

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

SENT TO D.C.
10-9-98

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Ayer Public Library

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 200 Locust Street not for publication

city or town Delavan vicinity

state Illinois code IL county Tazewell code 179 zip code 61734

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

William L. Wheeler / 5/14/00 / 10-1-98
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Illinois Historic Preservation Agency
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

| | | |
|---|-------|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet. | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet. | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register. | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register. | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain): | _____ | _____ |

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Ayer Public Library
Name of Property

Tazewell, Illinois
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1 | 0 | buildings |
| 0 | 0 | sites |
| 0 | 0 | structures |
| 0 | 0 | objects |
| 1 | 0 | Total |

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Illinois Carnegie Libraries

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

n/a

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Education/Library

Social/Meeting Hall

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Education/Library

Social/Meeting Hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Brick

roof Rubber

other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Education

Period of Significance

1914-1948

Significant Dates

1914

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

Simmons, A. T., Architect

Lillibridge, Ray, Builder

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: _____

Ayer Public Library
Name of Property

Tazewell, Illinois
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

| | | | | | | | |
|---|------|---|---------|-------|---|----------|-------|
| 1 | 16 | 2 | 8, 3 | 78, 0 | 4 | 47, 2 | 21, 0 |
| | Zone | | Easting | | | Northing | |
| 2 | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|------|--|---------|--|--|----------|--|
| 3 | | | | | | | |
| | Zone | | Easting | | | Northing | |
| 4 | | | | | | | |

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jim Sullivan, Glenn W. Allen

organization _____ date _____

street & number 5161 Morris Mill Road telephone 309-244-7321

city or town Delavan state IL zip code 61734

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name City of Delavan, Jean Pauley, Maor

street & number 219 Locust Street telephone 309-244-7266

city or town Delavan state IL zip code 61734

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Ayer Public Library

7. NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Ayer Public Library, 200 Locust Street, sits at the southeast corner of Locust and Second Streets, at the north end of the current business district of Delavan, Illinois, one block north of the historic business district, which was itself listed on the National Register of Historic Places on November 14, 1991. The library's immediate surroundings are of comparatively recent vintage. East of the library and across Second Street to the north, the area is residential, while businesses occupy the land to the south and across Locust Street to the west. The City of Delavan, in southern Tazewell County, is twenty-three miles south of Peoria, Illinois.

Aaron T. Simmons of Bloomington, Illinois designed the Classical Revival brick library, and Ray Lillibridge of Delavan built it in 1914.¹ The building has a limestone pediment, parapet, cornice, stringcourses, and foundation. The building is rectangular, 42 feet by 60 feet, with a flat roof. The original tar roof has been replaced with a rubberized roof. The one story building has a full basement. The main floor is five feet above the ground level. The foundation on the west, north, and south elevations is square-cut, polished ashlar limestone set in regular courses. The stone foundation of the rear, east elevation extends only to the ground level. The brick walls have a stretcher bond pattern. Windows on the main level are double-hung, with the upper sash having vertical multi-panes and lower sash having a single pane of glass. The windows have flat soldier-course brick lintels and stone sills. The basement windows are casements and are capped with dressed limestone lintels. A dressed limestone stringcourse extends around the south, west, and north sides of the building above the first story windows. A dressed limestone cornice extends around those same three sides of the building, one-and-one-half feet below the top of the wall, which is capped with stone coping.

The central projecting entry pavilion on the west, front elevation extends four feet from the west wall. Four limestone steps lead to the entry door. They are flanked by stone knee walls and two cast iron light poles with white glass globes. The wooden entry door has four vertical windows. Sidelights are on either side of the door. The door is covered with a modern aluminum and glass storm door. The entrance is protected by a flat roofed iron canopy suspended by chains. Above the canopy is a tripartite window. The large central window of that group has five vertical panes, and two narrow single pane windows stand on either side. Above the tripartite window is an inset segmental

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arched stone plaque and two small stone panels. The plaque is capped with a segmental soldier course brick arch and a segmental stone pediment. Decorative modillions support the stone pediment. Above the pediment is a stone parapet that extends about the building's walls. It has an inscribed plaque that reads, "Public Library." Decorative stone carvings are on either side of the plaque.

The first story, west elevation entry pavilion is flanked by a set of tripartite windows on either side. They have a large central window with four vertical panes in the upper sash and a single pane in the lower sash. The smaller windows on either side have two vertical panes over single panes. The basement windows on each side of the entry have a central casement window with two vertical panes and a vertical pane on either side.

Beginning at the west end of the first story south side elevation is a tripartite window. To its east is a four-over-one window. The basement has two windows. The one to the west has four panes, and the one in the center of the elevation has three panes. A brick chimney extends above the roofline of this elevation right of center.

The first story east rear elevation has five windows. The large center window has four vertical panes in the upper sash and a single pane in the lower sash. On each side of this window are two narrow windows with two panes in the upper sash and one pane in the lower. These windows are flanked by a pair of tripartite windows at the north and south ends of this elevation. Four steps lead down to a basement door left of center. To the left of the door is white globe lamp on an iron post. There are two pairs of casement windows in the basement, one pair to the center of the elevation and one toward the north end. Each casement has two vertical panes.

The north side elevation has two first floor tripartite windows at the east and west ends and, directly below them, two basement tripartite casement windows, each with four panes. A fireplace chimney capped with stone projects above the roofline, near the center.

All the windows original are wood with the later addition of unobtrusive storm sashes. Expect for the addition of storm windows and the storm door, the exterior remains exactly as when it was built.

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Ayer Public Library

The entry vestibule, with its original ceramic floor, is five feet above ground level and opens to a basement staircase and a main staircase. The main staircase along the north wall of the vestibule leads up eastward toward the first story. There, a large original oak reception desk faces the stairs. Behind the reception desk is a space that accommodates other desks, filing and storage cabinets, and computers. At the corners of the central reception area are four square pillars. Their capitals, as well as those of the two pilasters at the head of the stairs and the two pilasters behind the reception area, are decorated with identical original wood carvings. The outside walls of the main floor are lined with bookshelves, and the entire area is divided by freestanding shelves into four reading rooms. On the north wall is a large brick fireplace that, although still functional, is no longer used. The main floor dimensions are approximately 42 x 60 feet. Except for the fluorescent lights and the ceiling fans, all the interior furnishings on this floor are unaltered from the time the library was built in 1914. The tables, chairs, and all the woodwork on this floor are of natural oak in the mission style. The lamps on the tables are polished brass in mission style with green shades.

The staircase along the south wall of the vestibule leads to the basement. A hallway extends from the stairway to the east side of the building, ending at the rear exit door. On the north side of the hallway, occupying most of the basement is a room currently used as the children's library. The room has two doors, one at the west end of the hallway at the foot of the stairs and another toward the east end of the hallway. There is a small storage room at the southwest corner of the children's library. South of the hallway, at the east end, is the utility room, containing the heating and air conditioning equipment, and at the west end is the periodical storage room. The bathroom occupies an area immediately north of the periodical storage room and extends into the area under the stairs.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Ayer Public Library is locally significant for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. It meets Criterion A for education for its role as an educational institution that provided books and reading services to the local children, the students of Delavan's schools, and the citizens of the Delavan area from 1914 through this day. The Ayer Public Library also meets the registration requirements of the property type "Carnegie Library" as defined in the approved Multiple Property Documentation Form, "Carnegie Libraries in Illinois." The period of significance for the library is 1914, when the building was constructed, to 1948, the fifty-year cutoff for the National Register.

In 1836 Jonas R. Gale, the man primarily responsible for the founding of Delavan, had made arrangements to move from his home in Providence, Rhode Island, to Alton, Illinois, along the Mississippi River. On his way back to Providence, he passed through Central Illinois and visited an acquaintance who lived in the (still) unincorporated town of Dillon, about eight miles north of the present site of Delavan. Impressed with the fertility of the soil, he formed a plan to settle a colony of Easterners on the Central Illinois prairie. During Gale's stay in the area, he happened to meet, in nearby Tremont, Edward C. Delavan, of Albany, New York, who, convinced that Gale's scheme could work, agreed to help finance the colony.²

The fourteen original subscribers of the Delavan Association agreed, on Sept. 19, 1836, to a constitution, one of whose articles stipulated that the colonists would, in adherence to Edward Delavan's views on alcohol, neither sell nor use "ardent spirits." In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the legacy of the community's founding as a temperance colony became controversial and created considerable political strains as wet and dry city governments alternatively issued and revoked tavern licenses. After the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, however, interest in this issues flagged, and licenses were once again issued.³ Temperance was, of course, a major public issue not only in Delavan, but throughout the country during those decades. In Delavan, however, the temperance movement would lead directly to the founding of the public library.

After the Association's executive committee selected and purchased the site for the new community, farm and town land were sold at auction in Providence, Rhode Island, in the all of 1836, and the first settlers arrived in the spring of 1837. As Gale had surmised,

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the area had great agricultural potential, but the settlement's distance from river and rail transportation (in Pekin fourteen miles northwest and in Atlanta eighteen miles southeast, respectively) limited growth in the first few decades. Delavan did not, therefore, incorporate until 1865--first as a village, then again in 1888 as a city. When, in the late 1860s, two railroads were finally laid through town, one of them with the financial assistance of the new Village of Delavan, grain elevators were built, and in the 1870s Delavan became a thriving agricultural and commercial center for southern Tazewell County.⁴

For a general discussion of the growth of the public library movement in the United States and in Illinois, see the Multiple Property Documentation Form for "Carnegie Libraries in Illinois."

Before the Ayer Public Library was established in 1907, five other attempts were made to establish a library in Delavan. The first of those efforts, the Delavan Library Association, largely the creation of its treasurer, James T. Sanders, organized a subscription library in 1873. A quarterly fee of fifty cents from each subscriber entitled them to check out books, and fundraising shows at Phillips Hall (a building that, coincidentally, occupied the current site of Ayer Public Library) supplemented the library's finances. They opened a free reading room in 1874 where even non-subscribers could use their small collection. That first library, however, lasted only five years. A second, more short-lived subscription library was opened in 1887 by Delia Culver, followed soon after by another abortive attempt under Ina Kingman.⁵

The history of a permanent library in Delavan begins with the Blue Button Army, a temperance society that, among its other wholesome activities, in 1902, opened a reading room and circulating library.⁶ In the late nineteenth century, libraries had come to be seen as institutions of social reform, tools in elevating the spiritual level of the community by providing intellectual stimulation and enlightenment, as well as an alternative to vulgar, uncultured entertainments.⁷ Given this theory, a library was a logical project for a small-town temperance society where the licensing of taverns remained a controversial issue--they provided a sober alternative. In 1905, the Women's Club also opened a circulating library in a room above the Tazewell County Bank, a room that would later become the first home of the Ayer Public Library. The next year, however, rather than compete, the club donated its collection to the Blue Button Library.⁸ The books of the Blue Button

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Library would become the basis for the collection of the public library. Delavan, therefore, followed the fairly typical trend of a women's club or private library association maintaining a library over a private business before the establishment of a public library.⁹

In 1907, Amos K. Ayer, a prosperous citizen and longtime financial backer of the Blue Button Army, proposed the founding of a free public library in Delavan.¹⁰ The Blue Button reading room had closed in February with the intent (never realized) of reopening after a complete recataloguing of their collection of "several hundred volumes."¹¹ At the end of a lightly-attended lecture that May by a local clergyman on "Books and Reading," Ayer rose to present his plan: the Blue Button Army would cede its collection and equipment to a new, permanent institution, Ayer would donate \$1500 worth of new books and bookcases, and he would further provide \$200 a year for the next ten years for the purchase of books, provided that the community agreed to maintain the new library at public expense.¹² Within a month, the Blue Button Library's Board of Control unanimously assented to Ayer's plan and agreed to reorganize as a stock company to manage the transition from private to public institution and to maintain the library until the completion of that process. Most importantly, they planned to submit a referendum to the City of Delavan on a property tax in order to comply with Ayer's stipulation of public support for the new library.¹³ Ayer was elected chairman and treasurer of the corporation, and the new board decided to spread the proposed tax burden and expand the clientele to include all of Delavan Township, rather than just the City¹⁴--a decision that would come back to haunt them when, a few years later, they applied to the Carnegie Corporation for a new building.

The referendum passed in July, and a board for the new public library was elected in September, with Ayer chosen as the first president and Carrie A. Briggs as secretary. At one of their first meetings, the board voted in the name "The Ayer Public Library," in honor of both their president Amos K. Ayer, for his work in finally putting a Delavan library on a permanent and public footing, and his brother, J. E. Ayer, deceased the previous December, who had long been interested in establishing a public library for the community.¹⁵ Jessie Linbarger was hired as the first librarian, and her training for the position, begun as soon as she was hired, consisted of a week in Lincoln, Illinois, where she observed the operation and management of that city's public library.¹⁶ Opening day in that room above the Tazewell County Bank, November 7, 1907, was unannounced, so as not to overwhelm Linbarger while she was still establishing procedures and cataloguing

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the collection. Word of mouth, nevertheless, spread the news, and within the first nine days, she had already issued 150 library cards.¹⁷ The initial collection had over two thousand books.¹⁸ The Ayer Public Library was off to a successful start.

Mr. Ayer, however, having, over the course of just a few months, established the institution that still bears his name, did not live to see it thrive. On February 3, 1908, he died, at the age of 67, on a trip to inspect some property he owned in Missouri.¹⁹

For a discussion of the library philanthropy of Andrew Carnegie, see the Multiple Property Documentation Form "Carnegie Libraries in Illinois."

On May 7, 1912, Carrie A. Briggs, Secretary of the Library Board, first wrote James Bertram, Secretary of the Carnegie Corporation, to enquire about funding for a new library building. In subsequent correspondence over the next year after her initial request, Briggs described the need for a new building, noting that the library's collection already held about 3,500 books crammed into "a brick store building (rented) lighted only by the plate glass windows in front, and with no special adaptation for use for the purpose of a library." A letter from businessman James W. Crabb asserted his willingness to donate a lot for the building near the north end of the business district (already a significant site in the community's history as the former location of Phillips Hall, a much-used meeting hall until it burned down in 1896). Two other letters to Bertram described the existing tax support for the library: the town clerk testified to the successful property tax referendum of 1907, and the library treasurer attested to the income that levy provided, \$1,370 in 1912--well over the \$1,000 a year Bertram insisted the community would have to provide.²⁰

The board had hoped to obtain funds from Carnegie and build the new library in 1913, but a series of misunderstandings regarding the public funding of the library delayed construction for another year. Bertram, always prickly about exact attention to his instructions, insisted on a direct resolution by the municipal government providing funding for the library and had difficulty understanding that the 1907 referendum applied to the institution Carnegie was being asked to fund. When told that the city council of Delavan lacked the authority to pass a resolution regarding township-wide taxation, Bertram suggested then that the tax be put to a public vote. Throughout the summer and into the fall, the Library Board and other local officials tried unsuccessfully to convince Bertram

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that the local funding was already in place. Briggs reminded Bertram that Carnegie had already financed the construction of libraries with a similar township-wide property tax in both DeLand and St. Charles, Illinois. The exasperated board went so far as to draw up a ballot for the referendum Bertram proposed, asking the citizens to ratify once more the library district tax that they had approved six years before and that they were already paying. Fearing that voters would misunderstand this election as a vote on a tax increase and leery of the expense of a special election, the board stopped action on the project, unsure how to proceed on Bertram's seemingly impractical insistences.²¹

In November, when there was still no progress on the proposed building, a local newspaper speculated that the problem lay in the unique historical circumstances of Delavan's application. Delavan's library had been, in 1907, the first to take advantage of a new state law authorizing township-based public library taxing districts. Most of the libraries Carnegie funded were municipal, rather than township, institutions, and though Carnegie had funded other township-supported libraries in Illinois, they had generally been established as public libraries at the time of the Carnegie application, rather than, as in Delavan, prior to it. The paper expressed optimism, nevertheless, that, whatever the source of the misunderstanding, it would soon be resolved.²²

That same month, frustrated by the delays, assistant librarian Edith M. Pittsford contacted Bertram to end the impasse. "On my own account," she wrote, "I am taking the liberty to write you, although not a member of the library board. I trust I shall do the case no harm--even though I may accomplish no good." She laid out the misunderstanding and included a letter she had received from Mrs. Robert Bruce Farson of the St. Charles Women's Club stating that the Delavan library was funded in exactly the same manner as the township library in St. Charles, which had obtained a Carnegie grant for its building with far less difficulty. Pittsford ended her plea with specific instances of the need for more space. The collection had by then grown to 4,200 volumes, well beyond the capacity of their room. Furthermore, she wrote, "A few weeks ago, I was able to establish a children's story hour; and on Saturday many little folks come for an hour of real interest and entertainment, that a young lady of the city, with no adequate compensation, is glad to give them, although we have no suitable seats or space."²³

Pittsford broke the jam. Bertram finally accepted the library's financial arrangements and sent a standard form for a municipal government to accept the Carnegie

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donation, instructing that they should cross out the word "Council" and replace it with "Township Trustees." Rather than quibble over legal title and thus risk further delay, the Trustees of the Ayer Public Library District (co-extensive, after all, with Delavan Township) took the liberty of representing themselves as the Township Trustees Bertram wanted.²⁴

In 1914, the project finally started to move swiftly. James W. Crabb transferred the deed to the property. The Carnegie Corporation approved plans for the building, drawn up the year before by Aaron T. Simmons of Bloomington, Illinois, an architect who had already designed about forty other Carnegie libraries, and the corporation authorized \$10,000 for its construction. The contract was awarded to Ray Lillibridge of Delavan for a bid well under that amount.²⁵ Finally, in November 1914, two and a half years after the Carnegie grant application and seven years after its founding, Ayer Public Library had a building.²⁶

Over the next several decades, the library collection grew, providing ever greater educational and entertainment opportunities for the children and adults of Delavan. Its continuing service to the community has been interrupted only once. The library was closed for the month of May 1939 during a scarlet fever epidemic. Before it reopened, twenty-four books were burned on account of scarlet fever contact.²⁷ Over the years, the collection continued to grow so that, in 1943, it included 16,018 volumes.²⁸ Patronage also expanded over the years. In the spring of 1947, Librarian Ella Ryan tallied for the library board the number and categories of books checked out over the previous winter. From November 1946 through March 1947, 3,780 books had been checked out: 2,239 juvenile, 1,302 adult, and 239 categorized as "classics."²⁹

The population of the community served stayed fairly stable throughout the library's historic period. The City of Delavan grew a little during the library's first decade, from 1,175 at the time of the 1910 census to 1,191 at the 1920 census.³⁰ The 1930 census, taken after the Great Depression had begun, shows a significant dip, down to 1,084.³¹ The next census, however, in 1940, shows that the city recovered its lost population, the figure risen back up to 1,181.³² Those figures suggest that, although the number of people entitled to use the library did not change greatly over the historic period, they enjoyed a proportionately greater and greater selection of material as the library's collection itself grew from those 4,200 volumes in 1913 to the 16,018 in 1943.

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Though the overall population of Delavan did not change much, the school population increased considerably over the course of the historic period, a change that suggests an increased use of the library by the students for their school projects as well as for their own edification and entertainment. Schools had been established in a number of buildings around town since the 1840s, and a combined elementary and high school building was finally constructed in 1871, right across the street--across Second Street to the north--from the future site of the library.³³ High school yearbooks show that, in 1912, five years after the founding of Ayer Public Library, the high school had sixty-six students, and by 1915, a year after the construction of the library building, the high school had grown to seventy-seven students.³⁴ In 1922, Delavan Community High School District was established to serve not only students from inside the city but also students from the one-room country grade schools outside the town. To accommodate the increased enrollment, a new high school (still in use) was built that year at the south end of town on what had been the Tazewell County Fair Ground.³⁵ That year, 107 students attended the high school.³⁶ Other high school yearbooks show a trend of generally increasing enrollment throughout the library's historic period: 111 in 1928, 130 in 1939, and 129 in 1945, nearly double the number of high school students in Delavan when the library was built.³⁷ In 1948, the school population inside the City of Delavan experienced another sudden increase when a community consolidated school district was established. The children who had been attending the one-room country schools now came into town for their classes by bus.³⁸ Throughout the historic period, therefore, Delavan's elementary school stood right across the street from the library, and, until 1922, so did the high school. Students at Delavan schools, therefore, had easy access to the library, a convenient walk from their classrooms, and as the school population grew, they presumably made greater and greater use of the collection.

Ayer Public Library remains to this day an example of the successful legacy of the nineteenth-century public library movement, and it demonstrates the continuing impact of Andrew Carnegie's remarkable insight that he could most usefully transform and uplift American culture by seeding the nation with places for books.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Carnegie Library correspondence for Delavan.
- ² Delavan, Illinois: 1837-1987 (The Delavan Times, Delavan, IL, 1987), p. 10.
- ³ Ibid., 10, 13.
- ⁴ Ibid., 11-13.
- ⁵ Ibid., 16, 152.
- ⁶ Ibid., 17.
- ⁷ National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation for "Illinois Carnegie Libraries."
- ⁸ Delavan, Illinois, pp. 18, 152.
- ⁹ Raymond Bial and Linda LaPuma Bial, The Carnegie Library in Illinois (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), Preface.
- ¹⁰ Carnegie Correspondence for Delavan.
- ¹¹ The Delavan Times-Press, February 20, 1907.
- ¹² The Delavan Times-Press, May 15, 1907.
- ¹³ The Delavan Times-Press, June 12, 1907.
- ¹⁴ The Delavan Times-Press, July 3, 1907.
- ¹⁵ The Delavan Times-Press, September 18, 1907.
- ¹⁶ The Delavan Times-Press, September 25, 1907.

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¹⁷ The Delavan Times-Press, November 20, 1907.

¹⁸ Delavan, Illinois, p. 153.

¹⁹ The Delavan Times-Press, February 12, 1908.

²⁰ Carnegie Correspondence for Delavan.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Delavan Tri-County Times, November 5, 1913.

²³ Carnegie Correspondence for Delavan.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Delavan, Illinois, p. 153.

²⁷ Meeting minutes of the Ayer Public Library Board of Trustees, April 6, 1939.

²⁸ Meeting minutes of the Ayer Public Library Board of Trustees, August 5, 1943.

²⁹ Meeting minutes of the Ayer Public Library Board of Trustees, May 7, 1947.

³⁰ Blue Book of the State of Illinois, 1921-1922 (Springfield: State of Illinois, 1921), p. 381.

³¹ Blue Book of the State of Illinois, 1931-1932 (Springfield: State of Illinois, 1931), p. 625.

³² Blue Book of the State of Illinois, 1941-1942 (Springfield: State of Illinois, 1941), p. 660.

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³³Delavan, Illinois, pp. 85, 87.

³⁴The Delavo (Delavan: Delavan Community High School, 1912), n.p.; The Delavo (Delavan: Delavan Community High School, 1915), pp. 14-17, 20, 27, 31.

³⁵ Delavan, Illinois, p. 86.

³⁶ The Delavo (Delavan: Delavan Community High School, 1922), pp. 16-17, 24-29, 37, 41.

³⁷ The Delavo (Delavan: Delavan Community High School, 1928), pp. 15-20, 26-32, 37, 41; The Delavo (Delavan: Delavan Community High School, 1939), pp. 8-9, 12-17; The Delavo (Delavan: Delavan Community High School, 1945), pp. 3-12.

³⁸Delavan, Illinois, p. 86.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

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Schmidt, William E., and Penny L. Bright, eds. "Origins of the Ayer Public Library: In Its 90th Anniversary Year." Delavan, IL: Ayer Public Library, 1997.

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

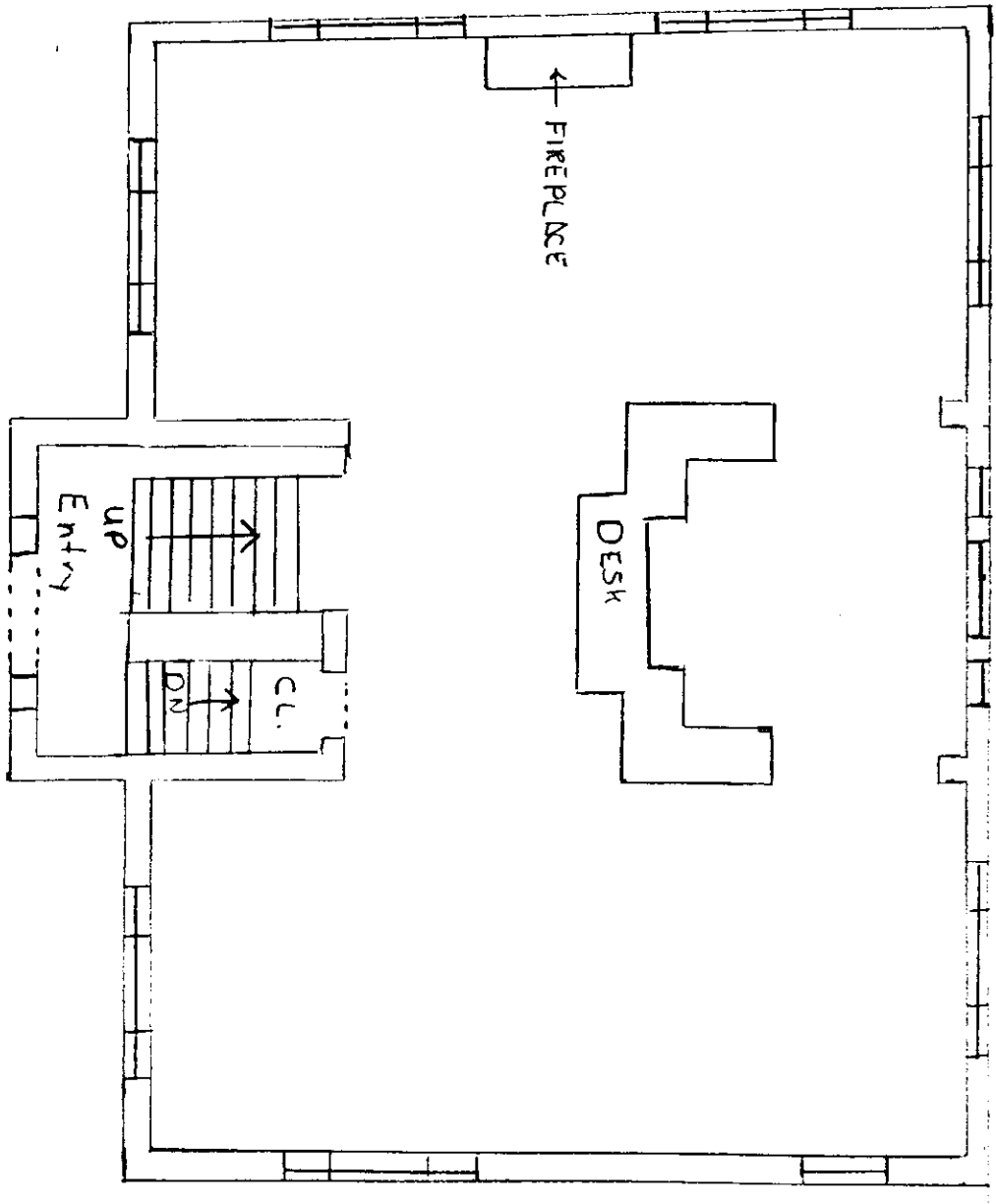
Verbal Boundary Description

The Ayer Public Library is located at 200 Locust Street, at the southeast corner of Locust and Second Street in Delavan, Illinois.

A part of lot 2 in block 11 in the original village, now City of Delavan, it is described and bounded as follows: commencing at the northwest corner of lot number 2 and running thence south 100 feet, thence east 150 feet, thence north 100 feet, thence west 150 feet to the place of beginning.

Boundary Justification

The nominated parcel includes the building and the lot associated with the Ayer Public Library and that maintains historic integrity.



AYER PUBLIC LIBRARY
DELAVAN, ILLINOIS

ILLINOIS HISTORIC SITES SURVEY INVENTORY

T-H-5

205594

1. Name of Site:

Common Ayer Public Library
Historic

2. Location:

Street and Number SE cor., 2nd + Locust
City or Town Delavan
County TAZEWELL
Zip Code
Township
Range
Section
1/4 Section

3. Classification:

Category (check one) Integrity (check one)
() District (X) Building () Altered (X) Unaltered
() Site () Structure () Moved (X) Original Site

4. Ownership:

Status (check one)

(X) Private () Public (X) Occupied () Unoccupied () Preservation work in progress

Access to Public

() Yes () Restricted () Unrestricted (X) No

Present Use (check one or more)

() Agricultural () Industrial () Religious
() Commercial () Military () Scientific
(X) Educational () Museum () Transportation
() Entertainment () Park () Other
() Government () Private Residence

5. Ownership of Property:

Owner's Name Phone Number
Street and Number
City or Town
State County Zip Code

6. Description:

(X) Excellent () Good () Fair () Deteriorated
() Ruins () Unexposed

Is there a program of preservation underway? () Yes (X) No

REPOSITORY

7. Historical Themes: (check one or more of the following)

- Archaeological Site (Pre-Columbian)
- Archaeological Site (Post-Columbian to 1673)
- French Influence (1673-1780)
- Illinois Frontier (1780-1818)
- Illinois Early (1818-1850)
- Illinois Middle (1850-1900)
- Illinois Late (1900-present)
- Famous People (give names & dates)

8. Specific Date: 1907, built

Areas of significance (check one or more of the following)

- Aboriginal (historic)
- Aboriginal (pre-historic)
- Agriculture
- Architecture
- Art
- Commerce
- Communication
- Conservation
- Education
- Engineering
- Industry
- Invention
- Landscape Architecture
- Literature
- Military
- Music
- Political
- Religion/Philosophy
- Science
- Sculpture
- Social/Humanitarian
- Theater
- Transportation
- Urban Planning
- Other (specify)

Brief statement of significance: (include all names and dates)

Use additional sheets if necessary. The first tax-supported library in Illinois;

9. Form prepared by: also a Carnegie library. See Kren's notes on Tazewell County, no. 1 for specific historical information.

Name and Title: _____ Date: May '75

Organization: KATHA A SCHALL Phone: _____

Street and Number: 1005 DEWONSIRE

City or Town: _____ County: _____ Zip Code: _____

During the course of the Survey we often find it necessary to search for a particular site. When filling out the Survey form, please list according to the following example, published references to the site for which forms are being completed. If a bibliography can be compiled, it will greatly deduct from the Survey's task.

Bibliography

- Robertson, Robert, Of Whales and Men. New York, Alfred K. Knopf, Inc., 1954.
1. Anderson, Florence. Library Program, 1911-1961. [New York]: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1963, p. 33.
2. Giles, Mrs. Elmer. Historical Delavan. Delavan: Delavan Woman's Club, 1910, p. 31.
3. New Frontier Days, Inc. Delavan: 125 Years of Progress, 1837-1962. Delavan: New Frontier Days, Inc., 1962, pp. 34-5.

