

In recognition of the Wellington Public Library's 106th birthday, I have been going through some of the Library's historical scrapbooks and documents to put them on display during July. Discovering how our library came into fruition is fascinating and I'd like to share the story with you over the next few weeks.

The tale starts with Wellington having a "reading room" as early as 1884 and it was located in a lawyer's office. In 1899, a local ladies group called "The Prentiss Club" took an interest in this compilation of books and asked to house their growing collection in the back of Harry Buttrey's shoe store. With the Club's support, more books were added and eventually in 1906 the "library" moved to the council chamber on the second floor of the new City Building. Soon, the citizens of Wellington recognized that there was a growing need for the community to have a larger, more well equipped public library. The first communication

The first communication sent to Mr. Andrew Carnegie about funding a library in Wellington, Kansas was sent on February 24, 1913 from the Wellington Commercial Club. He was so famous at that time that the letter was simply addressed to Mr. Carnegie, New York City, New York. No street address. No zip code. Thus began the relationship between Wellington and the Carnegie Corporation.

In 1914, Mrs. Ellen Clayton, secretary of the Library Board, began a correspondence with Mr. James Bertram, Mr. Carnegie's private secretary. Bertram was a Scottish immigrant, as was Carnegie, and was described as being devoted and meticulous in his involvement with the Carnegie spirit of giving.

As you may notice in the Library's display, Mr. Bertram's letters, while formal and precise in nature, are filled with misspellings. It's interesting to note that he wrote phonetically, leaving out any silent vowels or consonants. For example, he spelled show "sho" and purchased was spelled "purchast".

The letters between Mr. Bertram and Mrs. Clayton were in constant motion and a grant of \$17,500 was formalized on April 26, 1915. In today's dollars, that sum would equal approximately \$500,000. In exchange for the Carnegie Library funds, the City agreed to use the monies exclusively for the construction of the new building. Further, the City was to provide a sum totaling 10% of the grant for annual maintenance.

Although the Carnegie Corporation did not stipulate a specific architectural style, Mr. Bertram was very involved in the process, he asked many questions about the design and provided sample interior floor plans. In his letter dated June, 12th 1915, Mr. Bertram expressed a little frustration that "your proposed architect has not erected any other library bilding (building)" and, that if that were indeed true, he should "pay more than usual attention to the memorandum sent for your guidance rather than to ignore it."

Mrs. Clayton was not deterred, and responded with updated plans that more clearly reflected Mr. Bertram's instructions. The project was moving forward, but there were more obstacles to overcome...

In recognition of the Wellington Public Library's 106th birthday, the historical documents discussed in this article as well as future articles, will be on display at the Library during the month of July. You are invited to come in and learn more about your Library.