

Audubon Public Library  
401 North Park Place  
City of Audubon  
Audubon County  
Iowa

HABS NO. IA-166

HABS  
IOWA  
5-AUD, 1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, Colorado 80225

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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### AUDUBON PUBLIC LIBRARY HABS NO. IA-166

**Location:** 401 North Park Place, in the Audubon City Park, which is bounded by North Park Place on the north, South Park Place on the south, Leroy St. on the east, and Tracy St. on the west. The City of Audubon is located in central Audubon County, Iowa.

U.S.G.S. Audubon Quadrangle, 1983  
UTM Coordinates: 15 339340 4620420

**Present Owner:** City of Audubon  
410 North Park Place  
Audubon, Iowa 50025

**Date of Construction:** 1912

**Architect:** Proudfoot, Bird & Rawson, Architects  
Des Moines, Iowa

**Builder:** undetermined

**Present Occupant:** Audubon Public Library

**Present Use:** public library

**Significance:** The building, which has not been altered in any significant manner since it was constructed in 1912, is considered to be an outstanding example of Gothic Revival design influence as represented by public buildings in Iowa. It is also considered to be a good execution of library building design from the firm of Proudfoot, Bird & Rawson, the most prolific architectural firm in Iowa during the early twentieth century.

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**Date:** January 20, 1992

## I. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The Audubon Public Library was designed by the prominent Des Moines architectural firm of Proudfoot, Bird & Rawson, and constructed in 1912. It is a symmetrically composed single-story structure with a full basement, rectangular in plan, and measuring approximately 60 feet by 34 feet. The building rests on a concrete foundation, and the walls are of masonry construction with a deep-red brick veneer. Extensive use of cut limestone trim creates a dramatic contrast of light and dark throughout the building's surfaces. The original architects' specifications indicate that the stone was to have been of "best quality Indiana lime stone from an approved quarry...."<sup>1</sup> Although no documentary evidence confirms the actual material used in construction, the stone shows no sign of deterioration from exposure to the natural elements, indicating that it is of a high quality typically associated with Indiana limestone. A medium-pitched side-gable roof has parapeted gable ends and, on the front, a central parapeted front gable over the main entrance. Exposed roof beams are visible under slightly overhanging eaves on the front and rear.

Simplified Gothic Revival elements and heavy limestone detailing convey a dignified, almost monumental, character to what is in fact a small-sized public building. Limestone coping along the shaped parapets and limestone quoins effectively outline the building. A limestone watertable demarcates the basement story on all four sides. On the west and east sides, its horizontality emphasizes the gently sloping natural grade which falls from front to rear.

Limestone detailing is most heavily used on the front where the slightly projecting central front entrance bay is symmetrically flanked by two sets of wood casement windows set in large, arched openings. The flattened Gothic arch window and door openings on this facade are overshadowed by splayed block lintels. Arches above casement windows are filled with single-pane fixed transoms, while the arch above the recessed doorway has a five-pane, fixed transom. Quoin detailing continues along the basement story windows and around a small vent in the entrance gable. The front door is immediately flanked on the right with a sidelight; on the left with a marble slab, very weathered, which is inscribed "Erected by Andrew Carnegie as a gift to the people of Audubon A · 1912 · D." The approach consists of a flight of six poured concrete steps with stone side walls. The entrance is lighted by short, cast iron light standards with opaque white globes. These are located atop the side walls.

Horizontal bands of five hopper windows each accentuate the west and east sides of the building. These window bands are recessed into limestone lintels, mullions, and sills, with

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1 Proudfoot, Bird & Rawson, "Building Specifications for Audubon Library, December 4, 1911, n.p.

quoin detailing along the far sides. Likewise, the attic vents in each gable end are surrounded with limestone in quoin detailing. The windows boost the amount of natural light entering the interior and provide cross-ventilation. Basement entrances approached by below-grade stairways are located on either side, and these entrances are the only areas to have been altered to any appreciable degree. On the west side, the original double-door side entrance has been replaced with a single pass door which opens to a vestibule. On the east side, the northernmost of two single pass doors has been removed and the opening patched with brick. Also on the east, the stairway has been removed and replaced with a ramp which allows handicapped entrance from the rear.

Flattened Gothic arch windows also add stylistic interest to the back of the building. On the main level, a large central casement window is flanked on either side by transom-like windows. As with the front windows, the arched openings are slightly pointed, but here the lintels consist of a brick soldier course. The keystones and sills are of limestone. Plain, one-over-one-light, wood-sash windows are symmetrically spaced along the basement story, which is more fully exposed along this wall. An exterior brick chimney is located east of the central window. Architectural plans show a tall chimney shaft, but this detail seems to have been changed during construction since the chimney does not appear to be altered. Plans also show a coal chute located along the basement level just east of the chimney. This opening has been closed.

On the interior, the front entrance opens to a small vestibule. The vestibule entrance consists of a single wood-panel-and-glass pass door flanked by clear-glass, full-length sidelights and a transom window. This entrance opens to a reading room containing a centrally located circulation desk which faces the entry, an arrangement which is typical of Carnegie libraries. Built-in oak bookshelves, a newspaper rack, a magazine rack, and an atlas case, all with natural finish, line the walls. The rear of the circulation desk opens to a small, partially enclosed office area.

Original interior details on the main floor which have been altered include the flooring, wall covering, ceiling treatment, and lighting. Building specifications indicate that the tongue-and-groove pine floor was to have been covered with cork. It is now carpeted. The original plastered walls have been covered with fiber-textured paneling. Postcard views and plans show that the original lighting consisted of eight, three-globe chandelier fixtures suspended from a plaster ceiling and spaced symmetrically throughout the reading room. Lighting now consists of fluorescent light panels installed in a dropped ceiling. The dropped ceiling, however, has been carefully recessed from the wall in order to avoid covering the tops of the windows. The original oak reading tables and chairs are still in use.

The basement stairway is located immediately adjacent to the vestibule entrance on the east, with the original oak steps and balustrade intact. While the wall, floor, and ceiling coverings on this level have been modernized in similar fashion to those on the main level, the original room partitions are intact. To the west of the stairway landing is located a large reading room,

designated as a lecture room on the architectural plans and now used as the children's library. This room has a separate vestibule entrance from the outside basement stairway on the west side. An arrangement of smaller rooms is located to the east, providing separate spaces for one toilet, a work and storage room, a furnace room, and a fuel room, the latter two of which are now used for storage.

The degree of building alteration and repair has been minimal to this point in time. Minutes of the Library Board and expense ledgers show that the handicap ramp on the east side was constructed in 1981 by Siedelmann Construction Company of Audubon at a cost of \$4245.46. A year later, Roger A. Hanson, a local mason, erected a 32-inch concrete block wall to screen the ramp at a cost of \$757.08. In 1980, the interior was rewired; wall paneling, ceiling panels, and new lighting were installed in the main and basement levels; and the basement level was carpeted. The main level was carpeted in 1985. In 1988 the building was reroofed with asphalt shingles. A year later, in 1989, the exterior walls were cleaned by powerwashing, the bricks were tuck-pointed, and wood surfaces were repainted. Library records do not indicate when the original basement-level double door on the west side was replaced, nor when a coal chute on the rear was closed.

Proudfoot & Bird, et al., the Des Moines architectural firm which designed the library, has been the subject of a National Register Multiple Property Documentation study. This study found that, between 1892 and 1940, the firm pursued a practice balanced among residential, commercial, and public building commissions. Public building commissions included churches, hospitals, community buildings, five county courthouses, university and college campus buildings, hotels, theaters, lodge halls, and about ten Carnegie libraries. Although the firm's principals extended their practices well beyond Iowa, Des Moines was the home office from 1896 on, and the firm itself continues to the present day under the name of Brooks Borg and Skiles. From 1910 to 1925, when the firm was known as Proudfoot, Bird & Rawson, it was considered to be the foremost architectural firm in Iowa. By 1940, the firm's architectural legacy was evident in no fewer than 117 communities throughout the state which contained at least one of its designs. By choice, the firm adopted a conservative approach to architecture, both in terms of design and cost. John Woolson Brooks, who joined the firm in 1912 and went on to become its senior partner, wrote, when he reflected on his career in 1976, that "the main objective has been to produce Architecture in the unlimited sense of beauty, utility, and commodity; unlimited in that none of the three properties was allowed to predominate; none was neglected."<sup>2</sup>

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2 As quoted in Barbara Beving Long and Ralph Christian, *The Architectural Legacy of Proudfoot & Bird in Iowa, 1882-1940*, National Register Multiple Property Document, E-1.

## II. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Audubon Public Library building is directly associated with the development of Carnegie-endowed free public libraries nationwide, but the library's origins lay in the work of a local women's club, the Columbian Club. Organized on October 12, 1892, the Columbian Club's founding purpose was to assist the State of Iowa in making "a creditable display" for the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893. Charter members were all women, and throughout its existence the club's membership remained entirely women. Minutes do not indicate whether the women achieved their initial goal, but by 1893, with urging from local businessmen, they had agreed to sponsor and run a reading room. The Knights of Pythias provided the space, and the Columbian Club hired a librarian, Mrs. Laura Hurd, who received an initial salary of \$12.00 per month. For several years, the reading room was just that: a one-room operation which often doubled as the setting for small-group cultural events such as plays or literary readings. To support the library, the Columbian Club held bake sales, minstrel shows, home talent plays, and book sociables; sold cookbooks; and managed the annual Fourth of July celebration.

From all accounts the reading room became a popular spot, obviously filling a community need. Eventually, overcrowding dictated a move to larger quarters, so the Columbian Club made a \$600 down payment on a brick building to house its growing collection and to better serve patrons. By soliciting community donations, the club retired the mortgage in less than two years. The second reading room proved to be adequate for several more years; but as the collection grew to 3000 volumes and overcrowding once again plagued operations, further expansion seemed inevitable.

With the need for larger quarters having been established, members of the community logically turned to the philanthropy of Andrew Carnegie. Between 1886 and 1919, Carnegie gave funds to build at least 1679 libraries, almost one-half of them located in Midwestern towns and cities. Communities in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa were particularly attracted to Carnegie's program. One hundred Carnegie libraries were built in Iowa alone, constituting the vast majority of the approximately 135 libraries built in the state between 1900 and 1940.

The move to obtain Carnegie funding for a new public library in Audubon began in March of 1911 with a well-attended public meeting in the county courthouse. Miss Alice Tyler of Des Moines, Secretary of the State Library Commission, addressed the crowd to explain the basic provisions of funding and, as reported in the local press, to assure some of those assembled that Mr. Carnegie had no interest in retaining control over the libraries he helped to build. After a round of testimonials in favor of building a new library, attendees were asked to sign petitions requesting the City Council to call a special election to vote on local support for a public library. Although local citizens appeared to favor a new library building, the *Audubon Advocate* nonetheless ran several editorials throughout March and early April urging everyone to get out and vote for it, explaining how modest was the property tax increase that would be

required to support a new facility. Taking no chances, the editor even ran a lengthy quote by Carnegie on his motivations, which read in part:

I choose free libraries as the best agencies for improving the masses of the people, because they give nothing for nothing. They only help those who help themselves. They never pauperize.<sup>3</sup>

What the editor of the *Advocate* hoped to minimize was an undercurrent of opposition to soliciting Carnegie money for the library. Opponents found no space in the local paper to air their opinions, but physician J.M. Fulton committed his own thoughts to a private journal. On April 12, 1911, he wrote:

There is much talk here now concerning the building of a Carnegie Library. There is quite a divergence of opinion -- that is, I suppose there is -- next Monday will tell....I believe in a Free Public Library but I do not believe in perpetuating the name and fame of a man whom we know created his money dishonestly. We are plenty able to build a library of our own and have the name "Audubon Free Public Library" over the door instead of "Carnegie."<sup>4</sup>

Despite some opposition, the vote for a Carnegie library carried by a wide margin. A total of 673 votes were cast on April 16, 1911: 515 voted for the library, 142 against, with a few "spoiled" ballots. Women turned out in much larger numbers than men, in part because, as the local press noted, "[t]here were several automobiles run during the greater part of the day, principally to get out the ladies."<sup>5</sup> The vote enabled the City to levy a two-mill tax, which would raise an annual amount of \$900 for library maintenance. This amount made the City eligible for a \$9000 grant from Andrew Carnegie.

With the election settled, the mayor next appointed a Library Board. By early June of 1911, the board had negotiated with the Audubon County Supervisors for a building site measuring 80 feet square in the northwest corner of the city park. Architectural plans for the library were unveiled to the public in January of 1912. There are no records concerning the selection of an architectural firm, but Proudfoot, Bird & Rawson was a logical choice, since by then the firm had established a good reputation for designing public and institutional buildings. Construction began during the early spring, and by May the foundation was in. Exterior walls were completed by late June, and the entire building was finished by late summer or early fall. During November, the librarian, Mrs. Laura Delahoyde, catalogued books and organized the new check-out system.

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3 "Why Carnegie Establishes Libraries," *Audubon Advocate*, March 30, 1911.

4 Dr. J.M. Fulton, Private Journal, April 12, 1911.

5 "Library Proposition Carried," *Audubon Advocate*, April 21, 1911.

On December 5, 1912 the library formally opened with a grand public ceremony. Among numerous speakers and entertainers, Alice Tyler again addressed the audience and E.S. Van Gorder, chairman of the Library Board, provided an account of final expenditures. The cost of the library, including equipment, came to approximately \$10,000, with Andrew Carnegie donating \$9,000 of that total. In this regard, the library was typical, for over half of the Carnegie libraries constructed throughout the United States and Canada cost \$10,000 or less. It opened with about 2600 books on the shelves and another 400 on order. The women of the Columbian Club, their library mission now at a close, served orangeade.

### III. SOURCES

#### *Audubon Advocate.*

- "The Free Public Library Question," March 10, 1911.
- "The Free Public Library," March 24, 1911
- "Election Next Monday," April 14, 1911
- "Why Carnegie Establishes Libraries," March 30, 1911
- "Library Proposition Carried," April 21, 1911
- "Library Site Secured," June 8, 1911
- Architect's rendering of library, January 18, 1912
- "The Library Building," May 9, 1912
- "Our New Library Building," June 20, 1912
- "The New Library Building About Completed," July 18, 1912
- "The New Library," November 7, 1912
- "Grand Opening; Audubon Public Library," December 5, 1912

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Learned, William S. *The American Public Library and the Diffusion of Knowledge*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1924.

Proudfoot, Bird & Rawson. Original architects drawings for the Audubon Public Library, Sheets 1-13, [1911]. Drawn by B.N. Eubank.

Proudfoot, Bird & Rawson. Building Specifications for Audubon Library, Office Copy, December 4, 1911.

Richardson, Gail. "Columbian Club" history in *Recipes & Reflections: A Celebration of 100 Years of Good Cooking*. Audubon Public Library, 1991.

#### IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This HABS report was prepared in compliance with mitigation measures set forth in a Memorandum of Agreement among the State Library of Iowa, the Bureau of Historic Preservation of the Iowa State Historical Society, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The level of documentation for the HABS report was set by Gregory D. Kendrick, Chief of the History Unit, Preservation Programs Branch, National Park Service, Denver, Colorado. Mitigation measures stipulated that the building interior and exterior be recorded with photographs and written documentation prior to letting contracts for constructing a new addition and altering the interior design, particularly the basement level. New construction will increase floor space by approximately 3250 square feet and allow all library operations to be housed on one floor. The new wing will extend from the north rear of the existing structure and wrap around rear portions of the west and east sides. The south front facade will remain unchanged. What is now the basement level will become the main level of the library, with entry from the north. The existing main floor will house a new John James Audubon Nature Museum, with access from the existing south front entrance and from the new library entrance.

The written report was prepared by Dr. Rebecca Conard of PHR Associates with research assistance by Gail Richardson, Library Director of the Audubon Public Library. The photographer was Michael Whye of Council Bluffs, Iowa. Brooks Borg and Skiles Architects and Engineers, the corporate descendant of Proudfoot, Bird & Rawson, provided copies of the original architectural drawings for reproduction.