

“THE OLD LIBRARY” DEBATE:
How Bloomington Preserved its Historic Carnegie Library

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Introduction

Carnegie libraries are a common sight in towns and cities across the United States landscape, but especially on the streets of small-town Indiana. The largest number of Carnegie libraries of any state were constructed in Indiana, with 164 originally built and 146 still standing in 2009.¹ To many who have resided in a town gifted with one of these libraries, who fondly remember entering its doors into a world of books, the structures are familiar, recognizable, and even cherished.

In many cities across Indiana, especially smaller or more rural towns, the Carnegie libraries continue in their original function, serving as free public media centers. However, in cities experiencing more population growth, especially since 1960, expanding communities have often outgrown their library facilities. The challenges of adapting old library buildings to meet the accessibility standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act, as well as the need to support growing community desires for more books, technology, and other educational resources, have motivated many public libraries to seek new facilities during the late Twentieth Century.

As fewer of the well-known Carnegie buildings continue as libraries, fewer people hold attachments to them as landmarks, or carry fond childhood memories of afternoons spent reading in their halls. Over the last several decades, the Carnegie libraries of Indiana have been transforming into artifacts of past times; they reflect the state of communities as they once were. As physical artifacts, the buildings may speak for the people who established them, used them, cared for them, left them, fought to protect them, and gave them new lives.

What is a “Carnegie Library”?

The title “Carnegie library” has one simple definition: it is a label given to any free public library whose physical building was constructed using funds donated by American industrialist Andrew Carnegie.

Many popular myths and misconceptions exist about these buildings, mostly surrounding their benefactor’s involvement in their construction: that Andrew Carnegie personally selected cities on which to bestow the libraries; that he dictated their design, location, or architectural style—and thus they all look alike; or that he required his name to be displayed prominently on the buildings’ facades. In fact, Andrew Carnegie’s stipulations on the planning and construction of the libraries he financially supported were few. The grant program was remarkably flexible. Architectural writer Theodore Jones observes that “The most important development [in the history of the Carnegie library program] is rarely mentioned—that Carnegie libraries were built and used in accordance with each community’s sense of civic needs and well-being.”²

At the turn of the Twentieth Century, Andrew Carnegie was the wealthiest man in the United States, having sold Carnegie Steel Company, at the time the largest and most profitable industrial business in the United States, to JP Morgan in 1901. Carnegie founded the enterprise himself,

¹ Indiana State Library, “Carnegie 2009 Update,” Excel spreadsheet. Indiana State Library. www.in.gov/library/files/Carnegies_2009update.xls.

² Theodore Jones. *Carnegie Libraries Across America: A Public Legacy*. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997), 103.

and after selling it, committed his life to philanthropic and scholarly pursuits. He had many sophisticated opinions about the proper disposal of his riches, which he outlined in an essay titled “The Gospel of Wealth,” describing what he saw as the challenge of administering wealth. Carnegie believed that the best fields for philanthropy were the funding of universities, libraries, hospitals, public parks, meeting halls, swimming baths, and churches—in that order.³ His highest principle for philanthropy was that gifts must be made in ways that required beneficiaries to work for the results.

Carnegie once stated in an address for the dedication of one of his many libraries, “Books are the most perfect instruments of philanthropy that exists [sic]. I will tell you why. They do not do anything for nothing... If you are going to get any benefit out of these books, you must work for it...I wish to help those who help themselves.”⁴

And so it went for Carnegie’s unofficial library grant program. The responsibility for seeking funding for a library was left to the individuals who first identified the need for a library facility in their own town. News spread by word of mouth that Carnegie was willing to bequest a library building to any city with the means to support such an institution. Interested citizens simply addressed handwritten requests to Andrew Carnegie himself, and his personal secretary James Bertram handled all correspondence concerning the grants.

Carnegie’s tenets for the library program were simple. To be eligible, a community had to demonstrate need for a public library, provide land for the building site, and promise to support and maintain the library with tax funds equal to ten percent of the grant amount annually. Grant amounts were loosely based on a calculation of \$2 to \$3 per area resident.⁵ Once the grant amount was secured in a particular town, local leaders hired the architect, planned the design, and stocked the building with books. Any similarities that may be observed in these hundreds of buildings are due then, not to the influential hand of their financial benefactor, but to the parallel thinking of local individuals in cities across Indiana and the United States.

Libraries Transformed

Just as local citizens were instrumental in establishing the Carnegie libraries constructed in Indiana between 1900 and 1920, Hoosiers of following generations played crucial roles in deciding the fate of the aging structures, as dozens of them were vacated by their libraries since 1960. Some of Indiana’s Carnegie libraries have been lost to fires and other natural disasters, some to city or highway development, but many were at some point left empty but standing in reasonably good condition because they simply no longer met the local library’s needs.

In these circumstances, communities were left with a choice: what new purpose might this local space serve? In answering this question, at different points in time people across the state have engaged in conversations, sometimes escalating to heated public debates, over what the old

³ Carnegie, Andrew. “The Gospel of Wealth,” *The Gospel of Wealth And Other Timely Essays*. (New York: The Century Co., 1901), 24-39.

⁴ David Kaser, Forward. Alan McPherson. *Temples of Knowledge: Andrew Carnegie’s Gift to Indiana*, (Kewanna: Hoosier’s Nest Press, 2003), XI.

⁵ Theodore Jones. *Carnegie Libraries Across America: A Public Legacy*. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997), 28.

Carnegie library building meant to their community and what use it might still offer to the public. For various reasons, people have occasionally opted to raze the empty library buildings. But in many cases, concerned individuals, grassroots organizations, and public officials have chosen to preserve their city's empty Carnegie library for continued public use.

Adaptive Reuse

A majority of the forty-four former Carnegie libraries that still stand in Indiana now serve the public as town halls and civic centers, museums and art galleries, or as other kinds of educational or public facilities. A few are privately owned and some of these are operated as businesses, such as Greenfield, Indiana's "Carnegie Restaurant." The transformation of these buildings for a purpose other than their intended design is known within the terminology of historic preservation as "adaptive reuse."

Every adaptation of a former library into a new use represents a decision. In each case that a former Carnegie library has become a county historical museum, or a restaurant, or a meeting place for a city's chamber of commerce, some individual or group of people was responsible for envisioning that change and enacting the responsibilities of renovation and adaptation. While acting as historic preservationists in order to keep and transform their town's old Carnegie library into something new, countless Hoosiers have thought about the meanings of the buildings as local historic landmarks and sought to utilize those buildings' best features as architectural anchors in their downtown areas.

Significance for Study

The collectively decided adaptation of Carnegie libraries is an intriguing topic from which to explore and think about the practice and appreciation of local history and historic preservation in Indiana. There are so many of these libraries in the state that, studied as a collection, it is easy to draw comparisons and contrasts between the ways different communities have chosen to use, neglect, recognize, or adapt the buildings. These libraries are indeed common in Indiana; however, just because they do not lack in scarcity does not necessarily mean they are not valuable. On the contrary, the fact that this large number of buildings have served so many people is part of their value as a collection.

The preservation and adaptation of these buildings challenges the meaning of history and of the philosophy and practice of historic preservation. Is an old library "historic"? This question has been debated in a number of communities, and in doing so, people have argued as much about the definition of history as they have about the qualifications of any particular building.

Bloomington

If the preservation of Indiana's Carnegie libraries is in essence a dialogue between citizens about the meaning and significance of local history as contained in the commonplace landmarks of a city landscape, then nowhere was this conversation more fully articulated and fiercely contested than in Bloomington, Indiana, in the 1970s.

In some Indiana towns, the future use of an outmoded library building was decided before the library and its collections had even left. In Vevay, Indiana, the city and library board simply

swapped deeds in 1991, the library taking a prime piece of downtown property for its new facilities, while city officials settled into a new town hall in the old brick Carnegie building.⁶ The library board of Crawfordsville, Indiana, chose to retain their former limestone home when their new facility was built just across the street in 2005. The Crawfordsville District Public Library still owns the property and operates it as the Carnegie Museum of Montgomery County, with museum employees on library payroll.⁷ In many other towns and cities across the state, the original library structures sat empty and perhaps seemingly forgotten for months or years before at least one inspired individual decided that their local building's convenient downtown location, large rooms, high ceilings, formal architecture, and association with public use and local memories would make it a suitable space for an art gallery, a town office, or a restaurant. Vacancy and neglect are afflictions known at some point by many of the former Carnegie library buildings, now widely celebrated as historic landmarks.

In Bloomington, the Monroe County Public Library moved out of its 1916 Neo-Classical Revival home to a brand new modern style building one block west in October of 1970. The old building made of local limestone sat empty, but certainly not forgotten, for over seven years. During that time, the local newspapers reported in over three hundred separate articles on the dealings of the Monroe County Library Board, the Bloomington City Council, the city Redevelopment Commission, the local Historical Society, and eventually The Old Library, Inc, an organization formed in 1970 for the express purpose of preserving the library building. The *Daily Herald-Telephone*, the *Sunday Herald-Times*, the *Courier-Tribune*, and Indiana University's *Indiana Daily Student* chronicled private meetings, public hearings, minor scandals, countless interviews, and published dozens of letters to the editor, while the city of Bloomington debated, often with intense passion, what could or should be done with the old library.

Three times, under two different mayoral administrations, the library property barely escaped being demolished and turned into parking space. Meanwhile, members of the local Monroe County Historical Society and hundreds of other concerned citizens, a number of organizations, and a few city officials argued that the building be spared for its historical significance and potential usefulness as a continued community space to be utilized as a museum, art gallery, or public meeting place. The "Save the Library" movement, as it is sometimes referred to now, was an exhaustingly long and intensely battled debate between many Bloomington residents, representing a spectrum of opinions and values. The dispute was not enacted between long-held enemies, rather it was argued between Bloomingtonians who shared in common a concern for the growth and continued progress of their hometown. Not surprisingly, in detail, the story is remarkably more complicated than just that.

The Mary Ellen Farmer scrapbooks

The timeline of this story is in fact so complex that few people now have a clear or accurate understanding of the events. Several of the key players in these events are now deceased. The newspaper reports remain. Several hundred of these articles are held in the Monroe County Historical Society's genealogy library, neatly organized and preserved by the efforts of Mrs.

⁶ Switzerland County Public Library, "SCPL History," <http://scpl.us/about/switzerland-county-public-library-history>.

⁷ Crawfordsville District Public Library, "Carnegie Museum of Montgomery County," <http://www.cdpl.lib.in.us/carnegie/>

Mary Ellen Farmer, a devoted champion of the once quoted “crusade to save the library.” Mrs. Farmer personally clipped and saved newspaper reports relating to the library debate from the three local newspapers over seven years, and applied them to a total of 336 pages contained in three homemade scrapbooks. She not only saved the articles, she organized them in chronological order in hardbound books. Each of the three scrapbooks is labeled in order, and on each of the covers, encased in pink or gold shellac, is a printed sketch of the Carnegie building façade. Inside, the pages are smattered with her handwriting as she recorded the dates and days of the week of each article, and wrote in the margins her own notes, reactions, and corrections to factual inaccuracies. When she was particularly incensed by one of her opponent’s remarks, Mrs. Farmer’s handwriting would appear in red ink, occasionally with a few extra exclamation points.

Mary Ellen Farmer was closely involved in the movement to save the library building, a movement that was once referred to as her personal crusade.⁸ While she was not the only person who embarked on such a crusade, she was certainly a dedicated member of the front of Bloomington citizens who believed the former library building should not be torn down. In December of 1974, four years into the library’s vacancy, one news article reported in a special interest profile of Mary Ellen Farmer that for two years, “her life [had been] centered around saving the old structure and converting it into a historic museum for Monroe County. She has had time for little else other than letter-writing and attending meetings...”⁹ In addition to attending as many public meetings as possible of the Bloomington Redevelopment Commission and the Bloomington City Council, Mrs. Farmer also served as a member of the Indiana Historical Society, on the executive committee of the Central Business District Project Area Committee, and was an “outspoken member” of the Monroe County Historical Society.¹⁰ In regard to her work toward preserving the library building, she once said “I couldn’t be more involved.”¹¹

Mary Farmer was a meticulous saver of old things, of local history and artifacts. Her family farmhouse, one of the oldest homes in Bloomington dating back to about 1870, contains many of the items she saved. It was her intention to donate the entire house and its contents as a museum. She was a self-proclaimed perfectionist, and admitted that someone once told her she “was the busiest person sitting still they ever saw.”¹² Her scrapbooks are a testament to the great amount of care she had for this particular cause.

I had what I can say with sincere appreciation, the *privilege* of studying Mrs. Farmer’s scrapbooks while sitting in the genealogy library of the Monroe County History Center in that old Carnegie library building on the corner of Sixth and Washington Streets. I sat there and pored over her home-made books filled with original articles secured on pages with clear double-stick tape now brown and ineffective; I read angry and upset letters to the editor, passionate pleas to convert the seemingly doomed building into a museum and warehouse for local artifacts, all the time knowing full well what the outcome was, yet often awed that it could be so.

⁸ Terry English, “Farmer’s ‘historic’ crusade helped save library,” *Daily Herald-Telephone*, December 10, 1974, Tuesday profile. Scrapbook II, p. 178.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

What began in pipe dreams and evolved into genuine plans that many people still did not take as genuinely possible, is now absolutely real. I was sitting in that reality as I researched. I could look up from a yellowed piece of newsprint and see right in front of me the realization of past people's hopes.

While I typed my notes I also observed my surroundings. I saw other researchers, including one young couple who were thrilled to discover files of information concerning the history of the building they own, one of the oldest on the town courthouse square. I encountered many of the over fifty volunteers who regularly give their time to the center and its operation. I heard frequent grumblings about the hassle of finding parking spaces or avoiding unforgiving parking attendants. In all, I witnessed the effects of the decisions made by people in the past. I am now directly connected to these people through this building. That this connection is felt and recognized is, in my understanding of the term, precisely what makes the old library building "historic."

The History

The history of the library building's preservation is difficult to simplify. As a saga, it is neither simple nor short. I will present here the most important objective details of the timeline before delving into a more thoughtful and unavoidably subjective analysis of the meanings behind this Bloomington story.

Library Moves Out

The timeline begins in October 1970, when the Monroe County Public Library began to relocate its collections to its newly constructed, expansive library building across the street. Nine months earlier, the city of Bloomington under the administration of Mayor John H. Hooker, Jr. had reported interest in purchasing the soon-to-be vacated library property for \$145,000, with the intent of using it as the site for a new high-rise parking garage.¹³ However, the city missed its July deadline to purchase the property that it was intended to acquire by November. The library board extended this deadline, but with no response from the city, the former library was resultantly left empty when the new facilities opened to the public on November 1, 1970.¹⁴

The city's plans for a \$2.7 million parking program, including a garage at the library site, were threatened when the State Board of Accounts examiners sent a critical report to the city which led to a grand jury probe resulting in five dual indictments against Mayor Hooker and the city controller pending trial January, 1971.¹⁵ The indictments concerned the construction of downtown sidewalks with illegal funding and the purchase of land for a parking garage-apartment building with non-appropriated funds. The indictments and upcoming trial put a substantial delay on the city's plans to buy the library land.

With an empty piece of property on their hands, the library board sought another tenant. Several offers and suggestions were made, including the recommendation of several lawyers to use the

¹³ "Library still for rent," *Courier-Tribune*, November 25, 1970. Scrapbook II, p.4.

¹⁴ "Board Considers Renting Old County Library," *Daily Herald-Telephone*, October 29, 1970. Scrapbook II, p.4.

¹⁵ "Library still for rent," *Courier-Tribune*, November 25, 1970. Scrapbook II, p.4.

site as a location for the second superior court, expected to soon be established by the Indiana State Legislature.¹⁶ New Age Resources expressed desire to use the building as a combination arts and crafts center, co-operative organic foods market, and co-operative child care center.¹⁷ Neither happened. On June 12, 1972, the city Board of Public Works awarded three contracts to construct the previously proposed high-rise garage and apartment building on the library site.¹⁸ Only a few citizens reportedly opposed the city's plan at this time. Ultimately, the city abandoned the high-rise plan in November 1971, not necessarily due to public opposition, but according to city attorney James Cotner because parking fees could not be raised in order to help fund the project due to a wage-price-rent freeze.¹⁹ The library avoided demolition for the first time.

New Mayor

In January 1972, Mayor Francis "Frank" McCloskey took office and announced in early February that he would like to renew the city's interest in purchasing the library land for \$145,000.²⁰ Two uses were initially suggested. Mayor McCloskey favored creating a new city-county building and considered the library property as a potential location. Nine merchants operating businesses in the downtown commercial Kirkwood Street area, just one street south of the former library, offered to invest in city bonds if the city would consider making a parking lot on the library property.²¹ Mayor McCloskey worked with the merchants to develop a "Park and Shop" plan, first suggested in February 1972, and formally proposed the following September. Under the terms of the plan, the city would remove parking meters from three downtown lots, and shoppers parking in these lots would receive a stamped ticket from merchants after making a purchase; the ticket would replace payment for their parking fee. People who made no purchase would pay the normal cost.²²

Neighborhood Development Program

In early October 1972, the city took considerable steps toward making its proposed purchase of the library with funds received from the federal government through the Neighborhood Development Program (NDP) established under the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The city of Bloomington had applied for funds earlier in the year to be used in another neighborhood, but when those plans fell through due to resident opposition, Mayor McCloskey hustled to get new plans submitted in time for an extended deadline of November 15.²³ The newly proposed program called for land acquisition of two one-quarter

¹⁶ "Proposal would convert old library to courtrooms," *Courier-Tribune*, January 8, 1971. Scrapbook II, p.5.

¹⁷ "Multi-Use by community of old library proposed," *Courier-Tribune*, January 28, 1971. Scrapbook II, p.6.

¹⁸ "Weddle Brothers Gets General Contract August Start On High-Rise Is Planned," *Daily Herald-Telephone*, June 12, 1971. Scrapbook II, p.9.

¹⁹ "Parking Plan Dead—For Now," *Courier-Tribune*, November 19, 1971. Scrapbook II, p.11.

²⁰ Ric Manning. "Downtown Parking Lot Proposed," *Daily Herald-Telephone*, February 7, 1972. Scrapbook II, p.17.

²¹ Ric Manning. "Merchants, City Huddle On Parking," *Daily Herald-Telephone*, February 14, 1971. Scrapbook II, p.18.

²² Stephen Hofer. "'Park and Shop' Plan Proposed," *Sunday Herald-Times*, September, 17, 1972. Scrapbook II, p. 28.

²³ Dan Mills. "Downtown 1st In Line For NDP's 1st Year Requirements," *Daily Herald-Telephone*, October, 6, 1972. Scrapbook II, p. 31.

block lots on either side of the town square, with a budget of \$246,000.²⁴ Over half of this budget was appropriated for the purchase of the former library lot.

According to Housing and Urban Development guidelines for the Neighborhood Development Program, the plan would first seek pre-approval from HUD, then be subjected to a gamut of local approvals, going before the Central Business District Project Area Committee (PAC), then the city Redevelopment Commission, then the City Council. In addition to these approvals, the plan would also be required to be advertised in the local press twice, go before a public hearing, and would finally return to HUD officials for final approval, all in less than six weeks.²⁵ The federal requirements to acquire this funding would send the land acquisition plans through a whirlwind schedule, with necessary meetings scheduled only days apart.

Less than a week after the plan was first revealed in the press, the first approval meeting was held. On October 12, 1972, a Bloomington *Herald-Telephone* headline announced that the Downtown PAC OK's NDP Parking Lots.²⁶ The acronyms may get confusing, but the message was clear. Mary Ellen Farmer writes next to this headline in red pen, "Wham!" This meeting looked to be a sign of things to come for the old library as a majority of the fifty citizens attending this first public meeting, including members of the Project Area Committee composed of residents and merchants of the downtown district, approved by a show of hands the plan to purchase one lot on the west side of the courthouse square as well as the library lot with the intent to demolish the former Carnegie library building.²⁷ Several PAC members urged that "quick action on the plan was imperative" because the city was already acting under a 45 day extension, although PAC president Ed Tjardes also noted that there would be many more official votes to come in the following weeks.²⁸

After receiving initial approval from HUD, the Neighborhood Development plan was scheduled for review in three meetings on three consecutive days later that week, heading to the Bloomington Redevelopment Commission, the city Plan Commission, and finally to the City Council for ultimate approval. Redevelopment Director Danny Fulton presented the first year plans contained in an 11-page document.²⁹ Despite the fact that the presentation of the plan was deemed "utter garbage" by the Plan Commission president Dan Tarlock, the plan itself was approved during its first two obstacles of meetings.³⁰

The plan's presenter Danny Fulton defended the old library parking proposal by citing cost estimates of \$46,000 for the rehabilitation of the 55 year old structure, indicating that the building would need a new furnace, new wiring, additional restrooms and renovation of existing ones, improved plumbing, and numerous other repairs which added up to what he termed

²⁴Dan Mills. "Downtown 1st In Line For NDP's 1st Year Requirements," *Daily Herald-Telephone*, October, 6, 1972. Scrapbook II, p. 31.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Dan Mills. "Downtown PAC OK's NDP Parking Lots," *Daily Herald-Telephone*, October 10, 1972. Scrapbook II, p. 33.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Peter Cooke. "Downtown Plan Clear Second Hurdle," *Courier-Tribune*, October 18, 1972. Scrapbook II, p. 38.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

“complete rejuvenation.”³¹ Fulton described the use of the library lot for parking as an “interim” use, reflecting earlier statements from Mayor McCloskey.³²

Although so far achieving a majority of support, the plan also faced criticisms. Plan Commissioner Dana D’Esopo called the plan “unimaginative.” D’Esopo, who was the single dissenting vote among the nine city plan commissioners, argued her objections citing the economic liability of many parking lot projects, the need for other types of land use around the downtown area, and adding that it is “not wise to invest all the first-year money in one type of rehabilitation.”³³ At one point in the hearing, D’Esopo said “Frankly, I’m disappointed.” The plan also received criticism from Bloomington attorney Robert McCrea and citizen Warren Roberts, who specifically opposed destruction of the library building. McCrea argued that it was “too good a building to be torn down” while Roberts called it “one of the few oases in a rather drab downtown area.”³⁴ Still, the plan had passed two major approvals with strong margins in its favor as it headed to the City Council.

Here, the Neighborhood Development Program received a reported giant “slap in the face” as members the Bloomington City Council voted 5-3 to table the resolution to approve the first year action plan.³⁵ The Council was unsatisfied with the plans and their presentation, and Councilman Brian de St. Croix justified his own vote to table the resolution by arguing that this was “a very serious decision. To quickly approve it because of an impending deadline would be a great disservice to the community.”³⁶ Mayor McCloskey was disappointed in the vote and called for a special session of the Bloomington City Council.³⁷ After several private meetings with the mayor, the City Council met again shortly for a nearly three hour public meeting in which dozens of citizens spoke on behalf of preserving the library or developing the land for parking. Ultimately, the council approved the parking plan in a unanimous, if hesitant, decision.³⁸

Weeks later, the Neighborhood Development Program plan vaulted past its final local hurdle, with unanimous approval from the Bloomington Redevelopment Commission. The decision was announced just ten minutes after the conclusion of a public hearing during which a long line of proponents and opponents of the plan spoke their concerns for over two hours.³⁹ This final public hearing was a requirement from HUD, intended to assure that the public’s voice was considered in the proposal for use of funds. One citizen in attendance, Dr. Hugh Ramsay,

³¹ Mark Acres. “Tarlock Calls It ‘Garbage,’ But: Downtown PAC Gets 2nd OK,” *Daily Herald-Telephone*, October 18, 1972. Scrapbook II, p. 39.

³² Peter Cooke. “Downtown Plan Clear Second Hurdle,” *Courier-Tribune*, October 18, 1972. Scrapbook II, p. 38.

³³ Mark Acres. “Tarlock Calls It ‘Garbage,’ But: Downtown PAC Gets 2nd OK,” *Daily Herald-Telephone*, October 18, 1972. Scrapbook II, p. 39.

³⁴ Peter Cooke. “Downtown Plan Clear Second Hurdle,” *Courier-Tribune*, October 18, 1972. Scrapbook II, p. 38.

³⁵ Bill McKeen. “NDP Resolution Tabled By Council,” *Courier-Tribune*, October 20, 1972. Scrapbook II, p. 42.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Bill McKeen. “Mayor Calls for Special Session,” *Courier-Tribune*, October 23, 1972. Scrapbook II, p.45.

³⁸ Mark Acres. “Council Okays Downtown NDP Parking Plan, 7-0,” *Herald-Telephone*, October 27, 1972. Scrapbook II, p. 53.

³⁹ Greg Paeth. “Commission Okays NDP For Downtown,” *Courier-Tribune*, November 14, 1972. Scrapbook II, p. 65.

reported his assessment of the intention of the public forum, wryly commenting that “hearings such as these usually precede [the announcement] of a predetermined conclusion.”⁴⁰

The Library Board’s Decision

While the city waited for probable federal funding, it is important to remember that it was the library board, and not the city, who still owned the former library property. In mid-March of 1973, the city of Bloomington dropped its original price offer for the building by \$19,000.⁴¹ While also considering arguments made by local proponents of library preservation, the Monroe County Library Board voted to reject the city’s offer to purchase because it considered the new price too low.⁴² In a boldly directed response to the board’s decision, Mayor McCloskey recommended to the Bloomington Redevelopment Commission to condemn the library site, and on April 24, a formal condemnation action was filed.⁴³ After closed-door renegotiations with the mayor, on May 2, 1973, the Monroe County Library Board reconsidered the mayor’s offer and ultimately agreed to sell the library site to the Redevelopment Commission for \$125,000, a reduction from the original \$145,000 offer.⁴⁴

A New Player: The Monroe County Historical Society

During that same spring, a major player emerged in the debate over the library’s fate. On January 12, 1973, the Monroe County Historical Society officially reformed after a 5 year lapse in active existence. The group re-emerged with 35 members, whose reported immediate goal was saving the old library.⁴⁵ They began by announcing their desire to purchase the library building from the library board, and in a matter of weeks gathered 1,000 names on a petition to save the library.⁴⁶ Many key players in the fight against library demolition came out of this new revival of the historical society.

One important proponent of library preservation who led an organized defense of the “historic” property was Bruce Tone. He emerged early on in the debate. In October, 1972, he wrote a letter-to-the-editor articulately describing his assessment of the first City Council meeting that approved the Neighborhood Development Program plan to bulldoze the library for a parking lot. At the end of the article, Mary Ellen Farmer notes in her scrapbook “He was a stranger to us all then. He, indeed, was one of the main leaders, sacrificing so many years of his life.”⁴⁷ Tone became a frequent and outspoken spectator at many of the public meetings of the Bloomington

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ “Board May Not Sell Old Library To City,” *Herald-Telephone*, March 15, 1973. Scrapbook II, p. 87.

⁴² Greg Paeth. “City’s Offer for Old Library Rejected by Board,” *Courier-Tribune*, March 29, 1973. Scrapbook II, p. 98.

⁴³ Mark Acres. “City May Condemn Old Library Site,” *Herald-Telephone*, April 2, 1973. Scrapbook II, p. 99.

Rose Rumely, “Condemnation of Library Readied,” *Courier-Tribune*, April 18, 1973. Scrapbook II, p. 99.

“Library Condemnation Sought,” April 24, 1973. Scrapbook II, p. 112.

⁴⁴ “Board Agrees To Sell Old Library To City,” May 3, 1973. Scrapbook II, p. 121.

⁴⁵ Mike Kinerk. “For Resurrected Historical Society: Saving Old Library First Goal,” *Herald-Telephone*, N.D. Scrapbook II, p. 78.

Nancy Weaver. “After Five-Year Hiatus Historical Society Returns,” *Daily Herald-Telephone*, January 12, 1973. Scrapbook II, p. 79.

⁴⁶ “Petition to Save Library Readied,” *Courier-Tribune*, March 16, 1973. Scrapbook II, p. 91.

⁴⁷ Bruce Tone. “Council And The Library,” Paper unknown, To-the-Editor section, October 30, 1972. Scrapbook I, p.3.

city council and redevelopment commission and also served as the president of the East Central Neighborhood Association.⁴⁸

In May of the following year, just shortly after the city purchased the library building from the Monroe County Library Board, Bruce Tone prepared a 13 page report requesting a full investigation on the city's actions, including their neglect to conduct an Environmental Assessment of the proposed demolition, or to request comment on their plans from the National Register of Historic Places. Tone sent his report to offices of the Department of Housing and Urban Development in Indianapolis, Chicago, and Washington D.C., as well as to a number of Indiana representatives including Senators Birch Bayh and Vance Harke.⁴⁹ Bruce Tone's accusations would eventually resurface in effective ways.

"Feelings Wane," Fate Unresolved

From late summer of 1973 through 1975, the frequency of newspaper reports on the library issue declined. The *Courier-Tribune* reported that what had been "a red-hot issue in June seems to have fallen into disinterest locally."⁵⁰

The City of Bloomington maintained their intention to purchase the property, but did not offer definite plans for the building's use. Uses were publicly discussed, including proposals to turn the former library into an arts center, a city office building, and consistent pleas from the Monroe County Historical Society to transform the space into a museum. The city made no decisions apart from preparation to purchase the site from the Redevelopment Commission, and this transaction was officially completed on May 7, 1974.⁵¹

Renovate the Library

Despite the fact that Mayor McCloskey had previously recommended the library building be condemned, after the property was officially in the city's control, he began a campaign to rehabilitate the building for use as a city-county office. In February of 1976, he requested that the City Council appropriate \$65,000 for renovations. The council voted down this suggestion 7-2 objecting that this money would merely bring the building up to code and not pay for any other renovations.⁵² One council member warned that this would be "only the beginning" of spending money on the library, and wanted to know more specific goals for the use of the library before committing funds to its repair.⁵³ The mayor continued his pleas that spring, suggesting that the library could become a temporary home for city court before being transformed into a community center. Councilwoman Pat Kinzer supported the mayor's plan.⁵⁴ By April 1976, it looked as though the library would avoid for a second time the serious possibility of being razed.

⁴⁸Byron Rohrig. "PAC Unveils Downtown Parking Plan," *Daily Herald-Telephone*, June 28, 1973. Scrapbook II, p. 142.

⁴⁹Citizen Wants An Investigation," *Courier-Tribune*, June 4, 1973. Scrapbook II, p. 126.

⁵⁰Rose Rumely. "Feelings Waning On Old Library," *Courier-Tribune*, August 30, 1973. Scrapbook II, p. 152.

⁵¹Byron Rohrig. "Redevelopment ok's library sale to city," *Daily Herald-Telephone*, May 7, 1974. Scrapbook II, p. 167.

⁵²Ron Alsop. "City council okays \$93,317 appropriation—reluctantly," *Daily Herald-Telephone*, February 20, 1976. Scrapbook III, p. 191. [appropriation referenced in headline is for other use.]

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴Ron Alsop. "City officials seeking compromise on old county library uses," *Daily Herald-Telephone*, April 9, 1976. Scrapbook III, p. 194.

However, in late April, new reported estimates on the cost of revamping the library were up to \$180,000.⁵⁵ In a May public hearing of the Bloomington City Council, a majority of members recommended to “appropriate only a minimal amount of money to keep the library from deteriorating further.”⁵⁶ Afraid that the council would not approve an appropriation to renovate if it came to an official vote, Mayor McCloskey recommended that the council postpone any action on the library so that he might have another month to try to convince the council that the library should be restored.⁵⁷

Serious Offers

While Mayor McCloskey waited for the City Council to reach a decision on renovation of the library, serious financially-backed offers to buy the library distracted him from his campaign to remodel the building for city use.

Kathy Canada

As early as October of 1975, local property owner Kathy Canada considered purchasing the former library lot. In June the following year, she officially offered to exchange lots with the city, offering an urban park lot known as People’s Park, in addition to \$50,000, in exchange for the library site in order to turn it into a cultural center for the arts.⁵⁸ As a matter of diplomacy, the Mayor sought City Council approval on the proposed sale, calling it “significant enough for the downtown” to warrant giving the council a voice in the matter.⁵⁹

Councilwoman Patricia Kinzer came out quite vocally in her position against the sale. In an interview with the Herald Times, Kinzer said she unequivocally opposed selling the library to Canada because she believed that Canada’s offer might not be in the city’s best financial interests, and she feared Canada might someday transform the library into something other than a community arts center. As an alternative, Pat Kinzer recommended the city keep the library, rehabilitate it, and convert it into a cultural center for local civic groups such as the historical society. Kinzer also wanted to see the facility governed by a “nonpolitical” authority.⁶⁰

Members of the Historical Society had continually offered to lease the library from the city for \$1 a year in order to establish a county historical museum, including in their offer an intention to renovate the building at their own cost—an offer that was repeatedly rejected or overlooked. Their membership was outspoken against the sale of the library to a private owner and they were apparently heard. Kathy Canada eventually withdrew her bid for the former library, explaining that her “main reason for not trying to acquire the library is that there seems to be a large enough

⁵⁵ “Costs up on revamp of library,” *Daily Herald-Telephone*, April 22, 1976. Scrapbook III, p. 195

⁵⁶ Ron Alsop. “Library’s fate still in doubt,” *Daily Herald-Telephone*, May 14, 1976. Scrapbook II, p. 198.

⁵⁷ Ron Alsop. “Delay of library vote asked,” *Daily Herald-Telephone*, May 19, 1976. Scrapbook II, p. 199.

⁵⁸ Ron Alsop. “McCloskey ‘contemplating’ sale of library,” *Daily Herald-Telephone*, June 22, 1976. Scrapbook III, p. 201.

⁵⁹ Ron Alsop. “Mayor seeks council okay on sale of old library,” *Daily Herald-Telephone*, July 27, 1976. Scrapbook III, p. 207.

⁶⁰ Ron Alsop. “Kinzer opposes ‘deal’ on old library,” *Daily Herald-Telephone*, July 14, 1976. Scrapbook III, p. 204.

body of antagonistic feeling,” and she did not want to make people angry.⁶¹ Canada opted to back away from the controversy to consider other buildings for her proposed art center.

First Christian Church

The next substantial bid came from the First Christian Church, located next door to the library site. In September 1976, Mayor McCloskey announced that the church had made a \$1,000 deposit for the land and building and intended to purchase it for \$90,000.⁶² According to Reverend Roy Griggs, the church planned to renovate the library building if feasible, but if “after long and careful study” the church found the library could not be rehabilitated for what it considered a reasonable expense, then the church wanted to be assured that it would be able to get a permit to demolish the building.⁶³

The church continued courting the city with this offer for months; meanwhile, the Indianapolis extension of HUD requested the Bloomington Department of Redevelopment for its papers regarding its original purchase of the library building in 1974, to verify whether or not the deed included stipulations that the library be reserved for public use.⁶⁴ Perhaps in part in response to this request, the Bloomington City Council recommended only days later in an executive session that the city retain the building. In response to this decision, Reverend Roy Griggs stated that he was “disappointed by the Bloomington City Council’s decision not to endorse the church’s offer to buy the old Monroe County Library” but added that he did not resent the council’s actions explaining that “I think we had a chance to say everything we had to say...we still trust in democracy.”⁶⁵ The church’s offer held for several months, and as time went, the church expressed greater interest in keeping and renovating the building, but eventually their name faded out of newspaper reports as Mayor McCloskey proposed a formal open call for bids of sale and another potential offer emerged.

Workingmen’s Federal Savings and Loan Association or City Parking Lot

While the First Christian Church waited on consideration from the city, the Workingmen’s Federal Savings and Loan Association, located one block from the former library, made a more appealing offer to buy the lot. The financial institution proposed a bid of \$110,000 for the purchase of the property in order to demolish the library and replace it with a parking lot that would provide parking for its 27 employees who typically parked on the street.⁶⁶ Not only would their proposition ease complaints of downtown parking shortages, and outbid the church’s

⁶¹ Ron Alsop. “Canada withdraws bid for old library,” *Daily Herald-Telephone*, July 30, 1976. Scrapbook III, p. 208.

⁶² Nancy Weaver. “Old library worth \$90,000 to First Christian Church,” *Daily Herald-Telephone*, September 3, 1976. Scrapbook II, p. 209/

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Bill Koenig. “Restrictions hazy on old library sale,” *Indiana Daily Student*, September 17, 1976. Scrapbook III, p. 212.

Nancy Weaver. “HUD wants papers regarding ’74 sale,” *Daily Herald-Telephone*. September 23, 1976. Scrapbook III, p. 217.

⁶⁵ “Council’s library recommendations ‘disappoint’ church,” *Daily Herald-Telephone*. September 24, 1976. Scrapbook II, p. 218.

⁶⁶ Nancy Weaver. “Workingmens offers to buy old city library,” *Daily Herald Telephone*. December 27, 1976. Scrapbook III, p. 231.

offer by \$20,000, but the city could also tax the association for its parking lot while the church would be tax exempt. Workingmen's proposed deed would additionally include a provision to deed the property back to the city within five years if it would construct a multi-level parking garage on the land.⁶⁷

This proposal garnered almost immediate responses. Upon the announcement of Workingmen's proposal, the board of public works announced that \$5,000 of \$7,000 of funds recently appropriated for temporary repairs on the library would be reverted to the general city coffers.⁶⁸ Only two days after the announcement, the Monroe County Historical Society and the Save the Library Committee filed suit against the City of Bloomington, the city's redevelopment department, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, seeking an injunction through federal courts in order to stop the sale of the library.

Injunction sought

On December 29, 1976, attorney Guy Loftman, representing the Monroe County Historical Society and the Save the Library Committee announced that he was filing a suit in the two organizations' behalf alleging that the Bloomington Redevelopment Department had violated federal law by failing to submit plans for the 1974 sale of the library building to the city to the National Registry of Historic Places for comment.⁶⁹ The groups also charged that the city had neglected to conduct an Environmental Assessment of proposed uses, as would be required under the Environmental Policy Act. The accusing parties hoped that an injunction would impede or delay sale of the building and also encourage the city to submit a plan to the registry for comment before any future consideration of sale. The *Herald-Telephone* reported that "Loftman said it will be difficult for the city to sell the building and property while a legal action is pending [because in his words] 'Nobody wants to buy a lawsuit.'" ⁷⁰ While the society's pursuit of an injunction seemingly put a delay on the proposal for sale at hand, Mayor McCloskey and his administration sought alternatives for disposal of the old library building.

Although Mayor McCloskey clarified that he was not yet committed to selling the library, on February 5, an informal poll of the City Council revealed that a majority of the members supported selling the library to Workingmen's Federal Savings and Loan.⁷¹ Only Councilwoman Pat Kinzer disapproved, raising questions about whether the city could afford to buy back the lot in the future including the cost of proposed improvements. She also expressed concern over whether the city had seriously considered the Monroe County Historical Society's continued offer to lease the building.⁷² Councilman Lloyd Olcott said in the same meeting that "he thought

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Nancy Weaver. "Workingmens offers to buy old city library," *Daily Herald Telephone*. December 27, 1976. Scrapbook III, p. 231.

⁶⁹ Nancy Weaver. "Injunction sought to stop library sale," *Daily Herald Telephone*. December 29, 1976. Scrapbook III, p. 232.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Nancy Weaver. "Council 'poll' supports sale of old city library," *Sunday Herald Times*. February 6, 1977. Scrapbook III, p. 237.

⁷² Nancy Weaver. "Council 'poll' supports sale of old city library," *Sunday Herald Times*. February 6, 1977. Scrapbook III, p. 237.

it was time to ‘bite the bullet’ and deal with the society’s opposition to the sale and demolition of the building.”⁷³

In addition to considering sale to a private bidder, the city also began investigating the possibility of tearing down the building on its own accord in order to construct a city parking garage. In either case, the city would have to submit a change of plans to HUD before action. The impending lawsuit from the Historical Society and indecisiveness over preferred disposal of the former library slowed the city’s planning progress through the spring of 1977. Yet it was about to take a turn for the quick.

Demolition at Hand

On Monday, April 11, 1977, the Bloomington *Herald-Telephone* made the unexpected report that Mayor Frank McCloskey was seeking authorization to accept bids for demolition of the former Monroe County Public Library building.⁷⁴ His request would go before the Board of Public Works for authorization the next day. Unless stopped by the courts, the demolition would end the historical society’s lawsuit protesting the destruction of the building. Attorney Guy Loftman’s response captures his disbelief, as a reporter broke the news to him in an interview: “It’s fascinating” he said, “I assume it means I’ll have to run up to Indianapolis and get an injunction. I thought we had had a lot of stuff settled. I can’t imagine why they’re doing this. It’s a complete shock and a surprise.”⁷⁵

Despite the legal charges made by Loftman on behalf of the Monroe County Historical Society and the Save the Library Committee, Mayor McCloskey contended that the authorization of bids for demolition was legal, relying on recommendations from the city attorney, the redevelopment commission attorney, and the city’s corporate counselor. In his opinion, this action “basically has nothing to do with the historical society’s suit...I’ve been advised it is fully legal and complies with downtown plans submitted to HUD.”⁷⁶ He went on to describe that “As a personal opinion, I would state there is little or no historical value to justify historical designation with the old library.”⁷⁷ The mayor’s intention would be to replace the library with a parking lot for short-term use, then possibly use the lot for another public purpose in the future. Getting the building torn down “is just a matter of course,” Mayor McCloskey said.⁷⁸

When *Herald-Telephone* staff writer Kay Stewart interviewed City Council members for their reaction to the mayor’s move she reported “less than unanimous support.”⁷⁹ Pat Kinzer said she would oppose the demolition and that she still hoped the building could be restored as a historical museum or for use by the public, saying she thought a cultural center “would be ideal

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Kay Stewart. “Mayor asks authority to tear down library,” *Daily Herald Telephone*. April 11, 1977. Scrapbook II, p. 242.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Kay Stewart. “McCloskey’s plan for library facing City Council reservations,” *Daily Herald Telephone*. April 12, 1977. Scrapbook III, p. 244.

for improvement of downtown.”⁸⁰ She and Councilman Jack Morrison expressed disappointment for the way that the library issue had been turned into what he termed “political football.”⁸¹

“Three years ago there were plans to turn the building into an historical museum,” Kinzer said. “I think those plans have been ignored. Now the cost of renovation has gone up with inflation and further deterioration of the building...The whole thing has been a matter of indecisiveness. There should have been definite plans for that building when the city purchased it from HUD five or six years ago.”⁸²

Board of Public Works approves

The following night, approximately fifty people gathered in the council chambers of the Bloomington Municipal building to voice their opinions on the mayor’s intentions and to hear the Board of Public Works’ decision on the razing of the former library. Members of the Save the Library Committee, the Monroe County Historical Society, the local chapter of the National Society of Arts and Letters, the city’s Historic Preservation Committee, and the Bloomington Area Arts Council came to protest the mayor’s plan to level the old library. But when the board’s president Tobiatha Eagleson put an end to the nearly two hours of discussion, the three members of the Bloomington Board of Public Works unanimously decided to authorize the city to advertise for bids to demolish the former Carnegie library which had stood vacant for six years.⁸³ Rosemary Miller of the local chapter of the National Society of arts and Letters commented in disappointment at the board’s conclusion, “We can’t need parking lots this badly.”⁸⁴

Restraining order granted

Three days later, a U.S. district court judge issued a temporary restraining order prohibiting the demolition of the former Monroe County Public Library.⁸⁵ The restraining order would remain in effect until another judge considered a preliminary injunction to stop the destruction of the building; this preliminary injunction would last until the lawsuit against the city of Bloomington and the Department of Housing and Urban Development was settled.

Money allocated

On April 26, 1977, the general manager of a parking firm hired to assess downtown parking solutions recommended to the City Council’s Special Committee on Downtown that a parking garage be located on Fourth and Washington Streets rather than on the Sixth and Washington lot occupied by the library.⁸⁶ Still, the *Herald Telephone* reported that “city officials present at the meeting talked as if the old library would be leveled regardless of the recommendation.”⁸⁷ The firm also reported that it would cost \$1.24 million to build a parking garage. The lot, if built,

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Kay Stewart. “McCloskey’s plan for library facing City Council reservations,” *Daily Herald Telephone*. April 12, 1977. Scrapbook III, p. 244.

⁸³ Kay Stewart. “Despite several protests Works board okays library demolition,” *Daily Herald Telephone*. April 13, 1977. Scrapbook III, p. 245.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ “Order restrains city from wrecking library,” Paper unknown. April 16, 1977. Scrapbook III, p. 248.

⁸⁶ Kay Stewart. “Council hears parking cost,” *Daily Herald Telephone*. April 26, 1977. Scrapbook III, p. 249.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

would probably have an annual deficit of \$87,000 and cost about \$3,750 per parking space.⁸⁸ Director of Transportation Jim Wray said that if the city could not afford to build the proposed parking garage, a level lot could be built on the library property to accommodate additional parking. The city's Board of Public Works had already requested \$15,000 for the demolition, and city attorney Steve Richardson reported that the city planned to tear down the library later in the summer.⁸⁹

Library demolition indefinitely tabled

At the next meeting of the Bloomington City Council, members could not agree what to do with the request for demolition funds and in a split vote of 2-2, moved to table their decision.⁹⁰ Ten days later, in uncommon circumstances, council members and representatives of historic groups did not even discuss the issue before the council voted unanimously to table indefinitely the \$15,000 request for funds to demolish the former Monroe County Public Library.⁹¹ At that same meeting, members of a new group announced their existence to the council members.

Preservation in High Gear

TOLI forms May 1977

The diverse groups of Bloomington citizens who opposed demolition of the library and believed it should be preserved for public use united in one organization known as The Old Library, Inc. This alliance included six local organizations: the Audubon Society, Bloomington Arts Council, Bloomington Restorations, Inc., Monroe County Historical Society, Save the Old Library Committee, and the Society for Arts and Letters.⁹² Their plans were not only to save the library from the wrecking ball, but also to raise money to restore the building. The organizers of TOLI intended to come up with fresh approaches to what many had called a tired issue. That summer, The Old Library, Inc. launched into a series of successful actions.

Feasibility study by historic landmarks

TOLI's first major move was to commission a feasibility study to assess the cost to restore the empty Carnegie building for use as a county historical museum and cultural center. The study was conducted by the non-profit preservation organization Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana.⁹³ Members of TOLI hoped that the feasibility study would convince city officials of a growing community support for the preservation and restoration of the 59-year-old building.

Bruce Lynch, the architectural consultant who conducted the study called the facility "a very valuable landmark" and a fine example of modern classicism.⁹⁴ "In addition he said it is important locally because it was built of indigenous limestone. It is important to the state because it was designed by Indiana architect Wilson Boyden Parker. And it is important to the nation

⁸⁸ Kay Stewart. "Council hears parking cost," *Daily Herald Telephone*. April 26, 1977. Scrapbook III, p. 249.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Kay Stewart. "Library demolition action tabled as city council splits on funding," *Daily Herald Telephone*. May 10, 1977. Scrapbook III, p. 270.

⁹¹ Kay Stewart. "Library funds tabled by council," *Daily Herald Telephone*. May 20, 1977. Scrapbook III, p. 291.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Holly Stocking. "Save-the-library effort shifts into high gear," *Daily Herald Telephone*, June 11, 1977. Scrapbook III, p. 295.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

because it is a superb example of a Carnegie library.”⁹⁵ Lynch also said “to duplicate the building would easily cost half a million dollars. And according to his report ‘the cost of demolition in public monies and energy could heat sixty homes for one year.’”⁹⁶

Major Moves

Next, The Old Library, Inc. launched a \$90,000 fund campaign to raise funds to pay for the restoration of the former library building.⁹⁷ The non-profit organization also reported that an anonymous resident had made an offer to purchase the building from the City of Bloomington in order to donate it to TOLI’s management. At this time, the library was also nominated to the National Registry of Historic Places, and on June 23, the state committee for the registry recommended that the Carnegie library be added to the national list of historic sites.⁹⁸

Donald Carmony, a Bloomington representative on the state committee commented “I think this indicates the building is considered important and it would seem to me that the action of the state committee ought to help make clear the building is viewed as one of significance which should be preserved.”⁹⁹

On August 4, 1977, the *Herald Telephone* reported that the “old Monroe County Library at the corner of Sixth and Washington Streets was teetering on the brink of survival.”¹⁰⁰ The city of Bloomington and The Old Library, Inc. were deep in negotiation “aimed at preserving the once-threatened building and turning it into a community center and Monroe County historical museum.”¹⁰¹ TOLI planned to purchase the building with a donation from an unnamed local benefactor and expected to raise \$90,000 to refurbish the then 60-year old limestone structure.¹⁰²

While TOLI attorney Michael Hoff and City Attorney Steve Richardson carried on sale negotiations, TOLI President Rosemary Miller and other members geared up for a major fund-raising push to begin once the sale was finalized. Miller said that the response to the group’s initial donation campaign “has been just marvelous.”¹⁰³ In less than two months, county residents contributed over \$7,000 and a committee formed to seek matching grants for all money raised.¹⁰⁴ The group’s first effort was direct mail solicitation to about 4,000 people, with names gleaned from membership lists of organizations such as the Monroe County Historical Society and the Genealogical Society.¹⁰⁵ That first try started “a nice, steady flow of donations rolling in,” according to Miller. “Saving the building has turned into a very popular movement...It’s just wonderful to see these people coming forth, with money or services, and every little bit counts.”¹⁰⁶

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Bill Schrader. “Museum fund campaign begins,” *Sunday Herald Times*, June 19, 1977. Scrapbook II, p. 296.

⁹⁸ Kay Stewart. “Committee recommends old library as historic site,” *Daily Herald Telephone*, June 23, 1977. Scrapbook III, p. 297.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Sunny Schubert. “Survival of old library building hangs on negotiations, donations,” *Daily Herald Telephone*, August 4, 1977. Scrapbook III, p. 299.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

The Finale

After two months of negotiations between the city and The Old Library Inc, and seven years to the month of the library's vacancy, on Saturday, October 22, 1977, the former Monroe County Public Library building was officially safe from destruction. Mayor McCloskey signed the transfer of deed to the property at a public event held on the steps of the 60 year-old limestone building. Rosemary Miller, president of The Old Library, Inc., signed for the new owner.¹⁰⁷ The property was purchased for \$50,000 and sold to The Old Library, Inc. for \$1. TOLI would own and manage the building as well as operate funds for a museum and cultural center inside. Space would be rented to various community groups, and the Monroe County Historical Society would establish a permanent county museum on the main floor.

From here on would begin the story of the library building's rehabilitation. This story would encompass its own challenges, its own lengthy timeline, its own set of hometown heroes. The day that representatives of The Old Library, Inc. signed the deed for the former Carnegie library the property's future was entrusted to their vision of building a local historical museum. This day may have been only the beginning of the story of the building's renovation, but it marks the finale of the debate over the building's preservation.

Examination and Analysis

It is time now to re-examine this debate waged between the people of Bloomington over what to do with the vacant library, to consider the arguments posed on all sides of the issue. Most of the vocal citizens who participated in the dialogue about what should be done with the empty building stood on one of two sides: those who favored re-development of the property for any advantageous use, and those who favored preservation of the building for a discrete set of public, cultural uses. To be simple and impartial, I will refer to these two parties as Pro-Redevelopment and Pro-Preservation.

The people of Bloomington who voiced their opinions about the fate of the former Carnegie library building stood on a spectrum between these two camps. The language they used and the values they upheld reveal much about how ordinary folks think about and define the concepts of history and progress. Their decisions, and the outcomes that arose from their decisions, show how action and political progress are achieved in small Indiana towns like Bloomington. The dedicated work and passionate articulations of a few people, with a broader public in their support, succeeded in protecting this place they held dear, preserving it for the future so that it now serves residents as the Monroe County History Center.

Pro-Redevelopment

As someone who supports the values of historic preservation, I believe it is necessary to promote this battle over the library as something far more sophisticated than a war between good people and evil wrecking balls. And even as one who now personally benefits from the existence of the history museum and library in the old Bloomington Carnegie library, I would argue that the Bloomington citizens who at times preferred to demolish the building had legitimate concerns and logic.

¹⁰⁷ "Old library ownership transferred Saturday," *Sunday Herald Times*, October 23, 1977. Scrapbook III, p. 305.

Their arguments were more than merely about tearing down a vacant building; they were also about considering the value of alternative solutions to the costly rehabilitation of a decaying structure. With each passing winter, as the building went unheated and unoccupied, renovation costs rose. Each purchase offer came with a sale price lower than what the city had paid for the property. Mayor Hooker and Mayor McCloskey, members of the Redevelopment Commission, the Board of Public Works, downtown business owners, and potential buyers all saw in the old library an opportunity to utilize a valuable location for something new and useful. Sometimes, those who voted or voiced their opinion in favor of redevelopment of the site were conflicted. Frequently, the decisions of city officials were based on condition, as in supporting renovation of the library *unless* it would be too expensive, hoping to use it as a museum *if* no other offer was made.

Conditions so frequently fell through, and as each new alternative faced insufficient funding, legal hitches, and continually fervent opposition from members of the public, the fate of the old library was finally decided by those who would not cease their argument to preserve the library for public use as a museum and community space. Their success is also due to the financial and moral support of a broader community.

Pro-Preservation

The individuals and organizations who were heavily involved in the fight to preserve Bloomington's former Carnegie library are familiar at this point. They include, but are certainly not limited to the following: The Monroe County Historical Society, The Old Library, Inc., Bruce Tone, Mary Ellen Farmer, Councilwoman Pat Kinzer, Historical Society President Norris Wentworth, TOLI President Rosemary Miller, attorney Guy Loftman, and Kathy Canada, who donated the funds to purchase the building on behalf of TOLI. These names appear most often in the formal newspaper articles, but many other names and voices are present in letters to the editor also printed in the Bloomington news sources. Mary Ellen Farmer preserved these clippings in one inclusive scrapbook.

In these letters, and in quotes gleaned from the reports of meetings and public hearings, the controversy over the library was fleshed out in the emotions and opinions of individual Bloomingtonians. The themes they discuss suggest much about the goals of historic preservation and the politics of status, democracy, and progress in a small Twentieth-Century Indiana town. And in promoting the preservation of a "historic" building, people argue as much about the definition of history as they do about the qualifications of the building itself.

The value of a "historic" library

One of the most oft-repeated arguments for the preservation of the former Monroe County Public Library building was that it was a local historic landmark and had inherent value that merited being saved for future generations of Monroe County residents. But what people meant when they applied the label "historic" either to the library in particular, or to the concept of historic preservation in general, was highly variable and contested.

For some people the definition of history is reserved exclusively for those events of national importance, and in order for something to be deemed historic, it must be associated with figures

and places of widely recognized significance. This narrow definition of the term “historic” affected early movements of historic preservation around the turn of the century, as the earliest efforts under the name of preservation were to save the homes of early presidents including Washington’s Mount Vernon and Jefferson’s Monticello. This view of history as something officially defined and collectively shared by all members of a particular nation has generally broadened in the Twentieth Century and since. The expansion of historic preservation efforts to local landmarks reflects expansion of the study and interpretation of history to include matters of popular and local importance.

Evidence for this broadening definition of history is apparent in the letters of Bloomington citizens during the debate over the old library. One newspaper writer recognizes the flexibility of history when he quips, “George Washington never tossed a silver dollar across the Jordan River, Robert E. Lee didn’t sign his surrender in Dunn Meadow and Teddy Roosevelt didn’t lead any silly charge up Pigeon Hill. But there definitely are things of historical significance in Monroe County. And some people in Bloomington are worried such things may be destroyed.”¹⁰⁸

The question, then, is what is the nature of “historically significant” when the application of such a label is confined to one, somewhat typical, United States county? Some would forward the same logic that “historic” connotes association with things of broad national importance, only they would also argue that Bloomington contains such things.

For example, one editorial argued in favor of creating a local history museum on the library site that, “too little is known about the contribution the [Bloomington] limestone industry has made to the growth of this nation, a building stone that has sheathed over 100,000 structures from the Pentagon in Washington D.C. to the Empire State building in New York; that the nation’s first color television sets were assembled on the lines of the RCA plant on S. Rogers Street in the waning months of 1949; that Hoagy Carmichael’s meteoric career as a song writer was launched when he wrote “Stardust” while a student at Indiana University.”¹⁰⁹

Still, this editor’s argument is about the need for what could be contained within the old library building if established as a museum, not for what the building had to offer as a testament to history itself. On this matter, some would suggest that the library’s historic value originated from the fact that it was built with funds donated by Andrew Carnegie—industrialist, steel magnate, once the richest man in America—as part of his unofficial grant program that contributed to the construction of hundreds of free public libraries around the United States. After all, Carnegie is a name you may find in a student’s history textbook.

Still others would suggest another train of argument—that history is not about names and dates on whose importance we can all consent to some degree—but that history can be about personal memory and emotional connections to times and places now past. The value in keeping physical mementos of these private attachments was suggested by Jennifer A. Brown in the following excerpt from a letter to the editor she wrote in support of the “save the library” movement:

¹⁰⁸ Bill McKeen and John Ross. “Looking Back: Historical Night Observed In Old Bloomingtown,” *Courier-Tribune*, February 2, 1973. Scrapbook II, p. 83.

¹⁰⁹ Bill Schrader. “County museum idea gains momentum,” *Daily Herald Telephone*, From the Editor’s Desk, June 6, 1977. Scrapbook III, p. 293.

Can you remember back when you had to write a paper in school and you went to the old Monroe County public Library and could find just the materials you were looking for to write your paper? I can! And so can a lot of other Bloomington residents, young and old. Or maybe, you just went there to pass the time of day, to read the local newspaper, chat with your friend. These are fond memories.¹¹⁰

It was for the sake of such memories, and for pride in the old building cut of local limestone, and perhaps even for respect of the local citizens who once organized and requested funds to establish the first real Monroe County library in 1916, that many citizens felt the library building must be saved from demolition.

Opposing views

On the opposite side of the issue, some individuals argued that the term “historic” is often too broadly applied, especially as an under-justified attempt to keep unnecessary or unvaluable things of the past. One editorial remarked, “One of the great problems with historic preservation is the misconception that anything old is historic and thus should be preserved. The library’s historic significance is that it was an Andrew Carnegie library (one of thousands across the country funded by the industrialist and philanthropist) and that it was the Monroe County Library for years, neither accomplishments of earth shattering importance.”¹¹¹

One proponent of library demolition, Mrs. Marion Gottfried, said at a public hearing that “If you preserve the building, all you are really preserving is the fact Carnegie libraries are small, rather ugly buildings.”¹¹² Another citizen, Leila Engel, said she couldn’t understand “wasting sentiment on this old wreck of a building.”¹¹³ *Herald Telephone* staff writer Terry English wrote during the library debate in 1976 that there were “members of the Bicentennial Commission who [had] tunnel vision in regards to the Old Monroe County library. The dilapidated structure has caused many a heated Bicentennial meeting. And for what reason? None that I can see.”¹¹⁴

Others simply argued that the building did not need to be kept because it was unattractive—certainly a matter of subjective opinion as its beauty or ugliness were used as points of argument for both sides of the debate. Architectural styles inevitably go in and out of mode, and one person’s idea of antique and charming is another’s vision of a fussy eyesore. The 1970s were a period of architectural innovation and for some the pared down utilitarian styles of modern buildings, including the new public library, were sleek and forward-thinking, to others, dull and impersonal. Preference for the aesthetics of a building need not affect judgment on the structure’s value to the community, especially if its historic significance is supposedly the main question at hand, but people will remain apt to put great importance on appearances.

¹¹⁰ Jennifer A. Brown. “Memories,” Paper unknown, To-the-editor section, April 25, 1977. Scrapbook I, p. 30.

¹¹¹ “Old library’s fate,” Paper unknown, Editorial, November 8, 1976. Scrapbook I, p. 26. The claim that there were thousands of Carnegie libraries is inaccurate.

¹¹² Greg Paeth. “Commission Okays NDP For Downtwon,” *Courier-Tribune*, November 14, 1972. Scrapbook II, p. 66.

¹¹³ Nancy Weaver. “Deterioration may doom library,” *Daily Herald Telephone*, September 16, 1976, p. 2/3. Scrapbook III, p. 213.

¹¹⁴ Terry English. “Bicentennial planning slow,” *Daily Herald Telephone*, Cityscope/Commentary section, June 25, 1976. Scrapbook II, p. 185.

In all, arguments that the library actually *deserved* to be demolished were few. Although certainly there were many people, even some who would have generally preferred keeping the building for public use, who simply did not believe the structure was worth the immense amount of time, effort, and money that had been devoted to deciding what to do with the old building. Nor did many believe that the potential advantages of preservation warranted the resources that would be needed to rehabilitate the building.

The Voice of the People

There were varying opinions on what ought to be done with the vacant library. Perhaps what mattered as much as what people thought about the building, was who thought so, and who had the power to make the final decision. The struggle to redevelop or to preserve the property could be over-simplified as a battle between politicians and “gray flannel suits” of the downtown commercial Kirkwood area who wanted to make profits and open up the streets for shoppers, and on the other side history geeks and overly feisty housewives whose sentiments gave them unrealistic expectations about rehabilitating a decaying old library. This depiction has been suggested in some forms before. It is crude. Maybe there are shreds of truth in it, too. What is important to recognize in this caricatured depiction of the debate is that the decisions of what to do with the library had very much to do with status, with power, with democratic politics, and with money.

One of the major points debated was to whom the library belonged—not just in terms of which entity rightfully held the deed, but rather who owned it in a symbolic sense, and thus who deserved the right to decide its fate. Language about popular democracy often appeared on the pages of local letters to the editor.

In one of Mary Ellen Farmers many printed letters, she declared, “Although seemingly silent, the citizens are angry and indignant—and understandably so—about the bold and unfair attempt and plan to seize and demolish the old, sound, library building which belongs to the people, not to a few to have jurisdiction over. Such an unjust attempt to destroy it must be stopped! Such a decision belongs not to a few.”¹¹⁵

In 1972, urging more citizens to attend public meetings concerning the library, Mary M. Baker writes “There is a need for people participation if the majority will rule. Thanks also to many other people who voice their approval as well as their disapproval of the Monroe County Library as a parking lot. ... Democracy cannot survive if our representatives, elected or appointed, vote on ultimatums...instead of facts.”¹¹⁶

In April of 1973, Bruce Tone wrote that there was an “important public lesson to be learned” from the proceedings of the Redevelopment Commission meeting in which they voted to condemn the former library building in order to persuade the Library Board to sell the property

¹¹⁵ Mary Ellen Farmer. “Preserve City’s Past,” Paper unknown, To-the-editor section, January 9, 1973. Scrapbook I, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ Mary M. Baker. “Haste Makes Waste,” Paper unknown, To-the-editor section, November 2, 1972. Scrapbook I, p. 4.

to the city. He wrote, “If we are not to nurse, naïve, idealistic fantasies about what a wonderful, open democracy we have in Bloomington, we need to make an important distinction: There is a vast difference between a government that operates on the decisions of its elected officials and their appointees, and one which operates on actions that grow out of open citizen participation in a town hall-like atmosphere.”¹¹⁷ Tone argues in this letter that Bloomington officials had repeatedly proven, and that Redevelopment Commissioner Wilder even openly admitted, that citizen input on the issue of the library need not sway their votes, because their elected status alone warrants them to already be the will of the people. Tone concludes that “since precious little comes from meetings ‘open’ to citizen participation in Bloomington, it would be much more ‘honest’ if, like Wilder, all governmental agencies would admit their actual attitudes toward the input of other citizens. They could chuck their pseudo-democratic pose and charge headlong into their responsibilities, listening to whoever gets their ear or fully ignoring the desperate voices of those they represent.”¹¹⁸

Roots as Status in this College Town

Bruce Tone was not the only person who suggested that the fate of the library depended on the status of the people who argued on the silent building’s behalf. Others would suggest that the businessmen who hoped to gain a parking lot for their customers and employees had more than their fair share of sway on the mayor and other officials. But this is not the only way that status came into play in this debate.

In particular, it seems as though Mary Ellen Farmer might argue that her opinion about what should be done with the old library building had more validity than other citizens’ based on her attachments to the city. In one of her first letters to the editor on the matter of the library, Mrs. Farmer legitimizes her position based on both her feelings and her ancestry.

My roots, my experiences, and my memories are very deep in Bloomington and in the surrounding beautiful hills and land. And my love for Bloomington is also deep...Being a native Bloomingtonian and property owner, as were my parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, great-great grandparents before me; and believing strongly in historical preservation of the city and county, I wish to express my and my husband’s disapproval of the destruction of the old Monroe County Library.¹¹⁹

Another citizen, Lorena L. Miller, echoes this same point about permanence being an aspect of local history that deserves preservation:

Bloomington and Monroe County have much to offer historically. There is much local history in books, old bones and buildings...Many things and stories handed down, many descendants of old families still reside her. (In fact, several descendants

¹¹⁷ Bruce Tone. “Lesson To Be Learned,” Paper unknown, To-the-Editor section, April 6, 1973. Scrapbook I, p. 11.

¹¹⁸ Bruce Tone. “Lesson To Be Learned,” Paper unknown, To-the-Editor section, April 6, 1973. Scrapbook I, p. 11.

¹¹⁹ Mary Ellen Farmer. “Preserve City’s Past,” Paper unknown, To-the-Editor section, January 9, 1973. Scrapbook I, p. 2.

Mary Ellen Farmer. “Preserve The Library,” Paper unknown, To-the-Editor section, October 25, 1972. Scrapbook I, p. 2.

ran in the last Primary. Some of their ancestors ran for and held some of the first political offices in Monroe County.) So there's local history all around us.¹²⁰

One underlying assertion in these statements is that the city of Bloomington, a college town where nearly half the population are students who stay a few short years and leave with diplomas in hand, does have a continuous history, and one that is on occasion wrongfully overlooked.

Need for a Museum

Here enters another argument for the preservation of the former Monroe County Public Library: not just that it was or is historic, but that it could serve the function of history by appropriately providing space for a much needed history museum.

In an article written by Bill Schrader, the editor declares the 1970s “a time to begin chronicling [Monroe County’s] past, not only the beginnings—when one little log cabin surrounded by dense forests was built and inhabited by James Matlock in 1815—but the more exciting events of the 20th Century...Bloomington is slightly behind in this process, a victim of its burgeoning growth from 50,080 in 1950 to 84,849 only 20 years later...Bloomington’s transient nature minimizes the number of people in the community whose roots are so deep that they care about what came before. This is also all the more reason that the effort should be encouraged to create a living museum that can give all of Bloomington greater appreciation for its rich and multi-faceted past.”¹²¹

At this time, no such museum existed. It is difficult to tell which idea was hatched first: the intent to save the library from becoming a parking lot, which was originally proposed before the existing library had even vacated the building, or the thought to use the former library as a local history museum. In 1970, when Mayor Hooker’s administration made public its intent to buy the library and level it for a combination parking garage-apartment complex, there was little reported opposition. Perhaps the first words of protest from any citizen came from 21 year old Indiana University graduate and Bloomington citizen Karen Alexander, who suggested that the library be used as a museum instead.¹²² This idea for a museum, or a cultural center, was repeated by so many Bloomingtonians over the years, not just those affiliated with the county historical society or any particular arts group. For most of those who announced their opinion that the library really ought to be preserved, the thought of transforming the old Neo-Classical stone building into a space for history or art seems to have come intuitively.

Historic Preservation

This phenomenon of people both individually and collectively deciding that their town’s empty Carnegie library building really ought to become a museum of some variety is not unique to Bloomington. Of the 164 public libraries constructed in Indiana with the use of money donated

¹²⁰Lorena L. Miller. “Save old library,” Paper unknown, To-the-Editor section, 1973. Scrapbook I, p. 6.

¹²¹ Bill Schrader. “County museum idea gains momentum,” *Daily Herald Telephone*, From the Editor’s desk, June 1, 1977. Scrapbook III, p. 293.

¹²² Larry Incollingo. “Karen Believes Elderly Important to Neighborhoods,” Paper unknown, August 13, 1971. Scrapbook II, p. 10.

by the Carnegie Fund between 1906 and 1918, sixty no longer function as libraries.¹²³ Of these sixty, forty-two still stand, and ten of them function as historical museums or cultural centers.¹²⁴ The next highest percentage of existing Indiana Carnegie library buildings are owned by their city government and used as town halls, offices, or police stations. In short, the majority of the set of these buildings that still exist serve their community's as spaces for high culture, history, art, education, and public use—many of the same principles and purposes for which the buildings were originally constructed as free public libraries.

Why? How did all these Hoosiers know the same thought, or sense the same feeling, that their old library was meant to maintain a particular kind of public presence in their community landscape? The answer to this question appears to be quite complex—it includes practical considerations such as the fact that most of the original libraries were built in central locations among their city's downtown districts; perhaps aesthetic cues from the formal architecture of these buildings suggest they were meant for grand purposes; maybe they all simply worked out that way due to money, because only cities and philanthropic entities could afford to purchase the elaborate, hefty structures. All of these were likely factors in the fate of the empty Carnegie buildings in Bloomington and across Indiana.

Still, there seems to be yet another factor, frequently expressed in all those written pleas to preserve the library, but often only vaguely articulated. There is a sense of intuition that the building that served so many as a place for learning and intellectual communion, a place that had always belonged to the whole community free of charge, should remain a shared space for education, culture, and public gathering.

Monroe County Historical Society President Norris Wentworth once said in a public proposal for transforming the former Carnegie library into a historical museum, “The last and most important point is that there would be the assurance that the building, basically sound, would be saved for the continued use of the community as an educational cultural center for which it was originally planned and used for more than 50 years.”¹²⁵

Theorists in the field of historic preservation would call this concept maintaining the building's integrity. Maintaining the integrity of a structure is one of the principle goals within the philosophy of historic preservation. W. Brown Morton, who co-wrote the Secretary of the Interior's standards and guidelines for historic preservation in 1977, defines *architectural integrity* as 'those qualities in a building and its site that give it meaning and value.'¹²⁶

“Recognizing that meaning and value represent many things to many people, Morton admits that integrity is as intangible as love but that a successful preservationist can, and indeed must, develop a sense for it. For a building to have integrity, Morton believes, it must have or retain

¹²³Indiana State Library, “Carnegie 2009 Update,” Excel spreadsheet. Indiana State Library. www.in.gov/library/files/Carnegies_2009update.xls.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Nancy Weaver. “Deterioration may doom library,” *Daily Herald Telephone*, September 16, 1976, page 2 of 3. Scrapbook III, p. 213.

¹²⁶ William J. Murtagh. *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 118.

some or all of the following attributes: (1) style, (2) workmanship, (3) setting or location, (4) materials, (5) building type or function, and (6) continuity."¹²⁷

It is this last, and most abstract architectural attribute—continuity—that countless Hoosiers sought in the adaptations of Indiana’s Carnegie libraries into museums, art galleries, and civic centers. In their intentional or unconscious decision to keep these buildings for the benefit and service of the public, those who worked to preserve and reuse the former libraries sought to maintain those buildings’ character.

Current Use

The limestone building on the corner of Sixth and Washington Streets in Bloomington has had many lives. In 2010, it serves as the Monroe County History Center. Yet one museum employee, Outreach Coordinator Lisa Simmons, notes that many of the patrons who enter the building still sentimentally or stubbornly refer to it as “the old library.” After reading hundreds of newspaper articles referring to the structure, I can attest to the fact that this is everyone’s favorite label for the place. It was so rare for a reporter to refer to it as formally (and accurately) as the former location of the public library—always it was just “the old library,” as if the building’s identity transcends the existence of books within.

As the memories of an older generation of Bloomington citizens who recall walking through its doors to check out a book fade, new attachments and associations to this space are also being formed. Children of Bloomington’s Twenty-First century will later remember how they came to the museum on class trips to sit in the one-room schoolhouse or walk through the real log cabin on exhibit, or how they came for ice cream sundaes one Sunday a month. The building is still a place where people come to connect to each other and to their community’s past.

Conclusion

The story of the preservation of Bloomington, Indiana’s former Carnegie library building reveals much about the understanding and practice of history. History itself is an argument and a collective imagination contested among the living. History is not only a story told by artifacts, buildings, and remnants of the past to people of a later time; it is also a conversation between those people who wish to remember the lives that came before them. The debates that waged in Bloomington from 1970 to 1977 in public hearings and newspaper headlines over what to do with a local historic landmark were history in practice.

The arguments about the historical qualifications of the empty Carnegie library, and of the need for a county historical museum were alive and at the forefront of Bloomington politics in the 1970s. The story told in Mary Ellen Farmer’s carefully chronicled scrapbooks attest to the fact that the meaning of history was being thought about, debated, and acted upon over the issue of this particular local landmark.

History is an argument, a conversation, a dialogue, but it can also be a private feeling. The personal connections people have for the physical mementos of experiences and people they

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

remember, or maybe never knew but wished they could understand—these emotions are also facets of what might make an artifact or building historic. The emotional attachment so many people expressed for the old Bloomington library in their letters to the editor, the immense amount of time people sacrificed attending public meetings concerning the fate of the library building, and the sheer dedication apparent in Mary Ellen Farmer’s own act of creating the scrapbooks that contain the feelings and opinions of so many of her fellow Bloomingtonians—these are all evidence of the value people place on history and places they deem historic. Sentimentality, memory, curiosity, wonder, and appreciation for the ways ourselves and our ancestors have lived, are what give value to historic objects and places. History is something that truly exists only in our heads, and some may say, also in our hearts.