, serving the public as institutions of learning and repositories of knowledge, and a remarkable number are still used as libraries in their communities.
Though Carnegie’s influence on American libraries continues today through the legacy of his building program and the ongoing activity of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, a new philanthropic giant has begun to make its mark on the history of public libraries in America. From its formation in the late 1990s, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has been a major player in the support of libraries worldwide, and particularly of public libraries in the United States. Like Carnegie, the Gates Foundation’s library support has focused on providing infrastructure based on the belief that libraries are important institutions that must be able to provide tools that will enable individuals to improve their own lives. Whereas Carnegie’s program provided buildings, the Gates Foundation’s library programs have focused on enabling public libraries to obtain and maintain computing equipment and free public access to the Internet so that “if you can get to a public library in the United States, you can access the Internet” (Foundation Time Line). The Gates Foundation’s goal of closing the digital divide by providing libraries with computing equipment and internet access may well be the twenty-first century equivalent of Carnegie’s commitment to erecting free public libraries for “the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding” (Carnegie Corporation).

Both philanthropic programs affected the entire nation from coast to coast, and both have made important contributions to library and information culture in the United States over the past 110 years.

This paper will examine the individual histories and legacies of the Carnegie library building program and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s library programs and discuss their impact on the library and information culture of the United States of America from 1898 to the present. The paper will also consider the role that technology
has played in the relationship between libraries and philanthropists and discuss the role that gifts of infrastructure play in the public library’s position in American society. Comparing and contrasting the stated goals, parameters, histories, and effects of these two major philanthropic programs provides useful commentary on the persistent and important relationship between public libraries and philanthropy in the United States.
The Carnegie Library Building Program

Owing to its tremendous impact on the history of public libraries in America, and to the remarkable life and legacy of Carnegie himself, much fine scholarship has been conducted on the Carnegie library building program. Even while the program was in operation, as well as shortly afterwards, scholars had begun to write about Carnegie’s library building program, its impact, and about the changing place of the free public library in American communities. Examples of these early analyses include Arthur Bostwick’s *The American Public Library* and T.W. Koch’s *A Book of Carnegie Libraries*. In the decades following the program’s end in 1917, many monographs and articles were published discussing the program as a whole or, more often, discussing individual Carnegie-funded libraries or groups of libraries and the impact that their establishment had had on the recipient communities. Published in 1969, Professor George S. Bobinski’s *Carnegie Libraries* is still widely considered the major commentary on the Carnegie building program. Professor Bobinski’s book covers in detail the development of Carnegie’s library building program, the parameters under which the program operated, its successes and challenges, and its lasting impact on public library development in the United States.

Bobinski’s research and findings are based largely on the official records of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, now housed at Columbia University, which include voluminous amounts of correspondence between Carnegie library grant recipients and the building program administrators. Bobinski’s research also drew on a 1943 publication by
the Carnegie Corporation entitled *Carnegie Grants for Library Buildings, 1890-1917*, which provides detailed figures and rosters of U.S. communities that received library grant money from Carnegie or the Corporation. Yet another source for primary documents of importance to the study of the Carnegie library building program is Andrew Carnegie’s own work, *The Gospel of Wealth, and Other Timely Essays*, first published in 1900, which assembles various articles written by Carnegie between 1886 and 1899. These articles provide insight into Carnegie’s personal opinions on wealth, philanthropy, social structure, international relations, democracy, and other topics.

Since the publication of *Carnegie Libraries*, scholarly commentary on Carnegie-funded libraries has been steady and ongoing. Susan Spaeth Cherry and Theodore Jones each provide retrospective views of the impact of the Carnegie program, as well as detailed surveys of the status of Carnegie library buildings over the passage of time. Scholars such as Daniel F. Ring have focused on area-specific Carnegie libraries, such as Carnegie libraries in Montana, New York, or the Midwest. Robert Sidney Martin and others have examined instances of communities that sought Carnegie grants but either were denied funds or rejected the grant money for a variety of reasons. More recently, Abigail Van Slyck has examined the significance of Carnegie libraries’ architectural design in their impact on American culture. She argues that typical layouts for Carnegie libraries in the early twentieth century reflected contemporary ideas about social control and freedom. For example, open stacks gave readers agency in their use of library materials, while at the same time the librarian (whose desk was centrally located in the building) exerted social control over readers by monitoring their behavior in the library. Van Slyck has also discussed issues of gender and equality affecting the Carnegie library
building program, particularly concerning the role of women and women’s groups in forming and supporting American public libraries. Additionally, hundreds of articles have appeared in library professional literature discussing individual Carnegie libraries: their growth or diminution, their challenges, their successes, and their enduring legacy.

America at the end of the nineteenth century was a nation keenly aware of its own headlong momentum towards change and ‘progress.’ The industrial revolution had brought about unprecedented advances in manufacturing and production, which in turn had effected enormous change in economics, business practice, labor, family life, social relations, gender roles, and countless other aspects of culture and society, not to mention its very important role in the life and career of Andrew Carnegie. Immigrants from across the world flooded into the country, bringing with them their own beliefs and culture and sparking new interest in questions of assimilation, education, and social conditions. The frontier had officially been declared closed in 1890, and though regional differences across the United States were substantial, Victorian and Progressive values fueled a nationwide interest in civic improvement and community-building. Major public figures such as Theodore Roosevelt and Carnegie extolled the virtues of individualism, hard work, and self-improvement, while still displaying a strongly paternalistic attitude toward lower social classes and minorities. It was into this national milieu that Andrew Carnegie began to set forth his ideas about the importance of free public libraries in America.

It is important to note that Carnegie was not responsible for beginning the free public library movement in the United States. Ditzion points out that “Carnegie’s role in the library movement was not that of an initiator; it was rather that of a stimulant to an
organism which might have rested long on a plateau had it not been spurred on to greater heights” (150), and Bobinski stresses that by 1898 “the public library was already an established, although young and struggling, institution” (Carnegie Libraries 4). Libraries for the people (that is, independent of institutions of higher learning) had existed in the United States, particularly in New England and the Midwest, since the late eighteenth century. The first iteration of American “public” libraries came in the form of subscription libraries, which were supported by groups of people belonging to the same (privileged) social class, background, and level of wealth. Later, state governments began to recognize the idea of providing libraries for their people, resulting in “social” libraries, which were free to the public and supported by taxation (Bobinski, Carnegie Libraries 4). Furthermore, as Van Slyck points out, civic and community groups across the country had already taken it into their own hands to provide their towns and communities with libraries well before Carnegie’s library program began.

In Carnegie Libraries, Bobinski provides a list of communities in the United States receiving Carnegie grants for public library buildings (207-242). An astonishing majority of these communities indicated that a public library had already been established in their town prior to receiving the Carnegie grant. Most of these library-founding organizations were women’s groups, whose interest in forming libraries was borne out of a desire to build up the moral virtues and the civic pride of their communities, while at the same time boosting their own organizations, many of which were literary societies. In the early stages of their history in the United States following the Civil War, libraries were widely seen as a social good (though then, as now, it was possible to find the occasional dissenter), and women’s groups across the country took it upon themselves to
provide these positive establishments for their towns and cities. Van Slyck notes that “women were so active in establishing and administering libraries for their towns that in 1933 the American Library Association credited women’s clubs with initiating 75 percent of the public libraries then in existence” (125).

Carnegie’s philanthropic program arrived at a time when “political, economic, social, and intellectual forces in the United States were ripe for the establishment of public libraries and for their further development” (Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* 5). The established and growing interest in free public libraries that had already taken root in American soil both before and after the Civil War combined with the spirit of progress discussed above, the spread and strengthening of the public education system, and the popular idea of self-improvement and self-education to create fertile ground for Carnegie’s library building program. At the time of Carnegie’s entrance into large-scale philanthropy, there was a “desperate need for new library buildings in the United States” (Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* 34), so the offer of library buildings for communities that wanted them was seized upon by many municipalities in a short amount of time.

Andrew Carnegie had very specific opinions both on philanthropy in general and on philanthropy toward libraries. An examination of the impetus and stated goals that drove Carnegie’s library program will help provide a framework to better understand the impact of Carnegie’s program, as well as how it compares to other library philanthropy projects such as the Gates Foundation’s. Carnegie’s view of philanthropy is best represented in two of his essays, “Wealth” and “The Best Fields for Philanthropy,” both of which were published in the *North American Review* in 1889. “Wealth” sets forth what came to be known as Carnegie’s ‘Gospel of Wealth:’ his opinion on how excess
wealth ought to be handled and his understanding of the wealthy man’s duty to society. He begins this essay by asserting that it is “well, nay, essential for the progress of the race” (“Wealth” 653) that some individuals be endowed with the natural ability to succeed and amass more wealth and power than others: “We accept and welcome…the concentration of business, industrial and commercial, in the hands of a few” (“Wealth” 655). According to Carnegie, it is the duty of these extraordinary men to use their superior abilities, fortunes, and intellect to improve society as a whole. Carnegie never set out to eradicate poverty or equalize society; in his view, this was not the natural order of things. Instead, he was concerned with creating harmony between rich and poor through careful administration of wealth by the “superior” men who had acquired it. Carnegie’s is a view firmly in keeping with the social, economic, and philosophical mores of his day, and it defines much of his approach to philanthropy.

In the next section of “Wealth,” Carnegie explains the duty of the man of wealth. He is adamant that the best and only acceptable thing for a man to do with surplus wealth is to administer it, during his own lifetime, in ways that will improve society as a whole. That is, he must not bequeath all his fortune to his children, nor must he hoard it until his death. Instead, he must administer it “for the common good, and this wealth, passing through the hands of the few, can be made a much more potent force for the elevation of our race than if it had been distributed in small sums to the people themselves” (“Wealth” 660). Therefore, the wealthy man’s duty is:

to consider all surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust funds, which he is called upon to administer…in the manner which, in his judgment, is best calculated to produce the most beneficial results for the community—the man of wealth thus becoming the mere agent and trustee for his poorer brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience, and ability to administer, doing for them better than they would or could do for themselves. (“Wealth” 661-662)
In discussing his view of charity, Carnegie explains the principle which most directly affects the parameters and requirements of his library building program: “the main consideration should be to help those who will help themselves…to give those who desire to rise the aids by which they may rise; to assist, but rarely or never to do all. Neither the individual nor the race is improved by alms-giving” (“Wealth” 663). This concept of ‘helping (only) those who will help themselves’ is the cornerstone of Carnegie’s philosophy of philanthropy, and it played a tremendous role in how his library building program functioned.

In another important essay, “The Best Fields for Philanthropy,” Carnegie discusses more specifically his preference for libraries as recipients of philanthropy. He also goes into further detail on his idea of ‘the deserving poor’ and his expectations for the specific returns of philanthropy:

The first requisite…is to take care that the purpose for which he spends [wealth] shall not have a degrading, pauperizing tendency upon its recipients, and…[shall] stimulate the best and most aspiring poor of the community to further efforts for their own improvement. It is not the irreclaimably destitute, shiftless, and worthless that it is truly beneficial or truly benevolent to attempt to reach and improve. (“The Best Fields” 685)

Carnegie goes on to say that such ‘worthless’ poor can take advantage of established refuges “where they can be isolated from the well-doing and industrious poor, who are liable to be demoralized by contact with these unfortunates” (“The Best Fields” 685). Therefore in Carnegie’s view there is a meritocratic hierarchy to proper, effective giving, and philanthropy ought only to benefit those ‘worthy’ poor who have the motivation to take advantage of it: “the industrious and ambitious; not those who need everything done for them, but those who, being most anxious and able to help themselves, deserve and will be benefited by help from others and the extension of their opportunities at the hands
of the philanthropic rich” (“The Best Fields” 686). In Carnegie’s view, one of the best ways to extend the opportunities of the deserving poor was through free public libraries.

Carnegie’s explanation of his affinity for libraries as recipients of philanthropic giving usually involved proud and nostalgic tales of his childhood. Before Carnegie’s family had immigrated to America, his father, a skilled weaver from the town of Dunfermline, Scotland, had organized his fellow weavers to pool their resources in order to buy books, which would then be read aloud to them while they worked. The books acquired by the weavers became Dunfermline’s first circulating library, a fact of which Andrew Carnegie was exceedingly proud (Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* 11-12). Another early experience that helped established Carnegie’s love of libraries is the free library of Colonel J. Anderson in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. Anderson, Carnegie recalled, “opened his little library of four hundred books to boys” (Carnegie, “The Best Fields” 689), and each Saturday the working boys of Allegheny could come to the library to exchange their books and borrow new ones. These experiences in Carnegie’s formative years instilled in him a special regard for libraries and the opportunity they provide for people with ambition—even poor folk, weavers, working boys—to educate themselves and improve their own lives. Carnegie referred to free public libraries as “the library of the working class” and “a cradle of pure democracy,” (qtd. in Ditzion 151, 154), and saw them as bastions of knowledge, enlightenment, and self-improvement available to all of society.¹

Carnegie’s positive personal experiences with libraries and his convictions about the opportunities that libraries afford users formed the main impetus for Carnegie’s focus on libraries as one of the main areas of his philanthropy. His goals for the library building program were to stimulate the formation and spread of free public libraries in
United States communities in order to provide the deserving, ambitious poor with the opportunity to better themselves through reading, culture, and self-education.

Carnegie’s library philanthropy got started as early as 1886 and is often divided into two distinct periods. The first period, which Carnegie called “retail,” lasted from 1886-1896. During this period, Carnegie gave over $1.8 million to form 14 library buildings in the United States, most of which were in communities in Pennsylvania that were directly tied to Carnegie’s industrial empire—Allegheny, Johnstown, Pittsburgh, Braddock, and Homestead, Pennsylvania; and Fairfield, Iowa (Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* 13). These libraries were quite different from other Carnegie-funded library buildings, as they often included additional community amenities such as art galleries, recital rooms, organs, or swimming pools and gymnasium space. Carnegie also provided these early libraries with endowments for their maintenance. During the later “wholesale” period of Carnegie library building (1898-1917), Carnegie strictly forbade the use of donated buildings for other functions such as civic centers or gymnasia, and he was strongly opposed to free public libraries being funded by endowments, feeling instead that funding for a library’s upkeep ought to come directly from its patrons, the public.

By the time the Carnegie library building program reached the wholesale period, which comprises the majority of Carnegie buildings, Carnegie had devised a clear idea of how he intended his program to run. The basic parameters of the program were relatively simple. Carnegie was willing to give thousands of dollars for the erection of a library building to any community with a population of 1,000 or more that expressed a need or desire for one.\(^2\) In return, communities had to agree to maintain the library as a free,
public institution; they had to provide a suitable site upon which the library would be constructed; and they had to guarantee an annual fund that amounted to “at least” ten percent of Carnegie’s donation for the maintenance and upkeep of the library building and its collections (Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* 40). The amount of the donation was determined by Carnegie’s secretary, James Bertram, based on census figures for the community in question, and usually came to about $2 per capita. For example, if a town of 5,000 applied for a grant, the typical amount donated for the erection of the library building would be approximately $10,000, and the town would be required to provide $1,000 per year to maintain the library. Carnegie insisted that the 10% maintenance fee be paid from taxes (rather than an endowment, benefactors’ gifts, or library support groups) in order to ensure that the library was supported by the citizens of its town. The money donated by Carnegie was to be used only for the erection of the building itself; it was not to be used to purchase furniture, develop the library’s collection, or provide salaries for staff. These expenses were to be paid by the community from the 10% annual library appropriation. In discussing the requirements of the communities that benefited from his library philanthropy program, Carnegie often said that from a business standpoint, he was making the best bargains of his career. Bobinski notes, “when he gave a city money for library buildings, he succeeded in obtaining a pledge that the city would furnish sites and maintain the libraries forever. The city’s investment was greater than his” (*Carnegie Libraries* 12). Though Carnegie’s main motivation was the spread of libraries as a benefit to society, he also appreciated the handsome investment his donations resulted in over time.
Since the library grant received from Carnegie required effort on the part of the community in the form of providing a suitable site, architectural plans for the building, and the 10% annual appropriation, Carnegie soon came to insist upon dealing directly with official community entities such as town councils or the mayor’s office, rather than library boards or library booster organizations. Carnegie authorities wanted “the endorsement of the city so that there would be no doubt that everyone supported the library” (Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* 38). They also insisted that all business between Carnegie and the recipient libraries be carried out through mail correspondence, rather than personal meetings or other forms of communications. Once Carnegie had set up the general guidelines of the library building program, he passed the real control and running of the program to his personal secretary, James Bertram. Bertram “was the one involved in the daily contacts and decisions” (Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* 24) of the Carnegie library building program, and his power was considerable. Carnegie provided the funding and the general parameters of the program, but Bertram was responsible for communicating with recipients and executing the program into action. Van Slyck points out that Carnegie used the trusted model of the corporation to run his philanthropic projects, since it had served him so well in business:

Applying the principles of efficiency that he had developed for his railroad and manufacturing concerns, Carnegie centralized decision making, regularized procedures, and limited the possibilities for making mistakes. Instead of becoming personally involved with the administration of his philanthropies, Carnegie established procedures that allowed others to carry out his policies….the smooth functioning of the system depended on no single person. (Van Slyck 23)

The procedures set out by Carnegie and executed by Bertram were as follows: an interested community would contact Carnegie to ask for a donation for a library building. Bertram would then send them a standard “Schedule of Questions” to complete, which
inquired about the town’s population, whether it already had a library established and, if so, what its size and circulation was like. The Schedule of Questions also asked whether a suitable library site was available to the town and how much the town was willing and able to tax itself for the library’s annual support (Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* 39, 203-205).

For some communities, the quest for a Carnegie library never progressed beyond this point. The most typical reason for a town not receiving Carnegie funds after having requested them had to do with the 10% annual appropriation. Many towns simply could not gain the support from taxpayers necessary to raise this money. Some applicants were also denied by Bertram on the grounds that they did not appear to need a new library building or would not agree to furnish enough annual money to support a library. Communities that made it past this first hurdle often spent months in back-and-forth correspondence with Bertram, trying to reach compromises on a suitable site and architectural design for their new library building. Bertram was extremely scrupulous about considerations of location and function for new buildings, since these aspects were so important to the library’s survival and success. An added complication lay in the fact that Bertram could be difficult to work with (Bobinski; Jones; Van Slyck). Bertram’s correspondence with recipient communities often seems to indicate his conviction that he knew what was best for communities eager to obtain Carnegie funding for their libraries. His style of communication could charitably be called terse; sometimes it bordered on downright rude. The Carnegie Corporation Records files of correspondence between Bertram and recipient library communities are filled with copies of sharp, laconic letters from Bertram to eager town council members. However, Bertram was deeply committed
both to Carnegie and to the success of the library building program, and most applicant communities eventually received funding adequate to erect a library building sufficient for the needs of their town or area. Furthermore, the communities that did receive funding were those who had pledged to finance the ongoing maintenance of their libraries—a situation that dovetailed nicely with Carnegie’s personal conviction that philanthropy ought to help only those who are willing to help themselves.

The enduring legacy of Carnegie-funded libraries speaks to the overall success of the program. A hundred years after the main period of Carnegie library giving, the public is still generally aware that Carnegie did great things for libraries, and many communities can still point to the Carnegie building as the town’s first library. In terms of the sheer volume of the program, Carnegie gave nearly $42 million dollars to build 1,689 public libraries in the United States, more than half of the total number of public libraries in the country by the end of the Carnegie library building program. As for the success of Carnegie’s goal of putting books into the hands of every American, his libraries served “an estimated patronage of thirty-five million people” (Jones 3). Jones argues that “Carnegie libraries played a formative role in education, as well as civic politics, finance, and artistic and social developments….Carnegie’s grant stipulations fostered the now-unquestioned concept that it is a governmental duty to provide tax monies to support public libraries” (3). In addition to hundreds of requests for libraries, Carnegie also received thousands of letters of gratitude and thanks from librarians, children, mothers, fathers, teachers, mayors, and townspeople across the country. Many librarians sent reports of great success, citing the percentage of their town’s population that held library cards, the booming monthly circulation, and the growth of the collection since the
Carnegie building gift (Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* 162). Though states in the Midwest and Northeastern United States (as well as California) received both the largest number of libraries and largest dollar amount of grant money, Carnegie did not discriminate by geographic region, and 46 of the 48 states in the Union at the time of Carnegie’s giving received library buildings from him (Jones 128-129; Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Carnegie Grants* 7-8). Carnegie himself was always exceedingly pleased and satisfied with the results of his library philanthropy. Speaking in Braddock, Pennsylvania, in 1914, Carnegie said, “I’m willing to put this library and institution against any other form of benevolence. It’s the best kind of philanthropy I can think of and I’m willing to stand on that record” (qtd. in Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* 110). Overall, Carnegie’s library building program had a generally positive effect both on library culture and on society at large in the United States at the turn of the century.

However, the Carnegie library building program encountered its fair share of criticism and problems over the years. Carnegie’s first libraries constructed in the United States (during the ‘retail’ period of the program) were located in communities that housed major workforces of his industrial interests, such as Allegheny, Homestead, and Pittsburgh. Carnegie was vilified as a ‘robber baron’ among labor groups, particularly after the 1892 Homestead (PA) steel strike, in which striking workers were killed by security forces at the Carnegie Steel Company mill in Homestead. Criticism from organized labor accused Carnegie of “building libraries and then reducing wages to pay for them” (Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* 103), while some union leaders declared that they would refuse to support or set foot in a library funded by Carnegie. Though Carnegie always denied responsibility for the deaths at Homestead and saw his library
building program as a purely good endeavor, he and his corporations faced vitriolic criticism from labor groups throughout the course of his career until his death in 1919. Criticism also came from other groups. Alvin Johnson, in his 1915 report to the Carnegie Corporation of New York, pointed out “there are…to be found Socialists who attack the free library as an institution ‘cunningly devised to distract the attention of the working class from their woes’” (Johnson 7). Organized labor and the radical left were by no means the only factions that criticized Carnegie and his motives in erecting libraries, particularly in the early stages of the program, but they were perhaps the most vocal groups.

Carnegie and his program faced other criticisms. The most widespread accusation was that in providing money for library buildings which other entities were responsible for maintaining, Carnegie was creating hundreds of monuments to himself for posterity. Though Carnegie never required or even suggested that the new libraries bear his name, some recipients chose to name them ‘Carnegie Library,’ fueling the accusation that Carnegie had funded the buildings out of vanity and egotism. Several newspapers and magazines leveled this accusation at Carnegie in the form of editorial cartoons. The example below (Fig. 1), from the Detroit Journal on December 10, 1902, shows an image of Carnegie in highland costume offering a sack of money labeled “For My Monument.” Meanwhile, the library commissioner tries to talk the city of Detroit, represented by a woman overburdened with taxes, into taking on additional thousands in library maintenance fees “to help Andy build one of his monuments.”
In addition to criticism, the Carnegie program faced several other snags, often on account of communities failing to measure up to Bertram’s or the program’s standards in some way. Library or city boards would sometimes inflate their town’s population in hopes of obtaining a larger grant. This problem prompted Bertram to rely on census data to determine community size, even when the census numbers were several years out of date. Many communities had difficulty deciding on or providing a suitable plot of land. Still more towns and cities employed architects and designers who had no familiarity whatsoever with the needs of library buildings. Many new buildings were “planned with expensive exteriors and inefficient, uneconomical interiors” (Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* 58) that essentially wasted the grant money and were not conducive to library service. Others were held up in construction or went over budget, a problem which induced Carnegie and Bertram to require a written pledge from towns’ mayors saying
that the library would be constructed on time and on budget. However, Carnegie administrators maintained a strict “hands-off” approach when it came to oversight regarding library planning, function, or service; they refused to become involved in supervising the formation of local libraries. Bertram’s frustration with inappropriate building plans sent to him by recipient communities led him to create a document entitled *Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings*, which offered basic guidelines for library buildings “to obtain for the money the utmost amount of effective accommodation, consistent with good taste in building” (Bertram 221). The document also included sample architectural drawings of plans which Carnegie administrators found acceptable. Beyond this guidance, however, Bertram and other Carnegie officials regularly refused pleas from communities to provide guidance or oversight as they established their new libraries.

Other criticisms of the program came to light after many libraries had been erected. The most frequently identified problem had to do with the 10% appropriations fee. Many communities, particularly those who formed their town’s first library with the Carnegie grant, soon found that the 10% expected of them was insufficient to properly maintain the library. The Carnegie money was to be used strictly for the erection of the building, leaving furnishings, staff salaries, maintenance and janitorial duties, and the acquisition and development of the library collection completely up to the individual town. Occasionally, particularly in smaller towns, this problem resulted a library that experienced “a long period of stagnation” (Johnson 52) from its construction. Some communities expressed a wish to rent out library space, particularly the lecture hall space that was often included in the basement of Carnegie-funded libraries, for other purposes in order to raise funds. However, Carnegie administration strongly discouraged this
practice, since Carnegie himself felt that the library should only be used for library activities or events intended to directly benefit the library, as opposed to civic organization meetings or municipal offices.

As some communities found themselves with a beautiful new building but no means to furnish it, supply it with books, or keep it open, there was discontent toward Carnegie’s policy of providing library buildings but “not the books and brains to go with them” (Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* 105). A related problem had to do with the personnel appointed to run libraries once they were constructed. Again, Carnegie authorities refused to get involved in appointing or recommending staff, and librarianship as a professional field was still relatively new. Often, particularly in small towns or further West, away from the small number of library schools then in existence, the person appointed as librarian of a new Carnegie library had no concept of librarianship whatsoever beyond a vague notion of book guardian. Bertram’s correspondence files are filled with requests for guidelines, standard practice, or rules on how to run a Carnegie library, including questions as basic as what the hours ought to be and how books for a library could be obtained and recorded (Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* 163, Carnegie Corporation of New York Records Reel 1).

Though the program was still being considered a success, and the correspondence files also contain many stories of booming, well-run, functional Carnegie libraries, the Carnegie Corporation of New York (which was now responsible for running the program and disbursing funds) felt they needed an overall assessment of the program. In 1915 the Carnegie Corporation hired Alvin S. Johnson, an economist, to make a national survey of Carnegie libraries and report back with his findings on the program’s
efficacy and suggestions for changes that ought to be made to the program. The Johnson report is a remarkable document, forthright in its recommendations to the Corporation, and downright prescient in its view of library service in America.

Johnson saw the free public library first and foremost as a public service institution, stressing that “the value of the free public library can be judged only by reference to the resulting social service” (Johnson 3). He was also sanguine about the important role public libraries played in the United States both at the time of his report and also in the future, naming the public library “a necessary complement to the free public school system, an aid to practical development, and a means for distributing the fruits of civilization….it may be expected to play a significant part in advancing popular intellectual progress” (Johnson 12). Many of the towns observed in Johnson’s survey displayed great appreciation for the library as a means of bringing education and culture to the population. However, these communities did not necessarily have a clear concept of how a library was to function. Many towns were having trouble creating or sustaining good library service. In response, the main suggestion made by Johnson, and the bold upshot of his report, was that the Corporation turn its library philanthropy focus away from building donation and instead concentrate on aiding causes that would promote the formation of effective public service in the new libraries:

While the library work of the Carnegie Corporation has hitherto taken the form of building donations, the end in view has been the provision of library service. To confer upon the largest possible number of persons the benefit of access to such books as may afford pleasure and profit is the active purpose under which libraries have been founded. Now…the emphasis might properly shift to other elements in library service than the provision of buildings. (Johnson 17)

Though Johnson makes some minor recommendations for improvement to the program (i.e., paying closer attention to the location of proposed library sites), his major emphasis
Johnson reiterated this recommendation several times in his report and couched it in terms of good, efficient business practice, arguing that much of the Carnegie Corporation’s investment in libraries “[was] not yielding its maximum of service, for want of an adequately trained personnel” (49). Johnson also stressed the importance of intelligent collection development and outreach to patrons and communities, tasks which he argued ought to be carried out by trained librarians: “no library is properly employing its opportunities if it merely provides reading matter according to the requests of the community. An efficient public library engages actively in creating a demand for reading” (21). In Johnson’s view, the time had come for a shift in the Carnegie library program.

Johnson also made other important points in his report. First, he addressed the issue of the 10% appropriation and its inadequacy in maintaining the Carnegie library buildings: “the writer has not…discovered any class of libraries in which such a ten per cent maintenance fund appeared to make possible a high degree of activity” (51). Rather than suggesting that the Corporation increase the required percentage, though, Johnson was of the opinion that the community ought to choose of its own accord whether and how to appropriate more money for the maintenance of its library (Johnson 55). Another
point Johnson made involved the inefficiency of the system whereby communities could request and receive grants. Instead of the centralized, mail-based back-and-forth between Bertram and town officials, Johnson suggested that the Corporation employ a team of field agents to assess potential grant recipients and facilitate the overall process of grantmaking. Finally, in order to address the problem of trained personnel for Carnegie libraries, Johnson suggested that the Corporation become involved in supporting library schools and the American Library Association. Though Carnegie had given some support to both these causes in former years, he had generally chosen to deny Melvil Dewey’s persistent requests to lend extensive monetary support to library education and professional associations (Wiegand). Johnson, however, felt that the key to the Carnegie library building program’s future success lay in the formation of competent professionals to run the new libraries.

Though Johnson’s report was well-researched and gave clear, well-argued suggestions for adjusting the Carnegie library building program’s focus, it was not well received by the Corporation. Bertram, in particular, was opposed to Johnson’s recommendations, declaring that Johnson’s suggestion of field agents “flew straight into the face of Andrew Carnegie’s intentions of no centralized control or expenditure of money on the administration of the gifts” (Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* 157). Bertram called for the Corporation’s board to reject Johnson’s report, and the motion carried. Later Johnson discovered that Bertram had ordered all but a few private copies of the report to be destroyed.

Two years later, in 1917, the Carnegie Corporation made the decision to stop awarding library building grants. The program had been a great success, but the United
States’ entry into World War I had resulted in rising building costs and strains on material and labor, making further building grants unfeasible. However, scholars suggest that Johnson’s 1915 findings had already started the Corporation board thinking about ending the building program (Van Slyck 217). Indeed, many of Johnson’s recommendations were eventually carried out. In the mid-1920s, the Corporation returned to library support, this time extending grants to library professional organizations, programs of library education, and academic libraries (Van Slyck 217). Additionally, the nearly 95 years since Johnson’s report has witnessed a steadily growing attention to the importance of training, outreach, and professionalization of library personnel.

That the Carnegie library building program made significant changes to the role and place of the public library in American life is undeniable. The sheer physical impact of the program alone was enough to make an enduring stamp on the American landscape; nearly 1,500 communities in 46 states received new buildings, most of which were designed with Classical, Romanesque, or Beaux-Arts grandeur to stand as city landmarks for years to come. By advancing the growth of the free public library in America, the Carnegie library building program also had a significant and lasting effect on the library and information culture of the United States. Carnegie libraries served both an educational and a social role that nurtured change and growth in American public life. They also introduced new ways for citizens to seek information and, true to Carnegie’s vision, provided locations for Americans to gather, read, learn, and grow a library culture.

Carnegie’s stated goal had always been that the library buildings he funded would serve to connect those eager to learn and improve themselves with the knowledge and
tools to do so. While Carnegie libraries did fulfill this goal in many communities, they played other, more overtly social roles as well. For example, in order to obtain money for a Carnegie library building, a community had first to come to an agreement on whether or not they believed in the potential benefits a library could provide enough to agree to pay the annual maintenance fund. Van Slyck points out that in this way, the issue of whether or not to obtain a Carnegie library induced many American communities to seriously consider (some for the first time) the place of culture in their community. Towns would have to determine whether they considered a library, which would provide resources for culture and self-improvement, vital to their community’s social life or an unnecessary luxury (Van Slyck 64-65). Carnegie libraries also highlighted gender relations (and tensions) in recipient communities and across the nation. As mentioned above, the majority of American public libraries in existence at the turn of the century had been founded and established by women’s groups. However, Carnegie insisted on conducting library grant business with town officials, who, at the time, were invariably men. As a result of their inability to hold public office, “club women discovered that a Carnegie gift could mean losing control over the library they had established” (Van Slyck 134). Though women and women’s organizations frequently remained instrumental in the ongoing support of Carnegie libraries after they were built, the issues of power and control brought to light over free public libraries were concurrent with, and perhaps helped to fuel, the growing call for female suffrage in the United States.

Carnegie libraries affected social behavior in their communities in other ways. Even the physical layout of the library building could provide educational and social lessons to the town’s citizens. Bertram’s recommended floor plans in his *Notes on the
Erection of Library Buildings gave rise to an evolution of a typical arrangement for a library interior at the time. This common layout provided for open stacks, reading rooms for children and adults, and a service desk in a central location where library staff could monitor all patrons’ activities. The setup, and often even the furnishings and decoration of Carnegie libraries, meant that readers were always under the librarian’s supervision, which encouraged “good library behavior.” By extension, the library space provided “a training ground in middle-class behavior, preparing working-class readers to fit in at school, at work, or at church” (Van Slyck 109). In addition to the social roles the library played, it also served an important role as a point of public pride for many small towns in America. Cherry points out that some towns were more interested in having a Carnegie library as a symbol of civic distinction and good taste than because they were particularly knowledgeable about or committed to good library services: “it was a prestigious thing to have a Carnegie library” (222). Even more drastically, some communities saw a library as a good cure for social problems in their town. Ring notes that town officials in Montana, where communities were still relatively rural and wild compared to eastern Carnegie recipients, wrote to Bertram explaining that the large number of immigrants and single men in their towns could benefit from a library, since “there [was] absolutely no place for the man without a home to go to spend his evening, but the saloon” (8). For such communities, Ring argues, “social control was one of the most important reasons behind the development of Carnegie libraries in Montana….Carnegie libraries were one way of channeling and controlling undesirable behavior” (7-8). Though Carnegie himself may well have approved of the idea of young men seeking inspiration in the library rather
than in the saloon, this phenomenon certainly highlights the array of motivations that
various communities felt in applying for Carnegie grant money.

As Carnegie had hoped, the new public libraries provided citizens with both
material for reading and a public space in which to gather. Based on circulation figures
from successful Carnegie libraries, such as the one in Corsicana, Texas, the new libraries
were instrumental in creating a reading public, one that believed in the value of books
and in the library’s place in the community (Carnegie Corporation of New York Records,
Reel 7). More evidence of the new libraries’ role in building a reading public is the
prevalence of children’s reading rooms that became standard in Carnegie libraries. The
majority of example architectural designs for Carnegie libraries distributed by Bertram
include dedicated space for children, indicating that Carnegie administrators were
particularly interested in encouraging young people’s use of the library, in order to
supplement public education and to develop the library habit early.

More evidence of Carnegie libraries’ impact on American information culture is
the prevalence of open stacks: “Carnegie’s faith in books’ transformative power led to the
adoption of an open-shelf policy in all of Pittsburgh’s branches” (Van Slyck 106).
Though patrons’ interaction with library materials still took place under the watchful eye
of the librarian, the spread of open-stack policies in public libraries served as a tacit
reminder to the public that the library they paid to maintain was theirs, and the materials
therein open for their use. Scholars have agreed that the explosion of free public libraries
nationwide was effective in “democratizing culture” (Sullivan, qtd. in Bobinski, Carnegie
Libraries 185) and in advancing intellectual history in the United States.

1 Though, due to segregation and other civil and social inequalities, even Carnegie’s free public libraries
were not necessarily available to all of society.
Some small towns with populations under 1,000 would occasionally collaborate with neighboring communities and apply for a grant as a regional library system.

Both Bertram and Carnegie were devotees of Simplified Spelling, and all of Bertram’s correspondence and records of the library building program display his use of this system.
The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Library Program

In 1975, Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft Corporation, left his studies at Harvard University in order to focus his attention on his fledgling company. Twenty years later, Microsoft was a giant in the field of computing equipment and software, and Forbes magazine had named Gates the wealthiest man on earth. At the same time, the World Wide Web had exploded onto the public scene, becoming more available and more heavily used by people around the world with each passing day. As interest in and use of this powerful and prevalent new technology tool spread, a new form of ‘have and have-not’ came to light between individuals who had the means and ability to access the Internet and the information it offered, and individuals who lacked access. Growing awareness of ‘the digital divide’ and of the potential of the Internet was of particular concern to public librarians, who were faced with the challenge of how to provide access to this new information tool to patrons who were otherwise unable to obtain it. Many public library budgets in America could not find ways to meet the growing demand for Internet-capable computers in public libraries. This conundrum coincided with the formation of the William H. Gates Foundation, later to become the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, one of the most active, widespread, and robust philanthropic organizations at work today. In 1997, the Gates Foundation formed the Gates Library Foundation, which was created with the goal of helping to close the digital divide in the United States, an initiative they found to be well in line with the Gates Foundation’s motto, “All lives have equal value.” The Gates Foundation’s library programs and projects have had a
tremendous and widespread effect in public libraries across America over the past ten years, helping to bring the number of American public libraries that offer free public internet access to 99.1\% in 2007 (*Libraries Connect Communities* 5). In scope, timeliness, and goals, there are numerous connections and similarities between the Carnegie library building program and the Gates Foundation’s library programs.

In their 1998 Annual Report, the Gates Foundation pointed out that “American libraries have a long and democratic tradition of providing free information…to children and adults from all walks of life” (14). Believing that “computers and the Internet help people find life-changing information and opportunities” (*Libraries*), the Gates Foundation began its library program with the stated goal that “anybody who can get to a [public] library can get to the Internet” (Kniffel, “Gates Expands” 16). To accomplish this goal, the Gates Foundation invited libraries and library organizations to apply for grant funding. The Foundation began with the neediest regions and communities, focusing on public libraries in communities “where 10 percent or more of the population falls below the poverty line” (*Annual Report 2003*). The program spread from there to assist libraries and information centers in all 50 states, Canada, and around the world. Rather than issuing a general invitation for grant applications, the Gates Foundation partnered with target libraries to create “packages” for each institution. The “package” included PC computers donated by the Gates Foundation (the number of which was based on the recipient town’s population), “a comprehensive package of installed hardware and suites of software, including word processing and children’s educational programs” (Gordon et al, “New Computers” 134), training for library staff, reference publications for using the new technology, ongoing technical assistance, continued
training opportunities, and software updates. Occasionally, the Gates Foundation staff and recipient libraries first had to solve challenges to connectivity, particularly in rural areas. For example, in order to provide Internet access to needy reservation libraries in the Four Corners area of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah, the Foundation installed satellite links (Gordon et al, “Native American” 431). The services provided in each package would last for three years after the grant was awarded. In exchange, the recipient library had to agree to provide free public access to the new computers and to maintain and replace the machines and software in years to come, particularly after the three-year grant period expired.

The initial phase of the Gates Foundation Library Program lasted from 1997 to 2003. In its Annual Report for that year, the Gates Foundation declared that they had met their goal of helping nearly every public library in the United States offer and maintain free public access to the internet. The program had contributed approximately $180 million to provide over 40,000 computers in more than 11,000 facilities in all 50 states (“Bill Gates” 49). Librarians and patrons across the country expressed gratitude and excitement at the new technology and knowledge supported by the Gates program. Library Journal reported in 2003 that patron numbers at Gates recipient libraries had jumped by almost 25% between 2000-2002 (Gordon et al, “The Gates Legacy” 44), and that many of the new patrons were entirely new to libraries. Low-income and disadvantaged patrons who previously lacked reliable access to computers and the Internet expressed gratitude, commenting that the computers “even the score…so that people who can’t afford one can still have the same access as everyone else” (Gordon et al, “The Gates Legacy” 45). In a 2003 survey, library users reported that they use the
library computers to communicate with family and friends, gather information on current
events, learn or hone computing skills, research medical problems, do homework, and a
host of other typical uses (Gordon et al, “The Gates Legacy” 46). Library staff lauded the
Gates Foundation’s cooperative approach and noted the particular value of the
technology training the Foundation provided to library staff (Kniffel, “Gates Expands”
16). A 2006 survey of recipient libraries concluded that the packages granted by the
Gates Foundation “played two important roles, serving as a catalyst to advance the library
to the next level of networked service and…sustaining previous advances until local
support arrived” (Information Use Management & Policy Institute 127). Satisfied with
the success of its efforts to close the digital divide, the Gates Foundation ended the U.S.
library grants program in 2003, turning to global library support in foreign countries and
focusing on its other grantmaking priorities, which include worldwide public health,
community-building, and education initiatives.

Though it was a successful, timely, and generous philanthropic effort, the Gates
Foundation library program met with its fair share of criticism. As Stillwell points out,
“simply putting computers into a library does not ensure that they will be used or that the
library can manage the expense and effort needed to keep them running” (29). The Gates
Foundation addressed this problem by supplying on-site training and remote technical
support for three years after the initial grant. Nevertheless, “librarians and library staff
report that they were unprepared for the popularity of the computers and the number of
new patrons who [came] to use them” (Gordon et al, “New Computers” 134). The
technology was new to many library personnel as well as the patrons, and even with the
provided training, many librarians reported experiencing extra stress in their jobs on
account of “more patrons, asking more questions, and needing more help” (Gordon et al, “The Gates Legacy” 45). Another form of criticism involved questions of proper and appropriate Internet use. The availability of adult-oriented material online versus patrons’ right to information remains a tricky issue for public librarians today, and it was certainly a stressful topic for Gates Foundation recipient libraries dealing with Internet access in their libraries for the first time (Gordon et al, “The Gates Legacy” 45). The Gates Foundation took a strict ‘hands-off’ policy on the question of Internet filtering, stressing that such decisions were up to individual institutions and local authorities. Nevertheless, some critics lambasted Gates, saying that his practice of “bringing the Internet into the library brings pornography to children” (Kniffel, “Bill Gates” 49). More criticism accused Gates of bringing too much change to areas that weren’t ready for it. A 2002 New York Times article suggested that the Gates program was aiding an “exodus from rural America” (Egan A18) as small-town citizens found job announcements online that prompted them to leave their communities.

The most prevalent and persistent criticism of the Gates Foundation library program centered on the fact that the technology donated was almost exclusively proprietary equipment and software from Gates’ Microsoft Corporation. Such a policy, critics said, was a clever marketing scheme to create a bigger customer base for Microsoft and to make libraries and their patrons permanent Microsoft customers (Kniffel, “Bill Gates” 52; Egan A18). Some critics also argued that “inasmuch as Microsoft products [are] at the center of Gates’ philanthropy to bridge the digital divide, it is the commercial software industry that benefits most, not the intended recipients, the digitally divided” (Stevenson). Skeptics also labeled the program, which began in earnest
in 1998, an attempt to restore Microsoft’s public image coincidental to the *United States v. Microsoft* antitrust lawsuit. Stevenson has argued that the Gates approach will prove to be ineffective in closing the digital divide because “within Gates’ discourse, the digitally divided are passive recipients and consumers of information….As constituted, technology and not people will solve the digital divide” (Stevenson).

In response to the accusations that the program was a marketing ploy to create more Microsoft customers, Bill Gates acknowledged that the Foundation had expected that criticism, but that it was never a motivation for the program, and was a minor point compared to the positive effects the program had achieved:

> It was not the reason that the program was done. I do think computer literacy for society is a very positive thing, particularly not having it be something that just the wealthiest in society or just the people in the big cities have a chance to get at. The fact that overall exposure to computers and software might have a benefit to the industry, I think that’s a fairly small thing, and it wasn’t the key motivation….I think a lot of that criticism has gone away as people have seen that the foundation embraces a broad set of have-versus-have-not issues, both in the United States and on a global basis. (Kniffel, “Bill Gates” 52)

Despite ongoing criticism of the Microsoft aspect of the program, Bill Gates remains satisfied with the success of the Gates Foundation library program, pointing to the positive aspects such as the achieved goal of nearly 100% connectivity for American public libraries and the grateful stories from librarians and patrons of the positive changes Gates’ grants have made in their lives by enabling them to access the Internet. Like Carnegie, Gates stands by his library grants and is confident that they have made lasting, positive changes.

In 2007, the Gates Foundation returned to the United States Library Project. Though the first phase of its library philanthropy had successfully met its goals in that it had provided public libraries with the equipment necessary to offer free public internet
access, the Foundation now realized that many of those libraries were struggling to sustain both their computing equipment and the internet access it offered. A spokesman for the Gates Foundation announced in January 2007 that “libraries are…in danger of falling into a second digital divide because of inequities in computer and Internet quality” (Oder 16). The original grant money had provided and maintained internet-capable machines, and “new patrons by the thousands [were] attracted to public libraries to use free, high-end computers to gain access to the Internet” (Gordon et al, “New Computers” 134). Librarians across the country recounted success stories, citing booming gate counts, increased circulation, and persistent demand for Internet access from patrons. However, after the grant money and services had ended and years had passed, libraries found themselves with ever-increasing public demand for Internet access, not to mention faster connections, newer software, and more powerful machines.

A 2007 report from the American Library Association and the Information Institute at Florida State University found that the average number of public access computers in public libraries in American was 10.7, “a number that has remained nearly constant for libraries of all sizes since 2002” (Libraries Connect Communities 5). The report also found that “technology has brought more—not less—library use” (3), and that both library infrastructure and available technology support staff were frequently pushed to the limit, even as patrons continued to request more public access machines. Many library budgets, particularly in the poverty-stricken areas that had first received Gates grants, were totally unable to keep up with the technology they had gratefully received from the Gates Foundation.
Many librarians had anticipated this problem from the start, but unfortunately had not developed a plan to sustain their new technology. In a 2003 survey, half of library administrators at Gates recipient institutions “said their computing resources will not be adequate in two years. Most said they will need more computers. About half said they will need more staff training, more tech support, and more staff hours” (Gordon et al, “The Gates Legacy” 47). Like communities that sought Carnegie libraries without being certain of their ability to sustain a library program, it appears that some Gates recipients had accepted the grant as a way to meet their patrons’ growing need for Internet access, even if they did not have a plan in place for sustaining that access.

In response, the Gates Foundation launched a second phase of the United States library program in 2007, a five-year initiative designed “to help libraries sustain the public access computing infrastructure laid down during Phase I” (Stevenson). This second phase will focus exclusively on low-income communities and will concentrate its efforts on enhancing computer and Internet service and on staff training (Oder 16). The staff training appears to be the largest priority for the Foundation, but it is a different type of training than was prevalent during the first phase of the Foundation’s library program. Instead of technology training, staff will now receive instruction on how to be advocates for their institutions and funding needs in order to gain support from their own towns and cities. In their 2007 Annual Report, the Foundation declared, “to keep computers available to the public, librarians need help advocating for funding,” stressing a new approach of training librarians to secure funding for their institutions from their constituent communities.
The Gates library program now seems somewhat in limbo; the Foundation recognizes and supports the need for sustainable computing technology and Internet access, particularly as society becomes increasingly connected and access to the Internet becomes more of a foregone conclusion among educators, employers, and younger generations. However, in the years since Phase I of the Gates library program, the Gates Foundation has turned its grantmaking priorities increasingly toward global health initiatives and away from United States library concerns. Furthermore, the question of technology sustainability is a challenging one for most public libraries to resolve on any long-term basis. Without substantial changes, many library budgets in the United States simply do not allow for the kind of long-term sustainability that patrons expect, librarians desire, and was part of the initial vision of the Gates library grants, particularly given the lightning-fast pace at which information technology is changing in the twenty-first century. Meanwhile, the Gates Foundation must determine how, or even whether, it will continue to assist American libraries in sustaining computing and Internet access. The Foundation has made a commitment through 2012 to continue the second phase of its U.S. libraries program. Even so, the program is under tight control. The Foundation’s website stresses that “funding for grants in our United States Libraries initiative are by invitation only” and that it will not accept unsolicited letters of inquiry or applications from uninvited libraries (Grant Funding: United States Libraries). Whether or not the Gates Foundation will continue to provide aid to libraries struggling to maintain their grant-gifted technology and connectivity will remain to be seen.

In considering the effect of the Gates Foundation library program’s effect on library and information culture in the United States, Bill Gates points to a graphic
displaying a map of U.S. libraries receiving Gates grants for computers, Internet connectivity, and support (Fig. 2). Each recipient library is represented by a tiny dot on the map:

![National Impact of the U.S. Library Program](image)


The extent of the program is impressive. Beyond the physical impact the program has had on thousands of libraries across America, dozens of articles in library professional literature have reported increased patronage at public libraries, grateful and satisfied patrons for whom Internet access has opened “whole new worlds,” and librarians who feel that the computers “enhance the reputations of their institutions and attract new patrons” (Gordon et al, “The Gates Legacy” 45-46). The Gates Foundation library program came at a crucial time in the history of American public libraries, when the
future and impact of the Internet was uncertain and naysayers proclaimed the imminent
death both of the book and the library. The Gates Foundation program helped provide
thousands of libraries with the technological boost they needed to assert their important
and persistent role in the digital world. The presence of computers and free public
Internet access in the public library helped shift public opinion about what a library could
offer and what its role in the community might be. The Gates program also had an
important effect on America’s information society by raising awareness of the growing
digital divide in the mid- to late 1990s between citizens who could and could not afford
technology to access the Internet, and by providing thousands of patrons (particularly
those in low-income or disadvantaged areas) with the opportunity to make use of world-
changing new information tools.

Bill Gates, who has often stated that libraries and books have been important in
his life since he was young, asserts that the Gates Foundation library program was
implemented under the idea that “libraries play a very critical role in the future in
providing equal opportunity to everyone. The basic idea of working with libraries is to
let everyone have access to the Information Age” (Kniffel, “Gates Expands” 17). The
goal of the Gates library program is to ensure that people worldwide have access to free,
public computing and Internet access (Libraries). In the view of the Foundation, that
goal is best achieved by harnessing the historical role of the American public library as
an information center in its community; Bill Gates remarks, “I’d be happy if I could think
that the role of the library was sustained and even enhanced in the age of the computer”
(Egan A18). Critical to the Foundation’s overarching goal of helping to bridge the digital
divide, then, is the project of helping public libraries adjust their community role to fit the needs of an information society.
Carnegie and Gates: A Comparison of their Library Programs

The preceding surveys of the Carnegie library building program and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s U.S. Libraries programs reveal that the two massive philanthropic efforts have a good deal in common. Indeed, Bill Gates has cited Carnegie and his building program as an inspiration for the Gates Foundation’s projects, quipping, “Carnegie was a pretty hard-core guy” and pointing out the legacy of library funding that Carnegie instituted (Egan A18). The two programs also differed in important and intriguing ways, particularly in their modes of conducting business with recipient communities and in their attention to library personnel and training. In comparing the two programs, it is important to consider the impetus and stated goals of each program and its creator, the scale and approach of the two programs, and the lasting effects the initiatives have had library and information culture and the history of the public library in America.

Both Carnegie and Gates pointed to personal connections with the power of libraries and learning and their own love of books and libraries as driving forces in their decision to focus philanthropic efforts on libraries in the United States. Carnegie recalled the impact that access to Colonel Anderson’s library had on him as a boy in Allegheny, while Gates declares, “I’ve always believed in libraries. When I was young…I read more books in the summer than any of the other boys did” (Kniffel, “Gates Expands” 17). Furthermore, both philanthropists chose libraries as a focus of their program with the belief that what they were funding offered life-changing opportunities to a very wide and
needy array of people. The Gates Foundation library program’s web page asserts that “computers and the Internet help people find life-changing information and opportunities” (*Libraries*), while Carnegie wrote that free public libraries were “the best gift which can be given to a community” (“The Best Fields” 688) and maintained an ardent belief “in the value of books and libraries as a means for self-improvement” (Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* 187). Furthermore, both philanthropists aimed to connect the social good offered by their library funding projects with everyone and anyone who wanted it and would benefit from it. The Gates Foundation’s initial goal for its library program was to ensure that anyone who had access to a public library would be able to use the Internet, while Carnegie sought to “cultivate the habit of reading in all classes of society [and] place books in the hands of every man, woman, and child” (Hendrick 2:199).

Admittedly, Carnegie’s philanthropic philosophy (the “Gospel of Wealth”) was somewhat stringent in judging who among the needy were deserving of philanthropy based on their willingness and ability to work and pay for it. As a result, his program was careful to require a specific amount of money to be raised annually in an attempt to ensure the ongoing success and vitality of his donated buildings. In contrast, the Gates Foundation began with the neediest public libraries, those with 10% or more of their user populations living below the poverty line. Though the Gates Foundation required a pledge from the recipient libraries that they would maintain both the computing equipment itself and public access to it after the 3-year grant period, there is no evidence that the Foundation required a concrete plan or annual appropriation to support that maintenance. Despite these differences, both programs were committed to bringing
information and opportunities for self-education and self-improvement to people who were otherwise unable to obtain them. By attaching requirements to their grant money—specifically the pledges to maintain the granted goods and to guarantee free access to the public—the two philanthropists ensured a funding approach that required recipient towns or institutions to invest in themselves and their future.

Both the Carnegie and Gates library programs operated on grand scales that broke new ground in ideas about what philanthropy could do. Carnegie spent nearly $42 million to construct libraries in more than 1,600 communities. The Gates Foundation has spent more than $180 million to provide materials and training to over 11,000 public libraries and information centers in all 50 states. The tremendous scope of the two programs was in keeping with the philanthropists’ idea that the causes they were funding would contribute directly to the overall betterment of society and good of mankind. Cohen points out, “since the close of the nineteenth century, the overarching goal of philanthropy has been to uplift society as a whole, rather than to address individual ills” (389), and Gurin and Van Til assert that modern philanthropy focuses “on root causes of human problems and systematic reform, recognizing a responsibility to the public interest, and helping to effect societal change” (3-4). Carnegie and Gates’ approach to uplifting society and effecting societal change was to offer their grantees the tools and infrastructure with which to connect to information and, by extension, enlightenment. The two programs carried out this ideology through carefully organized procedures and basic parameters for the use of the gifted money and equipment. The programs are also similar in their ‘hands-off’ approach to local decisions. Carnegie officials refused to get involved in local disputes over the placement, staff, or collections of the libraries they
funded, while the Gates Foundation program stressed that problems arising from inappropriate computer or Internet use must be handled by individual institutions.

Another similarity between the two programs and their effects has to do with problems regarding the sustainability of the library support that they offered. The Gates Foundation’s recent re-entry into U.S. library support after only a 4-year hiatus suggests that their original giving was not as sustainable as they first intended. Early surveys of Gates Foundation grant recipients discovered that few of the recipient librarians “had any detailed plans for what they were going to do [to sustain public access computing] when the grant cycle was completed” (Gordon et al, “New Computers” 138). Similarly, Carnegie libraries were funded and built based on a snapshot in time for each recipient community. The money granted for the building depended on census figures, and generally did not consider room for growth or change in the community. Carnegie authorities’ refusal to provide standard plans or regulations for Carnegie-funded library buildings resulted in some structures that were unsuitable for their constituents very shortly after their construction. According to Theodore Jones, nearly 200 Carnegie library buildings had been razed by their towns by 1969, just over 50 years after the Carnegie library building program ended (Jones 131-166). Fortunately, many original Carnegie-funded library buildings are still in existence today, and some still function as libraries. Likewise, some Gates Foundation recipient libraries have gained enough public support to find ways to maintain and upkeep their Gates-granted technology. However, the issue of sustainability is one that neither program appears to have had at the top of its priority list at the program’s inception.
Eighty years of technological and social change have contributed to some significant differences in the ways the Carnegie and Gates Foundation library programs have done business with their recipient libraries. Owing partly to the lack of simple, inexpensive modes of travel or communication available in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Carnegie program’s mode of dealing with recipients was quite centralized, with all inquiries and grant business conducted via postal mail between James Bertram and would-be grant recipients. By contrast, the Gates Foundation has been able to leverage the relative ease and availability of travel and electronic communication in the 1990s and early twenty-first century to create a more collaborative model of business between Foundation personnel and grant recipients.

Ironically, parts of the Gates Foundation’s model bear a strong resemblance to the recommendations for the Carnegie Corporation made by Alvin Johnson in 1915. When dealing with a new recipient library, the Gates Foundation sends staff members—field agents—to meet with library administration and staff, plan implementation, assess needs for space and connectivity, and eventually to provide on-site staff training and troubleshooting (Our Approach to Giving). The Gates Foundation’s attention to ongoing staff training is also reminiscent of Johnson’s recommendations to the Carnegie Corporation on how to make the Carnegie library building project more effective and efficient. Johnson stressed that Carnegie libraries would only be as successful and efficient as the librarians who ran them, and that the Carnegie Corporation might effect more good for libraries by supporting library education to help produce capable librarians. This idea to focus on staff training and leadership seems to be an aspect of grant implementation that the Gates Foundation has taken to heart. Library staff credit
the training provided by the Gates Foundation in the use of the gifted technology one of the most valuable aspects of the Gates grants (Gordon et al, “Gates Expands” 16).

However, it may be well to reiterate that both Carnegie’s and Gates’ approaches to giving were very much influenced by the prevailing modes and attitudes of their respective times. While Carnegie had great faith in the power of progress, individualism, and self-reliance, the Gates Foundation’s overall philanthropic ethos takes more of a global, collaborative approach. Furthermore, advances in technology have made collaborating with groups and institutions around the country and across the globe a good deal more feasible than in Carnegie’s day.

Both Carnegie and Gates sought to provide needy citizens with treasures that they could not attain in their own homes, whether it was in the form of a book or a computer with Internet access. In a 1920 speech written by G.H. Lamb regarding Carnegie’s building program, the library is given the following lauds:

That old soldier who found in the library the exact data he needed to complete his pension application felt that he was getting cash value from the library. This young fellow working along with electricians and studying books on the subject…is willing to give the library part of the credit for his promotion and increased pay. Those boys who have turned the back lot into a vegetable garden or a profitable poultry yard learned their lessons from library books. The sign painter and the window trimmer are constantly appealing to the library for new ideas that can be turned to commercial value. A few people have learned that the library can supply valuable information regarding the values of stocks that are offered on the market. The lady who is interested in flowers or the one who is giving a party, find in the library the design, the recipe, the helpful suggestion she needs. (Lamb 10)

Twenty-first century readers will note that many people nowadays would likely turn to the Internet for all of the abovementioned information needs. The Carnegie library building program granted money to construct libraries that could meet these information needs, and the Gates Foundation has followed suit in a digital-age incarnation of the same
spirit. Recognizing the shifting patterns of information seeking as information tools change, the Gates Foundation has sought to help libraries maintain their historic role as information centers for the community by connecting them with new sources and tools for locating information.

The two programs have had other effects on library and information culture in the United States. Both have come at crucial moments in the history of the public library in America. Bobinski estimates that “about two-thirds of [Carnegie grant recipient] communities already had a free public library or were in the process of organizing one when the Carnegie gift was made” (Carnegie Libraries 193). Carnegie’s library building program came about at precisely the moment in which the nascent free public library movement in the United States was blossoming. By providing money for library construction, Carnegie helped encourage and develop that movement into a strong and lasting element of American community life. The Gates Foundation’s library program also came about at a crucial moment in the history of public libraries. With the advent and explosive growth of the Internet as an information resource, public libraries in the mid- to late 1990s faced the question of how they were to remain relevant and vital centers of information for their constituents. Gates’ philanthropy provided an opportunity for public libraries to reevaluate and redefine themselves and their position in their towns and cities. Both Carnegie’s and the Gates Foundations’ library programs have helped to establish and reassert the public library’s place in American communities.
Conclusion

The library programs of Andrew Carnegie and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have had profound and lasting impact on the history of public libraries in America and on the place and role of public libraries in American communities. Both of these massive philanthropic efforts came at moments in the history of information culture in the United States at which the position of the public library in its community needed to be developed, asserted, or redefined. By providing funding for initiatives that they understood to have the potential to transform lives, Carnegie and the Gates Foundation each helped to determine and define the public library’s relationship with its patrons, with information, and with American public life.

Notably, neither program sought to deal directly with the individuals that were to benefit from the philanthropy or to induce their beneficiaries to follow a prescribed pattern of how to make use of the new opportunities. Instead, both Carnegie and the Gates Foundation focused on building up infrastructure. Carnegie’s money was dedicated to the construction of library buildings (rather than collections, staff, or furnishings), while grants from the Gates Foundation largely went towards computers and connectivity. By providing tools and infrastructure, Carnegie and Gates were able to contribute to the good of society while still leaving individual progress toward societal change in the hands of those who benefited from the programs.

Each of the programs faced criticism, much of which was similar for both programs. Critics chastised both Carnegie and Gates for not providing sufficient
ongoing support for their gifts (whether building or computers) once granted. Carnegie and Gates were also accused of self-interested or egotistical ulterior motives for their giving: pundits speculated that Carnegie intended his libraries to be memorial edifices to himself, while critics of the Gates Foundation’s program labeled it a marketing scheme to increase the number of Microsoft customers. Both programs seem to have dealt inconclusively with the matter of sustaining and maintaining the infrastructural gifts that they bestowed. However, the philanthropists responsible for both programs firmly denied ulterior motives, defending their library programs as positive contributions to civilization and concrete solutions toward providing those deprived of information with the tools and opportunities to better themselves.

Future research will be able to deal more thoroughly with the lasting effects and histories of both phases of the Gates Foundation’s U.S. Libraries program in particular. In the meantime, the strong and vital position of the free public library in American communities testifies to these philanthropists’ vision of and dedication to the power and potential of information and learning, and their belief that no institution or tool is better suited to providing eager learners with information than the local library.
Works Cited


Davis, Donald G., Jr., ed. Libraries & Philanthropy: Proceedings of Library History Seminar IX, 30 March – 1 April 1995, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. [Austin, TX]: Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Texas at Austin, 1996.


<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/about/Pages/foundation-timeline.aspx>.


