

The Carnegie Building's Historic Architecture

*Of the 144 Carnegie Libraries constructed in California, only 60% survive today!
Of the 12 designed by Franklin P. Burnham, Oxnard's Carnegie is one of only 3 remaining!*



In 1906, steel magnate and philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie, donated \$12,000 towards the construction of a Carnegie building in downtown Oxnard next to Plaza Park to be used as a public library. With its Classical Revival design approved by Mayor Richard B. Haydock, it opened in 1907. Its contractor was Thomas H. Carroll, who also built the Pagoda in Plaza Park and Santa Clara Church. The Carnegie building is one of 1,678 built throughout the United States funded by the industrialist between 1891 and 1920. Other money was raised by local businessmen to help furnish the books for the library's collection. While the building has been modified several times, its striking exterior architecture has remained essentially untouched. The original Doric columns on the exterior and Ionic columns around the interior domed entry lend it magnificence.

Nationwide and across California most "Carnegies" were created by architects who designed only one. Fortunately, Oxnard's Carnegie was designed by one of the three architects who became a "Carnegie specialist", Franklin Pierce Burnham of Los Angeles. More prolific architects were Patton & Miller of Chicago and William H. Weeks. Born in Chicago, Burnham's most noted design on the East Coast was Georgia's State Capital done in the Classical Renaissance style. By 1887, Burnham moved to California and was designing innovative buildings of all types, including: Riverside's County Court House (1904), Corona's Lincoln High School (1907), and Pasadena's First Christian Science Church (1909). Burnham's work, from single homes to Masonic Temples, often in the Classical and Mission Revival styles, can be found in the counties of Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Ventura and Santa Barbara.

However, it was Burnham's involvement with Carnegie libraries from 1903-1909 that gained him architectural prominence. For eleven of his twelve libraries, Burnham was associated with W.J. Bliesner. His designs were individualized to each location: Claremont's Pomona College, Colton, Corona, Covina, Long Beach, Ontario, Oxnard, Santa Maria, Riverside, Whittier, Pomona and San Bernardino. Only Burnham's original designs for Claremont, Colton and Oxnard. are still standing today.

Over the years the building has served several different purposes. The lower level served as Oxnard's City Hall from the opening of the library in 1907 until 1949. In 1923, a sizable three-story addition was made on the east side of the edifice. With the completion of a new library in 1963, the Carnegie building ceased to function as a library and served as quarters for the Chamber of Commerce, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the Art Club of Oxnard. In 1978, federal funds were obtained to remodel and refurbish the building, and it reopened in 1980 as the Carnegie Cultural Arts Center. Transformed in 1987 into the City of Oxnard's Carnegie Art Museum by a vote of the City Council, the dream of the first Arts Chairman, Mary Bevans, of having a museum to house the City's art collection was realized.



Committed to serving the community and enhancing the quality of life through education, the Museum has offered a wide range of programs for children and adults. Among the past 26 years of offerings are: school tours with hands-on art workshops, group tours, Family Day, Artist Gallery Talks, Arcade Poetry Series, Building Blocks art classes, adult Master Art Workshops, lectures, Museum Members Studio Visits, Guest Artists residencies, CAM Book Club, ArtX, "In Your Classroom" art history presentations, After School sited photography workshops, and Young writer's camps. Additionally, the Museum collaborates with all area colleges and has tailored education presentations to teachers' curriculum needs.