



Local Library, Global Passport: The Evolution of a Carnegie Library

J. Patrick Boyer

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A local library, passport to a larger world for its individual patrons, is also a democratic institution whose contribution to the strength of a community is out of all proportion to its size or membership.

Several thousand Carnegie libraries were built a century ago when Andrew Carnegie, who had risen from poverty to become "the richest man in the world" vowed to donate all his money before he died and set about giving millions of people around the world the same "gift of reading" he had with access to a library as a factory working boy. Across the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and other corners of the English-speaking world, he created "the free republic" of libraries. This is the story of one of them.

By tracing evolution of library service in the Canadian town of Bracebridge from 1874 to the present day within the broad sweep of larger cultural and economic patterns, Boyer's engaging book provides a specific example of the universal transformation of books and information technologies and the libraries that house them from the 19th to 21st centuries. Most readers will find endearing and tantalizing parallels with their own library experience, wherever they live.

Written to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the Andrew Carnegie Library in Bracebridge in 2008, Boyer's book is an inspired and engaging effort to show patterns and perils that probably hold true for most local libraries although some of the dramatic and comedic episodes here are surely unique. This story is so rich it could be a feature movie.

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