



Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920

By Abigail A. Van Slyck

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Familiar landmarks in hundreds of American towns, Carnegie libraries today seem far from controversial. In *Free to All*, however, Abigail A. Van Slyck shows that the classical façades and symmetrical plans of these buildings often mask a complex and contentious history.

"The whole story is told here in this book. Carnegie's wishes, the conflicts among local groups, the architecture, development of female librarians. It's a rich and marvelous story, lovingly told."—Alicia Browne, *Journal of American Culture*

"This well-written and extensively researched work is a welcome addition to the history of architecture, librarianship, and philanthropy."—Joanne Passet, *Journal of American History*

"Van Slyck's book is a tremendous contribution for its keenness of scholarship and good writing and also for its perceptive look at a familiar but misunderstood icon of the American townscape."—Howard Wight Marshall, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*

"[Van Slyck's] reading of the cultural coding implicit in the architectural design of the library makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the limitations of the doctrine 'free to all.'"—*Virginia Quarterly Review*

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

This history of the Carnegie libraries was written by an assistant professor of architecture, art history, and women's studies at the University of Arizona. A revision of the author's Ph.D. dissertation in architecture at the University of California at Berkeley, the work examines the funding, design, staffing, and use of monumental urban central libraries and more functional urban branch libraries and small-town libraries. This is interpreted in the context of the professionalization of both architecture and librarianship and of the role of class in the large urban areas and of gender in the small towns. Van Slyck's study is based on extensive archival research concentrating primarily on Carnegie libraries in 13 cities and towns in 11 states and includes numerous illustrations. This broadly conceived work makes a contribution not only to architectural and library history but to social history as well. Thomas F. O'Connor, Manhattan Coll. Libs., New York

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From the Back Cover

Familiar Landmarks in hundreds of American towns, Carnegie libraries have shaped the public library experience of generations of Americans and today seen far from controversial. In Free to All, however, Abigail Van Slyck shows that the classical facades and symmetrical plans of these buildings often mask the complex and contentious circumstances of their construction and use. Free to All is the first comprehensive social and architectural history of the Carnegie library phenomenon, an unprecedented program of philanthropy that helped erect over 1600 public library buildings in the United States. Van Slyck skillfully untangles the overlapping and conflicting motives of the many people involved in erecting, staffing, and using the libraries: Andrew Carnegie himself; small-town civic boosters avid for new investment; metropolitan library trustees anxious to maintain the elite character of urban libraries; architects reacting to increased professional specialization; a growing number of female librarians; and the children and adults, frequently immigrants, who came to borrow books.

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